

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT IN THE CAO'S OFFICE THE WORLD BEYOND SOCIAL SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

My Interagency Agreement is unique among the BASSC program. While I was scheduled to visit Contra Costa County and learn fiscal issues under the direction of Jim Takahashi, the Division Manager of Fiscal Services, I was offered the opportunity to accept a four-month, full-time internship program through the Sonoma County Administrator's Office and learn about the world beyond social services. Not only would I be exposed to fiscal issues of monumental size, I would have the opportunity to discover more about county government and the issues that face the county as a whole. While I have not completed my internship program, this is an interim report as to my findings to date.

BACKGROUND

The Sonoma County Administrator's Office (CAO) assists the Board of Supervisors in managing, directing and coordinating the operation of all the departments over which the Board exercises control. Activities of the CAO include, but are not limited to, preparation of the County Budget; review of weekly Board agenda items; legislative analysis; and staff services to special committees or councils.

Total General Fund financing sources for Fiscal Year (FY) 1998-99 were budgeted at \$395.9 million. The County of Sonoma employs approximately 3,790 permanent staff (FY 98/99 allocation).

THE INTERNSHIP

I left my familiar world of Human Services and went to work for Mike Chrystal, Assistant County Administrator, for four months. My specific assignments were to:

- work with the Analyst assigned to
- review the Sheriff's budget review the Board agenda items for three departments (Permit and Resource Management Department, Transportation and Public Works, Water Agency)
- provide staff support to a Telecommuting Pilot program
- prepare an inventory of maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements applicable to the county general fund programs
- attend meetings/presentations as available (to participate in an overview of county government), and
- update a Citizen's Guide to services within Sonoma County.

THE BUDGET PROCESS

While many of us have worked on budget issues, I am in awe of the budget process as a whole for the Departments and for the County. There are revenues and expenditures, appropriations and

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transfers, maintenance of efforts, reserves, designated funds, net costs and use of fund balances, fixed assets, characters, sub-objects, and encumbrances to name a few.

The County budget is a detailed plan that identifies estimated costs (appropriations) and results in relation to estimated revenues. It represents a process through which policy decisions are made, implemented and controlled.

The budget includes:

- programs, projects, services and activities to be provided during a given fiscal year;
- the estimated revenue available to finance the operating plan; and
- the estimated spending requirements of the operating plan.

The County budget process usually begins in January with the issuance of budget preparation instructions to Departments. Departments prepare and submit their requested budgets to the County Administrator in March. Analysts within the CAO office review the requested budgets with each of their designated Departments. Before the end of the fiscal year, the County Administrator submits a proposed budget to the Board of Supervisors for approval. After public hearings on the proposed budget, the Board adopts the final budget no later than October 2nd.

WHAT IS A " BOLLARD" ANYWAY

Many of us have written Board of Supervisor agenda items. It is interesting to discover the full process that a Board item undergoes.

After a Board item is received from a Department, an Analyst (such as myself) reviews it at the CAO's office. I review the format, make sure that the numbers match up, look to see that all the attachments and resolutions are reflected in the item, make sure that any contracts attached are signed appropriately and match the requested Board item, and numerous other small details. From me, the Board item goes to the County Administrator's secretary to be reviewed and logged before going to the Clerk of the Board. After a brief review by the Clerk, the agenda items go to an Agenda Committee consisting of the Chair of the Board of Supervisors, the County Administrator, the Clerk of the Board and County Counsel. From there, secretaries type the agenda, it is proofed, reviewed by the County Administrator for final approval and then sent off to printing. Ten sets of Board agendas (complete with their many pages of attachments) are compiled. Once the Board has met, the secretaries tear apart the binders of information, record the outcomes and store all of the information for all eternity.

This process takes place each week within a very short timeframe. Finding out the process behind the Board **items is a little like** being behind the scenes at Disneyland - you know it gets done, but you're never aware of all of the work behind it.

For all of the acronyms and colloquialisms that Human Services has to offer, there are more than enough new words and phrases to learn in a lifetime at the CAO. Reviewing Board agenda items

from unfamiliar county departments is a challenging task. I requested a dictionary during the first week of my internship to find newly discovered words, like "bollard." I began a vocabulary list at my desk, and by the end of each day I would look up each word and write its meaning.

