

Santa Cruz County's Automated Cross-Jurisdiction Contract Management and Reporting System

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The current budget climate has all human service providers looking for innovative and streamlined methods of operating their programs and providing services. Sonoma County Department of Human Services (Sonoma County HSD) has over twenty staff of various levels administering approximately 584 contracts/Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) across five divisions. Community partners are also struggling to maintain service levels and secure adequate funding. In this climate, it is vitally important to show where services are needed and how the dollars allocated for those services are spent. The County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department (Santa Cruz HSD) faced similar issues and created a Cross Jurisdictional Contract Management Center (CMC). This lengthy and ongoing project was completed in several phases and involved a long list of stakeholders.

History

Phase I of the CMC became operational for Fiscal Year 2008/09 . It is the result of Santa Cruz HSD, more than fifty nonprofits, the United Way and the cities of Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Capitola and Scotts Valley working together to create a central, standardized system for nonprofit contracting for human services in their community. Santa Cruz's CMC appears to be a potential solution to the current environment of tightening budgets and fewer staff and could involve not only Sonoma County HSD vendor contracts, but also assist the Human Services Commission with its funding process.

Phase II of the CMC has been implemented on a limited basis and includes state funded Santa Cruz HSD contracts with non-profits and plans to include

other departments, such as Probation and Health Services. As Phase II becomes fully operational, it may present ideas that can assist Sonoma County HSD in streamlining its contracting processes.

Recommendations

Resources are shrinking for both governmental and nonprofit organizations, yet the need for services continues to grow. Sonoma County HSD has recently reached out to its community partners to share common challenges and brainstorm solutions, and this effort may be the groundwork needed to pursue a model similar to Santa Cruz's Phase I. The current budget climate is prohibitive, but long-term gains in consolidation of staff time, consistency in process -and engagement of community partners could outweigh these concerns. Sonoma County should consider further review of Santa Cruz's CMC as follows:

- Review the case study with the Executive Team to gauge feasibility
- Share the information contained in this case study with both the Human Services Commission Analyst and Contract PPA in the Administration Division
- Determine if a website of this complexity could be built by in-house IT staff or would require the services of the Information Technology Department
- Determine if funding could be allocated to such a project at this time
- Share information with key community partners to gauge interest

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Background

Sonoma County Department of Human Service (Sonoma County HSD) currently administers approximately 584 contracts/Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) across five divisions. A good portion of those are multiple contracts/MOUs with the same entity. Sonoma County HSD also has more than twenty staff of varying levels spread across those five divisions involved in the business of contracting with other departments, organizations or individuals. There is much duplicated effort from all parties involved in the contracting process.

The County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department (Santa Cruz HSD) faced similar issues in creating a cross-jurisdictional Contract Management Center (CMC). This lengthy and ongoing project was completed in several phases, involved a long list of stakeholders, and resulted in a currently operational central, standardized and efficient system for contracting with local nonprofits commonly referred to as "community programs." Santa Cruz's CMC appears to be a potential solution to the current environment of tightening budgets and fewer staff and could involve not only Sonoma County HSD vendor contracts but also assist the Human Services Commission with its funding process.

History

In June 2003, as part of the budget hearing process, the Board of Supervisors for Santa Cruz County directed two local organizations, Santa Cruz HSD and the Human Care Alliance (HCA) (a group of over sixty community providers), to develop recommendations for modifying the program evaluation system for community programs and enhancing client out-

come information. This step was taken in response to negative press regarding where these dollars were going and whether they were really addressing the needs in the community. The project was launched in October 2003 with the goal of creating a standardized outcome reporting system and developing methods to better tell the story of the needs of the community and how dollars spent made an impact on those needs.

The project was ambitious and the stakeholders many, each with varying goals and outlooks. But through patience, technology and a commitment to better serve their community, the Santa Cruz HSD and HCA, with the approval and support of the Board of Supervisors, implemented Phase I of the CMC for the 2008/2009 fiscal year and initiated an online common application process and standardized outcome reporting system. The development of the CMC was divided into two phases. The first phase included all community programs receiving county general funds to administer their programs/services. The second phase will include those programs/contracts for services funded through state and other resources that will be administered through Santa Cruz HSD. It is not fully operational to date.

Phase I required bringing a diverse group of stakeholders together and gaining more than consensus; the group needed to agree on core values, what outcomes were relevant, and the elements needed in a common funding application—a daunting and time-consuming task. A smaller, more manageable but still representative group was formed from the larger community partner group, the Community Programs Outcomes Reporting Committee (CPORC), which set to work on a core value statement

to focus the purpose and create a framework for the project. The following is a representative list of CPORCs core values:

Outcomes should:

- Make sense and be clear and relevant to consumers, policy makers, as well as community and service providers
- Not require “proof beyond a reasonable doubt” (for consumer outcomes)
- Track realistic results for clients and agencies (i.e., not ending homelessness in Santa Cruz County, but increased consumer self sufficiency)

The process for enhancing outcomes should:

- Use data that is readily available
- Require minimal or no additional cost
- Be communicated to other jurisdictions and departments in order to advocate for coordination

The outcomes reporting approach developed will:

- Ensure consistency in reporting
- Recognize that identifying and measuring outcomes is a developmental process and will be implemented in stages
- Ensure information required in reports is useful to all stakeholders

The group also agreed to utilize the American Information and Referral Services (AIRS) taxonomy for a recognized standard service strategy listing.

