

***Program People and Fiscal People:***  
**Maximizing Resources in the Sonoma County**  
**Human Services Department**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sonoma County Human Services Department (HSD) has developed a collaborative budgetary practice within its divisions and fiscal administration. This has resulted in HSD being able to maximize revenues coming into the departments so that the needs of programs are better met. A secondary effect has been that program functions and people are less isolated, resulting in increased team building and improved services.

HSD accomplishes this by beginning each year surveying supervisors and managers to assess the needs of each division including any program improvement requests. Division programs and fiscal directors then meet to compare these needs with expected revenues. During this process, the directors examine where there may be overlapping program objectives and where under-funded programs in one division may be augmented based on overlapping objectives with another division. New revenue sources are also explored. The outcome is that the staff is then able to work across programs as needed to meet departmental and community priorities.

**Recommendations**

Marin County health and Human Services Department could expand its budgetary process to incorporate some of these practices. A first step might be to begin ongoing education with line staff about the fiscal importance of time studies. This could be followed by educational team meetings among fiscal and program supervisors and managers across/within the divisions (particularly social services). Directors, along with fiscal administration, can adopt regular budgetary/program meetings with their managers and staff as appropriate. These opportunities for dialogue should encourage innovative thinking with the use of current and additional revenue sources. Finally, ways of rewarding successful collaboration should be explored to support the continuation and sustainability of the process.

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## **Introduction**

Sonoma County comprises over 1,575 square miles of geography ranging from redwood forests to rolling hills of the wine regions, to mountainous bluffs along the coast. There are over 470,000 people living in Sonoma County. The County of Sonoma employs almost 4,000 staff in service to this population. Within the county structure is the Human Services Department (HSD) which employs 645 people working with a \$165 million annual budget to meet the human service needs of Sonoma County residents.

The Human Services Department is comprised of five divisions: Families, Youth and Children, Economic Assistance, Employment and Training, Adult and Aging, and Fiscal/Administration. The HSD's mission is to strengthen and secure maximum independence for the individual and families through comprehensive services. In managing the programs and revenue to bring this about, the HSD has developed a very collegial and collaborative process across its divisions, particularly around budgetary issues. Plans are discussed and decisions made in a true team format. The program side of the department recognizes the necessity of the fiscal side in planning, and the fiscal side recognizes the need to understand the program side so that the money, and its use will have maximum benefit. With a better understanding of how the dollars are needed and spent, fiscal can be of greater assistance in seeking funds and allocating them in a manner that will have the most significant impact to program delivery. Conversely,

program staff is cognizant of the need to assist in securing maximum funding and views fiscal as an equal partner.

Further among the divisions, directors of divisions work in the spirit of sharing available resources for the greater good of the department and its clients. Since divisions are not revenue-isolated, and neither are the services, the sharing of resources broadens perspectives and encourages unity and the well-being of the entire organization. The process is not confined to just the division directors, instead many levels of the organization have input into program and budget needs; and this is directly linked to strategic planning efforts.

## **Division and Department Process**

Within the Employment and Training Division, a budget development survey is sent out annually to the program managers and supervisors. The survey addresses anticipated changes to the baseline in staffing, technology requirements, furnishing, supplies, training, and includes one-time expenditures. This yearly survey begins the conversation with staff about needs and involves them in understanding how financially those needs can or cannot be met.

Once the survey and feedback are complete, the division managers come together to decide what is feasible, and to determine what will go into the budget database to produce a mock claim (*see below*). The data are uploaded based on what is thought will be the state and federal allocations; then county expen-

ditures are loaded. From this “as if”, the department can see how in line expenditures and revenues should be allocated. Since the final outcome is dependent upon the final federal, state, and county budgets as well as the ongoing economic conditions, there will be several mock claims as discussions are held with the HSD director and the division directors in developing the final budget proposal. This budget will then be discussed between the director of HSD and the County Administrator.

### **Time Study and Claims**

In all counties, each quarter, county fiscal staff “claim” from the state the revenues that are due to fund the welfare programs. Most of the claim is based on the quarterly time studies. While there are some programs (e.g., special grants, I.T.) that conduct continuous time studies, for the most part there is only one set month of the quarter in which a time study can be used for claiming purposes. During this month, staffs are required to log their time into whichever program(s) they worked. While all staff do this, it is the time studies of the caseworkers and first-line supervisors that draw the revenues for the welfare programs and which fund not only their positions but all the indirect costs for the program, such as administration, human resources, support staff and building and supplies. Since a caseworker is not just covering his or her salary but all the costs associated with delivering the program, it is imperative that the time (hence, revenue) is appropriately recorded to those programs wherein the revenue lies. One can see that the absence of a caseworker during a time study month can have a significant impact as no time will have been recorded for the claim. This, in turn, impacts revenue available to fund support staff and other indirect costs.

