

# **Santa Cruz County's Key Indicator System:**

## **Increasing Organizational Clarity**

**Marissa Montenegro**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The amount of data available in social services is a data miner's dream. The Sonoma County Human Services Department became a data champion when the Trendex was developed in 2007 to consolidate all departmental reports from multiple sources into one consistent data hub. However, as new data sets are added, the Trendex has become increasingly time-consuming to maintain. Sonoma County Human Services Department (HSD) is working on a project to automate data and provide users with the tools to pull on-demand reports from a new platform.

As Sonoma County embarked on this new project, it was an opportune time to review the success that Santa Cruz County has had with the implementation of the Key Indicator System (KIS). This case study describes and analyzes Santa Cruz County's approach to assessing its Key Performance Indicators and the system used to present data to staff. It discusses Santa Cruz County's KIS implementation and includes recommendations for HSD to refine the department's key performance indicators, display the indicators in a complete picture with impacting drivers, and provide a forum to discuss a clear understanding of trends and challenges.

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### **Background**

The County of Sonoma Human Services Department (HSD) provides social services to eligible clients in accordance with state and federal regulations. The HSD program divisions are Economic Assistance, Employment and Training, Adult and Aging, and Family, Youth, and Children. HSD monitors hundreds of program data points monthly through the Trendex System.

Trendex is a monthly report designed to provide current and trended department-wide and division-specific information about caseloads, performance measures, outcomes measures, staff and support services. Trendex was launched in 2007; it leads the way in providing HSD managers an innovative, central repository for program data, a demonstration of trends, and the programmatic challenges and successes in a consistent manner. Monthly Trendex editions include a department-wide edition along with editions for each division. The department-wide edition is reviewed periodically at an execs meeting, which includes department and division directors. Division editions are used by program experts in individual division manager meetings to assess division performance.

Since the launch of Trendex, many new data points have been added, which has increased the amount of time required to produce the monthly report. There remain several additional sources of data to incorporate into Trendex. The time required to produce the report along with the recent movement of expert personnel has prompted the department to seek ways to automate the reports

needed by the department. Maintaining clarity when discussing specific metrics can be difficult with increasing amounts of data.

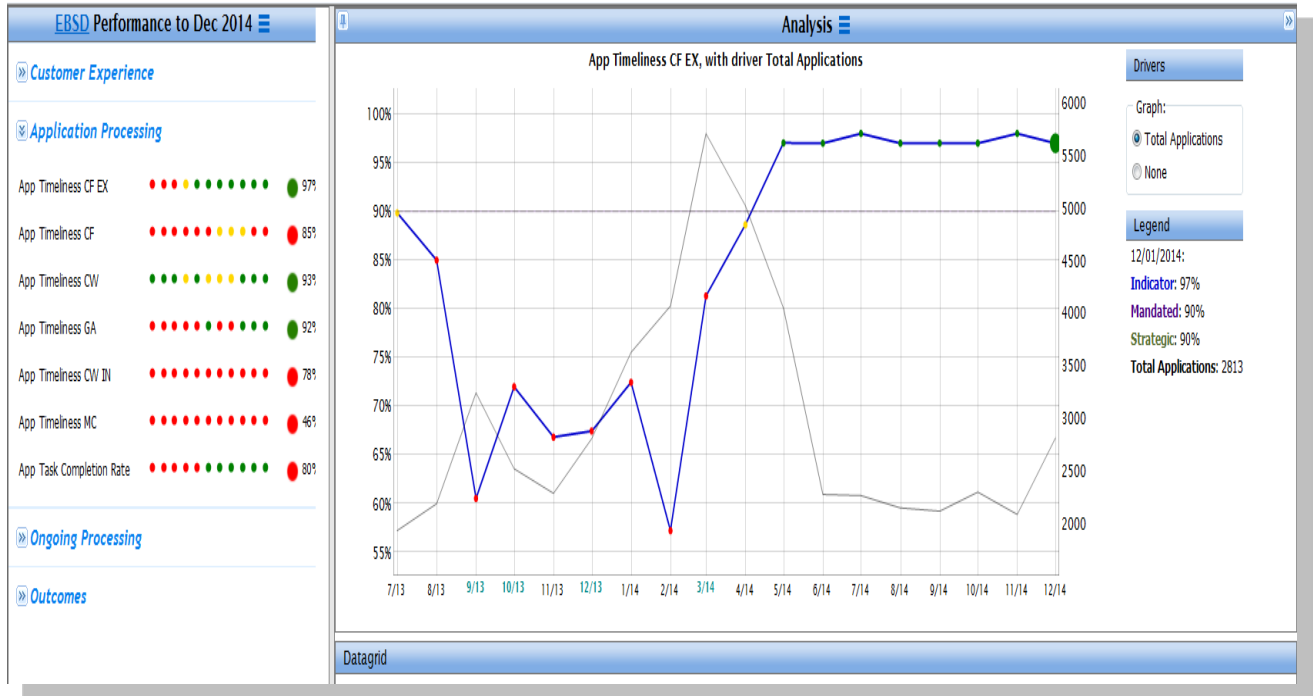
HSD is currently working to develop an HSD Enterprise Reporting System to provide divisions advanced reporting tools needed to develop on-demand reports from data stored in databases.

