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The Case for increased cross-agency data sharing in the State of Nevada

Richard Entringer
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Tina Jara
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Alysia Peters
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Steve Price
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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“The Case for Increased Cross-Agency Data Sharing in the State of Nevada”

Richard Entringer, Tina Jara, Alysia Peters, Steve Price

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

PUA 791 – MPA Group Projects

Final Paper

Dr. Christopher Stream

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Executive Summary

Statistical evidence regarding Nevada’s public education system and workforce engagement levels for youth ages 18-24, finds Nevada last in many positive indicators, and first in several other negative indicators: A July 2010 survey conducted by CNBC ranked Nevada 35th in the nation for its quality of life.¹ Consider these sobering socioeconomic statements:

- Nevada has the highest high school dropout rate in the nation.²
- Each dropout over his or her lifetime costs the nation approximately \$260,000.³
- 90% of Nevada youth will not complete a higher education degree in four years.⁴
- Nevada is 49th in the nation for citizens who possess a two or four-year degree.⁵
- Nevada’s unemployment rate, in July 2010, was 14.2 percent – the highest in the nation.⁶
- Nevada has the highest personal bankruptcy rate in the nation.⁷
- Nevada has the highest foreclosure rate in the nation.⁸

Throughout group discussions with *Ready for Life*, it became clear that the organization’s goal to remove non-academic barriers to student success was being significantly hindered due to a lack of interagency communication between the various governmental entities serving Nevada’s youth. In considering this policy problem, our analysis sought to recommend “*What strategy(s) can be utilized to best support Ready for Life’s mission as an intermediary organization in breaking down the non-academic barriers to student success?*” Following

¹ America's Top States for Business 09'. (2009). *CNBC*, www.cnbc.com/id/31765926.

² Nevada Public Education Foundation, NPEF Annual Report 2007

³ Nevada Public Education Foundation, NPEF Annual Report 2007

⁴ Nevada Public Education Foundation, Marketing Brochure “It Matters” (page 2).

⁵ Is Nevada’s education system underfunded?. (October 2009). *Nevada Business Magazine*, <http://www.nevadabusiness.com/issue/1009/27/2119>.

⁶ O’Driscoll, B. (July 19, 2010). Record: Nevada unemployment rate 14.2 percent. *Reno Gazette Journal*, <http://www.rgj.com/article/20100719/BIZ/100719002/1071/biz>.

⁷ Metzger, T. (January 27, 2010). Nevada surpasses Tennessee as highest per capita bankruptcy state. *Fox Business*, www.foxbusiness.com/personal-finance/2010/01/07/nevada-surpasses-tennessee-highest-capita-bankruptcy-state/.

⁸ The Nevada housing market’s troubles continue. (n.d.). *Nevada Homes Foreclosures*. <http://www.nevahomesforeclosures.com/>.

significant research in the realm of increasing high school graduation rates and the overarching issue of limited communication occurring between youth serving governmental entities, *cross-agency data sharing* became the strategy of focus in offering the greatest efficiency measures and highest potential to be successfully implemented in the State of Nevada.

While this strategy is still fairly young in terms of implementation, a national trend towards increased cross-agency data sharing has been building momentum since the mid-to-late 1990's. Along those same lines, it is important to note that cross-agency data sharing is currently happening in Nevada, but to a very limited degree. Furthermore, given the rather short timeframe since this strategy's inception, quantitative research is still relatively restricted on this subject matter. The data collection and methodology primarily utilized in the process of this analysis included an in-depth literature review of academic articles, *Ready for Life* reports, NPRO and NGO publications, case studies (State of Florida and State of Nevada data sharing projects) and informal interviews along with questionnaires on both the educational and data sharing fronts in Nevada (Dr. Henry of Clark County School District Adult Education, Shannon West of Homeless Information Management Systems, and Paul Bowen of State of Nevada UNITY Database).

Our research revealed that with approximately 98,784 children living in poverty in the State of Nevada and many of these children and their families requiring high levels of government assistance, increased cross-agency data sharing would allow for the public service providers to more holistically serve these children.⁹ Also with this increased access to vital information across agency boundaries, *Ready for Life* could significantly increase its capacity to identify client needs and gain statistical support for its mission. Moreover, it's important to

⁹ CLASP, "Child Welfare in Nevada" (2010), <http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/state-data-repository/cwf/2010/child-welfare-financing-nevada-2010.pdf>.

mention that the potential technical, organizational, and political benefits associated with cross-agency data sharing have wide reaching, positive effects on all involved parties. Some important benefits to mention include reducing data processing costs, increasing quality of services, and garnering greater public accountability.¹⁰

However, like any change in existing status quo policies, increased data sharing brings with it new challenges and barriers or can amplify existing challenges. Potential challenges include the fact that “technology and data-sharing cannot solve integration problems alone, management and policy interoperability must also be in place” and furthermore, “only legislators and government policy-makers have the power to alleviate key constraints to sustainable information integration strategies.”¹¹ However, the benefits of increased government efficiency and effectiveness that data sharing provides clearly outweigh these challenges but the ever-present risk averse political environment maintains that change is a negative occurrence. Therefore, incremental changes in public policy require support from independent research.

