

**PROGRAM-TECHNOLOGY ADVISORY COUNCIL: A NEW LOOK AT
GOVERNMENT IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY'S EMPLOYMENT AND
HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With more and more automation in work and business processes, Contra Costa County's Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) was inspired to establish the Program-Technology Advisory Council (PTAC). In early 2015, EHSD decided to unify program and technology goals and establish a technology direction to support the administration of programs and services, as well as oversee key technology initiatives.

EHSD developed a PTAC governance charter to set itself up for long-term success. The case study examines critical components of the PTAC charter, including vision, goals, council membership and their responsibilities, and subcommittees and meeting rules. Some specific value-creating findings and approaches adopted in the PTAC process include:

- Multiple channels of bringing new technology ideas
- Customer-Centric project approach
- Tech-Project queue tracking system and Value-added based rating and prioritizing system

Further, the case study reports on PTAC's impressive tech project results and organizational wins including:

- Formalizing the IT commitment at the top level by setting the charter and living by the charter
- Building trust and respect between IT and program
- Promoting PTAC values: involvement, responsibility, and collaboration for EHSD as a whole

PTAC at EHSD is not only championing what is possible with technology in local government human and social services, but, more importantly, showing how local government human services leaders can remake the experience that staff, citizens, and businesses have with our government. This provides a new look at government and service delivery experience for the 21st century.

Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA) is in the process of creating better ways to address its information technology governance related processes and strategies. It is recommended that Alameda County SSA take the PTAC model into consideration for implementation.

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Background

How to deploy and utilize technology has become a major strategic consideration for many human services leaders. Kathy Gallagher, Director of the Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD) for Contra Costa County, is already a step ahead. In early 2015, EHSD established the Program-Technology Advisory Council (PTAC). The PTAC is among the many strategic initiatives and efforts towards pursuing the EHSD vision¹: putting the EHSD into a “ready” position that uses technology to its best advantage to enhance the customer-centric business process.

EHSD's Executive Team (ET) used to have all executive business decisions, technology and non-technology, flow through weekly ET meetings. An Executive Oversight Group (EOG) was formed that split off technology operational issues. This still left the ET meeting to discuss the interface between IT and program. Recognizing the importance for the IT leaders and program leaders to work as a team to envision the future and develop strategies to meet workload and customer needs through technology, EHSD's Executive Team re-grouped and reconstituted EOG in early 2015. They established a Program-Technology Advisory Council (PTAC) and developed a governance charter to form a partnership that would guide department's technology and automation initiatives and projects into the future.

¹ In partnership with the community, we provide services that support and protect adults, children, families, and the elderly, and promote personal responsibility, independence and self-sufficiency.

Value-Creating Findings and Approaches

From the beginning of PTAC in early 2015 to its recent one-year anniversary reflection, EHSD has demonstrated its endless dedication, innovation, and continuous improvements in pursuing the PTAC vision; the vision of bridging the gap between program and technology and establishing a technology direction that supports the administration of EHSD programs and service. Below captures PTAC value-creating findings and approaches.

Governance Charter

PTAC Governance Charter establishes the vision, goals, membership structure and responsibilities, subcommittees, and PTAC meetings rules/mandates, in order to set itself up for long-term success.

Vision – Establish and conduct an inter-bureau governance council that will unify program and technology goals, establish a technology direction that supports the administration of EHSD programs and services, and oversees key technology initiatives.

Goals –

- a. Create a vision for the future and monitor emerging technologies for applicability to our program and systems
- b. Establish and monitor progress on a long-term Technology Plan
- c. Coordinate key program activities that have specific technology requirements
- d. Set priorities and oversee and track progress on key technology initiatives
- e. Ensure appropriate allocation of resources to technology projects

