CalWORKS Information Network (CalWIN) Best Practices

Rafaela Perez

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Santa Clara County has always taken a progressive and positive approach to providing support to staff. With this in mind, it is imperative to continue exploring approaches to enhance CalWIN expertise and find new ways to ensure better bridging and communication with CalWIN users.

CalWIN, the CalWORKs Information Network, involves an 18 county consortium. The CalWIN application supports eligibility determination and case management for federal, state, and county public assistance programs. CalWIN replaced a 30-year-old legacy system and is a much more complex system than its predecessor. With the implementation of CalWIN, one key problem impacting Santa Clara County is the information overload its staff is experiencing.

San Francisco, Alameda, and Santa Clara Counties have continued to review and refine their infrastructures and communication strategies to efficiently function in the "CalWIN World".

Findings

This case study focuses on key CalWIN strategies in San Francisco and Alameda counties that support CalWIN users. The following elements were observed:

- CalWIN Support Teams;
- Production Calls;
- BEnDS (Business Environment Design Strategy)
- CalWIN Help Desk tickets;
- Program & Policy departments;
- Coaches;
- Broadcast Messaging; and
- Conversion Room/CalWIN Support Team.

Currently, San Francisco's CalWIN Support Team manages the CalWIN Help Desk tickets. They have a presence in the district offices, allowing them to observe first-hand the user's experiences with the system. Their presence is instrumental in direct and immediate communication as well as troubleshooting alongside district office staff.

Alameda County maintains a team which is dedicated to working on identified tasks requiring action that may not be a priority for caseworkers and may otherwise go unattended.

Alameda County is also using the Broadcast Messaging feature in CalWIN. Daily broadcast messages are issued to remind users about key processes and dates, and alert them of new information that may affect their processes. Urgent messages are issued as soon as a functionality problem is identified and reviewed. Priority messages are e-mailed to managers who may need to know the information, but do not necessarily log on to the CalWIN system on a regular basis.

Although not all CalWIN strategies observed in San Francisco and Alameda are necessarily direct communication with the end users, these are best practices that may be considered for improving support.

Summary of Recommendations

San Francisco and Alameda counties' coaching, messaging and task-oriented team approaches provide best practices that can be further explored for adaptation in Santa Clara County to enhance CalWIN proficiency and comfort level for system users.

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Introduction

CalWIN, the CalWORKs Information Network, is the largest system of its kind in the country. CalWIN ensures benefits are appropriately issued to more than a million California families. It supports the work of over 24,000 county employees. It replaced a 30 year-old legacy system. CalWIN is a windows-based, much more complex computer system than of its predecessor, the main frame, "green screen' style Welfare Case Data System (WCDS).

While CDS had about 100 screens, CalWIN has over 1000. Transition from CDS to CalWIN is complete. Santa Clara County was the 5th county to roll it out, and it is almost at the two year anniversary mark. CalWIN brought new operational realities, necessitating redesign of business processes and operations. Eighteen months after implementation, there is a sense of normalcy. But there is lot more to be done for users to trust the system and to achieve proficiency in using CalWIN.

One key problem for Santa Clara County is the information overload staff is experiencing. The number of technical materials, such as CalWIN Announcements, Business Environment Design Strategies (BEnDS), Release Notes, Calendars, Program Updates, Handbook Revisions, Bulletins, Calendars, Business Processes updates and revisions, CalWIN 411s, and Form Revisions Updates, to name a few, is unmanageable. Since going live with CalWIN in June 2005, we continually hear: "I can't keep up with this paperwork" and "I can't manage my virtual cases". Even the volume of CalWIN related e-mail can be overwhelming, "I'm getting 30-40 messages a day, and it takes me hours to read them."

San Francisco and Alameda counties implemented the CalWIN system, five and six months, respectively, after Santa Clara County went live in June 2005. Because CalWIN is new for all 18 consortium counties, I elected to study San Francisco and Alameda Counties. The three counties have a comparable number of CalWIN users. Alameda County has a similar infrastructure to Santa Clara County, whereas San Francisco County's is different.

My goals for this project were to observe San Francisco and Alameda Counties' infrastructure and communication efforts. In doing so, I hoped to better understand how to improve the processes by which CalWIN information is relayed to staff.