Consistent with the other team-building themes of the fiscal/program interplay, staffs are educated about the time study and claiming process and the connection to revenues to fund the client work they do. Staff understand the need to spend their time in “priority” program areas and understand that if time is claimed incorrectly, it is possible that allocations

may be altered, resulting in fewer dollars to fund positions and provide for direct service. As a result, staff have an appreciation of the time study requirement and can recognize that their work and time are fundamental to the financial health of the department.

### **Leveraging**

Within and throughout the process, the directors are looking for overlaps and common purposes in program directives. During budget planning sessions, division directors are asking, “What do I have to share and who can share with me?” Employment and Training Division Director, Karen Fies, described it as a potluck experience where everybody brings their pie and all the pies are shared, within funding restrictions.

In budgetary terms, this technique is called “leveraging” and is intended to maximize revenues and expenditures with other programs. For instance, Program A may be under-funded; however, Program B may be in a stronger financial position and may have goals or mandates that are provided by, or at least overlap with, Program A. The staff of Program A in this situation could conduct their time study to the claim codes of Program B, thereby ensuring sufficient staff support to both programs. Often the route to maximizing funding is not so direct. It may be that Program B cannot fund Program A directly but may be able to offer support to Program C. Because of this added support, Program C is able to support Program A in areas where functions overlap.

Another piece to this, and sage advice from Jerry Dunn, Assistant Director of Human Services, is to “always ask for money.” For instance, just recently Employment and Training asked for and received a \$25,000 donation from Kaiser Permanente to support job training. Employment and Training has worked with Kaiser and received donations in past years to provide health-related job training. The positive outcomes of the training program, coupled with ongoing maintenance of the relationship with Kaiser, made seeking additional funding successful and as simple as just asking. In another case, by soliciting members of the Workforce Investment Board for

their help, enough donations were received to conduct a youth symposium for high school age youth about to enter the work force. There were over 540 participants and all costs came from community organizations and businesses.

In addition to these types of donations, revenues can be further enhanced through grant funding, and divisions are encouraged to seek these sources as ways to augment services and build capacity.

### **Leveraging Funds: A Case Example**

An excellent cross-division example of leveraged funds is the one between the SonomaWORKS, Employment and Training Division, and the Families, Youth and Children (FY&C) Division. SonomaWORKS is funded from state CalWORKs dollars and federal Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF). Dollars provided by TANF must be spent to meet four objectives:

- 1 Assist needy families with children so the children can be cared for in their own homes;
- 2 Reduce dependence on government benefits by promoting work and marriage;
- 3 Decrease out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- 4 Encourage formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

FY&C's objectives/mission is to ensure the safety and well-being of children. FY&C is generally under-funded relative to the needs of the community. FY&C and SonomaWORKS share an overlapping objective to ensure the well-being of children (and their families). As such, caseworkers technically assigned to FY&C link their time study to SonomaWORKS when they are working directly with families of the SonomaWORKS program. This shifts revenues into FY&C that would otherwise not be present if the FY&C caseworkers, who work with SonomaWORKS families, were only time studying to FY&C.

### **Concluding Impressions and Recommendations**

As expenses increase and revenue sources become tighter and tighter, human services agencies will need to expand methodologies for funding pro-

grams. This will require a broad perspective and the fostering of inter-divisional partnerships at all levels. Sonoma County's Human Services Department is an example of successful collaboration and partnership among the programs and with the fiscal departments. The net result is that as many funds as are available are secured and used in a manner to achieve maximum results. A secondary effect is that the process has fostered cooperation across the department and functional areas, thereby creating alignment with the overall mission. The practice has become self-sustaining. Whether to include fiscal or program in a discussion is no longer a question to ask. It just is.

Partnership, collaboration and transparency are all objectives we have been seeking in Marin County for a number of years. We act with these ideals in mind. We also seek to serve the people of Marin while maximizing the resources available to us. Sonoma County's HSD has an impressive approach to doing this. Sonoma's HSD mostly mirrors Marin County's Division of Social Services; however, the techniques are applicable to all divisions of Marin County Health and Human Services (H & HS). By expanding upon some of the county's similar practices in H & HS, the county could bring about similar results with more strategic funding, better intra-divisional and inter-divisional understanding, and a better cohesion around H & HS' common purpose of service to the community. Furthering these practices in the organization also means that staff will think in an interconnected manner, and current and future leaders will think this way as well. Leaders become prepared to make decisions with the full-scope knowledge of the interplay of their programs, other programs, and fiscal impacts.

It is recommended that Marin County utilize some of the successful techniques practiced in Sonoma County's Human Services Department. It is understood that there is a time expenditure to expanding these practices and doing such requires ongoing commitment to the purpose. The pros and cons must be examined with a final understanding of why a decision is being made. However, by continuing to educate staff and managers, and by encourag-

ing fiscal/program collaboration, as appropriate, the payoff is one of maximizing revenues and enhancing service deliveries. With the budget process as the cornerstone, the goals of partnership, collaboration, and transparency within and between divisions can become more of a reality and a method of practice for all staff.

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