County Management
of Computers

First Final Report January 1996

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

> The Grand Jury opened an investigation following meetings with County officials, several of whom voiced concerns over ambiguous technology plans and lack of resources and support for implementing necessary computer systems.

PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

- The Grand Jury members met with the County Administrative Officer (CAO), eleven department and agency heads and three members of the Board of Supervisors on the subject of technology.

- The user plans, current state of computer technology, relationships with other users, budgetary procedures and Information System Department (ISD) role were examined.

FINDINGS

- The county leadership does not have a firm grasp on the countywide cost of its computer technology. Costs are not easily ascertained from the budgets. For example, the cost of personnel, whose main job is to support their departmental systems is not categorized in the budget with any consistency by the departments.

- The state of computer technology is noticeably inconsistent among users. Some users have far more resources (i.e. personnel and capital) to acquire computer technology than most other users.

- Computer systems are under-utilized and application systems are duplicated. Systems are currently developed mainly to serve the needs of a single department instead of being developed in cooperation with users having similar functions and information processes. However, there are some exceptions where systems serve multiple departments.

- In the past, ISD sought to control the acquisition and operation of all systems; now users want more control. ISD and users are adjusting to the new realities of managed decentralized computer technology. ISD has become more responsive to user requirements by assuming a consulting role, and users have increased their participation in computer technology projects.

- Some officials blame the shortage of funds for lack of progress in acquiring necessary computer technology. But there are users who view this obstacle differently as attested by this quote from one successful county user: " Even in times of tight budgets, it is possible to launch sophisticated new technologies. The courts have been enterprising in seeking out private sector partnerships, utilizing creative financing and collaborating with other government agencies."

- The highest level of satisfaction with ISD is found when its staff works closely with the

user at the user's site. The Internal Service Fund (ISF) provides users accountability on how and for what ISD spends its money for computer work.

- County officials have failed to come to grips with the conflicts between centralized authority over computer technology and managed decentralized authority. ISD in its presentation to the Board of Supervisors on November 21, 1995 recommended steps that will preserve ISD's traditional central role. The Board of Supervisors approved ISD recommendations without a debate and without comments by any affected users who may not have known about the presentation. The approved recommendations failed to acknowledge the computer technological and organizational realities in the County which are pulling away from ISD centralized control and move towards a more balanced relationship between ISD and computer technology users.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1995/96 Grand Jury recommends:

1. The County should develop an integrated strategy to guide the development of systems both inside and outside of ISD. The Board of Supervisors and the CAO should see that resources are shared more effectively. The decisions about computer technology should involve all affected users. Users should form creative relationships to combine their resources and implement systems which can serve several County organizations. Users do not have to look far for a model to follow, namely the cooperative efforts fostered by the Courts.

2. The Board of Supervisors should be proactive in defining responsibilities for computer technology. The Board of Supervisors and ISD have formed an Executive Committee to oversee computer technology planning. There is a concern that this well meaning initiative will not succeed if it is viewed by the users as an attempt to preserve the old ways of planning county systems. It is easy for ISD to promote centralization as an efficient structure however, it discourages user participation and effective team effort. Therefore, it is imperative to strike a balance between centralized and decentralized managerial style that insures key users participation, including the users who develop or purchase systems independently of ISD. Furthermore, the participating members of the Board of Supervisors should assume an active role and make computer technology a key area of interest.

3. The County should intensify its employee training programs and bolster the training budget to accomplish it. The CAO and ISD should lead implementation of countywide programs for training users. Training in technology should be a mandatory line item in each department's budget. The amount can be set by some formula that will guarantee that training is not the first casualty of tight budgets.

   Advanced training for users is extremely important for the purpose of identifying opportunities for automation, conducting cost/benefit studies, designing systems and managing development and acquisition projects

4. The CAO should get a clear picture of the County's state of computer technology. The CAO with ISD assistance must evaluate existing systems and recommend a plan for the modernization of aging, overburdened, obsolete and costly applications.

5. The budget system must better support the financial management of computer technology

projects. The CAO should review the budget and the project justification process with an eye towards a process that is more conducive to financing long range technology projects shared by one or more departments. In addition, departments should be directed to implement a uniform method of showing the true cost for computer systems in their budget.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

Response was received by the Grand Jury.
See County Responses and County Management of Computers Update

March 20, 1996

Lin Koester
Chief Administrative Officer
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, California 93009

RESPONSE TO THE 1995-96
VENTURA COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT

As requested in your memo of February 12, 1996, here are the Information Systems Department's responses to the Recommendations as listed and numbered on Pages 14 and 15 of the 1995-96 Grand Jury's First Final Report. The responses have been reviewed by the Information Technology Committee and have met with their approval.

