WRITING A SCRIPT FOR SUCCESS: Accelerating Outcomes with Advanced Analytics in Los Angeles County
We all want safe neighborhoods, good schools, and clean environments. Citizens are constantly evaluating how well their governments deliver these public services. In order to understand and meet demands, government organizations collect a vast array of information on what they do and how it works. But merely reporting these results to elected officials and the public is not the sole intention. Effective governments can use these data to make better decisions and develop strategies that will improve performance. All it takes is the right mindset, purpose, and strategy.
The Value of Performance-Based Analytics

Public agencies are no strangers to the value of data. But the digital age has upped the ante. Analytics are redefining performance norms, and government is taking notice. Social services agencies can now glean new insights from data and use them to fundamentally transform the relationship between workers and their tasks, between workers and their clients, and between clients and the services they receive.

Law enforcement agencies, for example, have already effectively implemented performance-based analytics models in their own operations. They use comparative statistics to identify spikes in crimes, allowing ranking officers to address those spikes through targeted enforcement. These statistics measure the effectiveness of efforts to reduce crime and pinpoint areas that need improvement when crime increases. In using this analytics approach, for example, the New York City Police Department, through its COMPSTAT initiative, successfully drove down crime to levels not seen in decades.

There is no doubt these results are impressive. But can its success extend to social services?

Case in Point: Los Angeles County

With a workforce of more than 14,000 employees, the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) serves an ethnically and culturally diverse population of more than ten million people, or three out of every ten Los Angeles County residents. It is one of the first organizations to use a performance-based analytics model in a social services environment. Known as DPSSTATS, the system uses modern analytics technology and processes to help the county manage the increasing complexity of public assistance and employment programs more efficiently.

The DPSS is responsible for administering public aid programs that help alleviate hardship, promote health and personal responsibility, and advance the economic independence of county residents. And while it has invested in a number of initiatives over the last decade to improve its performance measurement techniques, collaboration and consistency in monitoring results across departments remained a challenge.

The department’s existing technology lacked standard operating processes, relying instead on a manual process for managing data. Not only was it prone to human error, but it also presented inconsistent metric definitions. This cumbersome process resulted in three-month-old reports with little to no insights into root cause issues, limiting the department’s ability to make effective and informed decisions in a timely manner. For those depending on welfare to support their livelihoods, any delays or uncertainty proved onerous.

The Power of Data-Driven Insights

The department recognized that it needed to improve the timeliness and accuracy of its determinations. But ensuring efficient and effective welfare administration depended on accurate and comprehensive data and the ability to capture detailed insights. So it partnered with Accenture to apply a performance-based analytics model and to develop a customized eligibility system that integrates the functionalities of multiple disparate legacy systems into a single data repository. The Business Intelligence Platform automatically consumes all shared welfare data, determines benefit eligibility, and delivers timely and actionable information about the state of DPSS welfare programs for executive leadership and key managers across the county to review.

With a new data mindset, the department used the Business Intelligence Platform to move beyond compliance to uncover analytics insights faster. This approach improves decision-making processes through prioritized actions, aligns valuable resources to actual results, and measures performance for speedier outcomes. It also reduces the implementation costs of...
managing different technologies and capabilities across multiple platforms. The platform is structured to collect and process large amounts of data on the two million welfare cases in the County of Los Angeles. And it has the capacity to grow by three times its current size. But the most significant accomplishments are the availability and accessibility to real-time comprehensive data:

- Multiple visualizations and scenarios turn data into digestible insights for county employees;
- Cross-program data provide a complete picture of a person’s situation from a single access point; and
- Real-time operational and programmatic data help the county manage its caseloads while supporting the entire organization’s business.

In essence, this data analysis drives forward organizational efficiencies that inform better decision-making and targeted efforts for improved performance. And yet, too few of the nation’s social services and welfare agencies today are actively capitalizing on data-driven insights.

### The Impact of Informed Decision-Making

Most DPSS programs are mandated by federal and state laws to serve low-income individuals and families with nutrition assistance, free and low-cost health care programs, and temporary financial assistance and employment services. With improved data processes and timeliness, the department can make quick, informed decisions that help ensure the continued delivery of high-quality, effective welfare programs.

For example, CalFresh applications are federally mandated to be processed within 30 days. But in emergency situations, a household may receive benefits within three days after the date of their CalFresh application and, if possible, be issued expedited

to improve usability. By creating a consistent look and feel, the department was able to generate interactive reports and dashboards that are accessible and usable at all levels of the organization—from the clerk and caseworker to executive management. And because of the platform’s flexible capabilities, users can view the appropriate level of detail relevant to their operations.

### The Promise of Business Intelligence in Service Delivery

The Business Intelligence Platform has greatly improved the efficiency of internal management processes within the DPSS. The availability and accessibility to real-time, comprehensive data provide the department and its leadership with the performance

New operational capabilities and capacities make the county’s application process management more proactive rather than reactive. The ability to share data and actionable insights allows DPSS to embrace collaboration and new opportunities for improved service delivery. The platform turns the attention away from the mechanisms of data and offers a more productive management process that eases employee frustrations with data compilation and allows them to focus more of their resources on program outcomes.

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CalFresh benefits on the day an application is submitted. However, for any given month, the DPSS could only measure itself against the target goal at the end of each month. With the Business Intelligence Platform and the availability of real-time operational data, the department is better positioned to monitor month-to-date application timeliness so that it can ensure expedited processing and adjust its operations accordingly.

More reliable and timely data also support the processing of Medi-Cal applications. Thanks to the platform’s new capabilities, the department can now more effectively manage and monitor applications to keep up with open enrollment influxes and help ensure people get quick and simple access to health coverage.

The platform also adopted a “one report, many users” design philosophy insights they need to make the most informed decisions about improvement strategies and policies as quickly as possible. This initial version also lays the framework for future use of analytics, which will further increase the department’s ability to provide quality public service.

But for now, the innovative digital platform enables organizations, continuously and proactively, to share data insights across the entire social services ecosystem. It supports future expansion of the program to other counties in California.

Constantly monitoring and enhancing the platform is crucial to serving a population that depends so urgently on services that support their livelihoods. And using data-driven insights through analytics is the key to improving service delivery and outcomes for citizens.