



Travis County Commissioners Court
Operational Review Final Report



Public Works LLC • July 12, 2016



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2015, the Travis County Commissioners Court issued a competitive Request for Services (RFS) “#1505-005-AW, Travis County Commissioners Court Departmental Review,” to solicit a consultant “to execute a comprehensive study of County departments reporting to the Travis County Commissioners Court, and provide a written detailed report on the findings and recommendations for improvement.”¹ The Commissioners Court selected **Public Works, LLC (Public Works)** to conduct the organizational and administrative structure performance review over a nine-month period, beginning in October 2015 and concluding in July 2016, with subcontractor Morningside Research and Consulting, Inc. (Morningside) managing the project.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

Over the course of the performance review, the review team conducted over 259 interviews with 196 unique interviewees (predominantly Travis County staff members, but also peer county staff for best practices and benchmarking purposes). In addition, **Public Works** and Morningside conducted 12 focus groups with 104 participants (including staff from the departments reporting directly to the Commissioners Court, as well as other Travis County elected officials and their staff). Focus group topics included cross-departmental and internal departmental issues.

These meetings—as well as an extensive review of Travis County data and documents, best practices, and peer county benchmarking research—were invaluable in providing the review team with a full understanding of the operations of the Commissioners Court departments. Detail was provided on staffing levels, work assignments, procedures, and operational and administrative methods to assist in identifying operational efficiencies and areas of improvement in County processes and structure. The success and thoroughness of this review would not have been possible without the engagement of staff or their willingness to be forthcoming with feedback.

1.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This performance review report is organized by the 11 departments reviewed. Ten of the departments report directly to the Commissioners Court. In addition, two chapters in the report focus on issues that impact the countywide operations and the reporting structure of departments to the Commissioners Court. Detailed information about the findings and recommendations for each department are included in the full report. Following is a summary of the issues discussed in each chapter in the report.



Countywide Policy and Operations. Several issues were identified that impact the operations of each department as well as the overall organization, including a lack of strategic planning, concerns about the inability to ensure accountability of personnel and programs, the prevalence of informal and ineffective internal and external communication, and gaps in documentation of policies and procedures. In addition, Travis County needs to maximize opportunities to secure revenue through fees and to strategically pursue grant funding.

County Organizational and Administrative Structure. This chapter of the report discusses the need for sustained, on-going, and focused support to the Commissioners Court to ensure that policies developed by the Court are executed timely and effectively and to ensure that the Court has the information and materials needed to make timely and effective policy decisions. The current reporting structure hampers the ability to address countywide issues related to accountability and communication and limits the ability to consider strategic initiatives and engage in strategic planning.

Planning and Budget Office (PBO). Lacking sufficient resources, PBO is unable to provide strategic planning support to departments or to the Commissioners Court. Economic development activities are beginning to have a higher profile with the development of a new division in PBO, but additional resources are needed to expand on the limited economic development activities currently underway. Additional resources would be available for planning if PBO is able to reduce the administrative time spent on monitoring department budgets. The cost of central purchases and services are not currently identifiable by the user department; a change in budgeting would result in more transparency in the use of countywide expenditures.

Human Resources Management Department (HRMD). Travis County has a highly decentralized human resource system that contributes to a lack of uniform, standardized policies and procedures. The role of HRMD has been diminished over the years, leading to its inability to meaningfully manage County human resources (HR). Significant changes to the County HR organization and software are required to build effective HR capacity and to improve trust between HRMD and the departments. In addition, a number of issues need to be addressed concerning the Travis County Employee Health Clinic, particularly whether the clinics are reducing costs to the County in the health benefits system.

Facilities Management Department (FMD). Improvements to data collection, monitoring, planning, and procedures will enable FMD to be more efficient and improve



customer service. New, recently implemented work order software will improve the management of more than 12,000 work orders annually; however additional procedural changes would make the system more efficient. No comprehensive, coordinated security plan is in place for non-judicial county buildings. Lastly, the costs and need for warehouse space in the county should be reconsidered.

Purchasing Office. The bidding process in the Purchasing Office is fully automated and departments and the Purchasing Office use SAP (the enterprise resource planning software used by Travis County) extensively to process purchase orders and partially manage contracting. Increasing the use of performance-based budgeting, improved contract compliance, allowing the use of procurement cards, and regularly conducting a spend analysis should result in efficiencies and cost savings to Travis County.

Information Technology Services (ITS). Despite efforts in recent years to improve governance of information technology (IT) services and resources, Travis County does not currently have a fully functioning IT governance process that places enterprise goals above individual department goals. Despite efforts toward centralization of IT services and support within ITS, a number of technology units have been expanded within County departments resulting in decentralized IT services. Service level agreements that define services between ITS and departments would improve customer satisfaction. IT security is not appropriately elevated within the organization and Travis County does not have a searchable inventory of software and hardware resources that is accessible to departments. Lastly, pay parity for IT professionals within Travis County is needed to ensure that highly qualified IT staff may be recruited to all county departments, including ITS.

Records Management and Communication Resources (RMCR). Developing a communications division within RMCR would lead to greater coordination and better management of the content of communication with the public, the media, Internet and social media, and Travis County employees. TCTV resources are underutilized; this television station has the potential to increase outreach to Travis County residents. Two customer service functions, mail delivery and the information line, could be improved with a more comprehensive staff directory and possible consolidation with existing 3-1-1 services, respectively.

Intergovernmental Relations Office (IGR). The impact of the two-person IGR office would be enhanced through regular briefings with Commissioners Court during periods when the state legislature is not in session and by collecting and reporting on best



practices information from other counties and county organizations. In addition, the news aggregation service provided by IGR staff could be done more efficiently through an existing service. IGR staff can provide additional support for recruitment and appointments to County boards and commissions by engaging County departments and the Commissioners Court in the recruitment process.

Emergency Services (ES). More participation from Travis County departments is needed in staffing the emergency operations center during emergencies; IT and purchasing support are particularly important. County departments do not have formal continuity of operations plans in place to minimize government service disruption in times of emergencies or disasters. In addition, disaster recovery planning needs to be enhanced with all departments receiving training. Travis County should continue to explore opportunities for consolidation among emergency service districts and collaboration between the districts and the County to increase efficiency and effectiveness; in particular, developing a uniform fire code among districts would create efficiencies. Fees for both STAR Flight and the medical examiner need to be updated. STAR Flight should pursue other revenue streams and develop a plan for updating the aging STAR Flight fleet.

Justice and Public Safety (JPS). The indigent legal services provided by Travis County (for juveniles, mental health, children, and parents) have all been reviewed in cost benefit analyses and have been shown to provide quality legal services at a lower price point than private counsel. Travis County should expand these indigent legal services offices while ensuring quality representation (through the development of quality performance measures) and producing savings. To enhance the effectiveness of these offices, a mechanism is needed for casework coordination for families with overlapping interactions with the Travis County legal system. The position of Pretrial Services as a division of the state-run Adult Probation Department should be reviewed to determine whether the Commissioners Court has sufficient visibility and oversight of County funds. Pretrial Services should also maintain robust collaborations with other County initiatives.

Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS). Many of the HHS and VS programs are models for others, such as Healthy Families, Children's Mental Health Partnership, and the Summer Youth Employment program. Through this department, individuals and families receive assistance with their mortgage, rent, utilities, and burials. Veterans receive assistance applying for the federal benefits to which they are entitled.



Several units or programs are not optimizing their resources or potential. The department lacks sufficient data to measure and track performance, and many programs do not have documented protocols for performing operations. The visibility of the Veterans' Service Office should be elevated, the department should seek external funding from community partners, and the work of the Research and Planning division should be refocused internally on department operations. Significant concerns about employee relations need to be resolved and several issues related to the efficient and effective operations of the community centers need to be addressed, including staffing, eligibility determination, the provision of case management, and technology. The department should pursue opportunities to support the availability of affordable housing. Payments to vendors and the condition of the HHS and VS facilities also need to be reviewed.

Transportation and Natural Resources (TNR). TNR should address administrative processes to increase efficiencies, such as streamlining approval of vendor invoices, consolidating flood plain management functions, formalizing the management of parks capital improvement projects, seeking dedicated IT resources through ITS, and ensuring the use of conservation easement funding. TNR is not taking advantage of the availability of supplemental transportation funding and should pursue additional funding opportunities. Development fees should be increased to more fully cover the costs of providing development review services. Enhanced and differentiated park fees and other revenue opportunities for parks should continue to be pursued. The cell phone policy and usage within TNR needs to be reviewed and should also be reviewed countywide.

1.3 MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

To accompany the report and assist with tracking the implementation of recommendations in the report, the review team has created a management improvement plan (MIP), an Excel spreadsheet that contains an assessment of all of the report recommendations listed by department and can be sorted by a variety of factors outlined in the RFS. The MIP is a tool that provides guidance to Travis County leaders in the implementation of the departmental review recommendations.



2 OVERVIEW

In June 2015, the Travis County Commissioners Court issued a competitive Request for Services (RFS) “#1505-005-AW, Travis County Commissioners Court Departmental Review,” to solicit a consultant “to execute a comprehensive study of County departments reporting to the Travis County Commissioners Court, and provide a written detailed report on the findings and recommendations for improvement.”² The Commissioners Court selected **Public Works, LLC (Public Works)** to conduct the organizational and administrative structure performance review, with subcontractor Morningside Research and Consulting, Inc. (Morningside) managing the project. This study of Travis County departments is submitted to the Travis County Commissioners Court.

This performance review report includes an evaluation of the organizational and administrative functions of the ten departments that report directly to the Travis County Commissioners Court, as well as the Travis County Purchasing Office:

- Planning and Budget Office (PBO)
- Human Resources Management Department (HRMD)
- Facilities Management Department (FMD)
- Purchasing Office
- Information Technology Services (ITS)
- Records Management and Communication Resources (RMCR)
- Intergovernmental Relations Office (IGR)
- Emergency Services (ES)
- Justice and Public Safety (JPS)
- Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS)
- Transportation and Natural Resources (TNR)

In accordance with the RFS, the performance review consisted of an “in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each department’s organizational structure, operating procedures and administrative systems in relation to delivering its mandate and policies.”³

2.1 PURPOSE OF A PERFORMANCE REVIEW

A departmental or performance review is designed to challenge assumptions about why a program or service exists, as well as how business is conducted. It is not an audit that checks to ensure money is spent according to acceptable accounting practices. It is a process that defines how services are provided, how business is conducted, what



emerging demands are being placed on government agencies and departments—and how effectively and efficiently the processes, procedures, policies, technology, and organizations responsible for the services are operating.

The end result of a performance review is the identification of recommendations to: reduce inefficiency and ineffectiveness; improve services and the way business is conducted; identify technology improvements to support operations; establish ways an organization must change to meet changing demands; and establish organizational structures, policies, and procedures to most effectively and efficiently deliver services to citizens.

The performance review report identifies a number of recommendations that result in cost savings or revenue enhancements. When the department begins to implement any recommendation, it often will need to consider the best option for doing so as well as a myriad of details involved in executing each one. Although the cost of changes recommended in this report will rarely outweigh the benefit of an improvement, the details—including which staff positions, offices in a building, or files on a server may need to be moved—can loom large. The performance review report makes every attempt to identify the benefits, costs, and challenges of any change it proposes. The full list of all suggested obstacles and their actual costs, however, can only be compiled as the department considers implementation; a performance review cannot conduct a complete cost benefit analysis of every recommendation.

2.2 PERFORMANCE REVIEW OBJECTIVES

The Travis County departmental performance review was conducted in accordance with RFS #1505-005-AW and guided by the tasks specified in the scope of work established by the Travis County Commissioners Court, including:

1. Evaluate the operational efficiency of each department to identify redundancies and opportunities for internal changes;
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of the current organizational and management structure;
3. Evaluate each department's ability to proactively manage the full range of business activities, consistent with industry standards;
4. Evaluate the major internal and external factors affecting each department;



5. Evaluate, as applicable, each department's process for monitoring and responding to customer needs and their ability to communicate with both external and internal customers;
6. Identify and evaluate customer service performance of each department against applicable industry standards;
7. Determine the existence of and adherence to documented policies, procedures, and management best practices;
8. Evaluate the performance of each department against applicable industry standards for use of technology;
9. Determine how technology supports department management and operations and how technology might be leveraged to improve management and operations.⁴

2.3 METHODOLOGY

Public Works and Morningside conducted the performance review over a nine-month period, beginning in October 2015 and concluding in July 2016. The performance review began with an initial onsite visit to Travis County offices on November 12 and 13, 2015. This included a project kick-off meeting with department directors, County Judge Eckhardt, and Commissioner Gómez. Over the course of the performance review, the review team conducted over 259 interviews with 196 unique interviewees (predominantly Travis County staff members, but also peer county staff for best practices and benchmarking purposes).

In addition, **Public Works** and Morningside conducted 12 focus groups with 104 participants (including staff from the departments reporting directly to the Commissioners Court, as well as other Travis County elected officials and their staff). Focus group topics included cross-departmental and internal departmental issues such as:

- Administrative operations and enterprise functions
- Operational efficiencies
- Strategic planning
- Fiscal and budgeting issues
- Assessment of customer service practices
- Best practices
- Performance measures and evaluation



- Departmental and countywide challenges, accomplishments, and solutions
- Employee recruitment, training, and retention
- Technology
- Communication and transparency
- Collaboration within and between departments

Focus group attendees included staff members directly involved in these functions, as well as those directly affected by these functions.

These meetings—as well as an extensive review of Travis County data and documents, best practices, and peer county benchmarking research—were invaluable in providing the review team with a full understanding of the operations of the Commissioners Court departments. Detail was provided on staffing levels, work assignments, procedures, and operational and administrative methods to assist in identifying operational efficiencies and areas of improvement in County processes and structure. The success and thoroughness of this review would not have been possible without the engagement of staff or their willingness to be forthcoming with feedback.

A draft report was provided to Travis County on May 31, 2016, for comment. **Public Works** and Morningside met with the Commissioners Court on June 23, 2016, in a work session to review and discuss the draft findings and recommendations. In addition, the directors of each of the eleven departments under review had the opportunity to provide memos to the consulting team to identify any errors in the report related to their respective departments. Revisions were made to the final report based on input from the Commissioners Court, county executives, and department directors. The final report was submitted on July 12, 2016 and presented in a Commissioners Court work session on July 19, 2016.

2.4 BENCHMARKING AND PEER COUNTY RESEARCH

Throughout this report, Travis County is compared to other counties for benchmarking and best practices purposes. Best practices and peer county research was conducted on a wide variety of topics including governance and structure; policies and procedures; fees and other revenue streams and opportunities; service delivery; coordination and communication; human resources practices; and information technology services.



The Travis County Commissioners Court identified five peer Texas counties in the RFS:

- Bexar County
- Dallas County
- El Paso County
- Harris County
- Tarrant County

The county administrator, an assistant county administrator, or budget director were interviewed in each of these five counties to understand how departments are organized and the policies and procedures in place to govern department operations.

When other counties in Texas or counties in other states are referenced in the report, the reason for the comparison is included in the relevant discussion.

2.5 TERMINOLOGY

For the purposes of this report, the terms “countywide,” “cross-departmental,” and “county” are most often used to refer to the 10 departments that report directly to the Commissioners Court and not necessarily all departments in Travis County. In some cases, Commissioners Court departments, including ITS, HRMD, and FMD, provide services to some or all of the departments who do not report to the Travis County Commissioners Court; in those cases, countywide does refer to all County departments and programs. Clarification is provided throughout the report as needed.

2.6 REPORT LAYOUT

After this Overview chapter, the following two chapters in the report discuss countywide issues. The first is a chapter discussing significant issues and themes that emerged across the departments reviewed. The next chapter discusses the executive management of the Travis County departments and the current structure through which departments report to the Commissioners Court.

The remainder of the report is organized by department, with a chapter for each of the 11 departments reviewed. Each department chapter begins with an overview of the department and is followed by the specific departmental issues identified. The discussion of each issue includes relevant background information, specific findings, and recommendations for issue resolution.



2.7 PROCESS MAPS

Process mapping techniques are used to understand the role and responsibility of each person in an organization, to assess job descriptions versus actual job activities, and to question the sequence of events to accomplish an objective. As part of the scope of work for this review, the review team selected 11 processes to be mapped; these processes were identified during the review as areas where efficiencies could be gained and that would most benefit from mapping. The review team gathered process information through many sources, including interviews, documentation, and observation. By mapping process activities in sequence, the team looked for duplication, delays, tasks that can contribute to mistakes, and overall cumbersome processes that lend themselves to streamlining or technology support.

The process maps are submitted separately from this report. These maps will be useful to Travis County by serving as a basis for implementing change and reviewing processes in the future.

2.8 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

To accompany the report, the review team has created a management improvement plan (MIP), submitted to the Travis County Commissioners Court. The MIP is an Excel spreadsheet that contains an assessment of all of the report recommendations listed by department and can be sorted by a variety of factors outlined in the RFS. The MIP is a tool that provides guidance to Travis County leaders in the implementation of the departmental review recommendations. However, the MIP is an implementation plan, not an action plan. While the MIP will serve as an important tool in prioritizing the recommendations and considering their benefits and costs, lead staff will need to create detailed action plans to guide the implementation process for each recommendation undertaken.



3 COUNTYWIDE POLICY AND OPERATIONS

The Travis County Commissioners Court stated in the Request for Services for this engagement that it intends to review “current operations with an emphasis on ensuring that programs are within their legislated mandates and policies, and to ensure that any new and innovative approaches for delivery of these services are realized through organizational and operational efficiencies.”⁵

County leadership is focused on ensuring the County is ready to meet increasing demands for services as its population grows while being fiscally responsible and working as efficiently as possible. Leaders are also concerned about delivering high-quality services and positioning the County to best serve its citizens in the face of limited resources at the local, state, and national levels.

During the course of this review of each department reporting to the Commissioners Court, it became clear that a countywide perspective was needed. Questions arise, not only about how each of these Commissioners Court departments is performing, but how departments work together for the greater good. What is the overarching strategic plan for the County towards which all departments are working? How do the departments interact to coordinate services and reduce duplication? How are countywide policies and procedures implemented to ensure uniform and consistent treatment of employees and citizens seeking services? How are departments held accountable? How are services measured in terms of quality and timeliness of delivery?

This chapter addresses several issues that are critical to efficient and effective countywide operations. These include:

- Developing a meaningful strategic planning process.
- Establishing and measuring objective performance criteria for employees and departments.
- Ensuring lines of communication are productive.
- Creating policies and procedures and applying them consistently.
- Establishing clear and consistent oversight to coordinate services, reduce duplication, and work as efficiently as possible.
- Ensuring services are provided at the highest quality level in a timely manner.
- Positioning the County to increase fee and grant revenue to support programs and services.



3.1 COMPREHENSIVE COUNTYWIDE STRATEGIC PLAN

Background

Strategic planning is an essential management tool used to help organizations assess the current environment, envision the future, establish priorities, and improve decision making. It is an accepted best practice for any organization, public or private, including local governments. Although there are many planning efforts taking place in Travis County departments, these efforts are not necessarily connected to a unifying County mission or to goals. The need for a strategic plan is mentioned here because it is so critical to County operations; the details of this issue are covered in section 5.5. As discussed in that chapter, a strategic plan is necessary to form the foundation for County services and to provide the framework for departments to be held accountable for meeting Travis County goals and objectives.

Findings

As noted in section 5.5, Travis County does not have a strategic plan that identifies overarching goals for County operations to address the range of services from citizen well-being to environmental protection. Existing department plans are not coordinated to identify gaps in services, duplication or overlap, or where additional resources might be needed. Most importantly, plans do not link department priorities to goals and objectives—a missed opportunity for County leaders to establish an accountability system to objectively monitor progress or problems within departments.

Recommendations related to strategic planning are discussed in section 5.5.

3.2 ACCOUNTABILITY

Background

Accountability in a complex organization such as Travis County government requires a level of transparency in policies, procedures, and operations management based on a consistent and comprehensive system that is understandable to employees and the public alike. Government entities are, and should be, held to a high standard of accountability by the public—a standard that engenders trust that government is providing necessary services as efficiently and effectively as possible. Accountability starts with setting clear expectations in both policy and performance at every level of the organization. Policies must be comprehensive and uniformly applied. Performance measures must be established and tracked for employees, managers, departments providing services to the public, and central administrative departments providing



services to support County operations. In addition, oversight and compliance reviews must be done to ensure operations are within all federal, state, and County laws, regulations, and policies.

In addition to performance measures, good organizational metrics include expectations for continuous improvement through a feedback loop that measures expectations against performance. An effective organization adjusts quickly when performance does not meet expectations. An accountable organization sets performance expectations, collects data on performance, reports performance data, and publishes data for transparent communication to employees and residents.

Findings

This review found that it is not possible to gauge the level of performance in many areas of services within Travis County because of the lack of data. Reports on levels or quality of service are generally not available, nor are there objective criteria established to hold managers and departments accountable for a defined level and quality of service. Additionally, departments providing central functions such as Human Resources Management Department (HRMD), Facilities Management Department (FMD), and Information Technology Services (ITS) have little feedback data with which to assess their customer service in support of County operations.

More detailed discussions of the need for data and reporting on performance can be found in the chapters dealing with individual departments. Several countywide issues are discussed here:

- **Oversight and Compliance.** The County does not currently have a mechanism for objectively reviewing the efficiency and effectiveness of the programs and services provided by the departments that report to the Commissioners Court. Other than the audits completed by the County Auditor, there is virtually no oversight of County departments and no independent, objective review of whether their programs and services are administered effectively and efficiently.
- Beyond individual department reviews, overall Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance has been challenging. Until last year, HIPAA compliance was not comprehensively monitored although compliance with HIPAA regulations is an area of high risk and can lead to significant federal fines for failure to protect health information. A considerable amount of work has been done by the County HIPAA compliance officer (appointed as the privacy



officer), and the security officer and the security officer's designees to develop policies and procedures related to HIPAA compliance, which puts the County in an excellent position to prevent breaches and to rectify areas of vulnerability. The recommendations from the compliance officer related to HIPAA planning, monitoring, and compliance were assessed as part of this review, and the proposal to the Commissioners Court for implementation is well researched and very thorough. The Commissioners Court implemented those recommendations at the end of June 2016, the fundamental element of which is a compliance structure with assigned responsibilities. The continued support Court for the efforts by the respective officers related to this program puts Travis County in the best position to effectively protect the County from substantial federal fines for violations, which have occurred in other jurisdictions.

Finally, contract and grant compliance is an example of the need for countywide oversight. Currently contract compliance is left to individual departments to monitor. In interviews, employees reported concerns about the full and appropriate use of grant resources; data from at least one department indicates that grant funding may not be fully expended. Two examples where contract oversight and monitoring concerns were identified during this review include whether the multiple translation contracts across departments have consistent pricing, and ensuring that pricing for outsourced payment card processing (when residents use credit cards to pay for County services such as park entrance fees) is competitive and that the vendor is compliant with all industry data security standards.

- **Employee Performance.** Through numerous interviews, focus groups, and other interactions with staff at all levels for the County organization, it was observed that the County has a high level of tolerance for poor performance and behavior. Despite language in Chapters 9 and 10 of the County Code describing behaviors that can lead to dismissal, County employees reported examples of inappropriate behavior by co-workers, supervisors, and subordinates: shouting, blaming, circumventing the chain of command, and reports of discord among officials and employees at all levels. In addition, reports of inappropriate use of County resources were raised, including the delivery of personal packages through the County mailroom. The County does not have a code of conduct to guide employee behavior and to make clear what constitutes acceptable behavior. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) cites personal, professional, and organizational integrity as one of 18 effective

practices for local governments. According ICMA, integrity means “demonstrating fairness, honesty, and ethical and legal awareness in personal and professional relationships and activities.”⁶ Travis County is in the process of developing an ethics policy.

- **Executive Hiring and Accountability.** The Commissioners Court is responsible for reviewing the performance of their direct reports, which includes six County executives (one of which is vacant), the chief information officer (CIO), and the director of the Intergovernmental Relations Office (IGR). The most recent performance evaluation was conducted in late 2015 and consisted of ratings on five qualitative “performance traits.” None of these traits are based on objective, measureable criteria. Rather, they are based on subjective perceptions of how well each executive communicates, is innovative and influential, completes projects in a timely fashion, manages fiscal resources, and collaborates. While this process might identify the executive who communicate best with commissioners, it does not provide an objective and accurate picture of how effective managers are at implementing and executing the programs and services within their areas of responsibility.

Furthermore, the evaluation of County executives does not currently consider the input of managers within their departments. This feedback should be an integral component of the evaluation process.

Finally, while the Commissioners Court appoints several positions, such as the medical examiner and the veterans’ services officer, County executives are responsible for the day-to-day management of these positions and subsequently their evaluations. This structure works as long as the Commissioners Court and County executive are in agreement; problems arise when they are not.⁷

- **Central Support Function Departments.** The lack of data available to assess the performance of central functions such as human resources (HR), information technology (IT), and facilities is especially evident and is discussed in detail in relevant chapters in this report. Human resources in particular is a vital function for any organization to ensure a stable workforce and consistent and fair treatment of employees. For more than a decade, Travis County has had very high turnover in the director position for HRMD. As a result of the lack of stability and consistency in this position, the level of services to County departments has eroded as evidenced by the proliferation of department-level human resource



units and the number of elected officials opting out of County human resource policies.

During the course of this review, the HRMD director position again became vacant. The need for stability in this function for the County is central to the overall health of the organization.

Trust in other central functions, such as ITS and FMD, is also low in some cases, due primarily to ineffective communication and feedback on all sides.

- **Implementation of Performance Review Recommendations.** This review is an excellent start for the Travis County Commissioners Court to determine priorities for holding departments and employees accountable to taxpayers and to each other. To capitalize on the extensive input from County employees during this performance review, the County should track progress and hold departments accountable for the implementation of the recommendations in this report. To best accomplish this, an individual should be assigned to report to Commissioners Court on a quarterly basis the progress that has been made, where challenges have been encountered, and how those challenges will be resolved. Otherwise, the Commissioners Court run that risk that the recommendations will be implemented haphazardly or not at all, leaving the County in the position in which it currently finds it.

In support of increasing transparency and accountability with citizens, the Association of Government Accounts (AGA) encourages governments to “create clear, concise reports for constituents so they understand how their tax dollars are spent...government financial information should be provided to citizens in ways that are clear and understandable, updated regularly and often, broadly delivered, easy to locate, honest in breadth and accurate in detail.”⁸

AGA has developed a four-page template that provides a guide for local governments to summarize financial data that is often difficult to navigate for people without a financial background. The template includes a community overview (population figures, regional characteristics, and goals for the community), a report of progress on key goals, graphs depicting cost and revenue information, and activities planned for the future.⁹



Recommendations

Recommendation 3.2.1

Adopt a countywide code of conduct and an ethics policy to set expectations for behavior by elected and appointed officials and by County employees. The effort to develop a code of conduct should be led by HRMD. The Commissioners Court should proceed with the efforts currently underway to develop an ethics policy.

Recommendation 3.2.2

Develop objective performance expectations for County Commissioner direct reports and hold direct reports accountable for these expectations. This report includes recommendations for developing strategic plans and performance metrics for each department. Commissioners Court direct reports should be held accountable for achieving those performance metrics and any other objective criteria developed to review their performance.

Recommendation 3.2.3

Conduct 360 evaluations of County executives annually. The evaluation of County executives should consider the input of staff and managers throughout their departments.

Recommendation 3.2.4

Assign an individual responsible for tracking and reporting the progress of the implementation of performance review recommendations directly to Commissioners Court. This would ideally be assigned to a well-respected existing County employee with a reputation for and experience with coordination and collaboration across departments.

Recommendation 3.2.5

Develop a process for the selection of a new HR director that is expansive, transparent, and inclusive. Conduct a national search for a skilled and effective human resources director. A county the size of Travis County should be able to attract multiple desirable candidates for the director of HRMD. This position would be an exciting opportunity for an experienced and well-regarded human resource manager who has the willingness as well as the communication and management skills to tackle a number of tough issues related to the provision of HR services. These issues include restoring trust in HRMD, developing a plan to centralize and standardize HR policies and



procedures, leading the development of a code of conduct, and reducing the time for posting and filling positions. This new hire should be held accountable for achieving a stable workforce across the County as measured by objective criteria such as reduced turnover rates and reductions in vacancy rates.

The County should engage the services of a search firm and should create a transparent and cross-departmental hiring process, including assembling a cross-departmental hiring team that includes leads departmental human resource staff. In addition, to further expand participation in the hiring process, the County should assemble a scoring team to score responses from qualified candidates. Multiple departments should be represented on the hiring and scoring teams, including elected official departments.

Recommendation 3.2.6

Create a short visual summary of Travis County financial and performance data for County residents. This document could be posted on County web sites and widely distributed at community meetings.

3.3 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Background

According to best practices published by the ICMA, National Association of Counties (NACo), and academic research entities, communication within an organization occurs on multiple levels and in three directions: downward, upward, and horizontally, depending on the position and role of employees within an organization.¹⁰

- Downward communication comes from organization directors, managers, and supervisors and is communicated down the chain of command. Downward communication is used to provide, inform, or establish organizational culture, procedures, policies, rules, employee instructions, and performance feedback.
- Upward communication originates with front line employees and supervisors and flows up the organizational chain to management levels. Upward communication most commonly provides managers with information on performance of employees and organizational units of operation and on employee relations issues. This upward communication can often generate ideas from employees for improving the organization.



- Horizontal communication flows among coworkers or across departments. This type of communication is useful to enhance coordination of work and collaboration across an organization whether one-on-one or through more formal task forces, liaisons, or committees. Positive communication among employees can improve morale and support employees working together for common goals. Communication can also be categorized as formal or informal.
- Formal communication is official organizational information and includes policies and procedures documents, memos, emails that communicate work-related information, organizational social media posts, and web sites. This type of communication establishes the formal rules and regulations for working in an organization and can be used to create records or track the progress of an organization.
- Informal communication is unofficial information related to the organization such as social interaction among colleagues. Informal communication often sets the tone for the culture of an organization that fosters employee collaboration or not. Informal information can be harder to track (or correct if based on misinformation) by an organization, but can be used to build a positive organizational culture.

Clear communication at all levels and by both formal and informal methods within an organization is vital to ensuring accountability. Clear expectations, including the strategic direction of an organization, need to be communicated from policy makers to administrators and from administrators to managers and from managers to employees. Data and reports regarding accountability need to be communicated through the organizations in the opposite direction to be sure that expectations have been met.

Findings

Communication within Travis County was described during interviews as sometimes challenging and confusing and often circumventing the chain of command, subverting the authority of program managers and supervisors. Some interviewees described being able to communicate with a central service department only because they had a relationship with someone in the office who could help them directly. Other interviewees expressed frustration with not knowing whom to go to for help on an HR issue, for example.

Interviewees also described instances where staff would go directly to a member of the Commissioners Court for assistance, and the commissioner would intervene on behalf of



the employee. Some staff reported that elected officials contact them directly to request services, establishing a conflict in how to prioritize the request.

This review identified a number of areas where communication about expectations needs to be strengthened. Most importantly, written policies and procedures must be in place to clarify expectations related to employee performance and behavior. County executives must be held accountable, and central support functions such as the County human resources, facilities, purchasing, budgeting, and information technology, must develop systems for reviewing program performance. Lastly, the recommendations included in this report are more likely to be pursued and implemented if oversight is established up-front and performed by a capable, neutral individual.

Finally, the structure of county government in Texas necessitates building cooperative relationships among elected officials and between elected officials and staff who provide services to all of the departments in the County. The review team observed strained communication between Commissioners Court departments and elected officials. County staff are left to navigate the relationships with elected officials on their own without coordinated or systemic support to assist them. In Dallas County, the County Administrator holds a monthly breakfast with elected officials to listen to their concerns and identify issues that need to be resolved.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3.3.1

Commit as an organization to honoring the existing chain of command. Some employees who now go directly to the Commissioners Court do so because they do not trust management to address their concerns. A structure must be put in place to hold managers accountable for addressing employee concerns and, as importantly, this information should be regularly reported to the Commissioners Court. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, this process must include involvement of HRMD to ensure employees are being treated fairly and consistently. HRMD should report complaints and outcomes by department (protecting employee identities) to the Commissioners Court regularly. Strengthening the chain of command will improve as trust within the organization improves. A policy and reporting mechanism could be part of a countywide code of conduct or a stand-alone policy.



Recommendation 3.3.2

Create a forum for regular communication with elected officials. At the very least, elected officials should be afforded the opportunity to meet regularly with one of the County executives who is charged with taking the lead on this initiative to communicate more frequently and effectively with elected officials (see Chapter 4 for more information).

3.4 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Background

During the course of this operational review, the Commissioners Court asked **Public Works** and Morningside to evaluate the County's communications operations and make recommendations to bolster current public information and open records operations.

The Court's request followed an internal evaluation of County communications resources conducted by the Public Information Subcommittee, with representatives from the following agencies:

- Records Management and Communications Resources (RMCR);
- Intergovernmental Relations Office(IGR);
- Information Technology Services (ITS);
- Emergency Services (ES);
- Transportation and Natural Resources (TNR); and
- Travis County Attorney's Office.

The Commissioners Court charged the Subcommittee to:

1. Document current public information request practices in all County departments with an emphasis on how "cross-departmental" public information requests are handled.
2. Recommend best practices for handling public information requests, including:
 - Tracking public information requests;
 - Procedures for responding to public information requests;



- Potential uses of technology for tracking and responding to public information requests; and
 - Potential uses of technology for proactively making more data available to the public.
3. Review current social media presence and practices by County departments and make recommendations to improve them.
 4. Explore other issues and opportunities related to providing public information to residents of Travis County.¹¹

On February 9, 2016, the Subcommittee briefed the Court on the findings and recommendations in its report – *Public Information Needs Analysis & Survey*. The Court deferred action on the Subcommittee's recommendations at that time and subsequently requested that **Public Works** and Morningside incorporate an evaluation of the County's communications operations into this operational review.

Findings

Communication Planning and Coordination

Travis County departments routinely manage their own communications with the public – some with robust departmental capacity, others with minimal resources. The County does not have an established process for communicating information to the public about County initiatives, activities, or services that coordinates the involvement of multiple departments.

The need for a County strategic plan is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this report. In tandem with the development of a general strategic plan, the County should also develop a strategic communications plan. Generally speaking, a strategic communications plan should outline:

- Key messages and/or areas of focus;
- Target audiences;
- Definitions of branding elements;
- Communications objectives; and
- Well-defined measures of success.



A plan may also include:

- An inventory of the County's communications assets and resources (including not only technologies, but also specialized talents and skills).
- Elements of situational, socioeconomic, demographic, social, and technological analysis used to establish the communications strategy, message development, and identification of target audience(s).

Several county government strategic communications plans are discussed below, with links to the cited plans provided in Table 3-3. These plans provide useful models for consideration by Travis County when enhancing its communications operations.

Marin County, California

Marin County, California, conducted an assessment of its public communications, identifying key challenges and recommendations. Pursuant to its review, the county organized a *Public Communications Workplan* with three key strategies and accompanying action steps and tasks as shown in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1 Marin County Public Communications Workplan

Strategies and Action Steps		
Build a Sustainable Framework	Expand the County's Reach	Develop Proactive Communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centralize communications coordination and develop policies.• Provide ongoing communications training.• Coordinate county logo and use for unified portrayal of county government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bolster traditional channels.• Use new media technologies.• Continue website revision and develop strategy for county portal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support and plan for targeted communication projects.• Enhance direct communication and partnership with the community.

Source: Marin County, California, Public Communications Plan. January 24, 2012: 4.

The Marin County plan was developed with input from county supervisors, department heads, members of the county public information team, leaders of community partner organizations, peer county governments with similar characteristics, and internal and external communications professionals.



Broward County, Florida

The Broward County strategic communications plan was developed as a result of the county commission's vision to "ensure a fiscally sustainable and transparent government."¹² The plan provides an integrated approach to communications in six focus areas that can be implemented by all county agencies:

- Branding;
- Transparency;
- Media relations;
- Partnerships;
- Professional development; and
- Workforce engagement¹³

Under each focus area, Broward County identifies objectives and measures of success. This provides a good model for consideration by Travis County when establishing an outcome-based communications program.

Orange County, North Carolina

As shown in Table1.2, the Orange County, North Carolina, strategic communications plan clearly defines the communication roles of its elected and appointed leaders as well as the responsibilities of departments and communications staff members. Given the pervasive questions regarding the powers and duties of a proposed Travis County public information officer (PIO), Travis County would be well served by similarly delineating the communications roles and responsibilities for all parties.



Table 3-2 Orange County, North Carolina, Strategic Communications Plan – Communications Roles

Board of County Commissioners	County Manager	Public Information Officer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approve periodic updates to the adopted Strategic Communications Plan. Appoint two commissioners annually to serve on the communications governance team to provide oversight and recommend appropriate refinements to the plan. Consider recommendations from the county manager to allocate financial, staff, and technological resources to address unmet or emerging communications needs. Provide guidance and direction to the county manager and PIO that will disseminate information to residents and other audiences regarding significant county programs, policies, events, and initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign and direct staff to accomplish the strategies laid out in the strategic communications plan in a timely and effective way. Supervise the public information/public affairs function for county government. Prioritize communications work to match available resources. Periodically apprise the county commissioners on progress in implementing the plan, including capabilities and constraints to achieving objectives, and recommendations for addressing any shortcomings of county departments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform duties as assigned by the county manager. Serve as an information coordinator for departments. Convene and provide leadership for county department communicators. Foster strong relationships with representatives of all forms of media and serve as a liaison between those persons and the county commissioners and county manager. When so designated by the county manager or emergency services director, serve as a spokesperson for the county during emergency or crisis situations. Serve as a resource for marketing and promoting county services.
County Departments		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish or maintain departmental plans or processes for executing their own communications functions in a manner consistent with the overall court plan. Support the manager and other departments by sharing staff, technology, and other resources when feasible to accomplish county communications goals and objectives. 		

Source: Orange County, North Carolina. *Strategic Communications Plan*. 2015: 7-8.

The Orange County strategic communications plan can serve as a model for Travis County with respect to the legal and ethical implications of open meetings and public



records. Additionally, the Orange County plan provides guidance for developing collective versus individual commissioner communications, a topic the Travis County Commissioners Court has discussed in some detail.

Comparative Communications Plans

As shown in Table 3-3, the county strategic communications plans referenced here include several elements of policy and programmatic design relevant to communications planning in Travis County. They should be reviewed in full and, where appropriate, can serve as templates for Travis County.

Table 3-3 Noteworthy County Strategic Communications Plans

County Strategic Communications Plan	Items of Note for Travis County
Marin County, California	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishment of key communications strategies and accompanying actions.• Plan developed with input from a cross-section of county elected leaders, department heads and staff, community partner organizations, peer county governments, and internal and external communications professionals.
Broward County, Florida	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communications outcomes aligned with the county mission and vision statements.• Focus areas that establish communications goals and measurements of success.
Orange County, North Carolina	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distinct communication roles for elected leaders, county executive, departments, and PIO.• Emphasis on legal and ethical implications of open meetings/records policies and processes.• Guidance for collective versus individual commissioner communications.

Social Media

Social media is the fastest growing source of public information, with users over the age of 40 making up the fastest growing social media user segment.¹⁴ According to The Pew Internet and American Life Project, 87 percent of senior citizens are now using Internet resources to find information.¹⁵ In its February 2016 report, the Travis County Public Information Subcommittee documented 38 different social media accounts managed by non-elected offices in the County and noted there were likely more.¹⁶ At present, the department list on the County web site notes 19 different Facebook pages,



18 Twitter accounts, and a variety of other Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Nextdoor, and Google+ social media outlets.¹⁷

In spite of this growing trend, Travis County has no social media strategy to prioritize its open government and digital media projects, or promote their existence to its target audiences. Nor is there a coordinated means for engaging the County departments to leverage these resources in fulfilling their public service missions. While ITS manages the TravisCountyTX Facebook, Periscope, and Twitter accounts; archives posts and tweets with search functionality; and maintains standards and guidelines on TravisCentral, there is no coordinated social media plan for departments.

Of course, social media is not used just for unilateral message dissemination. As its name suggests, *social* media is intended for multi-point communications where users (such as Travis County residents) can convene discussions with neighbors or like-minded residents and then provide feedback or communicate needs directly to county government. At present, Travis County has no systematic approach for monitoring social media to identify trends, inform decision making, or target resources.

Counties nationwide have developed social media strategies to guide planning and set policies for department and employee social media use. Marin County, California, developed a *Social Media Playbook* that established a county social media implementation timeline and a department workplan.¹⁸ Marin County also developed a social media strategy to amplify communication efforts and enhance departmental coordination. This strategy outlined plans to:

- Design social media sites to be visually appealing and consistent with the county's identity;
- Ensure a consistent look or identity marker among all department social media sites;
- Develop ways to inform and promote programs, services, projects, and issues to the public;
- Write inviting posts and allow the public to interact with the county and share content with others;
- Explore and utilize monitoring tools to track performance and other relevant data;



- Provide county employees with training on social media policy including tools, usage, and procedures;
- Create an interactive calendar with search functions for county meetings and community events;
- Create a centralized repository listing existing and emerging social media tools and applications; and
- Utilize the social media taskforce (comprised of department social media coordinators) to obtain input on technical, administrative, and policy issues.¹⁹

King County, Washington, has developed a social media handbook for its agencies. In this document, departments are urged to develop their own “social media playbooks” as part of their communications strategies. The county has also set goals for its social media pages such as near real-time customer service, targeted communications and media relations, and teaching the public about King County services.²⁰

News Aggregation

To provide the best programs and services to Travis County residents, County leaders and department staff must be aware of events taking place in the community and know how government is responding. As noted in Chapter 11 of this report, IGR currently assembles and distributes an aggregation of local and regional media stories relevant to Travis County government. Similarly, other departments (such as TNR and the Sheriff's Office) track County stories and disseminate news clips using tools such as Google Alerts and other news aggregation services.

Like other media consumers, County departments have recently lost online access to several in-state media outlets such as the *Fort Worth Star-Tribune*, *San Antonio Express-News*, and *Houston Chronicle*, as these publications have placed their content behind pay-walls. Most County departments do not have adequate budget resources to maintain subscriptions with multiple publications or memberships with news aggregation services.

Open Records

The Travis County Public Information Subcommittee outlined the current County open records processes in great detail in its February 2016 report to the Commissioners Court. The Subcommittee noted that the County maintains an effective open data and



governance presence with plans to expand an open records portal to direct requestors to the correct department. The Subcommittee underscored that some departments have a high volume of record requests requiring staff to receive a high level of open records training while other departments have very few requests resulting in minimal staff training.

Travis County does not currently have a systematic process to coordinate or track requests from the public for information from County departments, including open records requests where timely responses are required by statute (Public Information Act, Chapter 552 Texas Government Code). While several departments such as Transportation and Natural Resources (TNR) have accountability systems for responding to requests, other departments do not. For these departments, it would be more effective and efficient to have a centralized “clearinghouse” to coordinate proper and timely responses. There is no centralized tracking system to ensure or demonstrate the County is compliant with the Public Information Act, which is a potential legal vulnerability.

Three of the four Texas counties that are more populous than Travis County (Dallas County, Tarrant County, and Bexar County) have an open records coordinator or similar position that fulfills some or all of the functions described previously.²¹ Many other counties less populous than Travis County (including Collin County, Hidalgo County, Fort Bend County, Williamson County, and Nueces County) also have such a position.²²

Travis County has always placed a high priority on transparency and endeavored to provide the community with access to all publicly available documents. To date, County leaders have focused most of their attention on coordinating the *administration* of open record requests (e.g., IT interfaces for receiving and responding to requests, open record request tracking systems, etc.) rather than coordinating the *content* of such record requests. No formal process or coordination effort is in place to identify identical requests submitted to multiple departments and ensure consistent results using the same legal standards for document release, denial, or redaction (in circumstances of confidential or privileged information). Furthermore, there is no mechanism in place to inform County leaders of open record releases that could generate legal actions or media stories, situations when legal and communications strategies need to be coordinated.



Recommendations

This review concurs with the recommendations of the Public Information Subcommittee and provides additional recommendations below addressing important elements of governmental communication coordination and implementation.

Recommendation 3.4.1

Implement the recommendations in the Subcommittee report:

1. Create a Travis County Office of Public Information.
2. Hire a PIO.
3. Continue projects like the open government portal.
4. Duplicate the TNR in-depth study of open records practices among other departments.
5. Retain this Public Information Subcommittee as an advisory group to the PIO and Commissioners Court.²³

Recommendation 3.4.2

Create a communications office to lead the County's communications efforts, engage the media and the public, and ensure consistent messaging across all County departments. The need for a coordinated communications effort in Travis County is well documented. A cohesive effort will allow the County not only to respond *reactively* to media inquiries, but also to promote *proactively* all of the programs and services provided to residents every day. In its report to the Court, the Public Information Subcommittee recommended a two-person communications office. A two-person team should be considered a *minimum* staffing level for the communications work needed in a county as large and rapidly growing as Travis County. The communications team must have enough staff to provide back-up coverage in times of emergencies (or even scheduled holidays and vacations). The Court must also recognize the limited capacity of a small communications shop and provide clear direction on how staff are expected to prioritize their time.

Ideally, a County communications office and PIO are placed in an organization where they can oversee all County communications and, if necessary, mediate



interdepartmental disagreements on messaging. The Subcommittee indicated that this office should be either within Records Management and Communications Resources (RMCR) or IGR. Absent a county administrator or other executive office with oversight of all departments, Travis County should place its communications office where it will have readily available access to County communications resources, and the review team suggests that it be within RMCR for that reason.

To establish a communications office, a new Communications division should be created in RMCR overseen by a communications director who would also serve as the PIO. The communications director would oversee the functions that are moved to this new division, such as media operations and the new open records manager. In addition to the new division director and open records manager, this division will also need at least one assistant PIO to cover the many responsibilities of this new division, which would include:

- Working with County department directors to coordinate public outreach strategies and maximize cross-promotion of messaging to the public as appropriate across the multiple County media platforms.
- Serving as a resource for departments in coordinating responses to public information requests and create a central record of such requests to the County.
- Ensuring that Travis County communications are consistently made available in Spanish in addition to English (and in other languages as deemed appropriate) by working with the County's departments and coordinating shared translation resources where needed.

Recommendation 3.4.3

Develop a strategic communications plan in conjunction with the recommended County strategic plan. As noted throughout this report, strategic planning is an essential management tool to help organizations assess the current environment, envision the future, establish priorities, and improve decision making. Creating a countywide strategic communications plan should be the top priority of the new communications office. The plan should be developed with communications representatives from all County departments (and from the offices of elected and appointed County officials who wish to participate) and should reflect the goals and objectives identified in the overall County strategic plan.



Recommendation 3.4.4

Clearly define the role of the public information officer as the County spokesperson.

When establishing a PIO position, it is imperative that County leaders clearly define the expectations for the PIO's spokesperson role. Leaders should address questions such as:

- Will the PIO serve as a spokesperson for the County Judge? Individual commissioners? County executives?
- Are statements delivered by the PIO to be considered the “official” County position?
- Who determines and approves the County’s “message” on any given topic? (County Judge? Commissioners Court? PIO? Departments based on the topic?)
- Must department spokespeople (staff, directors, county executives) coordinate their statements with the PIO before releasing them to the press and public?
- Should departments seek approval from the PIO and the communications office before developing or releasing new messages, branding, or other communications efforts?
- Will the PIO or the communications office be expected to mediate departmental disagreements or reconcile inconsistent messaging among departments?

Once these questions are answered, it is important that not only the PIO, but all elected and appointed leaders as well as department staff understand these expectations.

Recommendation 3.4.5

Enhance the County social media presence. Social media use is now ubiquitous in American society. Travis County should develop a robust and coordinated social media effort to enhance customer service, target communications and media relations, and educate the public about County services and programs. Social media planning should be a key component of the County strategic communications plan.

Recommendation 3.4.6

Replace disparate departmental news aggregation work with an automated news search, clipping service, or other media monitoring system. A variety of options are



available on the market that Travis County could investigate – ranging from the more generic news search services available to the general public to more sophisticated subscription services that can be tailored to meet the exact needs and areas of interest of the County. Many public and open source news software applications are free; subscription services typically cost a few hundred to a few thousand dollars monthly depending on the depth and specificity of the requested media tracking. Such services are growing in popularity as more and more newspapers place their content behind pay-walls.

As noted in the IGR chapter of this report (when discussing IGR's current news aggregation work), media monitoring can be organized most efficiently by communications professionals. Accordingly, this work should be conducted by the new communications office. If the County decided to pursue a paid subscription service, County departments currently investing in subscriptions should pool resources for this purpose. News stories and media clips should be accessible to all interested County employees to inform their work and improve communications efforts.

Recommendation 3.4.7

Ensure consistent open record responses across departments. Open record responses should be consistent throughout County government. This will require not only monitoring and tracking all open record requests, but also coordination among responding departments, ITS, and the County Attorney's Office to ensure that the same processes for document retention, review, and release are used by all agencies. Similarly, all County departments should apply the same legal standards for assertion of privilege and document redaction. Open record requests submitted to multiple departments (for example, requesting emails exchanged between the departments on a specified topic) should produce identical results. While the communications office should not determine the content of such document productions, it should ensure that processes are in place to coordinate appropriate responding parties and promote open government and information dissemination.

Recommendation 3.4.8

Recognize the distinction in the media relations and open record coordination roles of the communications office. Even with the most open and transparent governments, public record requests can become adversarial and litigious. The County's communications office should maintain a positive working relationship with members of the press and the public at all times. In the open record process, the



departments should remain the subject matter experts in determining which documents are responsive to a request. Legal experts in the County Attorney's Office must then review responses for confidential or privileged information and assist departments in making a final determination on the appropriate information to release. The communications office can serve in a coordination role in open records requests, but should not be put in a position that could damage on-going relationships with the media or the public.

3.5 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES DEVELOPMENT AND OVERSIGHT

Background

Written policies are an essential part of the foundation for any organization. As importantly, procedures on how to implement the policies are equally important to ensure they are carried out as intended, uniformly, and fairly. The University of North Texas (UNT) describes the development of policies and procedures as a “dynamic and cyclical processes that require planning, collaboration, and patience.”²⁴

UNT goes on to establish five elements for policy development that include:

- Ease of understanding. Policies are written using simple, clear, and concise language that can be understood by everyone in the organization.
- Clearly differentiating policies from procedures. Procedures provide a guide for how to implement the policies. Procedures include personnel responsible for implementing the policy, timelines for completion of each step in a procedure, methodology for how compliance will be monitored, and a schedule for reviewing the effectiveness of the policies and procedures.
- A basis in law and regulation that must be reviewed regularly to ensure the organization is in compliance.
- Consistency with existing policies, using consistent terminology that does not conflict with other policies.
- A basis in best practices that supports the organization’s mission, strategic plan, and efficient and effective operation.²⁵



In all instances, development of policies and procedures is an interactive process that should include feedback from stakeholders and operational experts who will be charged with implementing the policies and procedures. A team approach to development ensures the buy-in of those subject to the policies and procedures and increases chances for the most positive implementation.

Findings

This review identified a number of areas across the County where programs and services are administered with limited or no policies and procedures to guide staff. In some cases, policies and procedures are inconsistent. The lack of clear guidelines for how to complete tasks makes it challenging to hold people accountable for effectively managing taxpayer resources.

One of the reasons for inconsistent policies and procedures is the decentralization of IT and HR services. As detailed later in this report, each of these functions has a central organization as well as extensive staff located in departments across the County. The staff within departments do not report to the central office. As a result, each department has developed policies and procedures that may or may not be consistent with the central office or with other departments. The ITS and the HRMD chapters each include a discussion and recommendations for addressing these inconsistencies.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3.5.1

Hold department directors accountable for the development of and adherence to policies and procedures that guide employees in the performance of their responsibilities. Each department should maintain a list of all policies and procedures in place in the department and the date they were last reviewed. All policies should be confirmed to be in alignment with countywide policies and should not be less restrictive than countywide policies; if department policies are more restrictive, the Commissioners Court must provide specific approval. Central support functions such as human resources, facilities, and information technology should ensure countywide policies are developed and disseminated and that monitoring of implementation is taking place to ensure consistent application.



Recommendation 3.5.2

Develop a performance audit function. There are two possibilities for developing this function: work with the County Auditor to determine if her office can provide requested performance audits or develop a position with the Planning and Budget Office (PBO) to perform this function. Conducting performance audits is an essential component of an accountable organization seeking continuous improvement.

3.6 MAXIMIZING REVENUE

Background

Like virtually all local governments, Travis County charges fees for a number of services provided to the community and to other jurisdictions and seeks grant funding to develop new initiatives and expand existing programs and services.

Findings

Setting Fees

Travis County is not maximizing opportunities to increase revenue from non-tax sources. In most cases, the revenue generated from fees falls far short of covering the costs of performing the service. The Travis County fee structure has not been comprehensively reviewed, and in many cases there has been no formal effort to determine whether the current fees support the actual cost to the County of providing the services.

While establishing new fees can be challenging, ad hoc adjustments of fees present additional issues. Often changes in fees without substantial justification face resistance from affected communities and hide the underlying subsidies and cross-subsidies (use of higher fees for one service to offset the costs of others). In recent years, governments at every level have begun to review fee structures to bring them in line with the actual cost of performing services and to provide for recoupment of costs in the future.

The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) has established a best practice protocol for establishing government charges and the fee-setting process, which includes:

- Adopting formal policies for reviewing and setting fees.
- Calculating the full cost of providing a service to provide a basis for setting the charge or fee.



- Reviewing and updating charges and fees periodically based on an index or indices that consider factors such as the impact of inflation, other cost increases, population increases, adequacy of cost recovery, use of services, and the competitiveness of current rates.²⁶

As an example at the state level, the Southern Legislative Conference also recommends and provides examples of states that have developed blanket policies for fee adjustments for government services.²⁷

The most commonly used automatic-adjustment measurement is the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which is widely used by both the public and private sectors for “indexing” salaries, benefits, contracts, taxes, and sometimes even prices. There is widespread public acceptance of the CPI as a measurement of the “cost of living.” The absence of any indexing feature increases the need for frequent cost and subsidy assessments, adding to the cost and complexity of the fee-setting process.

Seeking Grants

Numerous grant opportunities are available to local governments through federal and state agencies as well as private foundations. In Travis County, departments are responsible for identifying grant opportunities and submitting grant applications. Both the County Auditor's Office and PBO currently assist departments in the grant application approval process, and the Auditor's Office submits required reports to granting agencies on behalf of some departments. As a result of the decentralized approach to seeking grant opportunities and applying for grants, grant opportunities are missed, as discussed later in this report.

Travis County does not have a grant manual or a consistent policy or approach for grant oversight and monitoring. El Paso and Tarrant Counties both have a centralized grants office that reports to a county administrator.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3.6.1

Conduct a comprehensive review of the fee structure for all County services, with the goal of establishing fees equal to costs, accompanied by indexing to provide automatic adjustments of fees as costs change. This report contains several recommendations to increase fees in specific cases. A comprehensive review of cost recovery for services within Travis County will yield additional fee revenue opportunities.



Recommendation 3.6.2

Create a grant coordinator position within PBO to develop a coordinated strategy for pursuing and assessing grant opportunities countywide. The grant coordinator should identify and evaluate the feasibility of grant opportunities and work with departments to pursue grant opportunities that further the mission and goals of Travis County. Grant applications should also consider the long-term sustainability of the initiative after the grant funding ends.



