AN INFORMATION

OASIS

redf

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An Information OASIS:
The Design and Implementation of Comprehensive and Customized Client Information and Tracking Systems

A LETTER FROM THE ROBERTS ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT FUND

Spring 2002

Dear Colleague,

In the past few years, foundations across the country have placed increasing emphasis on evaluation and social outcome measurement for the nonprofit programs they fund. Yet, many of these same foundations are providing little funding to build nonprofit organizations' capacity to measure their social outcomes. As a result, most nonprofits are unable to deliver accurate social outcome results required by the funding community and foundations are increasingly frustrated about the low quality of the social outcome reports they receive.

When we launched The Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) in 1997, we wanted to measure the social outcomes resulting from our investment in a portfolio of nonprofit-run social purpose enterprises that employed disadvantaged populations. We also wanted to make sure the outcomes we collected mirrored the desired outcomes of the organizations we funded as much as possible, and that the information collected would inform their practice and not just end up in written reports on our foundation office shelves.

From 1997 to 1998, we worked with our portfolio members to increase each organization's capacity to measure, track and utilize business information and social outcome information about their enterprises and the more than 600 individuals employed in their enterprises. We were interested in whether employment in a social purpose enterprise resulted in improved outcomes for individuals across areas such as income, barriers to employment, housing stability, social service usage, self-esteem, and social support. We were also interested in connecting the social outcomes of enterprise employment with the financial investment required to create that employment opportunity — to calculate a social return on investment (SROI) for each enterprise. We were not

interested at that time in measuring the social outcomes of their entire agencies, nor helping them track their service delivery or streamline their social outcomes reporting systems overall.

In order to ensure our enterprise-specific social outcome measurement process would provide timely, accurate, informative data for the non-profit organization, we made sure the enterprise social impact design process incorporated nonprofit management input. We asked the nonprofit managers to define the social outcomes they expected to see in their enterprise employees and used that information to create a core survey instrument that REDF used with every enterprise in its portfolio. Not every enterprise wanted to track the same information, so in return for collecting this core information, we offered each group the opportunity to customize the survey instrument on REDF's dime (including consulting, staff and other costs).

One organization responded by requesting to ask 300 questions (!) instead of the 40 core questions. Additionally, they wanted to survey the 3000 plus clients they served each year, not just the 100 or so enterprise employees, and they wanted to streamline the way they reported on social outcomes to all their funders, not just REDF. Another organization wanted an integrated, relational database that would facilitate reporting on how many enterprise employees they had, sorted by demographic characteristics, on any given day with the push of a button. And they wanted to connect the services delivered to those enterprise employees with the employee social outcomes with the financial investment required to support both the enterprise and the services to calculate their SROI. Based on these responses, we realized there was a significant opportunity to transform the way these organizations tracked their social service and impact information across their entire agencies. In partnership with several other funders, REDF launched the Ongoing Assessment of Social ImpactS (OASIS) project in 1999.

The OASIS project, by definition, is about building customized, comprehensive, social management information systems (MIS) within nonprofit organizations. The Social MIS created through OASIS pro-vides timely, accurate, non-punitive information by which nonprofit

managers can assess for themselves and report to others whether they are having the desired impact on *all* the people they serve.

We at REDF are excited to have followed the lead of four of our portfolio nonprofit organizations – Rubicon Programs, CVE, Inc., Golden Gate Community, Inc., and Juma Ventures – in creating OASIS. And we are grateful to our OASIS funding partners: the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, the Phalarope Foundation, and the Penney Family Fund for helping make OASIS a reality.

We are publishing this paper on OASIS as an invitation to other funders to examine their requirements and practices around social outcome measurement, and how they fund the capacity building necessary to produce high quality social outcome measures. And we are hoping this will further the dialogue amongst nonprofit practitioners around how to improve service delivery to maximize quality outcomes and raise the level of practice and organizational effectiveness in the field as a whole.

We look forward to your comments and feedback!

Warm regards,
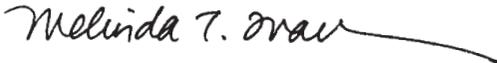
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Managing Director
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Lately it seems that everyone in the nonprofit sector is focused on outcome measurement. Outcome measurement is often looked to as a means of ensuring accountability with charitable or government funds. Several national funding organizations are now requiring outcome measurement for all of the programs they fund and are offering training and technical assistance to help nonprofits in those efforts. Entrepreneurial social investors are interested in outcome measurement because they want to ensure that they are making sound social investments and are looking for quantifiable results that speak to a social return on investment. Most governmental agencies require the programs they fund to conduct outcome evaluations, particularly for large and multi-year grants. However, while funders often require nonprofits to provide social outcome data, they have typically not invested in building nonprofits' organizational capacity to collect comprehensive social outcome information. Nonprofits have typically responded to these disparate measurement requirements on a program by program basis, establishing data collection efforts in a piecemeal fashion that often results in cumbersome and inconsistent measurement efforts

across an agency. Recently, a director of a sophisticated and successful San Francisco-based nonprofit organization complained that in response to multiple funding requirements, her organization had developed and was now maintaining seven different databases and that nobody could get decent information out of any of them!

Despite what has become a pervasive demand for outcome measurement, a recent study conducted by the Urban Institute and the Independent Sector showed that most nonprofit organizations have limited capacity to collect, analyze and use outcome information.[1] Most staff who work in nonprofit organizations have had relatively little exposure to training or technical assistance in outcome measurement. This is because by design, nonprofit staff members are generally *not* researchers. They have *social service* skills and not necessarily *social science* skills. Thus, when nonprofit organizations undertake outcome measurement on their own, without technical assistance, often the results are not seen as credible or valid. And when they engage the services of academic researchers or evaluation consultants, the data are not always fed back to program staff for the purpose of learning and program improvement. In fact, Michael Quinn Patton, the eloquent proponent of "utilization-focused evaluation" argues that the real problem with traditional evaluation and measurement efforts is that they are not conducted with the end user in mind.[2] Patton places much of the responsibility for this with researchers who get so caught up in technical details that they lose sight of the information needs of the end user. Thus data collection and outcome measurement become an end in and of themselves rather than a means of informing practice.

Four central practices have traditionally characterized many nonprofits' experience with social outcome measurement and evaluation in general:

1   FUNDER-DRIVEN DATA COLLECTION HAS LARGELY IGNORED
      THE REAL INFORMATION NEEDS OF ORGANIZATIONS;

[1] "Outcome Measurement in Nonprofit Organizations: Current Practices and Recommendations," Elaine Morley, Elisa Vinson and Harry Hatry, The Independent Sector and The Urban Institute, 2001.

[2] "Program Evaluation: What are the Outcomes?," Richard Scotch, The Not-for-Profit CEO monthly letter, Vol 8, No 6, April 2001.

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2   INFORMATION GATHERING IN PROGRAMMATIC SILOS
     RESULTS IN INCONSISTENCIES AND DATA CONFUSION
     ACROSS AN AGENCY;

3   LACK OF TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AMONG
     NONPROFIT STAFF HAS OFTEN RESULTED IN LESS THAN
     CREDIBLE RESULTS; AND/OR

4   MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS DO NOT ACCOUNT FOR THE
     INFORMATION NEEDS OF THE END USER.

This paper tells the story of how The Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) went about building a social impact measurement system with its portfolio of nonprofit organizations and social purpose enterprises. The system is called OASIS—the *"Ongoing Assessment of Social Impacts."* The story of its development involves some twists and turns and some mistakes along the way. But in the end, with OASIS, REDF has helped to pioneer a social outcome measurement system that addresses all of the four troubling practices highlighted above. OASIS is designed to be a process that leads to a comprehensive, agency-wide, state-of-the-art client tracking system that provides real-time data to staff at all levels of an organization. An OASIS tracking system is built with funder reporting requirements in mind but is not limited to them. It collects comparable information in comparable ways across programs to reduce the silo effect of data collection efforts in an agency. The process of OASIS development involves an integration of talent in social science, technology and automation so that each of these areas is credibly addressed. And, most importantly, OASIS is customized for each organization through an in-depth organizational planning process around client-centered information. This planning process involves staff at every level of the organization and is explicitly intended to account for the information needs of many end-users, from line staff to managers to Boards of Directors.

