MISSION STATEMENT

The Research and Planning Unit partners with HSA staff and the community to develop data, information, and processes that support strategic decision-making, innovative program design, effective services, and responsive business solutions.

RESEARCH FUNCTIONS

1. Research Design

The Unit designs plans for data development, data refinement, research, and program evaluation.

Examples of research design:

- The Unit is leading Family to Family Self-Evaluation activities and designed a Process and Outcome evaluation to track implementation progress and the impact of the initiative on children, families and the community.

- The Unit designed a program evaluation for the Child Care and Respite Care programs for resource families (relative caretakers and foster parents) funded by Proposition 10.

- The Unit provided methods analyses and planning support to develop an evaluation of Shuttle ridership.

2. Research Support

Unit staff provides support to all phases of research, including instrument development, data collection, data compilation, data analysis, and literature review.

A) Instrument Development

Instrument development includes, but is not limited to, the construction and refinement of surveys, interviews, and focus group protocols.

Examples of Research Support:

- In order to assess the effectiveness of a training seminar given to childcare providers, the Unit, in collaboration with the trainers, designed pre-training and post training surveys.
• In collaboration with Office of Housing staff, the Unit developed an intake tool to obtain a more accurate count of the homeless population served by HSA.

B) Data Collection Strategies

Data can be collected in many different ways including observation, face-to-face interviewing, telephone polling, mail survey, and content analysis. Strategies for collecting data can be influenced by a number of factors including the unit of analysis (e.g., people, programs, and workflow), the size of the population, the impact on the population, and the amount of resources available to collect the data. To minimize cost and maximize accuracy data should be collected in a documented, systematic manner.

Examples of Data Collection:

• Three separate requests for information on foster families came to the Unit. Given the small size of the foster family population, launching three concurrent research studies would have a significant negative impact on foster parents’ participation. By combining the three requests into one project, impacts on the families and the cost of the research projects were reduced.

• In order to improve the response rate to the San Mateo County Cares! Customer Satisfaction Survey, staff designed and implemented a feedback loop. Agency liaisons were more enthusiastic about distributing and collecting the surveys once they received reminders and consistent reporting on the outcomes.

C) Data Compilation

The Unit offers advice on structures and methods for compiling data. Data is gathered and compiled from many internal and external sources, including the mainframe, data bases, case files, and surveys or focus groups. The Unit helps create the infrastructure supporting this process. For smaller research projects, the staff can assume responsibility for data entry.

Examples of Data Compilation:

• At the request of the Children and Families First Commission, the Unit provided consultation on the development of the databases used for tracking the populations served by grantees.

• In collaboration with Alcohol and Other Drug Services staff, the Unit provided consultation on the development of a database used for tracking assessor referrals.

• The Unit provided data entry services for a limited analysis of the impact of Agency and Community Partner involvement in the Earned Income Tax Credit Program.
D) Data Analysis

The Unit analyzes data collected by the Agency, data provided by partners, and publicly accessible data. Analytic activities include synthesis of information, assessment of reliability and validity, statistical testing, expressing findings and conclusions, and providing suggestions for further investigation or action.

Examples of Data Analysis:

- Unit staff played an active role in editing and analysis associated with the Healthy Community Collaborative of San Mateo County 2001 Community Assessment.

- Data on 26 occupations was reviewed for the County of San Mateo Occupational Outlook Report 2000-2001. Staff analyzed wages and benefits, employer requirements and employment trends.

- Monthly and annual reports are provided on the San Mateo County Cares! Customer Satisfaction Survey.

- The Unit analyzed 1,845 surveys for the report entitled County of San Mateo Human Services Agency, Computer Survey – Initial Findings.

E) Literature Review - Best Practices

The Unit synthesizes current research, policy, and analytic literature in support of program and policy decisions. These literature reviews can be used to assess the state of the discipline and identify “best practices.

Examples of Literature Review - Best Practices:

- To better plan for future service integration, Unit staff are conducting a literature review to investigate the success of models implemented elsewhere in the country.

- In response to the Agency’s priority to develop a timely and effective response to the economic downturn, Unit staff conducted a literature review to identify employment trends and opportunities in health technology, biotechnology, security and education employment sectors.

3. Research Presentation

To be effective, research findings and conclusions must be communicated to a variety of audiences using varied media. The Unit prepares memos and reports to convey information, and designs and presents publications, graphics, and slide shows.
Examples of Research Presentations:

- The Unit contributed to the content and design of the brochure *TANF Reauthorization Legislation Recommendations Submitted by San Mateo County*.