4 COUNTY ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The Travis County Commissioners Court stated in the Request for Services for this review that it intends to evaluate the “effectiveness of the current organizational and management structure” and determine the “most structurally and operationally effective design for the County Departments reporting to Commissioners Court.”²⁸

This chapter explores the options available to the Commissioners Court for creating an organizational and administrative structure capable of addressing the issues raised in the previous chapter, developing and maintaining efficient and effective countywide operations, and providing innovative and proactive leadership for a rapidly growing County organization.

4.1 CHALLENGES WITH THE CURRENT STRUCTURE

Background

Since 1994, Travis County government has been structured around a small group of County executives and other direct reports to the Commissioners Court. Currently, there are eight positions that report directly to the Commissioners Court. Six are County executives: Planning and Budget Office (PBO), Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS), Transportation and Natural Resources (TNR), Justice and Public Safety (JPS), Emergency Services (ES), and Administrative Services (vacant for the past six years). The other two are the chief information officer (CIO) and the director of the Intergovernmental Relations Office (IGR).

Prior to 1994, 17 departments reported directly to Commissioners Court. In 1994, the Commissioners Court consolidated these departments and created five County executive manager positions to oversee the operations of the departments. This marked a significant change in consolidating administrative authority and reducing the administrative burden on the Commissioners Court.

Findings

Travis County is among the fastest growing counties in Texas, both economically and by population. It is seated in the state capital, Austin—which was named the fastest-growing city in the U.S. four years in a row (2011–2014) by *Forbes* magazine, and the second fastest growing city in the U.S. in 2015²⁹—and as such maintains a high public



profile in the state and nationally. As of 2015, Travis County is home to 1.2 million residents.³⁰

Travis County is currently the fifth most populated county in Texas and the 36th most populated of the more than 3,000 counties in the United States.³¹

With this growth have come significant challenges in managing a growing county workforce. Currently, Travis County has 5,108 employees.³² Travis County government has evolved over time to become a complex, multi-faceted organization that provides an extensive array of services to a fast-growing population. External issues such as expanding development, affordability, and more significant impacts to residents from natural disasters have challenged the Commissioners Court, the County executives, and the other direct reports to the Commissioners Court.

Challenges for Commissioners Court

The Commissioners Court is made up of individual elected officials with a unique set of constituents to whom they are accountable; commissioners have varying backgrounds and interests and differing views on communication and operations of County government. This is typical of an elected board. The role of an elected body is to advocate for and maintain relationships with constituents, set the policy direction for the organization they govern, and hire staff to carry out their policy directives and manage the programs and services provided by the county.

The current Court members have either extensive experience with the governance of Travis County or in local government policy and operations. Commissioners are committed to improving County operations and ensuring their constituents receive high-quality services from Travis County. Longevity and institutional memory are strengths of the current Court. The Commissioners Court is particularly interested in ensuring it does everything possible to provide a foundation for positive County growth and prosperity. Current commissioners and the County Judge have advocated for greater involvement in community-wide issues such as economic development and addressing affordable housing. Commissioners have also worked toward increasing accountability of their direct reports as well the functions and operations of County government.

In a 1995 review of County operations, a team from the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts prepared a report with findings that with multiple departments reporting directly to the Commissioners Court, the Court served dual roles, serving both as a governing body while retaining management responsibility for County operations.³³ The formation



of the five executive manager positions in 1994 by the Commissioners Court was expected to reduce the administrative role of the Commissioners Court. More than 20 years since this report, the Court remains involved in County administrative operations—seemingly more so than peer counties in Texas.

As measured by the number and time in meetings, the Travis County Commissioners Court is more involved in administrative decision making than five peer counties in Texas. The Travis County Commissioners Court typically has weekly voting meetings, as well as periodic work sessions and other meetings. An analysis of agendas, minutes, and video recordings posted online for Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, Tarrant, and Travis counties was conducted and the totals of the different types of meetings held by each commissioners court were tallied. The length of time for a random sampling of each type of meeting from each county were taken and extrapolated to estimate each commissioners court's total meeting time. This analysis suggests that, compared with the commissioners courts in the other major Texas counties, the Travis County Commissioners Court meets more frequently.

Table 4-1 Number of Commissioners Courts Meetings, 2015

County	Regular Meetings	Work Meetings	Other Meetings ^a	Total Meetings
Travis	56	20	11	87
Bexar	29	0	6	35
Dallas	41	0	3	44
Tarrant	45	0	3	48
Harris	21	0	11	32
El Paso	45	0	0	45
Average				48.5
Average Excluding Travis County				40.8

^aThe agendas for other types of Travis County meetings included: special voting; press conferences; county employee public hearings; public hearings; budget hearings; and budget mark-up voting. The agendas for other types of meetings for other counties included: certifying election results and other elections business; court elections; appointments; budget and capital improvements discussions; tax rate discussions; public hearings; presentations on special projects; and other general business of the court.



As shown in Table 4-1, the Travis County Commissioners Court met more than twice as many times as the average of the other five peer counties—87 meetings versus an average of 40.8 meetings.

The commissioners, the County Judge, County executives, and other County staff spend a substantial amount of work and time preparing for and attending Commissioners Court meetings. The manner in which Commissioners Court agendas are set and the frequency of the meetings has established a system that requires commissioners be involved in a detailed level of administrative decision making and one in which County executives are not fully exercising their administrative authority. Additionally, staff participating in interviews and focus groups report being frustrated that decision making within the County is very slow.

In addition to the time spent making decisions in formal meetings, involvement of the Commissioners Court in administrative operations was observed in other ways. They include:

- The Commissioners Court has not established a recent strategic plan or established a strategic direction for Travis County to provide the foundation and framework for policy and operations.
- In the absence of a strategic plan, departments report receiving unclear and conflicting goals, messages, requests, and directives from members of the Commissioners Court. In addition, members of the Commissioners Court contact staff at all levels within departments which circumvents department managers' ability to supervise requests.
- Some members of the Commissioners Court have an open door policy, which can be positive; however, such an approach also runs the risk of allowing "end runs" around the chain of command by permitting employees to take grievances and disciplinary issues directly to individual commissioners.
- Because of the lack of objective performance criteria and strategic direction, direct reports and other senior managers, including department directors, are not held accountable. In addition, this significant deficit sets up the situation where personalities and personal relationships, rather than objective data, guide decision making.



Challenges for County Executives

The Commissioners Court currently has eight executive positions that report directly to the Court. Most of these direct reports are tasked with two time-consuming jobs that require very different skill sets and types of expertise: they are expected to be department directors with subject matter expertise in the departments they manage and are expected to have administrative expertise to run county operations collectively with their peers. The executive team is also expected to address countywide operational issues as a team. The executive team reports that they work well together and this group is generally perceived as functioning effectively as a group.

The current structure has a number of limitations. Most notably, the current County structure focuses on management of departments over countywide strategic initiatives and decision making.

The eight direct reports to the Commissioners Court face several inherent challenges that hamper their ability to jointly coordinate the administration of county government:

- Current and previous managers have had varying levels of training, experience, expertise, ability, and desire to effectively manage communication with each member of the Commissioners Court, coordinate well with their peers, provide administrative leadership, and effectively manage the departments that five of them directly oversee.
- The level of responsibility that these direct reports have is dissimilar. The County executives for ES, JPS, and Administrative Operations (vacant) truly operate as executive administrators, with department directors as direct reports. The five other County executives serve a dual role as a department director and as a county executive. The director of IGR supervises one additional employee.
- The executive team is also inherently competitive, rightly advocating for the need for resources in their departments, making it very difficult to consider the needs of the organization as a whole above the needs of the departments they manage.
- The executives must manage “up”, communicating effectively with each member of the Commissioners Court, and manage “down” to effectively implement programs and services within the departments they oversee. Recruiting and retaining eight people who do both of these functions well, can work together



effectively, and who truly have the bandwidth to focus on the administration of the County as a whole will always be a challenge.

- While the Commissioners Court direct reports work with the County Judge to set the weekly Commissioners Court agenda and meet at other times to discuss and resolve issues, they are not always considered by the Commissioners Court or others in the County as an executive body with administrative and decision making authority. Without this recognition and authority, the executives operate in an advisory role, not in a decision making capacity.

The executive team does not have an on-going, formalized mechanism for working together on issues that transcend their departments. They do not convene regularly to consider current and future issues, typically tackling countywide initiatives only when they become urgent. Very little actual coordination is taking place to address countywide issues, such as disaster recovery response, economic development, strategic planning, working with other entities (such as the City of Austin) and elected officials, and resolution of the communication and accountability issues raised in the previous chapter of this report. With diffused executive authority and management by committee, decisions are slow to be made, issues are not always thoroughly vetted before consideration by the Commissioners Court, and no strategic planning occurs.

Current County executives were hired for their subject matter expertise related to the departments they manage, not for their expertise in county executive functions. While some County executives have interest and talents related to the administrative function, this is secondary to their subject matter expertise.

4.2 OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING CROSS-DEPARTMENT COMMUNICATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The magnitude of the challenges faced by Travis County related to communication and accountability warrant finding ways to improve the work environment, accelerate decision making, and actively develop plans and policies to guide County government into the future.

On-going, focused administrative support and more sustained guidance could assist the Court in addressing strategic initiatives and minimize the administrative tasks required of the Commissioners Court. Determining the most advantageous structure for Travis County government is a policy decision that the Commissioners Court will make. There are benefits and challenges to establishing a single chief executive, a decision that will



require more discussions among commissioners. Short of establishing a county administrator structure, which is discussed in the next section, the review team has identified two alternatives that could serve as interim steps to address the need for better defined lines of administrative authority and cross-departmental strategic planning within Commissioners Court departments. Following is brief discussion these two options.

- 1. Rotate lead responsibility among the current County executives.** This alternative establishes a system by which a County executive would be charged with convening cross-departmental meetings, serve as the final decision maker when needed, and work on countywide initiatives and planning. This would be an improvement to the current structure and would rotate responsibility for serving as the lead administrator among the six County executives on an annual, biannual, or quarterly basis.

Benefits: Maintaining the current organizational structure will avoid the need for commissioners and employees to adjust to a major change in County management. Rotating the lead executive would increase the likelihood that some of the challenges related to communication and accountability can be addressed. This is a cost-effective option, in that no additional positions are added. However, the County might consider a higher rate of pay for the County executive serving as the lead.

Challenges: This option perpetuates a system that expects County executives to play dual roles as administrators and managers. Some County executives will be more effective in the lead role than others, likely leading to inconsistent transitions between leads. The lack of systemic change will likely prolong many of the challenges that are pervasive under the existing structure as discussed in the previous chapter and throughout the remainder of the report.

- 2. Further consolidate administrative responsibilities in a fewer number of County executives.** One configuration could be to group departments around major themes: Community Services to include ES, HHS and VS, and JPS; Resource Management to include PBO, ITS, and Human Resources Management Department (HRMD); and Infrastructure Management to include TNR and Facilities Management Department (FMD).

Benefits: This option reduces the number of direct reports to the Commissioners Court and reduces the level of coordination needed to address countywide issues.

3. **Challenges:** While further consolidating administrative responsibilities, any reconfiguration of departments under the three County executives is somewhat arbitrary and might not result in an even distribution of resources and responsibilities. Determining the groupings may consume an inordinate amount of time and resources. With no central arbiter of the decision about how to organize departments under the three County executives, this decision could delay implementation. Hiring for these positions remains challenging because of the mix of skills required.

Considering a County Administrator

During the course of this review, the question concerning the best management structure for positioning the County to meet the challenges of growth, innovation, and efficiency led to the need to more fully explore the option of implementing a county administrator structure. A county administrator would eliminate the diffused decision making that currently hampers County operations and would provide a clear line of authority between the Commissioners Court and the departments that are charged with executing the policies of the Court.

The Texas Comptroller report from 1995 offered insight into the “blurred lines of authority” that can result from the “lack of a single executive responsible for day-to-day management” that is still relevant today, based on the current review. That report states that without a chief executive:

[L]ow-priority, low-profile programs might be allowed to function with virtual autonomy, receiving the commissioners’ attention only at budget time, with a consequent loss in reporting and management accountability. By the same token, excessive micro-management by the court could cause [programs] to devote too much time to non-critical matters.³⁴

Role of a County administrator. The traditional model of county government in the United States places a board or commission in charge of both the legislative and executive responsibilities of the county.³⁵ This means that county leaders have to stay informed not only of the political needs of their constituents, but also of the professional requirements for running their workplace.³⁶ Many counties have implemented reforms to this structure to respond to the new demands of a growing population and changes in



management technologies.³⁷ One solution has been the appointment of a county administrator.³⁸

Of the 3,007 counties in the United States, 1,323 (44 percent) have an appointed county administrator.³⁹ Seven counties in Texas have a county administrator: Bexar, Cameron, Collin, Dallas, Hidalgo, El Paso, and Tarrant.⁴⁰ According to the National Association of Counties, many county elected bodies appoint county administrators “to help with the increasing complexity of county activities and the range of responsibilities...County administrators implement the board’s policy, run the daily operations of the county and prepare the annual budget.”

A county administrator, with no programs and services to manage directly, brings a professional approach to managing and stays abreast of best practices and the latest thinking in county administration. County administrators are professional managers educated in current county management practices, state and federal laws and mandates, and cost-effective service delivery techniques.⁴¹ Of city/county administrators responding to a 2012 ICMA survey, 58 percent reported that they had earned a master’s of public or business administration or some other master’s degree, and 8 percent reported they had earned either a Ph.D. or J.D.⁴²

Professional administrators bring a community-wide perspective that allows them to take a broad and strategic view of policy and programs without getting too attached to any one special interest.⁴³ They also adhere to ethical standards set by professional associations, such as the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) or the American Society for Public Administration. Without guaranteed terms or tenure, they are subject to the approval of the governing body in their commitment to impartiality.⁴⁴ Appointing a county administrator allows commissioners to delegate day-to-day administrative responsibilities without having to sacrifice their legislative authority.⁴⁵

Implementation of recommendations from this report. The successful implementation of many of the recommendations throughout this report depends on the County having clear lines of authority and a management structure that goes beyond the current authority and responsibility of the County executives. Without a lead administrator, the County risks missing an opportunity to fully engage departments both in implementing these recommendations, and also in beginning to establish a culture and system of cross-department strategic planning, communication, and accountability.



For example, in the previous chapter it is recommended that the County develop a regular forum for communicating with elected officials throughout the County. While the recommendation suggests that this be assigned to a County executive, the ability of that County executive to effect change in another area based on feedback from elected officials may be minimal. Another example is the need for a public information officer discussed in the previous chapter. This position ideally would report outside of Records Management and Communications Resources (RMCR), but to recommend that would create another direct report to Commissioners Court; instead the recommendation is for this position to be administratively housed within RMCR, which compromises the integrity of the functions for which that position is responsible and hampers the ability of this position to work directly with department directors and County executives.

Implementing any of the recommendations will require oversight and reporting to ensure progress is made, issues identified, and obstacles removed. In lieu of a County administrator, the management of and reporting on progress would need to be done directly to the Commissioners Court. While that is not the most effective or productive use of Commissioners Court time, as noted throughout this report, it is currently the only mechanism in place to ensure accountability.

Challenges. The transition to a County administrator structure would involve a cultural adjustment in the County—for employees at all levels of the organization as well as for Travis County commissioners. Not only would reporting relationships change, but also long-established patterns of informal communication would be altered. Some County executives and others report that the relatively flat organization in Travis County is a positive feature of County government. A County administrator would not create an additional hierarchical layer within the structure of the County; rather, it would concentrate the executive functions of the current direct reports into a single individual with the sole responsibility of facilitating the management of the County. The existing County managers would continue to serve as the management and advisory body for the County.

Some Travis County commissioners, in conversations for this review, indicated concern that with a County administrator they would not have sufficient access to department directors or other County employees. County administrators in peer Texas counties acknowledge that the cultural transition was difficult for some elected officials as well as some department directors. The transition in those counties also had a number of benefits, including:

- While commissioners feared they would lose governance authority, one administrator believes they gained authority. Commissioners could focus on interactions with constituents, which they were elected to do, and found that it was easier to call the administrator to get information or to make requests to respond to constituent needs.
- Much improved communication between commissioner court departments and elected official departments.
- Shorter commissioners court meetings and fewer minor administrative changes included on court agenda.
- Commissioners court not needing to be involved in disciplinary issues.
- Improved strategic planning with commissioners court.
- Better communication among departments on strategic initiatives.

Based on conversations with county administrators in four other large counties in Texas (Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, and Tarrant), a transition to a county administrator can be best managed using advice compiled from those interviews:

- **Appoint an internal candidate.** Most of the comments to the review team about the possibility of a county administrator were related to concerns about having an “outsider” appointed who did not understand the County. A transition to this new structure could be accomplished by hiring someone known in the County who is trusted as a neutral party, has a reputation for collaboration and coordination, and is a strong, decisive leader with good communication skills. An internal candidate, even for an interim period, would help ease the transition for commissioners, department directors, and employees.
- **Hire a search firm if no potential internal candidates emerge.** An executive search firm should be engaged to provide the County with a specified number of candidates (i.e., at least five) with County administrative experience. The first El Paso county administrator was authorized in October in 2014 and lasted less than a year; the person selected had a background as a city manager, which was not a good fit. Because of the significant differences between city and county government in Texas, city management experience would not be sufficient.

- **Assemble an inclusive hiring committee.** As recommended previously for the selection of the director of HRMD (Recommendation 3.2.5), the selection process for a County administrator (whether internal or external) should be transparent and comprehensive. Elected and appointed officials should be invited to participate in the process by either serving on the hiring committee or by serving as scorers. Only with an inclusive process will the person selected have a chance at succeeding in guiding the County through needed changes in managing County operations.
- **Understand that the transition involves a learning curve and a commitment to the new structure.** There are strong feelings on both sides of the issue of changing the organizational structure. On the one hand, there are legitimate concerns about the loss of direct communication between elected officials, department directors, and employees. On the other hand, there is a desire to consolidate leadership within the administrative structure to address the current state of communication across all levels of the County that creates ill will, circumvents established protocols, and results in dysfunctional relationships throughout the County.

The future. A County administrator is not a panacea and would not solve all issues (and certainly not overnight); establishing the position would address the three most challenging issues within the County: the lack of clear, productive communication; inability to plan strategically; and improving accountability. Without a designated leader to execute the will of the Commissioners Court and to ensure accountability, these issues are likely to persist.

The Travis County Commissioners Court has a unique opportunity in the near future to consider restructuring the departments that report to the Court. Due to upcoming retirement eligibility for at least three County executives and a vacancy in the Administrative Operations County executive, streamlining county government can be more easily accomplished with minimal disruption. The review team believes that this option is the best option for Travis County in the long term.

This is a cost-effective option if the vacant Administrative Operations County executive position is reclassified to be the County administrator position. The other County executives would revert to department directors or would be eliminated through attrition, which would result in cost savings as positions are downgraded from County executives



to department directors or eliminated. All department directors would report to the County administrator.

The current organizational structure of the County has been in place for over 20 years and has ushered the County through years of high growth and increased service demands. As the County grows, County government will need to continue to evolve. The size of Travis County government and the need for responding quickly and decisively to the increasing demands on elected and appointed officials, as well as to employees and County residents, will likely result in continued discussions about creating a county administrator position and the eventual adoption of this structure at some point in the future.



5 PLANNING AND BUDGET OFFICE

The Planning and Budget Office (PBO) is comprised of two divisions: Budgeting and Economic Development and Strategic Investments (EDSI). The primary focus of the Budgeting division is the development and oversight of the County budget, with the purpose of facilitating the efficient and effective use of County resources. The Budget division works with County departments and elected officials on planning, performance measurement, program assessment, budget development, and budget implementation. The EDSI division was created in early 2016 and combines four programs or functions that previously had been operating independently within PBO:

- **County Corporations.** Supports County non-profit corporations, such as the Housing Finance Corporation, the Travis County Development Authority, and the Travis County Cultural Education Facilities Finance Corporation.
- **Cash Investment Management.** Monitors County operating funds, manages the County's investment portfolios, and manages and coordinates the depository contract for the more than 1,000 County bank accounts.
- **Strategic Resources Planning.** Works to promote informed decision making for County property and facility investments to optimize County real estate investments.
- **Compliance Reviews.** Reviews compliance as required under economic development incentive agreements for tax abatements and tax rebates.

Both divisions also conduct policy research for the Commissioners Court. The review team found that PBO is highly respected by other departments and the Commissioners Court. The findings and recommendations discussed following relate to strengthening the budgeting functions performed or monitored by PBO, increasing transparency, approaching County economic development more strategically, and developing a comprehensive County strategic plan to guide and monitor future decision making.

5.1 BUDGET DEVELOPMENT AND OVERSIGHT PRACTICES

Background

The PBO budget staff works with all Travis County departments to develop and manage the annual County budget. Specifically, PBO evaluates budget requests, makes funding recommendations to the Commissioners Court, assists with the development of revenue



projections, and monitors midyear budget and personnel adjustments. A considerable amount of PBO staff time is consumed by detailed budget oversight, analysis of budget requests, and processing midyear budget adjustments.

Findings

The primary focus of PBO budget staff is budget development and oversight, and they rightfully take these responsibilities seriously. There is a concerted effort to ensure that budget rules are clear, understood, and followed. They also work to maintain good working relationships with County departments by striving to treat them all fairly. Budget staff in various departments provided positive feedback about PBO, reporting that PBO staff are “tough but fair,” and that processes related to budgeting, while sometimes cumbersome, are not onerous.

In recent years, the County Commissioners have also asked PBO budget staff to undertake more work related to performance measurement development and policy research. However, budget staff has limited time for planning and research responsibilities due to: a budgeting culture where it is acceptable for departments to submit numerous budget requests and midyear budget adjustments; departmental budget structures that limit flexibility and necessitate numerous midyear budget adjustments; and labor-intensive budget oversight practices by PBO.

For example, according to several PBO staff members, departments put everything conceivable in their budget requests to “see what sticks,” and then use midyear budget requests to try and fund what was not approved during the budget process. PBO staff also reported that another strategy that departments use to increase their chances of getting funding is to group multiple items in a single request in hopes that the entire package will be funded. At the same time, PBO is very conservative about changing its processes to relax oversight and appears hesitant to exert authority to streamline budget process over departments that it views as peers. The result is a significant demand on staff time to analyze budget requests during budget development and midyear, and to maintain oversight of midyear budget adjustments and personnel actions.

Requests for New Funding During Budget Preparation

For the FY 2016 Preliminary Budget, PBO staff analyzed 376 budget requests from 41 departments, an average of approximately nine requests per departments. Even though PBO does not recommend funding all of the requests, some level of analysis is provided for each in order for PBO staff to be prepared to answer questions from Commissioners Court. PBO uses the prioritization specified by department and guidance from the



Commissioners Court to inform internal discussions and determine which requests they think they might recommend or the Court might approve. These requests receive the most extensive analyses by PBO staff. Analyses of all requests are compiled into an electronic file known as the “black book.” Last year, the black book was 1,219 pages.

The volume of analysis required from each analyst raises concerns as to whether PBO analysts are able to dedicate sufficient time to reviewing significant requests and to other responsibilities and functions of the department, such as planning and the development of performance-based budgeting. For fiscal year (FY) 2016, five budget analysts and two assistant budget directors reviewed an average of 54 requests each, with only six to eight weeks to study the requests, analyze them, meet with the department to discuss their preliminary recommendations, and write up their final recommendations.

Midyear Budget Requests

As fewer resources for new or existing programs have been available in recent years in the adopted budget, PBO has seen an increase in the number of midyear budget requests. PBO has stated that limiting the number of midyear budget requests would be inconsistent with their culture and past practices, and they do not want to limit the ability of the Commissioners Court to respond to a midyear request deemed critical by a department. The written budget policy pertaining to midyear budget requests is as follows:

Departmental budget increases proposed after the beginning of the fiscal year will be considered for funding if the Commissioners Court indicated during the budget mark-up process that the proposal was not yet fully developed and should be considered for funding from Allocated Reserves. Otherwise, such a funding proposal must meet the following criteria: it is of an emergency nature, funding cannot be identified internally, and it cannot be delayed until the next fiscal year without a very significant negative impact on the public.

Despite the limitations in this language, departments continue to submit requests that do not meet these criteria. The result is that departments can use midyear budget requests to circumvent the budget development process—the time when the Commissioners Court is attempting to prioritize funding for the entire County and the entire year—hindering the Commissioners Court in its ability to allocate resources strategically and creating additional work for the Court and PBO.



Midyear Budget and Personnel Adjustments

Once the budget is adopted, departments continually submit midyear budget adjustments. The budget rules specify which adjustments are “automatic” (and only require PBO approval) and which must be approved by the Court. Last year, 2,102 budget adjustments were submitted. Of these adjustments, 1,937 (over 90 percent) were automatic: 56 percent were line item changes and 22 percent were transfers between departments. Automatic budget adjustments are reviewed by a budget analyst and a budget director. Budget analysts tend to regard these reviews as inconsequential as they take less than a minute each. However, if we assume each budget adjustment results in one minute of disruption per person who must sign off on it, these reviews required almost 65 hours of PBO staff time. This estimate does not include the additional time required by the budget staff within the departments to prepare the request.

These figures can be compared with information received from Bexar County. In Bexar County, the county manager with the Budget Office approves transfers up to \$100,000 including those taking funds from the appropriated fund balance; the county commissioners must approve transfers over \$100,000. Staff interviewed in Bexar County estimated that they process approximately 100 to 150 budget adjustments per year—approximately 4 percent of what is processed by Travis County PBO. Dallas County staff estimated they have less than 100 budget adjustments per year.

Like Travis County, the Bexar County budget has large groups that expenditures are rolled into. Bexar County has five such groups: personnel, travel, supplies, operational, and capital. Travis County has seven groups: personnel, operating supplies, services, travel and professional development, employment related, court and law enforcement related, and capital. In both counties, departments can move funds within these categories and must only seek approval for transferring funding between categories.

So why does Travis County have so many more budget amendments? In part, the high number of budget adjustments is driven by departmental budget structures. When the SAP financial system was adopted, departments were given the flexibility to determine how to structure their budgets. Within the large expenditure groups listed above are smaller groups and individual commitment areas. Some departments have opted to roll up their budgets at the division level which allows more flexibility (and thus results in fewer budget adjustments) while still following budget rules. Other departments have chosen to budget further down the structure at the individual commitment item level, resulting in less flexibility and a greater need for budget adjustments. PBO prefers to



give departments the flexibility to do what works best for them rather than requiring them to all roll up their budgets.

When analyzing the budget adjustment data from last year, PBO realized that a substantial number of the midyear budget adjustments are to purchase employee business cards. Each time an employee is hired, promoted, or runs out of cards, the department submits a request for new cards, which results in budget amendments for both the requesting department and Records Management and Communications (who purchases the business cards for other departments). PBO stated that it would look at the budgeting processes surrounding business card purchases. However, the business card example is illustrative of a bigger issue: 22 percent of all budget adjustments are interdepartmental transfers, typically for the purchases for services by one department from another.

Additionally, PBO must review and sign off on any midyear personnel changes. PBO approved 3,644 personnel actions in FY 2015, an average of 520 each for the five budget analysts and two assistant budget directors. Of these personnel adjustments, 48 percent were salary changes, 27 percent were mobility changes, and 20 percent were new hires. Budget analysts report that these reviews also take less than a minute; usually the analyst reviews and approves the request without sign-off from the budget director. However, if one minute is spent reviewing each of 3,000 personnel adjustments, these reviews require approximately 61 hours of staff time.

Because there are a large number of departments in the County, many of which are quite small and might lack experienced budget staff, PBO prefers to review all midyear budget and personnel adjustments to ensure adherence to budget rules. PBO has caught errors in the past and feels that their oversight is required to both prevent problems and help departments, particularly small ones, manage their budgets.

However, this level of oversight should not be required of departments with budget staff. As described above, the types of midyear budget and personnel adjustments are minor. The fact that analysts repeatedly claimed that these reviews “take less than a minute” raises the question as to both the value and necessity of such reviews. Additionally, not only is staff collectively dedicating a substantial amount of time to reviewing minor changes, the fact that these changes can and do appear in their workload at any time, several times a week, year round, adds to the inefficiency. Research shows that brief mental blocks created by shifting between tasks can cost as much as 40 percent of someone's productive time.⁴⁶



Investing the amount of staff time described above to review minor budget and personnel changes is inefficient, particularly in light of the limited staffing resources in PBO. PBO is often asked to conduct research for members of the Commissioners Court and has been asked by the Court to move the County toward more performance-based budgeting. PBO budget staff took a training course in performance measures and is helping the departments develop more meaningful performance measures, but so far, progress has been piecemeal because of little time available to devote to these planning activities.

The Commissioners Court or PBO should change budgeting rules, policies, and procedures to enable PBO staff to use its time more efficiently and effectively. In general, the recommendations below move more responsibility for budget management to the departments, and work to create the expectation that they will live within and manage their budgets largely as initially approved.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5.1.1

Amend budget rules or PBO policies to reduce the number of budget requests analyzed during budget development. PBO should develop guidelines and criteria for which budget requests will be analyzed by PBO. Criteria for budget requests could include: alignment with Travis County strategic goals; validated, quantifiable performance measures indicating a demonstrated benefit; documented increases in caseloads; and employee health and safety issues. Requests could be triaged into one of three categories:

1. Meets new request criteria: PBO conducts analysis;
2. Partially meets criteria: may be analyzed if additional funding is identified; or
3. Does not sufficiently meet new request criteria: no analysis is conducted.

Departments would retain the ability to request a hearing if a budget request is not considered or recommended by PBO. However, such requests should not automatically be granted by the Court, otherwise there could be so many hearings that there will be no reduction—and possibly even an increase—in the amount of work demanded of PBO budget staff since they would need to prepare an analysis on each of the issues presented to the Court in a hearing.



Recommendation 5.1.2

Require the requesting department to itemize complicated or large budget requests prior to submission. Documentation submitted by departments for large budget requests should include the demonstrated needs and cost calculation for each itemized element. Budget requests that do not comply with this requirement would be returned to the departments for further development and resubmission within a set time frame. This change would push more of the work for request analysis onto the departments and facilitate the ability of PBO analysts to recommend, and the County Commissioners Court to approve, specific elements within the request.

Recommendation 5.1.3

Enforce budget rules regarding midyear budget requests to reduce the number of such requests that can be submitted. The approved Financial and Debt Policies establish criteria that are supposed to be met for midyear budget amendments to be considered. Either: (1) the Commissioners Court indicated during the budget mark-up process that the proposal was not yet fully developed and should be considered for funding from Allocated Reserves; or (2) the item is an emergency, and the department does not have funding, and funding cannot be delayed without significant negative impact to the public. Any midyear budget requests that do not meet one of these criteria in full should be rejected for consideration by PBO.

Recommendation 5.1.4

Amend budget rules or PBO policies to reduce the number of midyear budget adjustments. Some midyear budget amendments are warranted, such as revenue adjustments and changes involving capital funds. However, the volume of midyear budget adjustments currently processed appears to be an indication that department budgets were not carefully constructed, are poorly managed, or are structured in too fine a level of detail.

Some PBO staff believe that there is value in reviewing all budget adjustments as it provides an opportunity to communicate with departments about what is happening with their budgets. However, more control should be ceded to, and more budget management expected of, departmental budget staff.

- Require departments to “roll up” their budgets at the fund center (or division) level into the established, high-level commitment items instead of in lower level commitment items.** PBO staff estimated that half of budget

adjustments could be eliminated if all departments were required to roll up their budgets. The budget for each elected official should be rolled up independently of the budget of any other elected official. This recommendation would require some modifications to the current budget structure and possibly training of some departmental staff.

- **Give departments authority to make budget adjustments under a certain dollar amount.** Last year, 40 percent of non-capital budget amendments were for less than \$1,000. These adjustments have such a minor budgetary impact that they should be processed automatically, without PBO review. A cap on total annual adjustments per department could be adopted to prevent departments from using this authority as a loophole to make major budget changes. Departments found to have an excessive number or dollar amount of budget adjustments, or budget adjustments in violation of budget rules, could lose this authority; in that case, the department should be required to submit all budget adjustments to PBO and reviewed semiannually or quarterly. This clause would provide a disincentive for abusing this authority. PBO would be able to advise departments that have questions, and during the subsequent budget development process, annualize changes that should be annualized.
- **Establish a window for accepting non-time sensitive budget adjustments.** Some budget adjustments are very time sensitive, such as grant approvals that must meet deadlines or new contracts that need to be executed. However, most automatic budget adjustments are not time sensitive, such as transfers between line items for between departments for making purchases. Departments should be required to submit non-time sensitive budget amendments at a given time, semiannually or quarterly. This restriction would limit disruption to PBO and incentivize departments to develop their budgets more carefully.

Recommendation 5.1.5

Change budget rules and/or PBO policies so that PBO approval is not required for personnel actions that do not have a fiscal impact. Such actions could include changes in supervision and reassignment to other divisions within a department. These actions would be reviewed by budget staff when the budget is developed for the following fiscal year when any problems could be addressed. Departments found to have an excessive number of personnel actions in violation of budget rules would lose this authority; in that case, a department should submit all personnel actions to PBO and reviewed semiannually or quarterly. This clause would provide a disincentive for



abusing this authority. PBO would be available to provide assistance to departments, as needed, and all changes would be reviewed during development of the subsequent budget. Changes that require annualization would then be made. Department errors that result in on-going costs for which there is not an existing appropriation would have to be funded from other line items in the budget.

5.2 FULL-COST BUDGETING

Background

In the Travis County budget, the cost of internally produced services such as information technology (IT), fleet, and human resources (HR) are accounted for in the budget of the departments providing the service, not in the budgets of the user departments. As a result, the full cost to the County to provide any given program is not clearly reflected in that program's budget and is difficult to determine.

Findings

The full cost of a service or program includes all direct and indirect costs related to it. Direct costs include personnel expenses and operating costs such as materials, supplies, and travel expenses. In Travis County, only these direct costs are shown for each department in its budget. What is not currently included are the costs of internally produced services, sometimes referred to as indirect costs. Indirect costs include: (1) “market services,” for which user departments are the consumers of services provided by other County departments (i.e., information technology, vehicles, copying services, postage, legal services, records management, and facilities—rent, custodial care, and utilities); and (2) “policy and regulatory services,” which are needed organizationally but for which the user departments are more like a regulated entity than a customer (i.e., budgeting, finance, auditors, purchasing, and human resources).⁴⁷

The National Advisory Council on State and Local Budgeting, part of the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), recommends including the full cost of services in municipal budgets.⁴⁸ GFOA has published multiple best practices guides on the topic.^{49,50} GFOA has identified the benefits that can be achieved through full-cost budgeting, including:

- Governing demand. When departments and programs are charged for services, an incentive is created not to overuse them.

- Better informing budgeting and planning. When decision makers understand the full cost of a program, they can make more informed decisions about resource allocation.
- Promoting discussions about the best delivery models for services provided internally. When departments and programs are charged for services, they think harder about the value and quality of those services, which can facilitate discussions about the optimal method of service delivery (which could be centralized, decentralized, or even outsourced).
- Promoting competition in service delivery. It may be beneficial to allow departments to choose between internal service providers and private sector providers for some services, which can motivate internal service providers to improve serve delivery and increase efficiency so that they can offer more competitive prices.

Currently, determining the full cost of services for a program or department in Travis County would require substantial research. Appropriations for certain internally produced market services—including centralized computer hardware and software costs, rent, utilities, and centralized fleet services—are grouped together in the budget with recipient department appropriations each shown separately. However, to determine how much is spent on other internally produced market services—such as information technology services (Help Desk and other technology support requiring staff time), custodial costs, attorney time, copying, postage, and records management—would require requesting such information from each provider department that may or may not track their expenditures by recipient department. The costs of services provided by policy and regulatory departments—such as PBO, the Auditor's Office, Human Resources Management Department (HRMD), and the Purchasing Office—are not tracked by recipient department.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5.2.1

Plan a transition to full-cost budgeting. PBO has expressed interest in updating its budget software in the next few years, at which time a shift to full-cost budgeting should be implemented (see next recommendation). PBO should use the intervening time to determine appropriate goals for adopting full cost-of-services budgeting, which services will be in full-cost budgeting and how costs will be allocated, and how best to reflect such



information in the County budget. Department budget staff should be involved in the conversation about these changes—to incorporate their feedback and to ensure they understand the rationale and believe that the allocation process is fair. If there is a gap in time between when these policy decisions are made and when the County budgeting software is installed, the County budget publication should identify the internal costs and expenditures by each department and show each department's complete budget including all direct and indirect costs.

Recommendation 5.2.2

Move to full-cost budgeting when the County budgeting software is next upgraded. Moving to full cost-of-services budgeting is not without cost: implementation policies must be developed; changes will be required to budget policies, procedures, and software; and staff in both PBO and the departments will require training. However, costs would be minimized if this move is done in conjunction with a change in County budgeting—the software could be built to suit instead of the County paying for customization after purchase, and staff training on the new software would include the new budgeting policies, reducing training costs.

5.3 PBO POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Background

PBO does not have a policies and procedures manual for budget staff. PBO publishes many documents related to budget development, including Budget Rules and a Budget Preparation Manual. While the information in these documents inform and guide budget preparation and budget adjustments by PBO budget analysts and provide guidance on budget development for departmental budget staff, they do not provide an explanation of how budget preparation and adjustments are developed and conducted by PBO budget staff.

Findings

Although financial policies such as how target budgets and tax rates are calculated are well documented in the Budget Rules, Budget Preparation Manual, and other documents produced by PBO, internal PBO policies and procedures are not well documented. Most PBO staff have worked in the office many years. Due to this longevity, most staff are very knowledgeable about the policies and procedures, and because the office is small and cordial, staff seem willing to consult one another when questions do come up.



However, the review team did find the following examples of how the lack of a formal policies and procedures could cause inconsistencies in budget development:

- In December 2015, budget analysts and staff in Strategic Resources Planning (SRP) were asked what the policy was for reviewing capital projects. Staff in both divisions said that capital projects are “supposed” to be reviewed by SRP staff, but stated that there is no official policy in place nor a mechanism to ensure that this review occurs. However, the budget director reports that there is a mechanism in place through the PBO Access database where budget analysts are supposed to note which requests may have space implications for review by SRP. Additionally, PBO management works to ensure appropriate review by SRP and there are often verbal communications on a routine basis during the budget process.
- Feedback on PBO and the budget process was gathered from the financial staff of various departments across the County. Some reported that PBO had a policy of only recommending new personnel if they would generate revenue for the County. However, that particular policy was in the 2012 budget guidelines. The 2016 budget guidelines provide more general guidance: “...Commissioners Court directs PBO to balance the Preliminary Budget at a tax rate sufficient to cover the priorities discussed earlier in this document.” In regards to pilot programs, it states, “The Commissioners Court is supportive of innovative programs that can provide improved services, streamlined business practices, and cost reductions.” No specific written policy or guidance for budget analysts exists regarding how to review and assess requests, including those for additional staff or new technology.

Policies and procedures manuals are adopted by offices for myriad reasons. In the SRP example above, a written policy would have provided consistency and fairness in the evaluation process, helping PBO and the County to effectively manage resources by considering long-term impacts of capital funding decisions. In the second example, a written policy outlining how requests for new personnel are evaluated would have provided transparency and clarity to the budget development process, hopefully reducing speculation and rumor as to how recommendations are made.



Additional benefits from having written policies and procedures in place include:

- Aiding in succession planning.
- Providing a training and reference tool for new staff.
- Affording an opportunity for internal review for potential policies and procedures improvements.
- Preventing fraud, conflicts of interest, and/or favoritism.^{51,52}

Recommendation

Recommendation 5.3.1

Create written policies and procedures for budget development and on-going management and oversight for use by PBO staff. An internal policies and procedures manual would provide transparency, clarity, and consistency to the budget development and review process and provide clear work expectations for PBO staff.

5.4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Background

Travis County government has a myriad of economic development programs and efforts, the majority located in PBO, that historically have not been well coordinated. These programs have recently come under the management of a single program director with the intention of improving coordination, developing efficiencies, and increasing effectiveness. However, lack of clear guidance from the Commissioners Court and sufficient staff resources could impede these efforts.

Findings

Economic Development Benefits

Economic development includes a range of policies and activities designed to improve the economic and social well-being of the population by increasing employment rates and earnings, enhancing standards of living, boosting business confidence, and enhancing tax revenue that can lead to the provision of better public services. In 2014, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) surveyed city and county governments on economic development. Respondents indicated that their primary economic development goals were increasing the tax base (90 percent), creating jobs (88 percent), and improving quality of life (83 percent).⁵³



Economic development activities conducted by governments include:

- Infrastructure building and community development such as investing in highways, parks, affordable housing, crime prevention, neighborhood development, and K-12 education.
- Job creation and retention efforts including business retention and expansion, business finance, marketing, workforce development, small business development, and real estate development.
- Policies targeting broad economic objectives such as sustainable growth and affordability.

In addition to developing and implementing the types of activities just described, economic development offices often conduct research and analysis to inform economic development planning and decision making, as well as monitor the performance of economic development activities.⁵⁴

County Economic Development Resources

The majority of the economic development programs in the County are housed in PBO. These programs include: (1) Travis County Corporations, (2) Cash Investment Management, (3) Strategic Resources Planning, and (4) Compliance Reviews.

Travis County Corporations staff (2 full-time equivalent employees or FTEs) support the non-profit corporations. The corporations can issue taxable and tax-exempt bonds to assist in the financing of various projects and activities promoting economic development in Travis County, including housing, health care, and cultural and educational facilities. As part of their work supporting the Housing Finance Corporation, Corporations staff have been involved with efforts to address affordability in Travis County. For example:

- Corporations staff manage a Down Payment Assistance Program for homebuyers with incomes of up to 140 percent of the area median income.
- Corporations staff previously managed a Tenant-based Rental Assistance Program. This program provided very low-income households with utility, deposit, and rent costs for up to two years. Corporations staff managed this program in coordination with Travis County Department of Health and Human



Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS). However, the program ended at the end of 2015 when the federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant funding ended.

- Corporations staff are participating with the HHS and VS Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program staff on a multidisciplinary effort to develop a countywide affordable housing policy, a key element of the Fair Housing Plan needed for the CDBG Program.
- In January 2015, Corporations staff received authority from the Housing Finance Corporation (HFC) Board of Directors to pursue affordable housing projects where a legal subsidiary of the HFC acts as general contractor. Although these projects are very labor intensive, they enable the HFC subsidiary to collect fees from the developer who builds the project based on the sales tax exemptions provided to the master subcontractor. These fees are negotiated on a case-by-case basis and the revenue, minus the cost of expenses incurred by the HFC subsidiary, is expected to revert back to the HFC for use in other economic development projects. The HFC is currently utilizing a legal subsidiary as a general contractor on two projects.

Cash Investment Management (CIM) staff (2 FTEs) monitor County operating funds, manage the investment portfolios for the County and for another local government agency (Central Health, approximately \$1 billion total), and manage and coordinate the depository contract for the more than 1,000 County bank accounts. CIM staff are managing growing portfolios within a regulatory environment that over the past five years has increased in scope and complexity. In the current financial market, with near zero-percent interest rates, CIM staff aggressively and creatively pursue opportunities to increase revenues and returns.

Strategic Resources Planning (SRP) staff (2 FTEs) work to promote informed decision making for County property and facility investments to optimize County real estate investments. The staff provide long-range facilities planning and guidance to departments and the County based on rigorous data analysis and need projections, an understanding of County development and anticipated development patterns, and a thorough knowledge of County building assets. They work to ensure that the County is purchasing and maintaining properties with long-term needs in mind, including development concentrated on the three main County campuses, so that real estate investments are strategically used and costs are saved in the long term.



SRP staff works closely with the Transportation and Natural Resources Department (TNR) long-range planning group, utilizing its GIS tools for mapping and its Land, Water and Transportation Plan to inform their work. SRP staff also work closely with the Facilities Management Department (FMD) staff to discuss evolving facilities needs and conditions and to brainstorm mid-range planning issues. Additionally, SRP staff have worked with the City of Austin, most recently on the Travis County Exposition Center Market and Feasibility Study.

Compliance reviews required under economic development incentive agreements for tax abatements and tax rebates adopted under Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 381.004 are conducted by PBO staff. Although the Commissioners Court has indicated they are not inclined to favor entering into additional such contracts, there are still two abatement and seven rebate agreements that require annual compliance work. Formerly, this work was added to the responsibilities of a PBO budget analyst, but under the recent PBO reorganization (described in the following paragraph), it has been reassigned to the new director of the PBO Economic Development and Strategic Investments (EDSI) division.

PBO Reorganization

Until recently, the economic development functions described previously were functionally independent programs within PBO. In early 2016, PBO built on the informal collaborative efforts that had been taking place over the past few years and brought these programs together in a new division called Economic Development and Strategic Investments (EDSI). The EDSI division is overseen by a director who provides additional resources to each program for tracking overlapping issues and both formalizes and facilitates collaborative efforts between the programs.

EDSI Resource Needs

The economic development programs within EDSI function with very little staff. Staff for each program are able to fulfill basic requirements, but there are many opportunities for long-term planning, coordination, and additional services that are or might be missed because of insufficient staffing. For example:

- County Corporations' Tenant-based Rental Assistance Program ended because federal funding is no longer available. This program helped address affordability issues in Travis County, was well utilized, and received very good feedback from the participants it served. Corporations staff have discussed the possibility of developing a similar program with the County HHS and VS. However,



developing such a program is not feasible with the current revenue stream of the Corporations, and it would be an additional responsibility for staff that is already fully committed.

- CIM staff are required to spend approximately one-half of their time conducting basic account maintenance and oversight, which allows limited time for in-depth research of new investments that potentially could provide increased returns from the portfolios they manage. Additionally, CIM staff have the knowledge and skills to provide financial analysis of property investments for SRP and to assess possible returns on investment in affordable housing projects for the HFC, but they are unable to do so because of lack of staff time.
- SRP would like to provide more reporting of County demographic information and trends for use in real estate-related decision making; further refine plans for under-utilized County properties; and develop the Preventative Maintenance, Facilities Improvements, and Real Estate Portion of the County Capital Improvement Plan—work on these efforts is currently on hold due to lack of staffing resources.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5.4.1

Provide specific direction to EDSI regarding both the priorities for County economic development and the tools that should be used. EDSI initiated this conversation with the County commissioners on February 9, 2016, when the new EDSI director appeared before the Commissioners Court to seek guidance as to which economic development efforts the subdivision should prioritize. The presentation began with an overview of County demographic information, such as employment, education, and housing maps, presented by the Capital Area Council of Governments. The EDSI director then presented a matrix of traditional economic development tools used by, or potentially available, to the County.

The feedback received from commissioners was quite broad. Commissioners expressed interest in prioritizing economic development around certain issues (including housing, employment, income inequality, education, workforce, amenities, and transit); by utilizing particular tools (such as tax increment financing, tax increment reinvestment zones, public improvement districts, and venue taxes); focusing in various locations (such as East Austin and the Expo Center); and via collaborations with assorted other



parties (including chambers of commerce, the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau, the City of Austin, and the education and health care communities).

As the County is effectively launching a new effort to define and develop a coordinated economic development effort, such broad ideas are a reasonable and appropriate starting point. However, for EDSI to strategically use its limited staff and limited County financial resources most effectively, it will need more specific guidance on priorities, particularly in regards to the issues on which it should focus and the tools that it should use. For example, affordability appears to be a criterion that should be paramount for economic development planning given the frequency with which it has been raised as a concern by the County Commissioners Court. Developing a full set of priorities will require multiple conversations with EDSI, as well as information and assessments pertaining to County demographics, need assessments, trends, and best practices.

Recommendation 5.4.2

Identify the staffing resources needed to implement the Commissioners Court's economic development goals for Travis County. The scope of economic development work in which the County commissioners have expressed interest is beyond the capacity of EDSI to implement given its current staffing allocation. However, this work will be key to facilitating the type of dynamic yet affordable growth and development both the Court and County residents hope to see in future years. Additional staff will be needed so that EDSI can dedicate more time and energy to planning, analysis, collaborations, and new and on-going projects and initiatives. PBO should present a staffing plan to the Commissioners Court based on the economic development direction and goals provided by the Court and its anticipated needs for implementing them.

5.5 COUNTYWIDE STRATEGIC PLANNING

Background

Travis County has a mission statement to guide the strategic direction of the County, but it was last updated in the early 1990s, is not on the County web site, and is not well known by County employees. In addition to the mission and goals, individual commissioners and the County Judge have made their individual priorities known publicly. However, without a strategic plan that outlines County goals and objectives, departments develop their own programs, goals, and objectives based on a variety of factors, including state legislation, County code, current events, industry and sector area trends, and the interests and experience of department and program leaders. The result



is a lack of focus in program development and planning that prevents the County from strategically prioritizing its investments in the community.

In early 2016, PBO created the ESDI division. Although this division includes two planning staff, they are specifically focused on County facilities planning; other strategic planning activities in this division are focused on economic development activities only. Planning staff are also scattered across a number of other departments whose efforts are focused on specific program areas, not part of a comprehensive County strategic planning effort. No centralized planning occurs to guide the use of County resources.

Findings

Commissioners Court Mission and Goals

The County mission statement is:

For the people of Travis County, our mission is to preserve health, provide a safety net for the needy, ensure public safety, facilitate the resolution of disputes, foster an efficient transportation system, promote recreational activities, and manage county resources in order to meet the changing needs of the community in an effective manner.

This statement was adopted in the early 1990s. County commissioners and the County Judge have also made statements about their priorities, which have frequently included a concern about maintaining affordability, something not reflected in the County mission statement.

County Planning Staff

Although many planning efforts are taking place in County departments, these efforts are not necessarily connected to the County mission. PBO has two SRP staff that conduct long-range planning pertaining to County facility needs using data on County demographic, growth, and real estate trends, and projections of County government growth. Their work includes the development of a Facilities Master Plan, plans for the three County campuses, planning for major projects (such as the civil and family court project), and projections of long-term County staffing needs.

Planning staff are located in other departments as well: Justice and Public Safety (JPS) has five planning staff; TNR has 10 planning staff; and HHS and VS has 11 planning staff. These planners are involved in planning specific to their fields; for example, TNR



staff include four long-term planners and six GIS staff, and the planners in JPS focus on justice-related research, data collection, and model generation.

Five-Year Plans and Performance Measures

According to PBO staff, the court has been requesting more long-term planning and to move toward greater performance-based budgeting. Toward that end, all of the departments that report directly to the Commissioners Court are now required to develop five-year operations plans and report on them annually. In 2015, all PBO budget analysts completed a performance measure training provided by Rutgers University so that they would all have a similar understanding of performance measures, and departments were required to include performance measures in their five-year plans. The five-year plans are submitted outside the budget cycle. These plans focus on each department's five-year priorities, performance measures, and results. Some include the department's individual mission statement, but these plans are not tied to the County's mission statement.

As part of its increased focus on performance-based budgeting, PBO now requires each department that reports directly to the Commissioners Court to include in its budget submission its mission statement, strategic goals, annual and/or long-term work plans, and additional "program needs, mandated requirements, various growth factors, etc., that need to be considered in the next five years." Each program's budget submission must include program goals, objectives, and performance measures. All budget requests also must include a description of program measurement and evaluation criteria and the anticipated impact on program performance.

To help departments develop useful and rigorous performance measures, PBO offered both optional introductory and advanced performance measurement classes for departmental budget staff and added an appendix on performance measures to the budget preparation manual. Additionally, it created an opportunity for departments to receive funding to pilot new, short-term initiatives with a requirement that the participating departments develop relevant performance measures with their PBO staff that would be used for program assessment.

PBO staff reports that the effort to develop performance measures and five-year plans is a work in progress—departments that report directly to the Commissioners Court are developing these budget elements, and elected officials are being encouraged to do so to assist with planning, but PBO staff has limited time available to dedicate to planning. As a result, while the intentions behind these efforts to increase both accountability and



planning are commendable, the efforts are scattershot, the performance measures are primarily output-based, and the plans and performance measures are not clearly linked to the County mission. Without a County strategic plan, neither departments nor the County Commissioners Court can systematically direct resources and attention to the County's most important priorities.

Best Practices

Strategic planning is a management tool intended to help organizations assess the current environment, envision the future, establish priorities, and use this information to guide decision making. It has come to be accepted as a best practice for local governments. The GFOA approved strategic plans as a best practice in 2005.⁵⁵ Its guide on strategic planning states:

Strategic planning is about influencing the future rather than simply preparing or adapting to it. The focus is on aligning organizational resources to bridge the gap between present conditions and the envisioned future. GFOA recommends that all governmental entities use some form of strategic planning to provide a long-term perspective for service delivery and budgeting, thus establishing logical links between authorized spending and broad organizational goals.⁵⁶

The ICMA includes strategic planning as one of five key management tools that have become “professional norms” among local governments and notes that approximately half of municipalities with populations of 2,500 or more use strategic planning.⁵⁷ Of the five Texas comparisons counties, four have strategic plans: Dallas County has a 10-year plan; Tarrant and Harris Counties have five-year plans; and El Paso County has a plan with no specified length of time noted.

The Urban Institute explicitly connects strategic planning and performance measurement:

Strategic planning looks ahead toward desired goals; performance measurement looks back at achievements. Combined, strategic planning and performance measurement form a circle—a continuous process of governing for results. The strategic plan defines the performance to be measured, while performance measurement provides the feedback that keeps the strategic plan on target. The connection strengthens both processes.⁵⁸



Various types of indicators can be used when developing performance measures. Currently, the measures used in Travis County are primarily output based; that is, measures of the quantity or number of units produced. While these measures are often easily measurable and usually under managerial control, a wider spectrum of measures is needed to understand different aspects of program performance and provide information to decision makers that can be useful in evaluating programs and determining means for effective change. Fairfax County, Virginia, a leader in performance measurement, requires each program to have at least one of each of the following five types of performance measures:⁵⁹

- **Output.** Units produced (for example, the number of cases processed, purchase orders issued, or children immunized).
- **Input:** The value of resources used to produce an output (for example, dollars spent, or staff time used).
- **Efficiency.** Inputs used per unit of output (for example, cost per appraisal, or number of plans reviewed per reviewer).
- **Service Quality.** The degree to which customers are satisfied with a program, or how accurately and timely a service is provided (for example, percent of respondents satisfied with a service, or the average days to address a work order).
- **Outcome.** Qualitative consequences associated with the service, or the ultimate benefit to the consumer (for example, reduction in the number of injuries, or the percent of juveniles not reconvicted within a year).

Recommendations

Recommendation 5.5.1

Reassess the County's mission and establish five to seven broad goals. The current mission statement was developed over 20 years ago and incorporates goals that do not necessarily reflect the priorities of the County today. GFOA recommends a 13-step process for strategic planning that begins with establishing a mission, assessing environmental factors, identifying critical issues, and agreeing on a small number of broad goals.⁶⁰ The current Travis County mission statement incorporates seven broad goals. The County Commissioners Court should reassess the County's mission



statement, revise it if needed, and clearly establish five to seven broad goals that will provide strategic direction to County departments and offices.

Recommendation 5.5.2

Require all County departments and offices to develop a strategic plan linked to the County's mission and goals. The County Commissioners Court should set the expectation that strategic planning tied to the County's mission is a priority. It should require all County departments and offices under their purview to convert their five-year operating and performance measure plans into strategic plans linked to the County's missions and goals. The departments' strategic plans should clearly identify how each departmental program, and its associated performance measures, tie to the County's goals.

