Santa Cruz Cross-Jurisdiction Contract Management and Outcomes Reporting Website

Implications for San Francisco and San Mateo Counties

Denise Cheung and Pravin Patel

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Outcome evaluation has become an integral part of program evaluation in all programs whether the programs are funded by the government, or through other grants. In December 1999, San Mateo County implemented the Countywide Outcome Based Management (OBM) system, and in 2004, the City and County of San Francisco implemented a citywide performance management process called SFStat. However, in neither county is there currently a consistent reporting system of outcome measures.

In Santa Cruz County, the Human Resources Agency has worked with about fifty non-profit agencies, such as the United Way, and the cities of Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Capitola and Scotts Valley, to develop a contracts management and outcomes reporting website. The new system has been on line since February 2008, and feedback from the users has been positive. Both San Francisco and San Mateo counties have learned the following lessons from Santa Cruz County: maintain continuous communication with stakeholders in formulating outcome measures and community buy-in; partner with other agencies/departments in the county; and receive budgetary support from the agency and the department managers.

Currently, the biggest obstacle all counties are facing is the budget crisis. It is nearly impossible to allocate additional resources to information technology to develop additional reporting mechanisms, and to provide additional support to community based organizations for such purposes. However, there are some recommendations that both San Francisco and San Mateo Counties may still consider. The recommendations are: share the findings with the executive staff and provide a follow-up study by FY 2008–09 BASSC interns to look into Phase II of the Santa Cruz website; form a workgroup within the agency/department to consider the feasibility of similar projects; and develop and implement a pilot project by expanding the functionalities of the current information system within the county so that replications of the model may be considered in future.

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Introduction

Outcome evaluation has become an integral part of program evaluation in all programs funded by government and other grantmakers. Funders have been focused on outcome evaluations because of decreasing funds for nonprofits, and a *continued* increase in community needs. Funders are not only looking at how much is spent, the number of consumers served, and consumer satisfaction, they are also focusing on whether nonprofit programs are really making a difference for their consumers.

In 2004, the City and County of San Francisco implemented a citywide performance management process called SFStat initiated by Mayor Gavin Newsom. SFStat is a performance management process and technology initiative based on Baltimore's Citistat Management Tool. SFStat's purpose is to improve services by monitoring departments' outcome measures. The City and County of San Francisco has taken some steps via the SFStat initiative to improve accountability, reduce waste, and improve efficiencies. In the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SF-HSA), the contracted agencies have also become involved in developing outcome measures for their particular services. Although the City and County of San Francisco is moving towards outcome-based management, there is no consistent system for collecting the outcomes information, particularly from the contractors.

In San Mateo County, from Fall 1999 through 2000, the Shared Vision 2010 community process was initiated by the Board of Supervisors and community forums were held around the county. Residents and participants voted on long-term goals. Ten commitments, twenty five goals, and progress measures were then developed. The Countywide Outcome Based Management (OBM) kicked off in December 1999. The OBM Pilot Phase was in 2000, and OBM phase-in of all county departments/programs was implemented from 2001 through 2003. Currently, the county is focusing on training for managers, data reliability, documentation of collection methodology, and regular performance reporting. In September 2007, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, in collaboration with community partners, commenced work on the Shared Vision 2025, which will update the goals and commitments set eight years ago in response to the dynamic, changing needs of the community. All contracts, including those contracted by San Mateo Human Services Agency (SM-HSA) must list the Vision Alignment goal/s and outcome measures.

In Santa Cruz County, since June 2003, the Human Resources Agency (HRA) has worked very closely with the Human Care Alliance (HCA), which represents about 50 community based organizations, local jurisdictions, the United Way and other county departments to design more consistent outcomes reporting models for human service agencies' contracts with community based organizations. As a result, on October 23, 2007, the Board of Supervisors authorized the implementation of the Contracts Management Center effective fiscal year 2008–09. Beginning February 2008, a web-based

application and contract reporting system has been developed and is available live to the contractors.. This web-site not only allows the contractors to apply for funding but also report their outcomes online to their funders.

