



MASSACHUSETTS UI

Project Highlight

"People who work in public service actually want to serve the public well. I'm really proud that throughout the course of the project, we always had our customer in mind."

—Rick Jeffers, Executive Sponsor of UI Modernization

Heading into the 2020s, the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) had a clear goal in mind: make it easier for Bay Staters to get the help they needed. Standing in DUA's way was their unemployment insurance software, which had gone live in 2013 and always fallen short of expectations. "It really was terrible from the get-go. We were actually working around the very tools that we were supposed to be able to use to do our jobs," said Rick Jeffers, Executive Sponsor of UI Modernization. Despite continued efforts to improve the system, DUA staff knew it wasn't capable of providing the support and tools they needed long-term. "It quickly became this behemoth that we couldn't work with. So, we decided to replace the system," said Jennifer Lavin, Manager of the UI System Production Support Unit. A new system would give DUA better, more efficient tools and an opportunity to focus on bringing customer service to the forefront.



Project Beginnings

In the early 2020s, the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) started the procurement process for a new system, but quickly had to change course as the COVID-19 pandemic began. DUA paused procurement to implement functionality to administer the US federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program. “When the pandemic hit, the governor publicly said, ‘You cannot build PUA functionality in your existing system because it wreaks havoc wherever it goes,’” said Jennifer Lavin, Manager of the UI System Production Support Unit. DUA partnered with

Fast Enterprises
(FAST) to implement

PUA in a standalone system, successfully distributing funds to claimants in a matter of weeks. “I was very apprehensive about the PUA project because of the horrible experience I had with implementing the UI system in

2013, but it ended up being an eye-opening experience of how well something could progress,” said Matt Lovell, Management Analyst.

Once the PUA system was established and pandemic unemployment benefit needs leveled out, DUA resumed their procurement process, leveraging lessons learned to

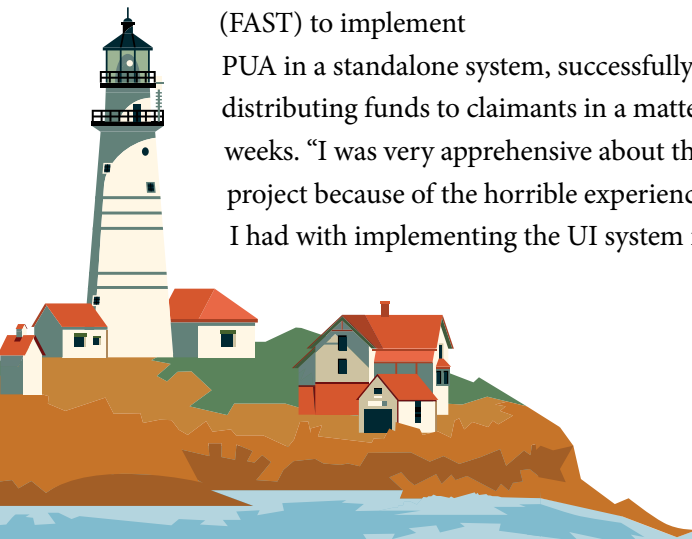
guide their search. “We were looking for a vendor who had experience with other states and had a product that had worked elsewhere—we didn’t want to be a test subject for somebody who had never done this before,” said Hal Bent, Project Coordinator. Based on their list of requirements, DUA selected FAST’s commercial

off-the-shelf unemployment insurance (UI) system, FastUI, a proven UI solution with the tools they needed. FAST was selected to implement both UI tax and benefits as part of the Employment Modernization and Transformation (EMT) project running from July 2022 to May 2025.



I’m proud of the team for their willingness to be open to a new system. We were coming out of a really tough time with the pandemic, and people still came in every day and gave it their all.

–Katie Dishnica, DUA Director





Getting it Right for the Bay State

DUA's decision to leverage a proven software solution and methodology enabled the EMT project team to focus on Massachusetts' specific needs rather than the mechanics of building the software from the ground up. Nicole Flores, Management Analyst, said, "It was so much more organized and easier than when we were implementing our last system, I could focus on what we needed." Hal Bent, Project Coordinator, agreed, "I'd wake up at 3:30 a.m. and be like, 'Oh no, two months ago I forgot to bring this up and it is going to be a nightmare.' But, when I did find things I missed, the project team would respond, 'Oh yeah, we can change that, no problem.' That flexibility helped me sleep at night."

The flexibility to focus on their needs enabled them to make huge leaps in streamlining administrative processes. "With EMT, we pretty much automated everything we could. We were still doing some things on paper in the old system or outside of the system altogether. All that is now integrated into the new system," said Laura Santiago, DUA Director of Revenue. The new system also included pre-built tools that

simplified staff work. "My schedule for hearings is really easy to look up and prepare now. A lot of that administrative work I was doing is just much easier now," said Abigail O'Donnell, Review Examiner.

The new system provided easier access to the information that staff and managers needed. "It's a much simpler process for the staff to go in and see things without hunting around, chasing handwritten documents. Now you have everything in front of you," Hal said. The team also achieved much-needed transparency

within the task management sphere. "One of the biggest gains with the new system—from my perspective as a Director—is all the insight the system has in terms of work. How are people doing their work? How much work is there actually? How quickly are we getting to it? That didn't exist at all in our legacy system," Laura said.