PBO should be given the responsibility for coordinating this effort as it falls within the scope of its countywide planning responsibilities. PBO staff should develop guidelines for departmental strategic planning efforts based on best practices. Departments should be given assistance from PBO and up to a year's time to work with its staff, stakeholders, and the Commissioners Court to develop a strategic plan.

Recommendation 5.5.3

Develop a centralized, countywide planning office located in PBO. One of the responsibilities of this office should be to convene a quarterly meeting of planning representatives from Justice Planning, TNR, and HHS and VS to develop a countywide planning strategy that is supported by planning staff throughout the County. Another responsibility would be to assist the departments as they convert their five-year operating and performance measure plans into strategic plans linked to the County's missions and goals as recommended previously. PBO will need additional staff resources for this office. There is a recommendation later in this report to move vacant planning positions from HHS and VS to PBO to address this need.



Recommendation 5.5.4

Develop diverse, measurable, and accurate performance measures for each County department. This effort will be led by PBO, but each department will be responsible for developing its own performance measures to which it will be held accountable. PBO already has the fundamental knowledge for assisting departments with the development of performance measures. PBO should also establish guidelines for departments as they further develop, refine, and adopt a broad spectrum of performance measures for each program.



6 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

The human resource (HR) structure in Travis County has evolved over many years as County leadership has struggled over policies concerning centralization versus decentralization of HR services. The current Human Resources Management Department (HRMD) states its mission to be “a strategic partner in developing the potential of the County’s greatest asset – its employees...” However, HRMD is a relatively small organization as a result of the shift to allowing departments to develop their own HR staffing components.

HRMD is organized around functions. Seven units work to meet the HR needs of the County: Benefits Administration, Staff Management, Organizational Management, Compensation, Information Systems, Employee Health Clinic, and Risk Management.

HRMD is focused on improving services to the departments through improved technology solutions such as the recent purchase of the Talent Management system and Onboarding software that will fully automate the recruitment and hiring process. Organizational changes have separated recruitment from organizational development, and the recent hiring of a recruitment manager provides the management focus needed to improve staff recruitment. Significant changes to the County HR organization and software are required to build effective HR capacity and to improve trust between HRMD and the departments—HRMD will need to understand and support the business needs of each department.

6.1 ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

Travis County has a highly decentralized human resource structure that contributes to a lack of uniform, standardized policies and procedures. The role of HRMD has been diminished over the years, leading to its inability to meaningfully manage County human resources.

Background

Private sector businesses know that talent management is one of their most important corporate functions. Three best practices are universally discussed in HR literature that public sector human resource systems should consider.⁶¹

- **Know your people.** Good human resource management means understanding, not only the skills, knowledge, and abilities of the workforce in each department,

but knowing the short- and long-term strategic goals of a department. Employees are more than job titles, and documenting how employees benefit an organization goes a long way to ensure a good match that promotes employee satisfaction and the opportunity for a department to meet its strategic goals.

- **Look at the work, not the job.** Filling jobs is not the primary role of human resources. HR's most significant role is understanding the work that needs to be done and creatively finding ways to ensure the right people with the right skills are found. HR should work to overcome bureaucratic barriers such as titles, departments, functions, and merely doing "head counts" to ensure the HR structure is working for the best interest of the organization.
- **Plan for what is next.** Effective private sector HR departments do a good job of planning ahead and anticipating changes so that when business needs change, the right people are in place. HR strategic planning in the public sector needs to ensure recruitment and training needs are in place to meet mission critical functions throughout the government entity.

Effective organizations find the right balance between centralized and decentralized operations. Highly decentralized organizations can lead to the development of independent functions, inconsistent interpretation and application of policy, and costly duplication. At the same time, overly centralized operations may not be responsive to customer needs or understand business requirements.

Findings

Staffing and Organizational Structure

In addition to HRMD, seven departments have dedicated human resource professionals; 92 other administrative personnel in the remaining departments have human resource functions as some part of their responsibilities.

HRMD employs 17 staff dedicated to general HR functions; this count excludes the HRMD Director, benefits, health clinic and risk management. Based on a Travis County workforce of 5,000, this equates to one HR staff in HRMD for every 294 employees, shown in Table 6-1.

Table 6-1 Human Resources Management Department Staffing

Title	Number of Positions	Number of Positions Per HR Staff
Administrative Assistant	1	
Human Resources Manager II	2	
Human Resources Analyst I	2	
Human Resources Specialist Senior	4	
Human Resources Analyst Senior	1	
Human Resources Analyst Specialist	1	
Human Resources Assistant Senior	1	294
Human Resources Financial Analyst Lead	1	
Employment Specialist	1	
Compensation Manager	1	
Business Analyst	1	
Human Resources Assistant I	1	
Subtotal	17	
Human Resource Management Director	1	
Human Resources Manager II (Benefits)	1	
Benefits Administrator	1	
Leave Coordinator	1	
Benefits Assistant Senior	2	
Health and Wellness Program Administrator	1	

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

Additionally, seven departments have dedicated HR staff with varying ratios of staff to employees, many of which are less than HRMD. Table 6-2 displays the three departments subject to this review, all of which have significantly lower ratios than HRMD as a whole.



Table 6-2 Human Resource Staff by Departments under Review

Department	Title	Number of Positions by Title	Total Number of Positions	Number of Positions Per HR Staff
Transportation and Natural Resources	Human Resources Assistant II	1	4	96
	Human Resources Manager I	1		
	Human Resources Specialist I	2		
Health and Human Services and Veterans Services	Human Resources Assistant I	1	3	79
	Human Resources Manager I	1		
	Human Resources Specialist Senior	1		
Facilities Management	Human Resources Specialist I	1	2	67
	Human Resources Specialist II	1		
TOTAL			9	

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

To ensure a complete representation of HR functions within the entire County, Table 6-3 displays the number of positions in departments outside the scope of this review that are designated as having some HR responsibilities.

Table 6-3 Human Resource Staff by Departments Outside of Review

Department	Title	Number of Positions by Title	Total Number of Positions	Number of Positions Per HR Staff
Sheriff's Office	Human Resources Assistant II	2	9	179
	Human Resources Assistant Senior	4		
	Human Resources Manager II	1		
	Human Resources Specialist I	1		
	Human Resources Specialist II	1		
District Attorney	Human Resources Manager I	1	1	205
Juvenile Probation	Human Resources Assistant Senior	1	1	466
Pretrial Services	Human Resources Assistant II	1	1	72

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

Travis County spends \$1.6 million in salaries for HR positions in seven of the departments under review; total spending on HR staffing across the County is just over \$2.3 million.



Table 6-4 Human Resource Staff and Salaries by Department Summary

Department	Number of HR Staff	Salaries (w/o benefits and overhead)
Human Resources Management Department*	17	\$1,125,538
Transportation and Natural Resources	4	\$222,020
Health and Human Services and Veterans Services	3	\$195,713
Facilities Management	2	\$113,613
Subtotal	26	\$1,656,884
Sheriff's Office	9	\$508,118
District Attorney	1	\$68,096
Juvenile Probation	1	\$44,048
Pretrial Services	1	\$35,576
Subtotal	12	\$655,838
		\$2,312,722

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

*Does not include risk management, health benefits staff, leave coordinator or health clinic salaries.

This spending and employee count does not include the portion of the salaries of the 92 administrative personnel who have some responsibility for HR. As noted in Table 6-5, HRMD identifies 92 positions in 38 departments throughout the County that are generally administrative staff with some portion of their responsibilities listed as HR liaison or contact. While the amount of time these staff spend on HR duties varies greatly, it is a considerable resource throughout the County.



Table 6-5 Other Department HR Liaisons

Department	Number of HR Contacts
County Judge	1
County Commissioner-Pct 1	2
County Commissioner Pct 2	2
County Commissioner Pct 3	1
County Commissioner Pct 4	1
County Auditor's Office	4
County Treasurer	1
Tax Collector	3
Planning and Budget Office	7
General Administration	1
Information and Telecommunications	4
Records Management and Communication Resources	2
Purchasing Office	2
County Attorney	1
County Clerk	5
District Clerk	4
Civil Courts	2
Criminal Courts	2
Probate Court	1
Justice of Peace 1	2
Justice of Peace 2	2
Justice of Peace 3	3
Justice of Peace 4	1
Justice of Peace 5	2
Constable 1	3
Constable 2	4
Constable 3	3
Constable 4	2
Constable 5	2
Medical Examiner	3
Community Supervision and Corrections	3
Travis County Counseling and Education Services	2
Juvenile Public Defender	1
Emergency Services	4
Civil Service Commission	1
Justice Planning	5
STAR Flight	2
Legally Mandated Fees	1
Total	92

Source: Data provided by dated HRMD

The organizational structure for the HR system in Travis County differs from peer counties; all four peer counties investigated (Bexar, Tarrant, El Paso, and Dallas) report



centralized systems in which all HR professionals are housed in the central HR department and report through the chain of command to the county HR director. These counties also report that most elected officials' departments opt into the county HR system based on two factors: (1) HR has been able to help them clearly understand the liabilities for not following administrative procedures; and (2) a trust in the quality of services provided by a central HR department—something that has been built over many years of responsive services to address each department's unique missions and operations.

According to the latest Bloomberg BNA *HR Department Benchmarks and Analysis* 2015–2016 survey of 348 human resource executives and professionals (11 percent in government), the median ratio of human resource staff to employees is 1.3 HR employees for every 100 workers.⁶² This translates to a benchmark of about 65 HR professionals for the 5,000 employees of Travis County. The combined number of HR staff (17 HRMD employees and 21 HR titles in seven departments) equals 38. This number increases when including a percentage of the 92 positions in the other departments that have HR responsibilities as part of their administrative duties. Estimating that these administrative staff spend about 20 percent of their time on HR activities (20 percent of 92 positions = 18.4 full-time equivalents or FTEs), this brings the total HR staff FTEs in Travis County to 56.4. Compared to the benchmark of 65 HR professionals for the entire 5,000 employee compliment, this suggests that HR functions in Travis County are understaffed.

The analysis of the HR system in the County suggests:

- HR functions are generally understaffed compared with national benchmarks. HRMD does not have the capacity to operate as a high-functioning central HR department for the County.
- The decentralization of HR and the inability to mandate countywide policies and procedures has led to inconsistencies in interpretation and enforcement of HR policies and procedures. Even within the Commissioners Court departments, policies are not uniformly applied, and departments have developed their own policies and procedures, which may or may not be consistent with Title 2, Chapter 9 through 18 of the County Code. HRMD has few written procedures based on County Code policy that provides additional guidance to departments. In the absence of a countywide HR manual, departments have developed their own procedures. For instance, the Transportation and Natural Resources



Department (TNR) has a staff manual that includes a range of procedures, including HR policies and procedures for hiring practices and disciplinary action that outlines the policy, goals and objectives, and procedures to be used for progressive discipline.⁶³ The Facilities Management Department (FMD) has a Hiring Procedures Manual that provides guidance to anyone participating in the FMD hiring process.⁶⁴

- HRMD is viewed primarily as a personnel action processor, not a full partner in understanding each department's needs and supporting departments in fulfilling HR responsibilities. While HRMD holds quarterly meetings with department liaisons, they are not perceived as working meetings that foster positive interaction among departments and HRMD.
- The organizational structure of HRMD is organized around functions, not necessarily around staff liaisons by department. This prevents HRMD from adequately responding to a department's needs by having a department expert who understands a department's strategic mission, HR talent requirements, and HR issues that could be unique to a department. Units within HRMD have defined responsibilities around HR policies and procedures, such as recruitment, compensation, and leave, which can prevent HRMD employees from having a more general knowledge base. Departments report when questions arise or an issue must be addressed, they are often required to go to multiple units within HRMD or are simply advised by HRMD to read the County Code. HRMD does not have the organizational philosophy of "ownership" of calls by HRMD staff through to a satisfactory conclusion.
- There are no performance measures that track the quality of services provided by HRMD. The department does not track such basic procedures as the length of time it takes to fill a vacancy, timeliness and adequacy of employee evaluations, or turnover rates. This gap prevents HRMD and County leadership from establishing meaningful benchmarks and accountability measures.
- HRMD's recent issuance of a customer satisfaction survey was designed to assess employees' satisfaction with working for the county. It does not provide information to determine issues concerning employee morale, department-specific HR issues, or other factors that would make it a valuable tool to evaluate where efforts need to be prioritized to have the most positive impact.



- The turnover in HRMD leadership has hindered the County's ability to develop and sustain workable, long-term solutions to identified HR issues.

Employee Complaints and Grievances

The pre-deprivation meetings that are part of the employee complaint and grievance process are well managed; however, the management and oversight of the grievance process needs to be extensively broadened to improve the system. Currently, pre-deprivation meetings are held to review department complaints, and possibly negotiate a settlement, when there is an employee performance issue that warrants some disciplinary action, up to and including possible dismissal. HRMD has reports that show on average five pre-deprivation meetings are held per month, although these are not tracked by department. If the employee is not satisfied with the resolution during a pre-deprivation hearing, the employee has the right to file a formal grievance.

In addition, HRMD contracts with Austin Dispute Resolution Services (ADRS) to mediate complaints. The contract is used to resolve conflicts between employees and supervisors or between employees, although a report of referrals since 2010 show only about two or three referrals per year to ADRS.

HRMD does not collect or monitor employee complaints or their resolution from departments unless they are brought to its attention for a pre-deprivation meeting or conflict resolution services. In employee focus group meetings, staff and supervisors in Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS) report significant issues with the process and outcome of complaints and grievances. No data, however, is available to make any determination about the number of complaints or grievances, how they are handled, or what interventions are needed to improve the system.

HRMD's ability to identify issues and trends and to intervene to address problems is significantly hindered without comprehensive tracking of, and HRMD's involvement in, complaints at the department level.

Employee Evaluations

Employee evaluations are a paper process that has little oversight, standardization, or data available—HRMD does not monitor or manage evaluations. The Commissioners Court revised the evaluation policy in September 2015 to reinstate a pay for performance system that was suspended in 2006. The new system establishes a three-point scale: those scoring a one (1) will receive no increase in pay and may be put on a need to improve process; those scoring a two (2) will receive a raise in pay as established through the budget process; and those scoring a three (3) will be eligible for



a portion of a special fund allocated to each department through the budget process. HRMD is now required to track evaluations, determine each department's level of compliance with policy, and report to the Commissioners Court on a regular basis.

The employee evaluation process will be difficult to manage without a technology solution. The County has budgeted for the purchase of Success Factors, a software package to support the evaluation system which is part of SAP (the enterprise resource planning software used by Travis County); however, HRMD has not begun the work to design the evaluation instrument and process to be used by Success Factors. Until this is done, the new evaluation system cannot be adequately implemented.

Information Technology

Information Technology (IT) solutions to support all aspects of HR procedures are limited.

- The recent purchase of Onboarding software will help to manage the actual hiring paperwork; however, the lack of a robust electronic personnel file will inhibit the County's ability to maintain a centralized electronic personnel file for employees. Even with Onboarding, employee files will remain paper-based with Payroll, individual departments, and HRMD continuing to have various parts of employee files in hard copy.
- The components of the Talent Management system, the SAP software purchased by the County to support HR operations, are only partially available, and what is available is not being used by all departments. Qualifications management software is used on a limited basis; however it needs to be revised to address new performance management policies. Learning Solutions is being implemented to support training registration and tracking.
- Reports are not produced regularly that would provide management with information to track and manage HR functions.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6.1.1

Increase HRMD staff resources through (1) targeted hiring, (2) redeployment or better use of department HR staff resources, and (3) restructuring HRMD staff into cross-functional teams. HRMD staff resources should be enhanced. At the same



time, it is recognized that there is little trust that HRMD is capable of meeting department HR needs, so simply adding staff is not the entire solution. Addressing the long-term issues and positioning HRMD to be a trusted HR advisor to departments will take a series of actions and sustained support over the long-term.

The County can increase HRMD resources by targeting hiring (converting HR vacancies in departments to new positions within HRMD) and/or redeploying a small number of current department HR resources to HRMD. At the same time, the needs of departments have to be individually addressed—large departments with dedicated HR staff have different needs than small departments, and HRMD should establish working relationships accordingly. Having a liaison in HRMD to work with the large departments can greatly enhance HRMD's knowledge of and assistance in meeting the departments' business needs. Smaller departments will also benefit from an identified HRMD resource, as they do not have the resources to dedicate to HR issues. The goal for strengthening HRMD's management of HR throughout the County is consistent application of policies and procedures and providing quality services to departments.

A first step should be to reassigned the three HHS and VS HR staff to HRMD. These staff should work under the direct supervision of HRMD to immediately improve the HR processes in HHS and VS from recruitment, hiring, and evaluations to the complaints/grievance process. In the mid-term, targeted HR staff vacancies in departments should be transferred to HRMD.

In addition to increasing staffing levels, HRMD staff should be organized in cross-functional teams that assign an HR professional to each department or business unit in the County. HRMD would have an expert who understands the business needs of and could more effectively provide HR support to each department.

These actions will begin to establish HRMD as a trusted advisor and help to bring departments, including elected officials, into a more centralized system without losing the benefits of decentralization. Success depends on hiring a respected and competent HR director who can lead the County through this transition and obtain Commissioners Court support for required administrative changes.

Recommendation 6.1.2

Develop a human resources strategic plan with realistic objectives that can be tracked. As discussed in more detail in Section 6.1, HRMD should develop a meaningful strategic plan that solicits department (customer) input to identify priorities,



establishes realistic tasks, and sets timelines. Doing so will give County leadership, HRMD, and the departments a path to resolve long-standing HR issues and focus on progress toward completion of each priority. Performance measures should include both process and quality measures, such as timeliness of filling positions, turnover, and employee satisfaction. These measures should be tracked in spreadsheets until automated systems can be developed to track and report these measures.

Recommendation 6.1.3

Standardize procedures by developing and issuing a Human Resources

Procedures Manual. HRMD should take the lead in developing a countywide Human Resources Procedures Manual that provides more detail than is available in Title 2, Chapters 9 through 18 of the County Code. Since some departments have developed their own manuals, HRMD should start by collecting these documents, reviewing them for accuracy and suitability for inclusion in an HRMD manual, and building additional procedures as needed. A good example of this is the recent development of a policy manual on the recruitment, hiring, and employment of interns in the County, giving departments a clear and comprehensive written document to assist them in managing the intern process.

For example, departments and new employees would benefit from a new hire checklist that outlines each of the new hire requirements, such as how to obtain key cards, notice to mailroom of new employee name and address, securing an identification badge, and assignment of equipment. An ethics policy and code of conduct should be included in the manual and discussed and distributed to employees at the New Employee Orientation.

Recommendation 6.1.4

Organize a workgroup of HRMD and department representatives to revamp the employee evaluation system, including implementing IT solutions. HRMD should prioritize work to design and implement procedures that address the new evaluation policy approved by the Commissioners Court. It is critical that a uniform process be established to ensure employees are treated consistently. This work must be done before the available technology solution can be implemented. Training of managers and supervisors is vital to this effort, and HRMD should lead that effort.



Recommendation 6.1.5

Develop reporting and tracking procedures for employee complaints and grievances and report data to the Commissioners Court quarterly. Two procedural improvements to the complaint/grievance process should be implemented:

- HRMD should collect data from all complaint/grievance sources by department and develop comprehensive reports that clearly identify the extent to which employee complaints/grievances are filed and their outcomes. Data should be analyzed to identify trends and the need for HRMD intervention when problems are discovered.
- HRMD should be involved in all aspects of complaints/grievances to closely monitor that County policy is being followed. HRMD should more closely oversee, and participate in, each department's processes.

Recommendation 6.1.6

Prioritize technology solutions. Some technology solutions are available but are not being fully utilized; additional software is needed to enhance and support HR procedures. Implementing—and requiring use of—IT solutions will enhance efficiency and give HRMD the tools needed to adequately manage the HR system in the County. All components of currently available software, such as Onboarding and Talent Management, should be used fully. Additional capabilities, especially an electronic personnel file, should be implemented.

6.2 RECRUITMENT AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

The Travis County human resource system should focus on establishing a robust recruitment and retention initiative, as well as comprehensive succession planning to ensure the County has the talent needed for the future.

Background

Many factors converging on business and government require a focused and organized approach to retention of employees: the economy is improving; young workers look for career growth and motivation more than new employees in past generations; there is a greater demand for technical and professional expertise; and social media tools make it easier to look for a job.



In today's workforce, compensation plays a role in recruiting and retaining good workers; however, other factors such as job fit, career opportunities, and the work environment are equally important to younger workers.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) estimates recruitment costs an organization as much as 50 to 60 percent of an employee's salary; total costs of turnover, when including lost productivity and training, costs as much as 90 to 200 percent of an employee's salary.⁶⁵ The real cost of an employee leaving the workforce includes: advertising for the position; screening, interviewing and hiring; training and management time for new employee orientation; lost productivity; reduced efficiency for new employees who have no institutional knowledge; and impact on the organization's morale when remaining employees see high turnover.

Succession planning is another area of growing importance that requires focused initiatives to prepare Travis County for the future. According to SHRM, both public and private sector employers are facing gaps in the readiness of employees to assume positions in high-level professional, management, and technical positions.⁶⁶ This exodus of professionals will cause a significant loss of "organizational memory."

Succession planning identifies the potential gaps in management and technical positions and can be used as a roadmap for recruiting and developing employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities to prepare them for advancement. Succession planning, linked to an organization's long-term goals that match strategic management and human resource functions, assists an organization in preparing for potential gaps in the organization and provides key employees with a clear career path for the future.

Findings

As shown following, Travis County's turnover rate has increased from 9.6 percent of the workforce in 2014 to 11.8 percent in 2015, a 23.4 percent increase (470 to 580) in one year. This trend is expected to continue and grow, especially as the workforce ages and more people are eligible to retire; the retirement rate has similarly increased from 135 in 2014 to 164 in 2015 (21.5 percent). A recent report from the Travis County and District Retirement System (TCDRS) shows 19 percent of the current workforce (922 employees) are still working though eligible to retire as of December 31, 2015; 38 percent of the current workforce (1,853 employees) are eligible to retire over the next five years.⁶⁷ While it is not known how many employees will take advantage of this opportunity, even a fraction doing so will have a significant impact on the Travis County workforce.



**Table 6-6 Countywide Turnover Rate
(Not Including Transfers)**

	Number of Positions	Percent of Workforce
2014	470	9.6%
2015	580	11.8%

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

Table 6-7 Turnover Due to Retirements

	Number of Positions	Percent of all Turnover	Percent of Workforce
2014	135	28.7%	2.8%
2015	164	28.3%	3.3%

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

The turnover rates among departments subject to this review are higher than the County as a whole. As shown in Table 6-8, the overall turnover rate for these departments is 13.9 percent, ranging from a high of 21.9 percent in Counseling and Education Services to a low of 5.6 percent in the Purchasing Office.

Table 6-8 Turnover Rates for Selected Departments in This Review (Not Including Transfers)

Department	Employee Count	Total Turnover	Percent
Counseling and Education Services	41	8	19.5%
Texas Community Supervision and Corrections Department	258	34	13.2%
Emergency Services	18	2	11.0%
Facilities Management	133	21	15.8%
Health and Human Service and Veterans Services	203	27	13.3%
Human Resources Management Department	36	4	11.0%
Information Technology Service	103	13	15.5%
Justice Planning	45	7	15.6%
Juvenile Public Defender	13	0	0.0%
Medical Examiner	37	8	21.6%
Planning and Budget Office	17	1	5.9%
Purchasing Office	36	2	5.6%
Record Management and Communication Resources	45	5	11.0%
STAR Flight	33	4	12.0%
Transportation and Natural Resources	391	47	12.0%
Totals	1,409	183	13.0%

Source: Data provided by HRMD.



These rates and trends translate into the County needing to fill almost 600 positions per year and growing. Using SHRM estimates, it could be costing Travis County about \$15,000 to recruit a custodian, \$20,000 to recruit an HHS and VS case worker, and \$54,000 to recruit an Administrator. Taking an average of the lowest cost estimates (50 percent of salaries average is \$26,000) means it will cost Travis County approximately \$15.6 million every year to recruit and hire for 600 vacancies, increasing as the number of vacancies to be filled increases. While some of this cost is offset by savings from salaries of vacancies that do not need to be paid out, having to recruit and hire new employees at this rate hinders each department's ability to work efficiently and effectively.

Table 6-9 Estimated Recruitment Cost for Various Position Levels

Title	Salary	Recruitment Cost at 50%	Recruitment Cost at 90%
Custodian	\$30,000	\$15,000	\$27,000
Case Worker	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$36,000
Administrator	\$60,000	\$30,000	\$54,000

SHRM notes that effective measurement of the quality of a hiring system must include both pre- and post-hiring metrics.⁶⁸ SHRM identifies examples of pre-hiring measures such as time-to-fill, quality of the candidate pool as measured by assessment scores, and referral rates from recruiting sources. Post-hiring measures often include such factors as length of retention, successful completion of training, new employee productivity and time required to be fully productive, and how well an employee fits into the culture of an organization. Over 3,000 human resource managers who responded to SHRM's most recent *2015 Human Capital Benchmarking Survey* indicated an average time-to-hire of 42 days.⁶⁹

HRMD has some initiatives underway; however, the department has been hindered by turnover within HRMD itself and limited resources. Initiatives underway include: a reorganization to separate recruitment activities into a distinct unit; approval of Onboarding software to streamline the application and hiring process; hiring of a Recruitment Manager; adding job descriptions to the public web site; and beginning limited use of social media for recruitment efforts. These efforts are to be commended—and should be expanded.



Recruitment, retention, and succession issues identified through this initiative include:

- HRMD has virtually no role in the screening, interviewing, and selection of candidates. HRMD posts open positions, turns over all applications to the hiring department, and once a selection is made HRMD reviews for the correct application of title and salary. This presents a missed opportunity for HRMD to become a full partner with departments in understanding their business needs and talent selection requirements.
- There is no consistency or standardization throughout the County in the hiring process, including no interview protocols or tools departments must use to complete the hiring process. Departments are permitted to use their own selection criteria and interview process for screening applicants with little or no HRMD input. This is especially true in the larger departments with dedicated HR staff who are able to control the process outside of HRMD.
- There are few metrics being tracked to assess the quality of the recruitment and hiring process. HRMD has no data to understand if and where delays in the hiring process occur. Departments report that there is no tracking of Personnel Action Forms even though they are automated. As noted previously, the quality of the hiring process includes both pre- and post-hiring measures. Little is known about the quality of the County hiring process itself due to limited automation, individual department processes, and HRMD's non-involvement in the hiring process. This is especially the case when attempting to determine the quality of recruitment post-hiring, since neither HRMD nor the departments track these types of quality measures.
- HRMD has no sustained and on-going relationship with area schools, colleges, or universities. As noted by SHRM, referrals from hiring sources are indicators of a quality recruitment system. With the wide array of jobs available in the County, relationships with schools and workforce agencies, such as high schools, technical schools, colleges, universities, and the state Workforce Solutions Career Center, would provide an excellent tool for recruitment.
- The use of social media by HRMD is new and limited. HRMD recently began posting on some limited sites, however there are no employer accounts on such sites if a fee is required. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and InDeed are not consistently used for recruiting.



- Departments report inconsistencies in how interns are recruited, hired and compensated. HRMD is working on a comprehensive policy to address these issues for Commissioners Court departments with the ability for elected officials' offices to opt in to the policy. This work is near completion.
- There is no consistent, organized succession planning taking place. Some departments reported an attempt to conduct succession planning, however no sustained plan is in place.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6.2.1

Assign HRMD staff by department. As noted in Section 6.1 of this report (Human Resources Organization and Operations), a new HRMD staffing configuration that identifies an HRMD specialist to work with each department will greatly enhance HRMD's ability to understand the business needs and talent requirements of a department. This is the model used by the Planning and Budget Office (PBO) and Purchasing Office and allows staff in those central departments to fully understand the operations and functions of their assigned departments. This would allow HRMD to be a partner with the department hiring manager and team to participate in the screening, interview and selection process. HRMD should not abdicate its role, even for larger departments; it should be an integral team member throughout the selection process.

Having a department specialist participate in the screening, interview, and selection process is an important step in establishing HRMD's credibility and understanding of department needs. In addition, the County will benefit from reduced turnover by having a stable workforce with experience in carrying out critical County functions with possible savings through more efficient operations.

Recommendation 6.2.2

Develop recruitment and hiring policies and manual that standardizes procedures. HRMD should develop a recruitment and hiring manual that establishes the procedures all departments must use in filling vacancies. This should include guidelines for screening applications, possible initial phone interviews of selected candidates, standardized questions to be asked during the interview, and criteria for final selection of a candidate. By establishing uniform processes and monitoring implementation, with some flexibility for departments to add job specific questions, the County can be more



confident that the process is equitable and that the best candidates are chosen for positions.

Recommendation 6.2.3

Establish benchmarks and measure critical recruitment, hiring, and retention metrics. Data collected should include both pre- and post-employment metrics such as length of time to fill a position, length of retention, and length of time for employee to achieve full productivity in new position. The measures should also include ensuring exit interviews are conducted to monitor factors contributing to voluntary separations. These measures should be collected manually until they can be fully automated.

Since several approvals need to take place prior to HRMD posting a position, it is important to separate metrics for vacancy to posting from posting to filling a position so that HRMD has an accurate indicator of its responsibilities. This differentiation provides more accurate data for departments and County leadership to know where delays are encountered in the system. If a department or PBO takes an inordinate amount of time to approve filling a position, this tracking will show such. If a department modifies the job description, position, or salary for a new hire, this pre-posting time and steps required need to be separately tracked. Once approvals are obtained, the length of time from posting to hiring is one indicator of HRMD's quality of service.

Recommendation 6.2.4

Accelerate efforts to expand relationships with talent sources and social media sites. As noted by SHRM, *getting* referrals from hiring sources, as opposed to simply contacting sources when vacancies arise, is an indication that good relationships have been developed that can make the recruitment process more effective. HRMD recruiters must develop working relationships with placement personnel at the schools, colleges, and universities in the County, as well as work more closely with the State Workforce Solutions Career Centers.

Employer accounts should be established with the major fee-based social media sites. The cost for this registration is minimal compared with the benefits such registrations can bring to the hiring process. In addition, the recent addition of job descriptions on the public web site will give job seekers the ability to view all job descriptions, not only those for which openings exist. This can be a tool for job seekers to explore jobs of interest and monitor if vacancies arise.



Recommendation 6.2.5

Finalize new policy on interns and train departments on its implementation.

HRMD's draft policy on interns is comprehensive and a good example of how to standardize policies across the County. HRMD should take this opportunity to train departments on the implementation of the policy and assist departments throughout the process.

Recommendation 6.2.6

Organize a succession planning initiative and assist departments with completion.

Succession planning to identify potential talent drains does not have to be overly complicated. HRMD has a report that identifies the positions now held by employees eligible or near retirement. Departments should take this list and identify positions that are:

- Single incumbent
- Specialized in knowledge and expertise
- Difficult to replace based on skill set and current job market

Once these positions are identified, strategies should be developed to address each situation. This could include identifying employees for possible promotion when a position becomes vacant; ensuring training initiatives are in place to address leadership talent; and developing knowledge transfer strategies.

Assessing an employee's competencies allow departments to focus on development opportunities that will prepare the person for future roles in the County.

6.3 EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLNESS

There are three components to the Travis County approach to health and wellness of its employees: the Travis County Employee Health Clinic, the Care Program, and health insurance/benefits program. Significant improvements must be made to data collection for the Employee Health Clinics and the Care Program to assess the impact of these programs on employee well-being, the effect on cost to the health benefits program, and the County's overall return on investment.

Background

Employer-sponsored health clinics can be a cost effective way to improve employee health and save money, especially for self-insured entities. Given that as much as 25



percent of health care expenditures are attributable to health risks (such as obesity, tobacco use, high cholesterol, and stress), cost savings can be realized if these conditions are addressed.⁷⁰

To be effective, clinics must:

- Achieve consensus and clarity regarding the mission of the employee health clinic (using the clinical model or patient education and wellness model).
- Reduce unnecessary specialist and emergency room use.
- Encourage and increase the use of generic drugs over brand name.
- Deliver high-quality services by offering immunizations, screenings, follow-up visits and wellness programs.
- Reduce administrative costs.
- Show reduced indirect costs such as reduced absenteeism and improved productivity.
- Demonstrate observable changes in high risk behaviors (such as smoking, over-eating, and lack of exercise regimen) ⁷¹⁷²

Employers that track and monitor these factors can determine the cost benefit of an employee clinic and whether or not it is reducing costs in the overall health insurance program.

The County's health benefits insurance program itself is beyond the scope of this review and is being addressed by HRMD through a consulting contract that will assess the current benefit package, costs, and recommendations.

Findings

Travis County operates three Employee Health Clinics that are part of HRMD. The clinics were established in 2005 and serve employees, dependents, and retirees who are part of the County health benefits plan.



HRMD engaged a consultant to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Employee Health Clinics in March 2015. The report raised significant points for consideration and raises additional questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of the clinics. It did not however address an important aspect of clinic viability; that is, do the clinics reduce the cost of health benefits insurance program for the County, an assumption cited by HRMD and County leadership who support clinic operations.

The 2015 report identified issues, some of which HRMD and clinic management are attempting to address within the current budget. In addition, a recently formed committee of commissioners, HRMD staff, clinic representatives, and PBO are meeting to assess clinic operations in terms of employee benefits and efficiency of operations. The 2015 consultant report highlighted:

- The number of patients seen per day is significantly lower than industry standards. Through recent efforts of the clinic manager, there is a 22.2 percent increase in visits when comparing January through November 2014 to January through November 2015. However, the number of visits per physician remains lower than industry standards.
- Physician assistants or nurse practitioners are not used; the use of these physician extenders is a commonly used staffing model in the health care system that is proven to reduce costs.
- Additional marketing and branding initiatives need to be implemented.
- Additional prevention, health promotion, and education initiatives need to be implemented.
- Salaries of many of the professional staff are below market and additional staffing is needed to expand operations—an investment that is questionable until a cost benefit analysis is completed.
- Additional technology solutions are needed to track and manage patient encounters and care.
- Clinic metrics that could provide a more thorough analysis of clinic operations, return on investment, and outcome measures are lacking.



Most significantly, the report could not determine if the clinics are, in fact, reducing cost to the County in the health benefits system, mentioned by staff and leadership as a goal and benefit of having the clinics. This is a significant factor that must be addressed to assess the actual return on investment to the County.

This rough estimate is shown Table 6-10 and indicates that in 2015, the 8,704 visits cost the County on average \$145.67 per visit.

Table 6-10 Employee Health Clinic Visits and Costs

	Visits (CY 14)	Visits (CY 15)	Percent Change
January through November visits	6,529	7,979	
Average per month	593.5	725.4	22.2%
December visits	609	725	estimate
Total	7,138	8,704	
Operating Budget			\$1,267,895
Average cost per visit	\$177.63	\$145.67	

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

As shown in Table 6-11, the top 10 diagnoses of clinic patients, representing 61 percent of the recorded diagnoses for 2014, are for screenings and treatment of many common chronic conditions such as diabetes, obesity, heart and cholesterol problems, and stress, as well as to administer common immunizations. This preliminary data seems to show the clinics are concentrating on the right mix of presenting health factors; however, what is not known is the extent to which interventions are on-going to reduce health risks and improve the overall health of employees.

Table 6-11 Top Ten Diagnoses and Percent of Total – CY2014

Diagnoses	Total	Percent Total
Total Diagnoses	16,291	
Laboratory examination ordered as part of a routine general	2,455	15.1%
Body mass screening	1,727	10.6%
Cholesterol	1,333	8.2%
Glucose/diabetes testing	1,219	7.5%
Essential hypertension, benign	1,009	6.2%
Immunizations, various	889	5.5%
Health checkup	614	3.8%
Vitamin D deficiency	319	2.0%
Tobacco abuse	260	1.6%
Generalized anxiety disorder	105	0.6%
Top 10 Diagnoses	9,930	61.0%

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

In summary, the issues that remain to be addressed concerning the Travis County Employee Health Clinic include:

- How to meet industry standards, implementing the use of physician extenders, and what additional costs will be incurred if the county enhances staffing to meet industry standards.
- How to collect sufficient data to assess the process and outcomes, most importantly the effect on health benefits and pharmacy spending.
- What needs to be in place to better manage care and ensure employees with chronic conditions are being monitored and improving their health conditions.
- Determining whether the emphasis should be on clinical care or health promotion and wellness.

Another component of the Travis County health program is the employee wellness program known as the Care Program. This consists of a health coach (provided by United Health Care) who is part of the health clinic system and the Care Program that was recently relocated to HRMD from the clinic. The Care Program is staffed by the County and funded in part by United Health Care's contribution of \$150,000. At this time, the Care Program is collecting process data such as how many employees participate in presentations and number of health fairs. Though not currently available, the program intends to collect more meaningful data such as medical net paid per member per month (PMPM), emergency room visits per 1,000, high cost claimants



PMPM, and pharmacy net paid PMPM. This type of data collection is critical to determine outcomes and cost benefit variables.

Table 6-12 shows the level of activity of the Care Program between January and August 2015.

Table 6-12 Care Program Participation Levels

Activity	Number of Participants
Attendance at health and wellness presentation	1,388
Completing a biometric screening	192
Completing a health survey	174
Attending County health fair	750

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

Additionally, no Care Program activity is related to risk management as discussed in Recommendation 6.4.1.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6.3.1

Expedite plans to enhance data collection and quality of services provided at the clinics. Since so little data is available to assess the cost benefits of the three Employee Health Clinics and Care Program, collecting relevant information is the first step in determining each programs effectiveness. This should include both process data (details on who uses the programs and for what services), as well as collecting information on outcome (the quality of services provided to improve health conditions and the degree of improvement in health conditions).

In addition, the Care Program should be charged with tracking behavioral outcomes of health education and promotion.

Recommendation 6.3.2

Use physician extenders to provide clinical services. In the short run while longer-term issues are being assessed, HRMD should expedite the use of physician extenders to increase clinic visits in a more cost-effective manner. Studies have shown, and industry standards have emerged, that indicate the use of physician assistants and nurse practitioners is a model that promotes quality and cost-effectiveness.



Recommendation 6.3.3

Contract for all or part of clinic services. While the long-term viability issues of the Employee Health Clinic are being assessed, the County should consider contracting for professional medical services personnel to address the issues of meeting industry standards, expanding to physician extenders, and enhancing the quality of services provided. In the long term, contracting for all clinic operations may be the most viable solution. In addition to addressing staffing and costs, contracting could establish a better network of primary and specialty providers to address chronic health conditions and reduce costs in the health insurance system.

Recommendation 6.3.4

Expand and enhance the Care Program and integrate it with clinic practices and risk management. The underlying principles of the Care Program should be integrated into the Employee Health Clinics, so that health promotion and wellness is a part of every clinic visit (support of healthy diet, regular exercise, and on-going healthy lifestyle). Additionally, more intensive efforts should be made to market these services to Travis County employees via the newsletter, email, local presentations, and other media.

The Care Program can play an integral role in effectively coordinating health promotion activities that will improve the quality of clinic services and risk management initiatives. A working group of representatives from the clinic, Workers' Compensation, and Care Program programs should be formed to develop ways in which the services can be better integrated, to include:

- Establishing mechanism to ensure referrals are made among programs, including referring employees injured (especially those not rising to the need for a Workers' Compensation claim).
- Following up with employees to ensure they are participating in suggested programs and determining what will improve their chances of participating for those who are not.
- Collecting data to track use and outcomes.
- Targeting employees for special initiatives who are not meeting healthy outcomes or who are experiencing repeated injuries at work.



- Coordinating events that will have the best chance for participation of targeted audiences.

6.4 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Management is charged with the responsibility to prevent workplace injuries and to process claims when injuries do occur. To accomplish this, risk management functions need to be an organized and focused portfolio of activities aimed at reducing claims due to injury, and most importantly, promoting sustained activities that promote worker health and safety.

Background

Risk management functions need to be focused on a range of activities that helps organizations prevent injuries, as well as respond to workplace mishaps.

Organizations should be asking:

- Are risks transparent and what matters most in identifying potential risks?
- Are critical business decisions made with an understanding of risk factors?
- Are structures, systems and controls in place to manage risk?
- What formal and informal mechanisms are in place to support positive behaviors that avoid risk?

In recent years, more employers are linking wellness programs with risk management to develop better employee communication plans and to promote overall workplace safety as well as risk management. Studies have shown wellness programs have a direct impact on workers' compensation claims. Employee health has an impact on risk management efforts; for example, obese workers who are injured are more likely to become permanently disabled and have higher claim cost.⁷³

Findings

HRMD and two other departments (Sheriff's Office and TNR) have personnel dedicated to risk management functions. HRMD has six staff, the Sheriff's Office has three, and TNR employs two staff to handle all aspects of risk management, including efforts to mitigate issues that could put workers at risk of injury and the County at risk of claims.



Table 6-13 Risk Management Staffing

Department	Title	Number of Positions
Human Resources Management Department	Human Resources Manager II	6
	Risk Safety Specialist I	
	Risk Safety Specialist II	
	Risk Safety Specialist Senior	
	Risk Safety Specialist Senior	
	Occupational Health and Safety Engineer	
Sheriff's Office	Risk Safety Specialist II	3
	Risk Safety Specialist II	
	Risk Safety Specialist II	
Transportation and Natural Resources	Risk Safety Specialist I	2
	Risk Safety Specialist Senior	
TOTAL		11

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

Table 6-14 Risk Management Staffing and Salaries Summary

Department	Number of Risk Management Staff	Salaries (w/o benefits and overhead)
Human Resources	6	\$266,821
Transportation and Natural Resources	2	\$127,051
Sheriff's Office	3	\$181,381
TOTAL	11	\$575,253

Source: Data provided by HRMD.

In reports identifying benchmarks and best practices in workers' compensation systems, Travis County is considered "high frequency, lower claims".⁷⁴ This means that the County has a higher number of claims than average, but a lower average cost per claim. As shown Table 6-15, according to Midwest Employers Casualty Company, from 2010 to 2014 the County had 1,503 claims compared with benchmarks and best practices of 645 and 517 respectively; claims, however were 49.6 percent and 37 percent below benchmarks and best practices.



Table 6-15 Travis County Claims Compared to Benchmark and Best Practices (2010–2014)

	Number of Claims	Percent Difference	Cost Per Claim Weighted Average	Percent Difference
Travis County	1,503		\$6,061	
Benchmark	645	132.8%	\$12,020	-49.6%
Best Practices	517	191.0%	\$9,616	-37.0%

Source: Midwest Employers Casualty Company Report provided by HRMD.

While this may seem a positive assessment of Travis County's risk, it must be noted that the County's total cost of risk has increased during this period by 63.8 percent, from just over \$3.1 million to just over \$5.1 million, showing that attention must be focused on improving the County's system to slow the growth of the number of claims. The fact that claims are lower payouts than peers or best practices does not offset the considerably higher rate of claims.

Table 6-16 Total Cost of Risk (2010–2014)

Policy Period	Total Cost of Risk (Direct and indirect losses, administration, excess WC premium)	Change from Previous Year	Change 2010–2014	Percent Change 2010–2014
2010	\$3,137,002			
2011	\$4,108,781	\$971,779		
2012	\$2,996,989	-\$1,111,792		
2013	\$4,885,525	\$1,888,536		
2014	\$5,139,590	\$254,065	\$2,002,588	63.8%

Source: Midwest Employers Casualty Company Report provided by HRMD.

Table 6-17 Ultimate Retained Costs

	Retained Loss 2014	Difference/Loss
Travis County	\$2,303,000	
Benchmark	\$1,451,610	\$851,390
Best Practices	\$929,031	\$1,373,969

Source: Midwest Employers Casualty Company Report provided by HRMD.

Finally, like many functions within HRMD, departments view Risk Management as workers' compensation claims processors only. Departments report difficulty in tracking the status of claims; those without dedicated risk management staff do not fully understand how to handle claims and limited data is provided by Risk Management to help departments mitigate risks. Procedures and forms are available online and training



is available, however more interaction with departments is needed to support their needs.

Air Quality Management

In Travis County, air quality functions are housed in HRMD within Risk Management, which is responsible for identifying and responding to complaints of air quality issues in County facilities. Risk Management is responsible for air quality testing and remediation; FMD is responsible for the construction of modifications.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6.4.1

Establish a risk management work group to plan initiatives to reduce claims. A countywide initiative will help to reduce workers' compensation claims and to support departments' understanding and handling of risk factors. The Care Program should be an integral part of this effort and should take the lead in designing wellness activities that tie to risk management. Reducing claims to benchmark targets would have saved the County \$857,390 in 2014; reducing claims to best practices in 2014 would have saved the County \$1.3 million.

Recommendation 6.4.2

Move air quality identification and remediation functions to FMD. FMD is better equipped to perform this function. FMD has technicians and mechanics in County buildings throughout the day to inspect and respond to issues, as well as the infrastructure in place to manage renovation and construction projects required to mitigate problems when identified. The one licensed staff person currently in HRMD should be transferred to FMD to better manage the entire response from identification to remediation. Close coordination is needed to ensure Risk Management is advised of instances and that proper reporting is maintained.



7 FACILITIES MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

The Facilities Management Department (FMD), with 166 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees in seven divisions, is one of the largest County departments and is responsible for managing about 2.89 million square feet of County buildings and accompanying grounds either through in-house staff or contracted services; with the addition of the Ronald Earle Building and new medical examiner building next year, this total will increase to 3.1 million square feet. FMD also manages all aspects of construction projects approved by the Commissioners Court.

Between fiscal year (FY) 2011 and FY 2016, the County has acquired or built additional facilities that have increased its footprint by almost 30 percent (327,378 square feet). Several major construction projects are currently underway, including new offices for the District Attorney and Medical Examiner.

FMD is required to manage large volumes of work (primarily accomplished through a work order system) and to ensure preventive maintenance requirements are addressed. A new software solution was recently introduced to improve the tracking and reports on the status of work orders. The department also reorganized to establish two units within the Building and Maintenance division and to separate out the Custodial division to better align responsibilities and oversight. While FMD is responsible for approved construction projects, it is not currently involved in developing the Travis County Master Plan developed by the Planning and Budget Office (PBO).

7.1 OPERATIONS

FMD should serve as an advocate for the departments in advising the Commissioners Court on all aspects of facilities management, including ensuring preventive maintenance is funded to allow all County employees to work in a safe and comfortable work environment. Improvements to data collection, monitoring, planning, and procedures will enable FMD to be more efficient and improve customer service.

Background

The International Facilities Management Association surveys private businesses to benchmark custodial and maintenance standards. In the most recent survey of 1,422 facilities, respondents reported employing one maintenance staff per every 49,000 square feet of office space, up from 47,000 square feet in 2006.⁷⁵ Respondents also reported spending \$0.25 more for maintenance per square foot than in 2008.⁷⁶ In addition to increasing the square footage per worker, companies have implemented new



standards to combat growing costs by reducing the frequency of such tasks as daily trash removal, dusting, and vacuuming.

The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association benchmarks custodial work at 4,500 to 6,000 square feet of office per hour per worker—at 6.5 hours per day of active worktime per worker that translates to between 29,250 to 39,000 square feet per worker.⁷⁷ Basic cleaning per month is estimated to cost from \$0.09 to \$0.14 per square foot.⁷⁸

Increasingly, companies are interested in tracking the real costs of maintaining assets to include utilities, maintenance, janitorial, and security, all of which are estimated to account for 95 percent of costs incurred to operate and maintain a building.

An increasing number of government entities are looking more closely at the real costs of maintaining facilities and are more realistically determining whether it is cost effective to contract for such work. Some jurisdictions have implemented “managed competition,” a bidding process that is open to in-house agencies/workers and potential private sector bidders.

As far back as the early 1990s, the city of Indianapolis used managed competition techniques for over 70 different city services and saved over \$230 million in five years.⁷⁹ In 2011, Tulsa, Oklahoma city employees won a contract, competing with 12 private firms, to provide all maintenance services at their city hall.⁸⁰ The same year, San Diego awarded a contract to city workers (in competition with five private firms) to operate its print shop at a 30 percent reduction in costs.⁸¹ To accomplish this, jurisdictions have:

- Worked with employees to clearly define all aspects of the service under review, including support services provided by other units within government. This type of exercise helped Tulsa officials understand the extent of support needed from information technology (IT), purchasing, human resources (HR), payroll and others to maintain city hall. When issuing a bid request, the city made sure all aspects of automated work orders, time and attendance, and tracking the status of work were included in the requirements.
- Required pay and benefit packages comparable to public sector workers and specified titles such as engineers, carpenters, and plumbers. This prevented private bidders from under-bidding by using lower wages and/or less qualified professionals or technicians.



- Structured performance measures to track outcomes rather than process.
- Trained department employees and union members on how to access information and develop budgets in response to requests for bids.
- Ensured an independent review system was in place to allow a level playing field for public and private sector bidders.

Findings

FMD staffing resources have kept pace as Travis County government has grown and expanded its infrastructure footprint (now about two million square feet of buildings). Currently, the department has 55 custodial staff plus supervisors and support staff (total of 57 FTEs with fully-loaded salaries of \$2.4 million) to manage the almost one million square feet of offices that are serviced by in-house staff. Four contracts are in place with private janitorial vendors to service an additional 535,252 square feet.⁸²

FMD's standards for in-house custodial and maintenance work compared with national benchmarking are shown in Table 7-1. Based on this comparison, FMD staffing compares favorably to benchmark standards for custodial work; however, FMD has significantly higher requirements for maintenance workers in older buildings than benchmark standards, which do not differentiate based on the age of the building.

Table 7-1 FMD and Benchmark Standards Per FTE

	FMD Standard in Square Feet	Benchmark in Square Feet
Custodial	21,500	29,250-39,000
Maintenance	80,000 (older buildings) 50,000 (newer buildings)	49,000

Source: Data provided by FMD. Benchmark standards sources discussed above.

During this review, the following issues were identified in reviewing FMD's custodial and maintenance operations.

- **Custodial Services.** FMD has excellent policies and procedures manuals for internal use, one of which covers custodial services. This is especially useful for new custodial staff orientation and to set work expectations for custodians. The procedures cover all aspects of custodial services, including daily and routine cleaning tasks and required equipment to be used. However, there are no metrics on how well these standards are being met. In a focus group,

department liaisons reported that vacuuming, trash pick-up, and other custodial tasks are not sufficiently completed. These comments were not specific to any one building and related to both in-house and contracted services.

Elected officials, employees in older buildings, and employees in buildings where the public receives various social services, attends mental health programs, or indigent legal services believe their custodial issues are not sufficiently addressed, and they believe they have little recourse to resolve problems. There are insufficient custodial services provided to offices where the public attends programs or physically presents themselves for services at elected officials' offices or social/legal services.

Three of four peer counties interviewed (Dallas, Bexar and Tarrant) contract for all custodial services in county buildings. While contracting alone is not a panacea since vendors must be held accountable for meeting contract standards, it is a way to consider possible cost savings.

- **Maintenance Services.** The Building Maintenance and Repair division policies and procedures cover a range of duties and responsibilities for routine and emergency maintenance services. There is an automated system (ePM) to manage preventive maintenance requirements for equipment and heating and cooling systems; however, no such system is available to manage other preventive maintenance requirements such as cycles for painting, building repairs, carpet replacement, and other minor capital projects that should be performed to maintain a building at its optimal operating status.

During budget preparations, departments send renovation/maintenance requests that are to be included in the budget to FMD, who is responsible for estimating the cost of the project being requested. FMD also makes a recommendation on the need and/or cost benefit of the request. If FMD does not support the request, the department is still able to bring the project to the Commissioners Court for consideration and a final decision. FMD also develops its own list of needed renovation/maintenance projects and submits these requests during budget deliberations. FMD is perceived as being very conservative in its request for funding, and in its efforts to be fiscally responsible, does not present the full picture of maintenance needs to the Commissioners Court. A longer-term plan that covers multiple years and includes annual costs associated with fully funding

all deferred maintenance is available; however it may not be sufficiently publicized or used during budget considerations.

Departments also report issues with the quality of work completed and their inability to intervene before sign-off on small renovation project completion. Departments report they are required to add to their budget punch list items that were not satisfactorily completed during a small renovation construction project.

Tarrant County has developed a 10-year deferred maintenance plan that is expected to cost the county about \$156 million over the 10-year span, allowing them to develop and monitor long-term plans for capital improvements and maintenance. Likewise, Dallas County has a similar 10-year deferred maintenance plan (\$135 million) that provides a plan for addressing items on the list in priority order. Bexar County is in the process of preparing such a list.

- **Communication.** A customer service focus is critical for a department such as FMD that must serve the diverse needs of departments. Departments report that they often do not know the status of a project or when or why changes are made.

There are several components to this communication issue. First, the recently implemented work order software upgrade will provide better information to users on the status of work orders. Success depends, however, on improving the data and descriptions of work being completed. Second, departments need to inform their own staff on the status and/or changes made when work is being completed. Department sign-off on maintenance and renovation work is critical. Third, coordination between FMD and PBO Capital Planning is important. Currently, FMD has no role in developing the Facilities Master Plan, yet it is the focus of employee's questions and concerns when changes are made. There are numerous examples when the basic assumptions on which the plan was built (for instance projected growth in personnel by department) do not materialize, requiring changes to the plan. When construction plans are implemented that differ from the Facilities Master Plan, FMD is charged with modifying planned projects, bidding, and eventual renovation of offices affected. PBO does not participate in communicating changes to the departments except at Commissioners Court meetings if changes to the plan are proposed.



Recommendations

Recommendation 7.1.1

Develop a guide and checklist for departments that outline custodial and maintenance roles and responsibilities. An easy-to-use guide and checklist for departments would clearly outline: how to initiate custodial and maintenance requests; whom to notify depending on the circumstance of the request; what the roles and responsibilities are of the requesting department and FMD; how best to obtain the status of work being performed; and who is responsible for sign-off. These elements currently are not clearly defined.

Recommendation 7.1.2

Conduct an annual customer service survey to determine areas of satisfaction and those needing attention. FMD should conduct an electronic customer survey at least yearly to determine the level of customer satisfaction and to identify areas needing improvement. The results should be reported to Commissioners Court.

In addition, regularly scheduled meetings with individual departments and FMD leadership would provide FMD with valuable information on issues and the opportunity to craft solutions. These meetings should be initiated by FMD and should include representatives from PBO and/or the Commissioners Court as appropriate since budget implications and priorities must be considered. Long-standing building issues (as reported in interviews with employees in older buildings and many elected officials) should be resolved jointly during these meetings, work plans established and implementation monitored. The results of the meetings should be recorded by FMD and reported to Commissioners Court.

Recommendation 7.1.3

Develop procedures, in conjunction with PBO Strategic Resources Planning, to notify departments when changes to the Facilities Master Plan are made. It is inevitable that a 25-year capital plan will change and will need to be modified on a regular basis. Even though the annual update to the Facilities Master Plan is public and approved by the Commissioners Court, additional efforts need to be made to ensure key department leadership and staff have the information on what changes are approved. PBO and FMD should work together to present changes to affected departments so that there is a unified and up-front understanding of what construction or renovation projects are being implemented and when.



Recommendation 7.1.4

Improve identification, tracking, monitoring, and reporting of maintenance projects.

FMD is not seen as an advocate for departments or as sufficiently aggressive in presenting building maintenance needs to the Commissioners Court. The department should be the focal point for developing requests, prioritizing projects, and ensuring the Commissioners Court has not only maintenance requests being considered in the yearly budget deliberations, but also long-range issues over a minimum of five to ten years that are critical for maintaining or improving buildings. Occupants of older buildings or those outside the downtown complex believe there is a focus on building acquisition and maintenance of buildings in the downtown complex to the detriment of older buildings and those outside the central complex.

