

CalWIN Management Reporting Shortfalls: Santa Clara County's Model

JULIA SHEEHAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

“Mind the gap” is a warning to train passengers to remind them of the sometimes significant gap between the train door and the station platform. With the advent of CalWIN, the CalWORKs Information Network, an automated information system programmed to automate eligibility determination and case maintenance functions for social services programs, the Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency (HRA) found itself at once overwhelmed with information but also lacking key pieces of data readily available from the previous eligibility system. There were gaps in an overall understanding of the new application as well as the internal needs for data. CalWIN provided hundreds of canned management reports that were, at best, difficult to use and, at worst, contained incorrect data. In order to fill the gap, all 18 consortium counties using CalWIN were required to use local staff to validate what CalWIN had to offer, reformat canned reports into more user-friendly formats or create their own reports cobbled together from poorly documented CalWIN data extracts and County Information Server (CIS) data tables. Santa Cruz was caught off-guard by all of the data demands and was in great peril of falling into the gap.

Challenges

The local burden now placed on counties to fill the gap in CalWIN’s report capabilities is compounded in Santa Cruz County by the unique geographic and economic issues which make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. We are a community defined by exorbitant housing costs and limited income and growth. Our economy is based on recreation (e.g. beaches, restaurants and wineries), shrinking agricultural land and an expanding university. Local government jobs are unable to compete salary-wise with larger neighboring counties. Santa Cruz County HRA finally fell into the gap in March 2007 when the single programmer retired, leaving the department with no other option than to cease entertaining data requests until it could come up with another plan.

Recommendations

As part of an 18 county consortium, Santa Cruz County needs to draw on its larger neighbors for support. We must explore the feasibility of a regional collaboration for the sharing of resources and co-location of those resources.

Julia Sheehan is the Social Services Data Systems Coordinator and CalWIN Manager for the Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency.

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Where We Began

The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS) Information Network (CalWIN), is an automated information system programmed to automate eligibility determination and case maintenance functions for specific social services programs (including CalWORKs, Food Stamps, Medi-Cal, General Assistance, and Foster Care) in the State of California. The 18 Welfare Client Data System (WCDS) Consortium counties (including Santa Clara and Santa Cruz) converted from an antiquated mainframe eligibility case management system, the Case Data System (CDS), to this robust, Windows-based automated case management system between January 2005 and July 2006.

The CalWIN application served as the “great equalizer” for the 18 consortium counties using the program with standardization and uniformity as the basic tenets of the CalWIN ideal. Regardless of size or resources, each county bears the same responsibility for facilitating new code releases, training staff and meeting reporting requirements for the state and federal governments. There is an expectation at the vendor and consortium levels that there is sophisticated local expertise to handle decision support, specifically ad hoc reporting (those one-time reports concerned with a specific subject or purpose).

As a smaller county, Santa Cruz County struggles with resource issues related to those reporting needs for our social services staff working for the county’s Human Resources Agency (HRA). In order to shore up our support staff in Santa Cruz County, I traveled to Santa Clara County and focused my efforts on fact finding (and some shameless recruiting as well).

Challenges

CalWIN arrived in Santa Cruz County on May 2, 2005 with over 750 “canned” reports in 21 separate categories:

- Report User Documentation
- Alerts & Tracking Reports
- Appointment Scheduling Reports
- Authorization Reports
- Benefit Issuance Reports
- Benefit Recovery Reports
- Case Assignment Reports
- Case Data Reports
- Client Correspondence Reports
- Client Referral Reports
- EDBC - GA/GR Reports
- Employment Services Reports
- Error Phone Reports
- Hearings Reports
- Interface Reports
- Mass Update Reports
- Security Reports
- Staffing Reports
- State Reports
- State Detail Reports
- Traffic Log Reports
- Workload Management Reports

On the surface, the promise of hundreds of reports readily available to any end user was a dream come true. Unfortunately, the canned reports, available through the CalWIN application on an internet site (called ContentOnDemand), were problematic for several reasons. First and foremost, much of the data reported were inaccurate or incomplete and had to go through an exhaustive validation effort (which is ongoing).

We encountered a stiff learning curve in Santa Cruz County—workers did not understand how to access the reports and once they got past that, it was difficult to compare what they were used to in

the old CDS system with what was available in CalWIN. How did the old translate into the new? Many tried and true staple reports available in CDS were now presented differently in CalWIN or split into separate reports. Naming conventions were foreign, and the schedules for rendering reports were unfamiliar. CalWIN reports are rendered in a portable document format (.pdf) that is only viewable and printable—they cannot be manipulated, filtered or sorted differently.

Our fundamental data needs for workload management were not being met, not to mention any reporting needs outside of the readily available reports. A great hue and cry went up upon CalWIN implementation, and Santa Cruz County scrambled to address what was developing into a great need for reorganized canned reports and ad hoc reports to fill the gaps in what CalWIN's ContentOnDemand had to offer. Santa Cruz County was not prepared to meet this need. Staff well versed in the ad hoc capabilities of the old CDS system had very little knowledge or understanding of the new CalWIN reporting structure—a structure rich in data extracts and County Information Server (CIS) tables but poor in documentation. The existing three staff capable of running sophisticated CDS ad hoc reports were not capable of creating anything other than a rudimentary ad hoc report out of CalWIN.

To complicate matters, staff originally working with CDS ad hoc reports were re-purposed during CalWIN conversion and implementation to support the application's infrastructure (reference tables and security) as well as assigned Help Desk support duties. There were just not enough hours in the day to add ad hoc reporting on top of the great application support needs. HRA had one Senior Departmental Programmer Analyst on staff that made every effort to fill the expanding gap. The advent of CalWIN made it clear that Santa Cruz County HRA was in need of an overhaul.