Accordingly the group’s recommendations are for Ready for Life are: 1) Approach the Nevada legislature and garner political support to begin a *Strategic Needs Assessment* of statewide cross-agency data sharing which includes: cost-benefit analysis, technological requirements, risk assessment, and project management breakdown (i.e. State of Florida ‘Children and Youth Cabinet Data Sharing Initiative’) and 2) Conduct further research on the tangible benefits of cross-agency data sharing for graduating/reconnecting Nevada’s youth.¹²

¹⁰ Pardo, T. A., Gil-Garcia, J. R., & Burke, G. B. (2008). Sustainable Cross-Boundary Information Sharing. *Digital Government E-Government: Research, Case Studies, and Implementation* (17 ed., pp. 421-438), <https://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/bookchapter/sustainable/sustainable.pdf>.

¹¹ Pardo, T. A., Gil-Garcia, J. R., & Burke, G. B. (2008). Sustainable Cross-Boundary Information Sharing. *Digital Government E-Government: Research, Case Studies, and Implementation* (17 ed., pp. 421-438), <https://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/bookchapter/sustainable/sustainable.pdf>.

¹² Children and Youth Cabinet Project Charter for Children and Youth Cabinet Data Sharing Initiative for FY 2009-10, State of Florida, <http://www.flgov.com/pdfs/ChildAdvocacy/cycprojectcharterfinaljuly31.pdf>.

Purpose & Focus of Research

The purpose of our paper is to act in a research capacity to assist *Ready for Life* in identifying cost effective strategies which will aid in achieving in their organizational mission and goals in the reduction of Nevada's dismissal high school dropout rate. In studying this purpose, our group considered who *Ready for Life* is, and what it is they do as an agency, in answering our research question: "*What strategy(s) can be utilized to best support Ready for Life's mission as an intermediary organization in breaking down the non-academic barriers to student success*"? We understood that our research would be limited by the rather broad scope of the subject matter, but that even one sound strategy could provide a valuable perspective for the client to potentially submit to policymakers, or act as a "spring board" for future research projects. It is our intention that this paper will increase public interest in the work of *Ready for Life* and increase public and private participation in Nevada's educational future.

The focus of this paper is to identify a strategy or strategies that can increase Ready for Life's core values and organizational mission capacity. The selected focus strategy is increasing cross-agency data sharing, a policy not only successfully being utilized in Nevada through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), but through the award winning Unified Nevada Information Technology for Youth (UNITY) data sharing system. In addition to current Nevada data sharing platforms, our group focused on the State of Florida's Automated Community/Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency (ACCESS Florida) and how the advantages of data integration outweighed the obstacles. Using the examples of four Nevada agencies that do not currently share information as a "current system", our research was focused

was on how those agencies (through legislation or a memorandum of understanding), may be able to implement an “ideal system” of cross-agency data sharing.

Organizational Background

Ready for Life:

In 1991, the Nevada State Legislature recognized the need to improve the state of public education in Nevada, and increase the population of “ready for life” youth, which led to the creation of the Nevada Public Education Foundation (NPEF). NPEF was charged with the mission to “secure and sustain resources that will assist, support and promote excellence in public education programs in Nevada.”¹³ In further realizing the need to remediate unacceptable educational trends, in 2005, NPEF launched *Ready for Life* “a collaborative cross-agency effort to improve Nevada’s success at engaging and graduating “ready for life” students and reengaging those who prematurely left school.”¹⁴ The effort was founded on the groundbreaking “*Connected by 25*” research conducted at Stanford University. The research established that “disconnected” youth without meaningful ties to school or work by the time that they were of age 25, would most likely remain “disconnected” throughout their adult lives, placing a significant financial burden to society.¹⁵ Operating under the auspices of the Nevada Public Education Foundation, *Ready for Life* serves as an intermediary organization, which seeks to cultivate educational resources, remove non-academic barriers, and seek out the best practice strategies for making recommendations in the formulation of public policy.

Educational Environment

State of Nevada Public Education System:

¹³ About Nevada Public Education Foundation. (2008). *Nevada Public Education Foundation*, <http://www.nvpef.org/about.php>.

¹⁴ Ready For Life . (2008). *Nevada Public Education Foundation.*, <http://www.nvpef.org/ready.php>.

¹⁵ YTFG, “Connected by 25: Effective Policy Solutions for Vulnerable Youth” (2010), <http://www.ytfgconnectedby25.org/YTFGConnectedby25FullIssueBriefApril2010.pdf>.

