# Mendocino County Information Services Department

The Information Services Department (ISD) directly or indirectly provides services to all County departments. As technology becomes more important and crucial to conducting the County's business, ISD must be highly involved in decisions that affect the direction of technology in the County. However, County departments are not using ISD as efficiently as is possible.

The ISD is functioning well internally with a new Director and knowledgeable support staff; this report gives recommendations for increased security, backup procedures, and updating manuals.

After completing an overview of the ISD and developing recommendations for County-wide data technology and computer services, the Grand Jury discovered that 12 years ago the Grand Jury found the same County-wide flaws that exist today. Even though technology has changed immensely since 1990, the basic issue of County-wide consistency in technology planning still exists.

## Method of Investigation

Within the ISD, the Grand Jury interviewed the former Director, the new Director, the Computer Operations Manager, the Network Services Manager, and various personnel in the computer operations sector and the network sector. The Grand Jury toured the facilities several times looking at physical and data security and working space and reviewing documents, logs, and computer operating procedures.

The Grand Jury also interviewed Information Technology (IT) personnel from the Departments of Social Services, Public Health, Mental Health, Child Support Services, and the Sheriff's Office.

The Grand Jury reviewed County Policy 22, "Information Technology (IT) Policy: Acquisition, Ownership and Use of Computer Hardware and Software, the Role of the Information Technology Committee, the Role of Information Services and the Role of Departmental IT Personnel," and the 1989-90 Grand Jury Report, "Mendocino County Data Processing."

## Background Information

The ISD stores and controls most of the information the County needs to conduct its business, including financial data, payroll, property ownership, building and encroachment permit data, and the County data communication network. The ISD participates in the decision-making and acquisition of communication hardware and software for voice and data for the County.

In January 1989, the County engaged an outside contractor to operate the County-owned computers and peripherals. The County supplied the premises and equipment. The contractor employed some of the County data

processing personnel, while other personnel remained County employees. The County resumed control of the operation of the ISD again in July 2000, and contractor-employed personnel became County employees.

On June 27, 2000, The Board of Supervisors adopted Policy 22.

## Findings

1. The 1989-90 Grand Jury reported, "Some departments have developed independent computerized systems with no coordination of efforts." The report recommended, "Department heads and key personnel of all county departments should participate in development and operation of a central computerized data processing, information storage, retrieval and analysis system." The County has not yet implemented this forward-looking recommendation.

2. ISD provides computer and software support for most County departments. Because of perceived unique requirements, the following departments have IT staff to provide computer and software support:

> Public Health
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> Mental Health
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> Child Support Services
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> Social Services (DSS)
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> Sheriff
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> Assessor/Clerk Recorder

3. The ISD Director is working toward all departments in a County-wide system. Past and present ISD Directors stated that, using one system, the ISD can provide service to all departments, including the Sheriff and DSS. (Directors recognized that DSS must use State-supplied computers to run State-mandated programs.) The Sheriff and DSS IT personnel report that those departments require separate systems and personnel for delivery of their services (except for County financial data).

4. Grand Jury interviews revealed that some departments IT personnel are not aware of the authority granted to the ISD Director under Policy 22.

   Policy 22, Section 4 (2) states that the ISD Director "may award various levels of authority to different departments" based on analysis of the services required and the skill level of the supporting staff.

   Policy 22, Section 5, The Role of Departmental IT Personnel, states: "This section is applicable only when a determination has been made by IS that departmental IT personnel are required to support departmental computer systems. If such a determination is made, the departmental IT personnel shall be employees of their respective departments."

5. Department heads hire their IT personnel, with some ISD input in the early screening process.

6. Policy 22, Section 4(3) gives the ISD authority to "conduct assessments of the technical services and the IT skill levels of supporting staff. The result of an assessment may cause ISD to modify the delivery model of IT services in the County, including the assignment of department personnel."

7. County decisions on voice and data communication format and equipment are fragmented. For example, the Sheriff and DSS acquire and maintain their own equipment. A County-wide unified system could use current computer technology for digital transmission of voice and data communication.