The Commissioners Court needs to have a comprehensive deferred maintenance plan that clearly outlines projects and priorities over a five- to ten-year period. This should include a comprehensive list of maintenance projects tracked through reports from the ePM system, as well as a list of deferred maintenance required, to ensure buildings are maintained at optimum status. The Commissioners Court should have regular reports on the status of projects on the deferred maintenance list.

As noted in Section 3.2, performance measures are needed that are meaningful and realistic. For FMD, this includes improving the data input in the new work order software system; establishing three to five key performance measures for each division, including one for the quality of customer service; and producing regular reports to monitor success and issues that arise.

In addition, a brief customer satisfaction survey should be issued at the completion of maintenance work and minor capital projects.

Recommendation 7.1.5

Consider options for contracting work as County building space increases and more demands are made on custodial and maintenance staff. Maintenance and custodial work are examples of the type of work that can be considered for managed competition, described previously. Conducting a thorough analysis of the real costs of these services, including the support services required by IT, payroll, HR, and other County departments, will allow County leadership to make informed decisions on the cost benefit of in-house versus contracted services. Most importantly, managed



competition gives public sector workers the opportunity to review their own work and processes and to find ways to complete work more efficiently—a win-win for the County.

If the County saved ten percent of its custodial salaries (\$2.4 million) through contracting, it would realize \$240,000 in savings.

7.2 WORK ORDER PROCESS

Receiving and responding to more than 12,000 work orders every year is a major responsibility of the FMD. New, recently implemented software will improve the management of this process, however additional procedural changes would make the system more efficient.

Background

Experts in the field of maintenance management understand that work orders are the backbone of a maintenance system, and they understand that the work order process lends itself to technology solutions for highly efficient operations. The work order system should:

- Be computerized and have unique work order identification numbers.
- Accurately assign priorities according to established guidelines.
- Have detailed and comprehensive descriptions that include originator and location.
- Allow anyone in the County to enter a request.
- Highlight safety issues, if applicable.
- Support the assignment of workers to respond, parts needed, and equipment/tools required.
- Be a centralized source to track work progress, problems, and completion.⁸³

Findings

FMD's work order system begins when a department enters a request into the system that automatically generates a notice to the FMD dispatcher. Once a work order is accepted by FMD, a custodial or maintenance worker is assigned and the requesting department receives an email with the work order number and person assigned.

Departments can check on the status of requests through the system; however, more often departments contact the dispatcher to inquire about status and/or delays. A new automated system for entering and tracking work orders is being tested and is expected to be implemented in early 2016. The new system will streamline the process and allow



the FMD dispatcher and departments to more easily track the status of work orders. Management reports will be available to track open orders by mechanic, by department, status, length of time to respond, etc.

From January 1, 2015 through December 10, 2015, FMD received 12,468 work order requests. This equates to an average of 1,097 per month or 36 per day. It is not known, however, how many duplicate requests may be in the system since a new work order may be opened if the requesting department believes that the original request was not satisfactorily addressed.

**Table 7-2 FMD Work Orders Received
January through December 10, 2015**

Month	Number of Work Orders
January	1,135
February	966
March	968
April	1,123
May	1,162
June	1,153
July	1,103
August	1,106
September	1,016
October	1,248
November	1,083
December (10th)	405
Total	12,468
Average Monthly (January–November)	1,097

Source: Data provided by FMD.

When FMD receives a work order, the dispatcher designates the priority category of a work order (emergency, urgent, or routine) based on criteria such as safety of employees (power outage, water leak), risk for possible work stoppage, or routine request such as moving furniture or adjusting the room temperature in an office. FMD received 190 work orders designated as emergency from January through December 10, 2015; 2,299 were designated as urgent, and 9,979 were routine. As shown in Table 7-3, work orders were considered closed anywhere from within the day received to over 61 days. Eliminating open work orders and those for which data is not available shows FMD closed 94.7 percent of its routine work orders, 94.2 percent of urgent work orders, and 96.4 percent of emergency work orders.



Table 7-3 Work Orders January through December 10, 2015

Closed Within	Routine	Percent	Urgent	Percent	Emergency	Percent
1 day	3,057	30.6%	759	33.0%	111	58.4%
2 days	1,303	13.1%	391	17.0%	22	11.6%
3 days	842	8.4%	184	8.0%	5	2.6%
4 days	470	4.7%	79	3.4%	5	2.6%
5 days	345	3.5%	72	3.1%	2	1.1%
6 days	240	2.4%	44	1.9%	0	
7-14 days	904	9.1%	168	7.3%	7	3.7%
15-30 days	794	8.0%	138	6.0%	7	3.7%
31-60 days	334	3.3%	72	3.1%	5	2.6%
61+ days	157	1.6%	28	1.2%	0	
Active/Open*	613	6.1%	155	6.7%	17	8.9%
Unknown (date not available)	920	9.2%	209	9.1%	9	4.7%
Total Work Orders by Type	9,979 (80%)		2,299 (18.4%)		190 (1.5%)	
Total All Work Orders			12,468			

Source: Data provided by FMD.

*Includes 216 work orders received in December.

Discussions with departments, including elected officials, would seem to question the closing rate for work orders. Numerous examples of problems with the quality of work completed or the actual resolution of a work order request were reported in group discussions and follow-up interviews with individuals. In addition, it is difficult to determine the details of many work orders because of the lack of clear descriptive information on the request and response. Whether or not FMD is meeting its stated goal of responding to after-hours emergencies within one hour is also not known.

Another issue noted by focus group participants is after-hours requests. Emergency requests received after hours are generally identified by security personnel as they patrol and inspect County properties during non-work hours. Some departments that operate 24/7 also report after-hour emergencies at times. Those identifying an after-hours emergency are instructed to call the on-call Security Supervisor, which begins the process to dispatch in-house or contracted service personnel to respond depending on the type of emergency. Focus group participants, especially for those departments operating 24/7, report slow response times for after-hours requests. FMD has submitted an FY 2017 budget request to improve after-hours responses.

Recommendations

Recommendation 7.2.1

Improve communication with departments on the status of work orders. More comprehensive training for departments will help them understand and use the new system capabilities, which include information on the status of an order. The new system will provide reporting to departments on a regular basis on the status of work orders—those initiated, closed, remaining open, and the reason. Training is also needed to improve the description of requests and the FMD technicians' description of the response, work in progress, and what was done to complete the request. Work orders should not be considered closed until there is a requestor sign-off that the work completed is satisfactory, allowing FMD management to track the real response time and to monitor where problems are occurring.

Recommendation 7.2.2

Develop and publish guidelines for after-hour emergency requests. FMD should clarify the process and expectations for after-hour requests. FMD should generate a regular report to determine if FMD meets the one-hour response requirement stated in its manual.

Recommendation 7.2.3

Produce regular reports to monitor work order requests and responses. With the new IT solution for work orders, FMD will be better able to manage the work order process and produce more accurate reports on a range of data points. These reports should regularly be produced to keep departments and County leadership apprised of the ability of FMD to meet stated goals. Equally important, FMD will be able to run reports that identify workload and work order requests by type, which will make the system more efficient and improve workload assignments—saving money or meeting growing demands without additional resources.

7.3 BUILDING SECURITY

Post September 11, 2001, security experts emphasize that “security is not a product, but a process.”⁸⁴ Effective building security that mitigates risk starts at the design phase of construction and continues through to daily building operations. Numerous federal agencies (Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, etc.) provide guidance for the design and operation of building security measures to protect people and property.



Background

Effective building security starts with a Security Master Plan. These plans are critical mechanisms to not only understand the risks, but also to have plans in place that are specific to the business needs of the organization occupying the building. For multiple sites, the Security Master Plan provides the underlying approach to security and the goals, strategies and processes on which individual building security plans are developed.

Comprehensive Security Master Plans should include:

- Organizational charts of offices within the facility.
- A copy of the security manual for reference that includes roles and responsibilities, and policies on such topics as requirements for employee identification badges, visitor controls, progressive actions to mitigate problems, use of force, when and how to call for armed police officers, and where armed officers are required.
- Building blueprints.
- Incident reports for at least two years.
- Staffing lists for offices within the building and for the security assigned.
- Listings of any exceptional risks such as offices that collect money, those open to the general public, and other unique security risks.
- Current and future plans for technology equipment and software.

Findings

FMD's security personnel are responsible for 74 County buildings, parking lots, and surrounding areas on a 24/7 basis—all County buildings except those related to public safety, jails, and courts that are managed by the Sheriff's Office.

Recently, responsibility for the security video system and access cards was transferred to FMD from ITS. The video system has six different platforms currently deployed throughout the County, some of which are old and will not be supported by the manufacturer in the near future. FMD is working on consolidating and unifying the systems so that the County operates on one video network.

The Security unit is staffed by one manager, one coordinator, two supervisors, 25 uniformed personnel, 15 private contracted security staff, and 3 system technicians. Tarrant County deploys sheriff's department personnel to provide security in county



buildings; Dallas County has commissioned officers and Level 3 security personnel in its buildings.

Issues identified through this review include:

- There is no comprehensive security plan that addresses the items discussed previously for inclusion in a Security Master Plan. Departments are not included in any planning and/or discussion of security issues and are generally unaware of the roles and responsibilities of the current security staff. Some departments are discussing developing their own security plans in the absence of any leadership or guidance from FMD.

FMD is working on a Request for Proposals (RFP) to engage a security consultant that will complete a review of County buildings and develop a security plan for each building. The department is also developing a manual that will outline for employees whom to call in an emergency or for security issues.

- There is no joint planning and coordination taking place among FMD and the Austin Police Department and Austin Fire Department. In addition, when an incident is reported in a County building, the Sheriff's Office will deploy personnel. There is also no indication that FMD is coordinating with the Sheriff's Office to clarify roles and responsibilities. FMD has not been involved in the County and City of Austin emergency preparedness planning. When incidents have occurred in the recent past, first-responders noted that FMD did not understand its role when on-site nor has FMD had the basic information about building layout, offices or programs and employees in the building, or other basic information that is critical in responding to an emergency.
- While FMD is developing plans to require additional training to ensure security staff meet industry standards, there does not seem to be consensus throughout the County on what the best policy position is and what the role of the security personnel should be. There is no clear policy on such issues as the level of engagement and level of understanding of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) or the Incident Command System (ICS), national guidelines that identify who is in charge during the response phase of an incident. Based on best practices, FMD would not be the primary incident coordinator.



- An incident tracking report to log any reported incidents and what action was taken is not available. This is an objective in the department's short-term planning; however, how and when it will be implemented is not clear.

Recommendations

Recommendation 7.3.1

Develop a Security Master Plan for the buildings and grounds for which FMD is responsible. A Security Master Plan is critical to guide and manage the security staff throughout the County. Most buildings have open access to the public with little to no security presence. This is especially problematic for sites that provide services that involve higher security risks such as Indigent Legal Services, Mental Health Public Defender's Office, and many of the Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS) buildings. The building layout and structure for these sites, public access, and serving clients (some of whom are under great stress when presenting for services) must determine the nature of each building's security plan. The Sheriff's Office has provided a template to begin this process, and FMD should take the lead in developing plans for each department.

The RFP that FMD is drafting to engage a security consulting firm may address these issues. The RFP should be accelerated to expedite security planning and implementation. In addition, FMD should make sure the RFP includes a review of the types of programs housed in each building, including services provided by elected officials, human services, legal services and others that involve high volumes of public access.

In addition, plans need to be developed with the Austin Police Department and the Sheriff's Office to address active shooter and workplace violence issues. HHS and VS and Austin/Travis County Integral Care (ATCIC) should also be involved in developing these plans to address the mental health aspects of such instances for both the assailants and victims. Finally, FMD should provide a schedule for regular and on-going staff training to help staff identify potential problems and actions that should be taken in response to these issues.

Recommendation 7.3.2

Participate in Emergency Management planning with the city and County. FMD should designate a representative to be a part of the development and maintenance of continuity of operations plans (COOP) to address every eventuality from a major disaster



to such incidents as broken water pipes to ensure work stoppage is minimized (discussed in more detail in Section 12.2).

Recommendation 7.3.3

Prioritize training to ensure security staff understand roles and responsibilities and are able to perform duties according to policies and procedures developed in the Security Master Plan. FMD should develop a closer working partnership with law enforcement agencies, especially the Sheriff's Office. FMD should arrange for staff training in emergency response to significantly improve how FMD works with these entities.

7.4 WAREHOUSES

With new technology and customer expectations for quick delivery, supply vendors are able to meet delivery requirements that can eliminate the need for storage and additional transport of materials to point of use.

Background

Private sector businesses know that warehouses costs money and that the use/benefit of warehouses is changing as fast as technology is changing today.⁸⁵ Companies are looking at just-in-time delivery methods from vendors and delivery systems to point of use—as noted in recent news articles, Amazon and other vendors are working on deliveries within hours. Almost all companies supplying goods to businesses are able and willing to deliver to work sites for no additional charges. These advances in purchasing and delivery should be incorporated into any large business operation such as Travis County government.

The real cost of a warehouse is typically calculated in terms of:

- **Handling.** Expenses associated with moving product in and out, including equipment, depreciation, and fuel costs.
- **Storage.** Costs of “goods at rest” such as facility costs typically calculated in a monthly cost based on turnover rates.
- **Operating.** Expressed as costs for such tasks as supervision, clerical, information technology, and insurance.
- **General administration.** Expenses attributed to oversight and management of the warehouse within a department.



Businesses today are rethinking warehousing and limiting requirements for storage only to those items needed when response time must be within hours.

Findings

Travis County operates four warehouses. One warehouse operated by the Purchasing Office is used for storing excess inventory such as old office furniture, computers, other office equipment; and one operated by Transportation and Natural Resources Department (TNR) is reported to be a small supply room for automotive parts. These warehouses are not part of this review, however, two warehouses, one operated by FMD and one by HHS and VS, are central delivery warehouses used to store goods required at various County sites; they are part of this review.

Limited data is available to assess the costs and benefits of operating these warehouses. FMD has more detailed information about its warehouse; HHS and VS rolls up information about the costs of its warehouse into the total Housing Services budget. Table 7-4 identifies what is known and some assumptions on costs.

Table 7-4 Warehouse Descriptions

	FMD	HHS and VS Housing Services
Facility size in square feet	7,000	7,360
Inventory	Janitorial and maintenance supplies, small tools, replacement equipment	General home repair materials
Estimated value of items stored	\$225,000	\$150,000
Percent of items stored more than 14 days	70%	98%
Staffing	1 FTE	1.25 FTE
Salaries (including benefits)	\$45,102	\$93,326
Operating costs	\$39,000 (utilities, maintenance)	Unknown**
Vehicles*	1	Varies
Estimated cost of operating vehicle (at USDOT estimate \$.059.2/mile assuming 12,000 miles/year) ⁸⁶	\$7,104	\$7,104
Staff and Operating Cost Totals	\$91,206	\$139,430**

Source: Data provided by FMD and HHS and VS Housing Services.

*Does not account for other vehicles used by departments to pick up materials from warehouses.

**Estimates operating costs to be the same as FMD.

While it is difficult to determine the real costs of operating these warehouses, these figures alone indicate the County is spending at least \$230,000 per year for this function.



If all expenditures associated with the four warehouse cost centers (such as handling goods, transporting to sites, and general administrative costs) were available, the total cost to the County would be considerably higher.

Recommendation

Recommendation 7.4.1

Revise supplier delivery contracts to just-in-time delivery to user sites where possible to eliminate the warehouses currently operated by FMD and HHS and VS. This will require both departments to implement new ordering and delivery systems for individual locations. As noted in best practices, only those items needed for emergencies with response time within hours should be warehoused. Revising the system will provide better data to monitor costs and save money by more efficiently managing supplies.

FMD uses a vending machine system that allows custodians and maintenance workers to access small parts needed for repairs at a kiosk-type device; the supplier checks the machine periodically and bills the County for parts used. This mechanism could be expanded and used as a solution for similar situations that now require warehousing.



8 PURCHASING OFFICE

The Travis County Purchasing Office reports to the Purchasing Board consisting of two County commissioners and three district judges. Since its inception, the office has worked to strengthen and manage all aspects of procurement policies and procedures, and the office currently has an extensive Purchasing Manual that is the guidebook for County employees and vendors on the entire purchasing process.

Travis County currently has over \$344 million in active contracts (including multi-year construction contracts) and purchases over \$127 million per year in goods and services. The Purchasing Office has successfully used many procurement tools available in a public purchasing system: informal and formal bids, Requests for Proposals, cooperatives, consortiums, state contracts, inter-governmental contracts, and reverse auctions. The bidding process is fully automated. Departments and the Purchasing Office use SAP (the enterprise resource planning software used by Travis County) extensively to process purchase orders and partially manage contracting. The Travis County Purchasing Office has been awarded the Achievement in Excellence in Procurement award from the National Procurement Institute for the past 11 years.

8.1 CONTRACTING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Background

Good contract management—from initial procurement to close-out—is a critical competency that requires a comprehensive and transparent system in the public sector. Comprehensive contract management processes can generate millions of dollars in savings and ensures the most competitive pricing is obtained.

Performance-Based Contracting

Over the past two decades or more there has been an increased focus on developing performance-based contracts, especially in human services and other service-oriented organizations. Performance-based contracting is defined by the National Association of State Purchasing Officials (NASPO) as “the specification of the outcome expectations of the contract and the requirement that any renewals or extensions be based on the achievement of the identified outcomes.”⁸⁷ Performance-based contracts describe the results required rather than how the work is to be accomplished. Performance-based contracting is also used to obtain overall better value and lower costs.



Among many benefits, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) notes that performance-based contracting:

- Increases the likelihood of meeting mission needs.
- Focuses on intended results, not process.
- Produces better value and enhanced performance.
- Does not require detailed specifications or process descriptions.
- Allows for contractor flexibility in proposing solutions.
- Establishes better competition and solutions.
- Establishes contractor buy-in and shared interests.
- Produces shared incentives for innovation and cost effectiveness.⁸⁸

Changing a contracting process to a performance-based system is a difficult but not impossible task. First and foremost, an organization must determine what constitutes success. For example, in a job training program, is it completion of job training or actually getting and retaining a living wage job that is important? Secondly, contracting agencies must set realistic measures of success that are based on current levels of performance.

The General Services Administration (GSA) manual⁸⁹ on developing performance-based contracts urges the use of a Statement of Objectives (SOO) in developing contract requirements. An SOO requires the competing vendors to develop a statement of work, performance metrics and monitoring plan to determine the approach to the service outcome desired. This approach to contracting encourages innovation and creativity in meeting the objectives established by the contracting agency.

Contract Compliance

Contract compliance is an important and distinct activity that is critical to good contracting policies and procedures. A robust contract compliance system can improve:

- Identification of areas for cost reductions.
- Cost recovery.
- Accuracy of vendor transactions and relationships.
- Contract structuring for sustained cost reduction.
- Procurement and payment processes.
- Financial and operational processes.
- Overall business performance.⁹⁰



To establish a sound contract monitoring system, organizations must:

- Train contract managers to give them the needed skills.
- Have written policies and procedures built into contract language that details robust reporting requirements and monitoring processes.
- Communicate clear expectations to vendors.
- Have plans in place for early warning systems when issues arise, as well as contingency plans if vendors default on their obligations.
- Have an organizational system in place to manage all aspects of contract compliance.⁹¹

Electronic Signatures

While ensuring compliance, procurement processes must also take advantage of available technologies to keep pace with best practices. These include procurement information technology (IT) systems that support all aspects of contract management.

One relatively recent development is the passage of the Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (E-Sign Act) and the Uniform Electronic Transaction Act; both pieces of federal legislation establish that in the United States, electronic records and signatures carry the same weight and legal status as paper and handwritten signatures.⁹² Digital signatures enable a truly paperless contract process that is efficient, time sensitive, and easy to store.

While there are different levels of e-signature options, the most secure is to use services such as DocuSign and Adobe EchoSign that comply with the E-Sign Act both within the United States and internationally.

Findings

Performance-Based Contracting

The Travis County Purchasing Office recognizes the benefits of performance-based contracting. Working with Health and Human Services and Veterans Services Department (HHS and VS), the Purchasing Office reports that of 84 contracts in place:

- 26 contracts have been reviewed and either changed or exempted from a competitive cycle.
- 42 contracts (61.8 percent) have not yet been reviewed and will be considered as part of a two-year review plan.
- 16 contracts are considered special cases, such as those requiring a County match, and are deemed not suitable for performance-based contracting.



This schedule means that 62 percent of contracts deemed suitable for performance-based contracting have not yet been reviewed and it will take two more years to do so. HHS and VS reports that they no longer fund organization-based contracts, a practice in place for many years until recently, that funded the operating budget of a department rather than paying for outcomes.

A review of a sample of four contracts that the Purchasing Office and HHS and VS consider renewed as performance-based contracts reveals, however, that the contracts are not performance-based. While there are some indicators of outcomes expected, most deliverables in the contracts identify process objectives such as number of training classes, number of clients attending, and number of counseling sessions. A more appropriate performance-based contract would indicate the desired outcome, for example the number of participants who obtain a living-wage job and maintain it for three months. Most importantly, the budgets for these contracts were not linked to the deliverables. The budgets remain department line item budgets for which the County is paying for all or some portion of the operation.

Additionally, until recently, social service contracts had automatic renewal clauses that have essentially allowed some contractors to renew contracts for extended periods of time regardless of performance, sometimes for decades. The Purchasing Office put in place a plan to eliminate these renewal clauses in fiscal year (FY) 2014. The status of that effort is:

- Six early childhood services contracts were modified in FY 2014.
- 12 contracts for youth services, workforce development and family services were modified in FY 2015.
- Four issue areas will be addressed in FY 2017 and FY 2018:
 - Access to Basic Supports
 - Support Services for Community Living
 - Behavioral Health Services
 - Public Health Services

Contract Compliance

Except for some federal contracts, the Travis County Purchasing Office is not responsible for contract compliance; historically this activity is carried out by individual departments. The Purchasing Office gets involved with compliance issues when departments report problems with contractors.



The County has no organized system of compliance that ensures staff fulfilling this function are adequately trained. It is not possible to assess how well this function is being performed since it is left to the departments with little oversight from the Purchasing Office.

As shown Table 8-1, Travis County has almost \$223 million in non-construction contracts. Contract compliance needs to be more tightly managed in a multi-million-dollar system of this size with the additional possibility of saving millions of dollars through improved controls.

Table 8-1 All Active Contracts as of January 27, 2016

Type	Amount	Non-Construction
Commodity	\$80,694,698	
Information Technology	\$75,973,981	\$222,955,961
Services	\$66,287,282	
Construction	\$121,680,362	
Grand Total	\$344,636,323	

Source: Data provided by Purchasing Office.

Electronic Signatures

Though the Travis County Purchasing Office has an electronic RFP/bid process in place, it does not currently allow for electronic signatures on contracts. The consequence of this is that all executed contracts must be printed in hard copy for signatures and then must be stored in hard copy. This process defeats the electronic processing goal and increases the cost of printing and storing contracts.

Recommendations

Recommendation 8.1.1

Implement performance-based contracting policies and procedures and eliminate auto-renewal clauses as aggressively as possible. The Purchasing Office should make implementation of performance-based contracting the highest of priorities. A plan should be developed with a goal to modify all appropriate contracts within the shortest possible time—even if this requires modifying some current contracts to reestablish them as performance-based. In addition, the Purchasing Office should review every contract to ensure it meets the true definition of performance-based, that is, paying for outcomes, not processes. The benefits of this type of contract, especially in HHS and VS, cannot be overstated.



In addition, surveys indicate that companies lose between three and five percent of savings opportunities because of auto-renewing contracts.⁹³

Recommendation 8.1.2

Develop tighter contract compliance procedures in the Purchasing Office. The Purchasing Office should develop short- and long-term plans to improve contract compliance. Initially, additional training and oversight of department compliance activity will establish improved reporting and procedures to manage this process. Improved contract compliance will also provide the Purchasing Office with data to more effectively use information for contract negotiations and renewals. In the long-run, analysis will inform County leadership and the Purchasing Board on the right balance between centralized and decentralized contract compliance efforts.

If Travis County saved three percent yearly through improved contract compliance, it would recognize \$3.8 million in savings.

Recommendation 8.1.3

Implement policies and procedures to establish electronic signature capabilities. As noted, electronic signatures are not only legally binding, they can provide a secure means to execute contracts efficiently. The Purchasing Office has significantly improved the bid and contracting process through technology; it should take the steps necessary to establish this tool as another way to streamline contracting.

8.2 WHAT TRAVIS COUNTY IS BUYING

Background

Simplifying and Expediting Small Purchases through Use of P-Cards

A growing number of companies and government agencies are using procurement cards (P-cards) to allow designated employees to purchase items under a set threshold rather than having to initiate the purchase through an ordering and invoicing system. A survey conducted by PayStream Advisors showed 64 percent of companies responding are currently using P-cards and an additional six percent are deploying a P-card program in the next six months.⁹⁴ Switching to P-card transactions can save as much as 55 to 80 percent of traditional processing costs that involve invoice processing and paper check payments.⁹⁵ Typically, purchasing large items such as vehicles or a five-dollar stapler entails the same process. Costs in a typical purchase order process include: requisitions, approvals, purchase orders, processing systems, receipts, follow-up to charge item to correct department, and general overhead. P-cards can reduce both



accounts payable and purchasing department workloads and simplify the reconciliation process. Organizations using P-cards also benefit from rebate programs offered by vendors, typically between one and three percent of the purchase amount.⁹⁶

The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) identifies the use of P-cards as a best practice that provides a convenient mechanism to: purchase goods without the need for a purchase order; expedite delivery of purchased items; achieve better pricing; establish greater opportunity for the number of merchants willing to do business with government; and reduce paperwork.⁹⁷

P-cards work best when appropriate controls are in place to manage policy and practice. Written vendor agreements and fee schedules, processing procedures, and security measures need to be in place. In addition, employees with P-cards must have clear guidelines on the use of a P-card, training, spending limits, approval processes, periodic audits of activity, and procedures for canceling cards when needed. With comprehensive and clearly understood policies and procedures, P-cards can be an efficient way to transact business.

GFOA recommends:

- Written agreements with banks that include fee schedules, processing procedures and security requirements.
- Written staff policies and procedures, including instructions on employee responsibilities, appropriate use of cards, and approved merchant categories.
- Written acknowledgments signed by an employee given responsibility for a card.
- On-going training for cardholders and supervisors.
- Established limits per transaction and on a monthly basis.
- Regular audits of card activity, ensuring retention of receipts and documentation of purchase is available.
- Timely reconciliation and separation of duties for payment, accounting, and reconciliation.
- Regular review of spending by vendor and merchant category.⁹⁸

Analysis and Reporting on Contracting and Spending

It is important for government leaders to not only ensure an efficient and effective procurement process is in place, but also to carefully monitor what is being purchased. Known as spend analysis, organizations track spending over time to leverage buying

power and manage suppliers, as well as to develop informed procurement strategies and to identify areas to reduce costs.

Spend analysis is used to help decision makers make informed decisions and to understand where spending is increasing beyond inflation and savings need to be identified. This process also increases transparency by identifying what was purchased, what suppliers were used, and how much was purchased from each supplier. Both public and private organizations report savings of between three and five percent of purchases when spend analyses are done on a continuing basis.⁹⁹

Findings

Simplifying and Expediting Small Purchases through Use of P-Cards

The Travis County Purchasing Office manages the “Shopping Cart” process that is part of the SAP system for departments to purchase needed goods and services. The Shopping Cart system is fully automated; however, transactions require some human intervention to correct information, reconcile contract and/or off-contract items, verify pricing, and other such tasks that may prevent a shopping cart from processing automatically. Each Shopping Cart may have several Purchase Order (PO) “lines” if multiple items are being purchased in the same cart.

One of three mechanisms may be used in a Shopping Cart to identify purchase requests: (1) the item/service is on a County contract and can be identified by designating the item from the contract; (2) the item is identified through free text (meaning the requester must describe in words what is to be purchased); or (3) the item is a “punchout” item that is part of a vendor’s online catalogue.

Table 8-2 shows the number of items purchased by each of these three mechanisms and the dollar amounts of the purchases. Free text purchases are the most labor intensive since the requester must describe the item and a purchasing agent must review the request to determine the best method to use to procure the item.

Departments report that the need for free text requests is increasing each year. While the purchasing dollar amount is less than contracts and punchouts, the number of free text PO lines is significant: 40.5 percent of all PO lines.



Table 8-2 Purchase Order Items by Method of Purchasing

Row Labels	Count of PO Items	Percent	Sum of Net Value	Percent
County Contract	9,529	32.2%	\$83,442,842	65.6%
Free Text	11,977	40.5%	\$42,480,048	33.4%
Punchout	8,046	27.2%	\$1,183,441	0.9%
Grand Total	29,552		\$127,106,331	

Source: Data provided by Purchasing Office.

Table 8-3 shows that of 29,556 PO lines processed by the Purchasing Office in FY 2015, over 85 percent (25,141) were for \$1,000 or less, representing only 3.1 percent of purchases (\$3.9 million). While some of the PO lines may be for adjustments to payments made incorrectly, a significant number of purchases remain under \$1,000 that would warrant establishing a P-card system in the County.

Table 8-3 FY2015 Purchase Order Lines

PO Value	Number of PO Lines at Each Value	Total PO Lines \$1,000 or Less	Value
Less than/equal \$1.00*	191		
\$1.01–\$5.00	1,539		
\$5.01–\$10.00	2,200		
\$10.01–\$25.00	4,546	25,141	\$3.9M
\$25.01–\$50.00	3,596	(85.1%)	(3.1%)
\$50.01–\$100.00	3,521		
\$100.01–\$500.00	7,260		
\$500.01–\$1000.00	2,286		
\$1000.01–\$5,000	2,861		
\$5000.01–\$10,000	615		
\$10,000.01–\$50,000	681		
Greater than \$50,000	258		
Total	29,556		

Source: Data provided by Purchasing Office.

*Note: some small amounts may be adjustments to payments made incorrectly and not new purchases. Total is unknown without a detailed review of all PO lines.

In addition, employees required to travel on County business report that obtaining funds for travel is a difficult and complicated process. Most often an employee is required to process paperwork for a paper check to be produced to pay for hotels and other travel expenses.

Bexar, El Paso, and Dallas counties have established P-card policies and procedures for purchases up to \$1,000 for an individual purchase and a \$10,000 monthly maximum on



one card. El Paso County allows up to \$5,000 in purchases if three bids are obtained prior to purchase. Bexar County has a separate travel card under the same policies and procedures as the P-card; El Paso does not include travel. The counties report no significant problems in oversight or managing the system.

Analysis and Reporting on Contracting and Spending

The Purchasing Office tracks spending and has numerous reports that identify yearly spending, trends over multiple years, vendors, and contract amounts. This information is used to inform future procurements and better manage the purchasing process.

However, this information is not reported to the Commissioners Court in a manner that would help to support budget decisions. The Purchasing Board, with two representatives from the Commissioners Court, meet only once per year. The Planning and Budget Office (PBO) provides the Commissioners Court with spending information but not the full range of data available on vendors, contracts, trends, and other data that is important for decision making.

For example, numerous purchasing codes can be rolled up to identify what the County is spending on office supplies or other major purchases. This information is critical in budget deliberations, especially when there is a need to identify where reductions can be made. Table 8-4 shows spending that was 30 percent higher in FY 2015 over FY 2014. There may be sound reasons for these increases; however, unless a more detailed spend analysis is conducted, the court does not have the information needed to make informed decisions.

Table 8-4 Increased Spending – FY14 to FY15 – 50 Percent or More

Product/Service	FY 2014 Spending	FY 2015 Spending	Difference*	% Difference
Boilers	\$879	\$884,469	\$883,590	100,522.2%
Security Guard Services	\$1,315	\$386,145	\$384,830	29,264.6%
Prefabricated Structures	\$1,201	\$182,384	\$181,183	150,86.0%
Mowers	\$5,162	\$722,178	\$717,016	13,890.3%
Real Estate Services	\$21,601	\$2,671,613	\$2,650,012	12,268.0%
Land Parcels	\$205,418	\$16,748,375	\$16,542,957	8,053.3%
Motorized Cycles	\$3,820	\$208,077	\$204,257	5,347.0%
Benefits Administration	\$65,655	\$3,007,120	\$2,941,465	4,480.2%
Baby/toddler Furniture	\$13,961	\$146,500	\$132,540	949.4%
Software/Hardware Engineering	\$56,887	\$508,139	\$451,252	793.2%
Minivans or Vans	\$48,094	\$309,037	\$260,943	542.6%
Funeral Association Services	\$105,995	\$153,150	\$471,550	444.9%
Internal Property Damage	\$68,175	\$360,791	\$292,616	429.2%
Right of Way	\$208,706	\$1,049,891	\$841,186	403.0%



Product/Service	FY 2014 Spending	FY 2015 Spending	Difference*	% Difference
Transportation Assistance	\$36,400	\$152,983	\$116,583	320.3%
Utility and Device Driver Software	\$253,515	\$1,053,899	\$800,384	315.7%
Concrete and Mortars	\$166,875	\$522,832	\$355,957	213.3%
Government Bonds	\$238,062	\$685,628	\$447,566	188.0%
Canned/Jarred Vegetables	\$43,229	\$120,921	\$77,693	179.7%
App implementation	\$243,534	\$679,300	\$435,767	178.9%
System/System Component Services	\$144,360	\$387,406	\$243,046	168.4%
Fixed Phones	\$44,042	\$117,871	\$73,829	167.6%
Specialized Vehicle/ RV	\$1,336,127	\$3,346,454	\$2,010,327	150.5%
Two-Way Radios	\$127,581	\$312,763	\$185,182	145.1%
General Building Office Cleaning Services	\$186,430	\$449,138	\$262,708	140.9%
Horticulture Services	\$231,215	\$509,331	\$278,116	120.3%
Methodology Analysis	\$497,335	\$1,083,780	\$586,445	117.9%
Sub-recipient Other	\$384,329	\$805,975	\$421,647	109.7%
Asphalts	\$1,555,296	\$3,248,605	\$1,693,310	108.9%
Firearms	\$71,641	\$148,062	\$76,420	106.7%
Surgical Products	\$114,949	\$228,371	\$113,421	98.7%
Education and Training Services	\$378,256	\$748,129	\$369,873	97.8%
Frozen Vegetables	\$130,267	\$254,198	\$123,930	95.1%
Audio and Visual Equipment	\$73,648	\$143,139	\$69,491	94.4%
Application Programming Services	\$248,800	\$467,824	\$219,024	88.0%
Elevator Maintenance Services	\$94,806	\$177,295	\$82,489	87.0%
Fence Construction Services	\$176,076	\$313,312	\$137,236	77.9%
Land Preparation Services	\$5,577,131	\$9,754,886	\$4,177,755	74.9%
Temp Personnel Services	\$154,856	\$263,955	\$109,099	70.5%
Rail Construction Material	\$322,605	\$543,512	\$220,907	68.5%
Office Furniture	\$388,809	\$635,700	\$246,892	63.5%
Newspaper Advertising	\$164,567	\$264,415	\$99,848	60.7%
Body Armor	\$87,289	\$134,384	\$47,095	54.0%
Other Equipment Repairs and Maintenance	\$1,904,019	\$2,869,877	\$965,857	50.7%

Source: Data provided by Purchasing Office.

*Some items are not included for unique items that show no spending in FY14 compared to FY15.

Likewise, spending by category or vendor tracking can provide the Commissioners Court with information that can inform budget decisions and better equip the Court for these decisions. Table 8-5 and Table 8-6 identify the top 50 highest spending categories and vendors. While all of these may not be areas to find savings or reduce costs, understanding what and where the County is spending will improve decision making.



Table 8-5 Top 50 Contract Purchases/Products

Product Category Description	Contract Spend from 10/1/2015 to 9/30/2016
Community Social Services	\$7,922,184
Ambulance Services	\$3,866,970
Employee Actual Claims/Loss Pharmacy Claims	\$3,473,938
Highway/Road Resurface	\$2,933,087
Software Maintenance Support	\$2,204,129
Lease/Rent Property/Building	\$1,226,704
Youth Camps/ Facilities Services	\$1,148,540
Civil Engineering	\$1,113,156
Social Work Administration Services	\$916,714
Workers' Compensation Insurance	\$900,000
HVAC Construction Services	\$842,050
Sub-recipient, Other	\$830,530
Benefits Administration	\$826,056
Utility and Device Driver Software	\$821,334
Copier Rent/Lease	\$812,088
Psychiatrist Services	\$762,222
Bus Corp Management Consulting	\$719,303
Aircraft Maintenance Repair Services	\$705,363
Human Resources Development	\$698,899
Gasoline or Petrol	\$598,847
Drugs and Pharmaceutical Products	\$552,934
Mentally Impaired Criminal Facilities	\$521,245
DVNMEP Rent/Lease Services	\$491,752
Computer Hardware Rent/Lease Services	\$463,990
Other Miscellaneous	\$458,637
System Installation	\$442,916
Dispute Mediation	\$440,580
Sub-recipient, Salaries	\$418,771
Escrow and Title Services	\$416,077
General Building Office Cleaning Services	\$414,486
Computer Hardware Maintenance Support	\$366,736
Alternative Education Services	\$350,684
Refuse Collection and Disposal	\$340,785
WC Premium	\$318,311
Land Parcels	\$313,399
Bus Function Software	\$265,575
Insurance Services for Structure/Property	\$220,992
Cell Telephone Services	\$218,631
Meat Poultry Products	\$208,453
Canned/Jarred Fruit	\$202,812
Rehabilitation Services	\$180,645
A/C Instillation and Maintenance or Repair	\$179,708
Office Furniture	\$173,811



Product Category Description	Contract Spend from 10/1/2015 to 9/30/2016
Fuels	\$169,623
Security Guard Services	\$159,585
Fence Construction Services	\$157,798
System Board Processors Interface/Modules	\$156,247
Legal Research Services	\$154,965
Storage	\$154,6826

Source: Data provided by Purchasing Office.

Table 8-6 Top 50 Vendors

Vendor Name	Contract Spend from 10/1/2015 to 9/30/2016
City of Austin	\$4,122,127
Envision Pharmaceutical Services, L	\$3,535,569
SMA Asphalt LLC	\$2,933,087
ImageSoft Inc.	\$1,141,269
York Risk Services Group, Inc.	\$900,000
CDMtek	\$842,050
Cobb, Fendley & Associates, Inc.	\$816,588
Capital Area Private Defender Service	\$804,511
CYRUSONE LP	\$792,825
Austin Travis County Integral Care	\$765,623
Capital Investing in Development	\$760,800
United Healthcare Services Inc.	\$756,547
XEROX Corporation	\$746,953
Family Eldercare Inc.	\$673,033
Southwest Key Program	\$665,269
TurbomeCA USA INC	\$662,048
Worksource Greater Austin Area	\$652,499
Texas Conference of Urban Counties	\$648,791
Workforce Solutions	\$630,315
Pinnacle Petroleum Inc.	\$597,746
AmeriSource Bergen Drug Corporation	\$539,962
Correctional Solutions Group LLC	\$521,245
ReliaStar Life Insurance Company	\$503,203
Youth and Family Alliance	\$476,147
Motorola Solutions Credit Company	\$473,444
Foundation Communities	\$459,850
Gartner Inc.	\$444,621
SAP Public Services Inc.	\$443,329
Dispute Resolution Center	\$440,580
Corrections Software Solutions LP	\$433,740
Capstone Title, LLC	\$416,077
AIDS Services of Austin	\$391,437



Vendor Name	Contract Spend from 10/1/2015 to 9/30/2016
Caritas of Austin	\$390,480
Boys and Girls Club of the Austin	\$389,000
Tiburon Inc.	\$368,971
Texas San Marcos Treatment Center	\$361,725
Texas Disposal Systems Inc.	\$348,376
AECOM Technical Services Inc.	\$336,492
DELL Marketing LP	\$335,375
Frost Insurance Agency	\$318,311
ITCOA LLC	\$313,399
Meals on Wheels and More Inc.	\$310,435
Halff Associates	\$294,999
Varsity Contractors Inc.	\$278,472
Presidio Networked Solutions Inc.	\$278,231
Literacy Coalition of Central Texas	\$273,054
Skillpoint Alliance	\$270,800
Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid Inc.	\$259,112
Cornell Corrections of Texas Inc.	\$255,523

Source: Data provided by Purchasing Office.

In addition to information available for the Commissioners Court, more transparency in the purchasing system is needed to allow the general public to understand what the County is purchasing and from whom. While the Purchasing Office web site allows for reviewing bids posted and responding to solicitations electronically, there is no ability to view information on selected bids and eventual contracts.

The city of Chicago has a comprehensive contracts search capability that posts the results/scoring of submitted bids, as well as the contracts for all vendors.¹⁰⁰ Citizens can access information that includes start date, end date, contract amount, and summary of contract goods/services being supplied. In addition, citizens can click on the contract summary and obtain a full copy of the contract online.

The Travis County Purchasing Office web site does not have any of these capabilities. There is no information posted on the results of the bidding process and selection of a vendor. Additionally, while it is possible to do a search and see information on the name of a supplier, type of contract, and categories of services, the results are limited to these pieces of information and the end date of the contract. There is no information on the amount of the contract or ability to view the contract itself. Viewers are instructed to contact the Purchasing Office for additional contract information.



Recommendations

Recommendation 8.2.1

Implement policies and procedures to establish a P-card system to expedite and simplify small purchases. A more efficient and streamlined purchasing system can be established through the use of P-cards given that 25,141 PO lines (over 85 percent of all purchases) are \$1,000 or less. Additionally, P-cards can expedite payments for employees who must travel on County business. With appropriate safeguards, policies and procedures in place, mandatory training for cardholders and supervisors, and monitoring of compliance, the risks of P-cards is minimal.

Beyond efficiencies, the County may be able to collect rebates of about \$117,000 if it receives a three percent rebate on the \$3.9 million in purchases.

Recommendation 8.2.2

Conduct an analysis of free text purchases and develop improved mechanisms for purchases. Since free text PO lines are the most labor intensive for both departments to establish and the purchasing agent to review, streamlining the purchasing system will require these types of purchases be kept to a minimum. The Purchasing Office should work with departments to analyze these requests, the reasons for the increase in the number, and develop a plan to reduce them. The need for some of these PO lines would be eliminated with the implementation of a P-card system.

Recommendation 8.2.3

Produce spend analysis reports to provide information for improved budget decisions for Commissioners Court. The Purchasing Office should work closely with PBO to produce reports that give the Commissioners Court more information on spending, especially identifying trends in spending over multiple years. With this type of information, the Court will have the ability to better oversee spending by department, intervene if spending is increasing without proper justification, and challenge departments to cut spending in non-critical areas.

The Purchasing Board should meet more often, especially in line with the budget process, to provide the opportunity for regular and on-going review and discussion of available data on spending.



Achieving a three percent savings on \$127 million in annual County spending equals \$3.8 million.

Recommendation 8.2.4

Improve the Purchasing Office web site to increase transparency in contracting.

The bid process and contract search functions on the current site should be improved to provide more information to the general public. Ideally, more detail about contracts, including the total amount of a contract and the ability to access the actual contract on-site, should be provided. Secondarily, information on bid reviews and scoring should also be provided to allow future potential bidders to understand how the County scores bids.

The Purchasing Office and Travis County legal staff will have to assess what is allowable under recent changes in Texas law regarding contractor's rights. Putting language in all contracts to notify contractors that information will be online once a contract is executed could be one solution. Other ways may be available that balance the public's right to information and a contractor's protection of proprietary information.



9 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

The Information Technology Services Department (ITS) provides information technology (IT) services to Travis County departments and to the offices of appointed and elected County officials in support of their functional responsibilities and respective missions to provide high quality services to County citizens and constituents. ITS provides IT infrastructure, data storage, applications development and support, deployment, project management support for key IT initiatives, telecommunications and network management and security, technical support, and web services to 46 departments and a user community of about 5,500 employees. ITS provides these services with a staff of about 100 full-time equivalent (FTE) County employees. Approximately 100 additional non-ITS staff provide IT support and services specific to the departments and offices in which they reside; these non-ITS or “departmental” IT staff are distributed among 21 of the more than 46 departments in the County.¹⁰¹

ITS is led by the chief information officer (CIO) who reports directly to Commissioners Court and who is charged in Chapter 35 of the Travis County Code with authority and responsibility to secure the Travis County network infrastructure under the control of the Commissioners Court. ITS is organized into four operational divisions: Network and Systems Operations Services, Applications Development and Production Support, Program Management Office, and an Administration, Security and Compliance unit (Administrative Services Division). Its commitment to high quality service delivery is established in an annual Work Plan that also identifies its major technology initiatives, objectives, and related performance metrics.

9.1 IT GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

Background

IT governance is a structure that sets forth processes used by private sector and governmental organizations to make informed and transparent decisions regarding organizational investments in technology. Without a robust governance structure and documented processes for prioritization, IT-related decisions tend to be (or to be perceived as) arbitrary, left to chance, influenced by political clout, or be the most pressing or popular choice of the moment. According to the IT Governance Institute, IT governance consists of the leadership and organizational structures and processes that help ensure that IT “sustains and extends the enterprise’s strategies and objectives.”¹⁰² In other words, the purpose of IT governance is to ensure that priorities for investing in IT resources are aligned with those of countywide government. Not only does IT governance establish who makes decisions and how, but it also should include a



systematic and transparent process for reviewing conflicts and contested decisions, measuring and monitoring outcomes, and ensuring that there is a clear system of accountability for results.¹⁰³ Governance helps prevent, minimize, and resolve conflicts that are commonplace in organizations where needs are many and resources are limited.

The ITS department has taken important steps in recent years to establish sound IT governance processes and practices within the department, including the establishment of a Commissioners Technology Subcommittee, a Change Advisory Board (CAB), and a Technical Advisory Board (TAB) that meets weekly. These boards together provide a forum for communication about planned and on-going IT projects including high-level (CAB) and technical (TAB) issues, challenges, and implications. Additionally, three governance committees oversee IT initiatives related to specific areas of concern: Integrated Justice System, Wireless Communications, and IT Security. Project steering committees may also be convened for projects that impact multiple departments.

Findings

Despite efforts in recent years to improve governance over the provision of IT services and resources, Travis County does not currently have a fully functioning IT governance process that places enterprise goals above individual department goals in a manner that is perceived as consistent or legitimate. The strongest evidence of IT governance consists of a policy in Chapter 32 of the County Code that requires ITS to review all department purchase requests for software, hardware, and other IT equipment. This policy and the efforts in place, however, fall short of providing an effective governance structure for coherent IT decision making.

Currently, there is no IT governance structure that includes representatives from all County government departments or from offices of elected and appointed officials. As a result, IT governance functions are in effect being fulfilled by the Planning and Budget Office (PBO) in its role of evaluating and approving departmental budget requests in preparing the County's budget. While PBO must play an important (and perhaps the lead) role in decisions about IT investments and priorities, the budgeting and purchase approval processes alone do not provide an adequate forum for collaborative short- and long-term strategic planning and decision making by County leaders about priorities for IT.

An example of the difficulty in project clarification and prioritization was witnessed by the review team in a project steering committee meeting. There were too many attendees,



too little focus on the agenda items, and no evidence of progress during the course of the meeting on either decision making or agreement on the topics discussed.

Deficiencies in the countywide IT governance structure and process make the work of ITS difficult to prioritize and complete without frequent shifts in focus. The effects are felt down to the line-worker level of ITS staff—interviewees report frustration at being pulled onto and off of projects unexpectedly due to shifting priorities, not being able to keep their original time commitments to departmental customers, and not understanding or being able to explain why priorities had shifted.

The vast majority of ITS employees expressed their strong commitment to cooperation with and service to all County departments. Similarly, most departmental experiences with ITS are positive as indicated during two focus groups conducted by the review team. Most focus group participants gave ITS high marks for responsiveness to their departments. Nevertheless, negative experiences were described by several user departments in focus groups and observed by the review team as limiting factors to progress, innovation, and effectiveness. Tensions, including rancor, accusatory language, and non-cooperation between some departments and ITS are not typical, but they have occurred, and their effects have tended to persist over time. Negative experiences and attitudes expressed by user departments include:

- Perception of overly bureaucratic processes, including multiple IT purchasing approval steps.
- Perception of an uneven playing field when it comes to making decisions about IT tools, support, and services.
- Anxiety and tension about the ability of ITS to provide an adequate level of service or to fulfill commitments.
- Lack of confidence by some County departments in their ability to reliably access IT resources and services essential to performing their duties.

ITS has been labeled by some as “unwilling to cooperate,” and as having a “fear of losing control.” The review team did not find evidence to substantiate these claims, but the ITS staff interviewed are keenly aware of these experiences and perceptions, and in turn feel scapegoated for dynamics beyond their control.

The provision of IT services has been moving toward a more centralized model in Travis County in recent years, as evidenced by consolidation of some staff and expansion of ITS roles, particularly in the area of IT security. The reasons for this are numerous and

include minimizing redundancies, achieving economies of scale, enhancing accountability, increasing efficiency, improving security, and reducing costs. Some Travis County departments have no technology resources of their own, and ITS manages all of their services, while other departments house nearly all of their own resources including IT staff; computers and servers; applications and/or application services; and other assets, services, and contracted services they administer internally.

The following best practices are set forth by IMPACT's IT Governance Specialists Development Group, a leading provider of expert services for IT professionals:

- **An enterprise wide approach.** A shared, cohesive view of IT governance is needed across the enterprise based on a common, non-technical language.
- **An agreed-upon IT governance framework.** An agreed-upon framework for defining IT processes and the controls or interdepartmental agreements that is integrated with other governance practices, such as the budget approval process.
- **Top-level commitment.** IT governance needs a mandate and direction from executive-level County management if it is to succeed in practice. The framework should be supported by an effective communication campaign so that user departments understand objectives and comply with practices.
- **Trust.** For IT governance to be effective, the suppliers of IT services and knowledge must be professional, expert, and aligned to customer requirements. Trust has to be developed, and this may warrant special initiatives, joint workshops, and/or an appropriate liaison, if needed (such as a County administrator or official).
- **Measurement systems.** Creation of an IT scorecard will underpin and reinforce achievement of IT governance objectives. Adoption of current or modified IT performance measures by the governance committee can be a very good way to establish common objectives.
- **Emphasis on cost savings.** It is likely that there will be opportunities to realize financial savings as a consequence of implementing improved IT governance. These will help to gain support for improvement initiatives.¹⁰⁴



Tarrant County has an IT Steering Committee made up of elected and appointed officials. Their charter is summarized in Table 9-1.

Table 9-1 Tarrant County IT Steering Committee Structure

Purpose
<p>The IT Strategic Plan recommended that the IT Steering Committee meet once per quarter and perform the following primary duties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare annual updates to IT Strategic Plan and Budget;• Present plan and budget to Commissioners Court for approval;• Determine priorities and allocate resources to IT initiatives;• Monitor countywide IT performance to ensure goals of the plan are fulfilled; and• Perform a quarterly review of County business requirements to ensure citizens' needs are met.
IT Steering Committee Voting Members
<p>The IT Steering Committee includes the following elected and appointed officials as voting members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• County Commissioner, Precinct 1• County Commissioner, Precinct 2• County Administrator• Purchasing• Sheriff's Department• 371st District Court• County Budget Office• County Clerk• Criminal Court Administrator• District Attorney's Office• District Clerk• IT Director of Operations, IT• IT Director of Strategic Planning and Development• Chief Information Officer• County Auditor• Tax Assessor

Source: Tarrant County PMO Guidebook, ITS Steering Committee v. 1.4, pages 3-4.

Tarrant County has a county administrator position; this individual does not serve on the IT Steering Committee, but mediates conflicts between ITS and offices of elected officials.¹⁰⁵

Recommendations

Recommendation 9.1.1

Implement an IT governance committee and associated framework and process according to best practices. The proposed framework should be suitable for the existing hybrid centralized/decentralized ITS structure and should encourage and facilitate building trust and working towards consolidating IT operations across the County. The framework should include a charter, bylaws, and other supporting



documents indicating IT governance committee membership, meeting frequency, and member roles and responsibilities.

Recommendation 9.1.2

Ensure that the IT governance model allows for appeals of adverse decisions and transparent decision making and accountability. ITS staff and departmental business analysts can provide the analysis to help ensure decisions are made within established parameters, but the decisions should be made by the IT governance committee. The IT governance structure should include a clearly outlined appeals process so that appeals for non-prioritized projects can be made in a transparent manner. For the IT governance process to be effective, the Commissioners Court should work to minimize the potential to circumvent the established countywide IT governance process.

Recommendation 9.1.3

Develop a comprehensive project prioritization scoring system as a component of an IT governance structure. An important role of the IT governance committee is to prioritize IT projects. Project scoring factors should include:

- Alignment with the strategic, long-term, countywide vision.
- Statutory mandate from the local, state, or federal government.
- Net positive revenue/cost savings projections.
- Urgent needs of the County and/or factors that may be outside the scope of the long-term plan.

An objective prioritization process must be fair, transparent, and credible.

9.2 CONSOLIDATION OF IT SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Background

When first-generation IT solutions were first implemented in county governments, including Travis County several decades ago, individual departments developed their own unique systems tailored to increase automation of their particular responsibilities, such as the collection of property tax and vehicle registration payments in the tax office, collection of fees for numerous services and court-imposed fines, and maintenance of property ownership documents. Thus, technology services used by each department to process bills and payments and to maintain records were historically provided by and housed within each department in a mostly decentralized fashion. In recent decades, IT,



and electronic communications in particular, has become integral to nearly every business process in government and the private sector. As a result, Travis County has taken steps to centralize essential IT services within ITS, including network support, telecommunications, data storage, and other IT functions. This is typical of similarly sized, multi-departmental organizations, including peer Texas counties examined in this review.

Travis County faces an additional challenge, as do all county governments in Texas, not faced by most private sector or public sector organizations (such as cities) in selecting and implementing the most appropriate balance of centralized or decentralized IT systems. This challenge is due to the independence of those departments that are led by elected or appointed officials, each with its own responsibility and authority to carry out their constitutional or statutory mission. As a result, county government in Texas is less like a single entity and more like a federation of several independent agencies that must cooperate with—but may not compel—each other to implement any particular operational model with respect to technology.

In a previous era of paper-driven business processes, this challenge with technology was less daunting; as long as departments had the resources to pay their staff, the tools and means by which work was accomplished was generally relevant only to that department. Today, economies of scale and information security concerns require, at the very minimum, central management of the networks that link each department to the public and to the rest of Travis County government.

