Ventura County Information Systems Department CalWIN Implementation

Summary

The 2005-2006 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) became interested in the Congressional mandate that all states must automate their welfare systems to speed up processing, have better information on public assistance, and reduce the chances of fraud. Ventura County joined a consortium of eighteen other California counties to develop the CalWORKS Information Network (CalWIN) System. Ventura County becomes the fifteenth of the eighteen counties to convert after 25 years of using a system heavily dependent upon paper.

The Grand Jury oversight of this project included reviewing project documentation, attending project meetings, participating in project conference calls, attending software demonstrations, and receiving training on CalWIN. After implementation the Grand Jury interviewed several Human Services Agency (HSA) employees to gauge their feelings about CalWIN.

The CalWIN System is used by over 650 Ventura County employees on a daily basis and services over 52,000 cases per month. The CalWIN System handles food stamps, foster care, the Medi-Cal health insurance program, and CalWORKS (temporary assistance for families with children). CalWIN created a "one stop" process with the system evaluating the potential recipient's needs and eligibility for services.

The CalWIN project was well organized and well managed. The project was delivered on schedule and within budget.

The CalWIN software performed as expected and delivered the expected benefits.

Background

The Grand Jury became interested in the CalWIN Project after receiving an agency briefing by the Ventura County Information Systems Department (ISD). The CalWIN System is a replacement for the current county welfare systems and paper based processes. The system replacement was brought about by a Congressional mandate.

In 1995 California mandated all 58 counties join one of four county consortia for automated welfare systems. Ventura County joined a consortium of eighteen other counties to develop the CalWIN System. Ventura County becomes the fifteenth of the eighteen counties to convert after 25 years of using a system heavily dependent upon paper.

Methodology

The Grand Jury received briefings from ISD and HSA concerning the progress of the project. It examined project plans, budgets, and training plans. The Grand Jury attended project meetings and monitored project conference calls. The Grand Jury also

received training on the new CalWIN System to determine its ease of use and effectiveness.

After the CalWIN System implementation in April 2006, the Grand Jury visited an HSA location to observe the system in use and to talk with agency employees about their experiences with the CalWIN System.

Findings

F-01.   The CalWIN Project timeline and milestones for the consortium are as follows:

- The project commenced in March 2000
- The requirements for the system were validated March to July 2000
- General system design took place August to October 2000
- Detailed system design took place November 2000 to May 2001
- Coding and unit testing took place June to November 2001
- System testing took place December 2001 to May 2002
- User acceptance testing took place June 2002 to November 2004
- Pilot rollout in Placer and Sacramento counties was January and March 2005
- Ventura County implementation was April 2006

F-02.   The CalWIN Project budget for all 18 counties is broken down as follows:

- Total nine year State welfare automation cost is $800 million
- Ventura County portion is $21,560,736
- Actual cost to Ventura County is $436,000

Much of the cost of the project was covered by federal/state government funding.

F-03.   The CalWIN System is used by over 650 Ventura County employees on a daily basis.

F-04.   The CalWIN System services over 52,000 cases per month.

F-05.   The CalWIN System handles food stamps, foster care, the Medi-Cal health insurance program, and the CalWORKS program which provides temporary financial assistance, job counseling, and work training to families with children.

F-06.   The ISD/CalWIN project team effectively used state-of-the-art project management software to track every detail of this project.

F-07.   The ISD/CalWIN project team completed the project on schedule and within budget.

F-08.   The ISD/CalWIN project team held regularly scheduled meetings where all tasks were discussed, progress was monitored, and solutions to potential problems were discussed and adopted.

F-09.   The Grand Jury found that the CalWIN software training provided by the project team for HSA employees was adequate.

F-10.   The Grand Jury found that CalWIN created a "one stop" process with the system evaluating the potential recipient's entire needs and eligibility for services. The "one stop" process is designed to reduce the chance of fraud, however the "one stop" process means that most HSA employees needed expanded knowledge beyond their specialty.

F-11.   The Grand Jury found that HSA employees who previously specialized in one of three major service areas (food stamps, Medi-Cal and Cal-Works) are now required to be knowledgeable in all three areas. Their training in the areas other than their previous specialty was not conducted early enough in the transition, nor was it sufficiently thorough.

F-12.   Grand Jury interviews confirmed that the CalWIN software is performing as designed and has so far delivered the expected results.

Conclusions

C-01.   The CalWIN project is a very large project effecting hundreds of HSA employees. (F-01, F-02, F-03, F-04, F-05)

C-02.   The CalWIN project was well organized and well managed. The project was delivered on schedule and within budget. (F-06, F-07, F-08)

C-03.   Training for the CalWIN software was adequate and complete. (F-09)

C-04.   The chance of fraud is greatly reduced because of system integration, internal system processes, and the elimination of much of the paperwork. (F-10, F-12)

C-05.   HSA employee interviews pointed to a need for better cross training in all CalWIN services to meet the needs of the "one stop" process that the CalWIN software provides. (F-11)

C-06.   The CalWIN software performed as expected and delivered the expected benefits. (F-12)

Recommendations

R-01.   Future project teams should look to this project as an example of how to run a large project. (C-01, C-02, C-03, C-04, C-06)

R-02.   Cross training in the three service areas should be continued on a regular basis, especially for new employees, using real cases that the employees are working on, until all employees feel competent in all areas. (C-05)

Responses

None required

Commendations

The CalWIN Project Team should be commended for its professionalism and success in delivering this complex project which will provide benefits to the County over many years.