

# **2003-2004 SANTA CLARA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY**

## **INQUIRY INTO PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENTS**

### **Summary**

The Santa Clara County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) inquired into performance measures for human services departments in the County of Santa Clara (County). County human services departments have not matched the best practices in some other counties in implementing performance measures that evaluate end results. Most existing performance measures only quantify the amount of service rendered, several do not match the departmental missions, a few are not scientifically rigorous, and some programs are not measured at all. Some, but not all, County human services departments recognize that recidivism is an important performance measure that could help provide clarity in setting goals. It is recommended that the County exploit existing in-house evaluation programs and expand their use by human services departments in forming outcome measures.

### **Background and Discussion**

#### **Managing for Results**

During the past five years, the County's performance-based budgeting process has made progress in setting performance measures and evaluating results for all County departments. A challenge remains in assuring that even departments whose results are not easy to quantify use valid, rigorous, and reliable measures.

The Grand Jury inquired into the progress toward departmental performance measures for human services related departments, including how closely they followed their mandate to match measures to mission, improve outcome measurements, and use measurements that cross the functional boundaries of departments. Human services departments are defined here as those that supply direct service programs to clients or 'treat' public clients in some fashion. These include the Department of Correction (DOC), Public Health, Probation, the Department of Alcohol and Drug Services (DADS), Mental Health, and the Social Services Agency (SSA).

In a recent report by *Governing* magazine, measuring and comparing the performances of 40 counties nationwide, including nine California counties (see Appendix A), Santa Clara County received a C- in managing for results (and a C+ for overall county performance, and a surprising D+ in information technology). In contrast, San Diego County received an A- in managing for

results (and a B+ overall), with the following specific commendations in results management, which our county doesn't share:

- Performance information drives operational and budgetary decisions;
- There is widespread collection and use of baseline data, with good validation;
- The County separates the data to allow sub-units to benchmark one another;
- All outside contracts are tied to performance measures.

The County has now implemented performance measures for all departments. However, some public purpose statements do not match stated departmental missions. For instance, part of the stated mission of the County Board of Supervisors' Children, Seniors', and Families Committee that oversees social services is "to provide...services that reduce the need for public assistance." Neither the overall Social Service Agency nor any of its individual departments address this mission in their public purpose statements.

Current performance measurements in several human service areas examined do not follow standards of scientific rigor. For example, according to DOC, short-term recidivism rates are between 20 and 30% for various jail programs and compare favorably to the 60 to 70% rate of re-incarceration for the general jail population. However, since program entry is voluntary, there are no control groups (matched groups with similar attributes). The volunteers for programs may be more motivated to not recidivate, regardless of any benefits of the programs. Rather than relying on anecdotal information or uncontrolled local studies that do not establish a cause and effect relationship between program and recidivism, it is better to take advantage of the findings from the best published studies that have been done on jail recidivism.

There are numerous social change or rehabilitation programs in various County departments. Some are implemented by County workers; others are only managed by the County and are implemented by community-based organizations (CBO). These CBO programs, especially, are less closely monitored for effectiveness. The head of Probation admits that the Ranch Juvenile Detention CBO programs are not measured for effectiveness, yet.

The U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Corrections provides extensive documentation on best practices and industry standards for jail and probation programs, from evidence-based studies. Surprisingly, some County probation managers who might be expected to be familiar with, and advocates for these trends in the profession, were not.

### **Recidivism as a Human Services Metric**

An article in *Federal Probation*, a journal published by the Administration Office of the U. S. Courts, entitled "Beyond Correctional Quackery - Professionalism and the Possibility of Effective Treatment," points out that the correctional field has relevance to other human service delivery systems. While writing about the corrections field, the authors make the following points:

- one of the core tasks of corrections is to correct, i.e., to reduce recidivism;
- contrary to common assumptions, there are things that work;

- those that work were found through, and follow from, applying the scientific method to the use of objective tracking and measurement of results.

To find out whether programs are effective, and to determine what works to improve the reintroduction of probationers into society, requires a commitment to tracking, evaluation, outcome measurement, and benchmarking for best practices, including gathering information and learning from experience outside the County. The National Institute of Corrections provides extensive literature on the use of recidivism as a performance measure that can be used to improve programs.