As both San Francisco and San Mateo Counties have started to implement outcome-based management, it is in their interests to study the development of the new Santa Cruz county web-based application, to learn from their experience, their success and challenges, so that we can bring back some recommendations to our own counties for continuous quality improvement, particularly in connection with contracts management and outcomes reporting.

Background

Currently, Santa Cruz County contracts out about $4.4 million (FY 2007–08) in general funds to 50 non-profit entities which provide a wide-array of social services (called community programs) to a diverse low income population, including children and teens, seniors, disabled people, women and the homeless. About 80% of the community programs support the core categories of nutrition, health, mental health, family resources, and child care services. The rest of the funds support disability, employment, housing, shelter, and other services, such as advocacy and legal services. The Board of Supervisors, at its discretion, awards these contracts non-competitively, based on the recommendations of the Human Resources Agency.

In response to a series of controversial stories published in a local newspaper, the Board of Supervisors in the June 2003 budget hearings, directed the HRA to work with the HCA in order to develop recommendations for the modification of the program evaluation system for community programs, including improved client outcomes reporting, and for contracting provisions requiring community programs to demonstrate alignment with the HCA's mission and goals.

Since most programs have multiple funding sources, including funding received form other local jurisdictions, the County of Santa Cruz, the United Way, and the cities of Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Capitola and Scotts Valley formed a partnership and worked with HCA in planning, developing, and implementing a new web-based contract management system.

Process

HRA partnered with HCA and formed a Community Programs Outcomes Reporting Committee (CPORC) with the mission to develop a well-defined, structured, and consistent reporting process of client outcomes. Many of the HCA members participated on the CPORC. In June 2004, the CPORC value statement was aligned with the HRA's mission statement. The committee utilized the Ameircan Information and Referral Services (AIRS) taxonomy and developed a standard set of service strategies and descriptors applicable to Santa Cruz County. The committee also developed a web-based version of the previously used "Common Application." HRA also periodically briefed the representatives of the Probation Department, Mental Health Services, and others on the status of the committee's work and proposed reporting model.

This Cross-Jurisdiction Contract Management and Outcomes Reporting Website project was divided into two phases. Phase I implementation includes all community programs funded by general fund. Phase II will include all other state-funded programs, which are initiated through a competitive bidding process.

HRA staff worked with the County Administrative Office and Information Services Department (ISD) to develop the website. ISD completed a feasibility analysis while HRA jointly identified anticipated resources necessary to operate and maintain the website. ISD initially projected the website would cost approximately $91,000, but the final cost came to slightly over $100,000.

In 2006, HRA and ISD arranged to build the web-based system, start data production in 2007, and make the system available to the contractors in February 2008. As of March 2008, initial work was begun to develop Phase II of the project and included the state programs that require competitive bidding.

In order to ensure all non-profit contractors are ready to use the system, several training sessions have been offered. In Module A, the emphasis was on navigating the Contract Management Center (CMC) with computer hands-on training for 2.5 hours. In Module B, the focus was on outcomes training, which lasted two hours.

During the development phase of the website, a few community programs contractors and one county department piloted the web-based contract management system in order to allow the system to be tested, evaluated, and improved as necessary. After Module A trainings, the agencies were able to practice on the web-site and reinforce and sharpen their program application skills. The Common Application process was opened on February 1, 2008 and closed on March 20, 2008 with several agencies acting as "mentors" and HRA staff available to provide technical assistance. CMC reported that all applications were filed on-line by the deadline.

Success to Date

- The newly formatted Common Application was completed, and applicants submitted the application online. Elimination of paperwork is not only environmentally friendly, it is also welcomed by the applicants who handle less paperwork with an online application.
- Contractors can now report client outcomes to multiple funders, all through one web portal. This is considered a huge improvement in terms of streamlining funding applications to different funders and also reducing reporting hassles.
- All nonprofits can now develop their scope of work based on a standardized outcomes reporting system. Standardization makes it easier for funders to review the outcomes and provide feedback to the contractors.
- There is consistent contract administration across all jurisdictional funding sources through the Contract Management Center.
- Periodic reporting and monitoring are now conducted online. This again reduces the time required to file and review paper reports.

