

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN HUMAN SERVICES: SAN MATEO COUNTY

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The last ten years have produced extraordinary change within county social service agencies. Federal and State legislation has changed the way core programs are operated. Increased outcomes and data reporting are required by funders, collaborative partnering with communities to develop and deliver services is increasing, and agencies are held accountable to new standards. All counties are tasked with managing these changes and producing high quality, efficient services that strengthen families, individuals and communities. Meeting this challenge using internal planning and development functions is one potentially successful approach that is explored further in this paper.

SAN MATEO'S PLANNING UNIT

San Mateo County has taken the rare step of creating a Planning and Development (PAD) unit to help manage changes in a proactive and effective manner. San Mateo County's internal PAD is comprised of organizational development, research, and planning functions, and serves the entire Human Services Agency. Some specific PAD services include: assessing programs, policies, and training needs, collecting, analyzing, and reporting data outcomes, conducting strategic planning, and aiding in community work. These services have helped the Human Service Agency and are exemplary models for other counties.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTRA COSTA

An in-house planning and development component would likely strengthen the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department. To manage this unit, county directors should hire a skilled, dynamic planning and development director who can organize the existing framework of staff development and two planning/research/OD positions into a cohesive unit that can support the department in fulfilling its mission. Benefits to be department would include:

- Improved data management increased support for community partnering
- Application of best practices
- Formalized learning agency culture
- Coordinated data analysis and report development to complement dissemination of information by Public Information Office.

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Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) directors have considered developing an internal planning and development function. Staff recognize the many potential benefits of a planning and development unit, including: increased understanding of specific areas of need; identifying effective services; improved management of grant procurement; expanded staff training; and improved community relations. Though these potential benefits are recognized, high-level staff want to explore potential challenges and limitations of creating an internal planning unit.

The San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) is one of a handful of counties that has implemented a Planning and Development (PAD) component within Social Services. San Mateo's PAD helps the agency accomplish its mission by providing an array of specialized services that were difficult or impossible to access prior to the development of PAD. PAD consists of several traditional county components - contracts and facilities management, special investigations, clerical support, payroll/personnel, and fair hearings - and two nontraditional county functions: organizational development and research and planning. During several visits to San Mateo County's HSA, I met with staff at various levels to discuss PAD's development, structure, function, and performance. This paper is drawn from those conversations and observations at agency meetings regarding the two nontraditional planning elements. The information is intended to provide a framework for better understanding why and how San Mateo's widely recognized PAD unit was developed, the services it provides, its limitations, and implications for developing a similar program in Contra Costa County.

PAD'S DEVELOPMENT

San Mateo's planning effort started in the mid 1990's after director Maureen Borland and staff recognized the need for a more global vision, a comprehensive, community informed strategic plan, and an integrated research and organizational development function in the agency. None of these elements existed at the time, and agency leadership, anticipating rapid changes in social services and wanting to be proactive, believed it important to develop skills and hire people with the expertise to meet changing agency-wide needs. The seeds of the planning unit were sown when the community was challenged to help the agency develop a strategic plan that met everyone's needs. During an 18-month process, agency staff performed extra work, doing both their regular jobs and convening community sessions garnering participation from more than 500 community members. Upon completion of the strategic plan, the need for ongoing community participation was noted by director Maureen Borland, "the process was as important as the product." Staff simply could not continue to carry out their duties and perform community development activities. Thus, a need for planning and development staff to carry on the task was identified. Planning for new welfare-to-work programs revealed a need for improved data collection, analysis, and reporting and the combination of needs propelled the creation of the PAD unit. Core PAD components - organizational development and planning and research - are further described in the following sections.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Program Description

There are many ways to conduct organizational development in a human services agency. In San Mateo, the human resources development unit (HRD) provides these services and is comprised of three parts: traditional organizational development, staff development, and personnel. HRD seeks to improve staff efficiency and effectiveness by assessing programs, policies, and training needs. HRD identifies areas for improvement within the agency and provides lasting solutions, thus promoting a culture of learning throughout the agency. Included in this effort is strengthening team building and facilitating meeting management skills within distinct units of the agency. HRD has eleven staff in two clusters: (1) workforce performance, which analyzes workgroup functioning, assesses staff learning, and conducts training to meet identified needs; and (2) program analysis, which conducts technical analysis of individual programs and provides procedures for staff. All HRD staff participate in both functions, though they are primarily assigned to one group.

HRD Projects

HRD has been involved in many projects. Below are two specific examples of projects with HRD involvement. (A) "Making the Shift" is an agency-wide effort with strong OD involvement, to recognize changing workforce dynamics and prepare junior staff for leadership roles within the agency. OD is involved with developing the succession-planning framework to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills required for positions of successful senior managers. (B) One Stop Centers Assessment. This qualitative project, still in the formative stage, will help agency staff assess the effectiveness of the onestop centers by developing appropriate questions with One-Stop staff input, and collecting, organizing and reporting lessons learned from the data. Four main questions will be asked:

1. Can staff perform necessary tasks?
2. Is there sufficient motivation for staff to achieve a high level of work?
3. Are there sufficient resources for completion of work?
4. What are the barriers to work?