Findings

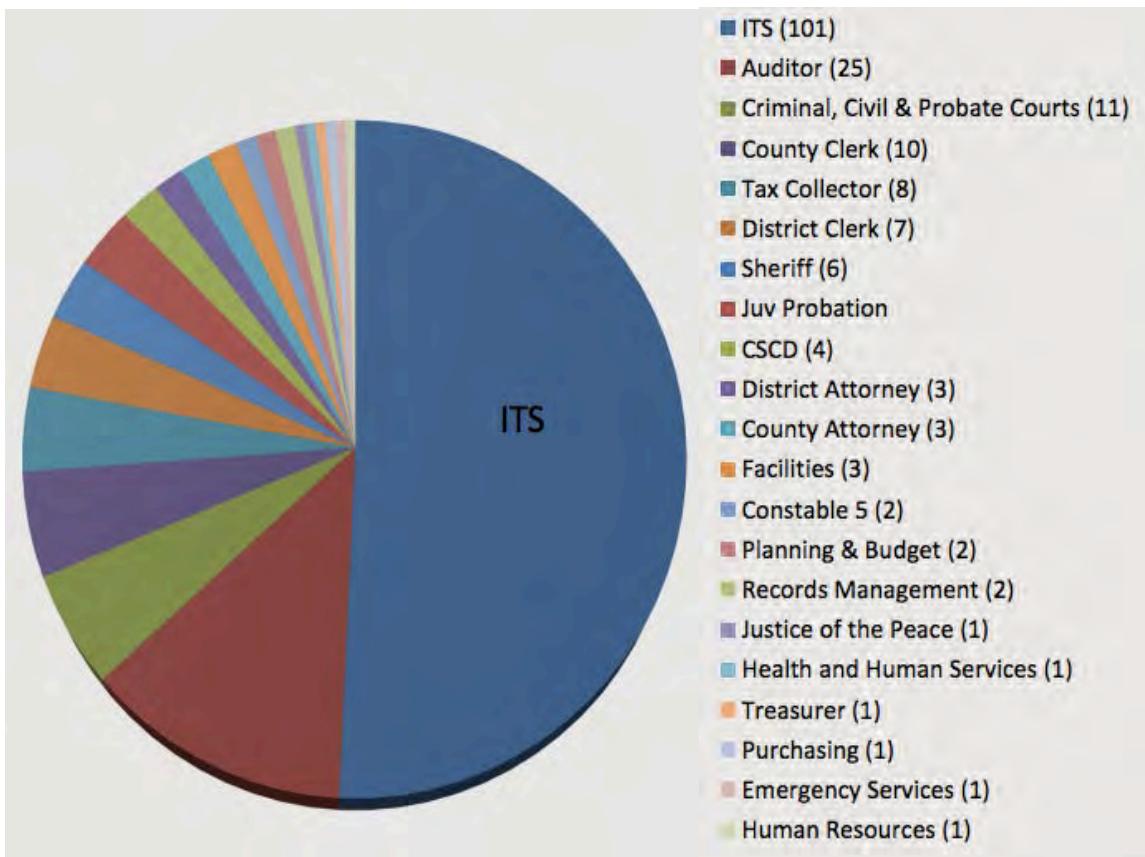
The current centralization of IT services and support within ITS is the result of efforts by Travis County to ensure that County government has the in-house expertise to manage and maintain essential technologies, to make the deployment of technologies more efficient, and to help control costs. Many departments have ceded IT responsibilities, assets, and positions to ITS. This has been effective for some departments, while others have demonstrated the need to maintain varying degrees of internal IT support and/or expertise within their organizational unit. There has not necessarily been broad consensus on the degree that various IT services and support ought to exist within each individual department. As such, a number of “decentralized” technology units have been either recreated or expanded and are at present unevenly distributed among County departments.



In the Travis County IT system, departments provide for their own technology needs to varying degrees, while the centralized ITS provides the network and IT infrastructure for all departments and varying degrees of routine and incident-based services for others. More than 200 IT-oriented positions are located in 21 of the more than 46 departments in the County. Of these, approximately 100 IT staff comprise the ITS department, and an additional 100 IT staff are housed in other County departments, including those who report to the Commissioners Court as well as to other elected and appointed officials. Of the departments with IT-oriented positions, ten are sufficiently staffed and do not rely extensively on ITS for IT services. These departments, which house 82 staff members in IT-related positions, are listed below (with number of IT-related staff in parentheses):

1. County Auditor (25)
2. Courts (11)
3. County Clerk (10)
4. Tax Collector (8)
5. District Clerk (7)
6. Sheriff (6)
7. Juvenile Probation (5)
8. Adult Probation (4)
9. District Attorney (3)
10. County Attorney (3)

Exhibit 9-1
Travis County Information Technology Staff by Department



Source: Travis County ITS 2015

The current degree of decentralization is not optimal from either an efficiency or effectiveness perspective. According to *Best Practices: Adopt the Discipline of Consolidation*, a report by Forrester Research, IT consolidation yields cost savings in three areas: standardization (typically 3 to 7 percent savings over baseline costs); centralization of resources (typically 5 to 10 percent savings); and eliminating redundant capabilities (10 to 25 percent savings).¹⁰⁶ While the greatest potential savings are typically achievable by eliminating redundant capabilities, the reorganization and restructuring required to achieve them may also require costs for moving facilities and upgrading infrastructure where applicable, moving staff, and project management for the consolidation effort.¹⁰⁷.

The review team observed conflict between several departments and ITS as the centralized provider of technology services. Efficient operations have been impeded in some cases by these poor relationships; although the effect is difficult to measure, it is



perceptible to ITS staff, user departments, and the review team. The uneven distribution of IT staff across departments appears to create uncertainty about roles and responsibilities, a poor understanding within ITS of the roles of the departmental IT staff (because they are so varied among departments), and latent resentment among those departments without departmental IT staff. In addition, this hybrid centralized/decentralized model has resulted in a limited ability to define or communicate an overall vision and direction for the development of technology for Travis County as a whole. At the same time, individual departments that do wish to pursue a particular technology vision with respect to their governmental objectives feel inhibited from doing so.

The most frequently cited example among ITS interviewees and focus group participants of inefficiencies arising from decentralized IT services is the separation between the ITS help desk and the SAP (the enterprise resource planning software used by Travis County) support services (“help desk”) housed in the County Auditor’s Office. Users often contact the ITS help desk for support on the countywide SAP application, which is not maintained by ITS. They must then contact the Auditor’s Office—which maintains and provides support for SAP—for assistance with this application. Sometimes, however, users may have a technical problem, and it is difficult to discern whether the source of the problem is with SAP, the network, the device, or some other issue. In these cases, a substantial amount of staff time and productivity, of both users and IT staff from ITS and the County Auditor’s Office, may be lost in attempting to determine the problem source and provide appropriate assistance. The review team was not able to identify existing policies or documented procedures for coordinating the IT support services offered by ITS and the County Auditor’s Office.

Strategically consolidating redundant IT capabilities, according to Gartner, a leading IT research and advisory firm, yields “economies of scale and scope, improves enterprise-wide integration, boosts capabilities and innovation, and achieves benefits from cross-business-unit/regional process harmonization.”¹⁰⁸

To be effective, ITS will need the trust and buy-in of the departments it serves. Based on this review, a historic lack of trust with IT functions underlies the proliferation of IT staff across departments and a lack of countywide transparency about their roles. Efforts to optimize the level of centralization and IT resource consolidation for Travis County should be undertaken in close coordination with efforts to improve the County’s IT governance structure (Recommendation 9.1.1).



Four of the five peer counties contacted for this review (Dallas, El Paso, Harris, and Tarrant) have moved from decentralized to consolidated IT departments.¹⁰⁹ In Dallas County, a few of the largest departments have dedicated IT staff, however they report to the central IT department.¹¹⁰ In Tarrant County, the court supported a deliberate IT consolidation process that took a period of 10 years to complete.¹¹¹ A new CIO in Harris County consolidated IT services over the past five years. Bexar County is decentralized and faces issues similar to those of Travis County; however, the county recently engaged a private consultant to prepare a five-year IT strategy, and IT consolidation is included in the consultant recommendations.¹¹²

Recommendations

Recommendation 9.2.1

Develop a long-term plan to move toward the consolidation IT functions. Travis County departments should work toward achieving an IT services model that maximizes efficiencies while maintaining and improving effectiveness. This long-term plan should be developed and approved by the proposed IT governance committee (see Recommendation 9.1.1) and implemented by ITS. The long-term plan may take several years to implement; slowly building effective avenues for communication and for resolving differences will go a long way toward building trust across departments on IT issues.

Recommendation 9.2.2

Establish “one-stop” coordination between the ITS help desk and SAP help desk services. The optimal solution for user efficiency would be a single Travis County IT help desk; due to the statutory responsibility of the County Auditor’s Office for accounting functions, a more feasible short-term solution may be closer coordination between the two help desks, and a structured system for a seamless handoff of users.

A service level agreement (SLA) (See Recommendation 9.3.1) between the two service groups would be an excellent first step toward a seamless process for users needing help desk assistance. Such an SLA should clearly define the responsibilities of each help desk, criteria for identifying whether a customer should be transferred to the other service group, and a consistent process for doing so seamlessly without requiring the user to start over in seeking assistance. Greater automation of help desk services could also aid in this process; for example, by ensuring that all incident data provided by a customer is shared electronically with the other service group if the customer must be transferred for further assistance.



To the extent that a shared online interface could be developed for both service groups, closer coordination of the help desks could be largely automated. Customers could be further instructed or encouraged to serve themselves through automated services when possible (such as for new password requests).

9.3 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

Background

Roles and expectations between ITS and user departments are not documented or understood in a consistent way by all involved parties. Departments within Travis County government have dramatically different IT needs, capabilities, and resources. The complexity of the different needs and the variety of IT systems in place in each department, combined with a lack of clarity about the role and responsibility of ITS relative to each department, has contributed to frustration and avoidable conflicts between ITS and other departments.

Findings

Customer satisfaction with ITS services varies dramatically by County department. Communications between ITS and several of the departments are strained to the point that the efficiency and effectiveness of essential cooperation on County projects and issues is significantly affected.

Two focus groups were conducted with a representative cross-section of the departments served by ITS. The participants' comments, in conjunction with a brief survey that included a simple numerical rating system, revealed a dramatic range in the levels of satisfaction with ITS services. Notably, County departments reporting to Commissioners Court expressed higher levels of satisfaction in the survey with ITS service in general than departments headed by elected officials, a finding that was echoed during focus group discussions of their customer relationships with ITS.

ITS managers believe their staff is very customer oriented and helpful, and ITS staff report that they place a high priority on customer service; however, a vocal group of customers reported a contradictory experience. A history of tension between some departments and ITS appears to foster recurring misunderstandings that continue to impede efficient operations.

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are documented agreements that may be either contractual or in the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU). They

define specific services and service levels between a centralized service provider such as Travis County ITS and its customers or users (departments). They explicitly define the responsibilities of each in relation to the other to provide a practical structure for the service relationship and to clarify roles, objectives, and priorities—especially in cases where roles are shared or shifting.

The Travis County ITS Department currently has no SLAs in place with any of the departments that it serves. SLAs are considered a best practice among enterprise IT departments serving multiple business units in both the private and public sector.¹¹³ Locally, the University of Texas at Austin has SLAs in place.¹¹⁴ Notably, SLAs for the Office of Information Technology (OIT) of Dallas County were adopted as part of the Dallas County Government strategic plan for fiscal years (FY) 2014–2018; however, these agreements are only in place for major IT initiatives.¹¹⁵ In Tarrant County, the central IT department has SLAs in place with each department of county government served.¹¹⁶

An SLA is a communications and conflict prevention tool that must be reviewed and assessed by the parties at regular intervals. The main components of an SLA development process, as identified by the Institute of Public Administration, are:

- **Negotiation.** To ensure optimal service provision arrangements, all aspects of the SLA (including the responsibilities that will be undertaken by both parties) should be negotiated between the IT service provider and the customer. The process of negotiation itself facilitates an increased appreciation of the needs and constraints on each side.
- **Agreement.** The process of negotiation should result in an SLA document. Establishing agreement on all aspects of the service level to be provided by each party is fundamental to its successful implementation. The process of negotiation and agreement has the benefit of educating both parties on the needs, priorities, and constraints of the other, resulting in more informed and intelligent service providers and customers.
- **Quantifying service levels.** The agreement will quantify service outcomes and levels (through performance indicators), defining what the customer will receive. Quantifying service levels involves reviewing departmental requirements and the cost justification of those requirements in terms of fulfilling the enterprise (County's) mission or strategic objectives.

- **Clarification of responsibilities.** In order for the service provider to supply a quality service, both the provider and customer must fulfill responsibilities and obligations. The SLA documents and communicates these mutually agreed-upon responsibilities.¹¹⁷

Benefits of SLAs include:

- **Definition of roles and responsibilities.** Identifying the needs and the responsibilities of the parties to the SLA involves participation and input by both parties. The negotiation of the SLA also encourages and creates a framework for communication about these roles and responsibilities.
- **Strengthened performance measures.** The SLA can provide an objective framework for measuring level of service performance against documented roles, responsibilities, priorities, and expectations.
- **Clarification of objectives and expectations.** Documenting the expectations of the parties to the SLA also becomes a tool for preventing and resolving misunderstanding.¹¹⁸

Developing an SLA does require an investment of staff time, involving tasks such as negotiating service standards and levels, establishing tracking mechanisms, preparing supporting policies and procedures, and securing approval and buy-in of stakeholders. The Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) guide to SLAs, titled, *How to Establish Service Level Agreements*, suggests that a three-to-six month timeline is a good rule of thumb for the process of information gathering, analyzing, documenting, negotiating, and consensus-building; more complex governing environments may take longer.¹¹⁹

The CIPS guide *How to Prepare Service-level Agreements*, sets forth six steps for developing an SLA:

1. **Understand the baseline position.** How are services really working in present practice? What are the current customer and service provider expectations? To what service standards are staff working at the moment? Do they know what the main outputs are for key activities?

2. **Understand the drivers and demands likely to be placed on the SLA implementation process.** Are there known efficiency gaps or areas of dissatisfaction that the SLAs may be expected by stakeholders to address? Similarly, are there areas or terms of service that ITS staff would like clarified for users?
3. **Initial consultation with service providers/customers.** Who is going to “own” (or be responsible for) the negotiation process up to final sign-off of SLAs? Who needs to be directly involved with reviewing each iteration or draft of the SLAs? Who must be kept informed of progress, if not directly involved?
4. **Agree to a framework for SLA development.** Will there be one SLA for all customers or tailored SLAs for different customer groups? (In the case of Travis County, likely the latter given the wide range of internal IT capacity and substantively different IT demands of different departments.) What shall be the standard reporting/monitoring process?
5. **Develop SLAs with providers (ITS) and customers (departments).** This should be a carefully managed, iterative process with clear milestones and endpoints. Maximize use of limited staff time by having a neutral facilitator guide each meeting and by designating “owners” who are responsible for each review stage.
6. **Agree to implementation and rollout plans.** Rollout plans require a clear roadmap with identification of any trial periods and responsible personnel. It can often be extremely useful to factor in a trial (shadow running) period for SLAs, after which the parties can take stock and make any final changes before the final rollout.^{120,121}

Exhibit 9-2 and Exhibit 9-3 illustrate the different processes—from a conceptual and technical perspective, respectively—involved in establishing SLAs between IT and the departments countywide.

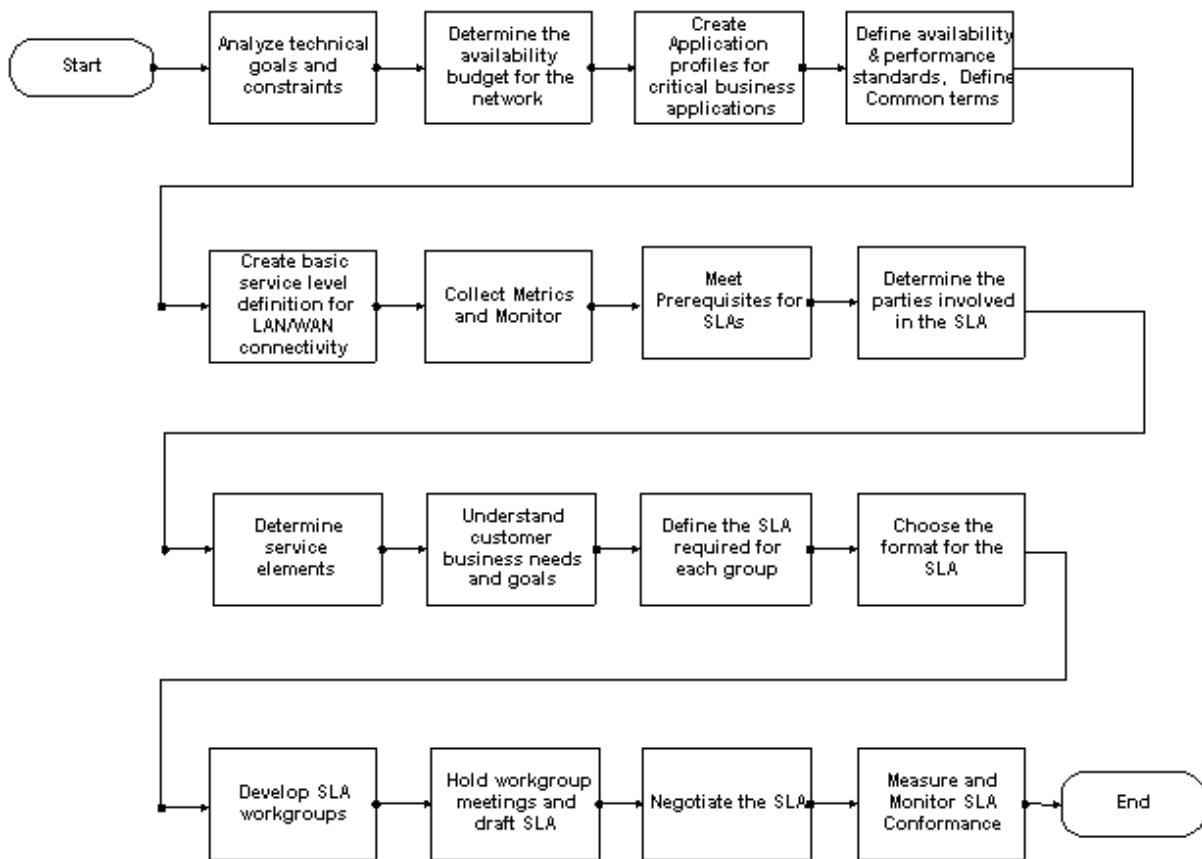
Exhibit 9-2

Setting Up an SLA – Conceptual Processes



Source: *A Guide to SLAs*, www.barclayrae.com

Exhibit 9-3
Technical Flowchart for Creating an SLA



Source: CISCO, Service Level Management Best Practices White Paper. Detailed information about each step in this flowchart can be found at http://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/support/docs/availability/high-availability/15117-sla.html#define_nsl.

SLAs are not a panacea and are not expected to automatically solve complicated interdepartmental relationships. However, IT industry leaders and public administration experts alike identify them as a best practice that brings greater certainty and objectivity to the relationship between IT service provider and user through their clarifying content and through the process of developing, negotiating, and managing them.¹²²

Recommendation

Recommendation 9.3.1

Create service level agreements between ITS and each user department. ITS should enter into negotiations with individual departments to draft and implement



mutually agreed upon roles and responsibilities of each party; the terms and level of service, scope, quality; and specific performance metrics. If desired by either ITS or individual departments, a trusted third party may be mutually selected or appointed to manage or mediate the SLA negotiation process. This third party may be an appropriate County staff member or official or a private sector professional.

9.4 IT SECURITY PRIORITIZATION

Background

IT Security is a small section within the Administrative Services division of ITS. All of Travis County government relies on ITS to provide security for its technology resources. IT Security includes physical security for most servers and telecommunications equipment, as well as cyber-security policies, tools, and techniques such as passwords; data encryption; and limiting access to certain applications and information found on the Internet, social media, and other sources.

Three FTE staff are assigned to the IT security unit and have direct responsibility for monitoring and responding to security issues. ITS has a third-party security management contract in place to provide additional monitoring and testing of components of security infrastructure. The ITS training unit provides security awareness training and two department staff are dedicated to identity and access management.

Findings

IT Security is not appropriately elevated within the organization. IT Security is placed at a rather low level organizationally within ITS as a small section (three FTEs) of the Administrative Services division. IT Security is responsible for protecting data that is covered under the following laws:

- Privacy Act of 1974
- Texas Business and Commerce Code (521.002, 521.053)
- Texas Medical Records Privacy Act
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH)
- Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Security Policy

ITS has a Security Incident Response Plan in place to ensure a consistent and effective approach to the management of security incidents, such as a breach or attack, in a way



that limits damage and minimizes recovery time and costs. The plan has been in place since August 2015 and will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

Current trends for IT security administration have elevated security's role and placement within the hierarchy of IT organizations. ITS does not currently have a chief information security officer (CISO) position.

In two focus groups conducted for this review and attended by IT staff and business analysts from County departments, most comments about IT security were very positive. Security policies, practices, and components deployed by ITS include IT security best practices such as the ability to monitor and detect security breaches with firewalls, gateway antivirus software, intrusion detection devices, and intrusion testing to help protect network-based systems. Additionally, the IT Security section worked with the ITS Training section to develop security awareness training modules and a system of reminder messages to help ensure all County employees stay aware of security needs and issues. The awareness training is offered to new employees during new employee orientation and available to employees upon request.

ITS established a Cyber Security Awareness Board in FY 2015 to serve as an advisory committee on IT security issues, specifically cyber-security training and updates. Board members include staff from several County departments including ITS, Human Resources Management Department (HRMD), Criminal Court System, Juvenile Court, Sheriff's Office, Justice of the Peace, Tax Office, Emergency Services, and the office of Commissioner Daugherty.¹²³ The Board is co-chaired by ITS technical trainers who are responsible for cyber-security awareness training and meets twice per year in August and in February (the first meeting was held in August 2015) to discuss issues, share information, and provide input on the training agenda and security updates.

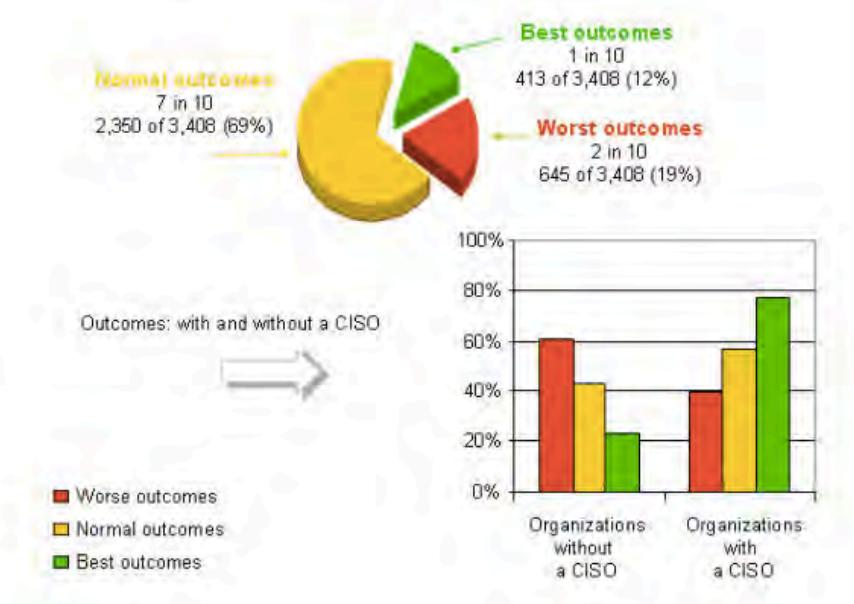
Cyber-security threats are a risk for all organizations. For a county government—especially a populous county such as Travis County, which is seated in the state capital and one of the fastest growing (demographically and economically) cities in the U.S.¹²⁴—the risks are high, in part due to the personal and sensitive nature of some of the information it captures and stores.

Two areas of information managed by the County, criminal justice and protected health information (PHI), as defined under the HIPAA Privacy Rule, must be kept in environments that are compliant with federal regulations and are subject to periodic auditing by responsible federal agencies. ITS Security staff indicated that in at least one

instance data covered by HIPAA was potentially mishandled (laptop with PHI was stolen out of a County employee's car), and that the potential violation was reported to the federal government. In FY 2015, one of the three positions in the ITS Security division was designated by ITS as a Travis County HIPAA security officer. In addition, ITS sent two ITS personnel involved in HIPAA Risk and Security assessments to training to become certified HIPAA professionals.

According to *Best Practices for Managing Information Security*, a report prepared by The IT Policy Compliance Group, a consortium of IT business and policy leaders, a 2010 study demonstrated that IT organizations with a CISO deliver better outcomes in terms of reduced costs, lower risk and data loss, and improved business results.¹²⁵ Among the organizations with the least amount of data loss and theft (top 12 percent); almost 80 percent have a CISO who manages the information security function.

Exhibit 9-4
Organizations with CISOs Deliver Better Security Outcomes



Source: *Best Practices for Managing IT Security*, IT Policy Compliance Group, 2010.

Recommendation

Recommendation 9.4.1

Establish an executive level office of IT Security headed by a chief information security officer within ITS. The role of this position is to work with the CIO and County



departments to coordinate IT security policies and issues across departments and identify emerging IT issues. Typically in the private sector this position would report outside of ITS. That is not normally the case in the public sector, where it is placed within a technology department. This position should be housed within ITS but have direct access to the leadership of all County departments and external offices served by ITS. Placement within ITS is consistent with organizational placement noted for peer counties included in this review.

This position should be responsible for providing periodic reports regarding the status of County government's security across all departments—as well as security issues faced by external departments served by ITS that have the potential to impact Travis County networks or data—directly to the Commissioners Court. The position should work closely with the County HIPAA Compliance Officer and in coordination with the County Attorney's Office to ensure compliance with all federal laws and Texas privacy laws, in addition to safeguarding the security and integrity of Travis County networks and data assets.

9.5 COLLECTING AND USING IT INVENTORY DATA

Background

ITS maintains internal controls and accounting protocols to track and maintain fixed assets assigned to ITS. ITS does not currently maintain an inventory database of software or IT equipment in use by departments that is accessible and searchable by departments. As a result, there may be purchases of redundant software applications, licenses, or other IT equipment by departments.

Findings

ITS underwent a scheduled fixed asset audit by the County Auditor's Office in FY 2015 per Texas statutory requirements (Section 115 of the Local Government Code), which concluded that the internal controls and accounting protocols used to track and maintain assets were “good.” This rating is the highest available, and is indicative of well-established internal controls, with few, if any minor weaknesses noted. ITS management reports that great progress had been made in a relatively short period of time prior to the audit to remedy previously identified weaknesses in inventory processes, location tracking, and to improve standardization of and compliance with established inventory procedures. The audit report noted a success rate of over 98 percent for tracking assets assigned to ITS.¹²⁶



One of the advantages of having a centralized organization such as ITS providing IT support to the various County departments is the ability to share the costs of IT hardware and software. However, the ability to effectively realize the efficiencies of sharing resources relies upon timely, accurate, and accessible inventory data and the ability to answer this question: What specific kinds of IT resources, including specialized software applications or hardware/technical equipment, are available in each department, and what are the terms upon which those resources could be shared with other departments?

During two focus groups conducted for this review with departmental users of IT support services, some participants expressed frustration about what they perceived to be lack of support from ITS in identifying IT resources that had already been purchased by the County. ITS is currently unable to easily answer these kinds of questions or to propose potential IT solutions to departments in a systematic way because there is no centralized database or basic spreadsheet that categorizes potentially shareable IT resources by department and application. As the central IT support and service organization, ITS is positioned to facilitate increased IT resource sharing between departments by making the pertinent information available in a usable format.

On-going improvements to the inventory process could be leveraged as an opportunity to integrate inventory information into an updated catalog of County IT resources designed for use by ITS and departments. This catalog would better facilitate the sharing of IT assets across departments and realize other cost efficiencies, such as reducing staff time spent researching industry products, minimizing the actual purchase of redundant resources, and maximizing interchangeability and the use of compatible IT applications countywide.

Recommendation

Recommendation 9.5.1

Assemble a user-friendly catalog of IT resources by function, quantity, and location (by department). This catalog should be compiled using existing inventory data and include information about software applications in use across the County (such as licenses available, location, and capability/functional purpose) and County-owned IT hardware housed in the County's departments.

At a minimum, this catalog would consist of an updatable online spreadsheet placed on the ITS web site on the *Service Catalog* page, although ITS may wish to consider a



database with additional functionalities or automatic updates linked to inventory. Whatever format is selected, the catalog should enable any department seeking an IT resource, including the Purchasing Office and PBO when reviewing purchase requests, to readily learn what resources already exist or are expandable prior to researching external vendors and creating a new purchase request.

9.6 PAY PARITY FOR TRAVIS COUNTY IT PROFESSIONALS

Background

Among the approximately 5,500 regular employees in Travis County, more than 200 full-time employees have technology-related job titles or are classified with a job family name of “information technology.” Of the more than 46 departments that form Travis County government, at least 21 have staff with IT-related job titles or with “information technology” in their job family name. Of these positions with IT job titles, 104 are housed within the ITS department, and 101 are distributed among other County departments.

Findings

During the course of individual and group interviews and other data gathering activities, several County employees reported a wide disparity among salaries paid to County employees performing similar IT duties. In an effort to determine whether these assertions could be validated, the review team conducted an analysis of available employee data (provided by Travis County) to determine whether the issue warrants additional exploration and analysis. The review team analyzed data provided by Travis County to determine whether these assertions could be substantiated. Position, pay-grade, hire date, salary detail, and salary range information was reviewed for County employees with IT-related job titles. Further market studies, compensation and classification studies, or other more detailed analyses are beyond the scope of this review and would be needed to expand on these findings.

As illustrated in Table 9-2, the average (mean) annual salary of staff with IT-related job titles is \$81,860. Seven of those departments had mean salaries in excess of the average and 16 had salaries below the average. The deviation from the average ranges from \$29,000 less than average to approximately \$29,000 more than the average. Many of the County IT-related positions are business analyst positions that generally have lower compensation than IT specialists or managers, so the large salary range is not unexpected. The number of staff noted in the following tables differs slightly from the number of staff noted in section 1.2 of this chapter. The variation is attributable to the use of two different sources of employee data, which were not reconciled.



Table 9-2
Travis County IT Staff in All Departments

Department	Number of Regular Staff in Department	Staff with BA (Business Analyst) in Position Title	Number of Staff with Tech in Position Title	Number of Staff with IT Titled Positions	Average IT-Related Salary	Median IT-Related Salary	Difference from Average of All IT Titled Positions
County Auditor's Office	89	12	14	26	\$99,227	104,020	\$17,367
County Treasurer	8	1	0	1	\$111,705	\$111,705	\$29,845
Criminal Courts	75	6	2	8	\$79,225	\$80,834	\$(2,635)
Civil Courts	82.5	2	0	2	\$78,630	\$78,630	\$(3,230)
Probate Court	13	1	0	1	\$68,653	\$68,653	\$(13,207)
Tax Collector	148.5	7	1	8	\$61,161	\$61,553	\$(20,699)
County Attorney	207.5	2	1	3	\$100,252	\$89,681	\$18,392
District Attorney	197.5	3	0	3	\$81,560	\$80,781	\$(299)
County Clerk	123	4	7	11	\$81,972	\$78,312	\$112
District Clerk	118	7	0	7	\$76,369	\$81,031	\$(5,490)
Sheriff's Office	1,682.50	6	0	6	\$86,999	\$94,720	\$5,139
Justice of the Peace 3	25.5	1	0	1	\$77,425	\$77,425	\$(4,435)
Constable Precinct 5	56	1	1	2	\$61,827	\$61,827	\$(20,033)
Planning and Budget Office	18	2	0	2	\$73,652	\$73,652	\$(8,208)
Community Supervision and Corrections Department	280.62	3	0	3	\$57,579	\$57,551	\$(24,281)
Juvenile Probation	471	8	0	8	\$69,108	\$65,983	\$(12,752)
Emergency Services	19	1	0	1	\$96,735	\$96,735	\$14,875
STAR Flight	33	1	0	1	\$52,145	\$52,145	\$(29,715)
Records Management and Communications Resources	43.75	2	0	2	\$85,294	\$85,294	\$3,434
Health and Human Services and Veterans Services	214	1	0	1	\$64,250	\$64,250	\$(17,610)
Facilities Management Department	162	3	0	3	\$88,406	\$87,905	\$6,546



Department	Number of Regular Staff in Department	Staff with BA (Business Analyst) in Position Title	Number of Staff with Tech in Position Title	Number of Staff with IT Titled Positions	Average IT-Related Salary	Median IT-Related Salary	Difference from Average of All IT Titled Positions
Human Resources Management Department	38	1	0	1	\$67,879	\$67,879	\$(13,981)
ITS	108	0	104	104	\$80,689	\$80,891	\$(1,171)
Subtotal	4,213.37	75	130	205	\$81,860		0
Other Departments	789	0	0	0			
Total Regular Employees	5002	75	130	205			

Source: Data provided by ITS.

A closer look at the data does reveal some unusual results. Thirty-two (16 percent) of the 205 IT positions had salaries in excess of \$100,000. Salaries over \$100,000 are not unexpected in Austin due to high demand in Central Texas for software engineers, application developers, project managers, webmasters, IT managers and other technology positions. However, the distribution of those positions is notable. The 32 technology-oriented positions compensated in excess of \$100,000 are found in only six departments, and of those six departments, three of them (County Treasurer, County Attorney, and Sheriff's Office) had only one position compensated at that level; one (County Clerk) had two such positions; 15 (47 percent) were in the County Auditor's Office and 12 (37 percent) were in the ITS department. The 15 IT staff earning more than \$100,000 per year make up more than half (58 percent) of the Auditor's IT staff, while the 12 in ITS represent only 11.5 percent of ITS technology positions.

The Commissioners Court may not have the authority to set or adjust the salaries of staff within elected official departments, however, systemic salary disparities between staff performing similar roles in different departments of a system of local government that serves the citizens of Travis County creates competition among these departments that is undesirable. While salary competition among competing organizations tends to increase performance by attracting the best talent from its competitors, such competition *within* an organization (or among independent organizations that work in support of each other in service to the taxpayers) is disruptive to the stability of the County's workforce and could normally be expected to have a negative impact on the morale and productivity of affected Travis County departments and their staff.



As illustrated previously in Table 9-2, the average (mean) salary for technology staff in the Auditor's Office was in excess of \$99,000, while the median salary for that group was more than \$104,000. Only two other departments had average salaries exceeding \$100,000: the County Treasurer and the County Attorney.

A comparison of the average pay to the maximum salary for the pay grade is provided in Table 9-3. Figures in red denote a statistically significant deviation from the mean. As illustrated, the range of total of salaries as a percentage of total maximum salary by pay grade was from 65 percent in the Tax Office to 84 percent in the County Treasurer's Office. Five departments, including the Treasurer, the County Auditor's Office, Sheriff's Office, Texas Community Supervision and Corrections Department, and Facilities Management Department (FMD) paid their technology staff in excess of 80 percent of the combined maximum pay for each pay grade of technology-related positions, while five departments paid less than 70 percent of the combined maximum. The ITS department salaries averaged 72 percent of the combined maximums.

**Table 9-3 County IT Salaries as a Percent of Maximum
for Pay Grades and Average Length of Service**

Department	Salaries as a Percent of Maximum Pay-Grade	Average Length of County Service (In Years)
County Auditor's Office	80.7%	7.2
County Treasurer	83.7%	24.0
Criminal Courts	75.6%	9.5
Civil Courts	72.0%	5.3
Probate Court	67.4%	19.8
Tax Collector	65.0%	8.1
County Attorney	74.6%	10.8
District Attorney	65.3%	7.1
County Clerk	73.3%	6.8
District Clerk	72.7%	11.7
Sheriff's Office	80.3%	9.5
Justice of the Peace 3	76.0%	9.2
Constable Precinct 5	75.8%	6.8
Planning and Budget Office	73.7%	11.0
Community Security and Corrections	80.4%	21.1
Juvenile Probation	69.4%	11.1
Emergency Services	72.5%	5.5
STAR Flight	76.7%	0.1
Records Management and Communications Resources	78.1%	25.8
Health and Human Services and Veterans Services	77.1%	19.0
Facilities Management Department	81.7%	15.8
Human Resources Management Department	66.7%	16.8
ITS	72.2%	9.8
Average of Departments	74.4%	11.8

Source: Data provided by ITS.

*Figures in red denote a statistically significant deviation from
the mean.*

Also included in Table 9-3 is the average length of service for the relevant departments. This was included to help indicate where salary differential may be accounted for by length of service. There appears to be some correlation between higher average pay and length of service, as three of the five departments with average pay nearer to 80 percent of pay grade maximums has more senior staff. The exceptions are the Sheriff's



Office, whose technology staff had an average length of service of approximately ten years, and the County Auditor's Office where length of services was seven years.

In sum, the review team finds there are more highly paid IT professionals in the County Auditor's Office than in ITS, the County's central IT department; and that IT staff in the County Auditor's Office earn more on average than other County departmental IT staff, although they are not, as a group, more senior. The County Auditor's Office supports and maintains SAP, which does require significant technology expertise. It has been noted by ITS staff, however that while many staff support this one admittedly large and important application, ITS staff support nearly 200 IT applications for the departments countywide.

Recommendation

Recommendation 9.6.1

Seek the support and cooperation of appointed and elected officials to work toward the goal of eliminating or minimizing disruptive pay differentials across County government, such as those identified in IT-related positions. The goal is to reduce and eventually eliminate the detrimental impact of competition for staff within County government. HRMD should lead this effort.



10 RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION RESOURCES

Records Management and Communications (RMCR) consists of 44.25 full-time-equivalent (FTE) employees and six divisions (Media Services, Law Library, Support Services, Imaging, Records Management, and Archives) that cover three functional areas (Support Services, Public Information, and Production). The department is responsible for media operations, including producing and broadcasting Commissioners Court proceedings, managing the nationally recognized Travis County Law Library, staffing the County information hotline, providing support services such as printing and document production for Travis County government departments, and providing records services such document imaging (scanning) and digitization of County records. In addition, RMCR collects and maintains the County archives, including records and documents of historical and cultural significance.

Two RMCR-managed programs are notable for their positive community impact. The Travis County Law Library and its staff have been recognized for excellence by several national and local groups, including the American Association of Law Libraries and the Austin Bar Association.^{127,128} The library is noted in particular for innovations and exemplary work in facilitating access for self-represented litigants to Travis County courts.¹²⁹

The formal partnership between Travis County and Austin Friends of Folk Art, established in 2015, is providing new opportunities for the public to experience artifacts, artwork, and photographs of local cultural, historical, and educational value; the new partnership, managed by the RMCR Archives program, is designed to ensure that these items are protected and properly preserved, while enabling them to be displayed to the public in Travis County facilities.

10.1 ROLE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Background

The departments of Travis County government routinely manage their own communications with the public through the County web site, and media content, public information requests, and communication with employees.

Findings

As discussed in Chapter 3, there is a great need within Travis County for coordinated content management in communication with the public, the media, Internet and social



media, and its own employees. This need is growing with the County population, economic activity, and the accompanying increase in cultural and linguistic diversity of its residents. Travis County is home to nearly 1.2 million residents (2015 estimate), of whom over one-third are Hispanic;¹³⁰ Spanish is spoken in nearly one-quarter of Travis County households.¹³¹ Seven percent of households speak a language other than English or Spanish.¹³²

RMCR maintains valuable communications resources, including some that are potentially underused by the County (notably TCTV; see Recommendation 10.2.1 for further discussion). RMCR has been innovative and forward thinking in its production of public information videos designed for the Internet, as well as its efforts to maximize the availability of public County records online. Social media is the fastest growing source of public information, and the fastest growing segment of social media users is over 40 years of age.¹³³ According to The Pew Internet and American Life Project, 87 percent of senior citizens are now using Internet resources to find information.¹³⁴ However, there is no developed strategy within Travis County or RMCR for prioritizing its open government and digital media projects or for promoting their existence to its target audiences. Nor is there a coordinated means for engaging County departments to leverage these resources and efforts consistently in fulfilling their public service missions.

There is no established process for communicating information to the public about County initiatives, activities, or services that coordinates the involvement of multiple departments. Some County departments manage their own web site and content, while others coordinate with the Information and Technology Services (ITS) Department Web Site Services (located within the ITS Application Development and Production Support division) for development and content management and update support.

From fiscal year (FY) 2013 through FY 2015, Travis County departments spent approximately \$250,000 on a variety of translation services, virtually all of which were either court-related or procured by Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS).¹³⁵ Individual departments may make selected communications available in Spanish or other languages at their discretion or in accordance with applicable laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act or laws governing translation and interpretive services for legal proceedings and court defendants. These services, where provided, are funded through individual departmental budgets; Travis County lacks a formal or coordinated effort to ensure that essential information about County services and initiatives is accessible to non-English speaking residents. With the exception of translation services for individuals who are deaf or hearing impaired, which is found



within HHS and VS, the County does not have staff or a standing contract to provide translation services for public meetings or documents.

While records management is a vital component of RMCR or “Records Management,” as the department is commonly referred to, it is not the primary component. The records management program has been successful in actually reducing, for the first time, the number of records in storage even as the County grows. As RMCR supports County departments in digitizing and/or destroying its backlog of records, the workload of the records function can be expected to stabilize or decrease, while the need and demand for its communications and media resources function grows—and will continue to grow with the County.

Recommendations

The development of a new Communications division within RMCR is discussed in Recommendation 3.4.2. This new division would encompass the following functions:

- Coordination of internal and external communications involving multiple County departments and providing related guidance to departments as needed, with the objective of ensuring clear and consistent messaging.
- Coordination and tracking of open records requests.
- Web site content management support (see Recommendation 10.1.1).
- Translation services (see Recommendation 10.1.2).

Recommendation 10.1.1

Move web content management support functions from ITS Web Site Services to the proposed Communications division within RMCR. Content management support for departmental web sites, where provided, should be housed in the department responsible for coordinating strategic communications as part of a countywide effort to encourage consistent messaging and ensure that communications with the public are in alignment. Appropriate authorizations should be provided to allow selected RMCR staff to make coordinated content updates to departmental web sites with departmental approval.



Recommendation 10.1.2

Coordinate the provision of translation services across the County. Centralized translation resources will increase the affordability and accessibility of translation services for communications by all County departments. The County should also consider developing internal resources, including staff and equipment for simultaneous language translation, within RMCR. Whether or not internal resources are developed, it is likely that greater value for departments can be achieved by consolidating translation services through one or more contracts administered by RMCR. Consider also whether translation services for the deaf and hearing impaired may be more efficiently consolidated here.

Recommendation 10.1.3

Rename the department to highlight its media content and communications role. The term “Records Management,” as the department as it is commonly referred to, is outdated and does not accurately reflect the current or envisioned responsibilities of RMCR. A change that re-orders the department name and/or includes the term “media” (such as “Media Communications and Records Management”) will serve to remind County department heads as well as elected and appointed officials of the diverse media resources (print, digital, TV, and archival) available to them in conducting public outreach for their respective initiatives and services.

10.2 TRAVIS COUNTY TV (TCTV) STATION

Background

The Open Meetings Act (Government Code, Chapter 551) provides that meetings of governmental bodies in Texas (with certain exceptions) must be open to the public. One of the ways in which Travis County fulfills this requirement is the use of a public-access cable TV station, TCTV, to produce and broadcast weekly sessions of the Commissioners Court.

Findings

Travis County has demonstrated its commendable commitment to open government in part by recording and broadcasting meetings of the Commissioners Court, both on Travis County TV (TCTV), the County-operated public-access cable TV station, as well as via the Internet. Additional programming on the station includes programming produced by RMCR Media Services staff as well as non-county produced programs and



public service announcements, including those from state agencies and the U.S. Army.¹³⁶ See Exhibit 10-1 for a sample schedule of current programming.

Exhibit 10-1 Sample TCTV Program Schedule

Program Schedule - Afternoon & Evening

Time	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
12:00 PM	Travis County Online	Comm Court LIVE	Comm Court Replay	Specials 2	Specials	Comm Court Replay	Comm Court Replay
12:30 PM	Focus			Water Quality	On Call		
1:00 PM	Dinner Tonight				Focus		
1:30 PM					Specials 2		
2:00 PM							
2:30 PM							
3:00 PM						Special or Any	Water Quality
3:30 PM							
4:00 PM	New GED	New GED	New GED	New GED	New GED	Focus	Dinner Tonight
4:30 PM						Travis County Online	County Connections
5:00 PM	Job List	Job List	Job List	Job List	Job List	Job List	Job List
5:30 PM	Dinner Tonight	On Call	Specials	Specials 2	County Connection	On Call	Specials 2
6:00 PM	Travis County Online	In The Fight	County Connection	Water Quality	Specials 2	Specials	In The Fight
6:30 PM	Texas Parks & Wildlife	Travis County Online	Texas Parks & Wildlife		Texas Parks & Wildlife	Dinner Tonight	Texas Parks & Wildlife

Source: <https://www.traviscountytv.gov/tctv/schedule>

Additional programming is somewhat ad hoc and has potential for strategic development. Given the County investment in maintaining this asset to serve the public, TCTV could be better leveraged as a resource in support of timely and relevant messaging by the County departments.

The underutilization of this resource may be in part due to a lack of awareness among County departments and their leaders about its availability and purpose. TCTV staff report that the comment they most commonly hear from people on entering the TV studio is, "I never knew the County had a TV station." Staff also report that when they are approached by department directors to work on video projects of relevance to their



department, the lead times are often unrealistically short, resulting either in no action, or rushed, suboptimal results. This suggests that demand exists within Travis County for RMCR video and TV services, but that more strategic planning and education or awareness about the resources is required to make full use of them.

Another possible reason for the underutilization of TCTV as a communications channel is the modern primacy of—and thus, focus on—digital communications such as the Internet and social media. Public and commercial broadcasters are experiencing market disruptions as the reach of digital media platforms overtakes conventional TV. RMCR has been responsive to this shift and has innovated in producing public service content for the Internet. Many of the videos posted on the Travis County YouTube page, however, have been viewed very few times, suggesting that the public is not aware of them. According to the Center for Media and Social Impact, the most successful public media efforts have been “cross-platform;” that is, involving the strategic coordinated efforts of digital and traditional broadcast TV. One underappreciated advantage of public, local channels such as TCTV is that the overall brand has a high trust factor relative to other media outlets.¹³⁷

While certain County departments are currently maintaining social media sites (including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram) independently and at their own discretion, there is no coordinated effort to cross-promote this content either amongst the various Travis County sites or using the broadcast TV channel.¹³⁸ This represents a missed opportunity to circulate information that is important to Travis County residents and to engage them in County activities and outreach efforts.

Recommendation

Recommendation 10.2.1

Develop a coordinated strategy for maximizing the outreach value of TCTV to Travis County and ensuring that its use is aligned with other multimedia County communications efforts. This effort should be led by the proposed PIO director (see Recommendation 3.4.2).

10.3 INTERNAL MAIL DELIVERY PROCESSES

Background

RMCR is responsible for support services to Travis County government including mail and parcel delivery services to all County offices. Rapid growth in Travis County,



combined with routine turnover, office moves, and employee transfers make it essential for mail service employees to have access to an up-to-date directory that provides the current physical location of all County offices and employees.

Findings

The RMCR Mail Services division receives all incoming mail and parcels from the U.S. Postal Service. The mail is sorted and delivered to all County offices by RMCR Mail Services staff (four FTE). Outgoing mail is also collected by staff from all County offices, metered, and mailed out; mail services staff meter over one million pieces of mail annually.

Mail services staff report being continually hampered by the task of tracking down new hires, individuals who have moved offices and employees who have transferred, because the staff and office locations are not updated regularly by each department. According to mail staff, the directory is rife with inaccuracies, some of which have persisted for long periods of time; in many cases their own knowledge of County offices and employees is more useful than the employee directory they should be able to rely on. County departments are responsible for providing the Information and Technology Services Department (ITS) with updated employee information in order for ITS to update the directory. However, left to the discretion of each department, this may occur with a significant lag time, or not at all.

The goal of the Mail Services division is to process and deliver incoming mail within four hours of its receipt in the mailroom and to meter and mail all outgoing mail the same day it is received. It consistently achieves a customer service satisfaction rating of 91 percent or greater based on customer survey results.¹³⁹ While the number of pieces of metered mail declined slightly (by just over 6 percent) between FY 2013 and FY 2016¹⁴⁰, likely due to an increase in some County business that is performed electronically, workload has not declined correspondingly. This is because County facilities have at the same time become more dispersed, a trend that is expected to continue. Further, Mail Services employees report an increasing trend in the number of packages delivered to County employees (i.e., from online merchants).

There is an urgent need for a centralized way to ensure that updates to a complete County office and employee directory are automatically made in real-time (as opposed to periodically or arbitrarily).



Recommendation

Recommendation 10.3.1

The Human Resources Management Department (HRMD) should be assigned responsibility for updating the County office and employee directory at the same time any employee is hired, transferred, or leaves employment with the County. This should include updating the current physical work location and phone number(s) of each employee. If that information is unclear, HRMD should be accountable for verifying the information prior to finalization of the employee's new status. At least one person in HRMD should be given access rights to make these updates directly, without the intervention of the ITS Department, to ensure these are made in "real time."

Concurrent to the implementation of this new system, HRMD should request a current and up-to-date roster from each County department, and perform a one-time, thorough update of the employee directory to correct existing inaccuracies.

10.4 INFORMATION LINE EFFICIENCY

Background

RMCR is responsible for staffing the Information Booth at the civil courthouse, and the corresponding telephone number, or information line, where the general public can receive information about Travis County courts and other services.

Findings

The Travis County information booth and telephone line are currently staffed by one supervisor (part-time) and three full-time employees who rotate between staffing the Information Booth at the civil courthouse and answering telephone calls during business hours. Over 100,000 phone calls were made to the information line in 2015 (including during non-business hours), of which over 80,000 calls were handled by staff.¹⁴¹

According to RMCR staff, there are a large number of calls that are not related to the courts, and some are not even related to County services. Additionally, many individuals use this phone number as a general switchboard for the County, which was not its originally intended purpose. Operators report receiving personal calls pertaining to job references, financial collections, and personal calls for current or former County employees. This is likely due in part to the fact that, until recently, the caller ID display for all phone calls from any Travis County office displayed the general number from the County (also the information booth line), and not the specific extension from which a caller was dialing.



Austin 3-1-1 is a local service that provides the citizens of Austin with a simple single point of contact for every city department. Austin 3-1-1 receives over one million calls per year producing over 200,000 service requests for departments within the City of Austin for non-emergency police and additional city services. Operators answer citizens' calls 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.¹⁴²

Recommendation

Recommendation 10.4.1

Consider contracting with Austin 3-1-1 to establish a general County information line that is separate from the civil courthouse Information Booth. A new “non-general” phone extension (i.e., one that does not end in “000”) should be assigned to the Information Booth, and the number should be clearly described in directories and online publications as pertaining to the County court.

The current general phone extension for the County should be contracted to a specialized operating service. It is likely that a larger service (such as Austin 3-1-1) with the current capacity to handle 24/7 calls will be able to fulfill the County’s general information call needs more cost-effectively.



11 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS OFFICE

Created in 2008, the Travis County Intergovernmental Relations Office (IGR) serves as a liaison for the Commissioners Court and Travis County departments to a variety of local, regional, state, and national policymaking bodies as well as many community and stakeholder groups. The IGR Office is headed by the intergovernmental relations coordinator who works directly for the Commissioners Court under the general direction of the County Judge. IGR has a two-person staff including the coordinator and an administrative associate.

11.1 IGR PRIORITIES, FOCUS AND OPERATIONS

Background

The IGR Office endeavors to serve as a “focal point for the Court’s external relations with the local, state and national community” with the following strategic goals:

- Legislative policy development and advocacy
- Relations with other governmental and civic leadership in the central Texas area
- Media relations and public information
- Community outreach and relations, including leadership recruitment and development¹⁴³

IGR operations for each strategic goal are reviewed in this chapter.

Findings

Legislative Policy Development and Advocacy

The Travis County small, two-person IGR Office produces a sizable body of work in the legislative arena, both during and between legislative sessions.

During the biennial sessions of the Texas Legislature, the IGR staff monitors thousands of bills and joint resolutions (2,257 in fiscal year 2015).¹⁴⁴ Aside from its own analytical resources, IGR closely coordinates with County departments that provide research and subject matter expertise on a variety of bills that could affect Travis County. In recent sessions, IGR has also worked closely with the Planning and Budget Office (PBO) and the Auditor’s Office to supplement bill analysis with fiscal impact statements.

The IGR Office also coordinates its legislative work with other Texas counties and associations like the Texas Association of Counties (TAC) and Texas Conference of Urban Counties (CUC). TAC and CUC leaders interviewed for this review had high



praise for the legislative work of their Travis County IGR colleagues, noting that in spite of its small size, Travis County has one of the most productive county legislative operations in the state. Association leaders also observed that Travis County's proximity to the state Capitol means that department officials are often called upon to provide "a county perspective" in testimony before legislative meetings and committees. The IGR team is often tasked with coordinating these efforts that represent the voice of county governments statewide.

To some it may appear that working with the Texas Legislature is a five-month endeavor every two years. However, there is a tremendous amount of work that takes place in the intervening 18 months, from attending legislative interim committee meetings to monitoring interim charges (issues researched and analyzed for the next legislative session).

Table 11-1 shows a summary of some of IGR's legislative activities during recent sessions.

**Table 11-1 IGR Activities
83rd and 84th State Legislative Sessions**

Activity	83 rd 2013	84 th 2015
Legislative bills/joint resolutions tracked	1,497	2,257
Percentage of total bills tracked	24.7%	34.95%
Percentage of tracked bills that were analyzed	68.6%	66.32%
Total House and Senate legislative charges	283	336
Legislative charges tracked by IGR	112	156
Percent of County legislative priorities accomplished	60%	50%

Source: IGR FY16 Budget Submission; April 5, 2016 Interim Update Presentation to Commissioners Court.

Travis County's success during the legislative session depends on many months of advanced planning by the IGR staff. In preparation for the next session in January 2017, the IGR Office will meet with County departments and elected officials to identify areas of concern and legislative requests. The IGR team will also meet with legislators and their staffs to discuss issues and ideas.

The County's legislative work is of critical importance given both the challenges and opportunities that arise each time the Texas Legislature convenes. Perennial state-level



proposals such as those that would impose revenue caps on local governments must be closely monitored, analyzed, publicized, and, if necessary, countered or modified.

Intergovernmental Relations

One of IGR's primary goals is to broaden the County's involvement in and communications with local and regional intergovernmental bodies. Travis County has cultivated strong relationships with the City of Austin and many jurisdictions in the capital area. As noted earlier, the IGR team has developed an outstanding reputation with colleagues in both TAC and CUC. In interviews conducted for this review, Travis County received great praise from government professionals working closely with the IGR staff, particularly in the state legislative arena.

While federal relations have not been a top priority for the County's intergovernmental work, active engagement with associations focusing on federal-local and federal-state policies can help track developments in Washington that could affect County operations. Travis County—like virtually all Texas counties—does not have a federal lobbyist or representative.¹⁴⁵ However, groups such as the National Association of Counties (NACo) have a wealth of information on county best practices from around the country. NACo maintains a County Innovation Network (COIN) that provides policy briefs and an information exchange among member counties. In 2013, NACo launched its Grants Clearinghouse, a one-stop shop for grant information, with enhanced searching features and up-to-date listings of federal, state, corporate, and foundation grants available to counties and community-based organizations.¹⁴⁶

Media Relations and Public Information

The IGR Office assembles and distributes *News Notes*, its aggregation of local and regional media stories, on a regular basis to inform County leaders and department staff of media coverage.

County employees have additional avenues for accessing relevant media coverage. Some County departments track stories related to their own areas of interest, using tools such as Google Alerts and news aggregators. In addition, CUC assembles a daily clipping list that is distributed to approximately 200 recipients in member counties.

IGR maintains a modest publications/subscription budget of \$1,750 annually.¹⁴⁷ Like other media consumers, IGR has recently lost online access to the *Fort Worth Star-Tribune*, *San Antonio Express-News* and *Houston Chronicle*, as these publications have begun charging fees for their content.