- The site serves as an archive for documents, such as the contract boilerplate, budget, scope of work, board list, minutes of the organization's board of directors, periodic reports, and correspondence among the funders and the contractors. For example, the contractors will only need to file the board list and minutes of meetings once, and all the funders can review them. This will also allow different funders to share the information of the same agencies that they fund, making it easier for monitoring.

Obstacles Overcome

In the beginning, many community organizations were resentful of the need to include outcomes reporting as part of the contracting and monitoring requirement. With great leadership within HRA and the tremendous amount of work and commitment of the HRA staff, the development of the Common Application website has proved to be a tremendous success. The development of a common vision, core values, and a "common language" are not easy to achieve, since all these services are so different and varied. Despite these challenges, however, through the cooperative process that the CPORC enjoyed, this was accomplished.

Through interviews and meetings with a number of community-based organizations (CBOs) that are users of the new website, we have come to a conclusion that the efforts of the staff and CBOs paid off. Below are some of the end-users' feedback:

- Santa Cruz Community Counseling affiliates Paul O'Brien and Carolyn Coleman described their participation on the project development as "collective efforts," and both reported overall increased efficiency as the biggest benefit associated with the new system.
- Susan Marinshaw, of Community Bridges found getting to know "what am I delivering?" as beneficial. Additionally, she found "the web-based application easier and faster to complete. She can now combine all programs and one product to all funders." She recalled previously having

to submit a 13-page application to each funder. Also, mistakes are now very easy to correct.

- Clay Kempf of Senior Council said, that as a fund recipient he liked the standardized process and no more duplication of work/copies. He also liked the CMC's governing principles of promoting simplified client outcomes and no cut in services.

- Yolanda Henry of Familia Center found the new website very easy to use and helpful to her and her staff in becoming more outcomes oriented during service delivery. All interviewees unanimously pointed out the availability and efficacy of peer and staff support during the web-based application process.

Challenges

- One of the big challenges in developing and implementing this project is to get the "buy-in" from all parties involved. It has been a lengthy process, meeting with the community partners and other jurisdiction funders, and coming up with a set of core values.

- Although training sessions were conducted, some of the outcomes included in the Common Application are not totally meaningful, according to HRA staff, in the first run of all the applications. There continues to be lots of work to do in order to make changes in the outcome measures before the scope of work can be completed and the contracts can be signed.

- As the Common Application deadline was on March 20, 2008, we have not been able to see what the reports will look like, and whether a standardized report will be available for review, e.g. by the Director of the Agency, or the Board of Supervisors.

- We will still need to see Phase II when the competitive bidding process and varying state reporting requirements will be included. As many of the state-funded programs have different requirements, it is uncertain how all these will be accommodated by the web-based application without complications.

Implications for San Francisco

The San Francisco Human Services Agency (SF-HSA) has an Office of Contracts Management that handles all the competitive bids in collaboration with the program staff of different programs. In FY 2007–08, SF-HSA has contracted out to non-profits for a total of about $163 million. All federal, state, and local funded programs are subject to a competitive bidding process. Setting service objectives and outcome measures have been included in the scope of service of all the SF-HSA contracts. Moreover, community partners have been involved in developing and implementing outcome measures to all the SF-HSA funded programs. What is lacking at this time is a mechanism to report the outcome measures consistently like the service units reports. The Information Technology (IT) Unit of SF-HSA has also developed a number of information systems to serve different purposes, such as the system known as CHANGES was used in the Homeless and County Adult Assistance Program, and OOA Net used by the Office on Aging (OOA). These are web-based applications developed to be used by both staff of SF-HSA and contractors who serve different purposes including reporting to the service units. It seems that expanding these IT systems to include the functionality of outcomes reporting is not an impossible task. However, there are challenges ahead. Some of the challenges faced are:

- San Francisco is blessed with strong advocacy groups and community based organizations. (CBO).We need time and resources to work closely with our community partners in order to achieve something similar to the Common Application in Santa Cruz County.