With data gathered through the CMC contract administration system, there are currently six common data reports available on the CMC to any user:

- Client Demographic Reports
- Client Demographic Reports (Client Counts as Percent of Total)
- Contract Amounts Nonprofit Contractors
- Funding Requests
- Jurisdictional Funding Analysis
- Client Outcomes

To date, these reports have been used on a practical basis. The HCA has used them to begin a jurisdictional analysis of the needs of the county; and it is estimated the data will assist in showing the investment in the community as fiscal year 2008/09 comes to an end.

Other time-consuming challenges of the project were translating the paper application into an online format, the actual building of the CMC website and training all users on the technology-based contract administration system. Santa Cruz HSD partnered with the County Administrator’s Office and County Information Systems to develop the website. During development, use of the CMC was piloted by a few community partners who later acted as mentors to other agencies once the website was officially available for fiscal year 2008/09 application for funds submission. Training all users, both funders and nonprofits, on how to use the CMC website and on how the new business practices driven by the new web-based contracting system proved to be staff-intensive.

Implementing Phase II of the CMC does not appear to be such a time consuming process but presents different challenges all its own. Staff from different divisions within Santa Cruz HSD as well as other departments, such as Probation and Health Services, were always kept informed of the progress on Phase I, including the common application and periodic reports. However, due to fiscal constraints, staffing changes due to current budget issues and ongoing issues for enhancements and upgrades, the CMC continues to require constant planning and project management, including training new and shifting staff.

Successes to Date

- A core value statement was created with participation from a diverse group of agencies which provides a framework, focus and reference to all involved
- Client outcomes and necessary periodic reports are completed online and can be compiled with other reports for better analysis, strategic planning and creating funding priorities.
- Consistency was achieved in the application and reporting process
- The entire system is ‘super green’. No more multiple applications or periodic reports with endless attachments and copies needed to submit requests for funding or show performance/outcomes.

- Data base centrally located for funders, nonprofits and governmental agencies for analysis, planning and retrieval as needed.
- Infrastructure put in place that can be enhanced.

Obstacles Overcome

The main obstacle to overcome was bringing the diverse stakeholders together and having them develop an inclusive process so they could create the other tools needed to make the CMC a success. Without having this group form into a team, none of the other accomplishments, such as changing the paper application into an online one, or developing a user-friendly outcome matrix, would have occurred.

Current Challenges/Next Steps

Terisita Hinojosa-Pereira, the Community Programs and HMIS Project Manager for Santa Cruz County, is currently bringing internal Santa Cruz HSD staff responsible for contract management on board for Phase II. This has required additional training for staff that have backfilled positions due to layoffs.

In the current economic climate, finding funding for updates and enhancements to the technology is challenging. Each request or apparent need for a change or enhancement must be addressed by asking whether it's a true need, can it be resolved in-house, or must it be sent to IT for resolution. As Phase II rolls out, some tasks must be separated into phases due to budgetary limitations.

Implications for Sonoma County

Sonoma County HSD currently has over twenty staff administering approximately 584 contracts/Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) across five divisions. Contract administration, monitoring and performance standards are not consistent, even those multiple contracts/MOUs with the same entity. There is much duplicated effort for all parties involved in the contracting process. Contracts are eventually centrally located in the Administration Division with one Program Planning Analyst (PPA) providing oversight to department contracts as a whole. However, one position cannot be expected to expand its

role in contract management and take on additional responsibilities for the Division contract managers. However, Santa Cruz's CMC could provide some solutions to its contracting issues.

Recent efforts to bring community partners together to discuss their common challenges could be a good first step toward a model similar to Santa Cruz's Phase I. Sonoma County could begin to consider the feasibility of a centralized contract management system via the Human Services Commission.

Recommendations, Next Steps and Conclusions

Like all counties, Sonoma County is facing severe budget shortfalls. However, it should consider conducting additional inquiries into the Santa Cruz County model as it may save duplicative efforts and staff time currently being spent on contracts. Additionally, developing consistent methods for submitting applications for funding, requests for proposals and developing performance standards and outcome measures could enhance services to the community and form a basis for determining ongoing unmet needs in Sonoma County. A project of this magnitude should begin slowly, and it will require the political will to see it through.

Based on my observations of Santa Cruz County, I recommend Sonoma County HSD taking the following steps:

- Review the case study with the Executive Team to gauge feasibility,
- Share the information contained in this case study with both the Human Services Commission Analyst and Contract PPA in the Administration Division,
- Determine if a website of this complexity could be build by in-house IT staff or if it would require the services of the Information Technology Department,
- Review local FIRST 5's contracting and outcome measurements model,
- Determine if funding could be allocated to such a project at this time, and
- Share information with all community partners to gauge interest

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Resources

Santa Cruz's CMC, Phase I (Community Programs and Social Services)
CMC Phase II (Department Planning & Evaluation)
CMC Status Reports and memorandum from November 2004 to February 2009
Sonoma County Human Services Commission
Funding Process Design 2009–2012