Human services departments are all, in some sense 'correctional' in purpose, whether DADS is 'correcting' substance abuse, CalWorks is 'correcting' dependence on welfare, or the Public Health department is 'correcting' the bad habits that could lead to avoidable illness. Traditionally, these departments have acted primarily as service departments, whose task was faster or more efficient processing of recipients and supplying timely assistance to fill immediate needs. Breaking away from this conventional view, the Probation Department boldly suggests that, "recidivism should be used as a measure of success across the entire spectrum of community services."

Even when not explicitly stated in their public purpose, some departments have already successfully integrated this 'anti-recidivism' approach—that of reducing the need for services. For example, the County Child Welfare Services System (CWS) of DFCS is developing data for fiscal year 2005 on increasing the number of children and families that are diverted from CWS by early intervention, limiting the need for out-of-home placement. On the other hand, while "families strengthened" is in their Public Purpose statement and ensuring "that parents acquire needed parenting skills and an ability to protect their children" is listed in the annual plan as a desired result, DFCS was not able to supply even a plan to collect data on what parenting skill training is needed to achieve these goals.

A common complaint against this type of measurement when applied to welfare-to-work programs is that while recipients might initially find jobs, they could soon be in need of County services again, perhaps at an even greater (and more expensive) level of need. In other words, premature exit from County assistance could lead to larger long-term costs later. Therefore, two important dimensions in comprehensive recidivism studies are the time period being studied and cross-departmental effects. The federal Office for the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the Department of Health and Human Services has numerous studies that have evolved to include recidivism of welfare clients as one of their assessment parameters for measuring program success.

### **Measuring Cross-Departmental Effects and Intelligent Use of Data**

Intelligent use of data, cooperative information sharing, and knowledge of how to proactively research outside resources can result in improving the cost-effectiveness of available programs. According to the *Governing Magazine* report, "those counties that have made serious managing-for-results efforts universally report that the benefits are significant." The chief financial officer of San Diego said, "San Diego had been similar to other California counties in terms of being

revenue-driven and always looking to the state or feds to give us more money to do what we wanted to do; then we realized the amount of time and money we were using to find more resources wasn't as effective as properly using the money we have.”

The County has spent over a million dollars to develop an enterprise data warehouse (EDW), a computer system designed to provide instant access to organizational data, presently extracted from over 55 databases in 9 systems from 5 departments. The five departments are Mental Health, Public Health, Probation, DFCS and DADS. Using this system, one can analyze trends, demographic and service patterns, and the effect of services on clients, i.e., outcomes. A program called Cross-Systems Evaluation (CSE) has been making use of EDW to study cross-departmental interactions for programs that affect juveniles in the County, such as correlations between medical insurance, dental care, and subsequent health care costs. CSE also found, surprisingly, that there was little overlap in the recipients of mental health and substance abuse treatment programs for juveniles. CSE was designed specifically to measure the effectiveness of programs involving juveniles but could be easily broadened as EDW already contains relevant data from Probation, Mental Health, some areas of Public Health, DADS, and DFCS.

In addition to measuring direct effects, it can be useful to measure indirect effects of service that may be more quantitative. For instance, one indirect and quantifiable benefit of successful substance abuse treatment may be a reduction in County incarceration costs, according to a study by DADS, to be released in June 2004. This study utilizes cross-system cooperation by pulling data from Criminal Justice Information Control, Mental Health, SSA, and Public Health. The results describe the savings that could be achieved with effective substance abuse treatment. The lack of data sharing between departments has hampered such measurements in the past.

These cross-departmental evaluations can also point out ways that one human service operation, especially a preventive or treatment program, can reduce costs in others, enabling a more effective disbursement of resources. The overall costs invested in monitoring the outcomes of programs, like the cost of performing audits, can be recovered multiple times by providing the information needed to design more effective service-delivery programs.

## **Conclusions**

Many of the conditions found that led to poor grades for the County in the *Governing* report remain in place. Among them are “there is virtually no validation of measures, little use of targets in management process, and that few performance measures trace outcomes.” One of the few areas where the County earned a high grade in the report was for the Enterprise Data Warehouse and its uses by Promise (performance tracking system) and CSE which “brought easier access to information about mental health, juvenile services and probation.”