The team not only got it right this time, they leveled up by every measure. Laura continued, "I'm proud that we were able to develop something that is drastically better than what we had—we were able to develop something really great."

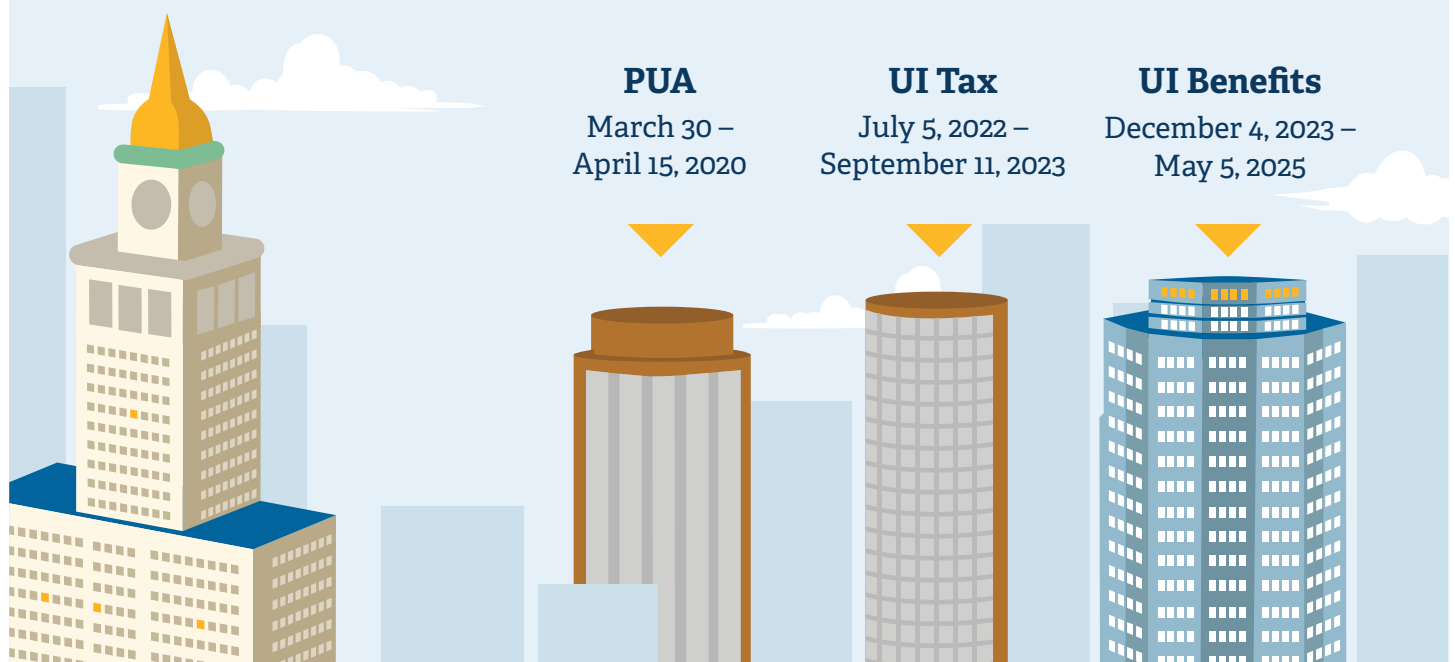


Project staff really cared about the end product and wanted to get it right this time.

—Laura Santiago, DUA Director of Revenue



Timelines





Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll and Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development Lauren Jones stand with Employment Modernization and Transformation (EMT) project staff after receiving the *Commonwealth Equity in Governance Award*, which honors public servants who promote equity and accessibility for Commonwealth constituents.

Photo Courtesy: Joshua Qualls, Director of Photography for the Office of the Governor



Access Across the Commonwealth

“We value plain language, accessibility, and equity—those are all really important to us,” said Katie Dishnica, DUA Director. Keeping these values at the forefront of their minds, the EMT project team made huge strides toward ensuring equitable access for all Commonwealth residents.

Keeping Accessibility Front of Mind

DUA introduced expanded self-service options and streamlined online processes to boost accessibility. “Before, we would get a lot of calls because claimants just didn’t understand what the process was or what their role in the process was. The screens and documents that were created for EMT were easy to understand for any Commonwealth resident. That was a huge move forward,” said Matt Lovell, Management Analyst.

Expanding Customer Reach through Multi-Language Support

A dedicated unit within DUA facilitated the translation of all customer correspondence into 12 languages. “Our clients are now getting letters in their primary language, and it’s really easy for them to opt to select their primary language within the system. I think that’s a huge advantage,” said Abigail O’Donnell, Review Examiner.

A Priority on Plain Language

Recognizing that clear communication is essential at every step of the unemployment process, **DUA staff applied plain language principles to all public-facing text to ensure customers could easily understand what they were reading.** “We updated literally hundreds of pieces of correspondence and many of the screens in the application to eliminate UI jargon and communicate in ways that people understand,” said Rick Jeffers, Executive Sponsor of UI Modernization.