The State of Nevada's public education system can be best understood as "a trinity: Clark, with 70 percent of students; Washoe, with 16 percent; and the rest of the districts, with 14 percent." Furthermore, Nevada experienced a 188 percent student enrollment jump between 1970 and 2000, with many being impoverished and non-native speaking students.¹⁶ Thus, while Clark County would grow to become the nation's fifth largest school district, the State of Nevada would mightily struggle to meet the provisions of national education standards. Sadly, despite the enactment of several educational accountability policies at the state level over the past several decades, little has served in curbing Nevada's sinking graduation rates. According to a June 2010 publication by the Nevada Policy Research Institute, "Sobering data from the *National Center for Education Statistics* puts the "Average Freshman Graduation Rate" in Nevada at 51.3 percent for the 2007-08 school year – worst in the nation and 23.6 points lower than the national average."¹⁷

Literature Review

Cross-Agency Data Sharing:

Cross-agency data sharing has been taking place at the government level since the mid-to-late 1990's, with the federal government considered an early adopter of this technology. However, the greater need for "information sharing between government agencies [was] highlighted in the post-9/11 scrutiny of terrorism events." Traditionally, cross-agency data sharing has been utilized in a very limited manner, on a case by case basis, particularly in the health and law enforcements arenas.¹⁸ Today, the application of this technology is much more

¹⁶ McRobbie, J., & Makkonen, R. (June 2005). Student Achievement and Graduation Rates in Nevada: Urgent Need for Faster Improvement. *WestEd.org*, www.wested.org/online_pubs/NevadaReport.pdf.

¹⁷ Gibbons, P. R. (June 9, 2010). Graduation time: Hold the celebration. *Nevada Policy Research Institute*, <http://www.npri.org/publications/graduation-time-hold-the-celebration>.

¹⁸ Atabakhsh, H., Larson, C., Petersen, T., Violette, C., & Chen, H. (2001). Information Sharing and Collaboration Policies within Government Agencies. *Intelligence and Security Informatics* (pp. 467-475). Tucson: Springer Berlin/Heidelberg.

sophisticated and requires comprehensive implementation to serve overarching societal needs. According to Bajaj & Ram, “Recently, there has been increased interest in information sharing among government agencies, with a view toward improving security, reducing costs and offering better quality service to users of government services.”¹⁹

In 2009 alone, the U.S. Congress authorized \$250,000,000 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to fund “the integration of state data on children and youth in education systems.”²⁰ The *Data Quality Campaign* solely operates to “improve the availability and use of high-quality education data to improve student outcomes,” and found that in 2009-10, the State of Nevada has only met one of the ten action steps needed to properly integrate a student data information system.²¹ However, it’s important to note while many of the original technical barriers have been overcome in recent years, the cross-agency data sharing implementation process faces “political and social barriers [that] are far and away the greater obstacles to overcome.”²² Given the customary political opposition to change of any sort and continuing social concerns on issue of privacy – data sharing continues to evolve in a rather patchwork fashion on various governmental levels, in and between some agencies and not others.

On the subject of barriers to data sharing, Pardo, Gil-Garcia, and Burke (2008) found that “research and practical experience tell us that technology alone cannot solve information integration problems.” They go on to explain, “The difficulty of this task boils down to the ability of a cross-agency group to resolve conflict among organizations and make decisions and

¹⁹ Bajaj, A., & Ram, S. (2003). IAIS: A Methodology to Enable Inter-Agency Information Sharing in Government. *Journal of Database Management*, 14(4), 59-80, <http://nfp.cba.utulsa.edu/bajaja/MyInfo/journalpubs/JDMI AIS.pdf>.

²⁰ Interagency Data Sharing: Improving Outcomes for Youth. (n.d.). *Forum for Youth Investment*, www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/files/Data_Statement_Nov_2009.pdf

²¹ Building and Using Data Systems: Nevada. (n.d.). *Data Quality Campaign*, <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/survey/states/NV>.

²² Atabakhsh, H., Larson, C., Petersen, T., Violette, C., & Chen, H. (2001). Information Sharing and Collaboration Policies within Government Agencies. *Intelligence and Security Informatics* (pp. 467-475). Tucson: Springer Berlin/Heidelberg.

mobilize organizational resources across intergovernmental boundaries.”²³ Making all of the working parts of data-sharing move involves several important factors: interoperability between agencies, a change in old work models, political buy-in/support, and both tangible and non-tangible capacity building.²⁴ However, interoperability may be one of the most important factors and yet, it is also the most misunderstood. Landsbergen and Wolken (1998) characterize interoperability as more than “strictly a technical problem” but the actual sharing of information, and should be developed accordingly.²⁵