This new system will allow divisions to access data and deliver information that they can use to make informed decisions. The HSD IT support division will provide the tools, training, and support needed for each division to track, monitor, use, and report data. This tool will allow for the automation of information delivery and will provide each division with the ability to access its own datasets anytime for on-demand reports. The division will have the ability to gather, automate, and disseminate the information to further organizational goals. As HSD embarks on this new project, it is an opportune time to compare HSD's data source to others, such as the Key Indicator System (KIS) found in Santa Cruz County. HSD should have discussions about the efforts Santa Cruz County used to develop its data source and the steps the county has taken to encourage data-driven decision making.

### **Santa Cruz County Key Indicator System**

Santa Cruz County Human Services Department's (SCCHSD) Key Indicator System (KIS) is a user interface that provides a simple and quick visual representation of key indicator performance over 12 months. Indicators are based on mandated and strategic targets, which are grouped into four business functions: Customer Experience, Application Processing, Ongoing Processing, and Outcomes. The KIS interface allows users to view data on performance drivers and significant events to clearly view the impact on performance. KIS provides a clear picture of the relationship between performance, drivers, and significant events. See example 1.

Example 1. Application Timeliness overlaid with Total Applications driver.



SCCHSD began its data effort in 2008 when a commitment was made to making data-driven decision support a principal focus of the Planning and Evaluation Unit. One of the first steps was to create a centralized reporting group which included a division director, two senior analysts, two senior programmers, and one programmer. An early key decision was made to move IT programming support into the Planning and Evaluation Unit allowing internal prioritization of the programmer's time and increasing the programmers understanding of the program support needed by divisions. The programmer's focus converted from general programming to business analytics, which increased the ownership of the unit's projects.

The group then worked with each division director to refine the department's Key Performance Indicators. Madeline Noya, Director of Planning & Evaluation, and her team spent time with

each division director to help refine the division's indicators. The team used the following decision points to refine the indicators:

- Key indicators should be performance measures only (not counts)
- Every KPI needs a clearly defined benchmark/target
- Include only KPIs that need to be monitored monthly
- Maximum of 20 KPIs per division
- Division's performance should be clear at a glance (i.e., simple design)
- Designed with simple a priori analytics (drill downs, drivers, sig events)
- Predefined dashboard content; not individual user defined
- Should be able to be maintained by current staff (no new resources)

The refinement of the key indicators allowed for the team to work on automating a set list of data. Once the data was in place and was as automated as possible, the team crafted a solicitation for a Graphic User Interface (GUI). The project was budgeted at \$90,000 and was eventually given to the Santa Cruz County Central IT Department.

