



County Information Services Department Focuses On Change

Issue

How has the Information Services Department (ISD) changed since the recommendations were made by the 2003-2004 Grand Jury?

Summary

ISD's function can be divided into two major categories: provision and support of infrastructure (telephones, computer connections, Internet service) and software/application implementation and support. The 2003-2004 Grand Jury conducted an investigation of the County's ISD to determine how well it serviced the technical and support requirements of other County Departments. A new ISD senior management team had only recently been installed when that report was issued. The 2003-2004 Grand Jury investigation resulted in numerous specific recommendations with responses from ISD that ranged from full concurrence to total disagreement.

Whereas the focus of the previous investigation appears to have been a "top-down" review, the 2004-2005 Grand Jury used a "bottom-up" approach in which a questionnaire was sent to all County departments to focus on user concerns and perceptions. Among the Grand Jury's findings were that ISD is perceived by virtually all departments as performing well in providing telephone, data, and connectivity infrastructure services and support, but that a disconnect in perception exists between ISD and several major information technology users on application evaluation, implementation, and cost of services rendered. ISD has initiated procedures and policies to address some perceived shortcomings, and is taking steps to address the issues while maintaining its overall responsibility for system and data integrity. The new ISD senior management team is successfully refocusing the department to a customer-based orientation.

The Grand Jury concludes that ISD is just starting its transition to a customer-focused, collaborative management orientation. Given the scope and nature, it is unrealistic to expect immediate quantifiable results. The Grand Jury recommends that ISD should pursue the organization of the Information Technology Management Structure and continue implementation of the Mainframe Elimination Plan. Also, the Grand Jury recommends that ISD create a customer satisfaction survey and circulate it annually to assist in the evaluation of performance on a non- project specific basis.



County Information Services Department Focuses On Change

Issue

How has the Information Services Department (ISD) changed since the recommendations were made by the 2003-2004 Grand Jury?

Background

ISD's function can be divided into two major categories: provision and support of infrastructure (telephones, computer connections, Internet service) and software/application implementation and support. ISD, according to 2004-2005 public budget documents, has a gross budget of approximately \$44.4 million. Approximately \$29.4 million is re-billed to other County departments leaving \$15.0 million as ISD's claim against the general fund budget. The department is budgeted for 134 positions in the current fiscal year. Other County departments are budgeted to spend approximately \$17.0 million for internal department information technology staff and outside vendors in addition to the inter-department charges from ISD during fiscal year 2004-2005. Total County information technology costs are \$61.4 million.

The 2003-2004 Grand Jury conducted an investigation of ISD to determine how well it serviced the technical and support requirements of other County departments. A new ISD senior management team had only recently been installed when that report was issued.

The Grand Jury investigation resulted in numerous specific recommendations. They included (ISD responses in italics):

1. Managing the information technology function with a committee of department heads;

Agreed: they were indeed forming an IT steering committee, under the Executive Council working group consisting of all department heads and County elected officials.

2. Replacing the old main-frame system within one year;

Agreed: they were planning to replace the main-frame system, but over a longer time period to avoid disruptions.

3. Making project management and systems development the sole responsibility of each individual affected department;

Disagreed: they were opposed to a completely decentralized/departmentalized IT staffing model because they felt that the value of leveraging the current business model of ISD is high for all County departments.

4. Transferring hospital operations services to the Medical Center Department Head;

Disagreed: they felt that the Medical Center and the Health Services Agency, were examples of ISD's larger and important responsibilities, and both were appreciative and effectively served under the current business model.

5. ISD should continue to have primary responsibility for communications and network infrastructure;

Agreed: as to their primary responsibility for communications and network infrastructure.

6. ISD should discontinue application development support

Disagreed: they felt that ISD has the knowledge and technical skills necessary to develop and maintain programs and systems operating on most computing platforms. ISD and the CIO (Chief Information Officer) will continue to demonstrate the value of ISD while concurrently supporting department-based staff.

The focus of the previous investigation appears to have been a “top-down” review, i.e., a study of the management structure needed for effective application of information technology. The resulting analysis referred to a “governance model” implemented in Nevada County, California, and many of the Grand Jury’s recommendations were based on this analysis.

As an alternative evaluation, the 2004-2005 Grand Jury used a “bottom-up” approach in which a questionnaire was sent to all County departments to focus on user concerns and perceptions.

Investigation

The Grand Jury:

1. Created, distributed, summarized, and reviewed a satisfaction and utilization survey of county department heads. The response rate was 93.3%.
2. Interviewed a sample of department heads that are large users of information technology.
3. Reviewed a variety of ISD internal documents that detailed strategic initiatives and plans in multiple areas.
4. Conferred with ISD to verify the accuracy of findings.

Findings

1. The results of the Grand Jury survey indicate that:
 - ISD is perceived by virtually all departments as performing well in providing telephone, data, and connectivity infrastructure services and support;
 - A disconnect in perception exists between ISD and several major information technology users on application evaluation, implementation, and cost of services rendered. In some instances, ISD is viewed as thwarting timely, cost-effective upgrades and implementation of applications.
2. The County's use of and reliance on information technology has grown as a result of perceived departmental operational needs with only limited guidance from ISD. Most departments have created an internal IT function to address unique day-to-day operational data recovery and reporting needs.
3. ISD has initiated proactive procedures and policies to address some perceived shortcomings, such as:
 - ISD is implementing an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system that would integrate general ledger, purchasing, and accounts payable, the County personnel information and payroll processing, and the County budget forecasting, development, and publishing tool. This would be done in three phases commencing in FY 06/07 and ending in FY09/10.
 - ISD has drafted a Mainframe Elimination Plan for eliminating the mainframe by FY 07/08.