Alternatively, establishing strong interagency agreements is equally central to the implementation of cross-agency data sharing – whether through an MOU or state statute. However, it is important to note that in case studies conducted in law enforcement and health care fields, interagency agreements were found to be time-consuming and took in excess of six months to fully implement.²⁶ Nonetheless, it is imperative to recognize that despite the aforementioned barriers to cross-agency data sharing “information is one of the most vital resources in government [and] government managers are finding that the information needed to plan, make decisions, and act is often held outside their organizations.”²⁷ Bajaj and Ram (2003) provided several practical examples of cross-agency data sharing which include “allowing

²³ Pardo, T. A., Gil-Garcia, J. R., & Burke, G. B. (2008). Sustainable Cross-Boundary Information Sharing. *Digital Government E-Government: Research, Case Studies, and Implementation* (17 ed., pp. 421-438), <https://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/bookchapter/sustainable/sustainable.pdf>.

²⁴ Pardo, T. A., Gil-Garcia, J. R., & Burke, G. B. (2008). Sustainable Cross-Boundary Information Sharing. *Digital Government E-Government: Research, Case Studies, and Implementation* (17 ed., pp. 421-438), <https://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/bookchapter/sustainable/sustainable.pdf>.

²⁵ Landsbergen, D., & Wolken, G. (1998, August 12). Eliminating Legal and Policy Barriers to Interoperable Government Systems. *Ohio Supercomputer Center*, www.osc.edu/press/releases/1998/phase_2_Recommendations.pdf.

²⁶ Atabakhsh, H., Larson, C., Petersen, T., Violette, C., & Chen, H. (2001). Information Sharing and Collaboration Policies within Government Agencies. *Intelligence and Security Informatics* (pp. 467-475). Tuson: Springer Berlin/Heidelberg.

²⁷ Pardo, T. A., Gil-Garcia, J. R., & Burke, G. B. (2008). Sustainable Cross-Boundary Information Sharing. *Digital Government E-Government: Research, Case Studies, and Implementation* (17 ed., pp. 421-438), <https://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/bookchapter/sustainable/sustainable.pdf>.

agencies to share geographic information systems (GIS) information [to] improve the quality of customer service afforded to end-users of these services.”²⁸

Finally, Pardo, Gil-Garcia, and Burke (2008) more broadly detailed the benefits of data sharing under the three general categories of technical, organizational, and political. Technically speaking “information integration reduces duplicate data collection, processing, and storage,” organizationally it means “improving the decision making process, broadening professional networks, and reducing costs,” and politically it translates into “better appreciation for government-wide policy goals and more public accountability.”²⁹ Given the various challenges and the presently known benefits of the strategy discussed in this review, current literature most pointedly reveals that cross-agency data sharing is the future of our government dealings and the challenges can and will be overcome in due time.

Data & Methodology

The data collection and methodology utilized in the process of this analysis included an in-depth literature review of academic articles, *Ready for Life* reports, NPRO and NGO publications. In addition, two case studies of current State of Nevada and State of Florida data-sharing platforms were employed to gain quantitative data on the various aspects of data sharing adoption and implementation processes. Finally, two interviews (one in-person, one internet-based) were conducted with government personnel, and sought to gather qualitative information on practitioner perspectives/experiences of the advantages and obstacles associated with cross-agency data sharing. The third and final interview was conducted with a Clark County official to discuss the current public education environment in Nevada.

²⁸ Bajaj, A., & Ram, S. (2003). IAIS: A Methodology to Enable Inter-Agency Information Sharing in Government. *Journal of Database Management*, 14(4), 59-80, <http://nfp.cba.utulsa.edu/bajaja/MyInfo/journalpubs/JDMI AIS.pdf>.

²⁹ Pardo, T. A., Gil-Garcia, J. R., & Burke, G. B. (2008). Sustainable Cross-Boundary Information Sharing. *Digital Government E-Government: Research, Case Studies, and Implementation* (17 ed., pp. 421-438), <https://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/bookchapter/sustainable/sustainable.pdf>.

Data & Methodology

Literature Review	Case Studies	Interviews/Questionnaires	Current vs. Ideal System
Academic Articles	State of Florida, Children and Youth Cabinet Sharing Initiative	Michelle Fuller-Hallauer Continuum Care Coordinator, Southern Nevada Regional Planning Coalition, Committee of Homelessness	Department of Family Services
NPRO's and NGO's Publications	State of Nevada, Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS)	Paul Bowen IT Manager, State of Nevada, Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services	Department of Juvenile Services
Ready for Life Reports		Dr. Robert Henry Director, Adult Education Clark County School District	Department of Health and Human Services
			Clark County School District

Analysis

A three-stage analysis was utilized in assessing the value of cross-agency data sharing. The first stage analyzed the advantages versus the outcomes of data sharing. The second stage analyzed a “current” system against an “ideal” system. The third stage was an analysis of three informal interviews conducted with Clark County officials on both issues of public education and data sharing in the State of Nevada. A longitudinal analysis was considered and later dismissed due to the absence of available historical cross-agency data sharing research. Furthermore, while advantages to cross-agency data sharing are highly relevant to an agency such as *Ready for Life*, quantitatively measuring advantages were difficult, particularly in monetary “costs versus benefits” terms. The adaptation from “costs” to “advantages” made analytic sense, as did shifting “benefits” to “outcomes” as the establishment of commensurability between the trade-offs with cross-agency data sharing are not often monetarily tangible.