In addition to collecting public/media information, IGR also responds to legislative requests for public information related to state-county relations.

Community Outreach and Leadership Recruitment

At the direction of the Court, the IGR Office leads recruitment efforts for eleven of the County's boards and commissions. IGR has developed a database system for appointments, allowing the staff to track recruitment efforts and catalogue background information on interested applicants in an on-going process rather than starting anew with each appointment vacancy.

Currently, the IGR staff is the primary source of recruits for the appointment database. While some departments such as Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS) and Emergency Services contribute candidate names, there is no formal mechanism for County department or Commissioners Court involvement in recruiting potential board/commission members.

Better representation across precincts, more candidate diversity, and stronger stakeholder involvement is, and should remain, a priority for appointee recruitment. The Commissioners Court has contemplated incorporating additional boards and commissions into IGR's leadership recruitment process (beyond the eleven current bodies) as staffing resources allow.

Comparison to Other Texas County Intergovernmental Operations

While the Travis County IGR Office has a broader mission (beyond just intergovernmental work) than many of its counterparts in Texas, IGR operations are comparable to or smaller in size than those of other major Texas counties. Harris County has four full-time intergovernmental professionals. Dallas County and Tarrant County house their IGR operations in the County Administrator's Office, each with two designated staff members and support from the administrative staff in the Administrator's Office. Bexar County's intergovernmental team has mirrored Travis County's two-person team in the past, but currently has one vacancy. In comparison, the City of Austin has a four-person intergovernmental relations staff.¹⁴⁸



Recommendations

Recommendation 11.1.1

IGR Office should regularly brief the Commissioners Court on intergovernmental relations work and solicit feedback and involvement—particularly between legislative sessions. In interviews conducted for this report, some County policymakers and department employees noted that they were unsure what the IGR Office did in the 18-month period between state legislative sessions. As outlined in the Findings section, some of IGR's most important policy work occurs during the legislative interim. In spring 2016, the IGR Office launched a concerted effort to schedule regular briefings with the Commissioners Court on topics such as interim studies and upcoming tax and revenue issues. Such briefings allow the IGR team to inform the Court, aides, and department leaders of important issues in a timely manner and solicit feedback when legislation is first being studied and crafted.

Recommendation 11.1.2

Build upon IGR's strong regional intergovernmental relationships by collecting best practice information from other counties and by expanding collaborations with national organizations such as NACo. NACo and other local government associations collect and disseminate a wealth of information (such as best practices and lessons learned) from jurisdictions around the country. NACo's COIN and Grants Clearinghouse could serve as vital resources for Travis County departments looking for innovative ideas and new funding sources. Such associations also offer programs for collaborative purchasing (including health and pharmaceutical discount programs) and personnel recruitment for member counties.

Additionally, policy briefings and other planning resources are available (even to non-members) from groups like the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and other state and local policy organizations. Travis County departments (not just the IGR Office) should access these resources whenever possible to learn from the successes and failures of other jurisdictions and use the information to inform Travis County planning, budgeting, and operations decisions.



Recommendation 11.1.3

Move the news aggregation work of the IGR Office to the new Communications division in Records Management and Communications Resources (RMCR). News aggregation is discussed in more detail in 3.4. The development of a Communications division within RMCR is discussed in more detail in chapter 3 of this report.

Recommendation 11.1.4

Engage County departments and the Commissioners Court in recruitment and appointments to County boards and commissions. Currently, the two-person IGR staff does the vast majority of community outreach and recruitment for eleven of the County's boards and commissions. No one knows local subject matter experts and stakeholders better than department leaders and staff members. Similarly, no one has more opportunities for community engagement than the members of the Commissioners Court. IGR should prepare a basic packet of information and talking points related to boards and commissions that County leaders can incorporate into their meetings and public events, where appropriate. Simple steps such as these can heighten community and stakeholder outreach and serve as a conduit of talent and information for County appointments and policy decisions.



12 OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Office of Emergency Services (ES) oversees a diverse group of departments committed to ensuring the safety and welfare of Travis County residents. The departments include:

- Administration
- Technology and Communications
- Fire Marshal
- Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
- Medical Examiner
- STAR Flight

In fiscal year (FY) 2016, ES had a total budget (including operating, personnel and capital) of just over \$36 million, with 96 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions (93 permanent and three temporary). FY 2016 revenue from ES departments was projected at \$9.1 million.¹⁴⁹

12.1 COUNTY DEPARTMENT EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Background

During and in anticipation of emergency events and disasters, the Austin/Travis County Joint Emergency Operations Center (Joint EOC) is activated, and from there the Travis County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) coordinates the County's response, in collaboration with all County departments.

The Joint EOC (located in the Combined Transportation, Emergency and Communications Center (CTECC)), is a 4,200 square foot joint City/County operation that provides interagency and area command for local incidents and special event coordination.¹⁵⁰ CTECC is operated by four partners: the City of Austin; Travis County; Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Austin District; and the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CMTA). The City of Austin serves as the CTECC managing partner and oversees all center infrastructure, including facilities management, maintenance, IT and other support services.

Findings

Emergency Operations Center Support

During activations, the Joint EOC typically operates on a 24/7 basis for some or all of the initial event response. While County public safety and emergency services agencies are accustomed to round-the-clock schedules, personnel from "non-emergency" County



departments are not typically required to work after hours or on weekends. This can create problems when purchasing, IT, and other County administrative support services are needed during an event. Emergency responders also rely on agencies like Transportation and Natural Resources Department (TNR) and Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS) for critical data and support during crisis response activities.

In the County's (draft) After Action Report from the October 30, 2015 floods, many employees who participated in response and recovery operations underscored the need for more inter-departmental participation and coordination. Comments included:

- “Area for Improvement in Communications: Clear expectations to all Travis County workers regarding response/recovery roles.” (page 9)
- “Non-emergency management County departments were not notified the same way emergency management personnel who report to the A/TC EOC were notified.” (page 10)
- “TCOEM needs emergency purchasing power (emergency budget) and emergency staffing power.” (page 15)
- “TNR must man A/TC EOC 24/7.” (page 16)
- “We need to look at typical flooding events and pre-plan what type of meetings would be appropriate.” (page 16)
- “We need to look at how the City of Austin responds to an event and look and see what opportunities makes the most sense for us to plug into.” (page 16)
- “Events that occur after hours or weekends can be challenging when support is required to maintain operations or response. Additionally, out of norm circumstances frequently result in unacceptable delays. Immediate disaster response and initial recovery operations require that decisions be made that may not fit into standard operating modalities. The Court should authorize County Executives the authority to make some disaster response/initial recovery decisions based on predetermined goals, objectives and established parameters.” (page 17)

- “A suggestion was made that [Travis County Sheriff’s Office] TCSO use emergency credit card/PO abilities to contract barricades when TNRs resources are exhausted. This should not be a TCSO responsibility. TNR or TCOEM should have the ability to make such purchases.” (page 17)
- “Travis County needs Geographic Information System (GIS) staffing at the A/TC EOC early to assist in situational awareness by providing mapping of the affected area.” (page 19)
- “Travis County needs purchasing staff at the A/TC EOC during the beginning of an incident of this magnitude in order to assist TNR and other entities if there is a need to get additional resources that are not already a county resource. TC OEM staff was providing logistical staffing...this staff could have been better utilized.” (page 19)
- “All County Departments should evaluate their A/TC EOC staffing plan to accommodate long-term A/TC EOC activation periods to ensure trained staff with decision-making authority are available – throughout entire event.” (page 19)
- “Liaison needed in A/TC EOC from constable’s office, judge’s office – perhaps develop a Liaison Officer position as a part of ICS [Incident Command System].” (page 19)
- “TNR needs staffing at the A/TC EOC that continues to handle TNR resources to include activating emergency contracts as necessary.” (page 20)
- “Allow departments (outside of emergency management/services) to prepare for events outside of Mon–Fri, 8a–5p. All Travis County departments need to be involved in emergency response.” (page 20)
- “Need ITS support for staff working at flood assistance center/shelter – laptops, printer, Wi-Fi cards.” (page 21)
- “Need to connect county departments with social workers [to help coordinate recovery services for affected residents].” (page 22)¹⁵¹



EOC and CTECC Connectivity

The Joint EOC is located at CTECC, which is owned and operated by the City of Austin. All County activities conducted at the Joint EOC run on the City's information technology (IT) network. This includes not only work during disasters, but also the day-to-day workings of the Travis County OEM that is housed at CTECC. County IT limitations do not allow employees to access any documents housed on the County's network from the EOC/City network. During disasters, this means that TNR cannot access much-needed GIS mapping data from the EOC. For the OEM staff, this means they cannot access their own personnel records, the County's SAP human resources program, or the Travis County intranet.

Emergency Notifications to County Departments

In interviews conducted for this review, OEM staff confirmed that they have current and reliable contact information for all County departments required for EOC activations. However, staff indicated that OEM does not have representatives from each County office on the region's Reverse 911 call list (for the system used to provide alerts to emergencies in the immediate area). OEM has offered to help offices with this service and stands ready to provide assistance.

Recommendations

Recommendation 12.1.1

Require all County departments to provide adequate representation at the Emergency Operations Center during activations. Exact staffing patterns will vary by department and by the type of emergency or special event. Departments should work closely with OEM to determine needs. Also, departments will need to coordinate with human resources to determine appropriate personnel accommodations for employees required to work extended shifts or non-traditional (evening or weekend) hours.

Recommendation 12.1.2

Train and exercise the roles of key department leaders and inter-departmental coordination in disasters. During emergencies, staff must know the role(s) they and their department are expected to play in response and recovery. Departmental leaders should be well acquainted with the County's statutory and regulatory responsibilities and understand how these come into play during disaster events. In addition to training in these areas, County departments should actively participate in table-top exercises so they may better understand inter-departmental coordination that will be required during an event.



Recommendation 12.1.3

Address any barriers, such as information technology network restrictions, that limit the productivity of County employees working in the Emergency Operations Center. Getting the right staff to the EOC at the right time is just the first step in successful emergency and disaster response. Once County employees arrive at the EOC, they must be able to access the data and network systems they need to support response activities.

Recommendation 12.1.4

Develop a strategic procurement group responsible for emergency purchases and procurement during emergencies and disasters. In addition to implementing a P-card program (see section 8.2 Travis County should have a team of purchasing/procurement experts available whenever needed at the EOC. To the extent allowable this team should have the ability to waive standard purchasing and procurement rules if required to protect personal safety or property in an emergency. The city of Houston has developed a good model for employee guidance and policies during emergency procurements and even issued an Executive Order (EO 1-42) allowing P-card holders to make purchases beyond their single and monthly transaction limits during emergency preparedness or disaster.¹⁵²

12.2 DEPARTMENT CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANNING

Background

As governmental entities plan and prepare for emergencies and disasters, continuity planning is of utmost importance. At the most basic level, continuity planning facilitates the performance of essential government functions during situations that may disrupt normal operations.¹⁵³ Continuity of operations plans (COOP) establish processes and procedures to quickly deploy personnel, equipment and data/records using alternate facilities and/or resources to sustain organizational operations.

When developing COOP plans, government departments typically consider planning elements such as:

- Department essential functions.
- Resource requirements to perform essential functions.
- Risk and vulnerability of the department's functions and facilities.
- Protection methods and redundancies for vital records, systems, and equipment.
- Essential staff, orders of succession, and delegations of authority.
- Alternate options for department facilities and modes of communication.



Successful COOP plans are consistently tested and updated and require that department staff receive regular training and know whom to contact during emergencies regarding COOP plan implementation.

COOP plans are essential not just for catastrophic disaster preparation, but also for any event (large or small) that can displace or disrupt government operations. Plans should be based upon the unique threats and vulnerabilities of the local area and agency and should focus on processes and procedures necessary to maintaining essential government functions and services during emergencies.

Findings

According to the Travis County OEM, County departments have no formal COOP plans in place to minimize government service disruption in times of emergencies or disasters. Planning is needed to ensure proper redundancies for vital County supports and commodities. For example, the four County fuel stations have no generator back-up for their pumps, meaning that a widespread power outage could leave County vehicles (including the TNR debris removal vehicles) without fuel.¹⁵⁴

Many counties across the country are requiring department leaders to sign letters of agreement to evidence their department's full participation in continuity planning. For example, all Fairfax County, Virginia department directors and local township leaders have signed letters agreeing to maintain "approved agency-specific COOP plans in accordance with county guidelines and standards, including identifying lines of succession, alternate site(s), IT recovery, and stand-by contracts as necessary."¹⁵⁵

In Texas, several cities and counties have developed robust continuity planning efforts. In 2013, the Dallas County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management drafted a detailed seven-phase county COOP plan.¹⁵⁶ The city of Houston has focused many of its government continuity efforts on financial and IT planning. For example, the city has developed plans and processes to maintain payroll in a variety of disaster scenarios.¹⁵⁷

Recommendation

Recommendation 12.2.1

Develop department-specific COOP Plans for all Travis County departments. As Travis County has seen in recent years, emergency events, ranging from simple water leaks or power outages to more significant natural disasters, can unexpectedly disrupt



services. To prepare for such events, all County agencies should have COOP plans in place. OEM has acquired a streamlined software package that can assist departments to develop simple COOP plans. OEM is currently working with Travis County HHS and VS to pilot the software. In quick order after the pilot, all Travis County departments should work closely with OEM to develop their own COOP plans.

The Commissioners Court should establish expectations for departmental continuity planning and hold staff accountable for such.

12.3 COUNTY EMERGENCY AND DISASTER RECOVERY PLANNING

Background

In the days and weeks after an emergency or disaster, a range of work is required to reestablish and rebuild communities—ideally, so they will be stronger, safer, and more sustainable. Local communities take the lead role in organizing recovery efforts. While many state, regional, and federal resources are available to cities and counties during recovery, local leaders must coordinate requests and ensure that community priorities are established and maintained throughout recovery efforts.

A variety of Travis County agencies, not just the ES, will be required to lead different components of recovery operations.¹⁵⁸ The County will also need to tap into a wide array of relationships, both inside and outside of government, to plan and execute a successful recovery.

At the national level, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) created a National Disaster Recovery Framework in 2011 to provide guidance and context for communities as they restore and redevelop their health, social, economic, natural, and environmental resources in recovery.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, the state of Texas provides assistance to local communities pursuing federal disaster recovery assistance.

FEMA has established six “Recovery Support Functions” (RSFs), groupings of core recovery capabilities that serve as a structure to facilitate problem solving and improve coordination for state and federal agencies, nongovernmental partners, and stakeholders.¹⁶⁰ The FEMA Recovery Support Functions focus on:

- Community planning and capacity building
- Economy
- Health and social services

- Housing
- Infrastructure systems
- Natural and cultural resources

In recent years, Travis County has been called upon to coordinate several immediate recovery actions such as debris removal and short-term shelter housing. Thankfully, the need for more elaborate long-term recovery operations has been limited.

Findings

After the October 2015 floods, nearly 1,000 homes within the City of Austin and Travis County were assessed for damage, with approximately half considered severely damaged or destroyed. Over 900 residents of the City of Austin and Travis County applied for financial help from FEMA's Individual Assistance Program.¹⁶¹

In the After Action Report (AAR) from the October 2015 severe weather event, representatives from Travis County's responding agencies noted several items for consideration in recovery operations, including:

- The need to supplement staff during long-term recovery to continue regular services for non-affected county residents. (page 16)
- Initial recovery operations that require decision making outside of standard operating modalities. (In the AAR, some County employees suggested that the Commissioners Court should authorize County executives to make some disaster response/initial recovery decisions based on predetermined goals, objectives, and established parameters.) (page 17)
- "Pervasive confusion" and mixed messaging about availability of various buy-out programs. (pages 24-25)
- Recommendations for a debris management policy (page 27) addressing issues such as supplemental public communications (page 24); potential assistance from the private sector (page 22) and NGOs (page 27); and multiple debris removal sites. (page 26). ¹⁶²



Recovery Planning

While most major cities and counties in the United States have produced robust disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response plans, very few have developed recovery frameworks.

As Travis County leaders know from wildfire and flooding events in recent years, recovery efforts often begin while disaster response is still underway. In fact, the most successful recovery efforts nationwide have started even before disasters occur, with pre-disaster planning.

There are generally two types of recovery plans:

1. **Pre-Disaster Recovery Plans.** Created as broad planning frameworks before an event, focusing on the transition from response operations to recovery coordination.
2. **Post-Disaster Recovery Plans.** Typically identify community recovery priorities in response to a specific disaster, designating lead organizations, assignments, and timeframes for rebuilding and revitalizing.

Table 12-1 lists (and provides links to) several exemplary pre-disaster and post-disaster recovery plans, along with potential items of note for Travis County. Table 12-1 also references two Texas recovery documents that County officials may want to consider in recovery planning.



Table 12-1 Model Disaster Recovery Plans

Recovery Plans / Guides	Items of Note for Travis County
Pre-Disaster Recovery Plans & Frameworks	
<u>Fairfax County, VA Pre-Disaster Recovery Plan (2012)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on the transition from response to recovery, including coordination and recovery agency operations.
<u>Oakland, CA Long-Term Disaster Recovery Plan (2010)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model action plan for multiple municipalities in the San Francisco Bay Area.
<u>Palm Beach County, FL Disaster Recovery Plan (2011)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recovery framework that includes municipal jurisdictions and independent districts, including water control districts, fire districts, and school districts.
<u>Salt Lake County, UT Disaster Recovery Framework (2015)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on community engagement (draft framework out for public comment in 2016).
<u>Seattle, WA Disaster Recovery Framework (2015)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on how recovery efforts can help community to “build back better” (be more resilient to future disasters, more efficient and sustainable, and more reflective of the community’s values and vision for the future).
Post-Disaster Recovery Plans	
<u>Beaufort County, SC Disaster Recovery Plan (2012)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlights expanded disaster recovery relationships between county and municipalities for debris management agreements and disaster impact assessment agreements.
<u>Hillsborough County, FL Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plan (2010)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan developed under the Florida State Recovery program, in coordination with several other counties.
Texas Recovery Guides / References	
<u>City of Galveston Disaster Recovery Plan and Planning and Development Regulations (2013)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes emergency ordinances passed after Hurricane Ike to help expedite efforts to complete emergency repairs, place emergency housing and storage, and establish assistance centers.
<u>State of Texas Long-Term Recovery Guide (2015)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case studies from long-term recovery efforts in the Bastrop wildfires and Hurricane Ike in the Houston area. Provides details on Texas statutes (e.g. HB1711) relevant to rebuilding efforts.



The Fairfax County plan listed above is one of the most robust pre-disaster recovery plans in the country and could serve as a good reference for Travis County. The Fairfax County plan provides a guide for decision making, establishing priorities, and identifying roles and responsibilities for recovery efforts. Its intent is to provide “menus of potential options” depending on the scope and scale of an incident. The plan outlines staff roles in a temporary Recovery Agency, potential issues and tasks that the recovery organization may need to address, and suggests lead and supporting agencies in Recovery Support Function roles.¹⁶³

The Fairfax County plan also underscores the importance of reevaluating and updating “pre-plans” so that they are current and viable when an event occurs. The Fairfax County Emergency Management Coordination Committee holds an annual meeting with lead Recovery Support Function agencies to update both the plan and the stakeholder list, and work with the county OEM to issue a Pre-Disaster Recovery Plan Summary Annual Report. In addition, OEM conducts a comprehensive review of the plan every four years to examine and reapprove the plan’s vision, goals, priorities, and objectives based on lessons learned from exercises, incident After Action Reports, and evolving national best practices.¹⁶⁴

The city of Houston has also taken recovery planning and training very seriously, with the city’s OEM providing departmental training on its Disaster Assistance Recovery Manual (DARM) and associated procedures on a yearly basis.¹⁶⁵

Recommendations

Recommendation 12.3.1

Develop a pre-disaster recovery plan for Travis County. Travis County leaders should establish pre-disaster planning as a top priority and call upon all key department staff to actively participate in planning efforts. As noted earlier, the most successful recovery efforts begin before a disaster occurs. Advanced planning allows government and community stakeholders enough time to develop plans and contingencies carefully. While a full recovery plan will likely require a multi-year planning process, Travis County can start by detailing basic RSFs based on FEMA’s national model.

When developing a pre-disaster recovery plan, Travis County should pay particular attention to its own “lessons learned” and gaps identified in recent disasters by developing policy decision matrices and plans for public messaging/notifications and debris management.



Recommendation 12.3.2

Involve all County departments in recovery planning efforts. While ES certainly possesses the County's disaster planning expertise and will play a vital role in recovery coordination, the foundational underpinnings of community recovery reside in other agencies. Therefore, all departments must be actively engaged in planning efforts.

Leading jurisdictions not only employ cross-departmental planning, but also require county departments, community stakeholders, and partnering cities and towns to sign letters of agreement to support of the county recovery plan with training and exercises prior to a real world incident.

Whether Travis County develops a full pre-disaster recovery plan or just a basic recovery framework, County departments should agree to the following responsibilities:

- Perform all assigned roles and responsibilities identified in the recovery plan/framework.
- Implement the recovery plan concepts, processes, and structures when carrying out assigned roles and functional responsibilities.
- Conduct operations in accordance with recognized federal, state, and local emergency management and homeland security directives, policies, and frameworks.
- Conduct planning and preparedness activities designed to prepare County staff to accomplish assigned emergency response and recovery responsibilities.
- Plan and train in cooperation with identified RSF lead and supporting agencies and county emergency management officials.
- Develop and maintain financial records for recovery purposes in accordance with guidance from planning, budget, and emergency management officials.
- Develop and maintain an inventory of department resources necessary to accomplish assigned functions.



- Provide staffing to the County emergency operations centers, service and information centers, and other identified recovery locations when activated and requested.
- Participate in approved drills, tests, and exercises.
- Maintain an approved agency-specific COOP plan in accordance with County guidelines and standards, including identifying lines of succession, alternate work site(s), IT recovery, and stand-by contracts as necessary.
- In cooperation with County emergency management officials, establish mutual aid agreements with surrounding municipal, county, and military counterparts as appropriate.
- Periodically review all emergency plans, policies, and procedures.¹⁶⁶

Recommendation 12.3.3

Review departmental responsibilities and train County employees regarding recovery processes and documentation requirements (both pre- and post-disaster). To provide the best and most timely support to Travis County residents during recovery, County departments should know what will be expected of them and be prepared to meet these expectations. County employees should also be trained regarding any special rules, exemptions, or waivers to their standard operating procedures during times of disaster.

Departmental training could cover topics such as:

- Organization of recovery activities and roles and responsibilities under the recovery plan.
- Availability and use of disaster grants and loans from sources such as FEMA's Public Assistance and Individual Assistance programs, Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program funding.
- County records that will be helpful or required during recovery.



- Expedited rule, regulation, and permitting procedures and waivers for use during disasters.
- Disaster housing assistance programs and local temporary housing plans.
- Business continuity planning and business assistance programs.

12.4 EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT COORDINATION

Background

Emergency Services Districts in Texas

Article III, Section 48-e of the Texas Constitution provides for the creation of Emergency Services Districts (ESDs) and notes that these districts “may provide emergency medical services, emergency ambulance services, rural fire prevention and control services, or other emergency services.”¹⁶⁷ ESDs are allowed to impose sales, use, and/or property taxes to support these services.

Chapter 775 of the Texas Health and Safety Code further authorizes the organization of Emergency Services Districts and outlines the governance of each by an Emergency Services District Board of Emergency Services Commissioners appointed by each county commissioners court.¹⁶⁸

ESD Coordination

In August 2014, the Travis County Commissioners Court passed a resolution encouraging the establishment of an “ESD Joint Working Group” to analyze data and identify efficiencies through collaboration and coordination among Travis County’s 14 ESDs.¹⁶⁹ Background documents supporting the resolution noted that:

- Separate ESD operating systems had created inefficiencies in coordinating data and measurements.
- ESDs had difficulty sharing information with other response agencies.
- Recent meetings with ESD chiefs and ESD commissioner representatives had culminated in a request that the Commissioners Court support joint working groups for collaboration and coordination to improve service delivery and sustain services for the future.¹⁷⁰



The 2014 resolution served as a springboard for a “Gap Plan” developed by ES leadership to document system shortages and redundancies and identify initial steps to achieve countywide services.

County and ESD Fire Codes

Texas Local Government Code Chapter 233 authorizes counties with populations of 250,000 or greater and adjacent counties to adopt fire codes and any regulations necessary to administer and enforce the codes. In February 2005, the Travis County Commissioners Court established the first Travis County Fire Code by adopting the 2003 International Fire Code (IFC) as endorsed by the International Code Council. (As a matter of practice, government jurisdictions often adopt national or international model codes by reference.) Travis County updated its Fire Code to reflect modernizations in the IFC in 2009 and again in 2015. The current County Code is based on the most recent version of the IFC published in 2015.

Chapter 775.036 (5)(b) of the Texas Health and Safety Code allows ESDs to adopt their own fire codes as long as the district fire code is “similar to standards adopted by a nationally recognized standards-making association.”¹⁷¹ Texas Health and Safety Code allows ESDs to maintain a district fire code even if a broader county fire code is developed. The law states that, “to the extent of any conflict between the county's code and the district's code, the more stringent provision prevails.”¹⁷²

Of the 14 ESDs in Travis County, five ESDs (districts 2, 4, 6, 9 and 12) currently have established their own fire codes.

Findings

Travis County and ESD Coordination

As the Commissioners Court is aware, studies have shown that Texas ESDs, particularly those in high growth areas, often have insufficient resources to meet the service needs of their district.¹⁷³ Due to new residents' service expectations and limits on raising revenues, some high-growth ESDs face significant financial and operational challenges. Recognizing this problem, ES and the Commissioners Court perennially consider the budget and policy benefits of ESD unification. In fact, ES has noted that “promoting/assisting with the unification of Emergency Services Districts” is one of its short-term goals. The ESDs have worked with the County on several collaborative projects including consolidated regional radio, dispatch, HAZMAT, and data warehousing initiatives. Both Travis County and ESD leaders have acknowledged the benefit of these collaborative efforts.



Similarly, state leaders have recognized the value of district collaboration allowing for ESD consolidation and noted in 2011 legislation that this could “allow the districts to provide services more economically and efficiently.”¹⁷⁴

ES leadership is to be commended for a strong commitment to regional collaboration. ES County executive meets regularly with first responder and emergency leaders from the ESDs, the City of Austin, local municipalities, and regional associations such as the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) and Capital Area Fire Chiefs Association (CAFCA). ES has also worked closely with local partners to assemble a regional public information officer group and continue successful collaborations at CTECC and the emergency operations back-up center.

In 2011 and 2015, all ESD commissioners were brought together to discuss the future of ESDs in Travis County. In addition, ES has convened meetings with fiscal and administrative staff from districts struggling to maintain service levels to review opportunities outlined in the ES “Gap Plan.”

County and ESD Fire Codes

There are currently six distinct fire codes in place in the unincorporated parts of Travis County (five ESDs and one for Travis County). In addition, the City of Austin and many municipalities have also adopted their own fire codes. As noted earlier, most jurisdictions adopt national or international model codes by reference. The six fire codes currently administered in Travis County are drawn from three different versions of the International Fire Code. Table 12-2 shows the IFC version currently adopted by Travis County and each of the ESDs with its own code.

Table 12-2 Fire Codes Administered in Travis County

Jurisdiction	Version of International Fire Code Adopted ¹⁷⁵
Travis County	2015
Emergency Service District 2	2015
Emergency Service District 4	2009
Emergency Service District 6	2015
Emergency Service District 9	2012
Emergency Service District 12	2009

Source: Travis County Code; ESD ordinances and fire prevention office web sites.



ESD fire prevention offices conduct inspections to determine compliance with the district's fire code. Limited personnel and the absence of sworn peace officers (to enforce the laws of the state of Texas) in most district fire prevention operations severely limit the offices' ability to truly enforce fire code provisions. Districts administering their own fire code charge fees for services such as site plan reviews and building inspections.¹⁷⁶ With limited financial resources and taxing capacity, such fees are seen by the ESDs as valuable revenue generators for the district.

The Travis County Fire Marshal's Office notes that ESDs are currently able to adopt or rescind their own fire codes with no notification or approval from the County Fire Marshal's Office. This means that the County Fire Marshal's Office may be required to conduct additional fire inspections with no advanced notice, limiting the office's ability to forecast budget or personnel needs. This was seen most recently in 2015 when ESD 3 rescinded its fire code, sending all district fire inspection work to the County Fire Marshal.

Having multiple fire codes throughout the County can also be a hindrance to residents and local businesses that must determine which code applies in each part of the county. This can be particularly frustrating for businesses that want to develop multiple projects in the County when each may have to meet a different set of standards. These frustrations are amplified when businesses realize they not only have multiple codes to follow but also must navigate different permitting, fee, and inspection processes in each area.

San Antonio city leaders recognized that navigating multiple building codes (even within the city) created frustration for their residents and businesses. As an efficiency and effectiveness measure, members of the city council in 2011 directed their Development Services Department to review processes and later passed an ordinance consolidating the city's various building-related codes and administrative provisions.¹⁷⁷

Recommendations

Recommendation 12.4.1

Continue to explore opportunities for consolidation among ESDs and collaboration between the districts and the County to increase efficiency and effectiveness. As financial burdens on ESDs continue to grow, leaders from the County and the 14 ESDs should prioritize coordination and consolidation efforts to ensure continued service delivery countywide. While Texas law clearly establishes the



independent nature of the ESDs and allows the districts to administer many activities autonomously, nothing prevents voluntary coordination among the ESDs or between the districts and the County. Successful collaboration efforts such as regional radio, dispatch, HAZMAT, and data warehousing initiatives are great models for future partnerships. Of course, leaders in each district view unification issues and district–county relations differently. But, the County should take a leadership role in bringing all of the players together to discuss mutually beneficial options.

Recommendation 12.4.2

When appointing ESD commissioners, emphasize the importance of collaboration and regional partnerships. As the Commissioners Court considers future ESD commissioner appointments, it should seek out candidates committed to building upon the important regional collaborations that have started to take hold.

Recommendation 12.4.3

Establish a common fire code for Travis County. Given the financial strains on most ESDs, it is not surprising that they would want to issue fire and building permits and conduct inspections as revenue generators for their district. This, however, should not be the primary driver in determining whether an ESD adopts and administers its own fire code.

As noted earlier, statutory provisions allow ESDs to maintain their own fire codes. The County can do nothing to compel districts to adopt a unified fire code or consolidate fire prevention efforts into a single fire code authority. But, the Commissioners Court can encourage the ESD commissioners that they appoint to work closely with ES and place a high priority on collaboration and coordination activities.

12.5 STAR FLIGHT REVENUE AND OPERATIONS

Background

Travis County STAR Flight is a county-funded public safety air rescue program with a variety of EMS, medical transport, search and rescue, firefighting, and law enforcement support assignments. STAR Flight serves Travis County and 19 surrounding counties in central Texas based on a dispatch matrix approved by the Commissioners Court, and outside the 19 counties on a case-by-case basis (seen most vividly in wildland fire and flood responses in recent years).



STAR Flight provides an integral component of rescue and emergency medical service to residents of Travis County. This has been seen most vividly in dramatic rescues during both wildfires and floods in recent years. The vast majority of STAR Flight missions are medical in nature. In fiscal year (FY) 2015, STAR Flight served a total of 548 patients, 172 from Travis County.¹⁷⁸ The number of fire missions is often driven by the unique fire hazards of the year. STAR Flight missions to support law enforcement have been reduced in recent years after the Austin Police Department added a helicopter to their service.

Table 12-3 STAR Flight Missions

Activity	FY2015 Missions
Total patients transported	548
Travis County patients transported	172
Search and rescue missions	121
Law enforcement missions	24
Fire Missions	14

Source: STAR Flight Commissioners Court Presentation-December 10, 2015.

STAR Flight currently maintains a fleet of four helicopters, ranging in age from six to 49 years old. Details of the current fleet are listed in Table 12-4.

Table 12-4 STAR Flight 2016 Fleet

Model	Travis County Service Commencement	Flight Hours	Missions
Airbus Eurocopter EC 145 (N373TC)	2005	2006	3,580.0 EM, F, IF, LE, SR, ST
Airbus Eurocopter EC 145 (N378TC)	2005	2006	3,362.3 EM, F, IF, LE, SR, ST
Airbus Eurocopter EC 145 (N392TC)	2010	2010	1,741.3 EM, F, IF, LE, SR, ST
UH-1H+ Huey (N832DH)	1967	2013	4,520.4 F, R
Mission Key:	EM=Emergency Medical LE=Law Enforcement	F=Fire SR=Scene Response	IF=Interfacility Transport ST=Specialty Team/Personnel Transport

Source: STAR Flight, 2016. Flight hours as of April 18, 2016.

Findings

Non-County Revenue

The STAR Flight team has done a commendable job generating revenue to supplement County funds and the tax dollars of Travis County residents. For FY 2016, STAR Flight projected over \$2.7 million in revenue (supporting 43.5 percent of its total budget), with over 80 percent of that revenue coming from sources outside of Travis County.¹⁷⁹ STAR Flight generates revenue from a variety of sources ranging from billings to patients, insurers, hospitals, and government programs such as Medicaid and Medicare.

On medical missions, STAR Flight transports patients both from accident scenes to local hospitals and also from hospital-to-hospital on “interfacility” flights when patients require additional or specialized care. In recent years, the distribution of STAR Flight missions has changed as more hospitals have been built (requiring less air transport) and as the Seton Medical Center and St. David’s HealthCare networks have grown, bringing more patients into Austin. In earlier years of STAR Flight operation, the distribution of flights was approximately 80 percent “scene calls” compared with 20 percent interfacility calls. Now, STAR Flight work is approximately 40 percent scene calls and 60 percent interfacility flights.¹⁸⁰ STAR Flight bills for all patient transport work, both scene and interfacility.

Most notable among STAR Flight’s non-County support is the Seton Reserve Fund, a \$3.2 million unrestricted donation received in 2010 (at the time of the purchase of STAR Flight’s third helicopter) from the Seton Hospital Network to fund scheduled maintenance. It is anticipated that this fund will be depleted in FY 2017. STAR Flight and ES leadership are currently in discussions with hospital partners regarding ways to continue support for the on-going fleet maintenance needs.

Billing Practices and Rates

As noted earlier, STAR Flight bills patients for its air transport services. The billing structure is similar to that of ground transport services provided by ambulances. Currently, STAR Flight maintains the following fee schedule:

- Flight/Lift Off for Travis County residents: \$3,900
- Flight/Lift Off for non-Travis County residents: \$8,700
- Loaded mileage (charge per mile from the pickup of a patient to arrival at the destination): \$105¹⁸¹



STAR Flight reviews its rates regularly with its billing vendor to ensure that County charges reflect market standards and current government program reimbursement rates. A March 2013 market analysis conducted by the STAR Flight billing vendor showed that Travis County rates were well below those of comparable providers. For example, the base rate for rotor aircraft flights from comparable providers ranged from \$10,000 to \$14,445 (compared with STAR Flight's current \$3,900 for in-county and \$8,700 for out-of-county charges) and the mileage rate rates ranged from \$100 to \$139 per mile (compared with STAR Flight's \$105 per mile charge).¹⁸²

Fleet Maintenance and Replacement

To provide comparative context for the STAR Flight fleet of helicopters, it is helpful to examine the age and mission tempo of other public safety helicopters in Texas. In 2014, the San Antonio Auditor's Office collected data on the city's police helicopter fleet in comparison to police and emergency medical helicopters in other cities. Table 12-5 provides comparisons of note for Travis County.

Table 12-5 Comparison of Select Police and Emergency Medical Helicopter Operations in Texas

Jurisdiction	Missions	Number of Helicopters in Primary Fleet ¹⁸³	Average Helicopter Age	Total Annual Flight Hours	Average Annual Flight Hours Per Helicopter
Travis County	EM, F, IF, LE, SR, ST	3	9.3 years	813	271.0
City of Dallas	EM, F, LE, SR, ST	2	7 years	1,500	750.0
City of San Antonio	F, SR, LE, SR, ST	5	11 years	2,104	420.7
Mission Key:	EM=Emergency Medical LE=Law Enforcement	F=Fire SR=Scene Response		IF=Interfacility Transport ST=Specialty Team/Personnel Transport	

Source: Travis County **STAR Flight** and San Antonio Auditor's Office, December 2014.

As is expected with public safety fleet operators, STAR Flight consistently monitors the size, age, and condition of its aircraft fleet to ensure that the equipment will ably support the agency's missions and do so in the most cost-effective manner. This constant review is particularly necessary as the scope of STAR Flight's missions (EMS, medical transport, search and rescue, firefighting, law enforcement) has evolved over the years.

The STAR Flight team tracks both the age and condition of its helicopter mechanical operations and on-board equipment. The two primary STAR Flight helicopters are 11 years old and have aging radio, technology, and tracking systems that will soon reach



the end of their life cycle. STAR Flight staff report that the radios in two helicopters will not be supported after 2017.

Historically, the County has replaced STAR Fleet aircraft on at eight-year intervals (1989, 1997, and 2005).¹⁸⁴ However, the County has no formal plan or funding mechanism to replace STAR Flight equipment at end-of-life. Unlike the depreciation model often used with public safety automobiles, the County does not have a method in place to accumulate funds for future replacement of helicopters.

In preparation for FY2017 budget discussions, STAR Flight projected costs for two potential fleet support plans moving forward: (1) continued maintenance/overhaul of its current fleet; and (2) the purchase of replacement aircraft and equipment. STAR Flight estimates \$3.4 million in FY 2017–2024 for scheduled maintenance on the current fleet, plus increased costs for more frequent unscheduled maintenance items and needed upgrades for radio and technology systems.¹⁸⁵ In FY 2015, STAR Flight worked with the Travis County Purchasing Office to issue a Request for Information (RFI) to estimate the purchasing cost of replacement aircraft. Based on responses to the RFI, STAR Flight projects that purchasing three replacement aircraft would cost \$30,000,000. STAR Flight estimates the current fleet trade-in value at \$10,000,000 and is seeking \$10,000,000 in contributions from local hospital partners, resulting in a net cost to the County of \$10,000,000.¹⁸⁶

Recommendations

Recommendation 12.5.1

Continue to pursue external revenue sources to support STAR Flight operations. STAR Flight's work with local hospital networks is an integral part of its medical transport mission. The financial support provided by these partner organizations allows STAR Flight to provide a vital service to Travis County residents while minimizing the cost to County taxpayers. County leaders should continue to pursue such external revenue sources, particularly as the Seton Reserve Fund is depleted in FY 2017. Of course, STAR Flight's primary objective will always be providing emergency service for Travis County residents. This priority should be maintained when considering any additional missions or funding mechanisms.



Recommendation 12.5.2

Ensure that STAR Flight rates reflect market standards and current government program reimbursement rates. The STAR Flight staff and its billing vendor have conducted in-depth market research and are well equipped to provide the Planning and Budget Office (PBO) and the Commissioners Court with the data needed to evaluate current fee levels.

Recommendation 12.5.3

Develop a formal life cycle plan for updating and replacing aircraft in alignment with STAR Flight's mission. As the STAR Flight fleet ages, departmental and County leaders should develop a plan for long-term sustainability of the fleet and its equipment. In tandem with these conversations, the County should determine appropriate on-going funding mechanisms for current and future purchases. In the short-term, STAR Flight has assembled budget data providing PBO and the Commissioners Court comparative cost figures for both extended maintenance on the current fleet and for aircraft and equipment replacement.

When reviewing these options, leaders should consider:

- The ability to extend the life of the current mechanical fleet with equipment upgrades.
- Service life limits (SLLs) or airworthiness limits of the current fleet and equipment.
- Availability of replacement parts for the current fleet and the length of time that mechanical and equipment manufacturers will continue to support their products.
- Current and future resale values of the current fleet.
- Potential cost savings from purchasing multiple aircraft, locking in current pricing for future purchases, and renewed warranty coverage.
- Downtime during increased repairs on the current fleet versus procurement and delivery times for new aircraft.
- Preferred source of funding (County versus private funds; new aircraft as a capital expenditure versus on-going maintenance dollars from the general fund).



12.6 MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE FEES AND CHARGES

Background

The Travis County Medical Examiner's Office (TCMEO) has a well-documented record of success. It is highly regarded and is known for providing superior evaluative and forensic analysis. The National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) has continuously accredited the TCMEO since 2009, and the toxicology laboratory has successfully maintained accreditation through the American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) since 2005.¹⁸⁷

The TCMEO is responsible for the investigation and certification of cause and manner of death of all sudden, unexpected, violent, suspicious, or unnatural deaths in Travis County. The Medical Examiner's Office also investigates similar deaths in 42 central Texas counties when requested by local authorities.¹⁸⁸ As is customary with medical examiner (ME) offices around the country, TCMEO charges fees to cover the costs of many of its services, particularly those requested by entities outside of the county.

Chapter 49.25 Section 13A(a) of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure allows medical examiners to charge reasonable fees for services including cremation approvals, court testimonies, consultations, and depositions. Sub-section (b) of this Article provides that commissioner courts must approve the amount of such fees and stipulates that fees may not exceed the amount necessary to provide the services. Sub-section (c) further states that fees may not be assessed against the county's district attorney or a county office.

Findings

Current TCMEO Fee Structure

Travis County has no systematic process for reviewing and revising its various fees. Typically, the TCMEO has reviewed medical examiner fees approximately once every three years. Recently, this review has been disrupted by efforts to explore financing for a new building and the hiring of a seventh pathologist in 2014. Notably, one fee adjustment was implemented in recent years when the autopsy fee was increased to \$2,900, effective January 1, 2015.

The TCMEO notes that the most recent autopsy fee was analyzed (in conjunction with PBO) and determined as sufficient to recoup costs of an outside autopsy (the major revenue for the department). Therefore, there has been no formal effort by the County since to determine whether all other current TCMEO fees support the actual cost of providing services. When fees do not fully support the cost of performance, the County



is inadvertently subsidizing services, often ones provided for other jurisdictions. If a system to comprehensively review fees for the medical examiner is not put back on track, cumulatively, the subsidies will likely increase over the years, as outdated fees generally fail to keep pace with growing medical costs.

With the notable exception of the flat \$2,900 autopsy fee for outside jurisdictions, TCMEO fees are typically lower than those of ME offices in other major counties in Texas. Table 12-6 shows a sample of common ME office fees comparing Travis County to Bexar, Dallas and Tarrant counties.

Table 12-6 Comparison of Select Medical Examiner Office Fees

	Travis County	Bexar County	Dallas County	Tarrant County
Autopsy	\$2,900	\$2,500-3,000 (fee based on complexity of autopsy)	\$2,050-2,500	\$1,450-3,500 (fee based on complexity of autopsy)
External Examination/ Partial Autopsy	\$900	\$1,250	\$1,050	\$1,150
Court Testimony (Medical Examiner)	\$121/hour (minimum of three hours)	\$500/hour (minimum of two hours)	\$725/half-day (one half-day minimum)	\$525/hour
Court Testimony Travel Time	\$121/hour	\$250/hour	Included in testimony half-day rate	\$90/hour
Cremation Certification/Authorization	No fee	\$25	\$25	\$25
Copy of Autopsy Report	\$10	\$25-45	\$5	\$100
Notarization of Documents	\$5	\$10	\$15	\$15

Sources: Travis County Medical Examiner's Office; Current Bexar, Dallas and Tarrant County ME Office fee schedules.

While Table 12-6 shows that Travis County's fees are consistently lower than other major Texas counties, the fee comparison only illustrates part of the discrepancies. For example:

- The Travis County fee for court testimony applies only to medical examiners. There is no fee in place for testimony from toxicologists or investigators. By comparison, Bexar County charges \$300 per hour for toxicology chemist testimony, \$150 per hour for investigator testimony, and \$100 for custodian of record and other staff testimony.¹⁸⁹

- When TCMEO staff members are called to testify in court for work they have performed for one of the 42 counties with whom Travis County has an interlocal agreement, the \$121 per hour fee is charged. But, medical examiners are also required by courts to testify regarding work they performed in positions outside of Travis County (e.g., previous employment). At present, Travis County pays for ME travel (even out-of-state) when staff is required to respond to court orders. If medical examiners travel on personal time (taking vacation) for these cases, they can be reimbursed by the requesting jurisdiction. If, however, they are unable to use (or do not have enough) vacation hours, there is currently no mechanism in place for Travis County to allow a medical examiner to comply with the court order on work time and bill the requesting jurisdiction for the ME's time and travel. (Note: The Travis County Attorney's Office has confirmed that unless an interlocal agreement or contract is in place, Travis County is unable to bill jurisdictions requesting court appearances.) According to staff from the TCMEO, other Texas counties (such as Dallas) bill for this type of extra-jurisdictional work and recoup their costs on a regular basis.
- Many counties (including Bexar, Dallas and Tarrant) have multi-tiered pricing systems with lower fees for basic autopsies and higher fees for more complicated cases. In contrast, Travis County has only one fee which covers the cost of basic autopsies, but likely falls short for work in more challenging cases.
- In Texas, medical examiners or justices of the peace (JPs) are required by law to sign cremation authorizations before a body is cremated. At the TCMEO, cremation authorization forms and death certificates are reviewed by a forensic pathologist before authorizing cremations. While most counties charge \$25 for these certifications, Travis County has no fee in place.

Additional Services

Chapter 49.25 Section 13A(a) of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure also allows medical examiners to provide (and charge reasonable fees) for consultation services. The TCMEO has identified a need from several JPs for basic consultation services for death certifications when a full autopsy is unnecessary. Travis County medical examiners could provide consultative services to the JPs for much less than the cost of a full autopsy. TCMEO reports that these consultative services would not require any increases to its current personnel or equipment, but would provide a much-needed (and affordable) service to other counties.



Recommendations

Recommendation 12.6.1

The Medical Examiner's Office should undertake a comprehensive review of its fee structure for all services, with a goal of establishing fees equal to costs. A fee study will be necessary to determine appropriate 2016 fee levels for each TCMEO service. The fact that some fees have not been updated in years (if ever) to keep pace with inflation and medical costs likely means that the County is costing itself significantly in lost revenues each year.

When reviewing current fees, the County should also consider areas where fees are not in place to cover the County's cost of performance. As noted earlier, Travis County does not charge for cremation certifications compared with most ME offices charging \$25. In interviews conducted for this report, TCMEO officials confirmed that \$25 is a fair estimation of the level of effort required for a cremation certification. In FY 2015, TCMEO issued 2,991 authorizations to cremate. At a rate of \$25, this is \$74,775 in foregone revenue or subsidized services. It should be noted that as a matter of public policy Travis County does not charge residents for some ME services; this determination would need to be evaluated in each fee review.

Table 12-7 provides some examples of revenue opportunities if Travis County fees were equivalent to the average of those in Bexar, Dallas, and Tarrant counties.

Table 12-7 Revenue Projections for Select Travis County Medical Examiner Fees at Average Comparable County Rates

	Current Travis County Fee	Average Comparable County Fee ¹⁹⁰	FY2015 Travis County Fee Revenue	Revenue If Average County Fee Were Charged
Court Testimony (Medical Examiner)	\$121/hour	\$402	\$5,385	\$17,889
Cremation Certification/Authorization	No fee	\$25	\$0	\$74,775
Copy of Autopsy Report	\$10	\$47	\$2,020	\$9,494

Recommendation 12.6.2

When establishing appropriate fee levels, the County may also want to consider incorporating an indexing component to provide automatic adjustments of fees as costs change. In recent years, governments at every level have begun to review fee



structures to bring them in line with the actual cost of performing services and to plan for recoupment of growing costs in the future. The most commonly used automatic adjustment measurement is the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which exhibits the cost of a "basket" of goods and services typically purchased by the average consumer. The CPI is widely used by both the public and private sectors for "indexing" salaries, benefits, contracts, taxes, and prices. There is widespread public acceptance of the CPI as a measurement of the "cost of living." This makes it a convenient indexing device for ensuring that costs do not ever-increasingly outstrip receipts.

While medical costs are part of the CPI "basket" (as are other costs germane to health testing services), the CPI is not a perfect fit to measure growing laboratory testing costs that reflect medical inflation (typically running significantly higher than the general inflation rate). Travis County should consider using the CPI to index fees and provide for regular automatic adjustments, with some study given to the possibility of utilizing a more accurate health care inflation index in the future.

Recommendation 12.6.3

Travis County should address any statutory or administrative barriers that prevent cost recoupment for services provided to other jurisdictions. Travis County should always recoup costs when employees provide services to other jurisdictions. In conjunction with a comprehensive fee review, department officials should work with PBO and the County Attorney's Office to identify and address any barriers to cost recoupment.



13 JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The Travis County Justice and Public Safety (JPS) division is composed of several executive departments that work closely with the County justice system. The division includes:

- Counseling and Education Services (CES)
- Justice Planning (JP)
- Juvenile Public Defender (JPD)
- Mental Health Public Defender (MHPD)
- Office of Child Representation (OCR)
- Office of Parental Representation (OPR)

Each department conducts day-to-day operations independently, but works in tandem with JPS to administer program budgets, evaluations, human resources (HR), and administrative matters. The departments often work together on justice policy matters and services for shared clientele.

13.1 INDIGENT LEGAL SERVICES

Background

The diversity of offerings in JPS is unparalleled in the nation, with programs ranging from assessment, education, and rehabilitation services to criminal justice data analysis to legal representation for indigent clients. Even within its legal services work, the wide range of clients is remarkable, including children and parents in Child Protective Services (CPS) cases, and juveniles and those with mental health issues who are unable to afford legal counsel.

In recent years, Travis County has invested significant time and effort in evaluating its various indigent legal service components to determine the most appropriate size, scale, caseload, and cost of operations. The uniqueness of each office and accordant client base requires individual consideration. However, there are some overarching protocols and policy considerations that transcend department lines.

Highlights of each JPS indigent legal services office are outlined with pertinent findings in the following section.



Juvenile Public Defender

As the oldest office of its kind in the country, the Travis County Juvenile Public Defender (JPD) has a long history of providing legal assistance to indigent children appearing in Juvenile Court. The JPD currently takes 100 percent of the cases referred from the Juvenile Court, as it has done for the past 15 years. In fiscal year (FY) 2015, the JPD served 1,758 clients in 2,702 cases,¹⁹¹ providing representation to all youth prior to their first court appearance.

The goals of JPD are to:

- Fully protect and safeguard the legal and constitutional rights of individuals accused of committing juvenile offenses by providing superior and ethical legal representation.
- Serve as a resource for individuals and organizations on the local, state, and national level in the specialized area of juvenile law.
- Serve the public and legal community by providing education and training in the area of juvenile justice.¹⁹²

Mental Health Public Defender

Travis County established its Mental Health Public Defender (MHPD) in 2007 as the first freestanding office of its kind in the United States. MHPD provides criminal defense and social services to indigent misdemeanor defendants experiencing significant mental illness.¹⁹³ Travis County courts work with the MHPD to appoint defendants with the most severe mental illness symptoms and least outside resources for support. MHPD endeavors to coordinate legal defense and social services to provide clients a more stable life rather than repeated arrests and additional jail time.

In FY 2015, the MHPD handled 401 cases, with 227 resulting in no conviction.¹⁹⁴ The MHPD also provides intensive social and casework supports to many clients beyond its legal docket and offers training opportunities on mental health to the broader legal community. This training is vitally important, as MHPD's limited attorney staff can represent only a small portion of indigent defendants suffering from mental illness.



The goals of the MHPD are to:

- Provide specialized, holistic legal representation for indigent persons with mental illness charged in Class A or B misdemeanors in the Travis County criminal justice system.
- Provide intensive social services support to indigent persons with mental illness represented by MHPD attorneys and other court appointed attorneys.
- Provide in-depth psychosocial assessments and reports to MHPD attorneys and other court appointed attorneys representing indigent clients with mental illness, for mitigation and sentencing advocacy.
- Provide continuing education opportunities to the legal community on specialized issues related to provision of criminal defense for defendants with mental illness.¹⁹⁵

Office of Child Representation

The Office of Child Representation (OCR) provides legal representation and case management for children involved in Child Protective Services cases brought by the state of Texas. OCR attorneys serve as the attorney ad litem for their clients, as well as the guardian ad litem in many cases. OCR also serves as a community resource on child welfare law.

In FY 2015, 585 CPS cases were filed, with 145 assigned to OCR. OCR reports a successful closure rate of almost 56 percent (81 of 145 cases).¹⁹⁶

Goals for the Office of Child Representation include:

- Providing legal services for children and youth in the Child Protective Services system.
- Helping to control the cost of indigent defense by reducing the number of private attorney appointments.
- Providing clients with quality support and social work services.
- Conducting public outreach and training regarding the work of OCR.¹⁹⁷



Office of Parental Representation

Launched in 2009, the Office of Parental Representation (OPR) serves as a public defender for indigent parents in Travis County who have had (or could have) their children removed from the home by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (through Child Protective Services) due to allegations of abuse or neglect. In civil CPS cases, indigent parents are typically provided their own attorney. Until the OPR, private attorneys appointed by Civil Courts Administration provided this representation.

In FY 2015, 585 CPS cases were filed, with 269 assigned to OPR. OPR reports a successful closure rate of 85 percent (129 of 269 cases),¹⁹⁸ defining success as when a child goes home with a parent or other family member.

Goals for the OPR include:

- Providing quality, efficient legal representation for the indigent primary (typically custodial) parents in child abuse and neglect cases pending in Travis County.
- Reducing the cost of private appointments for Travis County.
- Assisting in finding additional social services for OPR clients such as housing, substance abuse treatment, and mental health providers to fill in the gaps in services.¹⁹⁹

Findings

Advantages of County Indigent Legal Representation

Travis County indigent legal services offices have been shown to provide legal representation and case management support with both qualitative and quantitative advantages compared with private counsel. It should be noted that this is not necessarily a negative reflection on the quality of service provided by the private bar. Instead, County indigent legal offices have been able develop expertise in their unique area of practice and better access County support service for their clients (providing a qualitative advantage in representation) while leveraging the resources of government infrastructure that allows representation at a lower price point (a quantitative benefit).

Multiple Travis County studies and analyses in recent years have documented the advantages of County indigent legal representation, including:



Juvenile Public Defender

Justice Planning and JPD data showing:

- JPD provides representation in over 97 percent of cases in the Travis County Juvenile Court.
- The average cost of JPD representation is \$500 per case versus an average of \$1,100 per case for private attorney representation.²⁰⁰

Mental Health Public Defender

A 2015 Justice Planning report on MHPD showing:

- MHPD clients were more likely to receive dismissals on their legal cases, compared to similar clients who received assigned counsel.
- MHPD clients received fewer and shorter jail sentences and probation sentences.
- MHPD clients had fewer total new arrests that resulted in a jailing during the one-year follow-up period compared to assigned counsel clients.
- When MHPD client did reoffend, they had fewer total jail bed days for new bookings (creating lower jail costs for the County) than assigned counsel clients.
- After initial start-up costs for the MHPD, the office reached a “break-even” point in FY 2011 and has generated savings through cost avoidance in each year thereafter.²⁰¹

Office of Child Representation

A 2011 cost benefit analysis of OCR conducted by Travis County's Justice Planning office showing:

- OCR attorneys cost an hourly rate of \$66.03 versus \$75.00 for private attorneys.
- Some appointed attorneys without paralegals or support staff billed the County for their administrative work at the attorney hourly rate (\$75 per hour) versus the paralegal/support staff rate (\$30 per hour).²⁰²



Office of Parental Representation

A 2011 cost benefit analysis of OPR conducted by Travis County's Justice Planning office showing:

- The hourly rate of OPR attorneys was \$58.17 versus \$75.00 for private attorneys.
- OPR paralegals cost an hourly rate of \$28.59 versus \$30.00 for paralegal services through private attorneys.
- An average hourly rate for all OPR office operations, including support staff and operating costs, of \$62.15.²⁰³

Opportunities to Expand Current Indigent Legal Services

Expanding County indigent legal services offices is not a new issue for the Commissioners Court. However, the timing might be opportune to pursue expansion options in earnest as case dockets are growing in every court, and CPS cases are increasing 62 percent over a five-year period.²⁰⁴ Justice Planning analysts continue to evaluate cost benefit data and can provide high-quality research to address any specific questions posed by the Court and PBO.

