

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN ALAMEDA COUNTY

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INTRODUCTION

For my BASSC Executive Development Project I selected Alameda County to examine its MapInfo software program and how it is utilized in strategic planning. Once I attended my orientation at the Social Services Office in Alameda, I quickly realized that I had a much broader opportunity that reached beyond the MapInfo software. I had the opportunity to examine a county that was transforming their mission, vision, goals, and objectives into a comprehensive Social Services Agency Strategic Plan for 1999-2004.

My time was well spent interviewing representatives from the following departments: Planning Evaluation and Research (PERU), Children and Family Services, Welfare to Work, Finance, Workforce and Resource Development and the Benefit Center. My goal was to obtain a clear understanding as to the planning process in the individual departments and how their planning process fit into the Agency Strategic Plan. I was impressed by the level of commitment Alameda County has made to implement strategic planning as a way of doing business and not another time-limited project.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR 1999-2004

Over the last five years, the way social services are administered have changed dramatically. Alameda County has responded to the changes by actively developing innovative programs coupled with more client-centered services. Despite their successes, Alameda County decided that their system of care could be significantly improved to meet the needs of the clients and new social service mandates. In order to address the mandated changes and client needs, the Agency undertook a year long self assessment and planning process that led to the development of the 1999-2004 Strategic Plan. The 1999-2004 Strategic Plan was developed, in part, to address the following:

- 1 The development of a universal understanding as to the direction of the Agency;
- 2 Connect the various Agency departments; and
- 3 Address the needs of the communities.

In order to meet the above needs, the Agency took on an aggressive recruitment process to hire a Planning Director with the idea in mind that the individual would be dynamic with people, outgoing, intergetic, an experienced planner, neutral, and have resources in the community. As it turns out, a key aspect of the Planning Director is the fact that he comes from "outside" the Agency and therefore provides a fresh, new approach to planning. Through a lot of hard work and weekly meetings, the 1999-2004 Strategic Plan was developed.

"The Strategic Plan outlines the primary mission and goals of the Social Service Agency; defines core values and outcomes for its work; purposes a new, ongoing evaluation and assessment

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process for the Agency; and describes an integrated process for producing needed change and service enhancements that will allow the Agency to better serve its clients and the community.

The Strategic Plan highlights four key action components needed to set the Plan in motion:

1. The Social Services Agency Enhancement Initiative
2. The Service Integration and Innovation Initiative
3. The Community Integration and Innovation Initiative
4. The Intergovernmental Integration and Innovation Initiative."

The Strategic Plan consists of five themes:

- Theme 1 - Protecting Individuals and Families
- Theme 2 - Promoting Independence and Self Sufficiency
- Theme 3 - Strengthening Families and Communities
- Theme 4 - Preventing Crises Before They Occur
- Theme 5 - Partnering With The Community

The four key principles highlighted in the Strategic Plan are:

Valuing Innovation

"The Agency must give its staff the tools and the capacity to look for effective, alternative solutions to meeting family needs and for developing new partnerships that increase available resources.

Increasing Accountability

"The Agency must do a better job of listening to its clients, and of responding to their concerns quickly and appropriately. "

Honoring Diversity

"The Agency itself must not .only acknowledge anal respect, but honor the intrinsic diversity of the Alameda County com.m.unitl; anal actively work to provide opportunity and, service and support that counteract the social trends of racism and discrimination that contribute to the problems we seek to solve. "

Taking Pride in our Accomplishments

"The Strategic Plan proposes to generate an. additional focus on the Agencys achievements over the next five years that will allow staff to take pride in which they accomplish on behalf of needy residents of Alameda County. "

The Strategic Plan has 8 outcome goals and 78 current proposed priority policies. Additionally, the Plan contains 2 demonstration projects that are in the process of being implemented. One of the key items to developing a Strategic Plan is the implementation and follow through of the Plan. To ensure that the Strategic Plan becomes a way of doing business and not just another project within a huge Agency, Administration has approved 29 positions to implement the Strategic Plan within the Planning Department. I find this commitment very exciting and demonstrates movement towards the deletion of fragmented services. As we move away from categorical funding, good planning will become even more essential to ensure that programs and services

The 1999-2004 Strategic Plan Statewide Legislative Advocacy(CWDA)and the Enhancement of Foster Care Placement are provided to families in the most efficient and effective manner. The Strategic Plan provides a framework for which the other departments can develop their individual plans and at the same time it support the departments working together to tailor their plans to be in accordance with the overall goals of the Agency. Cross department planning is key to ensure that those we serve receive the support they need to become self-sufficient and expanding to meet the needs.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF WELFARE TO WORK AND DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE & RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

I was lucky to have had the opportunity to visit the Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Welfare to Work, the Department of Workforce and Resource Development and the Benefit Center. Each department is unique in their own respective disciplines. My discussions were centered on their planning efforts, how they built an infrastructure to support their planning efforts and how their planning efforts relate to the overall Agency Strategic Plan. It was apparent to me that each department has put building an infrastructure and planning as one of their priorities. This is evident by the allocation of staff to build the infrastructure for planning. The following key elements stood out in my discussions:

