

1999 - 2000
Ventura County Grand Jury Report
Oversight Responsibilities
In Ventura County Government

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Background

Oversight of departmental operations is essential to assure efficient and effective government operations. County oversight includes the performance of compliance, systems, operational, financial, and program audits. The Office of Auditor-Controller office is responsible for conducting these audits. There are plans to establish self-assessment audits within departments to enhance the effectiveness of the oversight process.¹

The expertise involved in evaluating total departmental operations requires strong backgrounds and education in the areas to be audited. Available personnel in County Government with these backgrounds are in very short supply since they are already occupied in demanding full-time positions. Accordingly, oversight of departments is rarely, if ever, actually performed on a countywide basis.

Methodology

- Interviewed both former and present Auditor-Controllers
- Interviewed department heads and /or supervisors in GSA- Materials, GSA- Transportation, Information Systems, HCA- Mental Health departments and CAO office.
- Reviewed specifications and literature regarding ISO9000 Quality Systems. ISO9000 is a series of quality procedures used worldwide to attest to the quality of services and products provided by conforming organizations.

Findings:

- F-1 There is little or no regular oversight performed in most of the County's operations by either the Auditor-Controller or by the departments involved.
- F-2 The reason given for not performing oversight on a regular or timely basis is a lack of qualified personnel.
- F-3 The ever-increasing use and dependence on computers by County Government requires more independent checks to insure that the systems are working as intended with a high level of confidence.

Typical concerns to be addressed include such issues as:

1. Are all required signature approvals in place?
2. Have all software and/or form changes been properly documented and implemented.
3. Have all work units been considered and/or notified of impending changes?

¹ CAO report "Strengthen Specific Financial Management Capabilities for the County of Ventura" dated 2/27/01

Conclusions

C-1 A broad definition of governmental oversight includes the performance of checks and investigations to assure the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of a Unit's operations. A part of the overall oversight audit process can be identified as a quality assurance component.

Under this heading, the following departmental functions can be evaluated:

PURPOSE (OBJECTIVE) OF THE UNIT	LISTING OF ASSIGNED DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES.
Customers (users)	Who are beneficiaries of units' services?
Are there written policies defining the functions performed by the unit	Step-by-step procedures for internal operations and desk or window procedures for public contact.
Are employees knowledgeable of the procedures and do they follow them?*	Procedures require compliance to be effective.

C-2 The advantages of performing the quality assurance elements of oversight are as follows:

1. The evaluations can be performed by personnel with lower level credentials, who are less costly and are more available for the tasks required.
 - a. Qualifications include the ability to read and understand complex directions coupled with a natural ability to deal with minute details.
 - b. In industry, these types of employees may be found in such occupations as "systems analyst," "information system technician," or "quality assurance technician." (F-2)
2. By concentrating on these quality assurance subsets of oversight, it is possible to achieve the classic desired outcome wherein 20% of the effort (cost) accomplishes 80% of the goal (meaningful oversight). In a typical scenario, the evaluator will appear at a selected area of a department's operation (either scheduled or unannounced) and ask to see the procedures covering that part of the work flow. After a verbal review of the procedures and forms with department personnel, the evaluator will monitor the flow step-by-step to insure that the procedures are being followed and accurately reflect the operations being performed. The evaluator will then review the results of his/her findings with the department personnel before completing and filing his/her reports. If appropriate, the evaluator will have previewed any applicable customer requirements to assure compliance with contractual obligations (F2).

For example, many of the errors uncovered in prior oversight reviews could have been identified and corrected on site had these simplified oversight procedures and personnel to perform them been available.

C-3 The quality assurance component of oversight constitutes the backbone of efficient, well-run operations.

C-4 A simplified “quality assurance” review on a regular basis will fulfill many of the objectives of an oversight evaluation. (F1-F-3)

Recomendations:

R-1 County government should organize to increase the number of performance audits that can be accomplished each year.⁴

R-2 Human Resources should use quality assurance- based definitions and procedures to set up guidelines for job descriptions, cross-training possibilities, and possible sources for staffing this level of oversight personnel.

(The County department currently working on training and procedures involved with Medicare billing training may be a valuable source for this information.)

R-3 The functions and personnel involved with the quality assurance-based reviews should be located in the Auditor-Controller office so that the findings, files, and other information collected can be used and maintained in conjunction with the less frequent, more comprehensive oversight reviews.

R-4 All County departments should act promptly to implement the CAO’s recommended internal self-assessment reviews⁵.

Responses Required

Board of Supervisors

Chief Administrative Officer R-3, R-4

Auditor- Controller R-1

³ 1999-2000 Grand Jury Reports “Purchase Orders,” “Procurement Bank Card.”

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ CAO report “Strengthen Specific Financial Management Capabilities for the County of Ventura” dated 2/27/01