OASIS is not just a database. What makes OASIS unique is that the *process* of its development is as important as the *product* of its development. Therefore, this paper describes both. We review every step in the process

of OASIS development as well as the resulting products. We include lessons learned at different points along the way and offer practical advice about what it takes to pursue the OASIS approach, in terms of financial and human resources as well as the kind of organizational inclination, readiness and capacity that makes OASIS most successful.

Similar to OASIS, the preparation of this paper has been collaborative, incorporating thoughts, reflections and lessons learned from multiple perspectives. We include the nonprofit organization and the investor perspectives as well as the perspectives of all of the consulting and technical assistance partners involved. We hope what we have to share will be valuable to practitioners and investors interested in developing nonprofit capacity around social outcome measurement and also to consultants and technical assistance providers whose services are often engaged to help build that capacity.

BACKGROUND

At its inception in 1997, REDF wanted to build a different kind of social impact measurement system with the social purpose enterprises in its portfolio of nonprofit organizations. REDF did not want a traditional evaluation model where all data collection was externally driven and where the grantees were simply passive recipients of dictated data requirements. REDF explicitly did not even use the word "evaluation" because that term carried punitive connotations of measurements that were externally driven rather than practice driven. REDF wanted social impact data to inform practice. It wanted a social management information system (Social MIS) that would provide credible data in a timely way to practitioners and investors alike. REDF was also explicitly *not* interested in the kind of bean-counting that had characterized many nonprofit evaluation efforts of the past, that is, counting the number of people participating in a service, their characteristics and so forth. REDF was committing itself to developing a new kind of social metric, one that was consistent with its approach to venture philanthropy and that would provide meaningful results in a language that would appeal to social investors. REDF called this metric "social return on investment

(SROI)."[3] SROI is a complex construct that essentially measures cost-savings to society and change in individuals' lives as a result of social purpose enterprise employment.

REDF did not attempt to develop this new measurement system on its own. It brought in multiple partners, each with their own area of expertise, to contribute to the building of this new approach. REDF brought in BTW Consultants, to provide assistance in the conceptualization, design, and implementation of social impact measurement. CompuMentor, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping other nonprofits more effectively use technology, was retained to assess and help build the technological capacity of organizations in the REDF Portfolio. Dayspring Technologies and Third Strand, firms with extensive database programming experience specializing in innovative uses of the Internet, were brought in to help automate the system that BTW designed.

We spent close to a year planning and preparing for the launch of a Social MIS that was specifically focused on measuring the social impact of employment among those employed in enterprises in the REDF Portfolio. This process included first meeting with staff from each of the groups in the portfolio to identify the outcomes they hoped for from the employment experience. We then organized the outcomes by group across the whole portfolio to identify where there was significant overlap in expected outcomes. These overlapping outcomes, combined with REDF's interest in gathering data to inform SROI, were called the "core data set." The core data set included outcomes related to employment, wages, housing, use of public assistance, and use of social services, as well as psychosocial outcomes such as self-esteem and social support. BTW developed baseline and follow-up interview protocols that would be used with all employees in the enterprises in order to measure social impact and provide the data necessary to support and inform SROI.

In recognition of the unique information needs of different organizations, we also offered to provide modest customization to the core data

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[3] For detailed explanation of SROI, please see "SROI Methodology," REDF 2001, and the "Social Return on Investment (SROI) Collection," REDF 2000.

set. Most organizations took advantage of this offer of customization by asking additional questions that were specific to their own efforts. For example, one organization working with homeless youth added questions about employees' substance use. Another organization that focused considerable effort on supporting employees to financially plan for the future added questions about employee savings practices. While this customization helped make the measurement effort even more relevant to each group's social purpose enterprise employment experience, it was not fully integrated into the larger *organization* of which the social purpose enterprise was part.

In our efforts to break the mold of traditional evaluation practice, we fell into one of the most common traps of nonprofit measurement efforts, the silo approach. We addressed many of the other traditional problems with social outcome measurement. We involved organizations in the development of the measurement tools in order to account for both the information needs of the practitioner and those of the funder. We provided technical consultation to ensure credible measurement. But, we restricted all of our measurement to the silo of enterprise employment. We built a Cadillac version of an enterprise employment measurement system, complete with import and export data buttons on site at each organization which allowed their databases to communicate with a central database at BTW Consultants and vice versa. This system has in fact told us a lot about the impact of enterprise employment and has provided all of the raw social data for REDF's SROI analyses. But from the organizations' perspectives, there was an over-emphasis on measurement of enterprise employment and an under-emphasis on everything else the organizations did. We had built a Cadillac for the enterprises while the organizations' other programs were patching together measurement approaches using old car parts that didn't always fit together too well.

During the process of the Social MIS development for the enterprises, one organization in the REDF Portfolio—Rubicon Programs Inc.— stepped forward and said, "We are interested in assessing the impact of our enterprises, but that is only one part of what we do. We employ

over a hundred people a year in our enterprises but serve thousands of people each year with our programs. It is very important to us that we also effectively assess the impact of our programs. Can you help us build a comprehensive information system for both our enterprises and our programs?"

Thus began the quest for OASIS. BTW worked with Rubicon Programs for two years in an intensive planning process to conceptualize, design and refine a comprehensive client tracking system for the whole organization. Then the automation process began, which involved another intensive process of planning, testing and refinement. Our work with Rubicon to build a customized client tracking system formed the foundation for all subsequent OASIS planning efforts. Each organization participating in OASIS presents its own unique circum-stances and challenges and our approach has been refined and has improved over time. Still, the principles we adopted early on with Rubicon have provided the essential framework for all later efforts. These principles include:

1   STAFF REPRESENTING EVERY PROGRAM, SOCIAL VENTURE AND DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS;

2   THE SYSTEM SHOULD BE BUILT FOR THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE, NOT THE PAST; AND

3   THERE MUST BE AMPLE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT FOR THE EFFORT.

Before the actual OASIS development gets underway, it is fundamental that an effective staffing and consulting structure be established. This means convening a working group with the right players involved, identifying staff who will be responsible for the OASIS project internally, identifying the key consulting partners and clarifying roles for everyone who is part of the process.

STEP ONE: CONVENE A WORKING GROUP

A committed and energetic Working Group is essential to the success of OASIS in an organization. The role of the Working Group is to guide the development of the organization's entire client tracking system. The members of the Working Group help conceptualize the overall design and they review and comment upon drafts of all information gathering tools. The Working Group meets every other week for about a year. In one instance, in order to move the processes along more quickly, we split the group in two, with each focusing on a distinct set of information tools to develop. Each group could then move along parallel tracks rather than doing all of the development sequentially.

The Working Group is comprised of representatives from every program in an agency and a staff member responsible for contract reporting. The representatives in the group do not have to be the top leaders in an organization, but they should be people who manage programs and have some decision-making authority. They should understand both the big picture of what their programs are trying to accomplish as well as the day-to-day details of client flow and service delivery. In the case of one small organization, the Executive Director chose to be part of the Working Group and attend all of the Working Group meetings. For most mid-size or large organizations, however, it is not essential that the Director be part of the group. As we will delineate below, the Executive Director and/or Executive Management Team must provide approval at two specific decision checkpoints: 1) adopting a new conceptual design for the organization's information system; and 2) final approval of all information gathering tools.

STEP TWO: IDENTIFY KEY STAFF

While the hallmark of OASIS is to involve staff from every program or department in the planning process, there are two staff positions that are key to making the information system planning process a success. For the purpose of this paper, we will call these positions OASIS Project Manager and OASIS Coordinator.

The OASIS Project Manager is responsible for managing the project internally and ensuring that the information system being planned is consistent with the agency's vision. The Project Manager ensures that sufficient organizational resources are devoted to OASIS. The Project Manager usually attends planning meetings and provides overall direction and guidance to the OASIS consultants.

The OASIS Coordinator is responsible for all day-to-day functions of the planning effort within an organization. This person facilitates information gathering to support the planning effort, performs basic analysis of contract reporting requirements, coordinates all meetings and follows up after meetings to ensure that all tasks are completed. The OASIS Coordinator reports to the OASIS Project Manager and serves as the primary liaison to the OASIS consultants on almost all operational issues.

