

BACK TO BASICS

Child Welfare Information Technology Systems Managers and Staff
Webinar Series

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Thursday, July 25, 2013

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Presented by ICF International under contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau

Back to Basics Series

- One webinar per month between April and September, 2013
- Target audience
 - Child welfare IT systems managers and staff
 - New and experienced
- Recorded webinars
 - <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/state-tribal-info-systems/training>

Back to Basics Series (continued)

- Webinar 1: What is a Child Welfare Information Technology Systems Manager (April)
- Webinar 2: The Child Welfare Information Technology System Project Lifecycle, Part 1 (May)
- Webinar 3: The Child Welfare Information Technology System Project Lifecycle, Part 2 (June)
- Webinar 4: Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them (July)
- Webinars 5 and 6: To be Determined (Aug./Sept.)

Participating in Today's Webinar

- Questions and comments by telephone
- Questions via chat
- If you have additional questions, please contact Joyce Rose after the webinar

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Attendee Poll

Who is attending today's webinar?

- State Child Welfare Information System (CWIS)
Project Manager
- State Child Welfare Information System (CWIS)
Program Manager
- State Child Welfare Information System (CWIS)
Technical Manager
- State Child Welfare Information System (CWIS)
Project Staff
- ACF/Children's Bureau Personnel

Today's Agenda

- Format
- Introductions
- State participant discussion
- Attendee Q & A
- Wrap up

Introductions

- Brady Birdsong, DC
- Tresa Young, OH
- Kevin Bullock, OH
- Linnette Carlson, NM
- Joe Vastola, FL
- Joyce Rose, ICF International

Common Pitfall 1: Poorly Defined Requirements

- ▶ **Description:** Many failed projects have had high level, vague, and generally unhelpful requirements. This leads to developers, having no input from the end users, building what they believe is needed, without having any real knowledge of child welfare business processes. Inevitably when the CWIS system is implemented end users say it does not do what they need it to. This is closely linked to lack of end user involvement, but goes beyond it. Users must know what they want, and be able to specify precise requirements.
- ▶ **Discussion:** CWIS end users are non-IT specialists and as such may not understand the IT requirements gathering process nor the impact of not getting them right. How did your state manage the requirements gathering process to assure you were building a system to meet end user needs?

Common Pitfall 2: Scope Creep

- ▶ **Description:** Scope is the overall view of what a CWIS system will deliver. Scope creep is the insidious growth in the scale of a system during the life of the project which may affect schedule, resources, requirements gathering and system quality. Controlling scope creep is a management issue closely related to change control.
- ▶ **Discussion:** What was your state and it's project management teams approach to realistically managing and controlling scope creep in order to stay on budget, on time and with quality?

Common Pitfall 3: Poor Testing

- ▶ **Description:** The developers will do a great deal of testing during development, but eventually the end users must run acceptance tests to see if the CWIS system meets the business requirements. However, acceptance testing often fails due to; poor requirements which cannot be tested; a poorly constructed testing process; inadequately trained users doing acceptance testing; an inadequate amount of time to perform acceptance testing.
- ▶ **Discussion:** What was your state's approach to system acceptance testing, how did you select acceptance testers, was training necessary and, do you believe your approach was successful?

Common Pitfall 4: Under-allocated Resources

- ▶ **Description:** Often there are too few state resources allocated to a large CWIS project. Multi-tasking, long hours and a constant juggling of priorities becomes a way of CWIS project life. This can lead to moral issues, productivity decline and dissention within the CWIS project team.
- ▶ **Discussion:** Do you engage your staff in team building exercises if so, what? How do you manage your staff to help build moral, keep productivity at a high level and deal with constantly changing priorities?

Common Pitfall 5: System Performance Issues

- ▶ **Description:** A CWIS system with performance issues such as slow response time, suspect stability and poor usability contribute to whether or not the end users will accept, embrace and actually use the application that was “marketed and promised to make life easier” for them. Also, system usability through the eyes of the end user can often make or break application acceptance.
- ▶ **Discussion:** What technical tools does your state use to measure, identify, manage and remedy system, security or database related performance issues? Have these tools been helpful in avoiding any major system performance issues? How did your state test the user interface (UI) to know that it was right?

Common Pitfall 6: Lack of High Functioning User Help Desk

- ▶ **Description:** Establishing a high functioning “Help Desk” is one of the main keys to creating end user satisfaction through customer service. When the end user experiences a problem (program or technical) it is the “Help Desk” that is their first point of contact. End users expect help desk staff to be courteous, knowledgeable, helpful and expedient.
- ▶ **Discussion:** What is the structure of your CWIS end user help desk and how does it operate? Does your state use a help desk software application? What specific knowledge and skills does your help desk staff have and, how do keep their knowledge and skills current?

Common Pitfall 7: Poor Vendor Relationships

- ▶ **Description:** It is not uncommon that when large IT projects such as a CWIS are outsourced significant “vendor management” problems can surface characterized by contract scope creep, poor quality, missed deadlines, and blown contract budgets.
- ▶ **Discussion:** What do you think are the critical success factors to maintaining a good state - vendor relationship? Based upon your CWIS project manager experience, what is the one critical piece of advice you would give to any state who may be developing a Request for Proposal for vendor services?

Attendee Discussion



Ten Ways to Guarantee the Failure of a Systems Project

1. Don't use a specific methodology because coding is all that is really important.
2. Create the project plan by working backwards from a drop-dead system completion date.
3. Don't bother with a data model. Just build whatever tables you need.
4. Use a technical lead that has never built a similar system. Hiring such talent is too expensive.
5. Hire forty developers to make the coding go faster.

Ten Ways to Guarantee the Failure of a Systems Project (continued)

6. Build the system in Java, even though most of the development team still thinks Java is coffee.
7. Three months before the system goes live, assign one junior developer to handle data migration.
8. Skip the testing phase because the project is way behind schedule.
9. Change the system to support critical new requirements discovered during final development.
10. Buy a commercial off the shelf package or transfer a system and customize it... A LOT!

Wrap Up

- ▶ What was accomplished today?
- ▶ What's next?
- ▶ Reminder: Recorded versions of each of the six webinars will be made available at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/state-tribal-info-systems/training>

- ▶ Submit suggested topics for future webinars to:
Joyce@kassets.com