TELECOMMUTING

One of my tasks is to implement a Telecommuting Pilot for County staff that was approved by the Board of Supervisors in August 1998. In October 1998. Departments were sent a questionnaire asking if they were interested in participating in the pilot. Since the initial six replies were received, not much had happened on this project.

At this point, I am checking in with the Departments to find out who is still interested in the pilot project and setting up contacts in each of the departments. I am also working with the County's Information Systems Department to identify any issues or concerns that Departments may have prior to implementing their telecommuting project.

LET'S GET FISCAL

"Prepare an inventory of maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements applicable to the county general fund programs." For this ex-Social Worker, that's quite a task. Coming from CalWORKS, I knew what a MOE was. I like to think of it as a deductible - you can't have your extra money until you spend what you are required to spend yourself.

This project has given me the opportunity to research the different MOE requirements for a number of programs within county government. To date, I have discovered thirteen programs with a required MOE, although some are actually required "matches" or "participation fees." MOEs touch many different Departments, including the Sheriff, Courts, Assessor, Health, and of course Human Services.

Concentrating specifically on Human Services, we have required MOEs for child care (through the California Department of Education), Adult Protective Services, and CalWORKs.

Much of the research for this project has taken me to the Internet looking up information from the California Legislature as well as researching Government Code.

The end product of this research will be an organized binder, for reference use by Analysts at the CAO's, containing the following information for each MOE:

- Summary description of the MOE,
- Copies of code sections, regulations, etc.;
- An explanation of how the MOE is calculated and methodology;
- The dollar amount of the MOE for FY 98-99 and FY 99-00;
- Funds included in the budget that count towards meeting the MOE, and
- The amount of any funds budgeted in excess of the MOE.

LEARNING NEW CULTURES

As part of my internship, I have the opportunity to participate in a number of meetings and outings that I would not have been able to do through the Human Services Department.

To date, I have attended meetings such as the implementation of Prop 10, union negotiations, and GIS (and that's not GAIN Information Systems). I have had tours at the Water Agency, the Department of Transportation and Public Works, the County Airport (I learned that the Sonoma County Airport has vernal pools of endangered Golden Flowers), and the Permit Department to name a few. I have promises to take field trips out to the Russian River watershed and to the County's central landfill. Again, this is distinctly different from the Human Services Department.

Attending these meetings and touring these facilities has taught me that county government is incredibly diverse and important. The county employees that I have met are warm, intelligent professionals who believe in what they are doing. While these traits are not absent in the Human Services Department, each agency certainly has its own unique culture. Many departments continue to process their work as they have been for decades in their tried and true manner. This is in sharp contrast to the world of social services where change is the only constant.

SHARING COUNTY GOVERNMENT WITH OTHERS

It seems fitting that one of my tasks during my internship is updating a Citizens Guide to County Government.

The guide compiles information regarding Sonoma County population, economic characteristics, the environment (including land use and agriculture), government services, and the budget.

Its purpose is to explain how county government functions as a local government body to serve the needs of its residents and how the Board of Supervisors oversees the functions and activities of the many branches of county government that provide countywide services.

Much of the value of this internship is discovering the hidden processes of county government, from Board agendas to budgets. While not everyone has the opportunity to participate in an internship of this sort, it is important that other individuals (from staff at Human Services to "ordinary" citizens) understand their local county government.

Implications for Sonoma County Human Services

The implications of my internship to my home Department may not be obvious compared to an internship in another County's Social Services Department. What I have been exposed to however, will benefit me as a manager in Sonoma County for many years to come. Discovering the processes, learning the new words/acronyms, meeting managers from other County Departments, and getting a feeling for how and why our county government operates is invaluable.

Recommendations to my home Department include:

- Post the Board of Supervisors' weekly agenda.
- Encourage managers to sit in on the Board meetings where there is an item of interest to the manager.
- Provide additional fiscal training to program managers and program training to fiscal managers.
- Establish an agreement with the CAO to have Analysts from Human Services shadow an Analyst in the CAO and visa versa.
- Encourage managers to become involved with opportunities to learn more about the other Departments in the County, including SCAMC's Management Academy, and BASSC.
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IN CONCLUSION

I have completed approximately one month of my four-month internship program. I have learned much and I expect to continue to learn more about budgets, county government and of course, new words.

bol•lard (bol-erd), n. 1. a thick low post, usu. of iron or steel, mounted on a wharf or the like, to which mooring lines from vessels are attached. 2. one of a series of short posts, esp. for excluding motor vehicles from a road.