The State of Florida attempted to measure the benefits of cross-agency data sharing from a cost versus benefits approach only to discover that while the \$2.2 million dollars in implementation costs were easily measured, the associated benefits could not effectively be

measured in monetary terms against the costs.³⁰ In addition, cross-agency data sharing simply does not follow the rules of formal policy analysis due to the inverse relationships of analysis variables, e.g. it becomes an exercise of benefits and obstacles whereas the benefits clearly permit agencies and their clients efficient access to all relevant data while the obstacles remain the status quo. Notable examples of status quo obstacles are: 1) Resistance to changing old work models, 2) Only politicians have the power to legislate data sharing policy (politics matter), 3) Lines of authority, conflict, and collaboration can be blurred between agencies (competition matters), 4) Demands on funding levels to pay for data-integration, 5) Agencies that once held other agencies irrelevant must now understand the other agency's mission (collaboration matters). In many of the cases observed in the research, any and all of these common obstacles can offer significant setbacks when deciding upon data integration policy, in turn truly revealing the case by case nature of data sharing analysis.

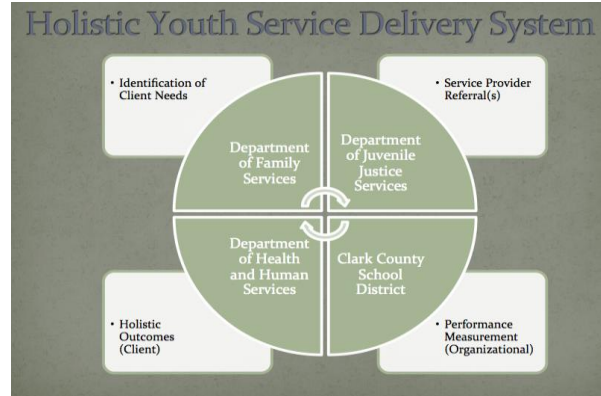
Realizing that the aforementioned obstacles play a significant role in preventing holistic cross-agency data sharing, the group decided to approach the analysis from the perspective of the “current system” versus the “ideal system” through a practitioner’s perspective of how things are versus how they should be. The current system example consists of four agency’s current communication structures, which reflects the absence of cross-agency data integration as is shown in “Figure A”.

³⁰ Children and Youth Cabinet Project Charter for Children and Youth Cabinet Data Sharing Initiative for FY 2009-10, State of Florida, <http://www.flgov.com/pdfs/ChildAdvocacy/cycprojectcharterfinaljuly31.pdf>.

Figure A.



Figure B.



In “Figure A” no one agency currently shares or integrates information with any other illustrated agencies. The unfortunate outcome is that even though one agency may expend considerable amounts of time and effort obtaining information on a client, another agency serving the same client could be expending similar and often replicate amounts of time and effort in performing that same function by another agency. This is not only a waste of personnel time and efforts, but also a waste of organizational resources.

“Figure B” illustrates the “ideal system” where data is not only shared and accessible to each agency, but that the holistic system better identifies client needs, costs, status, course, and history. Organizational performance measurement in the “ideal system” provides for staff and client input, establishes key benchmarks (current performances and future data integration research) while comparing efficiency and effectiveness before and after implementation.

Unique obstacles also exist when integration and agency data sharing involves privacy issues particularly in dealing with schools, social services, healthcare, and juvenile justice. Florida’s Automated Community Connection Economic Self Sufficiency (ACCESS Florida) addressed HIPPA and confidentiality issues through data security layers.³¹ ACCESS Florida

³¹ Lewis, Nathan. (November 4-6, 2009). ACCESS Florida. *National Children's Health Insurance Summit*. Lecture conducted from Center's for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Chicago.

offered the “ideal system” analysis a noteworthy dimension in that while the state or county benefits from the increased data sharing, it is the customer empowerment aspect of the program which truly reflects the holistic ideal system. For example, customers are not only electronically informed of their application status, but are further assisted through the automated identification program. This helps pinpoint those programs that the customer may be eligible for and subsequently “flags” that customer’s file for notice to be sent out. In addition, other intermediary agencies and non profits are able to monitor their involvement with public agencies and identify where they can provide services through group data mining and even individual application assistance. Both providers and clients have comparable tiered level access through the “Access My Account” data sharing forum. Even in the wake of nearly 50% staffing and office space reductions, one program’s retention rate was estimated to have increased from 60% to 80% as a result of increased program eligibility identification through ACCESS Florida.³²