- Staff prepared the report and power point presentation for the *County of San Mateo Occupational Outlook Report 2000-2001*.

- Staff conducted research used to prepare a graphic for the Human Services Advisory Committee and budget presentation displaying the *Maximum Monthly Income for a Family of Three to Receive Health and Social Services*.

- In collaboration with the Public Information Officer, staff prepared a report entitled *County of San Mateo Human Services Agency, Computer Survey – Initial Findings*.

4. **Small - Scale Evaluation, Needs Assessment, and Program Analyses**

   The Unit conducts small-scale evaluations, needs assessments, and program analyses. The services provided include project design, instrument development, data collection, data compilation, data analysis, report preparation and presentation. The Unit helps delineate the scale and scope of new research projects and advises on the logistics related to subcontracting all or portions of a research project.

   Examples of Small-Scale Evaluation, Needs Assessment, and Program Analyses:

   - In collaboration with program and financial services staff, Unit staff defined the project, conducted analyses, and prepared a report detailing a program description and cost history of Vocational and Rehabilitation Services which effectively answered questions posed by the County Manager’s Office. The Unit is currently working on a similar study of Employment Services.

   - The Unit designed an evaluation for the Foster Care Child-Care Project that involves a survey conducted by the Unit staff and interviews conducted by an independent contractor.

   - The Unit implemented small evaluation efforts for the Earned Income Tax Credit and Housing Subsidy Projects.

5. **Monitoring Research Contracts**

   The Unit provides project oversight and contract monitoring for large-scale evaluations and research projects conducted by independent contractors. The Unit helps design the projects and define deliverables, costs, and timelines. Unit staff monitor deliverables over the life of the contract.
Examples of Monitoring Research Contracts:


- *When Child Welfare and the Court Systems Meet: Toward a Regional Approach for Creating Collaboration in the Judicial Process* conducted by the Regents of the University of California, UC Berkeley.

6. Research Development Opportunities

The Unit seeks out and identifies opportunities for Agency and interagency research, and reviews requests for the Agency’s participation in research studies. This research may be grant-based and related to program and policy development.

Examples of Research Development Opportunities:

- The Research and Planning Manager is working with the Alcohol and Other Drug Services Program Administrator to explore partnerships with other counties, universities and private foundations to conduct research on AOD treatment, as well as participation in the State evaluation of Proposition 36 Implementation that will be conducted by UCLA.

- With approval of the Agency Director, the Research and Planning Manager provided a letter of support to participate as a focus county in a study on Child Care Price Dynamics conducted by the Public Policy Institute of CA and funded by the Department of Health and Human Services.

7. Data and Systems Development

The Unit assists in many phases of data and data systems development across all Agency programs and to support Outcome-Based Management and Budgeting (OBM) implementation. Data development activities include operationalizing concepts, helping to develop algorithms, and facilitating report design.

Examples of Data and Systems Development:

- Staff participate on the San Mateo County Human Services Analytical Project (SHARP) team which is designing and constructing the Agency’s data warehouse. The data warehouse generates reports on OBM outcome measures and performs ad hoc reporting, and has the capacity to generate maps displaying client information. Unit staff are responsible for SHARP project oversight, and work with technical
personnel to convert business questions to measurable indicators by refining measure definitions, mapping measures to data sources, defining requirements for every data element used to calculate each measure, and testing reports generated from the warehouse. Unit staff also designed training for executive management in how to access and use generated by the data warehouse.

- The Unit is responsible for Family to Family Self-Evaluation and works in close collaboration with the Business Systems Group to develop data needed to support building community partnerships and resource family recruitment.
- The Unit has contributed to the development of reports for the Business Systems Group, and Foster Care, and Alcohol and Other Drug Services programs.

8. Agency and Community Technical Support

The Unit provides technical support to program staff and various community constituents, including coordinating external surveys, representing the Agency in initiatives that have research components, and providing community-based organizations with technical support in response to data and research questions.

A) Coordinating External Surveys

External researchers and policy organizations request a variety of information about the Agency. The Unit coordinates these requests to identify staff who can best answer the survey questions, thereby minimizing redundancy and inconsistency.

Examples of Coordinating Survey Responses:

- The Unit coordinates data gathering on Child Welfare, Temporary Aid to Needy Families, AOD, and Youth Intervention programs in response to an annual request from the International City/County Management Association.