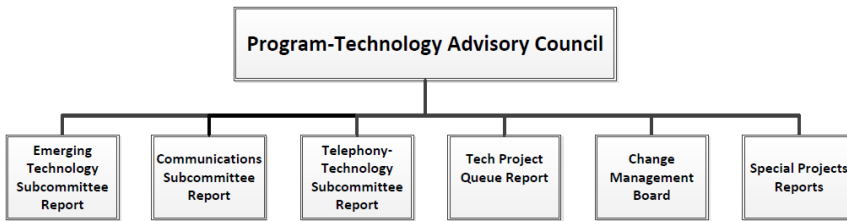
Membership and Responsibilities

Membership	Position Levels	Responsibilities
Executive Lead (1)	EHSD Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standing meeting agenda ▪ Vote last to break a tie vote
Core Council Member - Bureau/Unit Representatives (8)	Executive/Mid- Level Managers (or appointed Designee)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be in attendance at every meeting ▪ Be prepared to discuss the agenda items ▪ Participate in the meeting ▪ Vote
Facilitator (1)	Consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Post meeting materials 3 business days ahead ▪ Serve as clearinghouse for upcoming meetings, meeting minutes, Subcommittee reports, etc. ▪ Schedule meeting ▪ Facilitate meeting

Subcommittees

PTAC forms subcommittees to research and track progress of projects in key areas of interest to it. Each subcommittee will have at a minimum one sponsor from the core members of the PTAC that establishes its own Subcommittee goals and responsibilities. Subcommittees may be created and dissolved upon a consensus vote of the PTAC.

The chart below shows the current six active Subcommittees of the PTAC, five of which are initiative Subcommittees.



PTAC Meetings Rules/Mandates

- **A minimum of two-hour monthly meeting** – Extend as needed (9:00am thru. 12:00pm the 3rd Wednesday of every month)
- **Make attendance mandatory** – Core council members or their appointed designees must be in attendance for every meeting
- **Have open, honest communications** – Be respectful of members’ roles and expertise; support Council decisions; accept the differences, etc.
- **Make decisions by consensus** – No abstentions; address any “No” vote; make decisions based on clear information
- **Follow up on issues timely** – Report back on actions items or escalation when needed
- **Standing Agenda** – 1) Emerging Technologies 2) Subcommittee reports 3) Review of Tech-project queue

Multiple Channels of Bringing New Technology Ideas

PTAC created the Emerging Technology Subcommittee to gather and bring back information on new and emerging technology that could enhance program and staff effectiveness and efficiency. On the standing agenda of PTAC meetings, PTAC’s top executives and Mid-level manager members lay the ground work for trickling down the message of using new technology to all levels of EHSD staff. Coupled with efforts in the Director and Bureau Directors’ brown-bag lunches, the PTAC uses field visits and IT and program staff surveys and meetings to channel

new ideas of how to use new and emerging technology. Ideas include how to utilize varied sources, such as BASSC class sharing, system/service vendor demonstrations, intra/inter-agency information sharing, and on-line web search, amongst many others.

Customer-Centric Project Approach

PTAC adopts customer-centric project approach for technology in service design and service delivery processes. A tech initiative is first identified at the PTAC Newly-requested/feasibility stage, then, a specific PTAC Subcommittee (for a department wide initiative) or a cross-functional project team (for a Bureau/Unit wide initiative) would be created. This process requires members of representatives from both operating program(s) and IT to address project related issues and report back to PTAC. Focus groups from staff and clients, brown-bag lunches, surveys with partners and clients, and communication campaigns are utilized to identify the program needs and seek input and feedback during the planning process for system implementation, planning, and migration. The customer-centric, tech project approach starts with “what program/service needs and end results are required” and then works forward to configure “how to accomplish program/service needs with needed technology.”

Tech-Project Queue Tracking System

The PTAC Tech Project Queue Subcommittee was created for tracking and reporting the status of the technology projects to PTAC. Reviewing tech project status and prioritizing key tech initiatives have been major standing agenda items for PTAC meetings. The Information System Manager, also the core council member from the IT bureau, maintains a tech queue report for PTAC meeting review. Basically, projects are grouped by project-stages:

- Newly-Requested

- On Hold
- Feasibility
- In Process
- Complete or Withdrawn

For each project line, the following columns of information are reported:

- Project ID, Title and Description
- Status details
- Project Start Date and Estimate Completion Date
- Origin – Management request, Mandate, Strategic, Management Evaluation, Grand Jury, Security
- Stage – Newly Requested, On Hold, Feasibility, In Process, Complete, Withdrawn
- Bureau
- Project Manager and IT Lead
- Priority Score

Value-added Based Project Rating and Prioritizing System

A value-added based project rating system has been incorporated in the tech-project queue via assigning a priority score to each newly requested project. The project's priority score provides a quantifiable and an "across-the-board" method for prioritizing tech projects, especially projects within the same project-stage group. The rating metric has the following six value-based selection factors:

- Impact – Clients/Staff
- Strategic Need
- Cost (inverted)

- Benefit/Value-added
- Effort – size of staff hours (inverted)
- Operational Risk

Each factor is rated on a 1-3 scoring scale, with 3 = high, 2 = medium, 1 = low. A project's priority score is calculated by the sum of the six scores assigned for each factor to the project.

