

Development of a Data Dashboard and Data Integrity Steering Committee in Santa Clara County

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

This case study deals with the experience of Santa Clara County and how they dealt with the challenges of performance monitoring and data reporting after conversion to a new welfare data system. Their approach entailed a high level commitment to data integrity and improved working relationships between technical and operational staff.

The arrival of a comprehensive new welfare data system in 2005, CalWIN, provided an opportunity for the county to take a fresh look at performance measurement. Management reporting had long been fragmented, with no definitive agreement on which numbers to report where and when. Confusion mounted with the arrival of new CalWIN reports.

Executive leadership understood that collecting good information is central to knowing what works. They formed a Data Integrity System (DIS) to thoughtfully address their county's data integrity issues. One of the key strategies for improving data integrity was the development of a Data Dashboard. Management took a hands-on approach to selecting and prioritizing key measures. The Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS) Data Dashboard now provides a high-level overview that can be used to track key performance areas within the department.

Findings

Santa Clara responded to the challenges of reporting on CalWIN data by creating a Data Integrity System (DIS) that entailed reorganizing staff so that Information Systems technology experts, report writing staff, and program analyst staff cooperated more effectively in a newly reorganized CalWIN division. Senior executive-level staff from the Department of Employment and Benefit Services and the Agency Office oversaw development of the Data Dashboard, which consolidates the key performance measures of the Department. The DIS and Data Dashboard are now important processes and tools used by agency managers to meet federal, state, and local mandates, to hold staff accountable, and to measure agency program performance and client outcomes.

Implications

Alameda County could use Santa Clara's Data Dashboard and Data Integrity Steering Committee as a guide for developing its own data dashboard. This would help bridge the gap that currently exists between technology and program services in addition to serving as a useful tool for managers seeking to measure their programs' performance.

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Introduction

The introduction of a new welfare computer system, CalWIN between 2005 and 2006 created disruption in all 18 consortia counties. CalWIN counted cases and programs differently than the existing systems and data conversion issues resulted in missing and default values. These differences created problems with the accuracy and clarity of management reports. The responsibility for making sense of initially confusing and sometimes inconsistent reports fell to Santa Clara County's Data Integrity System. Through an organized and thoughtful approach, they have been able to agree on a singular version of the numbers to report on a variety of key agency indicators.

Santa Clara County, like all public agencies, had long struggled to find consistent, reliable administrative data to measure program performance and client outcomes. Long before CalWIN, the numbers reported on a multitude of internal agency, state and federally mandated reports were ostensibly at odds due to the different criteria for each report. The arrival of CalWIN made things even more complicated as staff were still learning how the system worked and how to pull information from the system.

Santa Clara County began to tackle its problem with an initially small effort to address a few key areas. This initial effort to help the department make it through the transition from one data system to another was used as a precursor for a much more comprehensive effort to improve the quality of their systems data that could be used to accurately evaluate program performance. Santa Clara's efforts are remarkable for its distinctive collaboration between traditionally separate and detached technical and program operational staff.

Data Integrity System Committee

The Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS) Director initially called together a small group of managers to try to get a handle on a small number of measures. This group included the supervisor of the Decision Support and Research Unit (DSR). DSR was responsible for management reporting and had already been producing numerous data reports. However, most reports were not being fully utilized at this time due to concerns about the quality of the data.

By the fall of 2006, the DIS committee had developed a formal project charter, and had expanded membership to include managers from the agency office, the information systems director, DSR, and welfare office managers. The meeting was co-chaired by a DEBS Project Manager and the DSR Manager. The goal of the group expanded to encompass monitoring and evaluation of all DEBS policy efforts. The key to the success of such efforts depended on the integrity of the data. Members came to understand the many reasons why the data on reports may be flawed and they determined strategies and established subcommittees to address these issues in order to clean up the data and validate management reports.

Managers took the opportunity created by the DIS to develop a consolidated high-level look at key measures of program performance. This list of measures became known as the Data Dashboard. Initial measures on the Dashboard included basic process measures, such as the number of applications pending over 30 days and discontinuance and rescission counts by office. Other measures included the number of RRRs overdue, Food Stamp error rates, and per cent of MEDS alerts processed. Over time, new

measures were added to the Dashboard. For example, with the enactment of the federal Deficit Reduction Act, the Work Participation Rate was added as well as other more refined measures to track client engagement in Welfare-to-Work (WTW) activities.

Over time, the Dashboard has become the key source of data for tracking program performance in DEBS. First and second level managers are the intended users of the Dashboard. Detailed reports behind the measures are intended for use by line staff and supervisors. The Dashboard is widely considered to be a tremendous success, and staff are proud of their accomplishment.

Data Dashboard Measures

The measures on the Data Dashboard are organized by program, and many measures are broken down at the local office level. Measures show a baseline figure, usually the prior year's average, as well as figures for each of the most recent three months and the change between the current month and the prior twelve-month rolling average. Each measure is assigned a data contact person and shows whether the goal for that measure is to reduce, increase or merely track it. All measures are supported by detailed client level reports that are posted on a monthly basis to an online application called InfoView that managers and supervisors can view and print from their desktops. A partial list of the Data Dashboard measures includes:

CALWORKS

- Work Participation Rate
- Non-exempt adults un-enrolled in WTW
- Enrolled but activity not updated
- Expired WTW Exemptions
- Sanctioned more than 90 days
- Show rates at Orientation
- Numbers entering employment
- Average wage
- Expired good cause

FOOD STAMPS

- Food Stamp Error rate
- Cases in control (unassigned)