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STEP THREE: ESTABLISH CONSULTING PARTNERSHIPS

OASIS employs a consulting triumvirate to provide assistance in 3 key areas:

1   ORGANIZATIONAL PLANNING AND INFORMATION
    GATHERING DESIGN;

2   DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE; AND

3   AUTOMATION OF CLIENT TRACKING AND REPORTING.

The organizations contract directly with each of the three consulting groups so that both practically and legally, the consultants regard the nonprofit organization as the client, rather than the funder.

BTW Consultants facilitates the organizational planning processes and provides technical assistance to organizations in the area of social science. On a practical level, this means facilitating and documenting all planning meetings, developing multiple drafts of all information gathering instruments and ensuring that the system being developed will meet the organization's ongoing information needs. CompuMentor is responsible for assessing an organization's technology capacities and needs in order to develop the infrastructure needed to run a state-of-the-art tracking system. Two database consulting groups participate in OASIS—Dayspring Technologies and Third Strand. The database consultants are responsible for automating all client-tracking instruments and developing memorized reporting that allows staff to access summarized client information at the push of a button. While each consulting group works with each organization and its staff in different ways, the consultants also frequently coordinate efforts with each other during the various stages of development. Initially, the consultants also met monthly with REDF staff as part of REDF's Information Management Team and conferred in that forum about each organization's progress with respect to OASIS. The strength of this three-way approach is that it leverages the expertise of each group, all to the direct benefit of the organization.
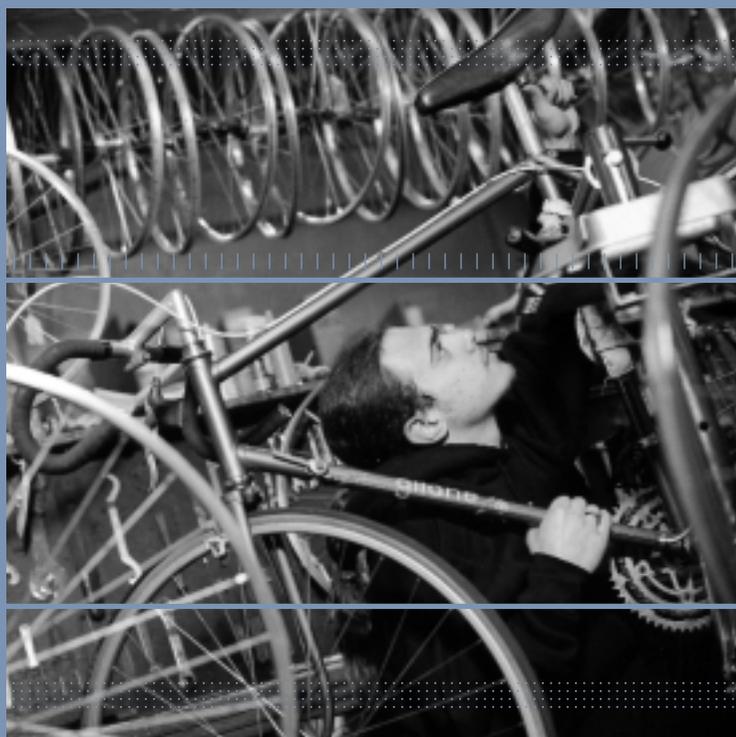
CHAPTER THREE *FOUR STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT*

There are four essential stages of OASIS development[1]:

1   ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CLIENT-RELATED
     INFORMATION NEEDS

2   DESIGN OF THE CLIENT TRACKING SYSTEM

3   AUTOMATION

4   IMPLEMENTATION AND BEYOND

Each stage of development builds on the previous one. Because the goal is to build a system that meets the information needs of dynamic organizations, the end result is a vibrant tool that will evolve as organizations evolve. Thus, after the initial system is launched, it will be important to periodically re-assess organizational information needs.

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[1] BTW Consultants provided the consulting, planning and design support for OASIS Stages 1 and 2 and CompuMentor, Dayspring Technologies and Third Strand provided the technical planning and design support for OASIS Stage 3. The internal staff of an organization are responsible for implementation and beyond in Stage 4.

This could happen on an annual basis or it could be revisited when program components are added, deleted or significantly modified. This will ensure that the system remains continuously relevant in organizational life.

1. ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CLIENT-RELATED INFORMATION NEEDS

The first step in OASIS development is assessing an organization's client-related information needs. This includes identifying both contractual reporting requirements as well as all other information essential to informing decision-making. BTW first asks staff at the organization to complete an inventory of contracts. (Please see Appendix A.) This inventory is a matrix that details the data collected for each contract and the forms used to collect that data. The inventory also asks for information about the type of reporting required, both in terms of frequency and flexibility. Usually, reporting for government contracts is less flexible than reporting for foundation contracts and it is important to know from the outset of OASIS planning the number of overall contracts and the distribution among different funding sources. The organizations that have engaged in OASIS planning fall along a wide spectrum of contractual reporting requirements; on one end of the spectrum is an organization with only a handful of contracts, one of which is governmental and the other few are with private foundations. On the other end of the spectrum is an organization with roughly 80 contracts at any given point in time, and about two-thirds of these are governmental.

Usually, the organizations with more contracts have many more data collection forms in circulation. It is an unfortunate reality for many nonprofit organizations that with each new contract, at least one new form is developed! Unfortunately, the corollary is not often true, that with the end of a contract an old form is put to rest and no longer used. As more and more client forms are developed, a complex and byzantine data collection structure usually emerges. It is often nearly impossible for anyone to understand the whole system or describe it in a coherent way because it is not really a system at all in the strict sense

of the word. It is a patchwork of forms that have often been photocopied too many times and are inconsistently completed by program staff. Many of these forms are not automated. They often exist in client files only and when data are needed for contract reporting, special and separate data gathering mechanisms are often put into place in a makeshift capacity. These mechanisms may take the form of a simple spreadsheet or a database that no one accesses except the staff member responsible for contract reporting.

In order to understand and assess how an organization uses the information it already collects and what else it wants to know, BTW conducts in-depth discussions with staff who work in different functional areas of an organization. These can include groups of staff from different program areas such as housing, counseling or vocational training as well as groups from administrative areas such as development or contract management. A protocol is used to guide these discussions and ensure that the assessment is thorough and accounts for all information needs. (Please see Appendix B.)

The "product" of the assessment stage is a memorandum that BTW prepares summarizing the findings from the group discussions and contract inventory analysis. The memorandum includes observations about the strengths and weaknesses of an organization's information gathering culture. These observations usually cover the following areas: a) quantity and quality of forms in circulation; b) quality and consistency of data gathering procedures and implementation; c) staff interest in and enthusiasm for client information; d) areas of explicit unmet information needs; e) the role of contract reporting in the organization; and f) the value of client information to organizational leaders. The summary also includes a list of the critical data elements of interest to different organizational constituents, both internally and externally.

The most important outcome of the assessment process, however, is that the assessment creates the foundation for the client tracking system's design. The assessment allows for a shared understanding of the scope and nature of an organization's information needs. It demonstrates where there is crossover among programs and departments and therefore

Nonprofit staff compile inventory of current contracts, data collection requirements, & data collection forms

Review & discuss results of inventory and assessment
◦ Identify gaps
◦ Identify opportunities for refinement

Consultants meet with staff to:
◦ Assess functioning of existing client information system
◦ Determine additional needs for client information

1

opportunities for information integration. It also highlights where there may be unique information needs for particular functional areas of an organization. And the list of critical data elements helps to facilitate the organization's decision-making regarding what to include or exclude from its client tracking system.

The assessment also allows the consultant to make a recommendation for whether an organization should or should not go forward with the OASIS planning. In one instance the process of assessing an organization's client information needs clarified that the organization was not ready to embark on the OASIS project. The organization was in the midst of significant transition on many fronts and it did not have the internal resources at that time to commit to an assessment process or an intensive information planning process. It was difficult for the organization's staff to comprehensively complete the contract inventory matrix, to schedule and keep functional group interview commitments, to attend Working Group meetings, or to actively participate in the OASIS technology assessment. These were signs that the OASIS planning was competing with too many other organizational priorities at the time. In this case, OASIS stopped after the assessment and the organization attended to its other organizational needs.