The MHPD has identified one option for incremental expansion that the Court should consider. Currently, the office represents clients only on misdemeanor charges. Often, these clients also have low-level felony charges in the same case. When this happens, the case is transferred to an attorney from the court's "mental health wheel" (a list of court-appointed attorneys with training in mental health issues). The MHPD team has noted that maintaining MHPD representation and continuing the collaboration of MHPD attorneys and caseworkers in these cases can better serve clients.

When appointing cases, the court considers whether MHPD has represented (and provided case support to) a client in the past. If so, the court is likely to assign subsequent cases to the MHPD, in an effort to maintain legal and casework relationships and defendant support services. This representation and casework continuity should also be explored if former MHPD defendants are later charged with low-level felonies. Presently, MHPD is well suited to expand operations/caseloads. In April 2016, the MHPD moved into new office space with room to grow. This could allow operational expansion at a relatively low cost.



Overlap in Families Served by Indigent Legal Services

Often, families in Travis County have overlapping interactions with the legal system, with concurrent cases involving different family members at the same time. For example, a parent and child might be involved in a Child Protective Services case while the parent is also a defendant in a criminal case. Frequently, this means that the County is providing indigent legal services and casework support to multiple family members at the same time. This can create a complex web of overlapping (and sometimes conflicting) County services.

Travis County courts have recognized this in the past and have made efforts to move to a “one judge, one family” approach in the court docket. According to interviews conducted with court officials for this review, some progress has been made to identify “crossover youth,” those who are dually involved in the CPS and juvenile justice systems.²⁰⁵ Other than this effort, there is no formal mechanism in place to track when a family has multiple legal or casework interfaces with the County.

Travis County leaders have placed a high priority on therapeutic justice and problem solving. Recognizing this, each of the County’s indigent legal services offices has worked hard to provide clients with not just legal representation, but also casework and other support services. Staff members have worked to cultivate relationships with community health, treatment, and social service providers and would like to expand these efforts even further to groups like Legal Aid.

Travis County has also developed a Model Court for Children and Families, a multidisciplinary community initiative (with representatives from OCR, OPR, CPS and the District Attorney’s Office) to facilitate systemic improvements of the court and child welfare systems and find ways to fill gaps in service providers. In spite of these commendable collaboration efforts, both court officials and representatives of the indigent legal services offices confirm that there is no formal mechanism in place to track when a family has multiple legal or casework interfaces with the County.

When confronting this issue, some jurisdictions have used court case managers or coordinators to find related cases, gather appropriate information to inform judicial officers and litigants, and ensure that services for families are coordinated. The Superior Court of San Francisco County employs a case manager who searches for related cases on specific court calendars and provides appropriate information to judicial officers.²⁰⁶



Performance Measures

Travis County indigent legal services offices track several quantitative performance measures (such as caseload numbers and hourly rates), and continually work with Justice Planning analysts to conduct and update cost benefit analyses of their offices. Some teams also measure elements of qualitative performance such as case “success rates.” To better evaluate outcomes, the offices may want to consider additional qualitative client representation measures, such as:

- Timely case processing, including observations by judges and peers.
- How well attorneys and caseworkers educate clients on legal and community resources and reasonable expectations for the case.
- Client advocacy, defined as both trial advocacy (reduction of charge, etc.) and treatment advocacy (greater access to mental health services, etc.)

Some of the County’s indigent legal offices are already considering ways to measure performance. JPD is making great strides toward quality measurement. JPD is focusing on performance-based programs that consider not just the office’s caseload, but also whether services are delivered in a cost-efficient way and with the highest quality representation. JPD is also looking for ways to measure the effect of broader supports (such as a good educational system) on juveniles in Travis County. In addition, OPR is working with ITS to identify the best ways to track and report data related to their performance.

More broadly, the County is making great strides in developing consistent and meaningful measures of justice programs. In October 2015, the County launched a Multi-departmental Evaluation Advisory Committee that brings together representatives from Justice Planning along with County court, human services, and law enforcement experts to evaluate justice programs and provide statistical data on which programs truly work. This group is also working to find a common measure for “jail bed day” costs and a common definition of recidivism to be used across all County programs. This work can provide good definitional standards as the indigent legal teams develop their own internal measures.

Escalating Cost of Indigent Defense in Travis County

The cost to Travis County for indigent legal services is growing exponentially each year. For FY 2016, the budget for Civil Courts Legally Mandated Fees increased by \$632,661,



a 19.5 percent increase,²⁰⁷ the budget for Criminal Courts Legally Mandated Fees increased by \$653,804, a 7.5 percent increase.²⁰⁸

Recommendations

Recommendation 13.1.1

Expand County indigent legal services offices while ensuring quality representation and producing savings. As the primary stewards of County tax dollars, the Commissioners Court must ensure not only that quality legal representation is offered to indigent clients, but also that it is provided with the best return on investment. The JPD, MHPD, OCR, and OPR offices have all been reviewed in cost benefit analyses and have been shown to provide quality legal services at a lower price point than private counsel. Additional County savings have been documented (beyond the period of legal representation) as clients from these offices have shown lower recidivism and subsequent incarceration rates (meaning lower long-term jail costs for the County) and better societal reentry rates (meaning lower costs to the broader community).

Cost benefit analyses of indigent defense expenditures in Travis County have recommended more in-depth studies to determine the impact of taking the County's legal services offices to scale (meaning adding enough resources so that the offices could take all court-appointed cases, except in instances where there may be a legal conflict). Such studies should be pursued as soon as resources allow. When considering expansion of the County's offices, leaders should pay close attention to:

- Manageable and productive attorney caseloads.
- Documented trends in case and client outcomes.
- Client satisfaction.
- Effects on other elements of the court system (such as judges).
- Projected implementation and operational costs.
- Systemic costs of different representation models (which model can best reduce recidivism and accompanying jail costs).

It should be noted that even with full capacity in County indigent legal services offices, court-appointed private counsel would still be necessary in cases of legal conflict.



Recommendation 13.1.2

When considering expansion of County indigent legal services offices, evaluate each office independently considering its unique caseload, personnel, history of performance, and demand for service. While Travis County's indigent legal services offices serve similar (and often even the same) clients, each office has a unique mission, client base, and record of performance. Even OCR and OPR, offices that represent children and parents in the same CPS system, have very different approaches to litigation strategy, attorney assignments/caseloads, and case management that should be evaluated independently when considering expansion. In short, the County should determine the representation system that works best for each indigent system and client base.

Recommendation 13.1.3

Create a mechanism for casework coordination for families with overlapping interactions with the Travis County legal system. Even without additional court staff, casework coordination among the County's indigent legal services offices could help improve outcomes for client families and reduce overlap, redundancy, and possible conflicts in County services. This could be accomplished by creating a mechanism for casework coordination for families with overlapping interactions with the Travis County legal system. Such coordination does not necessarily require an elaborate organizational framework, but rather can be achieved by identifying families with overlapping or co-occurring cases and bringing together their caseworkers to share relevant case and family information.

Benefits could include:

- Coordination of County hearings and services.
- Increased communication among legal services, social services, and court departments.
- Enhanced working relationships with community-based service providers.
- Fewer potentially conflicting court orders from multiple cases.
- Improved service referrals to help families.

Recommendation 13.1.4

Expand quantitative and qualitative outcome measures and key performance indicators for indigent legal services offices. To truly evaluate the performance of the County's indigent legal services offices, policymakers must consider both



quantitative and qualitative measures in legal representation. Quantitative measures (e.g., number of client meetings, number of court filings, or even the number of cases opened/closed) can illustrate *how much* work is being done, but do not measure *how well* the work is being done. Similarly, to simply compare the hourly rates of the County's indigent legal services offices to those of private counsel measures just the direct costs of initial representation, not the longer-term system and societal costs when defendants reoffend or receive inadequate treatment.

Recommendations regarding County department outcome measures and key performance indicators are discussed more broadly in section 3.2 of this report.

13.2 COUNTY COORDINATION WITH PRETRIAL SERVICES

Background

While the Pretrial Services department was not evaluated for performance or efficiency in this review, the following findings and recommendations relate to County coordination with Pretrial Services, which was a component of this report.

Generally speaking, pretrial services consist of coordination and support services provided to criminal defendants between the time of arrest and booking into a custodial unit (such as a county jail) and the disposition of the defendant's case either through a plea deal, trial, or dropping of charges.

The first element of pretrial services is to determine whether a defendant is suitable for pretrial release, and if so, under what conditions. Pretrial release conditions can include requirements for drug testing and treatment, personal or family counseling, or electronic monitoring systems. The ultimate goal of pretrial services is to reduce crime by those released to the community pending trial while also minimizing unnecessary pretrial detention and jail overcrowding.

In Travis County, Pretrial Services is a County-funded department that makes recommendations to the courts for pretrial defendant release on personal bonds. Travis County pretrial officers monitor compliance and provide case management to ensure defendants report to court and complete court-ordered treatment or other conditions.²⁰⁹



Across the nation, many pretrial services offices operate as independent governmental agencies. Others are administered by:

- County jails or sheriff's departments
- Probation departments
- Court administration
- Private, non-profit organizations

In Travis County, Pretrial Services operates as a County-funded division of the state-funded Adult Probation Department, with a total annual budget of just over \$5.8 million and 76.96 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees.²¹⁰

**Table 13-1 Pretrial Services – Adopted Budgets
Fiscal Years 2013-2016**

	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016
Personnel	\$4,874,270	\$5,129,457	\$5,270,307	\$5,526,095
Operating	\$221,303	\$261,047	\$233,225	\$275,786
Total Budget	\$5,095,573	\$5,390,504	\$5,503,532	\$5,801,881
FTEs	75.98	76.83	76.96	76.96

Source: Travis County Fiscal Year 2016 Adopted Budget, Volume II: Department and Fund Summaries.

Findings

The County bears a significant cost to support jail operations, making this a primary budget driver for the Commissioners Court each year. According to a recent Travis County Justice System Profile, 70.4 percent of the average daily jail population in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 was pretrial offenders.²¹¹

Travis County Pretrial Services aptly describes its mission as “assist[ing] in the administration of justice and to promote community safety by working collaboratively, ensuring fairness and equality in the pretrial process and empowering defendants with the resources necessary to successfully comply with court requirements.”²¹² Pretrial Services has also recognized the broader role it plays in County government by noting that “by facilitating the release of qualified defendants on personal bond, Pretrial Services provides a cost savings to Travis County by reducing the number of defendants incarcerated while awaiting trial and reducing the cost of pretrial detention.”²¹³

Travis County has devoted ample resources to analyzing, coordinating, and delivering casework support and services to individuals in the County justice system. While



several County justice programs share common (or complementary) visions and performance objectives related to positive outcomes for individuals in the justice system, more synergistic relationships could always be developed. For example, the Travis County Jail Overcrowding Task Force is a collaborative multi-agency work group with representation from the offices of every elected and appointed official working with the criminal justice system. A smaller group of Task Force members also reviews the County jail population on a frequent (often daily) basis. Some members of the Task Force interviewed for this report noted that they would like to see more participation from Pretrial Services in this work.

Pretrial Services is developing programs that reflect the County's priorities to support and reintegrate defendants into the community. For example, in its FY 2016 budget, Pretrial Services received one-time funding of \$111,644 for two special project workers for a pilot project to divert individuals with mental health diagnoses from the jail through case management and counseling.²¹⁴ This and similar programs present synergistic opportunities to work with the MHPD and other departments under the Commissioners Court.

While Pretrial Services was not evaluated in this review, it was noted that the department does not report to the Commissioners Court in spite of receiving its funding from the County. Instead, Pretrial Services operates as a division of the Adult Probation Department, reporting to the Director and Assistant Director of Adult Probation.²¹⁵

As noted earlier, pretrial services offices are administered in a variety of settings. A few examples in Texas:

- Harris County Pretrial Services is a county department receiving budgetary support and approval from the Harris County Commissioners Court. Administrative authority for the department resides statutorily with the Commissioners Court while a committee of judges from the Criminal District Courts and the County Criminal Courts at Law provides guidance for the department's operational objectives..²¹⁶
- Bexar County Pretrial Services is a division of the Judicial Services Department and its director serves as part of Executive Staff of the Office of the County Manager.²¹⁷



As a point of comparison, in the federal court system, each district determines whether pretrial services and probation are housed in one office.²¹⁸

Recommendation

Recommendation 13.2.1

Ensure full coordination between Pretrial Services, Justice Planning, and the Commissioners Court. Travis County Pretrial Services has been recognized nationally for its work coordinating pretrial and probation programs, evidencing its understanding that *pretrial* programs must maintain neutrality and make no assumptions regarding the innocence or guilt of the defendants with whom they work (a very different approach than the one used in post-adjudication probation programs).²¹⁹

However, the Commissioners Court should review Pretrial Services' position as a division of the state-run Adult Probation Department and determine whether the Court has sufficient visibility and oversight of County funds without a direct reporting relationship to the Commissioners Court. Given the County's significant financial investment in justice and incarceration programs, County-funded Pretrial Services should also maintain robust collaborations with other County initiatives.



14 HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND VETERANS SERVICES DEPARTMENT

The Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS) department of Travis County aspires to serve the many and varied needs of vulnerable County residents. HHS and VS is one of the largest departments reporting to Commissioners Court with a fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget of \$36.7 million and 211 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees. A wide array of health and social services are provided by staff and through contracts with community organizations. Staff are dedicated and work hard to meet extensive needs in the community with limited resources. Many of the department's programs are models for others in Texas and the United States, such as Healthy Families, Children's Mental Health Partnership, and the Summer Youth Employment program. Individuals and families receive assistance with their mortgage, rent, utilities, and burials. Veterans receive assistance applying for the federal benefits to which they are entitled.

Several units or programs, while well-intentioned, are not optimizing their resources or potential. In most cases this under performance is due to a combination of several factors including challenges with communication, collaboration, and problem solving. The department lacks sufficient data to measure and track performance, and many programs and services do not have documented protocols for performing operations. Clear direction and strong supervision and guidance from department leadership is needed to increase consistency and standardization of effort and approach across the department. By addressing these common issues throughout the department, HHS and VS will be able to more fully achieve its mission of service to Travis County residents.

14.1 VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE VISIBILITY

Background

VS operates as an independent entity but is administratively attached to the Travis County HHS and VS department. The veteran's service officer (VSO) who leads the program is appointed by the Commissioners Court. VS has seven full-time veterans' services officer positions: the VSO, one administrative associate, one associate social service program specialist, and four assistant veterans services officers. Five of these positions are currently filled, and all of those employed are veterans. VS assists eligible veterans, their dependents, and survivors in obtaining all benefits to which they are entitled from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Benefits Administration.²²⁰ VS is accredited by the VA.

Findings

Travis County VS has less than optimal visibility within County government and is not consistently consulted on veterans' issues. VS staff report a lack of communication on initiatives and policies concerning veterans' services between the VS and other HHS and VS divisions.

The expertise of VS staff is not fully utilized in vetting initiatives impacting veterans. According to VS staff, Travis County Commissioners Court has previously reviewed and provided support for Texas legislative bills concerning veterans' services without direct consultation with VS staff. Travis County Intergovernmental Relations Office (IGR) staff currently consult with a designated legislative liaison within the HHS and VS Research and Planning division on legislative items that impact HHS and VS.

In addition, HHS and VS has previously tried to implement veterans' services programs without consultation with VS staff. In 2013, HHS and VS supported the Latino Healthcare Forum: Community Health Worker Training for Travis County Veterans, a training program for unemployed and underemployed Travis County veterans. Input from VS staff was not sought initially, so a follow-up meeting was required. Ultimately, VS staff approved the project, but an administrative and fiscal review by the County determined that the project should not be funded.

VS staff specialize in connecting veterans to the benefits to which they are entitled. In FY 2014, veterans in Travis County received \$198 million in compensation and pension benefits, \$63 million in education and vocational rehabilitation and employment services, and nearly \$6 million in insurance claims and disability payments.²²¹

Other HHS and VS eligibility staff lack the training required to fully meet the needs of veterans in this regard. However, no documented procedures are in place for other HHS and VS staff to make referrals to VS. VS does not have a presence in six of the seven community centers that provide a variety of benefits to County residents, although helping veterans access federal benefits is one of the primary functions of VS. Having more visibility in the community centers could increase the amount of benefits received by Travis County veterans.

VS staff are also concerned about the lack of distinction between the VS and other HHS and VS divisions. The job titles of all HHS and VS employees include "Veterans Service," which VS staff believe can be misleading to veterans and the community. Veterans may not know where to receive assistance, and the department does not have



procedures in place for referring clients from other HHS and VS divisions, such as Family Support Services (FSS), Office of Children Services (OCS), or Community Services (CS) to VS, creating confusion for HHS and VS staff, veterans, and the community.

Three of the Texas counties contacted for this review have a similar structure, with VS located administratively within the health and human services department. In Tarrant County, VS is an independent department.

Recommendations

Recommendation 14.1.1

Change the name of HHS and VS to HHS and allow VS to be listed as a separate department. For management and budget purposes, VS would remain administratively attached to HHS, but to external customers, VS would be seen as a separate entity. This would remove confusion related to which employees in HHS and VS have the qualifications and expertise to work with veterans.

Recommendation 14.1.2

Develop a procedure for referrals between all of the divisions within HHS and VS. The procedure should include how to make a “warm” transfer between staff in various divisions rather than just providing a phone number or address to the person seeking services.

Recommendation 14.1.3

Rotate VS staff to the other six Travis County community centers to best facilitate client access to VS services. This could be one full- or half-day per week at each center, with the times posted prominently at each center.

Recommendation 14.1.4

Create a procedure to ensure that VS staff review proposals for veterans’ initiatives within HHS and VS and state legislation impacting veterans prior to approval or support by the County. This should include actively strengthening communication between the divisions within the department on veterans’ issues.



Recommendation 14.1.5

Engage in marketing of VS to improve visibility and differentiate the division from other HHS and VS divisions. Work to promote the services provided by VS to Travis County residents.

14.2 MANAGING EXTERNAL FUNDING

Background

Travis County HHS and VS relies on a number of funding sources other than the general fund to provide a wide variety of programs and services: grants, fees, and funds leveraged through community partnerships.

HHS and VS administers a number of initiatives through grant funding that are effective in addressing community needs. Grants and community partnerships fund innovative programs designed to prevent or holistically treat significant needs in the community.

Fees are used to recover the costs of health and environmental services provided to Travis County residents.

Findings

Prevention

The return on investment from prevention and early intervention programs has been well documented in the fields of health care, public health, social services, and early childhood programs. Despite the research, prevention programs are difficult to justify because of the more urgent needs for providing services when clients are in crisis.

Prevention programs generally have a low profile in HHS and VS. Prevention activities are included in the HHS and VS OCS priority goals, although the HHS and VS Strategic Plan Roadmap does not include prevention as a strategic issue or a strategic target.

An example of a successful prevention program within CS is the Summer Youth Employment program, both an employment program and a delinquency prevention program. By working with local employers, CS is able to coordinate job placements each summer for approximately 750 Travis County at-risk teenagers aged 14 to 17 by providing job training and mentoring services to ensure a successful experience for both employers and teens. The benefits to the teenagers and the community are substantial, especially in giving youth in the County a productive, safe environment in which to learn important life skills. The 2016 budget for this program is \$719,131 (\$217,554 from the



County and \$345,000 from the City of Austin). The alternative to youth employment can be expensive. The Justice Policy Institute estimates that locking up a juvenile in the United States costs states an average of \$407.58 per person per day (\$148,767 per person per year).²²² CS soon will begin a process of looking at how the program can be improved and expanded to include more youth who may be at risk. Investing more in this kind of program can provide substantial savings to the County juvenile justice system.

Grants

HHS and VS received 11 grants in 2015 totaling \$4,534,473. Funds for eight of these grants will be exhausted by the end 2016. One of those grants is for the Parenting in Recovery (PIR) program in OCS. PIR was developed to address the needs of substance-abusing mothers whose children are in the child welfare system by providing financial assistance for substance abuse treatment and support services. Participants are identified by the Child Protective Services (CPS) division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Participants must enroll in the Travis County Family Drug Treatment Court (FDTC), PIR's sister program that monitors participant progress and offers additional support services. PIR provides wrap-around services to participants and their families to improve outcomes. Services include therapy for the participants' children through Austin Travis County Integral Care, substance abuse treatment, recovery supports, housing and utility assistance, parenting support, and assistance with gaining employment.²²³

The PIR/FDTC program has been successful. In 2013 and 2014, 116 parent participants were enrolled in the PIR/FDTC program. Over 50 percent of participants successfully completed the program, and as a result, approximately two-thirds of children were able to remain in their parents' care. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau awarded five years of funding for this program from October 2007 through September 2012. A subsequent grant was received for 2012 through 2014. A no-cost extension was awarded in 2015. As a result of its pilot program review process, the Travis County Planning and Budget Office (PBO) has recommended one-time funding for the continuation of the program through FY 2017.

Leveraging Community Resources

The Community Liaison program within CS works to establish strong community relationships and linkages with Travis County residents and organizations, such as neighborhood associations and non-profits, to advertise and assist with the



implementation of HHS and VS programs. These relationships can be leveraged to ensure that Travis County efforts do not duplicate existing social service programs and provide a framework for connecting Travis County residents with the services that they need. Within CS, there are several programs that tap the existing resources within the community to create positive outcomes.

An example of a successful community collaboration is the Children's Mental Health Partnership (Children's Partnership), a system of care within Travis County that coordinates local organizations and resources to provide services to children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances. In addition to HHS and VS, four school districts, the mental health authority, the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, and Casey Family Programs participate in the Partnership. The Children's Partnership works to prevent out-of-home placement of youth by developing individualized service plans and assisting families with accessing services. By working together, the Children's Partnership is able to work efficiently to address client needs with a more cost-effective approach that maximizes community resources.²²⁴

HHS and VS, Austin Travis County Integral Care, and the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department provide funding for The Children's Partnership. OCS staffs this program with one manager and five caseworkers. All 28 participating agencies currently provide one to two staff for a full-day meeting every week to address the complex needs of the children served and agree to make their agency's resources available to provide services as they are identified. Additional children could benefit if some of the other participants would provide direct funding for the program. Partners such as the City of Austin, Austin Independent School District (AISD), or other school districts could be approached to contribute funding.

The Children's Partnership has continued operating for more than 10 years after the initial grant funding ended. In 2012, a decrease in delinquent behavior was seen in 71 percent of children assisted, and 93 percent of assisted children were able to remain in their communities.²²⁵ Partnering with non-profit organizations, churches, and private industries to leverage existing resources has proven successful. Other services provided by HHS and VS could benefit from applying this collaborative model to both improve service provision and increase cost savings by sharing costs with community partners.

Fees

The interlocal agreements between Travis County and the City of Austin for public health and animal control services include fee assessments for a variety of services. The Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department offers a variety of services on behalf of Travis County, ranging from vital records acquisition to environmental health services. Fees are charged for most of these services. There is currently no established schedule for reviewing and adjusting the fees to ensure the city and County costs of providing the services are being covered. The rapid increase in the County population has resulted in a greater demand in every service area. While a consumer price index (CPI) adjustment can be used to modify the fees at regular intervals (i.e. Every three years), an additional calculation should be made that recognizes the impact of any increased salary and benefits for County staff.

Recommendations

Recommendation 14.2.1

Elevate prevention as a priority within HHS and VS. Include prevention in the HHS and VS strategic plan and expand current programs with proven positive outcomes. Explore the implementation of additional programs focused on alleviating poverty rather than addressing its symptoms.

Recommendation 14.2.2

Implement a process for obtaining and managing grants within HHS and VS. Central coordination of grants is needed within HHS and VS to ensure that appropriate grants are identified and grant applications are submitted. Grant seeking activities need to consider whether County resources are adequate to manage grant funding and to sustain programs after grant funding ends.

Recommendation 14.2.3

Pursue additional monetary assistance from partner organizations for successful prevention programs. Partner with additional local organizations providing social services within Travis County to leverage existing resources to meet residents' needs and create cost savings.



Recommendation 14.2.4

Review all fees charged through the interlocal agreements with a focus on cost recovery for these programs. Section 3.6 of this report includes additional suggestions for building in automatic fee adjustments to ensure that fees keep pace with. HHS and VS should take an active role in working with the City of Austin to set the fees included in the interlocal agreements.

14.3 RESEARCH AND PLANNING

Background

The Research and Planning division supports HHS and VS programs as well as community efforts by providing planning expertise with a focus on measurable outcomes and evaluation. The division has 10.75 FTEs; however, two planning positions, one senior planning position, and one administrative position were vacant at the time this review was conducted. The FY 2016 budget is \$934,328.

Research and Planning is leading an effort to update the contracts through which the County purchases social service and health care services from community organizations; the County spends \$17.5 million per year on 105 contracts.

The division publishes an annual *Community Impact Report* that highlights the community conditions and the services purchased through these contracts.

Research and Planning provides planning support to 10 external stakeholder groups, and staff have made contributions to the work of 19 additional external stakeholder groups. Research and Planning offers technical assistance to external organizations seeking to obtain and interpret data for grant applications and other purposes. The type of assistance available includes training and instruction on navigating U.S. Census Bureau data and mapping services. Research and Planning considers service requests on a case-by-case basis and targets clients engaged in local service delivery and community planning within a number of social service issue areas.²²⁶ Research and Planning also provides individualized consultation services for community organizations in group conflict management, strategic planning, and performance metric improvement.²²⁷

The division interprets findings from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey and has produced an annual summary of the social, housing, and economic characteristics of Travis County since 2006. Research and Planning has also developed



four in-depth reports looking at American Community Survey data over a longer period of time, exploring topics on older adults, children, poverty, income, and health insurance.

Findings

Social Service Contracts

Currently, one of the primary roles of Research and Planning is to oversee the development of new performance measures for the 105 social service and health service contracts through which the County purchases services from community organizations. The previous system for issuing these contracts did not allow for competition for funding, which resulted in limited service provision and community impact. In FY 2015, HHS and VS adopted a four-year planning cycle to strengthen the performance and compliance of contractors. Research and Planning is focusing on two to three categories of services each year so that by 2018 all contracts will have been reviewed. This process involves planning sessions with various stakeholders (providers and users of the services) to optimize the County's understanding of needs and constraints within the various categories.

The newly created measures are incorporated into the language of the contracts and jointly managed for compliance by a program officer in the specific program area and a contract specialist in the HHS and VS Finance division. While the intention of this process is to incorporate performance-based measures in each contract, a discussion in Section 8.1 of this report indicates that the contracts are not performance based.

Measuring Program Outcomes and Staff Productivity

HHS and VS has few metrics for measuring program outcomes or staff productivity. Currently, HHS and VS programs are not required to report on performance metrics, and longitudinal, quantitative, and qualitative data collection is lacking. While each of the divisions in HHS and VS report specific measures for program performance on their annual budget submission department program information (PB-3) forms, these metrics primarily measure program outputs, not program outcomes. Program outputs detail or count the number of individuals served or activities performed, but they do not measure the impact of the services provided on clients and the community.

In addition, HHS and VS does not have a process for collecting data on the services provided by the department. For example, FSS does not conduct client baseline or follow-up assessments to track outcome measures for the social services they provide to clients. The seven FSS community centers might keep data on client progress, but data collection is left to the discretion of the community center managers and very little data is



collected or aggregated across all of the centers to measure program success. HHS and VS does not engage in a formal benchmarking process, which would compare the current processes and performance of HHS and VS programs to available data on best practices.

One example where staff productivity data is insufficient is in the FFS community centers. Staff roles and responsibilities are not clearly outlined and the metrics for tracking staff productivity vary by center. Some of the FSS community centers conduct monthly performance reviews of social workers and case workers by looking at the number of clients assisted (financially and non-financially), the amount of assistance provided (by funding source), the number of denials, and the number of referrals (to social workers and other resources). However, due to a lack of standardization between centers, the data that is collected is not comparable. With the lack of documented policies and procedures, staff productivity varies across the department.

Client Feedback

HHS and VS does not have a consistent method for seeking client input or complaints and does not compile the ad hoc information that is collected. HHS and VS divisions report various customer service outputs on their respective PB3 forms, but the department does not have a standardized process for aggregating and comparing this information across the department. HHS and VS staff report that customer surveys are administered to clients by the division from which they received services, which may bias the results.

Evaluating Program Outcomes

One of the program areas outlined in the Research and Planning division PB3 form is “ensuring effectiveness”. This area involves conducting process reviews, recommending and supporting program improvements, establishing measurable outputs and outcomes, monitoring and supporting a performance measurement process in social services, collecting and reporting performance to leadership and the community at large, and collaborating with stakeholders to evaluate the impact of local efforts on community problems. HHS and VS has a need for all of these services, and evaluating and improving the effectiveness of HHS and VS programs should be the primary objective of Research and Planning.

HHS and VS has benefited from partnering with external organizations for independent evaluations of their programs and services. The Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources (RMC) has worked with Research and Planning since 2006 to



evaluate County-funded workforce development program outcomes and impacts with local workforce service providers, such as American YouthWorks, Austin Academy, Austin Area Urban League, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas, Skillpoint Alliance, Workforce Solutions—Capital Area Workforce Board, and Capital IDEA. Fifteen reports by RMC are available detailing the evaluation of local investment in workforce development since 2007.²²⁸

RMC has also worked with FSS to evaluate Case Management and Benefits Administration (CABA), the database used to monitor and track FSS and CS program data. This evaluation was intended to analyze the data from the FSS Emergency Assistance program from 2008 through 2012 to assess the program's impact.²²⁹ Due to limitations with the available data, RMC has instead worked with FSS to develop an evaluation plan with pre-, post-, and follow-up assessment of clients. The initial results of this evaluation were scheduled to be released in April of 2016.

Countywide Planning

While HHS and VS has a dedicated staff of nearly 11 full-time planners and support positions within the Research and Planning division, PBO has no dedicated planning staff. Having a planning unit that conducts research and planning external to the County could be a misallocation of resources considering the deficits in measuring staff productivity and performance outcomes within HHS and VS and the need for countywide strategic planning.

Recommendations

Recommendation 14.3.1

Redirect the work of the Research and Planning division to focus inwardly on HHS and VS program evaluation, monitoring, and planning. This should include strategic planning around how Travis County government can address the affordable housing crisis, conducting and analyzing HHS and VS client and employee satisfaction surveys, conducting data analysis and program evaluation, ensuring succession planning, and evaluating budgeting and staffing efficiencies. In addition, the division should review or audit HHS and VS programs to ensure documentation of internal processes and effective use of taxpayer resources. Research and Planning should develop an annual work plan that shows how each component of the work plan ties to internal HHS and VS programs and services. External support and consulting should be eliminated to allow Travis County resources to be focused on addressing significant internal departmental needs.



Recommendation 14.3.2

Transfer three currently vacant Research and Planning positions to PBO to work on planning for the entire Travis County organization. PBO is tasked with conducting planning that is essential for supporting countywide initiatives but does not have staff for this function. By eliminating the outward focus of Research and Planning, the staff remaining in HHS and VS can focus on social service contracts and internal evaluation and planning for HHS and VS.

14.4 HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Background

HHS and VS is one of the largest departments in County government, with 211 employees and an annual budget of nearly \$37 million. HHS and VS is one of three departments reporting to the Commissioners Court that has human resource (HR) professionals outside of the Human Resources Management Department (HRMD); Transportation and Natural Resources Department (TNR) and Facilities Management Department (FMD) are the others. HHS and VS HR has four positions: one HR manager, two senior HR specialists, and one HR assistant. One senior HR specialist position has been vacant since April 2015. These staff provide the full range of HR responsibilities for the department including reviewing employee compensation, employee relations, hiring, and employee benefit support. They are charged with coordinating HR services with the central HRMD. More detail concerning issues related to HR support services is provided in Chapter 6.

HHS and VS has a unique partnership agreement with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) that has been in place a number of years. The partnership agreement establishes a formal structure for union participation in policy discussions within the department.

Findings

HR Support

Based on interviews with staff throughout the department, the level of frustration with HR services is high. Staff report multiple issues with the timeliness and consistency of support from the HHS and VS HR division. For example, reclassification and hiring are reported to take months to accomplish, and managers receive little or no communication from HHS and VS HR during this process.



No data is collected and analyzed by HHS and VS HR on HR statistics such as turnover rates, the actual number of vacancies open for recruitment, and data to track the time it takes to fill vacancies such as the date that a vacancy is requested to be filled, the date that the position is posted, the date that the posting is closed, and the date that the position is filled. According to Travis County job descriptions, the HR manager is responsible for coordinating record keeping for all personnel actions for the department with the support of a senior HR specialist who is responsible for day-to-day record keeping for all personnel actions for the department, including hiring, staffing, compensation, benefits, performance and leave. This is consistent with findings in the HRMD chapter; central HR services does not track many important vacancy and hiring statistics, employee complaints, or informal disciplinary actions.

Staff also report confusion concerning HR policies. Staff reported that the department HR personnel have different understandings of HR policies and their application. Employees seeking advice or information on specific policies report that they are instructed to refer to Travis County Code Title 2: Human Resources, rather than receiving direct assistance on interpretation, clarification, or application of the policies.

Staff report a lack of support and guidance from HHS and VS HR, Travis County HRMD, and HHS and VS management in addressing personnel issues. Examples of personnel concerns expressed by HHS and VS staff during interviews for this review include:

- Tolerating disruptive and inappropriate behavior by employees during regular business hours and during employee disciplinary meetings, including yelling and name-calling.
- Instructing managers not to discipline employees or document grievances.
- Moving poor performing employees within the department rather than disciplining them.
- Selecting internal staff for positions for which they are not qualified.



- Forcing a supervisor to accept an employee with no experience or aptitude for a job.
- Disregarding poor performance by not holding employees accountable.
- Conducting employee reviews and disciplinary actions in a biased manner.

Union Partnership Resolution

The Commissioners Court adopted a resolution on June 8, 1999, to create a formal partnership between HHS and VS and AFSCME.²³⁰ This partnership is unique to HHS and VS; no other department in Travis County has a partnership agreement with AFSCME.

The resolution was intended to address concerns by AFSCME about staffing changes during a reorganization of HHS and VS and to rebuild trust between the department and the union. The partnership agreement established a Partnership Council composed of the HHS and VS County executive, a management team with four representatives appointed by the HHS and VS County executive (including a minimum of two HHS and VS directors), four HHS and VS peer-elected representatives, four AFSCME-appointed representatives, and two advisors (one HHS and VS staff member and one AFSCME staff member).²³¹

One of the responsibilities of the Partnership Council as outlined in the bylaws is to continuously educate and conduct outreach for HHS and VS and AFSCME personnel on the purpose, concept, and process of the Partnership Council. The Partnership Council has developed two PowerPoint presentations outlining the history and purpose of the Partnership Council that, according to HHS and VS records, have been presented to HHS and VS staff on two separate occasions since the inception of the council.

The Partnership Council bylaws, which were last updated in March 2013, indicate that the Partnership Council is to meet every other month unless the Council approves an alternative schedule.²³² Based on information provided by HHS and VS, the Partnership Council has convened only six times since 1999; there are no documented meetings having taken place since March 2013. Several informal projects were reported but are undocumented. According to the original partnership agreement, the Partnership Council was intended to foster collaboration and provide recommendations to the Commissioners Court on initiatives, policies, procedures, and business decisions for



HHS and VS. HHS and VS was unable to produce any documentation regarding recommendations developed by the Partnership Council.

Partnership Council membership and activities are not transparent; information concerning the Partnership Council and its activities is not available on either of the Travis County or AFSCME web sites nor the internal HHS and VS web site. HRMD and other officials in the County report that they know of the agreement but are not familiar with the partnership resolution details.

While the formal partnership structure as envisioned in the partnership agreement has been largely inactive, AFSCME is reported to be actively involved in employee disciplinary meetings and to have considerable influence over personnel actions in HHS and VS. Travis County HR policies are silent on the participation and role of union representatives in formal and informal employee disciplinary meetings.

The partnership agreement has evolved from its original intent into a less formal structure. The HHS and VS county executive and HR director report that the relationship with AFSCME has resulted in training for 15 to 20 employees annually from the AFSCME national affiliate and assistance and sponsorship of a fundraising effort that paid for a department-wide retreat held in October 2015.

Recommendations

Recommendation 14.4.1

Transfer the HHS and VS HR division to HRMD. This move is part of an effort recommended in this report to transition toward centralization of HR functions across the County and is discussed more fully in Chapter 6 of this report. Given the level of concerns about the effectiveness of HR within HHS and VS, this move should take effect immediately. Sufficient staff should remain physically located at HHS and VS to meet department needs for HR support on a full-time basis, however reporting and management of the unit should be under the direct supervision of HRMD. This unit should immediately begin tracking performance metrics for HHS and VS HR functions and be held accountable by HRMD for tracking measures, such as timeliness in filling vacancies and responding to the needs of the department. An HRMD representative should be present in every HHS and VS employee disciplinary meeting, whether formal or informal.



To further support the department, HRMD should train every manager and supervisor within HHS and VS on Travis County HR policies and procedures and develop a policy and mechanism for regularly communicating HHS and VS HR information to all employees in the department.

Recommendation 14.4.2

Develop countywide policies and procedures to guide County managers and supervisors in working effectively and productively with AFSCME in employee disciplinary meetings. These policies and procedures should be developed by a group consisting of representatives from HHS and VS, HRMD, the County Attorney's Office, Commissioners Court, and AFSCME. The policies and procedures should define the roles and responsibilities of County staff regarding union leadership and union members. In addition, the policies and procedures should outline what guidance and support employees will receive from HRMD when initiating personnel actions that impact AFSCME members. These policies and procedures should be communicated regularly to all staff.

Recommendation 14.4.3

Reauthorize and refocus the HHS and VS and AFSCME Partnership Resolution to its original purpose. This 17-year old document should be reviewed in light of the current needs of the department by a group consisting of a representative from HRMD, a representative from the County Attorney's Office, a member of the Commissioners Court, and an AFSCME representative. The purpose of the resolution should be clear and implementation of a reauthorized agreement should be approved by Commissioners Court and evaluated annually by the same group suggested above. Information about the partnership agreement, including all activities of the partnership, should be regularly communicated to HHS and VS staff and posted on the internal and external HHS and VS web sites.

14.5 FSS DIVISION – COMMUNITY CENTERS

Background

Operations, Services, and Eligibility Processing

HHS and VS strives to maximize the quality of life for all people in Travis County by protecting vulnerable populations, investing in social and economic well-being, promoting healthy living, and building a shared understanding within the community.²³³ In support of this goal, the FSS division operates seven community centers: two within the City of Austin and five located in rural areas of the County. The centers provide



emergency financial assistance with utilities, rent and mortgage payments, and prescriptions to individuals and families who meet eligibility criteria. Social work services are available at each community center and all residents of Travis County are eligible to receive case management services regardless of financial need.

A food pantry, clothes closet, bread and food donation program, and computer access for job searches are provided at some of the community centers. Some community centers partner with Meals on Wheels for a congregate meal program and with Goodwill to provide job search assistance on-site. All of the community centers provide referrals for home repair and weatherization, which is administered by another division within HHS and VS. The downtown community center processes applications for indigent burial assistance.

The financial assistance programs provided through the community centers are designed to provide safety net services and short-term emergency assistance for individuals and families in crisis. FSS uses a number of funding sources to provide this assistance, including the Travis County general fund, federal grant programs, and funding available directly through utility companies serving Travis County. Case workers can access about 15 different programs to assist clients. Each of these distinct programs has unique eligibility requirements.

Staffing

Professional line staff in HHS and VS consists of case workers and social workers—a distinction that is important to the profession because social workers have a more rigorous education and licensing requirement than case workers. HHS and VS has 63 case worker positions in the following programs:

- FSS: 29 filled and 4 vacant
- OCS: 19 filled and 1 vacant
- CS: 4 filled and 1 vacant
- AgriLife Extension Service AmeriCorps: 5 filled (no vacancies)

Case workers are responsible for interviewing clients, collecting and completing required eligibility documentation, determining applicant eligibility for several emergency assistance programs, monitoring client progress and usage of assistance, referring clients to clinical and social service provider resources, and providing other social services related to crisis intervention and short-term case management.²³⁴



HHS and VS employs nine social workers in two programs:

- FSS: 6 filled and 2 vacant
- OCS: 1 filled (no vacancies)

Social workers are tasked with providing case management, conducting psychosocial or needs assessments, developing individual and family individualized service plans and monitoring progress, and identifying community resources to assist individuals and families with obtaining other needed services such as education, training, and advocacy.²³⁵

The FSS social workers provide case management services at the seven community centers to help individuals and families access shelter services, housing options, legal aid, budget counseling, and other family support services. In FY 2015, 1,500 households received social work services. Social workers are supervised centrally by the FSS case management social services program administrator rather than the on-site community center social services program administrators.

Information Technology

FSS and CS utilize the CABA system to track client information such as name, date of birth, social security number, U.S. citizenship status, address, phone number, household demographics, income, financial assets, household expenses, and information on the client's current residence. CABA also generates electronic invoices for approved bills for utility assistance, rental assistance, and mortgage assistance.

Findings

Operations, Services and Eligibility Processing

The primary functions of FSS are administered through the seven community centers. Key operating data for the community centers budgeted for FY 2016 is shown in Table 14-1.



Table 14-1: Key Operating Data for FSS Community Centers

	Budgeted FY 2016
Total FSS operating budget	\$5,743,246 (about 16 percent of HHS and VS budget)
Total applications processed	27,576
Applications determined ineligible	5,476
Total households receiving financial assistance	22,100
Total general fund emergency assistance paid	\$1,769,292
General fund spending per household for eligible individuals or families (total benefits paid divided by total eligible applicants)	\$80.06
General fund administrative spending per application submitted (total FSS budget less social workers less assistance divided by total applications)	\$122.19
Total GF spending per eligible individual or household (GF emergency assistance plus administrative costs)	\$202.25

Source: Travis County FY 2016 Adopted Budget, Volume II, p. 99.

https://www.traviscountytx.gov/images/planning_budget/Docs/fy16/FY16-Adopted-Budget-Vol-II.pdf.

Calculations based on this data also included in the table.

Expeditious determination of eligibility for emergency services is especially important when individuals or families are in crisis and must come to the County for emergency services. The County is typically the last resort and it is therefore important for the eligibility process to be efficient and timely. The process in Travis County is complex and cumbersome.

To receive emergency assistance from Travis County, individuals and families must complete forms three different times, both online and in person with repetitive information requests. The first point of contact for many applicants may be the online application for services. This application can be completed and submitted remotely from



any electronic device with Internet capability. However, the online application for services does not gather all of the necessary information from applicants that case workers require to start eligibility determination. Specifically, it does not collect social security numbers or allow an electronic signature. Even if the online application is completed, applicants must complete and submit a paper application in person at one of the seven community centers.

The second step in the application process is completing the paper application for assistance, which must be filled out by every applicant seeking assistance regardless of whether an electronic form has been completed. The paper application can be printed from home to be completed and brought into a community center or supplied in person at each community center after an applicant uses the community center check-in system. The paper application has duplicative information requests from both the online application and community center check-in system. Staff report that applicants will often go to several of the community center sites and fill out applications in hopes of receiving assistance more quickly.

The third point of contact is the community center check-in system. This application, located on a computer at each community center, requests applicant demographic information, such as name, address, and phone number, to begin the process of connecting applicants with case workers. While the community center check-in system is only utilized to track when an applicant checks in at each community center, it requires applicants to provide information already entered into the online and paper applications. The electronic application and the community center check-in system are not linked.

If applicants have all of the necessary supplemental materials for eligibility determination, then they may meet with a case worker. If supplemental information is not available, applicants have three to eight days to gather this material. If they do not provide the information within the time limit, they must start the process over from the beginning.

Once the paper application has been completed and all of the required materials are gathered, case workers can begin to determine which assistance programs the applicant is eligible to receive. If the applicant is determined eligible for services, his or her paper application must then be manually entered into CABA by the case worker. FSS expects to review 27,576 unduplicated household applications for emergency assistance in FY 2016.



If applicants are not eligible for services, they are given a list of resources and other organizations that may be able to assist them. Case workers do not actively participate to connect individuals and families to these other resources.

As can be determined by the description of the application process and confirmed by caseworkers, the process of determining eligibility is extremely complex, duplicative, and lengthy. The different assistance programs have varying eligibility requirements that are complex and difficult to remember. Currently, case workers must manually determine an applicant's eligibility by referring to the Program Eligibility Matrix and Reference Guide developed by an FFS staff member. While the matrix is detailed, it is open to interpretation and may contribute to human error in eligibility determinations. No approved manual exists for all the grants that may guide case workers in making accurate determinations.

One example of a process that slows down the eligibility determination is verifying utility service bills. Currently, community center case workers must request individual utility data from the City of Austin, which can take up to 72 hours. FSS staff previously had access to the City of Austin utilities database and were able to retrieve applicant information and determine eligibility for utility assistance; however, access to this database was revoked in the last four to five years after Austin Energy changed to a new billing system. Now applicants must complete a City of Austin release form that is emailed to the City of Austin by community center staff along with utility information requests, such as the applicant's current utility bill and his or her 12-month billing and consumption information. The release form is kept on file with the City of Austin for one calendar year.

Applicant income verification can also delay the eligibility process. Applicants can provide check stubs or show proof of income through online employment portals; however, applicants may not know how to access their online employment portal accounts. With an applicant's permission, case workers can help create or access accounts. However, if employment was terminated, the accounts may no longer be accessible.

If online accounts are closed, applicants do not have check stubs, or they are paid in cash, the applicant's employer can complete an income verification form. This form asks for general employment information, such as employment start and end dates and gross income while employed. Employers are not always willing to fill out the form, as the information may not be readily available. In some instances, case workers can receive



income verification over the phone from employers if the applicant is present in the office at the time of the call. More often, it can take one to two days to gather the information; some employers do not have automated systems for accessing the information.

Community center case workers report that income verification can take 30 to 40 minutes per employment source if applicants do not have immediate access to their check stubs or the ability to have the income verification form completed. Having the capability to verify income online is an effective way to reduce the length of time it takes to determine eligibility.

The eligibility process just described is conducted manually by each individual case worker. Most of the assistance programs do not have standardized procedures documented for case workers to follow to ensure that services are provided consistently across all seven community centers. No quality assurance measures are currently in place to ensure the process is being carried out correctly or to hold case workers accountable for accuracy or productivity.

The state of Texas Health and Human Services Commission contracts with a vendor to access online data verification of applicant information, such as residence address, individuals living at that address, vehicle and real property ownership, credit, employment, income verification (TALX), and Texas Works Commission (TWC) wages and benefits to confirm eligibility for federal programs. This data is compared to applications to identify discrepancies and reduce the possibility of case error and fraud.

Travis County TNR and Pretrial Services also conduct eligibility for income-based programs; neither uses an electronic system to verify the income data provided by applicants. TNR relies on the documents submitted by the applicant and consider proof of eligibility in state and federal programs as sufficient for determining eligibility. Pretrial Services allows applicants to submit a signed statement that swears to the accuracy of the income information provided.

Staffing

Case Workers. An analysis of roles and responsibilities of case workers and social workers in the FSS delivery system highlights several areas requiring clarification and modification to ensure services are delivered efficiently and effectively.

The seven Travis County community centers have the same staff configuration: a manager, typically an office specialist, a complement of case workers, and a social



worker. Staffing is based loosely on client volume, but a clear difference in workload among the centers was noted during this review. The full-time center manager in Jonestown, for example, supervises 4 staff. In contrast, the manager at Palm Square, the busiest center, supervises 11 staff; despite the difference in responsibility, social services program administrators are classified and paid the same. Also, FSS does not have a system of allocating staff resources for fluctuating peaks or periodic higher volume of applications, such as having a “travel team” of mobile case workers and social workers who can rotate to centers that might be experiencing higher volume than normal. Table 14-2 shows community center staffing and average caseloads based on the number of eligible applications processed.

Table 14-2: FSS Community Center Staffing and Caseloads

Community Center	Number of Office Specialists	Number of Case Workers	Number of Social Workers	Average Monthly Number of Clients Assisted	Cases Per Case Worker Per Month	Cases Per Case Worker Per Day
Palm Square	2	9	2	344	38	1.9
Post Road	1	5	1	244	49	2.4
Pflugerville	1	5	1	278	56	2.8
Oak Hill	1	4	1	249	62	3.1
Manor	1	3	1	164	55	2.7
Del Valle	1	4	1	236	59	3.0
Jonestown	1	3	1	96	32	1.6

Source: Data provided by HHS and VS.

Please note that “cases” in this table only includes eligible clients and does not include applications processed for applicants who are determined to be ineligible for financial assistance.

Three peer counties interviewed for this review have considerably smaller staff to conduct eligibility determine for County benefits, as described following. These counties have more streamlined eligibility determination programs than Travis County.

- **Tarrant County** does not have community centers. The Human Services Department operates at the Resources Connection Campus, a one-stop shop for health and social services which has staff from a number of government agencies and non-profit organizations providing a wide variety of services to Tarrant County residents. Eligibility for housing and utility assistance and other Human Services Department benefits is conducted over the phone; clients do not need to come to the center in person to complete their application. Three case aides conduct the initial screening of callers and eight case workers complete the



in-depth questionnaire and send the application to the client for signature. Required documents are scanned or faxed by the applicant.

- **EI Paso County** has one office where applicants can apply for General Assistance. The county operates six community centers outside of the city limits, but the county does not have social workers or case workers at these sites to determine eligibility for General Assistance benefits. The community centers are focused on providing services to seniors. Each center has a coordinator who serves as a case manager and conducts assessments for seniors. The centers offer programming for seniors, such as health and wellness education, aerobic exercise, yoga, and games (such as bingo).
- **Bexar County** does not operate community centers. Residents in need of assistance call in or request an application online for emergency resource assistance. The county has memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with several non-profits in the community that assist applicants with completing the application. Completed applications are submitted to the county and intake workers in the Client Services division determine eligibility.

The 29 filled FSS community center case worker positions in Travis County are each processing an average of four applications per day. Improved technology, streamlining the application process, clarifying policies and procedures, and monitoring performance will enable the County to increase the number of applications processed per case worker. If productivity were increased to five applications processed per day, case worker staffing could be reduced to 23 (a reduction of 10 budgeted case worker positions). This would result in a commensurate decrease in the supervisor staffing, of which there are currently seven, one at each community center.

Reducing staffing by 10 case workers (at an average cost of approximately \$58,971 for salary and benefits) would result in a savings of \$589,710.²³⁶ Reducing one or two supervisor positions would further increase the savings. Increasing productivity beyond five applications processed per case worker per day would yield even higher savings. This savings could occur through attrition and be used to expand case management services, implement preventative programs, or be used for another purpose in the department.

Social Workers. Travis County has set a limit of one allocation per year per individual or family for emergency financial assistance. Some applicants seeking aid from FSS,



however, suffer from long-term issues and need more support than one-time assistance. In addition to eligibility determination for financial assistance, FSS currently provides limited case management services. However, the case management services provided are ill-defined and, based on County job descriptions, fall under responsibility of both case workers and social workers.

FSS staff report that case management, provided by social workers, currently does not incorporate treatment planning based on an assessment of individual or family needs. After assistance is given, neither initial evaluations of self-sufficiency nor follow-up evaluations are conducted. FSS staff would like to incorporate more individual goal setting and assistance with workforce training into programs. In practice, community centers are more focused on emergency interventions and one-time assistance rather than a broader focus of helping individuals and families with more lasting and permanent support to move to self-sufficiency, independence, and stability.

This limitation raises the question of the long-term impact on the families receiving services. No data is available on outcomes to determine the effectiveness of the one-time assistance (i.e., whether individuals or families are still in their homes six months after rental assistance is provided). It is not known how many applicants have requested services repeatedly over time or if individuals or families are more stable six months after concluding case management services. FSS does not have a consistent method for seeking input from applicants or recipients of services on the process and problems with applying for assistance and is unable to aggregate ad hoc information that it collects to verify that the services provided are meeting residents' needs.

The Travis County job descriptions for case workers and social workers do not adequately distinguish between the scope of work for social workers versus case workers. Some of the duties and responsibilities specified for case workers fall under the duties and responsibilities for social workers, such as providing short- and long-term case management, crisis intervention, and service coordination for clients. Likewise, social workers are often expected to perform tasks that could be provided by case workers. In addition, there is no career ladder for either social worker or case worker positions to distinguish between skill and responsibility level that allows them to assume positions of increasing responsibility and compensation.

HHS and VS does not have a protocol for or consistency in how referrals are made to social workers from case workers. Some clients who are referred by a case worker to a social worker are only seeking financial assistance and do not require case



management, leading to social workers exhausting resources on form completion rather than actual case management or counseling. According to the Travis County job descriptions, only case workers are responsible for completing the documentation required for eligibility for financial assistance. The lack of distinction in roles and responsibilities between social workers and case workers leads to an unequal workload distribution among community centers with overworked social workers at the larger centers and underutilized social workers at the rural centers.

In Texas, someone designated as a social worker must have a social work degree and be licensed by the state. In addition, becoming a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) requires certified supervision. The County has not had a certified LCSW supervising the social workers; and, as a result, a licensed social worker (LMSW) cannot become an LCSW through working at FSS. HHS and VS has indicated that this issue will be rectified in filling this position, which was vacated during the time of this review.

HHS and VS clients often have limited transportation options to access programs and services, which reduces the impact and reach of the programs. In an effort to overcome this barrier, FSS social workers report using their private vehicles to transport clients. HHS and VS management and Travis County Risk Management have expressed concern about County employees transporting clients. While employees are discouraged from transporting clients in either their personal or County vehicles, Travis County does not have a written policy in place. The liability to the County of staff transporting clients in private staff vehicles poses a risk to the County and its employees.

Information Technology

The CABA system, used to monitor and track FSS and CS program data, is limited in its ability to support program operations:

- The system does not link information on individuals and families who are receiving services from different divisions within HHS and VS. The database is unable to track clients among HHS and VS divisions such as FSS, OCS, VS, or CS. This shortcoming hinders HHS and VS staff's ability to assess the impact of County programs.
- Staff are not able to upload documents to CABA and instead must keep paper files for each individual or family that applies for services, what services are provided or if eligibility is denied.



- CABA does not accurately record and maintain client information or measure program impact.

CABA was developed by CAP Systems, Inc. and was implemented in FSS in September 2000. Since implementation, the developer has made multiple upgrades and modifications to the database to meet department needs and is currently contracted to maintain the current system and develop an online version of the current database called CABA.net. The new system has been in development for two years. FSS staff report continued issues with CABA and the inability of CAP Systems, Inc. to address issues. Based on these problems, FSS program staff are concerned about continuing to work with CAP Systems, Inc.