Background

Legislation

Chapter 303 of the 1995 budget act and legislation was enacted in October of 1997 (Welfare & Institutions Code, Sections 10823 and 10824), facilitating the formation of up to four county consortia to design automated welfare systems. These consortia, guided by federal and state laws, regulations, rules and policies, were granted autonomy by the state to develop and implement the system of their choice. Current consortia are as follows:

- CalWIN is a joint effort of an 18 county consortium, equaling 42% of the state caseload.
- ISAWS was developed in Napa County and is currently in operation in approximately 35 small California counties, and it accounts for 12% of the state caseload.
- LEADER was designed exclusively for Los Angeles County, and it represents 34% of the state caseload.
- C-IV Consortium is the fourth consortium of California counties. The C-IV Consortium includes Merced, Riverside, San Bernardino, and

Stanislaus counties and equals 12% of the state caseload.[1]

General CalWIN Functionality

The CalWIN application supports eligibility determination and case management for federal, state, and county public assistance programs. These programs include:

- California's Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids/Temporary Assistance for Need Families (CalWORKs/TANF);
- Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA);
- Food Stamps;
- Medi-Cal;
- CMSP;
- Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI);
- Foster Care;
- KinGap; and
- General Assistance/General Relief programs.

It also supports Welfare-to-Work, Child Care, Food Stamps Employment and Training (FSET), Cal-Learn and County Employment Programs.

As an integrated on-line, real-time automated system with 26 subsystems, CalWIN allows for automated eligibility and benefit determination, benefit issuance, notices of action and other client correspondence, and management reports. It also interfaces with other key systems, such as State-wide Client Index (SCI), Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), Service Management Access Resources Tracking (SMART), Income Eligibility and Verification System (IEVS), Welfare Data Tracking Implementation Project (WDTIP), MEDS, and Child Support Collections.

CalWIN Impact

It has been over two years since the first county went live on CalWIN, and almost a year since the last of the 18 consortium counties went live on CalWIN. Staff have experienced a big change in the way they do business, including both the new computer system, along with virtual cases, and electronic mail.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org

This study reviews strategies in San Francisco and Alameda Counties and identifies the structural placement of CalWIN support teams, program and policies, and staff development groups within each organization. The focus is on common CalWIN communication component and how they are managed within the county. The following components were observed:

CalWIN Support Teams;

- Production Calls;
- BEnDS, Business Environment Design Strategy;
- CalWIN Help Desk tickets;
- Program & Policy departments;
- Coaches;
- Broadcast Messaging; and
- Conversion Room/CalWIN Support Team.

The City and County of San Francisco, Human Services Department, like Santa Clara County, is in the large county category. They have an average of 2,100 CalWIN users. Unlike Santa Clara County, DHS case worker's structure is based on a one-worker, one-program concept. Their infrastructure supporting the CalWIN end users is a partnership between their Information Technology Department and the Economic Support and Self-Sufficiency Department.

Alameda County is also in the large county category, with an average of 2,700 CalWIN users.

Findings

CalWIN Team

The CalWIN Help Desk team is the vehicle for CalWIN functional information to and from the CalWIN Project. This team links to Program and Polices, and Staff Development. These individuals possess a high level of program knowledge in their area of responsibility. For the most part, they are the subject matter experts who participate and represent the county in the CalWIN Project workgroups. They work closely with Program and Staff Development in identifying training and communication needs and developing tools e.g., (newsletters, "how to's", updates, and handbooks).

In San Francisco County, similar to both Alameda and Santa Clara, its CalWIN team members are assigned a program area. San Francisco County has its CalWIN team work at the Program/District Offices sites two to three days out of the week.

The table below identifies the job titles and division/departments used in each of the three counties:

County	Title	Department
San Francisco	Business Analysts	Information Technology
Alameda	Program System Coordinators	Information Technology
Santa Clara	Application Decision Support Specialists	CalWIN Division

In all three counties, the CalWIN team is responsible for coordinating the CalWIN conference calls and ensuring stakeholders and/or subject matter experts are in attendance.

San Francisco County takes the conference calls to another level. District offices staff, including program managers and staff development specialists participate in the conference calls. In district offices where CalWIN business analysts are on-site (stationed or there for the day), the analyst, along with the program manager and key staff such as, supervisors, coaches, program specialists, and handbook writers, participate in the conference calls. Having key people participate in the conference calls gives them first-hand knowledge of what is going on at the project; and critical information is immediately disseminated to affected users.

BEnDS

A Business Environment Designed Strategy (BEnDS) is a project-issued, temporary work-around required because a function has been determined to be incorrect or not yet programmed in CalWIN. BEnDS are received by the county's CalWIN team and redirected to the program team for review, testing, and to issue to staff, if needed. San Francisco makes the project-issued BEnDS available to all users. Alameda and Santa Clara Counties issue the county's customized BEnDS to line-staff. The project-issued document is only available to key people, such as Program and Staff Development.

