

SWIM LANE (or CROSS-FUNCTIONAL) DIAGRAMS

A swim lane diagram, sometimes called a cross-functional diagram, is a process flowchart that provides richer information on **who does what**. It can also be expanded to show times—**when** tasks are done and **how long** they take. As seen in a swim lane diagram of ARC Community Services’ intake process (FIGURE 4), the visual metaphor is a swimming pool, with each participant in the process assigned to “lanes.”

The steps to create a swim lane diagram follow:

1. Focus on a specific process, and put the title of your diagram on top.
2. Enumerate the people involved in this process and assign them to rows, typically beginning with the customer on the top row.
3. Create the process flowchart, drawing processes and decisions made, as well as arrows that indicate the process flow.
4. If the diagram is too complex, break it up into its components. As seen in FIGURE 4, the diagram indicates *phases* or *sub-processes* (i.e., pre-intake, intake, pre-treatment, treatment, etc.).
5. If possible, indicate times for each node on the bottom of the diagram. Compute cumulative totals—the total time elapsed—within each phase.

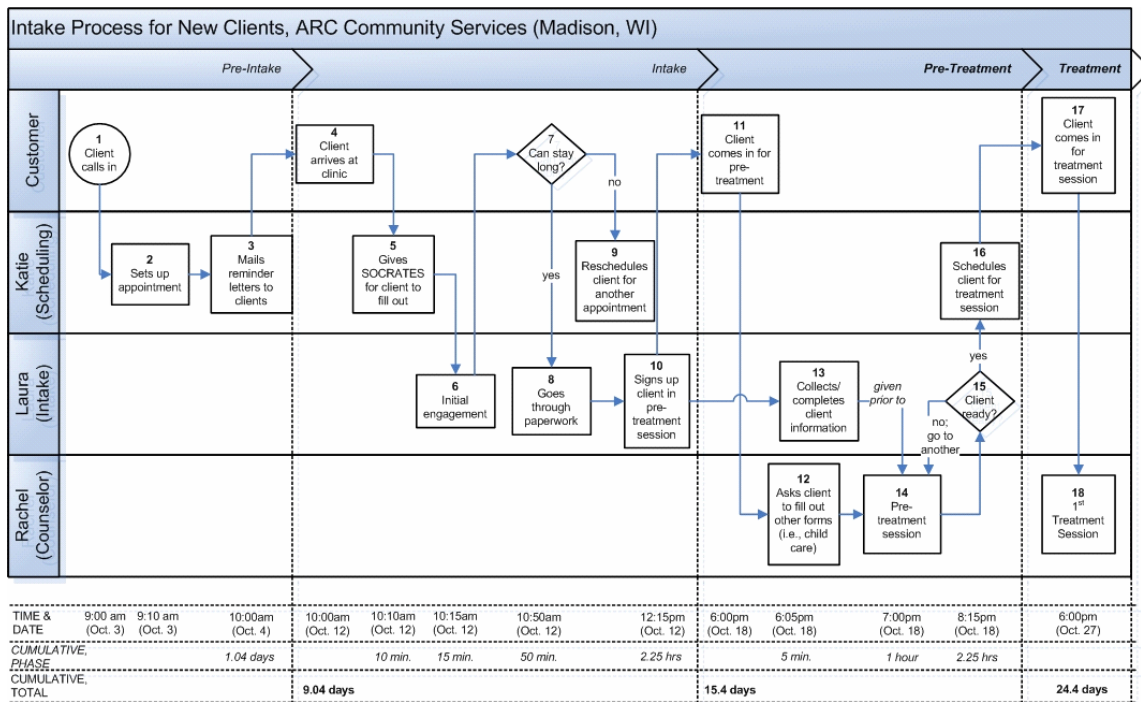


FIGURE 4: SWIM LANE DIAGRAM OF THE INTAKE PROCESS (ARC COMMUNITY SERVICES)

Swim lane diagrams take more time to develop, but enable teams to identify *time traps*—which processes take the longest—as well as *capacity constraints*, or which resources get bogged down because of work. Ideally, after identifying the current process, teams should try to map out a better process, based on the information provided in the diagram.