RECOMMENDATION

1. The County should develop an integrated strategy to guide the development of systems both inside and outside of ISD. The Board of Supervisors and the CAO should see that resources are shared more effectively. The decisions about computer technology should involve all affected users. Users should form creative relationships to combine their resources and implement systems which can serve several County organizations. Users do not have to look far for a model to follow; namely the cooperative efforts fostered by the Courts.

RESPONSE

One of the first documents to be presented to the newly created Information Technology Committee (ITC) for their review and approval was the Ventura County Information Technology Strategy. The Strategy includes principles and criteria for decisions on technology investments, policy statements and guidelines on key management issues, as well as a description of and a plan for Information Systems architecture and infrastructure. The proposed overriding policy will permit County departments to individually manage the use of technology to achieve their goals and objectives, while the Information Systems Department (ISD) and the Chief Administrative Office (CAO) will manage the use of technology to support and ensure Countywide planning and collaboration on systems for common services and functions. ISD will continue to update and maintain its common, standards-based, Countywide Information Technology infrastructure for collaboration and use between departments and other work groups.

RECOMMENDATION

2. The Board of Supervisors should be proactive in defining responsibilities for computer technology. The Board of Supervisors and ISD have formed an Executive Committee to oversee computer technology planning. There is a concern that this well meaning initiative will not succeed if it is viewed by the users as an attempt to preserve the old ways of planning County systems. It is easy for ISD to promote centralization as an efficient structure; however, it discourages user participation and effective team effort. Therefore, it is imperative to strike a balance between centralized and decentralized managerial style that insures key users participation, including the users who develop or purchase systems independently of ISD. Furthermore, the participating members of the

Board of Supervisors should assume an active role and make computer technology a key area of interest.

RESPONSE

Prior to its recommendation toward the creation of the Information Technology Committee (ITC), ISD indicated that it was necessary "to bring our distributed departmental systems back into the fold, under a more formal centralized management, through the establishment of policies, standards and guidelines which will support and provide for individual departmental initiatives and at the same time, provide for the needs of the County and its established technological infrastructure." ISD's approach will continue to be one of consultation with our users to help them to find the best combination of technology available to meet their needs in serving their clientele. Users who develop or purchase systems independently of ISD must still abide by the policies, standards and guidelines established by the centralized management, whether that be embodied in the Board of Supervisors, the CAO, the ITC or ISD.

Early actions on the part of the Board members participating on the Information Technology Committee reflect a strong desire to be proactive and to play an active role in the continued implementation and use of technology in Ventura County.

RECOMMENDATION

3. The County should intensify its employee training programs and bolster the training budget to accomplish it. The CAO and ISD should lead implementation of countywide programs for training users. Training in technology should be a mandatory line item in each department's budget. The amount can be set by some formula that will guarantee that training is not the first casualty of tight budgets.

   Advanced training for users is extremely important for the purpose of identifying opportunities for automation, conducting cost/benefit studies, designing systems and managing development and acquisition projects.

RESPONSE

ISD and the CAO agree on the value of training County employees in the proper and advanced use of any technology installed and implemented throughout the County. The CAO, ISD and Personnel Department, in response to the Auditor's Countywide Review of Personal Computers and the Final Report of the 1994-95 Grand Jury, agreed, after a number of meetings, that the Personnel Department was better suited to coordinate, administer and conduct the required departmental training. ISD, however, can provide technical guidance to the Personnel Department in the development of appropriate training classes as well as provide instructors in training users in the latest or newer technologies. ISD will continue to provide user-specific and county-standard specific training to users when required or requested.

The Personnel Department has recently informed the CAO of the creation of a group called PC Power, whose purpose is to provide a forum by which departmental office systems coordinators can communicate with the Personnel Department and ComputerFocus, the County's computer training provider. Participants in PC Power can provide detailed insight into their PC training needs and provide the proper focus toward the pertinence and quality of training. The group has also expressed an interest in working with ISD, the CAO and the Information Technology Committee regarding

issues related to PC training and PC usage.

