

Transparency in Service Delivery: How We Utilize Data and Process Improvement to Measure Impact

ERICA SCHWANBECK
Santa Cruz County

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) and Results-Based Accountability (RBA) go hand-in-hand when it comes to measuring program impact outcomes in both Social Services need-based eligibility programs and contracted services with organizations in the community. The San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA) put both to work when they founded the Innovation Office with a dedicated team of employees committed to measuring and improving outcomes and processes within the agency. While Santa Cruz County Human Services Department (SCCHSD) employs some of these strategies, there is room to grow and develop more impactful data-driven practices.

To better serve the community in Santa Cruz, I am recommending the following:

- 1) Reformat the performance measures table within existing contracts to make the measures easier to interpret;
- 2) Disaggregate performance measure reporting on new CORE Investments contracts to include specific data around race and geography of clients served; and
- 3) Create department-wide Strategic Plans for all client services - including eligibility programs and contracted services.

Erica Schwanbeck, Administrative Services Manager
Santa Cruz County Human Services Department

Introduction

Dedicated to Making a Difference
– HSD Motto

Simply put, social services departments and programs exist to help people by providing access to basic human needs like healthcare, food, housing, and a safe environment. In turn, the greatest critics of Social Services argue for the efficacy, efficiency, and transparency of social service programs which means that more and more of these programs must be defined and supported by data. A common data methodology for creating and measuring the effectiveness of Social Services is Results-Based Accountability (RBA). RBA focuses on identifying performance measures that answer three questions: (1) How much did we do? (2) How well did we do it? and (3) Is anyone better off? Santa Cruz County Human Services Department (HSD) currently uses the RBA methodology in its contracts with outside organizations to establish performance outcomes for the contracted service or program.

By constantly reviewing and revising outcomes, we can identify areas needing development, and create a plan to achieve improved well-being for the communities we serve. One of the many methodologies of process improvement is a bottom-up approach similar to LEAN or PEAK performance strategies which connect organizational change driven by staff “on the ground.” Inspired by these methods, Santa Cruz County as a whole launched Process Improvement Onward (PRIMO!) Santa Cruz in 2018 to anchor the success of the County Strategic Plan and initiate formal Continuous Process Improvement (CPI).

San Francisco County Case Study

For their own CPI approach, in 2014, the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA) launched the Innovation Office. SFHSA established a dedicated System Design Team to collaborate with staff to identify targeted issues or shortfalls in the agency and to develop and implement strategies for change. The Innovation Office also included a focus on visual design (e.g. how to communicate information more clearly for the impacted audience - whether clients or staff) while maintaining a capacity for growth and continuous process improvement. The Innovation Office blended a PEAK or LEAN approach with equity-centered design and behavioral insights from CPI, relying heavily on “frontline staff” to weigh in on the roadblocks and solutions. With a dedicated System Design Team to facilitate CPI toward achieving better outcomes, SFHSA was able to effectively and efficiently improve service delivery for their clients. The impacts of the Innovation Office can be seen in the improvements made to reducing wait times on the phone and in the lobby by 60%+, SFHSA’s intranet, their analytics dashboard, and text message reminders to clients, to name a few.

Small Improvements

HSD has already initiated an RBA data-driven approach to its contracting, utilizing the “How Much,” “How Well,” and “Is Anyone Better Off” framework to determine the efficacy of programs we contract with community partners. We also have a robust Business Analytics team that has been making strides to collect improved data where it is available from both our contract portfolio and from the internal client-facing programs where data collection is required due to state mandates. More often we are seeing the State request

reporting in an RBA approach, first with the Family and Children's Services Division System Improvement Plan, and more recently with the CalWORKs Outcomes and Accountability Review (OAR) process.

While some data from the HSD contract portfolio is readily available, there is not currently a cohesive repository for the data when received, nor a streamlined performance measurement framework to compare service delivery between contractors - even within the same program or modality. Additionally, the current format within our contracts has implied integration or cohesion of the "How Much," "How Well," and "Is Anyone Better Off" components when each measure stands alone.