2. DESIGN OF THE CLIENT TRACKING SYSTEM

There are two steps in the design process: 1) conceptual design regarding client flow and information flow within an organization; and 2) instrument design wherein information gathering tools are developed to account for all of the information needs of an organization.

STEP ONE: CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PROCESS

The conceptual design process involves a rethinking about how client and service-level information is gathered throughout an organization. The process starts with the OASIS Working Group deciding what information is essential to collect, how and when it is collected and who will collect it. At a minimum, the kind of information delineated in the conceptual design process is:

Client/consumer characteristics – who are the people who use
   your services?

Utilization/service encounters – what services are people using and
   with what frequency?

Social outcomes – how do people who use services change over time?

At this point, the instruments used to collect this information are
identified as part of a larger schematic of information flow.

BTW worked with Rubicon's Working Group (which they called "The
PEG" or "Program Evaluation Group") to identify a simple conceptual
design that responded to the findings of the assessment phase and to
the future plans of the organization. Prior to the redesign, intake
interviews were decentralized and conducted on a program by program
basis. Some questions asked during intake were similar across programs,
but many were different and the emphasis often depended upon what a
consumer was asking for when he/she walked through the door. Also,
much was left up to the discretion of the individual staff member
conducting the intake. There were few systematic sets of information
that were consistently gathered for all clients or potential clients.
During the assessment process, it became clear that the organization
was moving towards working with clients more holistically because many
clients had service needs that cut across program areas. As a result, it
made sense to begin collecting information about Rubicon clients
more comprehensively and consistently.

The initial conceptual design for Rubicon's system called for three
stages of information gathering (although later in the process that
design was refined slightly). The initial three stages included: 1) a com-
prehensive central intake interview after which people would be referred
to services as appropriate; 2) an automated, real-time service encounter
tracking system for all who received services; and 3) a comprehensive
follow-up interview to be administered to a sample of consumers on a
rolling basis. The intake interview would serve both as a comprehensive
assessment tool for individuals as they enter the organization and also
as a means of gathering baseline measures for social outcomes. Thus,

For all instruments:
◦ Management review
◦ Pilot test
◦ Finalize

Revise existing &
develop new data
collection instruments

Develop conceptual
framework for refined
information flow
◦ Identify all outcomes
  and data elements

②

DESIGN
9-12 MONTHS

in Rubicon's conceptual design, the intake interview would be designed to collect demographic characteristics and baseline information in history and current status in these areas: employment, wages, vocational skills, housing, public assistance utilization, social support, self-esteem, substance use, and health. The service-tracking tool would collect information about clients who received services and capture most of the outcome data contractually required. The follow-up interview would be designed to collect change information in all social outcome areas measured in the baseline intake interview.

The refinement that happened later in the process is an important part of Rubicon's story. As BTW and Rubicon embarked upon the second stage of design which was instrument development, the comprehensive intake was beginning to get very long. Rubicon wanted a lot of information about its clients, not an uncommon occurrence when an organization begins to look critically at its information needs. While staff did not want to cut out questions from the intake process, they also did not want the intake to be a *barrier* to getting services. That led the group to refine the design as a two-stage intake process. Intake A would serve as a kind of screening tool, collecting basic information about needs and determining eligibility for programs. Intake B would collect more in-depth information and would be the time to administer the more sensitive part of the intake, for example, the psycho-social scales and questions about substance use. Rubicon's basic conceptual design is shown in Appendix C.

Before moving to the next stage of development, it is important to build in a decision-making checkpoint with an Executive Director or Executive Management Team regarding approval of a conceptual design for a client tracking system. The process of information gathering becomes part of organizational life and it can affect the way services are provided and the timing of service provision. It may also have important resource implications for the organization. An organization's leaders must be committed to supporting the changes the new system will bring about. Changes in routine can sometimes be hard for some staff members and it is critically important that an organization's leaders be supportive of the changes and speak to how the changes are connected to an

organization's vision and mission. Often staff members are worried that changes will mean more work for them. It is important that organizational leaders recognize that while efficiencies will be gained with a new automated information-gathering system, new staffing needs will also emerge and the organization will have to identify resources to support those needs.

STEP TWO: INSTRUMENT DESIGN PROCESS

The process of designing the information gathering instruments themselves is the most time-consuming step in the OASIS effort, both with respect to the number of months it can take and the amount of staff time devoted to the effort. It is the "roll up your sleeves and get to work" stage. This step takes a minimum of nine months because it involves the drafting and re-drafting of all client-level information gathering tools in the organization's client tracking system. Just developing a comprehensive intake tool or tools can take anywhere from six to twelve meetings. BTW prepares drafts of instruments and facilitates weekly or bi-weekly meetings with staff Working Groups to review the drafts and solicit comments and advice. Between meetings, BTW makes revisions and prepares materials for the next meeting. Staff members on the Working Group are often asked to review materials in advance of the meeting and be prepared to comment.

In order to make the instrument development stage more efficient, BTW sometimes divides the Working Group into smaller parts with each group focused on developing a distinct set of tools. For example, one group can work on the intake and follow-up interviews while another works on the individual encounter tracking tools. This way there can be progress on multiple instruments on parallel tracks. For some of the groups in the REDF Portfolio, we work with the social purpose enterprise staff in their own group because their temperaments are often different from that of program staff. Enterprise staff tend to be quick to make decisions and have little patience for a long iterative review process. Program staff can often be much more deliberative, wanting to thoughtfully consider every word and nuance.

No matter which approach is taken, the instrument development stage is usually the time when staff begin to get invested in and excited about the new system. They begin to see concretely how information can change and *improve* the way they do their work. And different staff members see benefit in different ways. Some see how an automated tracking system will reduce the amount of manual counting, coding and filing they do. Some like the notion of a comprehensive on-line client file that lets them know what may be happening with a client being served in another part of the agency. Some look forward to being able to print out summary reports at the push of a button. And some, particularly managers, appreciate that the system will provide concrete information that can be used in supervision with staff. In the case of one smaller organization with few formal reporting requirements, it was not until they were almost through with all of the instrument development that staff fully appreciated the potential power of what they were creating. At that point, they decided to make significant additions and changes to the overall design and scope of information gathered.

STEP THREE: PILOT-TESTING

After the tools are in final draft form and have been reviewed and approved by an Executive Director or Executive Management Team, they are pilot-tested by staff with real clients and then refined as needed. *This is a very important step!* Even with the best thinking of staff and consultants in the planning process, there is nothing like a real life situation to let you know whether a tool will actually work. Pilot-testing can help identify practical issues or resolve questions about implementation. It allows the organization to make important adjustments to the wording of questions, the instructions for questions, the order or flow of an interview, the length of an interview, and the overall design of a tool. It is important that these final changes are made before database automation begins because it can be an unnecessary expense to make changes after automation is already underway.