A change in overall departmental orientation, from service delivery to recidivism reduction, whether in Corrections, or across the human services spectrum, can only come from the top administrators and the Board of Supervisors. It requires making departmental expectations and consequences clear. Policymakers have the right and responsibility to know how public funds are being spent and how effectively they are allocated.

Human service-related agencies that are charged with a mission of rehabilitating clients (rather than protective, service, or product oriented functions) bear a special burden since their goal is to reduce the need for public assistance. Giving aid, without helping the recipient become independent of it, could be seen as doing everyone a disservice.

## **Finding I**

County human services departments have been slow compared to other counties in implementing performance measures that evaluate end results for their programs and contracts. Most existing performance measures only quantify the amount of service rendered, several do not match the departmental missions, and some programs are not measured at all.

## **Recommendation I**

The County Executive should require human services department managers to set performance measures for their programs and contracts that relate to their mission and measure the effectiveness of all programs and out-sourced contracts rather than only the quantity of services rendered.

## **Finding II**

Some, but not all County human services departments recognize that recidivism is an important performance measure.

## **Recommendation II**

The County Executive should consider making recidivism one benchmark measure of success, including it in the mission, public purpose statement, and performance measures of all human services departments.

## **Finding III**

Performance measurements in several important human service areas are not scientifically rigorous.

## **Recommendation III**

County human services departments should design performance measures that are scientifically rigorous, avoiding statistical pitfalls in evaluating performance outcomes.

## **Finding IV**

Data bank systems in the County (such as Promise) exist that could be used to improve the rigor and effectiveness of performance measures. CSE has the capability to locate best-practice information for application to County human services functions.

## **Recommendation IV**

The County Executive should consider broadening CSE's mandate to cover adults and to assist human services departments in setting and measuring performance goals using County data systems more effectively.

**PASSED** and **ADOPTED** by the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury on this 8<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2004.

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Richard H. Woodward  
Foreperson

**Appendix**  
**California County Grades**  
**(Governing Magazine)**

<b>County</b>	<b>Managing for Results</b>	<b>Overall</b>
Alameda	C	C+
Contra Costa	C-	B-
Los Angeles	C+	C
Orange	C+	B
Riverside	C	C+
Sacramento	B-	C+
San Bernardino	D	C-
San Diego	A-	B+
Santa Clara	C-	C+

Counties were chosen for the study by dividing the United States into four regions, then taking the 10 largest counties from each region, measured by revenue. Managing for Results was judged by asking of each county government questions such as whether there are “organizations within the government whose responsibility it is to evaluate programs or agencies, and are their conclusions utilized” and “do leaders and managers use results data for policy making, budgeting, management and evaluation of progress.” Detailed explanations of all methodology and criteria used to judge each category and overall county performance are available at:

<http://governing.com/gpp/2002/gp2how.htm>.

## References

### Documents

“Beyond Correctional Quackery—Professionalism and the Possibility of Effective Treatment,” *Federal Probation*, Vol. 66, pp. 43-49, 2002.

County 2004 Recommended Budget.

CSE Status Report, March 5, 2003.

Deputy County Executive Memorandum to the County Board of Supervisors, April 14, 2003.

Fax from Information Services Department, March 30, 2004.

*Governing Magazine*, “Government Performance Project 2001/Report Card: Santa Clara County, California,” February 2002 issue.

National Institute of Corrections website: [www.nicic.org](http://www.nicic.org)

Office for the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the Department of Health and Human Services website: [www.aspe.hhs.gov](http://www.aspe.hhs.gov).

“Outcome Evaluation of the Department of Alcohol and Drug Services Using Performance Indicators from Secondary Data,” DADS Research Institute Memorandum, Martha Beattie, Report to be released June 2004.

### Interviews

Adult Services Manager, by phone, April 22, 2004.

County Executive and two Deputy County Executives, February 2, 2004.

CSE Director, March 19, 2004.

DADS Director and Research Institute Manager, March 9, 2004.

Deputy Chief Probation Officer, by phone, February 4, 2004.

Deputy County Executive, by phone, May 13, 2004.

DFCS Deputy Director, February 10, 2004.

DFCS Director, October 2, 2003.