The Personnel Department, in a memo dated February 15, 1996, has responded to this recommendation as well. A copy of that memo is attached.

The standards and guidelines established by the Information Technology Committee, and the Ventura County Computer Architecture document proposed for promulgation by the Committee and the CAO, will assist both the Personnel Department and ISD in providing the proper focus for training classes on the part of County employees.

The amount of County funding made available in individual departmental budgets is, of course, an appropriate concern of the Board of Supervisors and the CAO. The Information Technology Committee, however, may consider other Countywide approaches to the providing and funding of technology training for County employees.

RECOMMENDATION

4. The CAO should get a clear picture of the County's state of computer technology. The CAO with ISD assistance must evaluate existing systems and recommend a plan for the modernization of aging, overburdened, obsolete and costly applications.

RESPONSE

The CAO and ISD are working together in the preparation of the Ventura County Computer Architecture document for presentation to the Information Technology Committee. This document will adequately describe the technology currently in use in the County. The CAO and ISD are also collaborating on the preparation of the Interim Five-Year Projection of implementation and possible funding of information technology in the County over the next five fiscal years. ISD's Goals and Objectives for Fiscal Year 1996-97 include the presentation of the final Information Technology Plan to the CAO, the Information Technology Committee and to the Board of Supervisors in a July-September 1996 time-frame.

RECOMMENDATION

5. The budget system must better support the financial management of computer technology projects. The CAO should review the budget and the project justification process with an eye towards a process that is more conducive to financing long range technology projects shared by one or more departments. In addition, departments should be directed to implement a uniform method of showing the true cost for computer systems in their budget.

RESPONSE

The CAO and ISD, in collaboration with the Information Technology Committee, are exploring possible funding sources and processes toward the financial management of information technology projects. Particular attention will be paid to the processes concerned with financing long-range technology projects shared by more than one department.

ISD, in compiling its proposed budget for FY 1996-97, will be accompanied by the pertinent CAO analysts in its deliberation with each of its users. This will afford the CAO the opportunity to evaluate existing systems, as suggested in Recommendation 4, as well as the budget and project

review suggested in Recommendation 5.

If you have any questions regarding the above material, or if you would like additional information or clarification on specific responses, please feel free to call me at 654-3543.

Respectfully submitted,

GEORGE E. MATHEWS, Director
Information Systems Department

M. Lin Koester

March 20, 1996

Date: February 15, 1996

To: M. L. Koester, CAO
From: Ron Komers, Personnel Director
Subject: Response to Grand Jury First Final Report

The Personnel Department has the following suggestions regarding a response to the "County Management of Computers" section of the Grand Jury Report, Recommendation #3. The CAO may wish to integrate policy directives with our proposed response.

"Based upon the recommendation of the Auditor Controller's 1995 audit of Personal. Computer usage .in the County, the Personnel Department was given the responsibility to develop and implement a personal computer training program that would be both flexible and comprehensive in meeting the diverse training needs of County employees. Personnel Department staff, in cooperation with the Oxnard Adult, School, developed an initial program that operated from March through June of 1995. During that time period, over 200 employees received training at a minimal cost. Also during this same time period, the Personnel Department staff was better able to identify specific training needs and methodologies and at the same time be flexible and comprehensive.

In September, 1995, after researching all local area personal computer training providers, the Personnel Department entered into an agreement with Computer Focus, located in Oxnard, CA, to provide heavily discounted, comprehensive personal computer training on all software packages that County departments were using, as well as working directly with departments on training of customized software systems. In addition, Computer Focus would perform much needed personal computer training needs assessment surveys free of charge to all County departments requesting such service,

The Personnel Department has been monitoring employee feedback on the training. The majority of responses have rated the training "very high" to "outstanding" in respect to the quality of training received, the appropriateness of the training facilities, and the help/support after the training. The Personnel Department intends to hold a series of information exchange meetings in order to maintain an awareness of the various County departments personal computer training needs, and continue to develop and improve a personal computer training program that is a valuable resource to all County employees.

There is an issue of lack of budgeted training funds, specifically for personal computer training, which has been continually brought up by County departments. We believe an increase of training budgets for this specific purpose would enhance the PC training program's effectiveness, and in turn continue to provide employees with the tools to be more productive.

Notwithstanding the budget dilemmas that County departments face, the PC training program has still been very successful. Many County departments have taken advantage of the assessment services and over 800 employees have been trained in the various personal computer software training courses to date."