3. AUTOMATION

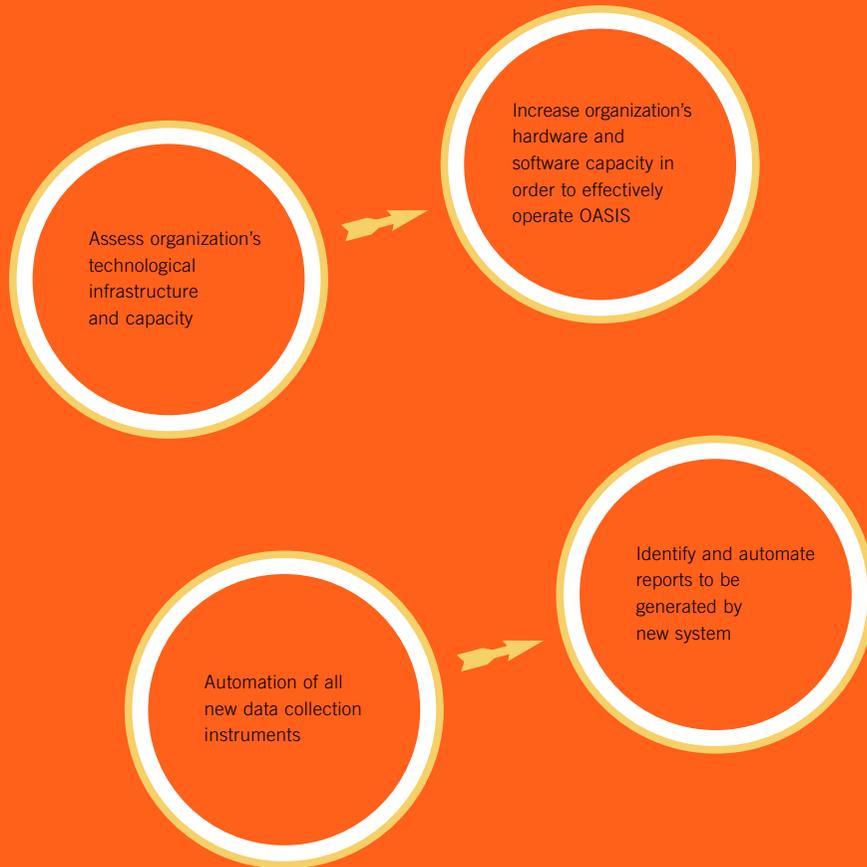There are two dimensions to OASIS automation. Simply put, they are:

1) hardware; and 2) software. The first dimension concerns the actual technological infrastructure and capacity of an organization. The second dimension concerns the automation of all of the instruments developed as part of the organizational planning and design process and the automation of reports that provide summary information to staff users.

HARDWARE: TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Implementation and operation of a comprehensive automated client tracking system that collects and provides real-time client information requires an appropriate technology infrastructure. One of the unique features of the OASIS project is an investment of significant resources for building an appropriate technology infrastructure and developing the management capacity to operate and sustain that technology into the future.

The first step in building technology infrastructure is to determine the expectations for the new system. Using Rubicon as the test case, the database consultants provide a blueprint for technical architecture needed to support comprehensive database automation. CompuMentor takes the technical architecture and identifies the minimum technological requirements to operate such a database.

CompuMentor conducts an assessment of an organization's existing technology capacity to identify the extent to which an organization is capable of running a state-of-the-art tracking system. The assessment covers a wide variety of technology-related subjects, including tangible technology assets (servers, computers, network hardware), network architectures (local and wide-area) and Internet connections. In addition to documenting assets and systems, CompuMentor also assesses how agencies manage their technology. The management portion of the assessment measures the capacity of an agency to sustain the operations of its systems. CompuMentor assesses sustainability by measuring the extent to which organizations engage in technology planning and budgeting, how Information Technology staff and/or consultants are supervised, whether adequate policies exist to govern staff technology usage, and how technology support and training issues are addressed.

Assess organization's technological infrastructure and capacity

Increase organization's hardware and software capacity in order to effectively operate OASIS

Automation of all new data collection instruments

Identify and automate reports to be generated by new system

3

Every organization has unique technology challenges. CompuMentor staff works with each organization to develop a technology infrastructure-building project that will raise their capacity to the level required for operating a comprehensive client tracking system. The technology upgrades are done in a comprehensive manner, taking into account the unique management, culture, business requirements, program requirements, and strategic vision of each agency. The upgrades are thorough and complete. They are meant to address all potential technological barriers to the successful implementation of OASIS.

While execution of infrastructure-building projects differs with each agency, in general, the infrastructure building is completed before the database is ready for implementation. CompuMentor works with organizations to purchase new computers and new servers and get the network wiring in place so that the infrastructure backbone to run the system is established and an agency is able to begin building its own internal capacity for managing technology into the future.

SOFTWARE: BUILDING THE DATABASE

To begin the automation effort, database developers from Dayspring Technologies or Third Strand (the two firms that automated the systems) meet with the client organization. A joint meeting is generally held between BTW, the database developers, and the Executive Director and OASIS Project Manager from the client organization. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the scope of the OASIS project, the contracting relationships, and the responsibilities of each of the parties. Because the consultants overlap in the range of services offered, it is important that the client organization clearly understand the different roles that each consulting organization plays in the project.

After BTW finishes working with an organization on information and instrument design, the content of this design is transferred to the database developers through a set of paper instruments and other accompanying documentation. Oftentimes, there is a meeting or two between the client organization, BTW, and Dayspring/Third Strand to ensure a smooth hand-off. Invariably, the database developers have

detailed questions about how to automate the instruments. Occasionally, these questions reveal a need to revise the instruments and the client organization then determines the number and type of revisions to make. Communication between the organization and the database developer is either direct or through BTW, depending on the organization's preference.

While CompuMentor helps the client organization plan for and install its hardware, the database consultants determine the systems requirements for the application. Dayspring/Third Strand's work overlaps with CompuMentor in the areas of software architecture and software installation. The database developers consult with the client organization directly regarding the kinds of users that would need access to the system and the locations from which the system would need to be accessed. When remote locations need access, CompuMentor ensures that proper networking is in place and the database developers ensure that the application performs sufficiently over a remote connection. With respect to software installation in general, CompuMentor installs the operating system software while the database consultants install the database and the custom application.

The design of the database application proceeds with a series of conversations between the database developer and the organization. These conversations help develop an outline of all the features that will be available through the database system. These features are carefully organized around user roles—what tasks key users need to accomplish and which tools will best serve them. Managers from each area of the client organization review this outline to make sure all the features needed by their employees are included. This process generates good suggestions and promotes broader ownership of the database system throughout an organization.

The work of developing the application falls into four primary areas: importing legacy data (historical client information), data-entry functionality, reporting functionality and system administration tools. The application is built in stages, allowing users to give feedback during each stage. The online forms are implemented to match the paper

instruments as literally as possible. Keeping the online forms and the paper instruments in synch makes it possible for data to be collected before automation and be easily entered into the system after automation is implemented. In addition to building the online forms, the database developers build the infrastructure that surrounds the instruments: indices, search pages, navigation, work cues and summary views.

In general, the application is released for general use once legacy data are imported and data-entry functionality is available. Reporting functionality, which enables the user to compile and access the data in pre-designed custom report layouts, are usually released at a later date.

Sometimes the paper instrument data collection gets ahead of the online system development. Because the total timeline for designing and implementing OASIS takes many months, an organization occasionally pushes ahead with data collection using only paper instruments, assuming they can catch up on data entry once the system is online. This idea is generally fine, but it does not account for adjustments to the paper instruments based on feedback that arise once Dayspring/Third Strand begin working with the instruments. When these situations arise, the database developers, BTW and staff from the organization work together to identify conventions for how to handle any data differences in order to incorporate all of the data collected into the system.

Prior to launching the system, staff from the organization are trained to use and maintain the system. Dayspring/Third Strand typically provides training to a limited number of staff from the organization, and those staff then provide training to other staff. The database developers train program staff on the use of the application and technical support staff are trained on how to maintain the system. The launch, preceded by so many months of planning and preparation, is usually received as a great milestone and is sometimes inaugurated with a party or celebration. This initial launch, however, is not the end point. There are typically bug fixes and requests for enhancements as the system is used for real work.

RUBICON SAMPLE SCREENS

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Address http://server8/ise1.asp?dept=hcl&smtype=enroll&consumerid=2346&button=Create+New+Enrollment ▼ Go Links Malachi Google Hotmail

Individual Service Encounter
CICERO/RUBICON: Danny Fong

HOUSING/CASE MANAGEMENT

STAFF INITIALS: [ ] DATE OF ENCOUNTER *(month/day/year):* [ ]

OTHER STAFF PRESENT: 1. [ ] 2. [ ] 3. [ ] LENGTH OF ENCOUNTER: [ ] minutes

LOCATION OF ENCOUNTER

Indicate the location at which the encounter occured:

- ○ Main: 2500 Bissell
- ○ E&T: 232 Brookside
- ○ Bdwy: 101 Broadway
- ○ Bakery: 154 South 23rd
- ○ Garden: 970 13th

- ○ Resource Center
- ○ Brookside Shelter
- ○ Richmond Works
- ○ Sojourne

- ○ West Richmond Apts.
- ○ Virginia Street Apts.
- ○ Idaho Apts.
- ○ Ohio/21st/22nd Apts.
- ○ San Joaquin Apts.