The goals of the GUI were to:

- Provide a system to collect and report a wide range of metrics identified by agency executives in collaboration with Planning & Evaluation analysts
- Present the data in a fashion that is easy to grasp quickly

- Reduce the effort required to gather data
- Make the data readily available for further use outside of the KIS presentation layer

The goals of the user interface were met and the KIS system was ready for use in 2014. Over an eight year span, the KIS was developed from an excel-based dashboard, to a dashboard hosted on a SQL server, to the current and refined system used today with expanded reporting capabilities and a sleek graphic user interface. An extensive training program was not necessary for deployment due to the systems simplicity and intuitiveness.

Once the KIS was in place, the HSD leadership meeting was converted to an HSD STATS meeting. The intention of the HSD STATS meeting was to increase transparency and encourage data-based discussions across divisions. Department leadership, program managers, and analysts are invited to each monthly meeting. Each month the divisions rotate the presentation of a division's KIS monthly summary. According to Kim Petersen, Program Manager, the meeting structure has proven to be valuable in informing team members across divisions of goals and performance across the department. "Meetings have increased collaboration and there is more to come."

The HSD STATS meeting is based on the PerformanceStat leadership strategy by Robert D. Behn: "A jurisdiction or agency is employing a PerformanceStat leadership strategy if, in an effort to achieve specific public purposes, it holds an ongoing series of **regular, frequent, integrated meetings** during which the chief executive and/or the principal members of the chief executive's leadership team plus the director (and the top managers) of different subunits use **current data** to analyze specific, previously defined aspects of each unit's past performance, to **follow-up** on previous decisions and commitments to produce **results**, to examine and **learn** from

*each unit's efforts to **improve performance**, to solve performance-deficit problems, and to set and achieve the next **performance targets**.”*

## **Key Findings**

It was evident in discussions with SCHSD staff that KIS increased overall clarity of organizational performance and the drivers that impact performance. This allowed for meaningful discussions based on a snap shot that gave a more complete picture of how performance was being impacted. The effort to refine and identify critical indicators has also increased department focus on critical division performance. Lastly, it was clear that the HSD STATS meeting structure increased collaboration and alignment across the department due to the increasingly complete picture provided by the KIS tool and the full participation of all division program managers.

## **Recommendations**

HSD is on track to increase its reporting capacity within divisions. HSD is also moving towards the automation of the reports used to reduce the amount of time devoted to producing reports. The goal of this report's recommendation is to increase the understanding, alignment, and collaboration between programs and divisions across the department.

The first recommendation is to refine the departmental performance indicators to a consistent number of critical indicators and drivers per division. Increasing amounts of data can be overwhelming and a shorter list of critical indicators with the ability to drill down to more information would encourage staff to review and understand. Refreshing goals and benchmarks due to the recent change in resources is also recommended. Key performance indicators, goals,

and benchmarks should be reviewed annually to maintain relevancy and to provide a clear picture to leadership to make informed decisions.

The second recommendation is to begin discussing departmental criteria for a user interface that will provide a more complete picture of performance and information collection on impacting drivers. The agency is quickly moving forward with the implementation of a reporting system with report creation tools. This system will need to be fully implemented to be able to understand the capabilities prior to discussing whether a separate user interface would be needed. HSD would benefit from the clarity obtained from an interface similar to KIS to be able to review data overlaid with impacting drivers.

Lastly, the report recommends the creation of a monthly opportunity for all HSD program managers and directors to meet and showcase division performance. HSD has a team of incredibly intelligent and passionate program managers throughout the department that can easily work in silos within their respective divisions. An all-inclusive meeting would provide an opportunity for all program managers to understand the successes and challenges across the department and provide a forum to leverage resources promote synergistic approach to solving organizational issues.

Refining the department's key performance indicators, displaying the indicators in a complete picture with impacting drivers, and providing a forum to discuss clear understanding of trends and challenges will further HSD's ability to understand and improve program outcomes. The costs associated with the recommendations are internal with the exception of the GUI.

Ultimately, this investment will improve our ability to make informed decisions to efficiently provide increased services to clients.



## **Acknowledgements**

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## **References**

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