- The Unit provided information in support of the Welfare Policy Research Project, “The Effect of Welfare Reform on Counties Survey” conducted by the National Association of Counties, and a TANF survey conducted by the United States General Accounting Office.

B) Community Initiatives

The Agency is committed to supporting various Community Initiatives, many of which directly or indirectly impact the Agency’s work. The Unit provides technical support to Community Initiatives that includes gathering and reporting Agency data, providing analytic consultation and research expertise, and conducting analyses.
Examples of Support for Community Initiatives:

- As the Agency’s representative on the Healthy Community Collaborative of San Mateo County, the Unit is conducting an analysis of survey results for Agency clients as comparison group of the general county population for the *San Mateo County Health and Quality of Life Assessment*.

- The Unit participates on the Data Development Committee and helps collect information included in the Peninsula Community Foundation’s report on Child Health and Wellbeing.

- The Unit helps in the development of measures and tools for the Peninsula Community Foundation’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.

C) Support to Community Based Organizations

Data must be collected and synthesized by our community partners to support coordinated case management, service integration, and full implementation of Outcome-Based Management and Budgeting. In order to assure a level of consistency and accuracy in the information collected, The Unit provides technical support to the Agency’s community partners in many aspects of data collection and reporting.

Examples of Support to Community Based Organizations:

- OBM Project staff are conducting a needs assessment of 25 community partner organizations to assess computer resources, including hardware, software and networking; map client flow and how client information is captured; review existing reporting systems; and identify challenges CBOs face in collecting and effectively using data, such as confidentiality concerns.

**PLANNING FUNCTIONS**

9. **Strategic and Program Planning**

The Unit provides assistance to program staff to design and implement long-range strategic plans, new programs, and program enhancements. For strategic planning projects, activities include working with program staff to assist in stakeholder identification and recruitment, meeting facilitation, staff support, report and plan preparation, and oversight of transition to full implementation.
Examples of Strategic and Program Planning:

- The designed a planning framework for six committees to develop a comprehensive implementation plan for the Family to Family Initiative. Staff provides support to all aspects of the Initiative.

- Unit staff coordinated a process with staff in Alcohol and Other Drug Services (AOD) and Children and Family Services to develop strategies integrating AOD Prevention Services at Family Resource Centers.

- The Unit staffed a planning effort in which multiple county departments and community stakeholders designed a new State mandated program serving nonviolent criminal drug offenders (Proposition 36), and worked closely with the AOD Administrator to prepare the plan submitted to the state. The Research and Planning Manager served as Co-Chair of the Implementation Committee through the first six months of program implementation and worked with committee members to develop a program handbook.

10. Budget Planning

In collaboration with the Agency’s Executive Team, Unit staff direct and manage Outcome-Based Management and Budgeting implementation. Staff work closely with Agency Directors and managers to develop project plans, facilitate workgroups, synthesize, refine, and present deliverables, and manage communications with Agency staff, community partners, the County Manager’s Office, and Board of Supervisors.

Examples of Budget Planning:

- Staff co-facilitate four stakeholder workgroups with Agency Directors. The workgroups assess the Agency’s internal and external environment, establish program, policy, and administrative priorities for the upcoming fiscal year, and develop and refine outcome measures.

- Staff coordinate the process by which Agency Policy Teams and Budget Analysts develop program strategies that implement the priorities. Unit staff organize, synthesize, and refine products and present budget deliverables to the Agency’s Executive and Operations Teams and the County Manager’s Office.

- Staff assist in designing plans and mechanisms to integrate OBM related activities into the budget development process, coordinate and prepare supporting documentation used in the budget development process, and assist in preparing the Agency’s budget presentation to the Board of Supervisors.

11. Community Programs, Initiatives, and Outreach

The Unit represents the Agency and provides support for community and state level program development and implementation initiatives, strategic and program planning initiatives, and outreach activities.
A) Program Development and Implementation

Program development activities include, but are not limited to, design and refinement of interagency programs, collaborative protocols and procedures, and participation on steering and advisory committees.

Examples of Program Development and Implementation:

- Unit staff participate on the Juvenile Assessment Center Steering Committee and contributed to the design of the program, a screening and case planning tool, physical site, and staff training program.
- The Unit provides staff support to the Human Services Advisory Committee, which is charged by the Board of Supervisors to oversee implementation of the Year 2000 Strategic Plan for San Mateo County Human Services.
- Unit staff participate on the steering committee of the Adolescent Collaborative Action Team, which is a clearinghouse for information and develops strategies to address youth programming needs countywide.