- ○ Telephone
- ○ Home visit
- ○ Workplace visit
- ○ Other (specify):
- [ ]

CONSUMER INFORMATION

Consumer name: Danny L. Fong
Birth date: 1/1/60

PROGRAM

*Check **one** Program for which you are the responsible staff person in this encounter. Check enrollment or exit if appropriate:*

- ○ Project Independence
- ○ Independence Transitional Housing
- ○ Housing Search

Done Local intranet

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Baseline Summary Report
CICERO/RUBICON: Danny Fong
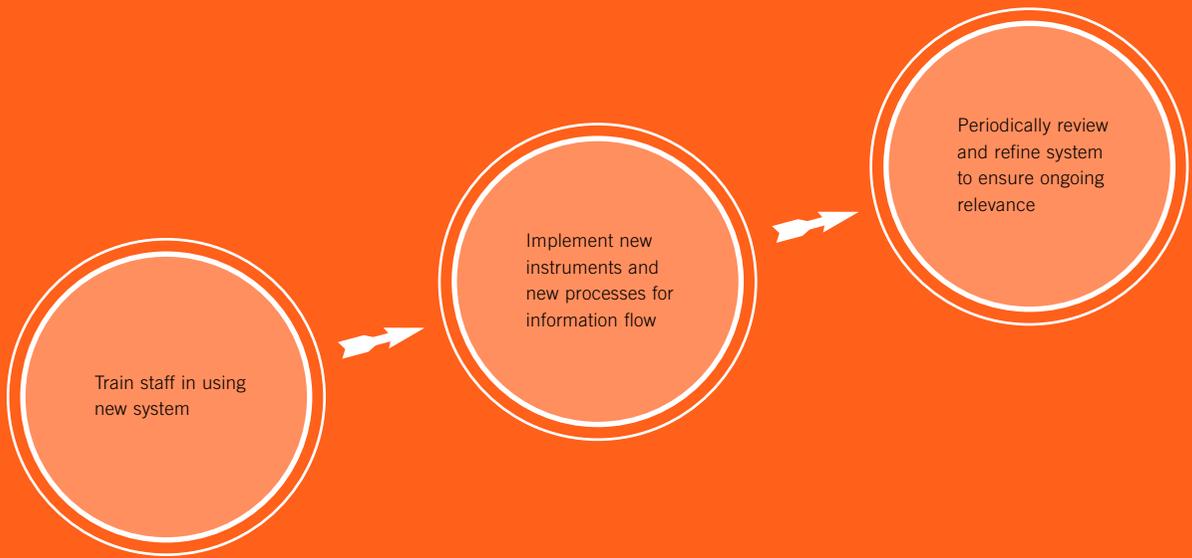
REPORT PARAMETERS

Programs: Program One
Report Begin Month: January 2001
Report End Month: February 2001
Number of Persons Served: 93

HOUSING REPORT

Living Situation at Intake	Number for Whom This Applies	Percentage of Total Selected Participants
Permanent housing	60	65%
Permanently staying with family	5	5%
Permanent, pending eviction	2	2%
Temporarily with family	10	11%
Temporarily with friends	4	4%
Emergency shelter	2	2%
Motel	1	1%
Board and Care	1	1%
SRO	1	1%
Street	2	2%
Other (specify)	5	5%
Total number who responded	93	100%

Homeless Status	Number of Selected Participants	Percentage of Total Selected Participants

Done Local intranet

Train staff in using
new system

Implement new
instruments and
new processes for
information flow

Periodically review
and refine system
to ensure ongoing
relevance

4

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND BEYOND

Implementing a new tracking system can be exciting for an organization. It can be seen as a way for an organization to reinvent itself, or to codify all that it does. It can mark a new era of attending to client needs and understanding the effectiveness of different programs and services. It can also be a scary time for some. There are always some people in an organization who are less comfortable with change and less comfortable with technology even when it is very user-friendly. The first six months of the implementation period are a time of transition, when everyone is acclimating to a new way of doing and recording work and when the technical bugs are being worked out as well.

So far, both the OASIS process and product have been transformative for organizations. The time spent reflecting on expected outcomes, client flow, service delivery and overall information needs that results in the development of a customized, state-of-the-art client tracking system is a unique experience for most staff of nonprofit agencies. Day-to-day life in an organization changes and there is no going back. There is, however, a need to continue moving forward. Dynamic organizations do change over time. They add, delete, or modify their programs and services and they identify new information needs. It is important that a client tracking system reflect that dynamism. An organization should plan to periodically update data collection and data reporting mechanisms. This ensures that the information system remains a vital and credible tool for decision making and planning.

5. THE ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Perhaps no one can tell the story of the impact of OASIS better than an organization that went through the process and is using its own customized client tracking system today. We have included the story of Rubicon Programs below.

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The Story of CICERO: Rubicon Programs' Development of a Customized Client Tracking System

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

When Caesar crossed the Rubicon, he changed the course of history irreversibly. Named after the same river, Richmond, California-based Rubicon Programs Incorporated aims to encourage people to cross their own personal Rubicons. Since 1973, Rubicon has built and operated affordable housing and provided employment, job training, mental health, and other supportive services to individuals who have mental health disabilities, are homeless, or are otherwise economically disadvantaged.

The mission of Rubicon is to help people and communities build assets to achieve greater independence. Rubicon provides an integrated continuum of social services that help people achieve greater independence in their lives. Our goal is to provide clients with the tools they need to become more self-sufficient. Our programs include housing and homelessness services, employment services and job training, mental health care and money management. In addition, Rubicon owns and operates three social purpose enterprises, whose paid employees include low-income and disabled adults: a bakery, a landscaping service, and a homecare business for the elderly and disabled.

Rubicon has emerged as a leader in social entrepreneurship by successfully managing thriving social ventures while offering a comprehensive range of integrated services. Rubicon employs 280 staff members (including business enterprise staff of 145), with $14 million in

revenues for the fiscal year 2000-2001, of which half is from Rubicon's own social purpose enterprises.

WHAT LED RUBICON TO WANT A COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM?

Rubicon had reached a point where the time spent preparing reports for various funders and for internal purposes necessitated a comprehensive re-engineering of the process through which information was gathered and reported. With 80 active funds at any one time, and reports necessary for all of these funding sources, report-generation alone was an onerous task.

The irony for Rubicon was that although numerous reports were constantly being written, the fragmented nature of those reports left little time for Rubicon to look at the "big picture." For example, while we could determine how many people had been served during a particular time for a particular funder, comprehensive information about program and social impacts was difficult at best to obtain.

In addition to this challenge, the volume of persons we were serving had increased to thousands per year. Hard-copy centralized client files alone were inadequate to manage participant information. Compounding this was the fact that the integrated nature of Rubicon's services encouraged and facilitated co-enrollment of participants in more than one program. Effective coordination of staff services for each client required a robust and versatile case management system. Staff could no longer rely on a homemade database that was both idiosyncratic and obsolete to manage caseloads, or to enter and access consumer information. We decided it was time to invest in developing a new program evaluation/case management tracking system.

In 1997, finding itself stretched by the multiple, varied and expanding social impact reporting requirements of funders, and challenged by the need to manage information on program participants in a more streamlined way, Rubicon took action. We embarked on a 3-year, partly REDF-funded effort to completely redesign our social impact measurement processes and systems.

HOW DID THE PLANNING PROCESS AFFECT THE ORGANIZATION?

Our most notable capacity gains have been in the areas of systems and performance culture: the social impact system redesign has equipped Rubicon with a new database, supported by improved information and client flows. The increase in data transparency has enhanced Rubicon's ability to assess the suitability of our programs to meet participant needs.

We significantly re-tooled Rubicon's direct services to make them more integrated and to gather better information about who the organization serves, how these individuals and families are served, and what the outcomes of those services are. The new system has brought about significant internal cultural changes. Any time a new program is implemented, lead staff engage in a process of "mapping" the flow of program participants with Rubicon's in-house program evaluator. The new program map traces participants' possible co-enrollments with other programs, data collection needs, and indicates which position(s) has responsibility for carrying out quality assurance tasks.