All One-Stop staff members will be asked these questions. The answers will be analyzed for consistent themes and along with recommendations and action items, will be presented to staff so that barriers can be removed and staff can function at an optimal level.

RESEARCH AND PLANNING

The mission of this unit is to partner "with HSA and the community to develop data, information, and processes that support strategic decision-making, innovative program design, effective services, and responsive business solutions." To meet this mission, the Research and Planning unit acts to:

- Support agency staff in developing research models, e.g., working with housing office staff to develop an intake tool to accurately count the homeless population.
- Perform data collection and analysis, assess data validity and reliability, conduct statistical analysis, synthesize information, and provide suggestions.
- Review best practices from academic literature and recommend new practices.
- Present research - communicate findings to diverse stakeholders through reports, memos, graphs, charts, and work with the Public Information Officer.
- Develop small-scale evaluations and needs assessments - project design, instrument development, data collection, compilation, analysis, and presentation.
- Monitor research contracts - provide project oversight and monitoring for large-scale evaluations conducted by independent contractors.
- Data development - work with programs to convert agency work into measurable indicators and outcomes that can be used by staff to measure effectiveness.
- Community technical support - help community based agencies develop and measure data that support county initiatives. Conduct needs assessments to identify areas that need support.

Planning Functions

- Strategic planning -Work with staff to develop long range plans.
- Program planning - Help design Family to Family, Child Welfare redesign implementation plan and Alcohol and Drug/ Child Welfare service integration model.
- Budget planning - Help with outcomes-based management and budget implementation. This requires close work with agency directors and managers to facilitate workgroups, synthesize, refine, and communicate information to stakeholders.
- Grant management - Tasks include identifying potential revenue, helping agency staff prepare funding requests, and tracking and coordinating agency grant seeking.

PAD AND THE AGENCY

Because the ultimate goal of PAD is to improve HSA's service quality and effectiveness, understanding the transition from PAD support to delivery of service is important. Instead of engaging in on-going projects, PAD provides time-limited technical support, to improve the internal agency capacity and enhance service delivery. If PAD conducted ongoing projects, it would be unable to deliver as many services and could lose its dynamic function. PAD projects typically come out of executive team meetings, with the agency director or one of the other directors making the request for services. Staff perception of PAD efficacy seems to be correlated to staff level, with highest regard from top level administrators and lowest from line level staff; line staff may not be as aware of PAD activities. One new manager commented, "I wasn't in management at the time PAD was coming up, so I wasn't impacted much." As described in preceding sections, PAD has taken on many tasks that have benefited the agency and this dynamic is probably an example of the tension and conflict often experienced between management and line staff.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

An in-house planning and development component would likely strengthen Contra Costa County's services in many ways, some of which are noted below. To manage this unit, County directors should hire a skilled, dynamic planning and development director who can organize the existing framework of staff development and two planning/research/OD positions into a cohesive unit that supports the department in fulfilling its mission. Contra Costa County could benefit from hiring a director to develop planning, research and organizational development, especially in the areas of:

- Data management. State and Federal mandates increasingly require difficult to obtain outcomes reporting. A planning and research unit could take the lead on securing, analyzing, and reporting the outcomes of programs within Workforce services, Children and Family Services, and Aging and adult services. Having one unit manage this data would also increase the consistency of reported data and centralize a currently widespread function.
- A centralized, coordinated grants management system with consistent data would benefit the agency by securing funds in a deliberate manner, with the ongoing communication with fiscal staff in the administrative services bureau.
- Increased use of existing research would improve services. Researching best practices and making recommendations for program development would help the department move forward in a more judicious and informed manner.
- Facilitating increased managerial input into the budget process. Improved communication between administrative services and program directors and managers during the budget and contracting process would strengthen the agency as more staff would understand and inform the process.
- OD playing a bigger role in staff development and the ongoing development of a learning agency.
- A planning unit that could serve as a recipient of staff questions and concerns. If staff sees its concerns and ideas acted upon by managers and directors, agency morale and productivity will likely increase.
- OD that could help staff facilitate difficult meetings and improve conflict resolution.
- Research that can translate program data into information for the PIO to use for annual reports and publicity.

In order to assess the agency's readiness to implement a planning and development function, the topic should be discussed among EHSD's directors. Staff may have concerns with developing a planning function in the agency, but a strategically implemented planning unit could operate to the advantage of all of the bureaus in the agency. Implementing this plan would require spending

money, and in the current budget environment, that could be difficult. Nonetheless, adding a planning and development unit will benefit the agency and should be strongly considered.

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