Comparisons

In order to compare CalWIN experiences, I needed to research the similarities and differences between

Santa Cruz County and Santa Clara County. Based on FY 2005-2006 statistics, Santa Clara County's diverse population totaled about 1.66 million residents. To serve its population, the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) is made up of over 2,200 budgeted staff (about 1800 full-time CalWIN users and 260 web users) supporting the Departments of Aging & Adult Services, Employment & Benefit Services, Family & Children's Services, and Central Services (e.g. Administrative, Financial, Personnel, etc.).

Based on 2005 estimates, Santa Cruz County's similarly diverse population totaled about 250,000 residents. To serve its population, the Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency (HRA) is made up of about 500 budgeted staff (about 295 fulltime CalWIN users and 80 web users), supporting the Divisions of Administration and Administrative Services, Benefit Services, Careerworks, Family & Children's Services, Adult Services and the Workforce Investment Board.

It turns out that the two counties are similar in structure in how they have segmented their approach to social services by creating separate divisions for distinct populations. Yet, the two counties support vastly different numbers of people. Santa Clara County currently has over twenty personnel dedicated to working on reporting solutions; Santa Cruz County HRA has one. The situation became critical in March 2007 when that one staffer retired. There was no back up and recruitment looked grim due to the expertise required to fulfill the position's commitments and the lower wages offered in Santa Cruz County for technical jobs (as compared to neighboring counties).

Santa Clara's Solution

After several months of struggling with the support issues that arrived with the CalWIN application, Santa Clara County took a bold step to acknowledge that CalWIN really was here to stay and that structural changes were necessary in order to support the application itself and the ad hoc reporting demand that came along with it. Among the large

organizational shifts, Santa Clara created a new CalWIN division and staffed it by splitting the existing SSA Information Systems group supporting ad hoc needs into two distinct groups: SSA Solutions Development Support and CalWIN Decision Support & Research.

The Solutions Development Support team, made up of eleven mid-managers with the titles of Information Technology Specialist, Application & Decision Support Manager and Information Systems Manager is heavy in the design, application support and technical arenas. It is responsible for the ad hoc needs of the entire SSA (except for the CalWIN piece) but also maintains/creates the tables needed for the CalWIN team to create ad hoc reports. This group works primarily with the Business Objects reporting tool. In order to bring this group up to speed with the Business Objects tool, outside contractors were hired to train staff and help create data universes against which to run reports.

The CalWIN Decision Support & Research group is more diverse. It is made up of a mixture of mid-managers and union staff with the titles of Information Systems Manager, Employment Program Supervisor, Information Systems Analyst, Management Analyst, and Information Systems Data Assistant. This model marries technical staff with staff responsible for end-user (eligibility) interaction, policy/regulations interpretation, and research. As Solutions Development Support is more technical, the CalWIN Decision Support & Research group is more comprehensive, taking a more wrap-around approach to reporting needs.

The CalWIN Decision Support staff works closely with the eligibility program staff in order to create an ad hoc solution that really answers the question at hand. This group is also responsible for some non-CalWIN ad hocs, mainly reporting related to SSA labor issues (e.g. staffing and caseload levels), fiscal support and budget development. There is a standing request process whereby a program liaison (normally a manager or standing workgroup) may request data. Completed reports are posted to InfoView, an online business intelligence portal that

collects, consolidates, and presents an organization's reports. Appropriate access is granted to those who need to access online reports. The programmer creating the report and the end user requesting the report are responsible for quality assurance checks. As with any agency, there is some crossover between the two groups and a lot of close coordination so they do not end up working at cross-purposes.

Evaluation

Santa Clara's reorganization efforts to better support the CalWIN application, its users and managers, are very new - the changes were implemented in early 2007. As with any reorganization effort, there have been growing pains, and it may be too early to tell whether or not this is a permanent change or a short-term change to meet the immediate needs of a new application.

The reorganization will be revisited periodically to determine whether or not it still makes sense. Santa Clara County is faced with its own staffing challenges, similar to those of Santa Cruz County, including staff attrition and shrinking skill sets.

Recommendations for Santa Cruz County

First, Santa Cruz County must be more calculated in how it recruits, trains, uses and retains staff. It must also find a way to become more competitive with the larger neighboring counties when it comes to compensation.

Second, it is clear that Santa Cruz County must hire more staff in order to support ad hoc capabilities. But because Santa Cruz County is often unable to compete salary-wise, hiring new staff may not necessarily mean adding to the HRA personnel stable. We must think outside of the box. Santa Cruz County must pursue other avenues, such as outsourcing, contracting, entering into mutual aid agreements and 'software as a service' designs.

If we are unable to recruit/retain appropriate staff, we must look to other ways of augmenting support services. As CalWIN really is the "great equalizer", and consortium counties are faced with similar reporting needs, I suggest Santa Cruz County works

together with Santa Clara County and enters into a mutual aid agreement (and perhaps with other CalWIN counties, if appropriate) in order to meet its reporting needs. Santa Clara County has a functioning model that Santa Cruz County could work closely with.

Third, Santa Cruz County must be smarter with the limited resources it has or is able to attract. Clear lines of communication between those in need of data and those retrieving the data must be drawn and reinforced. A central location for ad hoc reports must be identified, and, eventually, models must be created whereby a requestor may run his or her own reports against tables maintained in the background by technical staff.

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