The importance given to creating staff buy-in around the new system has strengthened the social impact orientation throughout the organization. Having our new program evaluation/case management database CICERO (Consumer Information Collection, Entry and Reporting for Organizations) as a guiding force in the organization's culture has

pushed Rubicon to strive to ensure improved integration of enterprises and programs, and closer alignment of goals across the organization. This is especially evident in the agency's strategic planning, establishment of annual operating goals and internal monitoring of achievements towards these outcomes.

HOW HAS CICERO AND THE INFORMATION CONTAINED THEREIN AFFECTED THE ORGANIZATION?

Although significant time was necessary to re-tool how Rubicon did business, the clear outcome was a significant improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of our management. The way Rubicon manages information has significantly changed due to the advent of CICERO. Managers have much more accurate and timely information about services; staff has greater access to consumer information and easier documentation requirements; consumers spend less time in repetitive "intake" processes as they move from service to service within the organization.

Both the presence of CICERO and the actual content of the information have had a significant effect on Rubicon. The presence of CICERO has made funders more confident in Rubicon's capacity to track and evaluate outcomes for persons served. Further, almost all contracts and grants reports are now based on data produced by CICERO. The depth of information Rubicon produces is helping the agency identify to a much greater extent—along with its funders—which performance measures to use as indicators of program success.

The information in CICERO affects both the day-to-day operations of programs and, increasingly, decisions about future directions. Staff now know that if their work with clients is not in CICERO, it does not count. Therefore, all client encounters, records of all outcomes (job

placements, housing placements, career advancements of clients, etc.) are entered into CICERO in real time or very shortly thereafter. Because of CICERO, managers now have easy access to information about what services and outcomes are occurring in their programs, how their individual staff are performing, and they can review program outcomes and determine where attention is needed.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE KEY INGREDIENTS TO CICERO'S SUCCESS?

A key ingredient was the long-term commitment of senior management to enter into and support a long-term, resource intensive process to fundamentally make information and evaluation a central part of Rubicon. Rubicon declared the first year of the CICERO effort "the year of evaluation." Working on the evaluation committees was deemed to be an important, career advancing opportunity. Committees were given significant authority to develop new ways of doing business and "release time" from regular duties was given to team members. The Executive Director played an ongoing cheerleader role to the project, and one of the strongest senior managers was given the charge, authority and time to make the process work. The concept of the database was given star status, with a "name the database contest" for all staff members with a grand prize presented at the launch party.

From day one, management paid close attention to ensuring a collaborative process and one that would lead to actual behavioral change by staff. This started by assembling internal multi-department teams and hiring proven, REDF-recommended consultants to assist in the effort.

On an ongoing basis, time is dedicated to training new staff and to upgrade training of existing staff as new features of CICERO are rolled out. Within each program, a quality assurance person is identified and

trained to review data and ensure that they meet protocols for that program's data processing. In instances where that quality assurance person is not a manager, the individual reports directly to the manager if data quality is lacking, so that corrective efforts can be taken.

Ultimately, the success of CICERO rests on one critical feature: it makes the work of line-staff easier. They no longer need to complete repetitive forms with redundant information, and they easily benefit from their data input by being able to retrieve participant data on a real-time basis, in flexible report formats.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH CICERO'S DEVELOPMENT?

Having significantly improved information about what our clients achieve has created numerous opportunities. Management can better evaluate program and staff performance; can track follow-up with clients; and Rubicon has garnered a reputation for being a cutting edge organization in the area of MIS/evaluation.

The challenges are maintaining the positive momentum of keeping CICERO vital and responding to both internal and external information needs. When the agency develops goals and objectives for new programs, these need to be tracked by CICERO. If CICERO cannot track a significant outcome, this capability needs to be incorporated into the system and is put on the punch-list for the next phase of new features. Finally, our ongoing challenge, but one well worth pursuing, is in continuing to devote the appropriate level of organizational resources necessary to maintain CICERO as a cutting edge information tool for our organization.

Rick Aubry Ph.D.   Jane Fischberg MPA
Executive Director   Director of Integrated Services

Now to the big question: how much does OASIS cost? While the OASIS approach is certainly not the least expensive approach an organization can take to improving its client tracking, it is important to keep in mind that OASIS is a comprehensive process that results in a customized product that builds a Social MIS infrastructure for the long-term. For all of the stages of development combined, the cost per organization has ranged from $297,000 up to $638,000 over 2-3 years. The cost tends to be lower for smaller organizations (estimated annual budget of approximately $2.6 million) and higher for larger and more complex organizations (estimated annual budget of approximately $14 million). The largest line item for every organization has been for technology—to cover the cost of purchasing computers, servers, network wiring, and IT staffing.

OASIS BUDGETS: RANGE OF LINE ITEM COSTS		
	From a low of...	**To a high of...**
Technology and IT Staffing	$ 126,000	$ 174,000
Consulting for Information Technology Needs	$ 14,000	$ 14,000
Consulting for Organizational Planning & System Design	$ 55,000	$ 153,000
Consulting for Database Automation	$ 67,000	$ 157,000
Internal Staffing: Evaluation Analyst	$ 20,000	$ 110,000
Internal Staffing: Information Technology	$ 30,000	$ 30,000
Total	**$ 312,000**	**$ 638,000**

The costs displayed in The OASIS Budgets above show the range of
costs associated with OASIS development for REDF Portfolio mem-
bers. Most, although not all of these costs were generously covered by
REDF and its group of core OASIS funders: the Charles and Helen
Schwab Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the
Surdna Foundation, the Phalarope Foundation, and the Penney Family
Fund. All of the nonprofit organizations understand that after the
system's initial development and launch they are responsible for
identifying any ongoing resources necessary for maintaining the sys-
tem. Thus far, this has been achieved by organizations doing strategic
budgeting and rethinking resource allocation assumptions. In effect,
maintaining a client tracking system becomes a cost of doing business
that has to be accounted for in an annual budgeting process.

During the course of the last few years of our OASIS development work, we have learned some important lessons about the process, the players and the products. We outline these lessons below in the hope that they are useful to other practitioners, investors and consultants who are considering embarking on the OASIS journey.

1   Both the OASIS process and product impact organizations.

    a. The planning involves intensive organizational reflection and often results in rethinking and refining service delivery processes.

    b. The product—an automated and integrated client information system—changes the way information is gathered, reported and used. It challenges management to use information in new ways.

2   OASIS requires a significant investment of organizational resources, both human and financial.

    a. For about a year, organizational staff spend about two hours

every other week in OASIS Working Group meetings. While this ensures both staff buy-in and a system that is built to end-user specifications, the investment of staff time is significant and an organization must be able and willing to support that investment.

b. Because OASIS is a comprehensive planning process that results in a customized and automated product, it is expensive. The most expensive portion of the effort is the hardware because, with OASIS, no expense has been spared on technology. It is possible that the investment in hardware could be scaled back in future efforts.

3   Dedicated funding has been tremendously important in building nonprofit capacity to gather and use social outcome information.

Before OASIS, many of the organizations in the REDF Portfolio were interested in comprehensive social outcome tracking but did not have the resources to develop an effective system. The financial support from REDF and its collaborating funders has been critical to this effort. The OASIS investment has demonstrated to the organizations that these funders are not simply requiring the submission of evaluation data as a condition of grantmaking, they are investing in organizational capacity for the long-term, in the hopes that the information will inform practice as well as future social investment.

4   Engaging key staff and consultants lays the groundwork for the essential partnerships in the OASIS process.

a. Successful implementation of OASIS requires a nonprofit to have both a vigilant OASIS Project Manager and an organized OASIS Coordinator. A Project Manager who can mobilize the staff in his or her organization and coordinate the three outside consulting firms plays a crucial role in the success of OASIS.

b. Leveraging and integrating the talents of the different consulting groups facilitates the development of a customized state-of-the-art client tracking system. It is essential that the different

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consultants and technical assistance providers coordinate with each other as well as with the nonprofit organization to ensure a seamless process across the different stages of OASIS development.

