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ACCESS FLORIDA HONORED AS INNOVATIONS IN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AWARD WINNER

Harvard University's Ash Institute Recognizes Automated Community Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency

Cambridge, Mass., – September 25, 2007 – The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government today announced Florida's Automated Community Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency (ACCESS) program as a 2007 Innovations in American Government Award winner. ACCESS Florida was one of seven award winners announced at yesterday's Innovations in American Government Awards twentieth anniversary reception in Washington, D.C. Acknowledged for its dramatic improvements in how citizens receive public assistance benefits, the program will receive \$100,000 to advise other municipalities nationwide on the replication of its successes.

Launched in 2004, ACCESS Florida automates the process of applying for public assistance benefits for more than 2.2 million Florida residents. Florida's Department of Children and Families currently processes 1.8 million Food Stamp; 290,000 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and 1.8 million Medicaid applications per year. Under the department's previous paper-based system, beneficiaries waited in lengthy lines and sat through a time-consuming interview process to apply for benefits. Staff spent valuable hours entering paper applications into the agency's database.

Thanks to the efficiencies achieved through policy, procedure and systems innovations, the State of Florida Department of Children and Families reports \$83 million in annual cost savings. The

department employs 40 percent fewer staff despite a 600,000 increase in benefit applicants over the last four years. Most importantly, beneficiaries continue to express positive feedback on the automated system; according to a recent satisfaction survey, 95 percent of first time applicants planned to use the system again and 83 percent required no assistance in filing benefits applications online.

Features of ACCESS Florida include:

- **Anytime, Anywhere Access:** Benefits applicants can submit electronic applications or review the status of their claims online at any home computer or at terminal sites hosted by 2,500 community partners throughout the state. Should applicants require assistance, they can speak with a live agent at one of the state's three call centers which employ 1,500 staff.
- **Rapid Application Approval:** ACCESS streamlines the staff approval process of benefits by rapidly transmitting applications through a main frame portal. As a result, the approval process has been reduced from 40 to an average of 18 days with more than 4.5 million applications finalized annually.
- **Web-Based Document Management:** Staff from across the state can retrieve benefit information through the system's centralized web-based document management system which includes digitizing and indexing of archived files.

"We are incredibly proud to be honored as a 2007 Innovations in American Government Award winner and to share our ACCESS process nationwide," said Secretary Bob Butterworth of the Department of Children and Families. "We believe our program represents a fundamental change in the way we serve our residents. Many of our applicants work full time jobs so it was essential that we build our system to accommodate their needs and busy schedules. We have done that and we've seen great success."

"ACCESS Florida dramatically cuts overhead costs while serving those in need more efficiently," said Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in American Government Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. "By applying the same customer service principals that work in the retail sector, the Department of Children and Families empowers its citizens to take an active role in personal benefit management. We look forward to the replication of this successful innovation in governments throughout the country."

Established in 1986 at Harvard University by the Ford Foundation, the Innovations in American Government Award Program has honored 174 federal, state and local government agencies. Through this annual competition, the Program provides concrete evidence that government can work to improve the quality of life of citizens. Many award-winning programs have been replicated across jurisdictions and policy areas, and some have served as harbingers of today's reform strategies or as forerunners to state and federal legislation. By highlighting exemplary models of government's innovative programs over the past 20 years, the Program drives continued progress and encourages research and teaching cases at Harvard University and other academic institutions worldwide.

About The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation

The Roy and Lila Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its research, publications, leadership training, global network and awards program – developed in collaboration with a diverse, engaged community of scholars and practitioners - the Ash Institute fosters creative and effective government problem-solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world's citizens. The Ford Foundation is a founding donor of the institute. Additional information about The Ash Institute is available at www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu. Organizations are encouraged to apply to the 2008 Innovations in American Government Awards by October 15, 2007 at www.innovationsaward.harvard.edu.

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