- As in Santa Cruz County, many of our CBOs are not well equipped to develop outcomes that are most meaningful. Training for both CBOs and staff is therefore necessary.

- With a budget crisis looming for FY 08–09, it will be nearly impossible to add resources to IT, Contracts Office, and Programs to develop and implement additional reporting mechanisms, and to provide additional training to staff and CBOs.

Implications for San Mateo County

Contract administration and monitoring in San Mateo County's Human Services Agency (SM-HSA) are very important due to the amount of funding given to the non-profit agencies. For example, for FY 2007–08 SM-HSA executed approximately 419 contracts (including 99 from Alcohol and Other Drugs services). The Children and Family Services (CFS) Section of SM-HSA has about 85 contracts (FY 07–08) totaling about $7 million dollars. Some of the challenges faced include:

- Providers having multiple contracts with different outcomes
- Contract monitoring is not consistent
- Outcomes are not standardized. Also, there is no standardized process to address a contractor's inability to meet the outcomes.
- Programs, contracts office, and the County Manager's Office need to work more closely together to achieve a meaningful outcome evaluation process for non-profit organizations funded by the county.
- Reports are not submitted electronically. The current paper report process is not environmentally friendly.

Lessons Learned From Santa Cruz

We think that both San Francisco and San Mateo Counties can learn from Santa Cruz County's experience of developing a website for cross-jurisdiction contract management and outcomes reporting. These are the lessons learned from Santa Cruz County:

- Continuous communication with stakeholders in formulating outcome measures, including setting common core values, common language, and the agreement process, such as "use data that is readily available," etc.
- Partnering with other agencies/departments and community-based organizations in the county.
- Great leadership. The Deputy Director of Santa Cruz HRA has been personally involved in spearheading this project, because of the political environment when this project was first started. Continuous support from agency and

department heads is necessary in terms of budgetary support, and community buy-in.

- When implementing a project of such nature and magnitude, it is essential to take into consideration the timeline. Santa Cruz County has taken four years to make this happen. It is good to have the Santa Cruz model as a reference, but it may not be perfect for replication. It is important to look into the evaluation of Phase I of this project and learn more about the challenges that may surface after implementation. Also, since Phase II will begin soon, it will be helpful to learn how Phase II will be implemented and the challenges which may arise.
- On-going training opportunities should be made available to end-users.
- A strong political will is required to ensure success of the project.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Like most counties, San Francisco and San Mateo Counties are facing a budget crisis for Fiscal Year 2008–09. Also, in view of the state's growing deficit, we believe the availability of fiscal resources for such a project will be unlikely. With this in mind, these are our recommendations for both counties:

- Share the findings of this case study with the executive staff in SF and SM Counties.
- Since most contracts in both SF and SM counties are awarded competitively, it is important to look at Phase II of this project in Santa Cruz County, to learn about their success and challenges of the on-line application of all Requests for Proposals (RFP). We recommend that the FY2008-09 BASSC interns from SF and SM look into Phase II and come up with some follow-up recommendations.
- We also think that in each county (SF-HSA and SM-HSA), it will be more effective that a workgroup comprised of personnel from Planning, Programs, Contracts Office, IT, Finance, Program Support, etc. work on the model for each county.
- SF-HSA and SM-HSA may also look into the possibilities of developing and implementing

some pilot projects on a smaller scale in order to determine the possibility of future development on a major scale.

Santa Cruz HRA has given us a very good example of how government and community partners can work together to achieve a cross-jurisdiction contract management and outcomes reporting system on-line. We think that the most valuable part of our case study is to learn about the process of the development of the website, which includes all the stakeholders who came together for a valuable cause. We will bring back such experience to our own county and hope our recommendations will make a difference.

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