The identification of a Nevada public agency which has successfully addressed many of those issues, while successfully implementing data sharing policy was instrumental in understanding how a holistic “ideal system” may work in Nevada. Results from three informal interviews with Clark County, NV public officials were studied in the analysis. Michele Fuller of the Southern Nevada Coalition on Homelessness, who has been utilizing the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) a cross-agency data sharing system since 2000, felt that in her agency the obstacles were minimal while advantages were numerous. Mrs. Fuller added that in order to maximize the benefits of data sharing, flexible software must be carefully selected along with a competent and knowledgeable program administrator. Moreover, high

³² Lewis, Nathan. (November 4-6, 2009). ACCESS Florida. *National Children's Health Insurance Summit*. Lecture conducted from Center's for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Chicago.

speed/capacity compatible hardware optimizes the selected software, as well as mandatory training for all users.

Dr. Robert Henry, Director of Clark County Adult Education, was more cautious with his assessment of how cross-agency data sharing may assist in the pursuit of high school dropout reconnection. Dr. Henry felt it would do very little as if the person is already disconnected from school, usually their family, and social services. Jennifer Ouellette, *Ready for Life* consultant, has a more optimistic assessment. Ms. Ouellette explained that having a cross-agency data sharing system would allow the organizations that *Ready for Life* convenes with to more quickly identify a child's needs and allow for proper intervention before that child drops out of school. She further cited that it would paint a more complete picture when looking at child and recognizing the barriers that are inhibiting him or her to succeed in school (foster care, juvenile justice, etc.) and having the proper resources in place to overcome those barriers.

A questionnaire to Paul Bowen with the State of Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services was returned showing positive feedback on his agency's data sharing with seven other health and human service agencies. Mr. Bowen expressed that while there were no negative technical aspects of his agency's data integration; time, money and staffing resources were identified as barriers to achieving ideal levels of cross-agency data sharing. Political (more accurately defined as collaboration) deficiencies were also identified by Mr. Bowen.

The three-step analysis supported the premise that while increased cross-agency data sharing clearly offers some distinct efficiency advantages over the status quo, obstacles still present themselves to the policymaker when shepherding increased data sharing in the public sector. Obstacles may not be realistically justifiable by opponents to data sharing in today's

electronic information age (with increased levels of security) but agencies, and individual policymakers are both risk adverse and resistant to change. Obstacles, whether real or perceived, can lead to objections for a requesting agency or agencies and it become incumbent for the agency or agencies to foresee and overcome those objections when approaching policymakers for increased data sharing legislation. All in all, this analysis concludes that increased cross-agency data sharing lends itself to be one cost effective and efficient strategy that well serves the intermediary mission of organizations such as *Ready for Life*.

Findings & Limitations

The three step analysis supported the idea that increased cross-agency data sharing would increase high school dropout and reconnection agencies in better identifying relevant data and information utilized in high school dropout prevention and reconnection strategies. A rule of promoting policy, services, or programs is that if the product more than pays for itself, then it should hold serious consideration. Very rarely are policymakers given the opportunity to consider a change in public policy that more than pays for itself. Given that the HMIS program is estimated, by Michele Fuller, to do just that at least 5 times over and Florida's claim that their data sharing initiative paid for itself nearly 40 times over – Nevada policymakers should strongly consider legislative action that increases cross-agency data sharing statewide.³³ In addition, there is the issue of lost federal dollars for non-compliant data sharing states.

However, it is important to note the limitations that were observed when attempting to quantitatively identify what level of increased high school graduation rate(s) could be expected through increased data integration, particularly in the State of Nevada. The *Florida Children and Youth Cabinet Project Charter for Children and Youth Data Sharing Initiative* provided a good

³³ Lewis, Nathan. (November 4-6, 2009). ACCESS Florida. *National Children's Health Insurance Summit*. Lecture conducted from Center's for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Chicago.

example of quantitative data sharing encountering challenges when assessing the *Costs-Benefits Analysis Results*. While the costs of the project was quantitatively measurable at \$2,676,910, the benefits claimed in the amount of \$47,997,198 were more qualitative in nature, acknowledging the intangibility of the benefits metrics, e.g.:³⁴

- “DCF: Quicker access to consistent information - benefits are intangible”
- “DJJ: Children and Youth Cabinet Data System has the *potential* of increasing the *effectiveness* of the Department’s Operation.”
- “DOE: Consolidating related data functions greatly *facilitates coordination*”.
- “GAL: Our case coordinators will be more *efficient* will be more *efficient*.”
- “AWI: Data sharing capabilities provide a variety of *benefits... reduction in payment errors, improved case management, and reduced time to process cases.*

The Florida Data Sharing Initiative’s claim of a net return on investment of \$44,320,288 is more likely than not true (although the amount is highly disputable), policymakers require more tangible findings from which to base substantial investments.

