

HUD HMIS peer-to-peer conference call #3

8/29/05

2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

I. In attendance (HMIS stage)

Humboldt County – Kermit, Fox, Amy Knopp (planning stage)*
Napa County – Annette Krammer (collecting and inputting data)
Yolo County – Leona Jull (negotiating software purchase, hope to be up and running in October)*
Marin County – Graciella Rodriguez (collecting and inputting data)
Monterey County – Martha Navarette (collecting and inputting data)*
Santa Clara County (Community Technology Alliance – Ray Allen, Jen Hoey, Michelle Ogburn (collecting and inputting data)*
Stanislaus County (planning stage/selecting software) *
HUD SF – Karna Wong
QED – Matt White
HomeBase – Gina Allendorf, Lise Ström
Tony Gardener Consulting – Tony Gardener
Carrie Arviso – San Diego Continuum of Care (substituting for Deborah Lester)
Tracy D’Alanno – Colorado Continuum of Care*

* = planning on attending the national HMIS conference in September 2005

II. QED discussion

Matt White
QED, HMIS national TA provider

Description of QED: Five to seven fulltime staff members of QED work exclusively on the development of TA materials and/or technical solutions to HMIS problems.

SAVE THE DATE FOR THE NATIONAL HMIS CONFERENCE!

National HUD-sponsored HMIS conference: September 13 – 14, 2005 in St. Louis.

- Two (2) participants from each CoC may attend the conference.
- HUD will pay for accommodations and meals at the conference.
- You only need to cover the cost of transportation to/from the conference.
- The national HMIS conference is an opportunity to participate in a large-scale conference (500+ participants are expected). The conference not only has formal workshops and sessions, but also encourages information-sharing and networking among attendees. There are 28 different TA sessions planned for this conference, organized by “track” and addressing HMIS management, general participation in HMIS, participation by special populations (such as youth and domestic violence programs), advanced technical aspects of HMIS, and data analysis and evaluation.

SIGN UP FOR A REGIONAL TRAINING!

Regional data standards training: QED is also sponsoring a series of regional HMIS data standards training sessions; six sessions are scheduled thus far (see list below; to RSVP for a regional session or for further information, contact Jen Hoey at jen@ctagroup.org). QED has developed a curriculum on how to implement HMIS, collect data, and develop and manage privacy policies and procedures. The data standards training is geared not only for HMIS staff but also for frontline agency staff serving homeless people. Local trainings can be tailored to the community's needs; while there is a set curriculum; each trainer can focus on specific community concerns. The content is uniform and consistent so that everyone knows the same information, but the particular area of emphasis and/or amount of time spent on a given topic will vary according to community need. Each session is a full day.

Schedule of remaining regional data standards training sessions:

Sept. 15th

9am - 4pm

San Rafael, CA**

Marin County Housing Authority, 4020 Civic Center Dr., Garden Room, San Rafael, CA

RSVP by Sept. 5

III. Guest Speakers Discuss Software Selection Issues

Deborah Lester, Associate Director of Programs, Regional Task Force on the Homeless, San Diego (*for further information, you may contact Ms. Lester via email at deborah.lester@rtfhsd.org*)

(Carrie Arviso substituting)

- San Diego was one of the first communities to implement HMIS.
- Planning for HMIS began in 1997.
- Service Point was the software ultimately selected and fully implemented in October 2000; the software selection process took a total of 1 year and was followed by a 6-month period during which the system became fully operational.
- San Diego will be upgrading to the latest version of Service Point later this year (the community currently uses version 2.5 and will be upgrading to 4.0)
- When selecting a software vendor, San Diego used a formal "Request for Proposals" process. After narrowing the field of potential vendors to three candidates through the use of a scoring tool, the community then conducted "site visits" (both real and "virtual") in an effort to learn from those already using Service Point and whether or not the software fit their needs and budget. A thorough cost analysis was also part of this evaluation process.
- Service Point was ultimately selected because it was judged by the community to be most:
 - user friendly (easy to navigate; case managers/end users comment on how easy the system is to use)
 - cost efficient
 - and the software had a reliable track record

- San Diego is happy with the Service Point software, especially its reporting capabilities and the ability to easily customize the software for their community needs.
- The largest limitation of their HMIS is the need for continual end user training, updating of training materials and manuals, and accounting for human error in data input.
- Funding (both initial and ongoing) for San Diego’s HMIS is through a HUD SHP grant, United Way funding, CDBG money, as well as local, city, and county funding.
- San Diego’s HMIS includes approximately 50 different agencies and at least 300 end users who input data.