- Expedited applications approval times
- Pending FSET registration
- Subject to ABAWD

FOSTER CARE

- Total payments amount
- Overpayments discovered amount
- Number of active placements
- Number of payments
- % providers paid on time
- % applications assigned in 1st month

GENERAL ASSISTANCE

- SSI/CAPI referrals & reimbursements
- Days from SSI referral to filing
- Days from SSI denial to appeal
- Job placements from Vocational Services
- Number employable/unemployable

MEDI-CAL

- Applications process within 45 days
- DED applications processed within 90 days
- % RRRs completed
- % MEDS alerts processed
- Medi-Cal Bridging Program measures
- Referrals to Children's Health Initiative

OTHER KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Number active cases by program
- Applications disposed >45 days
- RRR overdue
- Overpayment amounts
- CalWIN alerts processed
- IEVS review cases
- Fraud referrals
- Child Support referrals

Organizational Restructuring

Santa Clara realized that in order to make headway on getting reliable administrative data in the CalWIN era, management reporting staff needed to work hand-in-hand with program analysts and IT technical staff rather than each group working independently in their own silos.

Furthermore, at about the same time, there was a realization that the traditional role of the program

analyst, to review, analyze and write instructions on how to implement administrative policies handed down by the state in All-County Letters, had become obsolete. With CalWIN, the sort of analysis traditionally done at the county level was now done at the consortia level, and new rules were programmed into CalWIN. Counties no longer had the leeway they previously had to implement technical changes as they saw fit. The role of program analysts therefore needed to evolve into one of understanding how CalWIN operated technically, and how to work as a team with information technology (IT) and report writing staff.

Program analysts worked with IT staff to understand how the data in the system is organized. They worked with report writers explaining where the relevant data needed for the reports was entered (or not) into the system and to help test various iterations of management reports to ensure that they were providing the type of information sought.

Santa Clara was in a rather unique position to pull together its newly organized CalWIN division. The county had recently hired as their CalWIN manager someone with ten years experience as a manager with the company that designed CalWIN. That experience afforded not only detailed technical knowledge of the system, but an awareness of the operational needs of counties and a keen understanding of what needed to be done to bridge the gap between the old and new systems.

To better achieve the teamwork necessary to bring these various skill sets together, Santa Clara consolidated three groups into a newly organized CalWIN division, under the leadership of the new CalWIN manager. The CalWIN division consists of three units: Program, Decision Support & Research (DSR), which is responsible for management reporting and producing the monthly Data Dashboard. DSR is comprised of ten staff. The Program Services unit is comprised of seventeen staff, mostly program analysts. Finally, there is the CalWIN Application Triage Unit (CATS) which performs the functions normally associated with most counties' CalWIN units (i.e., production support, CalWIN

conference calls, and CalWIN help desk support, comprised of seventeen staff).

The Program, Decision Support & Research unit (DSR) creates the Dashboard from a complex set of data tables called CIS. CIS files are updated on a daily basis by data files sent down from the CalWIN Project office in Folsom. DSR uses CIS to create not only the Data Dashboard, but also a variety of other reports as requested by management. Each member of the unit has his/her own area of specialization, and also serves as the back-up for another person within the unit. Although the CalWIN Division is not technically a part of DEBS, it is devoted 100% to the support of DEBS. DEBS includes all the functions that in Alameda County are assigned to the EBD and Employment Services departments, but it also carries Foster Care eligibility and MediCal cases that in Alameda County are carried by Adult and Aging Services ETs.

Implications for Alameda County Social Service Agency

Alameda County's Social Service Agency (SSA) could benefit from using a tool like Santa Clara's Data Dashboard as a means of tracking program level performance in the Economics Benefits Department (EBD). While the Alameda County SSA has a well-established Data Dashboard in the Department of Children & Family Services and has more recently begun reporting on performance measures in the Employment Services Department, there is nothing similar for EBD. The closest thing is the monthly Agency Report, which for EBD tracks the Food Stamps Error Rate and various welfare program case-loads over time.

The Alameda County SSA is in the process of developing a Data Warehouse, the chief purpose of which is serving as the agency's primary management reporting tool. Once it is more fully developed, the Data Warehouse could be designed to produce an EBD Data Dashboard.

As this case study found, teamwork between three distinct staffing groups was required to make the Data Dashboard a success in Santa Clara. In

addition, Santa Clara's project had strong program-level executive leadership. Program analyst staff, IT technical staff, and management report writing staff all worked together and in fact were consolidated into a single division, with the division director reporting directly to the agency director. The implication is that Alameda County would need to assign resources from EBD's Program Planning and Support unit, the Office of Data Management (ODM), as well as other technical staff from the Information Services Division. At present, ODM and other ISD technical staff are working with IBM to build the first ten contracted Data Warehouse reports. At this time however, there is no significant EBD executive leadership involvement, nor does Alameda County have its Program Planning & Support unit staff actively involved in the planning for the Data Warehouse.

Recommendations

- Alameda County SSA should consider incorporating elements of a data dashboard into its Data Warehouse Project.
- Staffing resources from Program Planning & Support should be assigned to the Data Warehouse to provide an EBD program perspective and to help with testing and validation of reports.
- A high level EBD executive should be assigned to oversee the development and implementation of new reports for the Data Warehouse, prioritize the incorporation of measures to be included on an EBD Data Dashboard and develop a plan for using Dashboard measures as a management tool to help improve program performance.
- The work done by Santa Clara County should be leveraged and built upon. Alameda County could save considerable time and effort by using the programming logic already developed.

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