One-Year Anniversary Reflections-Wins and Challenges

In the PTAC, March 2016 meeting, two months after the PTAC one-year anniversary, the tech-project queue² reported the following status statistics:

- Complete – 100
- Withdrawn – 8
- Newly Requested – 9
- On-Hold – 5
- Feasibility –5
- In-Process – 14

Some snapshots of “In-Process” initiatives are:

- A revamped employee intranet with enhanced capabilities for staff-customized, job-related researching and on-the-job coaching, making it simple and easy to navigate
- A Workload Distribution Tool originally developed by InTelegy and now supported by EHSD is rolling out to all Workforce Services for program staff to better manage tasks including assignment, tracking, and status reporting

² Tech-Project queue only reports project requires an estimate of over 80 staff hours or over 40 staff hours with high visibility

- Enhance the current Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to allow voice recognition for IHSS providers checking on the status of their payroll submissions, and to pilot IVR voice prompts in the Medi-Cal CalFresh Call Center.

Along with the tremendous project results, the PTAC community - EHSD Director, IT leaders and program leaders, and consultant – share their big wins PTAC has achieved:

- Formalize the IT commitment at the top level by setting the charter and living by the charter
- Build trust and respect between IT and program
- Promote PTAC value: involvement, responsibility, and collaboration for EHSD as a whole
- Enhance and guide IT resources planning and management
- Enhance Inter-bureau communication and understanding
- Tune new skills in meeting management, time management, information technology project management, vendor management, business process refinement, etc.

Stepping into the second year, PTAC is finding its own direction facing the following challenges:

- Focus more on strategy and direction after one-year warm up on operations and results to align with the Charter
- Optimize the priorities among numerous business demands/commitments
- Secure stable supply of funding for technology projects

Conclusions

PTAC at EHSD is not only championing what is possible with technology for local government

human and social services, but, more importantly, is showing how local government human services leaders can remake the experiences that staff, citizens, and businesses have with our government. It creates a new look at government and an exciting service delivery experience for the 21st century.

Considerations and Recommendations for Alameda County

Alameda County Social Services Agency's Information Services Division merged with Alameda County's Information Technology Department (ITD) in July 2015. Social Services Agency (SSA) maintains a small team, Information System Division (ISD), to provide user support for certain state-owned systems that SSA staff, vendors, and partners use: CalWIN, CWS, for example.

Each quarter, ITD's Chief Information Officer, Chief Technology Officer, Assistant Agency Director, and ITD's SSA Account Manager have a Portfolio Review with SSA's Agency Director. Accomplishments, issues, and future plans are discussed during these sessions. Additionally, at the end of 2015 key ITD folks started meeting monthly with SSA's Agency Executive Team (AET) to review and discuss Current, Queued, and Future Projects. Prior to these monthly meetings, ITD's SSA Account Manager meets with each member of the AET to review the details their division specific projects. With services merged with ITD, SSA is in the process of tuning ways to better address its information governance related processes and strategies.

PTAC is a valuable and powerful governance tool in many ways, from its charter design to its customer-centric service delivery business process. It is recommended that Alameda County

SSA and ITD take the PTAC into consideration for implementation. SSA should consider the following list of action items, tailoring or expanding as needed, to address SSA particular needs:

1. Formalize a program-technology forum at the top level by establishing the charter, assigning department technology Champion and their roles
2. Appoint an outside consultant or internal manager to facilitate the forum
3. Inventory of areas or components needed to be improved or enhanced
4. Identify areas or processes where technology could be utilized to enhance efficiency or effectiveness
5. Perform a gap analysis of the current tech state versus the targeted level of efficiency
6. Establish a detailed technology strategy to achieve identified technology goals
7. Communicate to all staff and stakeholders about the established technology strategy and roles of the Champion
8. Execute the established technology strategy and measure the progress
9. Periodically reassess the technology strategy and revise or update it to respond to new conditions or situational needs

Acknowledgments

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