- ISD has drafted an Information Technology Strategic Plan (ITSP) for the Medical Center to be used as a guideline for deployment and development over the next five fiscal years.
 - ISD has developed an Information Services Rate Relief Plan for reducing the ISD labor rates.
 - ISD has initiated the formation of an IT Steering/Oversight Committee. The committee is a cross-departmental, cross-disciplinary group composed of department and division heads within the County. The Committee, among other goals, will work collaboratively to ensure compatibility and interoperability of IT systems
 - Starting October 2003, the County began to address the need for collaborative IT standards. There are monthly meetings of the Countywide IT Standards Committee, composed of ISD management, IT management from departments, and departmental managers who have an interest in managing technology costs.
4. ISD has acknowledged its limitations and, as indicated in Item 3 of the Findings, is taking steps to address the issues while maintaining its overall responsibility for system and data integrity.
 5. There is evidence that the relatively new ISD senior management team is successfully refocusing the department to a customer-based orientation. (See Rate Relief Plan above).

Conclusions

ISD is just starting its transition to a customer-focused, collaborative management orientation. It is premature to evaluate whether the transition will be accomplished successfully, although the progress made to date is reassuring. ISD is knowledgeable about and conversant with many of the shortcomings of the current interdepartmental environment, and is attempting to address them. Given the scope and nature of the needed changes, it is unrealistic to expect immediate quantifiable results. ISD is meeting its basic mandate of providing service but in several cases how that is done leaves the other departments uneasy. ISD is identifying and implementing interim strategies that may become the foundation for the new collaborative Management Structure of Information Technology, once it is organized.

Recommendations

The Board of Supervisors should instruct the County Manager and the head of ISD to:

1. complete, by June 30, 2005, the organization of the Information Technology Management Structure and its shift from independent, departmental systems development to a collaborative model directing the resources available within ISD and the departments.
2. Continue implementation of the Mainframe Elimination Plan and accelerate it to the extent possible.
3. Create a customer satisfaction survey and circulate it annually to assist in the evaluation of performance on a non-project specific basis.



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Inter-Departmental Correspondence

County Manager's Office

DATE: July 13, 2005
BOARD MEETING DATE: July 26, 2005
SPECIAL NOTICE: None
VOTE REQUIRED: None

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors
FROM: John L. Maltbie, County Manager
SUBJECT: 2004-05 Grand Jury Response

Recommendation

Accept this report containing the County's response to the 2004-05 Grand Jury report: County Information Services Department Focuses on Change.

VISION ALIGNMENT:

Commitment: Responsive, effective and collaborative government.

Goal 20: Government decisions are based on careful consideration of future impact, rather than temporary relief or immediate gain.

This activity contributes to the goal by ensuring that all Grand Jury findings and recommendations are thoroughly reviewed by the appropriate County departments and that, when appropriate, process improvements are made to improve the quality and efficiency of services provided to the public and other agencies.

Discussion

The County is mandated to respond to the Grand Jury within 90 days from the date that reports are filed with the County Clerk and Elected Officials are mandated to respond within 60 days. It is also the County's policy to provide periodic updates to the Board and the Grand Jury on the progress of past Grand Jury recommendations requiring ongoing or further action. To that end, attached is the County's response to the Grand Jury's report on Information Services' Focuses on Change issued May 5, 2005.

County Information Services Department Focuses on Change

Findings:

Generally agree with the Civil Grand Jury findings in the report titled "County Information Services Department Focuses on Change" report with one addition to finding #3 – ISD has initiated a Relationship Management program in which every ISD customer department is assigned a Relationship Manager who is responsible for working with department staff to understand the business needs of the department.

Overall, the CIO and ISD are focused on maintaining and improving customer service throughout this department. At the same time, all ISD staff is encouraged to focus on the benefits of approaching IT with a Countywide view.

Recommendation:

The Board of Supervisors should instruct the County Manager and the head of ISD to:

1. Complete, by June 30, 2005, the organization of the Information Technology Management Structure and its shift from independent, departmental systems development to a collaborative model directing the resources available within ISD and the departments.

Response: Concur. The committee members have been identified, have agreed to participate and are scheduled to meet as a committee on August 18, 2005.

2. Continue implementation of the Mainframe Elimination Plan and accelerate it to the extent possible.

Response: Concur. The ability to accelerate the mainframe elimination plan is dependent upon the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS). This will be the largest single application remaining on the County mainframe at the end of Fiscal Year 2005-06. While it is important for the County to eliminate our dependency on this outdated computing environment, it is absolutely crucial to maintain and keep whole the functionality and business process integration currently provided by CJIS. CJIS departments have committed funding for an independent consultant to provide guidance on the best means of achieving this goal. The RFP for this consultant was completed, and the County is in contract negotiations with the elevated bidder.

3. Create a customer satisfaction survey and circulate it annually to assist in the evaluation of performance on a non-project specific basis.

Response: Concur. The 'San Mateo County Cares' survey can be expanded to include more questions through the department-specific section of the survey. Ensuring these surveys are provided to management of customer departments will allow ISD to stay focused on providing services that the County needs and to foresee upcoming needs.