INFORMATION SYSTEMS COMMITTEE

Information Services General Review

Reason for the Report

The Grand Jury selected Information Services (IS) as one of its general reviews for 2002/03.

Scope of the Investigation

The members of the Grand Jury:

- Made an announced visit to the IS Department on December 4, 2002;
- Interviewed collectively the following IS representatives; IS Director, Information Technology (IT) Manager/Contracts; IT Manager/ PC; and the Fiscal Administrative Manager;
- Toured the IS facility;
- Was briefed on the various operations of the department;
- Interviewed countywide IT departmental personnel on a random basis;
- Reviewed the District Attorney Management Information Integrated Office Network (DAMION) Contract;
- Reviewed Purchasing Operating Practices;
- Attended the Information Technology Steering Committee (ITSC);
- Attended the Information Technology Standard Sub-Committee (ITSSC).

Background

The Information Services (IS) Department operates and maintains the County's communication systems and its various programs. There are many services IS provides to County departments, such as training, communications, repairs and technical advice. One of the main problems encountered by IS is the lack of use of its services. Varying departmental budgets and the inability or "refusal" of some departments to adopt the current standards for technology protocol cause unnecessary complexities. Segmented purchasing of technology by individual departments has tended to perpetuate a trend toward departmental independence and has reduced the County's ability to leverage its bulk purchasing power. While some departments replace equipment in three-year cycles, others are working with 10-12 year old technology. The high cost of repairs, technical support, and training encourages departments to avoid IS altogether, and therefore creates more incompatibility issues over the long term.

The County standards for operating systems and various database programs are established by the IS department. However, because some departments provide a unique and specialized public service it is not cost efficient for IS to design, create, and service this type of database software. In these cases the utilization of an outside vendor is encouraged. The only other exception to the countywide standard evolves out of a compliance issue with State-run programs. In these circumstances, the State supplies computers and software to departments involved with their

programs. Some departments have many computers from such State-run programs and therefore feel less dependent of IS.

There are two conduits for the exchange of email, one Internet-based (outside the County network) and the other intranet-based (inside the County network). Because email software varies from one department to another, IS must keep abreast of compatibility issues and bridge email software together for the many types in use. In addition, vendors of these email programs release patches, fixes, and updates that create more compatibility issues for IS to resolve. Thus, departmental preference of email, according to manufacturer-type, has created unnecessary complexities associated with maintaining the system.

The IS department is also charged with scheduling and organizing the Information Technology Steering Committee (ITSC). The Committee's function is required as part of the Countywide Strategic Plan and is an integral part of County Policies and Procedures A-10 (2) (b). However, only four of 32 invitees attended the most recent meeting in April. When the Committee cannot properly convene, there is no venue for the review and approval of multi-departmental and new systems development projects exceeding $10,000. The current dysfunctional status of the Committee creates a flawed process, and invalidates the provision of Policy A-10.

The acquisition of the DAMION Software license and Maintenance Agreement by the District Attorney's Office (DA) further illustrates this problem. The DA received a contract for DAMION from Constellation Justice Systems in late 2000. The department was seeking solutions for case tracking, legal support, scheduling, and victim/witness issues. The contract did not go before the ITSC, but rather was submitted to IS on January 11, 2001. The DA provided IS with only six hours to review the contract, and thus prevented IS from referring the $138,370 software purchase to the ITSC for proper review. In addition, the contract was signed by the DA on January 9, 2001 (before its submittal to IS or the ITSC) and was scheduled for approval by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) on January 23, 2001. However, within the DA's six hour deadline, IS raised a very important countywide security issue i.e., the contractor was allowed dial-up and Internet access to all computers running the software. Apparently, the DA and/or the BOS did not consider these serious deficiencies, and the contract was subsequently signed on the scheduled date. Thus, recommendations and concerns of IS were ignored, and County Policies and Procedures were not followed.

Findings

F1.   Some departments encourage employees to cross-train into the field of Information Technology (IT) to avoid the costs associated with the Information Services (IS) department's programming, training, and PC support services.

F2.   IT functions are handled independently by departments, so the total cost to the County for IT equipment and staff are unknown.

F3.   Since budgets of departments vary, some departments are able to keep current with technology, while others are incapable of upgrading.

F4. In some cases, IS cannot produce or replicate industry specific software and the related service and support, so that departments must utilize outside vendors.

F5. There are no industry-specific requirements found within County departments, which might justify the wide array of email programs in use.

F6. The Board of Supervisors (BOS), Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), IS, and other departments have no venue to which they may refer purchases of multi-department or new systems development projects exceeding $10,000.

F7. The Information Technology Steering Committee (ITSC) is controlled and directed by its members. These members are countywide Departmental Directors, and must abide by County Policies and Procedures A-10 (2) (b) when submitting approval requests for purchases of multi-departmental and new systems development projects exceeding $10,000. By not attending the ITSC meetings, Departmental Directors invalidate the ITSC, and are thus incapable of enforcing decisions by the ITSC on themselves.

F8. In January 2001 and again in 2003, the BOS and the District Attorney's Office (DA) together signed both the DAMION Software License and Maintenance Agreement contracts without the endorsement of IS through the ITSC.

F9. The DAMION contract was signed in 2001 by the BOS and the DA with full knowledge of a potential security breach for the County.

F10. The DA signed the contract for the DAMION Software License and Maintenance Agreement, and scheduled its submission to the BOS before giving it to IS for their approval.

F11. IS was given insufficient time (6 hrs) to review the DAMION Contract.

Recommendations

R1. Since IS is in a position to provide the County with improved promotional decisions of IT workers, and provide ongoing testing and training of current technologies, departmental IT staff throughout the County should be trained and under the jurisdiction of the IS.

R2. Since the County stands to benefit from bulk purchasing, the technology budget should be consolidated and shifted to IS.

R3. In the event that the utilization of an outside vendor is required, IS should review hardware, software, and IT-related contracts before the departments go forward with purchases.

R4. IS should establish a countywide standard for both Internet and intranet email applications, along with standards for database and operating systems.

R5.   The Board of Supervisors should vote to amend Policy A-10 by either dissolving the Information Technology Steering Committee (ITSC) or include language to enforce its duties.

R6.   The District Attorney's Office and the Board of Supervisors should work with IS to ensure the DAMION system is equipped with the proper security tools for protecting the County's IT data.

R7.   The Board of Supervisors should take seriously the recommendations made by IS as they relate to contracts or purchasing decisions, and ensure that departments allow IS reasonable time for this review process.

Commendations

The Information Technology Standard Sub-Committee (ITSSC) was well attended by departmental IT personnel and provided a useful format in the sharing of problems or information relevant to other County departments.

Responses Required for Findings

F1 through F11	El Dorado County Chief Administrative Officer
	El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
	El Dorado County Director of Information Services
F6, F7, F8	El Dorado County Director of General Services
F8 through F11	El Dorado County District Attorney

Responses Required for Recommendations

R1 through R7	El Dorado County Chief Administrative Officer
	El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
	El Dorado County Director of Information Services
R2, R3 through R7	El Dorado County Director of General Services
R6	El Dorado County District Attorney