Travis County Information Technology Services (ITS) works as a liaison between the FSS and CAP Systems, Inc., although HHS and VS also has an IT business analyst that works with ITS to make decisions regarding the maintenance of CABA. Communication about the status of the system, updates, and timeframes for completion of work was difficult to discern during this review, with staff reporting different levels of awareness and understanding about the decisions being made. It appears that decisions concerning CABA (and the automated system in place within the Housing Services program in CS) are being made without routine and formalized input of program staff.

An analysis of CABA conducted in 2013 by the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources identified a number of concerns about the accuracy and integrity of data entered into CABA as well as with CABA itself.²³⁷ This study examined CABA data from 2008 through 2012 to determine the completeness, consistency, and accuracy of FSS program data. The study found the following limitations and subsequent unreliable reporting capabilities with the use of CABA as the main database supporting the Emergency Assistance program:

- Inability to measure basic program metrics, such as the number of unduplicated individuals served.
- Inaccuracies in data elements require a significant amount of time to review and fix, causing delays in performing any analysis of the data, including complex statistical analysis.
- Inaccuracies in client identification numbers and social security numbers such as multiple client identification numbers for one social security number.



- Inconsistencies in data such as payment close dates occurring before intake dates.
- Irregularities in income values such as negative values and questionably high values.

While these issues do not make it impossible to analyze FSS data, CABA lacks the ability to produce basic reporting. In addition, reports require intensive manual work to ensure data is accurate before any analysis can occur.

Other existing software programs are available that could address the department's needs and facilitate accurate tracking of program data, including the following:

- ServicePoint is a web-based data management software program for human services organizations. The program provides accurate tracking of participant data for multiple programs throughout an organization and has built-in reporting tools for conversion of data into reports with the option for advanced customization to meet the needs of funding agencies.²³⁸ According to FSS staff, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires a data sharing system for those utilizing HUD funding, and a component of ServicePoint, the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), is maintained by the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO); HHS and VS social workers have been trained and certified to use HMIS.
- CAP60 provides centralized client and case management systems designed to track funding sources for programs and meet specific requirements for multiple programs, such as Head Start, Parenting in Recovery, Community Action Programs, HMIS, and domestic violence, foster care, transportation, weatherization, utility assistance, and food assistance programs.²³⁹
- ZoomGrants is an online application management system with invoice and payments tracking, post-funding reporting, and program budgeting.²⁴⁰ HHS and VS staff report that this software ties directly into the HUD database with real-time uploading that could reduce inefficiencies for the CDBG program.



Recommendations

Recommendation 14.5.1

Formalize and document eligibility criteria and procedures for each service and program. Currently not all services and programs have approved manuals in place.

Recommendation 14.5.2

Conduct an audit of eligibility determination. HHS and VS does not have a quality control process in place to ensure that benefits are provided correctly to applicants. The County Auditor should conduct an audit to ensure that taxpayer funds are distributed to eligible applicants consistently across all community centers and according to grant requirements. In addition, HHS and VS should develop, document, and implement a quality control process to ensure regular evaluation of eligibility determination to address inconsistencies. The quality control process should include performance measures that are needed to ensure the accuracy of the eligibility process.

Recommendation 14.5.3

Conduct a detailed review to identify how the eligibility process can be improved, including the development of an electronic application that mirrors the paper application. The electronic application should function as a stand-alone application that can be submitted electronically. Applicants should not be required to complete an electronic application, but if they do, they should not also be required to complete a paper application.

A working group composed of a community center social services program administrator, an FSS case worker, the HHS and VS business analyst, a division director within HHS and VS, ITS, and PBO should review the process map developed for the HHS and VS eligibility process and identify what changes can be made to speed up the eligibility determination process within FSS. Specifically, changes to CABA need to be considered or new software identified to allow for an online application for assistance that collects all of the necessary data for eligibility determinations to create efficiencies and reduce the need for paper applications.

Recommendation 14.5.4

Review opportunities for electronic verification of utilities and income. The costs and savings associated with electronic verification should be explored given the needs to streamline and increase the productivity of the eligibility determination process. This



effort should be coordinated with other departments that also verify income, such as the Tax Office, Pretrial Services, and TNR.

Recommendation 14.5.5

Develop a model for an alternative staffing plan for community centers that increases productivity, reduces 10 case worker positions, and creates a mobile case worker team. Eliminating 10 case workers through attrition, while providing additional tools to existing case workers, could result in cost savings of \$589,710. A more innovative, streamlined model is needed to reduce the high costs of determining eligibility for services.

Recommendation 14.5.6

Develop short- and long-term plans for resolving technology issues within HHS and VS, especially the development of a fully electronic client tracking system. The performance of the current contract with CAP Systems, Inc. and the possible need to replace the current CABA system must be evaluated. Currently, decisions concerning CABA (and the automated system in place within the Housing Services program in CS) are being made without the input of program staff. In order to direct future decisions concerning data management software, a data management plan should be developed to formally document what data needs to be collected to measure program outcomes and how that data will be analyzed. For example, any data management system, either purchased or upgraded, needs to include a data imaging function to enable uploading of documents to case files.

Recommendation 14.5.7

Clarify job descriptions to distinguish between social worker and case worker roles and responsibilities. This should include protocols for how social workers assist clients with referrals to needed services. In addition, a career ladder should be developed within the social worker and case worker job descriptions to denote varying levels of responsibility and expertise and to allow for increased responsibilities and pay.

Recommendation 14.5.8

Develop and implement consistent and documented procedures for case management services provided by social workers. This should include outlining what case management services are expected and delivered by social workers and detailing how case workers make referrals to social workers.



Recommendation 14.5.9

Implement a Travis County policy prohibiting staff from transporting clients in their personal vehicles or County vehicles. Although this will have a negative impact on clients, this policy is necessary to fully protect staff, clients, and the County from liability. Only County vehicles that are specifically designated for transporting clients should be used for that purpose. HRMD Risk Management should take the lead on the development of this policy. Recommendation 14.6.4 addresses the need to increase transportation resources available to clients.

14.6 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Background

HHS and VS provides several direct services to meet housing needs in the community. FSS offers mortgage, rental, and utility assistance, as well as case management services to help individuals and families remain in their homes. The CS division conducts weatherization and home repairs for eligible families to improve the energy efficiency and the physical living conditions and safety of housing. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program funds organizations that provide social services and works to improve infrastructure and expand affordable housing options within Travis County.

In addition to the direct services offered by HHS and VS, the department also collaborates with community organizations that provide housing services. These contracted services include counseling on housing rights, emergency landlord-tenant mediation, financial assistance to maintain housing, and emergency and transitional shelter for vulnerable populations. In FY 2015, Travis County gave a total of \$793,972 in funding to partnering organizations including Austin Tenants' Council, Blackland Community Development Corporation, Caritas of Austin, Foundation for the Homeless, Inc., Green Doors, Lifeworks, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc., and the Salvation Army.

Another partner agency is the Housing Authority of Travis County, an independent, government-funded agency charged with the responsibility to provide access to safe, decent, low-income housing to help meet the housing needs of County residents. The Housing Authority works with City of Austin and Travis County agencies to combine their various resources (where possible) to meet the County's growing needs.



As a step toward better coordination on housing issues, Travis County created the Affordable Housing Policy Committee in 2015. The committee meets monthly and membership includes key staff from various County departments involved in housing development issues and a representative from the City of Austin.²⁴¹

Findings

According to research conducted by the Center for Housing Policy, “the development of affordable housing increases spending and employment in the surrounding economy, acts as an important source of revenue for local governments, and reduces the likelihood of foreclosure and its associated costs. Without a sufficient supply of affordable housing, employers—and entire regional economies—can be at a competitive disadvantage because of their subsequent difficulty attracting and retaining workers.”²⁴²

Travis County government has limited resources to address the lack of affordable housing within the County. Moreover, restrictions placed on available funding by various granting authorities result in gaps in services for certain groups, such as chronically homeless individuals and low-paid workers.

The HHS and VS programs that assist with keeping residents housed often do not provide sufficient support to be effective. According to HHS and VS staff, Travis County Code Chapter 79: Housing Services Policies and Procedures, has not been updated since 1999. Due to inflation of material and labor costs, the \$5,000 limit per home set for home repair services provided by CS does not always cover the costs needed to create a safe living environment for families.

In addition, the market rate values detailed in Travis County Code Chapter 72: Emergency Assistance Program Policies and Procedures, used by FSS for rental and mortgage assistance, have not been updated since 2007. As a result, staff report that the assistance provided to clients cannot cover the whole cost of a client’s monthly rent, often resulting in client eviction.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) determines fair market rents (FMRs). As defined by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 24 Part 888 FMR, “the FMR is the 40th percentile of gross rents for typical, non-substandard rental units occupied by recent movers in a local housing market.”²⁴³ FMRs are calculated to set rental assistance limits for the HUD Section 8 Rental Certificate and Housing Choice Voucher programs. These programs cover the difference between the FMR and 30 percent of household income. Families who spend more than 30 percent of their



household income on housing costs are considered cost burdened. Families who spend more than 50 percent of household income on housing costs are experiencing a severe cost burden. The FY 2015 HUD FMRs and the average rental rates in Travis County, based on an inventory of 19,119 rental units, are depicted in Table 14-3.

Table 14-3: Travis County Fair Market Rents

Efficiency	One Bedroom	Two Bedroom	Three Bedroom	Four Bedroom
Fair Market Rent	\$681	\$834	\$1,050	\$1,421
Average Rental Rate	\$1,293	\$1,141	\$1,596	\$1,661
Gap Analysis	\$612	\$307	\$546	\$240

Source: "Travis County, TX: Rental Rates and Rental Prices." *Realtor.com*. National Association of Realtors, Web. http://www.realtor.com/local/Travis-County_TX/rent-prices?v7=1. Accessed February 18, 2016.

As seen in Table 14-3, average rental rates in Travis County exceed the HUD FMRs for all rental unit sizes. According to the 2015 Community Impact Report, 48 percent of renter households and 26 percent of owner households in Travis County are cost burdened, spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing.²⁴⁴

Further exacerbating the problem with affordable housing, residents lack access to transportation services, which limits access to available employment as well as HHS and VS assistance programs. HHS and VS has limited funds available to provide transportation vouchers to clients. TNR administers the AirCheck Texas: Drive A Clean Machine program that provides funding to eligible residents to repair cars that do not meet emissions and safety requirements or to assist with a down payment on a new car.

Recommendations

Recommendation 14.6.1

The Affordable Housing Committee should develop a short- and long-term strategic vision with clear goals and an implementation plan. These plans should include communicating and coordinating more effectively with other housing-related organizations to optimize low-income housing options for Travis County residents.

Recommendation 14.6.2

Give priority to projects that will quickly add to the supply of low-income housing options and support neighborhood and community development. This should include recognition that the lack of affordable housing in Travis County impacts



employment and economic development. Some areas for Travis County to address through the Affordable Housing Policy Committee are how to incentivize investment from the private market, how to raise the profile of CDBG so residents know what is available to them, considering programs that lease unused land for very low cost, and ensuring that CDBG funds are used for projects that cannot be funded through the general fund.

Recommendation 14.6.3

Update the market rate values in Travis County Code Chapter 72 for the FSS rental assistance program to accurately reflect the cost of housing in Travis County.

While this will require additional resources, streamlining FSS eligibility staffing will allow additional resources to be used to increase the assistance available to clients.

Recommendation 14.6.4

Provide resources to expand public transportation reduced fare options. As discussed in Section 14.5, some case workers currently transport clients to services they would otherwise have difficulty accessing. Providing more bus vouchers or vouchers for gas would help clients access needed services in the community. FSS caseworkers should make clients aware of how to apply for the TNR AirCheck Texas: Drive A Clean Machine program that provides financial assistance for car repairs or down payment assistance for a new car. Travis County should work with Capital Metro to expand bus routes into less populated areas; creativity is needed despite resource limitations.

14.7 VENDOR PAYMENTS

Background

HHS and VS makes payments to vendors and clients to provide services through several different programs:

- FSS administers the Emergency Assistance program to provide safety net services and short-term emergency assistance for County residents. In FY 2015, \$1,769,292 in benefits was paid on behalf of clients for these services.
- OCS works to develop policy and coordinate service delivery for HHS and VS services for children, youth, and their families in an effort to address this population's needs and reduce the incidences of child abuse and neglect as critical factors in youth delinquency prevention.



- The CDBG Administration uses HUD grant funding to develop viable urban communities by expanding economic opportunities for persons with low and moderate income and providing them with decent housing and suitable living environments.

Findings

According to FSS staff, payment of bills to vendors such as utility companies, landlords, mortgage providers, pharmacies, and food vendors on behalf of Travis County clients can take 90 days or more. Payments to vendors for OCS clients for drug testing, psychiatric care, parenting education, and foster children service provision can take 60 to 90 days. The delayed payments to vendors results in delays in the provision of services and the alienation of vendors. For the CDBG program, payments to vendors for projects dealing with street improvements, home rehabilitation, and housing development can take 60 days, resulting in delayed work and late reporting to the funding agency. As a result, some grant funding could go unspent.

Payments to vendors from HHS and VS do not meet the requirements of the Texas Prompt Payment Act, which states that payments by a governmental entity are overdue on the 31st day after a) the date that the government receives the goods under contract, b) performance of the contracted services is completed, or c) after the governmental entity receives an invoice for the goods or services.²⁴⁵ The Travis County Prompt Payment Act requires the County to pay complete and correct invoices to the vendor within 30 days of receipt. If payments exceed this window, then the vendor may calculate and charge interest.

FSS

In order to assist clients with emergency payments for utility, mortgage, and rental bills, FSS staff first determine the clients' eligibility for emergency financial assistance. Once emergency financial assistance is approved, staff contact the appropriate vendors to secure their agreement to wait for the financial assistance offered by Travis County rather than shut off utilities or evict a client. Once a vendor has agreed to accept the payment, the case worker creates and submits a bill to the Social Services Program Administrator.

Once a week the social services program administrator at each of the seven community centers approves and manually compiles all of the bills that FSS case workers have approved. The average number of payments processed by a case worker was 55 per month or 14 per week in FY 2015. For the largest community center, this would result in



126 client bills processed per week and for the smallest community center, 42 client bills processed per week.

Compiling the bills is a lengthy process. Each payment for every bill generated requires both an electronic invoice from the FSS data management system (CABA) and a paper bill document before it can be submitted. The case workers submit one bill document per payment requested as a hard copy and the administrators arrange these bill documents according to the CABA-generated report. Once the bill documents are arranged, they must be manually scanned into the computer system before they can be sent via encrypted email to HHS and VS Finance. HHS and VS staff report that for 50 payments this process takes approximately 90 minutes.

One full-time HHS and VS Finance employee is responsible for compiling the bills for all seven centers and entering the data into SAP (the enterprise resource planning software used by Travis County). After the data is entered into SAP, it is submitted electronically to the Travis County Auditor's Office for approval and then to the Travis County Commissioners Court for final approval. Three community centers submit reports to Finance on Tuesdays and Finance submits the reports to the County Auditor the following Friday. Four community centers submit reports to Finance on Thursdays and Finance submits their reports to the County Auditor the following Tuesday. The County Auditor takes five business days from the first submission of bills from Finance to audit and process the checks for these payments, which are then submitted for review and approval during the next meeting of the Commissioners Court. After the Commissioners Court review and approval, a check is authorized and the County Treasurer disburses the funds the next day.

Overall, the process outlined above should take a maximum of 22 days after FSS staff creates bills; however, this is not consistent with staff reports of late payments. Data is not available from CABA to verify the number of unduplicated eligible households that received emergency assistance payments within 30 days of application.

While payments are likely made within 30 days of when the information is entered into SAP, they are not made within 30 days of eligibility determination or vendor agreement to accept the payment. Due to the slow payment process within HHS and VS, only two pharmacy vendors will accept payment from the County and no food vendors will accept payment from the County. The HEB grocery chain was the last food vendor to work with Travis County on a food voucher program. However, according to HHS and VS staff, when HEB submitted invoices to the County, due to lack of communication and



inconsistency in processing payments, the County would often disallow some items leaving HEB responsible for the non-covered items. These issues ultimately resulted in HEB discontinuing participation as a vendor.

Office of Children Services

OCS reported similar problems with the current payment process. In an effort to better meet OCS needs and to ensure timely payments to vendors, the Travis County Children's Protective Services Board had to set up a non-profit corporation called the Children's Protective Assistance, Inc., which operates as Capital Area Safe Kids Fund. The non-profit pays the bills directly to the vendors and is then reimbursed by Travis County once the funds are approved, thus avoiding the vendor issues experienced by FSS.

Community Development Block Grant

CDBG staff report that it takes 60 days for bills to be paid to vendors for street improvements, home rehabilitation, and housing development, which can delay work and impact reporting to their funding agency, HUD. Other delays, including specific grant requirements and processes, added to the challenges of optimizing CDBG funding within the allowed grant period.

Recommendation

Recommendation 14.7.1

Conduct an audit of the vendor payment process. A working group consisting of a social services program administrator, an HHS and VS Finance staff person, a representative from the County Auditor's Office, and PBO should review the process map developed for the HHS and VS payment process and identify what changes can be made to speed up the payment process within HHS and VS. They specifically need to consider:

- Where the delays in the process occur and how those can be rectified.
- Whether bills need to be submitted to the Finance division daily rather than weekly.
- Why the bills cannot be entered into SAP by program staff.



- What changes to CABA and other systems are needed to allow for an electronic rather than a manual process, or what alternative system would include an electronic process.
- Whether these transactions need to be approved by the Commissioners Court prior to submission to the vendor.

14.8 FACILITY SPACE AND CONDITION

Background

HHS and VS employees are housed in nine locations: the Highland Mall office building, the Housing Services building located on East Cesar Chavez Street, and the Del Valle, Jonestown, Manor, Palm Square, Pflugerville, Post Road, and Oak Hill Community Centers.

Findings

Space allocated to Travis County HHS and VS department staff is not sufficient or adequate. Based on observations and reports from staff, the space allocated to HHS and VS is crowded and substandard. For example, employees report that the Palm Square Community Center basement is unusable due to a mold infestation. Staff at the Del Valle Community Center also reported issues with heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) units, plumbing, and air quality. Other sites reported problems with leaking roofs and water damage even after roof replacement or repair. Parking at the Agricultural Extension Office is unable to accommodate current HHS and VS staff and clients. Both the Manor and Jonestown Community Centers are housed in older buildings that are in need of updating.

The conditions of HHS and VS facilities are in stark contrast to other Travis County departments, which appear to have excess space that currently is not being utilized. Some of the newer office buildings are also in much better condition than the HHS and VS facilities.



Recommendations

Recommendation 14.8.1

Evaluate the amount of space per person for all HHS and VS facilities compared to that of other Travis County departments to determine the actual facility space deficiencies and needs of HHS and VS. Develop a plan for allocating adequate space to HHS and VS as a result of the evaluation.

Recommendation 14.8.2

Evaluate the condition of the space allocated to HHS and VS. Develop a long-term plan to mitigate unsafe or inadequate conditions. The results of this evaluation should be included in the deferred maintenance plan that is recommended elsewhere in this report.



15 TRANSPORTATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Transportation and Natural Resources (TNR) is one of the largest departments reporting to the Travis County Commissioners Court. TNR has 433 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees and a fiscal year (FY) 2016 adopted budget totaling \$99,434,979.²⁴⁶ The TNR budget includes several funds: General Fund (149) - \$52,004,711, Road and Bridge Fund (0145) - \$18,409,474, Balcones Canyon Preservation (0115) - \$25,783,301, LCRA/ TC Parks CIP Fund (0109) - \$2,944,406 and Mary Quinlan Park (0123) - \$293,087.

The mission of TNR is to “provide citizens living in the unincorporated areas of the County with comprehensive transportation, natural resources management, and public service systems to promote public safety, health and welfare in compliance with Texas laws and mandates of the Travis County Commissioners Court.” To achieve the department’s mission, TNR engages in a wide variety of activities including designing, engineering, constructing, and maintaining County roads, drainage areas, and bridges. It also provides and maintains vehicle and equipment in fleet services; reviews and permits land development; provides flood plain management, natural resource conservation, and preservation; and manages County parks and many small and large capital improvement projects.

TNR’s Parks division manages 8,865 acres, including 25 caves in the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve and 26 parks covering a total of 9,666 acres of public land for public recreational use. Development Services reviewed 155 preliminary and updated subdivision plans in 2015, while Public Works annually provided 95.5 miles of surface treatments and maintenance.

The staff of TNR should be commended for the work they do to serve Travis County residents. Staff is dedicated to the department’s mission, indicated by TNR’s many successes and their willingness to share information and data for the review. This review has resulted in the following discussion and recommendations which detail ways TNR can pursue additional funding opportunities and address some administrative processes to increase efficiencies.

15.1 TRANSPORTATION FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Background

Although Travis County TNR has applied for and received some funding from TXDOT and the USDOT, the division does not possess a defined methodology to track all non-



county funding opportunities. In addition, TNR does not maintain a repository of information so grant applications are less time consuming. In addition the division is not taking advantage of financing available through the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO).²⁴⁷

Findings

TNR officials do not currently keep track of available funding opportunities and corresponding information regarding those opportunities. When asked for a list of grants for which the division was eligible and the reasons the division did or did not apply for these funds, the Public Works (PW) division was not able to provide this information for each type of grant. However, according to TNR officials, the division has not applied for grants if the opportunity requires an environmental assessment. The division has not taken advantage of some funding opportunities because the application process is time consuming; the division does not have a central repository of commonly required information to make the application process easier.

Due to the lack of information cited above, it is unknown which potential funding sources may have been available to the PW division but were not considered. Potential funding sources include TIGER Discretionary grants, FHWA Highway grants, Transportation Safety grants, MAP-21 grants, Surface Transportation Program funds, Transportation Alternatives Program funds, and TXDOT's Traffic Safety Program grants.

NEPA Assessments. Travis County has not applied for funds associated with TxDOT calls for projects for several years because state eligibility requirements dictate the projects must be “shovel ready,” meaning they require environmental assessments, as defined by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). NEPA mandates that executive federal agencies complete an assessment of the potential environmental effects of proposed projects.²⁴⁸ The complexity of these assessments depends on the impact a project might have on the environment. Categorical exclusions (CE) are for projects that will have no significant impact based on a pre-determined USDOT list. Environmental assessments (EA) are used to determine if the project will have significant potential impacts when the impacts are unknown. These assessments are followed by either a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) or an environmental impact statement EIS, used for projects with significant potential impacts. Each type of assessment requires a public comment period.

Little data is available to determine the cost of NEPA assessments; agencies completing a NEPA assessment have no requirement to report that information so most agencies do



not delineate NEPA assessments from other project costs. Furthermore, the type of assessment and associated costs vary considerably based on the complexity of the project. According to the limited data available from the U.S. Government Accountability Office, EIS assessments ranged from \$60,000 to \$85 million with a median cost of \$1.4 million and an average of \$6.6 million.²⁴⁹ In the same period, EAs ranged in cost from \$3,000 to \$1.2 million; the median cost was \$65,000.²⁵⁰ Specific estimates of CE costs were not provided, but all agencies stated that CEs are the least expensive and time consuming of the NEPA assessments.²⁵¹

TNR Public Works officials estimated that NEPA assessments in Travis County add about 10 percent to the cost of a project and about one year to the completion of a project.

A potential cost-saving benefit of NEPA assessments is they require a full review and public comment of all ecological aspects of a project early in the project cycle. These assessments can expose issues that can be resolved before a project is stalled, jeopardized, or requires expensive “fixes” late in the game.

CAMPO Transportation Development Credits. PW division officials have stated that they have not applied for CAMPO transportation funding. One important type of funding available through CAMPO is referred to as transportation development credits (TDCs), formerly called toll revenue credits, a federal funding tool that state and local agencies may use to meet 100 percent of the local matching funds requirements (usually 20 percent of the total cost of a project) for federal roadway and transit programs (23 USC §120). Local metropolitan planning organizations are awarded credits from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) through TxDOT when toll revenues are used to fund capital transportation investments.²⁵²

TNR has been reluctant to apply for TDCs because they believe CAMPO members with fewer resources should use the finite number of credits available. However, TNR Public Works officials agree that some portion of their transportation projects are or will be eligible for TDCs. In 2012, CAMPO was awarded 734,282,287 credits by the Texas Transportation Commission. Since then, 4 percent (or 28,789,972 TDCs equal to as many dollars) has been awarded to eight projects; most of these projects are physically located in Travis County although they are not Travis County TNR projects. If Travis County were to take advantage of the TDCs available to CAMPO members, the County could reduce its share of local dollars (normally 20 percent) for projects using TDCs.



Recommendations

Recommendation 15.1.1

Create a process to track and vet funding opportunities in the TNR Public Works division. This process should include investigating funding, recording opportunities, and keeping track of decisions to pursue or not pursue funding opportunities, NEPA assessment costs should be but one of many factors taken into consideration when pursuing transportation funding opportunities because they are covered by federal funds, typically 80 percent of the cost of the study. Furthermore, the County may benefit greatly from a NEPA assessment because mitigation plans would be agreed on with the interested and affected community members early in the process. This should include an information repository for funding applications so applications are easier to write and submit.

Recommendation 15.1.2

Apply for CAMPO transportation development credits for transportation projects to stretch Travis County dollars. TDCs can be applied to any part of a transportation project.

15.2 CIP INVOICES APPROVAL PROCESS

According to Travis County TNR staff, Capital Improvement Project (CIP) invoices require six signatures for approval.

Background

TNR has not reviewed the signatory requirements for CIP invoices in several years. The invoices are physical paper copies and the current process requires six staff members to sign off on all invoices in the following order:

1. Project inspector
2. Engineer
3. Assistant Public Works manager (CIP)
4. Public Works director
5. TNR financial manager
6. TNR chief deputy



Findings

Based on staff feedback, the current signatory process consumes more time than needed to provide adequate oversight and has led to delays and bottlenecks in invoice processing due to wait time at each level. TNR Financial Services is unable to effectively track invoices, since they do not see the invoices until four other staff have provided their approvals. Other invoices in TNR are received by the Financial Services division first so they can be entered into a tracking system. This process is duplicative, as the project inspector is responsible for checking the same information as the assistant Public Works manager (CIP), Public Works director and TNR chief deputy.

Each signatory estimates spending two hours a week reviewing and signing CIP invoices; the total time for all six staff involved is approximately 624 hours annually or 30 percent of an FTE. Staff spend additional time to track the paper invoices through each person's inbox when attempting to resolve delays or other issues.

Recommendation

Recommendation 15.2.1

Reduce the number of signatures needed on Capital Improvement Project invoices and reorganize the order of approval. The following TNR staff members should review and sign off on all invoices in the following order:

1. TNR financial manager
2. Project inspector
3. Engineer

As the first step in this signatory process, Financial Services will be able to enter CIP invoices into their system, which will allow them to better track payments. The duplicative efforts of three positions are eliminated in the proposed process while the project inspector retains the responsibility for checking that information.

15.3 DEVELOPMENT FEES

Background

TNR Development Services oversees the issuance of permits, guidelines, and procedures for development outside corporate city limits in Travis County. The division permits development, inspection of construction activities, septic systems, and floodplain regulations. Development includes "any man-made changes to improved or unimproved real estate, including but not limited to structures or other buildings, driveways or other



work in the County right-of-way, septic systems, mining, dredging, filling, grading, paving, excavation or drilling operations and the division of land.”²⁵³

Findings

Based on staff comments and TNR fee reviews by the Travis County Auditor’s Office and Deloitte and Touche LLP,²⁵⁴ current fees do not represent the true cost of the County’s permitting activities and the fees have not been updated in several years.

Non-residential permits require varying amounts of County resources depending on project complexity and the cooperation of applicants. Furthermore, Development Services does not charge fees for some of its permit activities that could be directly aligned to specific development projects permits. The Travis County Auditor’s Office described these new fees and recommended increasing them in its 2015 “TNR Permit Revenue Review”.²⁵⁵

As a result of not charging the actual cost of conducting these activities, Travis County is subsidizing non-residential enterprises at the expense of County taxpayers.

The Commissioners Court is reluctant to increase its residential permit fees so as not to discourage affordable housing in Travis County.

In 2003, Deloitte and Touche LLP mapped Development Services and Long Range Planning subdivision plat process, measured the level of effort it took them to process those permits, and calculated the cost of that effort.²⁵⁶ Following this study, the Commissioners Court, in 2004, adopted fees to recapture these costs. These fees have not been updated since that time.

In 2012, TNR requested and was granted permission by the Commissioners Court to charge a \$10 fee per application to cover the cost of using the My Permit Now automated system to provide applicants access to the online permit application and tracking system.²⁵⁷

In September 2015, the Travis County Auditor’s Office reviewed TNR Developmental Services’ permit fees and presented recommendations to TNR. The review found that many permits have not been updated in several years: 24 permits since 2004, 4 in 2006, 23 in 2010 and 10 in 2013. The report suggested increasing permit fees in four functional areas: basic development; floodplain; on-site sewage; and planning review.²⁵⁸ The report provided a target range of possible increases with upper and lower



boundaries of 90 to 75 percent, respectively. The upper limit was set at 90 percent to ensure that the County does not make a profit on its services, which legally it is not allowed to do. The Auditor's Office proposed changing the fees to 77 percent, at the lower end of the target range, with adjustments every two to three years to match inflation and any other changes in effort that might arise. Current permit fees cover approximately 65 percent of the real cost of issuing those permits.

Table 15-1 Possible TNR Savings by Raising Fees According to 2015 Auditor's Report

	Current rates (FY 2014)	Minimum Recommended by Auditor's Office	Proposed Increase by Auditor's Office	Maximum Recommended by Auditor's Office
Estimated Revenue Increase	-\$621,642	-\$503,520	-\$468,580	-\$203,907
Percentage Recovery	69%	75%	77%	90%

Source: "Travis County TNR Permit Revenue Review SP#15-01", Travis County Auditor's Office, September 11, 2015

Recommendation 15.3.1

Charge non-residential permit applicants TNR's actual costs for providing permit services. All non-residential permit fees, including subdivision plat fees, should be charged to reflect the amount of actual staff time spent on the permit, with a standard multiplier for ancillary costs such as materials and office space. Exceptions should be made for permits that take a standard amount of time, such as on-site sewage facilities permit renewals; fees for these types of permits should be a standard amount, increased by the rate of inflation every two years if needed.

To implement this recommendation, the department should estimate the cost of the permit and charge the applicant 80 to 85 percent of this estimate. To implement this recommendation, the division should set base fees at 80 to 85 percent of the estimated cost to the County to process a permit and charge that as a base fee to applicants. Once the division processes the permit application including completing reviews **and** revisions, the division will calculate and charge the applicant the difference between the actual cost of the permit and the base fee. Only after the cost of any difference is collected (so that 100 percent of all County expenses are recovered) would the division grant the permit to the applicant. The division has the ability to track project costs through its My Permit Now software.



It should be noted that implementation of this recommendation will not only recover County funds expended for the benefit of private enterprise but will also encourage permit applicants to present required permit information in an efficient manner.

Recommendation 15.3.2

The Development Services and Long Range Planning division should charge fees for additional non-residential services as outlined in the 2015 Travis County Auditor's review. These new non-residential permit fees should be charged on an individual cost basis, as described in Recommendation 15.3.1.

15.4 FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Background

The Floodplain Management Program in TNR resides in two divisions: Development Services and Long Range Planning, and Natural Resources and Environmental Quality division (NREQ). In Development Services, the permit program manager is the only federally certified floodplain administrator in the County, responsible for ensuring the County follows federal rules and regulations so that Travis County residents are eligible for floodplain insurance. The position determines, among other duties, which properties are included in the floodplain, ranks these properties for County acquisition, performs cost benefit analyses, and directs demolition of existing buildings and utility connections to prevent future flood damage to environmental and public health and safety. In addition to housing the floodplain administrator position and duties, the division also administers all permits relating to floodplain management.

Among other duties, the environmental project manager position (now vacant), along with environmental specialist senior position in NREQ, writes grants for floodplain management funding and is responsible for County buyouts of floodplain property. Because the environmental project manager position is currently vacant, the position's duties are now assigned to the NREQ natural resources program manager. The natural resources program manager is responsible for the large Balcones Conservation Preserve (BCP) which is not yet complete and thus will require significant time and resources for additional land acquisition, management policies, and operations



Findings

The floodplain management program has efficiency issues because it is housed in two divisions. This creates problems concerning coordination of land management, buyout, and funding policies.

Recommendation

Recommendation 15.4.1

Administer the floodplain management program entirely in the Development Services and Long Range Planning division. The permit program manager who is the County's Certified Floodplain Administrator should have full authority and accountability for all floodplain program decisions and policies. The environmental project manager in NREQ should be moved to Development Services to more evenly distribute workload and leverage the knowledge and experience in the grant and buyout aspects of the program. This change will allow the natural resources program manager and staff in NREQ to spend more time on the important and expanding Balcones Conservation Preserve, along with other duties.

15.5 CONSERVATION EASEMENT FUNDS

Background

According to Texas Natural Resources Code Title 8 § 183 (1983), conservation easement programs²⁵⁹ allow local governments to purchase easements from willing landowners to “protect natural and cultural resources.”²⁶⁰ The Travis County conservation easement program specifically protects working farms and ranches, water resources, wildlife habitat, rural character, and scenic views.²⁶¹ Travis County purchases easements in perpetuity (rather than for a limited period of time), and landowners retain the legal title to their property and can work with the County to determine land uses and restrictions. Landowners may be eligible for any combination of income, estate, or property tax benefits while retaining use and protecting their land. Government entities are able to support conservation efforts at a cost savings compared with purchasing the entire property. According to the Texas Land Trust Council, without conservation easement programs, land and other natural resources may be threatened by disuse or development.²⁶²

Findings

The Travis County TNR NREQ division administers the County conservation easement program. Landowners apply for conservation easement funding, and the applications



are reviewed and ranked by a panel of NREQ, Development Services, Parks, and Planning staff. The panel then sends its recommendations to the Travis County Commissioners Court for award of easement funds.²⁶³

In 2011, Travis County voters approved a \$73.7 million bond for parks and land conservation projects. Of that amount, \$8.3 million was specifically appropriated to purchase conservation easements in the County.²⁶⁴ However, as of January 2016, only about \$1 million has been spent for this purpose. Because these funds were raised by selling bonds, they can only be used to purchase conservation easements. Unused funds cannot be reallocated for other purposes, but the County pays interest on the unused portion.

In the past, the Travis County Commissioners Court has awarded conservation easement funds as matching funding with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) monies. The NRCS is a federal agency that collaborates with and supports private landowners to maintain, conserve, and improve natural resources.²⁶⁵ However, TNR personnel stated that NRCS funding has not been available in years, NRCS funds are not likely to be available in near future, and this use of the funds is not required by Travis County's conservation easement program. The staff also stated that the easement funds are underutilized because landowners who are willing to sell these easements believe that they must apply for and receive NRCS funds to participate in the County's program.

Recommendations

Recommendation 15.5.1

Purchase conservation easements according to Travis County policy. The use of these conservation easement funds should not be tied to NRCS funding. Although TNR is not in jeopardy of losing the funds, the County is paying interest on the unused portion and missing out on the conservation benefits that this program can provide.

Recommendation 15.5.2

Inform land owners of County conservation easement funding requirements. Use the TNR web site and other media to inform possible grantees that NRCS funds are not a requirement for County conservation easement funding and encourage eligible land owners to apply directly to the County for conservation easement funding. Increased participation in the County's conservation easement program can ensure important easements are purchased without the County purchasing the property outright.



15.6 REVENUES FOR THE PARKS DIVISION

Background

In FY 2015 the Parks division's actual expenditures without encumbrances or debt service totaled \$8,914,521, while FY 2015 fee revenues totaled \$2,391,819. The difference between expenditures and revenues in FY 2015 (\$6,522,702) equals an amount paid for by the general fund.

Currently, the Parks division manages 26 parks covering a total of 9,657 acres of public land for public recreational use. Amenities include trails, natural swimming areas, basketball, volleyball, and tennis courts, sports fields, picnic tables and shelters, and camps sites. Of the other large counties in Texas, Bexar County and El Paso County also operate parks systems, but do not charge entrance fees. Neither Dallas nor Tarrant counties operate parks or recreation facilities.

TNR does not update Travis park fees on a regular basis. The 1999 Travis County Parks and Recreation Facilities Fee Study found that fees had not been adjusted since 1993.²⁶⁶ Except for the day use fee and pedestrian/bicycle fee at Hippie Hollow Park and Hamilton Pool (increased in 2014), most fees have not increased since 2010 or before.²⁶⁷ In January 2016, the review team met with Parks division officials for the purpose of this review, and since meeting, Parks has moved forward to increase some fees. On March 1 and March 29, 2016, the Parks division presented and received Travis County Commissioners Court approval for seasonal fees for Reimers Ranch Park, Mansfield Dam Park, and Loop 360 Boat ramp; seasonal reservation fees for Hamilton Pool; temporary concession site fee expansion to all Travis County Parks; Northeast Metro BMX event parking fee increases; trailer fee increases; and changes to pavilion rental rates for East Metropolitan Park, Bob Wentz Park, and Mansfield Dam Park.

In the past, the Parks division attempted to establish a Travis County Parks Foundation but the plan was eventually abandoned. In addition, the Parks division has not established private sponsorships nor has it set up procedures to accept donations from the public.



Table 15-2 TNR Parks Division Fees

Park Entrance Type	Fees
Day Use	\$10 per vehicle
Day Use at Hippie Hollow Park	\$15 per vehicle
Day Use at Hamilton Pool Preserve	\$15 per vehicle
Pedestrian/Bicyclist	\$3 per pedestrian/bicyclist
Pedestrian/Bicyclist at Hippie Hollow Park / Hamilton Pool Preserve	\$8 per pedestrian/bicyclist
Primitive Camping aka Day/Night Combo	\$15 per vehicle
Improved Camping (plus \$10.00 reservation fee)	\$20 per vehicle
Trailer Parking Fee (No charge to Lone Star Seniors and Veterans)	\$5 per trailer per day**
Annual Day Use Permit (+ \$5.00 per vehicle at Hippie Hollow / Hamilton Pool Preserve)	\$10 per vehicle
Pedestrian/Bicycle Annual (+ \$5.00 per pedestrian/bicyclist at Hippie Hollow / Hamilton Pool Preserve)	\$25 per pedestrian/bicyclist
Annual Trailer Parking Permit	\$50 per trailer **
Lone Star Pass for Day Use (Senior Citizens)	No charge for age 62 or older
Overnight Camping for Lone Star/Annual Permit Holders	\$7 per night
Lone Star Veteran Pass for Day Use	No Charge to U.S. Veterans with 60% service related disability
Camping for Lone Star Veterans	No charge if in vehicle with permit

**Updated March 2016

Findings

A number of opportunities are available for the Parks division to increase revenue and reduce the cost of parks to the general fund, including annually modifying fees, charging non-Travis County residents higher fees, adjusting fees seasonally, developing sponsorships with private sector organizations, establishing a foundation, and providing opportunities for citizens to donate to the park system.

Annual Fee Modifications

Parks does not have a schedule, nor a standard reporting or analytical process for modifying fees. Other parks organizations use state-of-the art methodologies to assess park fees. For instance, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) uses an annual fee modification process that examines use trends and customer resistance. The process also requires a SWOT analysis to assess each park's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In addition, TPWD identifies competitors in local areas and completes a competitive analysis on competitors' products, services, customer convenience, rates and charges, and other pertinent information.²⁶⁸



The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) recommends developing a measurement system as one of three best practices to help parks operate more efficiently. The measurement system includes calculating entrance fees and concession revenues against the cost of park maintenance. Having this information allows park management to have full control of operations, and when this information is shared with the community it shows “accountability and transparency.”²⁶⁹ According to NRPA, the other two best practices are committing to performance management and creating a culture of innovation.²⁷⁰

Non-Residential Fees

The Parks division does not distinguish between Travis County residents and non-Travis County residents when assessing fees. Despite providing the tax funding for the Travis County park system, Travis County residents pay the same park fees as non-residents. Parks such as Hamilton Pool and Reimer’s Ranch attract many non-resident users from outside the County and the state. The Parks division does not track whether park users are residents or non-residents. Higher non-resident park fees provide an opportunity to increase revenue without penalizing resident park users.

Multiple state park systems charge non-resident users a higher fee if they do not live in the tax authority of the park system, although TPWD does not distinguish between Texas residents and non-residents for either daily entrance fees or camp site fees. Delaware, Indiana, Maine, Montana, and Wisconsin do distinguish between residents and non-residents when setting their daily entrance park fees, shown in Table 15-3. Several state parks charge non-state residents a higher campsite fee; Table 15-4 shows campsite fees. The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department increased non-resident user fees by \$1 at many of its parks in 2013, which was estimated at the time to increase revenue by an additional \$280,000 annually.²⁷¹



Table 15-3 Resident and Non-resident Daily Entrance Park Fees

	Per Vehicle		Per Person	
	Resident	Non-Resident	Resident	Non-Resident
Travis County	\$10	N/A	\$3	N/A
Delaware	N/A	N/A	\$4 (Ocean \$5)	\$8 (Ocean \$10)
Indiana	\$7	\$9	\$2	\$2
Maine			\$4–\$6	\$4–\$8
Montana	\$0	\$6	\$0	\$4
Wisconsin	\$8	\$11	\$5	\$5

Source: Data available from state parks web sites.

Table 15-4 Resident and Non-resident Campsite Fees

	Primitive		Campsite without electricity		Campsite with electricity	
	Resident	Non-Resident	Resident	Non-Resident	Resident	Non-Resident
Travis County	\$15	N/A			\$20 (improved camping)	
Montana	\$12	\$20	\$14	\$24	\$20	\$30
Wisconsin	N/A	N/A	\$16–\$20	\$21–\$25	\$26–30	\$31–35
Indiana	No residency distinction					
Delaware*	\$3 per person plus \$20 non-refundable reservation fee	\$3 person plus \$40 non-refundable reservation fee		\$45	\$50	\$40
Connecticut**			\$20	\$30	\$35	\$45
Virginia	\$11–\$15	\$13–\$18	\$20–\$26	\$24–\$31	\$20–\$35	\$24–\$41
New Jersey	\$3	\$5	\$20	\$25	N/A	N/A

* Holts Landing State Park, weekend peak summer fees

** Hammonasset Beach State Park

Source: Data available from state parks web sites.

Weekend and Seasonal Fees

Historically, the Parks division has not increased park fees for high-demand seasons of the year. Popular Travis County parks are often over-crowded during the summer peak season. Hamilton Pool turns down visitors during the peak season to help maintain the quality of the park. In an effort to ensure visitors are not turned away, the Parks division sought and received approval from the Travis County Commissioners Court to charge a reservation fee for Hamilton Pool in addition to the entrance fees from May 1 to



Table 15-6 Peak and Off Season Park Camping Fees

	Primitive		Campsite without electricity		Campsite with electricity	
	Peak Season	Off Season	Peak Season	Off Season	Peak Season	Off Season
Travis County	\$15	N/A			\$20	N/A
Montana	\$12 (\$20 non-resident)	\$12 (\$20 non-resident)	\$18 (\$28 non-resident)	\$14 (\$24 non-resident)	\$24 (\$34 non-resident)	\$20 (\$30 non-resident)
Minnesota	\$15–\$19	\$15	\$15–\$23	\$15–\$17	\$23–\$31	\$23–\$25
Delaware*	\$3 per person plus \$20 (\$40 non-resident) non-refundable reservation fee	\$3 person plus \$20 (\$40 non-resident) non-refundable reservation fee	\$40 (\$45 non-resident)	\$30 (\$30 non-resident)	\$35 no residency distinction	

* Holts Landing State Park, weekend peak summer fees

Source: Data available from state parks web sites.

Private Sponsorship

The TNR Parks division has not sought private sponsorships of parks or for park events.

In 2013 Montgomery County (Maryland) Department of Parks developed a corporate park naming and sponsorship program, estimated to raise between \$100,000 and \$1,600,000 annually.²⁷⁷ The Chicago Park District has raised “an estimated mid-to-high six figures in incremental revenue since launching a new sponsorship sales strategy in 2012.”²⁷⁸ In addition, corporate sponsorship has been implemented by many counties to generate revenue: King, Mason, and Kitsap counties in Washington; Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; San Diego and Oakland counties in California; Charleston County, South Carolina; and Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Parks Foundation and Donations

The Parks division attempted to establish a Travis County Parks foundation in the past, but for unknown reasons, the effort was abandoned. Park foundations and other park advocacy organizations have increasingly become integral to park systems across the country.²⁷⁹ These organizations receive their funding mostly from donations and engage in activities ranging from operation of special activities and programs in parks to advocacy on behalf of parks.

For example, the Austin Parks Foundation (APF) was established in 1992 and “has been at the center of promoting park development, maintenance, accessibility and



Table 15-6 Peak and Off Season Park Camping Fees

	Primitive		Campsite without electricity		Campsite with electricity	
	Peak Season	Off Season	Peak Season	Off Season	Peak Season	Off Season
Travis County	\$15	N/A			\$20	N/A
Montana	\$12 (\$20 non-resident)	\$12 (\$20 non-resident)	\$18 (\$28 non-resident)	\$14 (\$24 non-resident)	\$24 (\$34 non-resident)	\$20 (\$30 non-resident)
Minnesota	\$15–\$19	\$15	\$15–\$23	\$15–\$17	\$23–\$31	\$23–\$25
Delaware*	\$3 per person plus \$20 (\$40 non-resident) non-refundable reservation fee	\$3 person plus \$20 (\$40 non-resident) non-refundable reservation fee	\$40 (\$45 non-resident)	\$30 (\$30 non-resident)	\$35 no residency distinction	

* Holts Landing State Park, weekend peak summer fees

Source: Data available from state parks web sites.

Private Sponsorship

The TNR Parks division has not sought private sponsorships of parks or for park events.

In 2013 Montgomery County (Maryland) Department of Parks developed a corporate park naming and sponsorship program, estimated to raise between \$100,000 and \$1,600,000 annually.²⁷⁷ The Chicago Park District has raised “an estimated mid-to-high six figures in incremental revenue since launching a new sponsorship sales strategy in 2012.”²⁷⁸ In addition, corporate sponsorship has been implemented by many counties to generate revenue: King, Mason, and Kitsap counties in Washington; Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; San Diego and Oakland counties in California; Charleston County, South Carolina; and Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Parks Foundation and Donations

The Parks division attempted to establish a Travis County Parks foundation in the past, but for unknown reasons, the effort was abandoned. Park foundations and other park advocacy organizations have increasingly become integral to park systems across the country.²⁷⁹ These organizations receive their funding mostly from donations and engage in activities ranging from operation of special activities and programs in parks to advocacy on behalf of parks.

For example, the Austin Parks Foundation (APF) was established in 1992 and “has been at the center of promoting park development, maintenance, accessibility and



improvements in Austin and Travis County”²⁸⁰ through various programs such as “volunteer workdays (large and small scale), park activation programming, and large capital improvement projects.”²⁸¹ In 2014, the APF raised a total of \$4,231,793 from corporate contributions, fundraising events, and grants.²⁸² The APF web site includes a donation page that allows anyone to click a button to donate to the foundation. The APF also accepts donations through by phone and mail.

Recommendations

Recommendation 15.6.1

Set fees annually based on specific criteria.

Recommendation 15.6.2

Charge non-residents a surcharge to use park resources.

Recommendation 15.6.3

Increase fees during high-demand periods to generate revenue. This will also reduce park congestion and encourage the use of under-used parks.

Recommendation 15.6.4

Procure private sector sponsorships for parks and events held at the parks.

Recommendation 15.6.5

Establish a parks foundation that can accept donations via web site, phone, or mail.

Recommendation 15.6.6

Use existing mechanisms to take direct donations from the public to support the Parks division. This should include the addition of a donate button to the existing Parks web site and could include accepting donations at large events. This might involve setting up a regular system for the Travis County Commissioners Court to officially accept the donations, but has been done so on occasion to support the Parks and other Travis County departments such as law enforcement. This recommendation is in addition to donations that a parks foundation may collect.



15.7 PARKS CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Background

According to Travis County policy,²⁸³ Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) have a value of \$5,000 or more and a lifespan of greater than one year. These projects include the costs of structures, buildings, and infrastructure as well as alterations, additions, reconstruction, and installations. TNR CIP projects include drainage, roads, bicycle lanes, sidewalks, bridges, and new parks.²⁸⁴

Standardized CIP tracking systems allow project managers to set uniform construction parameters to ensure that critical progress points are recognized and defined. These systems allow contractors and the project managers to have clear expectations that promote clear communication and increased efficiencies. They also ensure continuity of service should the need arise to shift responsibility from one project manager to another.

Findings

Public Works uses Microsoft (MS) Project, an automated tracking process to manage all of their CIPs and larger CIPs for the Parks division. However, park rangers and other park employees who are responsible for small CIP projects do not use any type of automated tracking system even though they have little or no experience managing small CIP projects.

Recommendation

Recommendation 15.7.1

Shift management of the Parks division's small Capital Improvement Projects from park employees to the Public Works division and require Public Works to use MS Project for all Park projects, large and small. The Public Works division has experience managing construction projects and infrastructure to manage both large and small CIPs, while park employees do not.

15.8 CELL PHONE AND PAGER POLICY

Background

Cellular phones and other communications tools such as pagers have become integral tools for many business and government entities. This is increasingly true for a workforce as geographically dispersed across Travis County as TNR.



Findings

During interviews, the review team found that some TNR employees do not use their County-issued phones because TNR has an unwritten policy, based loosely on Travis County policy, that does not allow employees to send text messages from County phones.²⁸⁵ The Travis County policy does not specify how phones may be used and does not explicitly prohibit texting; these policies are left up to individual departments. Travis County's policy on pagers is also broad with individual policies left to departments.

Based on December 2015 invoices, TNR uses State of Texas contracts to provide voice, text, and data service for 139 cellular lines; service for each line costs an average of \$32 per month,²⁸⁶ for a total monthly expenditure of \$4,382 or \$52,584 annually. While the average plan is \$32 per month, plans range from \$20.19 to \$80.11 after discounts and surcharges. On average, all TNR employees with cellular service used voice service very infrequently: a monthly average of 53 minutes per line, or less than three minutes per phone per workday. Even those TNR employees who utilized their cellular voice service used them only an average of 119 minutes per month or less than six minutes per workday. Employees sent a total of 35 text messages during the month from the eight lines with text bundles. During the same month, 36 phones, or 27 percent, were not used for any voice, text, or data at a monthly cost of \$1,128 or \$13,530 annually. Furthermore, most lines were only used for talk or data even when a plan was bundled or could be bundled to include multiple services.

In addition to cellular usage, TNR pays \$618.96 per month for 84 pagers. The monthly pager invoice does not show usage; therefore, it is unknown how many pagers employees actually use and how often they use them.

Recommendations

Recommendation 15.8.1

Review employee cellular and pager usage and eliminate unused County plans.

TNR management should examine employee phone and pager use. If the phones and/or pagers are not being used, the plans should be changed to meet employee needs or in some cases, eliminated. Management should switch employees from County cellular service to a cellular allowance if that better meets department needs.



Recommendation 15.8.2

Update department's cellular policy. TNR should revisit the department's cell phone policy to allow texting for certain positions to increase productivity and efficiency.

Recommendation 15.8.3

Review state cellular contracts to ensure that the County is utilizing plans at the best rate possible that meets their needs. This review should be led by the Travis County Purchasing Office.

Recommendation 15.8.4

Ensure that all County departments follow County policy in reviewing cellular usage. Each department should review their cell phone usage and policy to ensure that cell phones are in use and at the best price. According to Travis County Code § 39.038(b):

“The Official must conduct analyses of monthly rate plans to determine if County Cellular Services are enrolled in appropriate rate plans and make changes as appropriate.”²⁸⁷

15.9 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POSITION

Background

In recent decades, information technology (IT) has become increasingly important to the private sector and government entities. IT personnel provide data storage, network support, telecommunications, and software application assistance to customers and employees. Electronic communications are integral to business processes, and IT services are critical to meeting customer demands and programmatic success.

Findings

Across Texas, counties, including the four peer counties reviewed (Dallas, El Paso, and Tarrant), are moving toward centralization of IT services. Three of the four peer counties reviewed have begun centralization processes, and one plans to do so in the future. Peer counties with IT models similar to Travis County are considering centralized IT positions that are geographically located within other departments but report to Information Technology Services (ITS). This arrangement allows ITS to oversee County IT resources while allowing individual departments to have a larger role in how IT helps their individual missions.



TNR manages 17 automated systems across the department, without any dedicated IT staff. In FY 2015, TNR spent \$ 267,633 on IT.²⁸⁸ That amount does not include what is spent by ITS to support technology services it provides for TNR.

According to TNR staff, TNR has not had a dedicated IT professional since 2004. This has caused inefficient and disjointed IT-related decision making and implementation. The substantial amount spent by TNR on IT requires a person knowledgeable, dedicated, and answerable to make sure the investment is spent wisely.

TNR is the one of the largest departments in Travis County based on FTEs and budget size. In FY 2016, TNR employs 433 FTEs with an adopted budget of \$99.4 million dollars.²⁸⁹ Of the departments that report to the Travis County Commissioners Court, only Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHS and VS) has more FTEs (211), but HHS and VS has a smaller budget of \$37,166,979. Of the same departments, four (other than ITS) have dedicated IT personnel: Facilities Management Department (3), Planning and Budget Office (2), Records Management and Communications Resources (2) and HHS and VS (1).

Though Travis County ITS provides various services to TNR, these services do not meet TNR IT needs, because ITS assigns project managers by asset type and function rather than by department. For instance, ITS may have one its employees work on the TNR web site while another is working on TNR's permit tracking system. This could create inconsistencies due to a lack of ITS personnel who have a thorough understanding of the department as a whole. Moving from one project to another is frustrating for ITS staff, and working with multiple ITS staff is frustrating for TNR. Not having a position dedicated to TNR creates a situation where the needs of TNR are prioritized against other competing ITS responsibilities.

Typically, an IT business analyst position is assigned non-technical, IT-related responsibilities for a department such as tracking hardware, hardware and software purchasing, new systems review and recommendations, and hiring outside IT consultants. To compensate for the lack of a dedicated IT position in TNR, the department has assigned responsibilities to individual division heads, the chief deputy, and the Financial Services director, though IT is not the primary duty of these positions.

Performing these duties takes approximately 15 percent of work hours each for the chief deputy and the Financial Services director. For the most part, system training is presented in-house via computer-based training provided with software systems or



available online or by a user within TNR. This training is inadequate to meet current needs and is uncoordinated, leaving the burden on the individual employee to determine what training they need. Furthermore, assets acquired by TNR have not been shared across the department and there is no systematic way to do so.

Recommendation

Recommendation 15.9.1

Create an IT business analyst position reporting to ITS to coordinate IT in TNR. This position should be dedicated to TNR IT needs only and be physically located within TNR while reporting directly to ITS. The source of funding for this position has not been identified. Cost savings will be realized and could be substantial considering the amount of TNR's IT budget; savings would be realized from better coordinated efforts and increased productivity.

This recommendation may serve as a pilot program for Travis County as a step toward greater centralization of ITS.

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¹⁷⁷ City of San Antonio Ordinance #2011-12-01-0984 (2011). San Antonio's effort included consolidation of the International Building Code, International Residential Code, International Mechanical Code, International Plumbing Code, International Existing Building Code, International Fuel Gas Code, and National Electrical Code, and local amendments to each, as well as City Code chapters.

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¹⁹² Travis County Justice and Public Safety Division. *Travis County Fiscal Year 2016 Adopted Budget, Volume II: Department and Fund Summaries*. 2015: 150.

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