B) Initiatives

Initiatives supporting program development and design are often the products of state or community-wide bodies assembled to identify areas of need, promising practices, and demonstrated program successes. Unit staff participate in and support the work of collaborative planning groups. Activities include research, brainstorming and conceptual development, assembling recommendations for model programs and designing implementation strategies.

Examples of Initiatives:

- Unit staff participated in a statewide initiative supported by the Department of Social Services to integrate CalWORKS and Child Welfare services. The CalWORKs/Child Welfare Partnership Project worked in several committees to generate recommendations that will be presented at a conference in May 2002.
- Unit and AOD staff are currently meeting with the Schwab Family Foundation to explore ways to develop system capacity and stimulate promising practices in service delivery and evaluation through training, technical assistance, and other support.

12. Consulting Support

The Unit holds contracts with consultants who have expertise in strategic planning, meeting facilitation, grant writing, training and technical assistance, research, and program evaluation. Unit staff assess project needs and link program staff with consultants, facilitate and monitor project activity, and approve payment upon satisfactory completion of project deliverables.
Examples of Consulting Support:

- In consultation with the Director in charge of Economic Self-Sufficiency Programs, Unit staff assessed and responded to the need for a plan to improve operations in the Catering Connection. Staff and linked program staff with a consultant who assisted in preparing the Client Habilitation and Exceptional Food Services (CHEFS) Plan approved by Operations Team.

- Unit staff linked Housing and AOD program staff with a contracted grant writer to plan and prepare a successfully funded 1.5 million-dollar proposal to the Federal Department of Alcohol and Drug services supporting treatment at homeless shelters.

13. Grant Management

The Unit provides in-house and consulting support to HSA program staff and collaborative partners who wish to prepare competitive grant applications and requests for proposals. Activities include identifying potential funding sources and opportunities, managing competitive grant proposal application processes, and grant oversight and tracking activities.

A) Revenue Identification

Unit staff scans potential public and private funding sources to identify opportunities that correspond with Agency priorities. Activities include searching websites, constructing and maintaining a database to track grant cycles and funding information, and establishing relationships with local foundation program officers.

Examples of Revenue Identification:

- Unit staff constructed a database to monitor granting areas and cycles of over 50 potential funding sources.

- Unit staff recently met with a senior program officer from the Lucile Packard Foundation to discuss the possibility of obtaining support for the Family to Family Initiative and submitted a letter of intent for the winter 2002 funding cycle.

B) Managing Competitive Grant Application Processes

The Unit manages and coordinates competitive grant application processes by facilitating and/or providing support in planning sessions, preparing letters of inquiry and support, reviewing external requests for support, reviewing draft grant proposals and requests for proposals, and sitting on proposal review panels.
Examples of Managing Competitive Grant Application Processes:

- Unit staff facilitated a collaborative planning process and prepared a successfully funded proposal to the Stuart Foundation outlining a framework to implement the Family to Family initiative.

- The Unit assisted AOD staff in developing language for an RFP facilitating integration of AOD prevention activities at Family Resource Centers and linked AOD staff with a consultant to provide technical assistance to interested applicants.

- Reviewed proposals for ACAT WIA Youth Services

C) Grant Oversight and Tracking

The Unit has constructed a database to track the Agency’s grant seeking, grant awards, monitoring activity, and reporting obligations for the life of the grant. This information can be used by program, financial services, and research and planning staff to assist in appropriate resource identification strategies, project development, and project needs, and help assure that all requirements are met on a timely basis.

Examples of Grant Oversight and Tracking

- Unit staff are currently collecting data from financial services and program staff to enter into the new database.

14. Community Partner Technical Support

The Unit assists community-based organizations by linking them to technical assistance and financial resources supporting collaborative program and organization development. The Unit provides planning, training and technical assistance, letters of support, and can position the Agency as a fiscal agent supporting development of organizational and program capacity in partner agencies.

Examples of training and technical assistance:

- The Unit will offer basic training to HSA staff and community-based organizations under contract with HSA on how to read and interpret OBM reports. In addition, the Unit will provide technical assistance to HSA’s community partners involved in providing data for OBM measures.

- Unit staff will work with consultants to conduct a needs assessment of the Family Resource Centers, Core Service Agencies, and Child Care Alternative Payment Providers under contract with HSA. The needs assessment will document the agencies’ current capacity for data collection and reporting and identify strategies for implementing an automated reporting system for OBM measures.