An easy way to make performance measures within HSD contracts more easily interpreted both by vendors and for data reporting is to simply modify the presentation both within the contract itself and in our vendor semi-annual reports. By reworking the formatting of the measures within the contract, the focus would be on the measures themselves and not the interpretation of how individual measures may or may not work together. Table 1 below shows how performance measurement is currently integrated into contracts, and Table 2 is the suggested modification.

Table 1: Current Contract Performance Measure Layout

How Many Services Will Be Provided?	How Well Will Services Be Provided?	Is Anyone Better Off?
23 unhoused families will receive housing placements.	100% of newly housed families will move into permanent housing, on average, 90 days or less from the date of program entrance.	70% of housed families have improved housing stability, specifically, will be in permanent housing at program exit.
45 families will receive housing case management support.	<i>Data Collection Tool:</i> Bi-weekly report	<i>Data Collection Tool:</i> State monthly report (BFH 17)
45 families will receive housing assistance.	98% of monthly rental assistance payments will be received by landlord by the due date.	85% of families housed at program exit have improved housing stability, specifically, will not utilize homeless services within one year of program exit.
	<i>Data Collection Tool:</i> Client payment report	<i>Data Collection Tool:</i> Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

Table 2: Proposed Contract Performance Measure Layout

<i>Result 1: Families will obtain permanent housing</i>	
How Many Services Will Be Provided?	23 unhoused families will receive permanent housing placements
How Well Will Services Be Provided?	100% of newly housed families will move into permanent housing, on average, 90 days or less from the date of program entrance. <i>Data Collection Tool:</i> Bi-weekly report
Is Anyone Better Off?	70% of housed families have improved housing stability, specifically, will be in permanent housing at program exit. <i>Data Collection Tool:</i> State monthly report (BFH 17)
<i>Result 2: Families will maintain housing</i>	
How Many Services Will Be Provided?	45 families will receive housing case management support/housing tenancy and sustaining services.
How Many Services Will Be Provided?	45 families will receive housing assistance.
How Well Will Services Be Provided?	98% of monthly rental assistance payments will be received by landlord by the due date. <i>Data Collection Tool:</i> Client payment report
Is Anyone Better Off?	85% of families housed at program exit have improved housing stability, specifically, will not utilize homeless services within one year of program exit. <i>Data Collection Tool:</i> HMIS

CORE Investments

The Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments program awards \$5.8 million annually of combined City and County of Santa Cruz local funding to community-based organizations that support the community in basic needs or “safety net” services. CORE Investments utilizes a collective impact, results-based approach to focus on improving the well-being of the county’s most vulnerable populations.

HSD is at the precipice of awarding the next cycle of the CORE Investments program, and in turn, establishing new contracts with those awardees. While the Request for Proposals (RFP) has emphasized a focus on equity and expressed the intention of every awardee to foster equity in their proposal,

the definition of successfully delivering equitable practice has not been readily available. If a streamlined equity focus is not established upon the inception of the awardee contracts, an opportunity has been missed to create an impactful equity practice in CORE with a data-driven approach.

At its base, an equity focus for CORE Investments could look like having contractors disaggregate their performance measures by race and geography when reporting on them. This simple step allows for a deeper level of analysis of how the CORE Investments funding directly impacts our most vulnerable populations when compared to demographic data available from partners like DataShare Santa Cruz County. The Department would then have the information necessary to pivot targeted

service delivery to populations or areas that are proven to be underserved.

Moreover, HSD has an opportunity to continue its equity evidence-based practice through a recent grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation within the Results Count® effort. With this targeted funding and a parallel “north star” available to HSD, we have the resources needed to begin making strides in addressing equity through a data-driven lens within our contracted services, starting with CORE Investments. Because equity is about outcomes, utilizing our contract performance measures to evaluate our equity practice is an approachable first step.