- Planning staff must work collaboratively with program staff to develop the most effective and realistic plan for services.
- Planning structures (allocate staff) must be integrated and cut across programs/departments.
- Individual department plans must be integrated and support the Agency Strategic Plan.
- Administration must be committed to planning

SIGHT SEEING IN PERU

The Planning Research and Evaluation Unit (PERU) is both an old and new concept in Alameda County. Until June 1998, PERU consisted of two (2) Management Analyst and one (1) paid intern. The responsibility of PERU was focused on internal projects, caseload data, and requested

analysis. With the demands of welfare reform, it became apparent that more data and analysis was needed to answer program development questions for planning purposes. In June 1998, PERU was expanded to include two (2) additional Management Analyst and two (2) additional paid interns. Recently two (2) Management Analyst positions and three (3) consultant positions were approved. The consultant positions were developed as a mechanism in which the interns could utilize as a career ladder after the completion of their internship.

The role of PERU is to support the efforts of the Agency as a whole with data analysis and research. PERU is known as a neutral party and utilized for their objective viewpoint. Utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Services (SPSS), PERU fulfills specific data requests from the various departments by downloading data reports to their PC's. The more visual projects prepared by PERU are the Quarterly Report of Data and Trends, Quality of Life Benchmarks Report, and the Customer Comment Card Project. Recently PERU completed a customer satisfaction survey (focused on Social Workers as the customer) on the usage of the CWS/CMS system in conjunction with Department of Children and Family Services. PERU also acts as the coordinator of outside evaluation projects. The proximity of Alameda County to the UC Berkeley Campus lends itself to many evaluation requests.

PERU is the home of the MapInfo mapping software. MapInfo is the mechanism in which caseloads can be mapped on a computer image of the County. The maps provide a visual picture of the physical locations of cases. MapInfo provides a new and exciting way of looking at data. Mapping of caseloads, bus lines, highways, etc.. allow planning staff to visually determine the best locations for new offices.

As with other departments, PERU provides supportive services to the Planning Department and the Strategic Plan.

FINANCE

Finance plays an integral part in strategic planning and has the capability to determine what categories of funding are available and what is the flexibility of those categories. Finance determines what appropriations are being underspent, claiming guidelines, and interprets how dollars can be spent across systems. Most importantly, finance determines how the overall strategic plan fits in with the spending priorities of the Agency and visa versa.

LESSONS LEARNED

I believe the following statements/thoughts reflect some of the more common feelings of lessons learned:

- A key component to the success in developing the Strategic Plan was the extensive hiring process the Social Services Agency undertook to hire an appropriate Planning Director.
- The continued commitment from Agency Administration to develop, implement, and build an infrastructure to support strategic planning.
- The continued commitment from Agency

- Administration to build an infrastructure within the various departments for planning and evaluation.
- Refining the definition of "strategic plan". Staff have to understand and see the commitment that strategic planning is a part of the Agency and not just another "project".
- Strategic planning includes mandated programs, categorical and noncategorical funding, new and innovative program, etc.
- Define who needs to be at the table. Managers, clients, Board of Supervisor representatives, advocates, etc.
- Turf issues need to be addressed. Participants need to let go of their turf issues and come to the table understanding that competition breaks down cooperation.
- Implementation - follow through on planning. Planning must become a way of doing business not just a time-limited project.
- Define and measure success. Generally success is defined as doing something or not doing something. Determine how to measure and learn from your experiences.
- Determine who makes decisions in the "big system". Do the same people who have veto power have the authority to make decisions? Get focused on the same outcomes.
- Reaching a consensus, planning 'vs.' decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SANTA CLARA COUNTY

It became apparent, very early on in my internship, that in order for Strategic Planning to be effective, staff (all levels), time, and resources must be committed to the process. Strategic Planning must have the support and participation from all levels - The Board of Supervisors down to the line workers. With the changes imposed by welfare reform and the commitment to provide community-based, strength-based services, programs must be organized in a manner which is beneficial and focused on developing self-sufficiency and independence of families that receive services.

In order to provide services in the most efficient manner, a Strategic Plan provides the guidelines in which each individual department can assess their services and relay to the larger plan. By building an infrastructure of planning staff, devoted to planning and/or special projects related to planning, in each department allows the department to become organized and knowledgeable of the services available. The planners interact with their own program staff as well as other department staff to begin to bridge the gap between services.

It is my recommendation that Santa Clara County look at the way Alameda County has developed their infrastructure in an organized fashion to support the individual department planning as well as the development and implementation of the Strategic Plan for 1999-2004. I believe this type of planning will provide departments with the necessary guidelines to develop and coordinate their programs across disciplines. Additionally, as Santa Clara County develops an Evaluation and Planning Unit, it would be important to continue discussions with Alameda County as to the role PERU plays in their Agency.

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