5   Organizations must be ready for OASIS. Based on the OASIS experience of the last several years, we have developed an Organizational Readiness Checklist. Nonprofit organizations considering pursuing OASIS should first see if they meet the requirements in this list.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS CHECKLIST

☑ Leadership—Executive Director and Management—is committed to OASIS planning and product

☑ Organization is relatively stable with respect to leadership and programs

☑ Organization is able to commit staff time to organizational planning effort, at least two staff members who have specific time dedicated and others who participate to represent their programs/constituency

☑ Within the organization there is a culture that values information about service delivery and social impact

☑ There are sufficient financial resources to devote to the effort, both for the development stage and for future sustainability

☑ Consulting partnerships are in place to assist in the different stages of system development

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Nonprofit organizations have responded to social outcome information demands in a variety of ways. Some have pieced together program-based evaluation efforts. Others have purchased off-the-shelf software to track activities and program efforts. OASIS is one response to internal and external demands for social outcome data. It is not for every organization. We have shared our experience with OASIS not because we think it is right for every organization or because it is the only way to track social outcomes, but because it is a process that is unique and effective for those organizations that are ready for such an undertaking. What makes OASIS unique is that it is both a process and a product. OASIS is explicitly about organizational change; it requires reflection about an organization's programs and services and their anticipated outcomes. OASIS links that reflection with a process for determining the information that will be useful to organizations, both with respect to providing services and assessing the effectiveness of those services.

We designed and implemented OASIS at a particular moment in history. The moment is defined by current technology and existing nonprofit capacities. It may be that 10 years from now there will be other or better defined social outcome tracking solutions in the nonprofit sector. We hope that our work on OASIS makes a contribution to the nonprofit sector's ongoing pursuit of better information to inform better practice.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: OASIS - INVENTORY OF CONTRACT[1] AND DATA COLLECTION REQUIREMENTS

MATRIX TEMPLATE

Contract/Funder	Program/Component	Data Collected for Contract (including process and outcome objectives)

[1] Ensure this includes current contracts as well as any contracts pending.

Forms Completed for Contract (including client intake, eligibility, service use, etc.)	Is report monthly? Yearly? Quarterly?	How much longer do you expect to have this requirement?	Level of Flexibility of Reporting Requirements (None, Some, High)

FUNCTIONAL GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Application

(a) What are the components of the programs?

(b) How is eligibility to participate in the programs assessed?

(c) Who is eligible for the programs?

(d) Does each of the programs have its own application process,
     or is there one general one?

(e) What are the criteria for involvement?

(f) How are applicants identified/referred to each program or to
     the overall program?

(g) How are referrals documented and tracked?

(h) What are the steps to apply to the programs?

(i) Which forms are used, and are they automated?
     How are they administered?

(j) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the application process?

(k) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the application forms?

II. Enrollment

(a) Does each program have its own enrollment process,
     or is there one general one, or is there both?

(b) When are, if any, the "program cycles"?

(c) Once an applicant is accepted, what are the steps in
     the enrollment process?

(d) Which forms are used, and are they automated?
     How are they administered?

(e) Which forms are required/optional?

(f) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the enrollment process?

(g) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the enrollment forms?

III. Services/Activities

(a) What is the range of services that is offered to the participant?

(b) How are the particular services/activities that a participant will
     access determined?

(c) Which services/activities are required/optional?

(d) How are services received, documented and tracked?

(e) Which forms are used, and are they automated?

(f) Which forms are required/optional?

(g) Is there any quality assurance on services/activities,
     and if so, how is this documented?

(h) Is there other case management that should be documented?

(i) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the services/activities
     tracking process?

(j) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the forms used in the
     services/activities tracking process?

IV. Exit

(a) Is there an automatic exit date, or a limit to how long a participant
     can be active in programs?

(b) Is there a different exit process for each of the programs or
     just one general one?

(c) Once an applicant completes the program, what are the steps
     in the exit process?

(d) Which forms are used in the exit process, and are they automated?
     How are they administered?

(e) Which exit forms are required/optional?

(f) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the exit process?

(g) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the exit forms?

V. Follow-up and Outcomes

(a) What kind of contact does the organization have with
     program graduates?

(b) What outcomes are tracked on participants?

(c) At what time points are participants assessed for
     changes/status updates?

(d) How are follow-ups administered? Who administers them?

(e) Which forms are used, and are they automated?

(f) Are there incentives for participating in the follow-ups?

(g) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the follow-up process?

(h) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the follow-up forms?
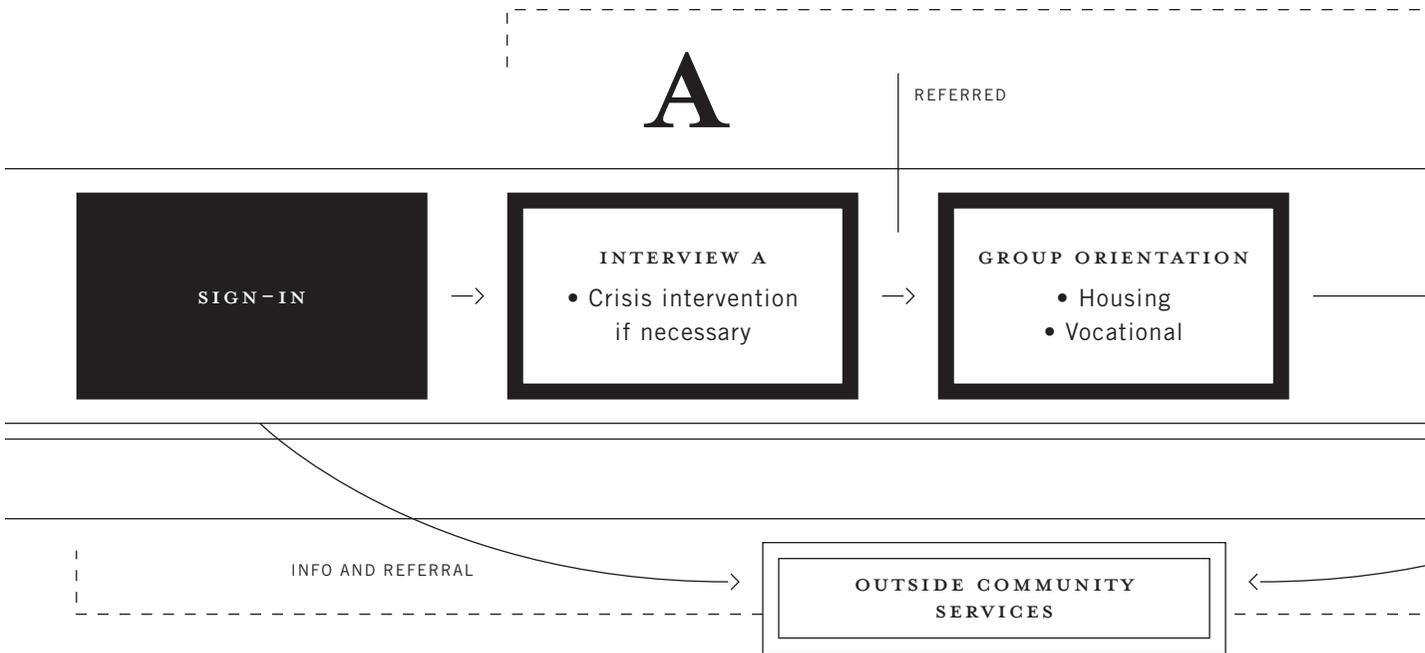
VI. Forms

These are the forms that we are currently aware of in the programs.
     Are there other forms used that we are not aware of?

VII. How Information is Used

(a) How is the information that is collected used?

(b) Is the information fed back to the programs? To the Board?

(c) Is the information useful? In what ways?
     In what ways is it not useful?

(d) Is the information accurate?

A

REFERRED

| SIGN–IN | → | **INTERVIEW A**
• Crisis intervention
if necessary | → | **GROUP ORIENTATION**
• Housing
• Vocational |

INFO AND REFERRAL

**OUTSIDE COMMUNITY
SERVICES**

APPOINTMENT
SCHEDULED

B

INTERVIEW B

• Referrals made

→

**INDIVIDUAL SERVICE
ENCOUNTERS**

• Housing
• Vocational services
• Day treatment
• Money management

→

**FOLLOW-UP
INTERVIEW**

(six months after
Interview B)

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