

Process Improvement in San Mateo County, CA



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San Mateo County California is located between San Francisco and San Jose. The County has a population of 727,209 who are served by 5139 county employees. As with other jurisdictions across the country, the county is facing growing fiscal and service delivery challenges.

The county developed several strategies to meet their challenges. County management reasoned that the challenges were such that the county had to find better ways to do its business. In 2011, the county formed a countywide Business Process Redesign cohort composed of representatives from every department to identify and select, on an ongoing basis, business processes to be reviewed for production of efficiencies, reducing operating costs and improving effectiveness. The County planned the development of a cadre of trained staff who would develop and then exponentially expand business process review activities throughout the county. As the staff from County departments became comfortable with the application of business process redesign methodologies to activities, processes, procedures, and work flows it was reasoned that unnecessary time and resources would be eliminated. As these efforts became imbedded in the business practices, a culture of continued improvements in efficiency and effectiveness would grow.

It issued a Request for Information to obtain learn about various approaches to business process improvement and to gain information about vendors with experience in facilitating and training in business process redesign. Since then, savings in time, cost, and improved effectiveness have been commonplace. The RFI specified that training be structured so that participants can take concepts back to his/her respective department to train other departmental staff and lead projects within their own department and other departments.

The County selected TechSolve, a not-for-profit process improvement firm based in Cincinnati, to assist in its efforts in large measure because its approach to process improvement mirrors that of the county. TechSolve's "Lean Government" philosophy "seeks the involvement of all workers in the elimination of waste and the adding of value. It has produced startling results, first, by stressing respect for people and teamwork and, second, by incorporating a series of analytical techniques to reduce wasteful and non-value-adding activities."

An initial meeting was conducted via telephone with the Business Process Redesign planning team to establish clear and measurable goals/objectives, deliverables/outcomes, timelines and resources for the Business Process Redesign program. Special effort was made to ensure that training be integrated and aligned with the strategic goals of the organization.

Within the agreed to framework, TechSolve presented a one-day course for senior managers and members of the County of San Mateo Business Process Redesign team. This training provided an intensive look at the principles and philosophy of successful process redesign and continuous improvement efforts within organizations of all types, with specific examples from city and county governments. Participants discussed what it takes to successfully implement these tools and sustain gains. They were also exposed to the importance of value stream management, correct performance measurements, and creating a sustainable culture of continuous improvement within the organization. The training was a hands-on event with thorough discussion on its application to the County's issues and opportunities.

The County then worked with TechSolve to conduct a series of three to five day process improvement "events" which both produced the desired performance improvements and provided increasing levels of experience for County staff in leading the events. The subject matter for the events were as varied as county purchasing procedures, processing of leave of absence requests, contract administration to the process for handling public assistance overpayments. Regardless of the subject matter, the analytical process was consistent and significant process improvements in processing time, accuracy and cost resulted.

Examples of results so far include a reduction of 25% in processing time for service provider selections through the Request for Proposal process, overall time savings in contract administration by more than one full-time equivalent, minimized risk through increased accuracy in contract development, a 20% reduction in the number of steps to process an employee leave of absence request, increased savings to Human Resources trust funds by more than \$10,000 annually, increased employee and customer satisfaction with overall process improvements and ability to redirect limited resources from wasteful non-value added steps to mission critical activities.

Each event was held with a separate project team composed of line staff involved in the process being reviewed along with a limited number of management staff, others who may not be directly associated with the subject process. At times, the team also included "users" (people affected by the particular process).

The events were initiated with a brief overview of the analytical process to be employed. A discussion was then held where the team determined the beginning and ending points of the process to be reviewed and, to the degree possible, a baseline assessment of performance and appropriate performance measures. The team then developed a current state value stream map that visually illustrates the "as is" process and information flow of a function or activity. This current state map allows the team to zero in and tackle the processes steps and handoffs that do not add value from the standpoint of desired outcomes. A non-value-added activity is anything that occurs within the process that hinders conformance to the desired outcome of the service. Team member were regularly given the opportunity to lead the analysis, thereby gaining skills to subsequently conduct similar improvement events. Once the current state is established, the plan for the implementation of the new, improved, future state was developed, followed by hands-on coaching, training and implementation to drive actual improvement.



As a result of performing similar engagements across the country, TechSolve has found that the amount of involvement the staff has in the process improvements (and all associated tasks) directly corresponds to the success of the proposed implementation plan. San Mateo County expanded on this concept by incorporating formal team presentation of the planned improvement results to the top management and political leadership of the County. The presentations of the results of the events have proven to be the capstones to the project team taking ownership of the process. The project team members then had first-hand knowledge of the process nuances, results, which facilitated grassroots communication to their peers.