Tracy D’Alanno, Unit Manager, Homeless and Resource Development, Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs, Colorado Department of Human Services (*for further information, you may contact Ms. D’Alanno via email at tracy.dalanno@state.co.us*)

- The state of Colorado, containing only 3 Continua of Care, opted to use the Vision Link/Tapestry software. The state began its work toward having a fully operational HMIS in 2003. To date, the state still does not have Tapestry HMIS software that complies with all HUD requirements; they hope to have the correct software by year’s end at the latest.
- Colorado was relatively easy to organize because there are only 3 CoCs across the state. While each CoC has a separate HMIS administrator, the system is integrated and acts as one unified system.
- Colorado’s HMIS came to be as a result of the United Way’s contract with Vision Link for a 211 system (211 is a 24/7 toll-free hotline that the United Way is promoting across the country to provide health and human service information and referrals). The CoCs “piggy-backed” on this United Way contract to add an HMIS “module” to the order for a 211 system. Thus, while the cost of the Tapestry HMIS module was good (\$300/month administration fee to Vision Link), Colorado has faced difficulties in obtaining operational, HUD-compliant software.
- Funding HMIS was (and is) a challenge for Colorado. There is no state and very little local government funding that goes to homelessness and what funding is available is difficult to get. HUD money was used to fund an early HMIS system (in 1995) in Colorado and subsequently used to fund the 211 roll-out. Thus, cost was a major factor in Colorado’s decision to go with Tapestry.
- According to Ms. D’Alanno, Tapestry seriously underestimated the complexity of the HMIS module; the state still lacks finalized software. She suggests that a very specific and detailed contract be negotiated between the CoC and the software vendor (specifying exactly what data elements need to be incorporated, a specific timeline, and any customization that your community needs/wants). Further, she recommends that communities invest in an existing, working product (not a new software that lacks a track record). Find out if the software vendor is willing and able to modify the software as HUD modifies its requirements; whether the HMIS database can be integrated with other state database systems. Finally, she recommends pooling resources by joining multiple CoCs, regions, or counties together to reduce costs and increase bargaining power with the software vendor.
- Project management – in terms of managing people’s expectations about HMIS, what it can and cannot do and when it will be implemented – remains challenging in Colorado. It is important to maintain interest, enthusiasm, and willingness to participate in HMIS

throughout the implementation stage, which can be frustrating, especially if the roll-out is slower than expected.

Questions and Answers

- Does anyone have any experience using scan ID cards and Service Point?
 - In Santa Clara County, scan cards with bar codes are used successfully in conjunction with Service Point. Bar codes have been found more durable and reliable than magnetic stripes. Homeless persons in Santa Clara County are accustomed to the scan ID card requirement (an ID requirement has been in place for some time in order to receive shelter and/or services). One expense associated with scan ID cards, however, is that they are frequently lost and must be replaced. They do help, however, cut down on intake time.

- How accurate are the reports generated by either Service Point or Tapestry?
 - Human error is the greatest difficulty to overcome with respect to any HMIS database. The software is not the problem. Service Point has released a new reporting tool that is very useful in “cleaning up” the data. Santa Clara County, which has used Service Point for 2 years, is still not 100% comfortable with its data quality to release its reports. San Diego, however, has released reports using Service Point data (San Diego has been up and running for 5 years).

 - Colorado can’t say (yet) whether the reports generated by Tapestry will be accurate. However, Tapestry does allow for easy method of extracting data from the HMIS database into programs such as Access or Excel. There will be a need to check data quality regularly as there will be at least 1,000 end users in the state of Colorado.

- Can Service Point or Tapestry be integrated with other database systems?
 - This is a challenge for all communities. Colorado is in the process of implementing a statewide benefits management system, which is undergoing difficulty. Colorado counties are participating in this integrated database, but only to the extent that they provide homeless services (but no TANF, food stamps, etc. are included).

 - Santa Clara County is in the process of implementing the CalWIN system (CalWIN is the “CalWORKs Information Network,” and is a state-mandated information system to automate welfare eligibility for CalWORKs, Food Stamps, Medi-Cal, CAPI, GA, and Foster Care programs; it will replace outdated software, increase productivity, and improve public service). Before HMIS is integrated with CalWIN, county officials want to ensure that CalWIN operates properly first.

- Napa’s HMIS includes government agencies as participants, particularly those agencies that are part of the county Health and Human Services Department (such as welfare and housing).
- Yolo County is in discussions with county officials to include AB 2034 and GA applications in their HMIS database system.
- What about domestic violence, privacy and confidentiality, and HMIS?
 - HUD only needs aggregate information, not specific information about specific individuals. There will be a special session on “DV solutions” at the HMIS national conference which will directly address this concern. Also, with respect to all concerns about confidentiality & privacy, these issues cannot be resolved solely by technology – there is a need to develop local solutions at the community level that all involved can live with.

IV. Next call

We will plan to have 2 speakers from communities who are in the data collection stage to discuss software selection issues, how they funded the purchase of software, and the strengths & weaknesses of the software they selected. We plan to have speakers who will be able to address the **MetSys** and **Sparrow** HMIS systems.

Tentatively, our next call will be either September 22 or September 29 (both are Thursdays). Details will be forthcoming via email.