Strategic Planning

An impactful way to ensure continuity across a Social Services department for both the community it serves and the staff it employs is to establish universal results targets. This would involve revisiting the previous data target of equity within the CORE Investments contract awards and mirroring those specific equity measures as part of targeted data components of a holistic, department-wide equity goal or goals. Effectively, this is creating a data-driven HSD Strategic Plan for all direct client services funded and supported by HSD, while simultaneously creating a culture of transparency by publishing the Strategic Plan. With a Strategic Plan in place, we have a data-driven goal structure that can maintain its agility through regular CPI practice and reevaluation.

Once a Strategic Plan for client services is established with targeted goals for what successful service delivery looks like, individual divisions can establish their own sub-goals that contribute to the Strategic Plan. In turn, contract performance measures

can be more easily streamlined to support the direction of HSD and its divisions. A model of this is the current Santa Cruz County 2021-23 Operational Plan. The Plan is referenced frequently in all memos to the Board of Supervisors indicating which goal of the Operational Plan each recommendation supports. Employing a Strategic Plan for our internal (needs-based eligibility programs) and external (contracted) client-facing services allows HSD to present an approach to service delivery in line with our current value set (Figure 1). Additionally, a client services Strategic Plan can sustain community support of our programs by utilizing data to identify client outcomes and impacts regardless of the political climate.

Figure 1: HSD's Values



Conclusion

What makes RBA and CPI so impactful in our client-facing services and contracts is that it reinforces the idea of outcomes and data transparency in our service delivery. SFHSA used the Innovation Office to shine a light on elements of its agency that could be more impactful, and HSD can parallel their efforts in our own way. To better serve the community in Santa Cruz, I am recommending a scalable approach to better incorporating RBA and CPI into our direct client services.

First, I recommend that we reformat our performance measures table within existing

contracts to make measures easier to interpret by both HSD and our vendors.

Second, I recommend disaggregating our performance measure within our new CORE Investments agreements to include specific data around the race and geography of clients served. Both steps will allow HSD to better focus our contract performance measures to target the members of the community most in need of our services. Over time, utilizing CPI will allow us to streamline these measures to make our services even more effective.

Lastly, I recommend creating a department-wide Strategic Plan for all our client-facing services – both need-based eligibility programs executed by internal staff and contracted services with organizations in the community. By identifying broad outcomes for the community that utilizes our services, we are given the opportunity to become more adept at serving them.

We strengthen our community by protecting the vulnerable, promoting self-sufficiency, alleviating poverty, and improving the quality of life. – HSD Mission Statement

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my husband, son, and parents for affording me the support to take on this generous opportunity from HSD Executive Leadership and the BASSC EDP team. I would like to thank the San Francisco Human Services Agency executive leadership team for their time and insight. A special thank you to Marc Hébert and Diana Hernandez for our many frank and inspiring conversations. To the HSD Contracts team, BASSC EDP Liaison Andrew Stewart, and my mentors Micki,

Trish, Jen, and Ben: thank you for keeping me afloat.

References

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, Agenda Item DOC-2018-826 (October 2, 2018)
https://santacruzcountyca.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_LegiFile.aspx?ID=6043

Lean Enterprise Institute, “Problem Solving”
<https://www.lean.org/explore-lean/problem-solving/>

Elms, B. (2016) *Peak Performance: How Denver’s Peak Academy is Saving Millions of Dollars, Boosting Morale and Just Maybe Changing the World (And How You Can Too!)*. Governing Books.

Clear Impact, “What is Results-Based Accountability™”
<https://clearimpact.com/results-based-accountability/>

Hébert, M. “Our Portfolio of Work.”
<https://medium.com/designinghumanservice/s/our-portfolio-of-work-fefab8b5791d>

Zeitler, Leslie W., LCSW; GARE California Regional Manager. (March 18, 2022) *Using a Racial Equity Tool, Steps 3-4*.

DataShare Santa Cruz County
<https://www.datasharescc.org/>

CORE Investments <https://www.corescc.org/>

Annie E. Casey Foundation, “Results Count®”
<https://www.aecf.org/work/leadership-development/results-count>

Santa Cruz County 2021-23 Operational Plan
<https://www.santacruzcounty.us/VisionSantaCruz/OperationalPlan.aspx>