Putting the People of Massachusetts First

Alongside delivering much-needed system enhancements for staff, the EMT project revamped customer-facing processes to empower Bay State residents with the tools they needed while still having ample support from DUA. “We put the people of Massachusetts first. We were focused on having a new system that was more accessible so people who need the safety net that unemployment insurance provides have an easier time using the system and getting access to DUA,” said Rick Jeffers, Executive Sponsor of UI Modernization.



Timelier Benefit Payments

“I just want people to get paid their benefits timely. It’s one of my biggest pet peeves when people have to wait to get paid. We’re doing that much better than we were, and I’m pretty proud of that.”

—Nicole Flores, Management Analyst



Mobile Access

“Claimants can just reach into their pocket, go on their phone, and everything is right there for them. There’s no juggling paper or anything like that. It feels good.”

—Hal Bent, Project Coordinator



Claimant-Friendly Processes

“The majority of the claims are now filed by people on their own. In the old system, we had a lot of claims filed through staff. Claimants either just didn’t trust the system, couldn’t make it through the claim, or they didn’t understand. We have a very small amount of claims filed with staff intervention now.”

—Jennifer Lavin, Manager of the UI System Production Support Unit



Easy Uploads Through e-Services

“The new system for claimants is user-friendly. We had a lot of trouble before with claimants not being able to upload their wages and pay stubs. Now, they can upload their wages and pay stubs, we get it quicker, and we’re able to process it quicker.”

—Nicole Flores, Management Analyst

EMT

EMPLOYMENT MODERNIZATION
& TRANSFORMATION

Project Name

*Employment Modernization
and Transformation (EMT)*

Project Type

UI Tax and Benefits

Project Dates

*July 5, 2022 to
May 5, 2025*

Agency Name

*Department of Unemployment
Assistance (DUA)*

Population

7,154,084

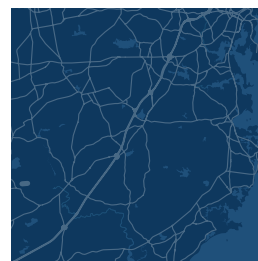
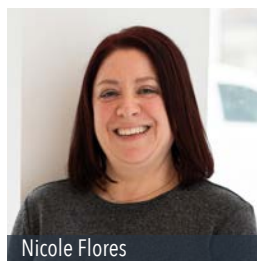
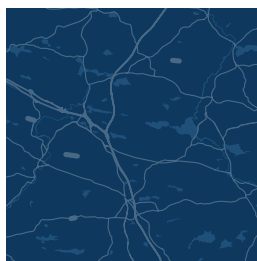
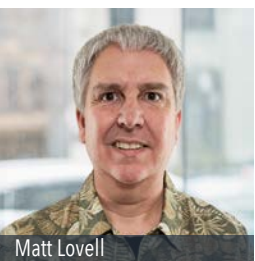
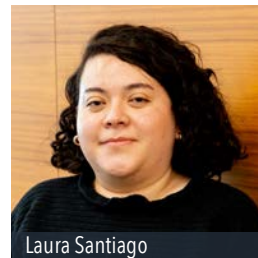
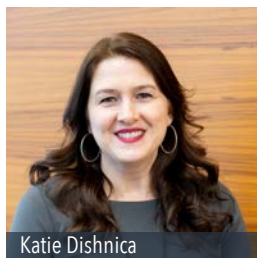
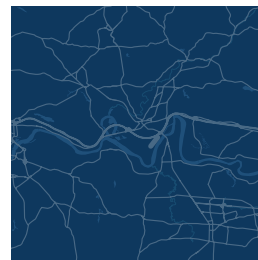
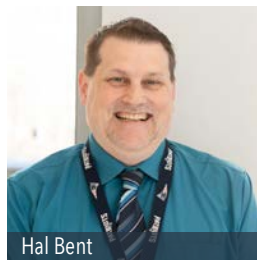
Capital

Boston

Fun Fact

*Massachusetts residents
are known as “Bay Staters,”
a nickname that comes
from the Commonwealth’s
original name, the
Massachusetts Bay Colony.*





Settling in and Looking Ahead

The EMT project completed their final rollout in May 2025. Now, DUA staff are looking forward to the challenges ahead and are finding ways to leverage the new system to meet those challenges. Hal Bent, Project Coordinator, said, “We’ve taken it out on the highway for a spin, and now it’s at the point where we can really see what the system can do.” With a highly capable system in place, expectations of DUA have risen, and staff are eager to exceed them. Rick Jeffers, who is now Chief Innovation Officer under the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, said, “I think DUA has the toughest challenge of all now. They have the burden of expectation and now it’s time to perform. They have better tools and can serve people better than they could before. I think that—whether they’re federal metrics or whatever metrics the organization sets for itself—the goals are achievable now. I’m excited about DUA’s future.”



Left to right: Dan Simon, Neel Patel, Jack Carr, Hal Bent, and Justin Gorodetsky