These findings stress the importance for a longitudinal analysis of an agency’s actual costs versus its actual benefits (tangible or not) in the solicitation of policymakers for increased cross-agency data sharing. Relaying that this strategy “makes logical sense” may persuade some policymakers, while others will seek greater empirical evidence in supporting their decision to invest significant funding at a time of continued fiscal shortfalls. And while the SNPRC data sharing initiative clearly gives Nevada an example of a working data sharing initiative in actions, limitations were observed in the nature of cross-agency relationships, in that HMIS, primarily serves one State agency who shares information with other non-profit agencies. The obstacles

³⁴ Children and Youth Cabinet Project Charter for Children and Youth Cabinet Data Sharing Initiative for FY 2009-10, State of Florida, <http://www.flgov.com/pdfs/ChildAdvocacy/cycprojectcharterfinaljuly31.pdf>.

identified in the analysis while not affirmative in the HMIS case, may very well expose unforeseen intra-state cross-agency data sharing obstacles which translate into highly intangible expenditures (not necessarily on a monetary level).

Agency collaboration, understandings of authority, security access, client agreements, compliance monitoring, and performance measuring, bring many of these unforeseen and “hidden” costs to light, justifying the advantages versus obstacles approach of our analysis rather than a costs versus benefits approach. Due to the infancy of cross-agency data sharing initiatives, it remains challenging to connect supportive finding strictly from a cost versus benefit perspective. Regardless of the limitations and complexity in financially supporting the argument that increased cross-agency data sharing is a sound investment for Nevada, the down turn in the economy and a weakening tax base increases reliance on federal funding; and many federal grants require mandated cross-agency data sharing to states receiving federal aid. These grant funding mandates for data sharing offer sufficient incentives for state policymakers to investigate (and approve) data integration policy, but significant political obstacles remain in Nevada, who currently ranks last in federal stimulus funding.

In the case of in “*Race to the Top*”, Nevada lost out on what would be its portion of \$175,000,000 of educational stimulus dollars.³⁵ The awards were based on four (4) criteria and were largely awarded on a basis of a state’s willingness to implement genuine (educational) reform. One of the four highly weighted criteria called for proposed a strategic and performance measurement plan, addressing status quo and new criteria in measuring human capital. Complimentary to the plan is the state(s) ability to prove that an effective data sharing structure would be in place to help facilitate reform and measure outcomes. Our findings support the

³⁵ Martinez, M. (July 27, 2010). Nevada schools lose out on \$175M in federal funding. *Reno Gazette Journal*, www.rgj.com/article/20100727/NEWS02/100727021/Nevada-schools-lose-out-on-175M-in-federal-funding.

rationale that investing a comparable amount of funding that Florida invested (\$2-3 million) in performance measurement and incorporating cross-agency data sharing could have made the difference in Nevada securing its fair share of *Race to the Top* funding. Nevada, who currently ranks 51st in education could have inarguably used the *Race to the Top* revenue, and potentially utilized those funds to facilitate increased data sharing.³⁶ Increased cross-agency data sharing would not only greatly serve an agency such as *Ready for Life* but it could also help State of Nevada grant writers better secure federal education funding for Nevada.

Due to time and access constraints, we were unable to survey individual clients on their sentiments and perspectives as to how cross-agency data sharing may serve them, and how they viewed the subject in regards to their own personal information. Duly noted is that individuals (not only agencies) value limited access to their personal information and remain vigilant in protecting against today's increased risks of personal information falling into the wrong hands. A performance measurement system could involve client/citizen focus groups in addressing and recommending how these concerns will be addressed and explain security safeguards that will be implemented to protect the public.

Recommendations

In concluding our analysis of 'Cross-Agency Data Sharing,' we recommend the following to *Ready for Life* in the pursuance of the researched strategy:

Recommendation #1:

Ready for Life needs to approach the Nevada State Legislature and garner political support to begin a *Strategic Needs Assessment* of statewide cross-agency data sharing which includes: cost-benefit analysis, technological requirements, risk assessment, and

³⁶ Nevada Ranks at Bottom of the List for High School Graduates. (June 16, 2010). *KLAS-TV*, <http://www.8newsnow.com/global/story.asp?s=12659828>.

project management breakdown (i.e. State of Florida, ‘Children and Youth Cabinet Data Sharing Initiative’).³⁷

Explanation: The State of Florida conducted a very systematic and in-depth *Strategic Needs Assessment* before implementing their data-sharing initiative. In order for the State of Nevada to move forward with this strategy, a comprehensive understanding of the true need of its implementation in our state, the associated costs, technological requirements, and the agencies to be involved is required. However, it’s also important to note that this strategy is currently unfolding in and between various governmental agencies in our state and given national trends, it will be only a matter of time and of course, resources before it’s implemented across-the-board at the state level. Nevada should be prepared in this realization and begin the proposed *Strategic Needs Assessment* sooner rather than later.