Help Desk Tickets

The CalWIN Help Desk ticket system, also referred to as Service Request (SR), is the methodology used by users to report issues/problems. It is the main vehicle the CalWIN team uses to disseminate information directly to the end-users. In this area, the three counties receive, process, and redirect tickets in a slightly different manner.

In San Francisco, SRs are directly assigned and routed by the Agency Help Desk, which manages all tickets including non-CalWIN tickets, to the analysts based on their area of expertise. They troubleshoot the SR and, if needed, escalate it to the CalWIN Project Help Desk.

In Alameda, SRs are sent directly to the CalWIN team queue. The Alameda CalWIN team has a designee who reviews, troubleshoots, and resolves easy tickets. Those requiring in-depth or program-specific knowledge are assigned to members based on their program and system expertise to troubleshoot and escalate to the CalWIN Project Help Desk, if needed. Tickets are reviewed up front, by the queue designee, to ensure workers took and documented appropriate steps and trouble-shooting actually took place. Tickets are also evaluated to identify if the issue is about CalWIN functionality; tickets identified as eligibility or process questions are returned to the user and supervisor.

In Santa Clara County, similar to Alameda, SRs are sent directly to the CalWIN Team queue. The staff person responsible for the queue assigns tickets to team members who are then responsible for troubleshooting, assessing the need to redirect problems, including escalating to the CalWIN Project Help Desk. Tickets that involve issues related to business process, regulations, and CalWIN operational subsystems are forwarded to the Program Team for further review and troubleshooting.

Program

The infrastructure of Program and District Offices in San Francisco County differs from that of Alameda and Santa Clara Counties.

In San Francisco, the Program Policy and Operations Department is grounded as each Program/District Office manages primarily an assistance program, each office counts with its own resources, including program specialists, trainers, and CalWIN coaches. The CalWIN Team business analysts attend the district offices staff meetings. These meetings are a communication tool and an opportunity to exchange information. This gives the CalWIN Team the opportunity to see business operations first-hand and understand what users are experiencing, and have immediate access to any CalWIN issues or errors users may be encountering. It gives the program manager, program specialists, trainer, coaches, and supervisors a setting in which to receive current updates on CalWIN, and the opportunity to be involved in CalWIN at a different level besides being an "end user". As a group they identify SR trends, issues, and challenges in using the system; they brainstorm solutions and determine the need for written communication "how to's" and/or training. Because the office meetings concentrate on their specific assistance programs, such as Food Stamps, issues pertinent to other assistance programs are flagged to be discussed in a more applicable setting, such as the cross program meetings where representatives of all the offices/programs participate.

Alameda and Santa Clara Counties' programs, district offices and staff development infrastructures are similar. District offices manage multiple programs with eligibility intake and continuing functions. Program and Policy, and Staff Development departments provide policy interpretations, business processes, and training supports to district office staff. Unlike, Alameda County whose program staff continues to be under the Department of Workforce and Benefits Administration, Santa Clara County program staff recently became part of the new CalWIN Division.

Coaches

During CalWIN implementation, the "Coach" concept was in use in all three counties. Most of these coaches were in a supervisory capacity. Shortly, after implementation, Alameda and Santa Clara stopped the sponsorship of "formal coaches" and staff returned to their former duties. Although, these individuals continue to assist users, their focus is primarily their direct reports.

San Francisco County's decision was to maintain the coaches. They have designated staff who works with users in a coach capacity. After initial troubleshooting is done by the worker and supervisor, the issue is brought up to the coach. Issues not resolved at the coach level are reviewed by the on-site CalWIN team member and a decision to initiate a help desk ticket is jointly determined. Another role of the coach is to identify trends. When a trend for an ongoing problem is identified in a particular area, system, and/or eligibility, the coach notifies the supervisor. Trends are reported to the program manager and options are identified and solutions recommended.

The San Francisco County hands-on coach and on-site CalWIN team approach may have attributed to the low number of help desk tickets being opened. The number of help desk tickets (level 1), as well as those that are escalated to the CalWIN Project (level 2), are relatively low compared to the numbers in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties. The table below is an extract of the latest published CalWIN Help Desk Statistics Report—Period February 2007:[2]

County	Opened Level 1	Opened Level 2	Closed Level 1	Closed Level 2
San Francisco	294	16	282	34
Alameda	1000	45	425	20
Santa Clara	1162	92	946	101

Broadcast Messages

Broadcast Messaging is a feature in CalWIN whereby authorized users can create and send messages to all CalWIN users within their county. This feature is currently not in use in San Francisco or Santa Clara Counties.