8. The lack of long-range planning and consolidation has led to a fragmented use of all the County IT assets, personnel, hardware, and software. Each department acting independently often causes duplication of services and hardware.

9. The two County AS400 mainframe computers, one in ISD and one in the Sheriffs Office, have network connection only. To ensure continuous operation in case of failure, the ISD Director has considered requesting another AS400 at a cost of approximately $100,000. The Director found that the two existing computers have ample capacity to configure the AS400s so that if one failed, or needed to be taken off-line for maintenance or upgrade, the other could take over with minimal loss of data and service to the County. ISD employees report that they can provide the additional required security to address the concerns of Sheriffs IT personnel regarding law enforcement data.

10. Department heads meet monthly to discuss information services and information technology.

11. ISD and IT personnel hold monthly meetings to discuss technology and seek solutions to common problems.

12. Lack of a standardized County data security system compromises a completely secure County-wide system.

13. ISD employees report that the software firewalls and passwords in place at ISD are adequate to ensure the security of the data at ISD.

14. ISD has a policy and procedure for periodic backup of data kept and maintained by ISD. ISD does not control backup within departments. Backup procedures and equipment vary from department to department. A centralized file server would eliminate the need for individual department backup.

15. Storage of backup data varies from department to department. The County does not have a designated fireproof central depository for all

data backup. Departments store backup tapes at the Sheriffs secure vault, within their own departments, and in private facilities, including employee homes.

16. The lack of an identified County network topology decreases the ability to locate, identify, and troubleshoot County-wide network connections and hardware.

17. ISD physical security is not as effective as it could be because ISD shares the building with other departments. One department requiring daily public access will relocate this year.

18. Information for the operation of the ISD computer system is not consolidated in manuals.

19. ISD has not updated its systems design and programming functions manual recently.

20. ISD has not updated the Disaster Recovery Guide since October 2000. Personnel, vendor contacts, and phone numbers are not current.

## Recommendations

A. Board of Supervisors consolidate the communication and technological system, designating ISD to plan and maintain all equipment for the County. (Findings 1 through 9)

B. ISD Director follow Policy 22 and assess all departments' needs for IT personnel. (Findings 4 through 6)

C. Board of Supervisors revise and strengthen Policy 22 to consolidate management of IT personnel under ISD for more efficient use of employee resources, including time and expertise. Board of Supervisors make ISD responsible for hiring technology personnel. (Findings 1 through 9)

D. ISD and the Sheriffs Office configure the AS400s to ensure continuous delivery of services throughout the County. (Finding 9)

E. Board of Supervisors empower ISD to safeguard all County data from outside intrusion. (Finding 12)

F. Board of Supervisors empower ISD to implement County-wide standard back up procedures with a centralized file server. (Finding 14)

G. Board of Supervisors provide a County fireproof central depository and also use an out-of-county location for data backup storage. (Finding 15)

H. ISD maintain an identified network topology of all County communication and computer systems. (Finding 16)

I. When the department that needs daily public access relocates, General Services install a secure entry identification system in ISD facilities. (Finding 17)

J. ISD compile manuals for the operation of the ISD computer system. (Finding 18)

K. ISD update the manual for the ISD systems design and programming functions. (Finding 19)

L. ISD update the Disaster Recovery Guide. (Finding 20)

## Comment

All the personnel interviewed were dedicated, hard working, and took the importance and responsibility of their jobs very seriously.

## Response Required

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

Mendocino County Sheriff (Rec. A through H & accompanying Findings)

Mendocino County Assessor Clerk-Recorder (Rec. A through H & accompanying Findings)

## Response Requested

Information Services Department Director

Department of Social Services Director (Rec. A through H & accompanying Findings)

Department of Public Health Director (Rec. A through H & accompanying Findings)

Department of Mental Health Director (Rec. A through H & accompanying Findings)

Child Support Services Director (Rec. A through H & accompanying Findings)