Recommendation #2:

Ready for Life should conduct further research on the tangible benefits of cross-agency data sharing on graduating/reconnecting Nevada’s youth.

Explanation: Due to both time constraints and the limited research available, our group could not identify the specific benefits that cross-agency data sharing would have on increasing the dropout/reconnection rates of high school students in Nevada. *Ready for Life* should undertake further research on this matter to be most prominently positioned in justifying and advocating for implementation of this strategy at the Nevada State Legislature on their organization’s behalf.

³⁷ Children and Youth Cabinet Project Charter for Children and Youth Cabinet Data Sharing Initiative for FY 2009-10, State of Florida, <http://www.flgov.com/pdfs/ChildAdvocacy/cycprojectcharterfinaljuly31.pdf>.

Conclusion

The Great recession of 2008/2009 has created a “perfect storm” of statewide fiscal crisis across America. Nevada, one of the fastest growing states from 2000 to 2007 has a linear fiscal policy which relies on a one dimensional economy, tourism and gaming. Never before has Nevada found itself having to fund such high levels of social services and public education with a looming three billion dollar deficit. Policies established during times of an expanding economy can no longer continue with “business as usual”, and while politicians pledge that this is not the time for new taxes (increased revenues), recent across the board budgetary cuts leave Nevada with few options to decrease spending.

Policy analysis, like economics, is not a linear process nor do they function in static environments or a vacuum. New strategies of what services government provides, and how it may more efficiently and effectively deliver the basic services such as public education require serious consideration from policymakers now, more than ever. Government and policymakers inherently resistant to change (even incremental change) should keep an open mind to the analysis and recommendations of policy analysis professionals who recommend investing (spending) at a time a state can least afford it. A sound strategy such as increased cross-agency data sharing may require nominal up-front costs to implement and maintain, but have also proven to pay for themselves, many times over, and in the end, offer greater business and industry opportunities. As surprising as it may be to some politicians, corporations do not place low taxation on the top of their relocation criteria list; they place quality of life, schools, technology, and workforce skills.

Considering today’s highly competitive and challenging economic climate, Nevada policymakers need to recognize the resources that intermediary organizations such as *Ready for*

Life bring to the table by convening public and private interests in removing education and quality of life barriers, and in recommending contemporary public policy strategies. Increasing the integration of cross-agency data sharing is on such strategy, and is already being successfully performed on some state agency levels. But in order for *Ready for Life* to better reconnect Nevada's dropouts and under trained/utilized youth work force, greater access must be afforded through a holistic cross-agency data sharing system that would involve agencies that traditionally do not share information. Greater access of data would allow *Ready for Life* a cost effective means to better identify and service potential client groups that have the greatest likelihood to benefit and succeed from reconnection strategies.

Increased cross-agency data sharing has not only demonstrated its ability to assist agencies such as *Ready for Life*, it has shown to mitigate the impact of agency budget cuts by providing similar or even expanded services to customers in the absence of a physical agency office. ACCESS Florida offered a prime illustration of how this concept can work. After one Florida agency had closed 50% of their office space, that same agency's customer retention rate actually increased 20%. As stated Nathan Lewis' presentation in November 2009 on ACCESS Florida platform, "data sharing not only helps the state, the county, the agency... it empowers the customer to have greater access and involvement in their account".³⁸

Future Research

Cross-agency data sharing still remains a new and ever-evolving field of study. Thus, grasping the full range of benefits associated with this strategy is nonetheless challenging. The technical requirements and overall obstacles to implementation have largely been addressed in the available literature. However, in realizing data sharing's fullest potential, greater focus

³⁸ Lewis, Nathan. (November 4-6, 2009). ACCESS Florida. *National Children's Health Insurance Summit*. Lecture conducted from Center's for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Chicago.

should be paid to understanding the more tangible and long-term outcomes that manifest over time. Further study should illustrate a true study of costs on returned benefits on implementing cross-agency data sharing systems, understanding this strategy's true efficiency and effectiveness seems to be lacking in present-day research.

Final Thoughts

Ready for Life is in a unique and important position to initiate true change within Nevada's poor educational environment. Given the organization's capacity to bring together the state's chief political leaders, philanthropists, and service-providers – the opportunities for success are boundless. However, true success in achieving the ultimate goal of improved graduation rates is not possible within the state's current policy framework. Nevertheless, new legislation cannot fix the state's educational problems alone, greater community buy-in and individual parental support is necessary to invoke real reform. Moreover, the long-standing mentality of both Nevadan citizens and legislators must be altered, we cannot continue to verbally abhor our subpar educational standards and yet, continue to underfund and under educate our youth.

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