Alameda County is successfully using the Broadcast Message System in CalWIN. Broadcast messages are issued daily. These messages are designed to

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[2]http://www.calwin.org

remind workers about specific functions/tasks and alert them of new information to assist them in their day-to-day case management and processing in Cal-WIN. Copies of the urgent messages are e-mailed to program managers. Routine broadcasts are pre-scheduled and urgent messages are sent as soon as an issue has been identified and reviewed. Broadcasts are set to be read when users log on to the CalWIN system; workers are unable to navigate to any part of the system until all unread messages are viewed. Workers can access a listing of all available messages in this system. They are also able to read, delete or flag a message as a reminder. Supervisors review and discuss the broadcasts during their unit meetings. Messages are maintained in the system for up to 30 days. Feedback from staff has been positive and users are requesting messages be available to them beyond the 30-day availability in CalWIN. The Alameda IT CalWIN team is currently exploring the feasibility of storing the broadcast messages in a "knowledge" data base that can be accessed by all CalWIN users.

Conversion Room (CalWIN Support Team)

During CalWIN implementation most consortium counties assembled a "Conversion Room. Its primary goal was to clear cases with conversion problems. In most cases, this was dissolved after the implementation phase.

In Alameda this concept continues and will remain in existence with a re-defined focus. In Alameda County, shortly after implementation, issues beyond conversion were identified as needing immediate action, and the Conversion Room Team took responsibility. The team will remain in operation with a re-defined focus and a new name. It is now referred to as the CalWIN Support Team. The former Conversion Room was under the IT Department and has been moved under the Department of Workforce and Benefits Administration. This team will continue to provide the agency with much-needed support to assist workers to "pre-troubleshoot" difficult cases prior to initiating a help desk ticket to their IT CalWIN Team, Time-on-Aid reviews, SR listings and locally developed listings. The team is comprised of seven

eligibility technicians and a supervisor, and it is part of a seven continuing unit Bureau providing support to the Bureau as well as others in the department. On a pilot basis, the team is set to test the upcoming May 2007 CalWIN release 14.

Conclusion

CalWIN consortium counties completed implementation in December 2006. The consortium is now in maintenance mode. The sense from staff in the counties I visited, as well as others involved in CalWIN, is "we've accomplished much, and there's a lot to learn."

CalWIN counties have faced and worked through many challenges during implementation and will continue to step-up to new challenges in maintenance. Because the system is new to all Cal-WIN counties, the infrastructure and communication that was in place under the legacy system does not fit the needs of users in managing the volume of information they receive and need to understand in order to efficiently function in their new world. San Francisco, Alameda, and Santa Clara counties have managed and continue to review and refine their infrastructure and communication strategies.

Recommendations and Opportunities for Santa Clara County

Based on the newness of CalWIN and the experiences of counties implementing and trying different strategies to support CalWIN users in becoming more efficient and confident in the use of the new system, there is no one firm approach that surfaces. Counties have their distinct departmental structures and relationships. Therefore, identical approaches cannot work in all counties.

Regardless of individual structure, style, and approach, there are best practices and anecdotal evidence from the two host counties that are worth exploring for possible adoption in Santa Clara County to 1) better bridge to and communicate with users, 2) enhance user proficiency, and 3) to increase comfort level using the system and virtual case management.

The following recommendations are offered:

- **On-site coaches:** Explore development of on-site coaches utilizing CalWIN experts. Analyze existing resources to determine how these can be utilized differently to support on-site coach development.

- **Support teams:** Utilize support teams to work on the multiple listings that are problematic for staff. Consider formation of a task-oriented team that will focus on the issues, allowing case workers to concentrate on customer service and case management. The task-oriented concept is not new to Santa Clara County and has been proven effective in the existing Medi-Cal Service Center service delivery model.

- **Broadcast messaging:** Explore the use of this CalWIN system feature. Consider a similar approach to that used by Alameda County. Identify key messages and develop a systematic way to use the same messages and generate new ones.

Critical elements to adapt these recommendations already exist in Santa Clara County. While significant barriers still exist, they can be addressed in a productive manner in order to assist staff in further developing their CalWIN knowledge and expertise.

Acknowledgments