

Integrating data for financial decision-making

MOLLIE BRADLEE, COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
MHBRADLEE@GMAIL.COM

SUMMARY

Mollie Bradlee, a Foster America alum and now Deputy Director of the Office of Children, Youth, and Families with the Colorado Department of Human Services (CO DHS), worked with the Colorado Digital Service to help improve CO DHS's approach to how it tracks and categorizes financial data in order to better understand how resource allocations impact child and family wellbeing outcomes.

THE OPPORTUNITY

CO DHS had received several requests from the state legislature to provide information on how counties allocate child welfare dollars and how funding is associated with child and family outcomes. Because of Colorado's state-supervised, county-administered system, financial information is spread across many different data systems, making it especially difficult to determine how counties allocate state dollars. With the aid of the Colorado Digital Service, CO DHS set out to understand what it would take to link financial and child and family outcomes data across different systems to comply with the state legislature's request, and, more importantly, have information to make better resource allocation decisions.

THE SOLUTION

Cultivate partnerships for additional capacity and expertise. With the newly established Colorado Digital Service, CO DHS saw an opportunity to partner with the Colorado Digital Service for additional technical expertise and capacity to explore the question of what it would take to get a state-level view of child welfare spending allocations across multiple county systems, as well as how those allocations might be connected to child and family outcomes. CO DHS developed a proposal to partner with the Colorado Digital Service to conduct a two-week discovery sprint to map the current system of tracking and storing financial and outcomes data and make recommendations on how to improve the tracking of the data.

Interview key stakeholders. After establishing an agreement with the Colorado Digital Service, they identified a list of stakeholders to interview for input, including members of the Governor's Office of Information Technology, those who develop and manage the various systems in the counties and states, those who use those systems, and more.

Map where existing financial and outcomes data live. In addition to stakeholder interviews, CO DHS and the Colorado Digital Service mapped the current infrastructure of tracking child welfare financial and outcomes data in the various counties. Questions that the Colorado Digital Service considered about each piece of data of interest when mapping the current infrastructure included:

- To what degree of granularity do we track this piece of data?
- Where and how do we track it?
- If we don't currently track it, how much effort would it take to track?

Draft report with short- and long-term recommendations for systems improvement. The Colorado Digital Service drafted a report for CO DHS with the results of the system infrastructure mapping and recommendations for systems improvement that will allow CO DHS to understand spending allocations. The report includes short-term recommendations for CO DHS to begin to extract the data in question from the current system, as well as long-term recommendations aligned with existing initiatives focused on linking different data systems in the state.

Share report with key stakeholders and revised based on feedback. CO DHS and Colorado Digital Service presented the report to key stakeholders and gathered additional feedback on the feasibility of the recommendations.

THE RESULT

As a result of the work with Colorado's US Digital Service team, Colorado DHS now has a blueprint for extracting different categories of financial data from various IT systems, as well as recommendations for improving data categorization and management.

In the long-term, having a more granular understanding of prior years' spending will enable CO DHS to make financial decisions that may have higher likelihoods of improving child and family outcomes.