

Results-Based Accountability: A Roadmap for Program Performance

KELLIE NOE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Results-Based Accountability (RBA) is being used by counties across California and across the nation to evaluate the effectiveness of investments. RBA offers a simple approach to effectively measure and report out on program-level performance. In addition, RBA offers a framework to describe how programs work together to contribute to community-wide results at the population level. Alameda County Social Services Agency

and Santa Cruz County Human Services Department have both applied RBA to their contract monitoring and program performance evaluation processes. While the two communities have their own unique approach to implementation, there are many similarities, and the findings from these two communities can contribute to Sonoma County's efforts to successfully apply RBA to contracts with community-based organizations.

**Kellie Noe, M.A., Program Development Manager,
Sonoma County Human Services Department**

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Background: Results-Based Accountability

Across California and the nation, counties are using Results-Based Accountability (RBA) as an approach to address some of the challenges communities experience in collecting and communicating social service program results. Before RBA, the systems used to assess program results were often cumbersome, and it was difficult for contractors such as non-profit organizations to capture data related to program performance. Moreover, reporting systems did not offer a simple way to transparently communicate results to leadership and to the community about the long-term impacts of programs on community health and well-being. Thus, communities turned to RBA for a simple approach to data-driven decision making within grant-making and contracting processes.

RBA can be used by whole communities to improve collective quality of life and can be deployed by organizations to improve program performance. RBA is a disciplined way of thinking and acting to improve entrenched and complex social problems. RBA starts with “ends” and works backward, step by step, towards “means.” For communities, the desired “ends” are results or conditions of well-being for children, families, and the community as a whole. Examples may be articulated as “Residents with good jobs,” “Children ready for school,” “A safe and clean neighborhood,” or even more specific conditions such as “Public spaces without graffiti,” or “A place where neighbors know each other.” For programs, the desired “ends” are how customers are better off when the program works the way it should. One example may be “The percentage of people in the job training program who get and keep good paying jobs” (Friedman, 2005).

RBA allows grantees to sharpen their focus in three key performance areas by answering the questions:

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Is anyone better off? (Friedman, 2005)

Once performance measures are identified, the RBA Turn the Curve monitoring process can be utilized to measure program progress. Turn the Curve monitoring is a simple way for counties and community partners to facilitate a conversation that answers the following five key questions:

- How are we doing or what is the data trendline?
- What is the story behind the curve or what are the factors that are contributing to the trend?
- Who are the partners that have a role to play in turning the curve?
- What works to turn the curve?
- What is our action plan to turn the curve? (Friedman, 2005)

RBA also provides the process and tools for transparency and accountability. RBA uses an online dashboard that partners can utilize to capture population-level and program-level impact. This process places contractors alongside county departments to develop performance measures together and to build better engagement in the contracting process.

Alameda County Social Services Agency

In 2011, the Alameda County Grand Jury concluded that the county’s Social Services Agency needed to improve its contract monitoring and performance oversight of community-based organizations. The

jury's report included a requirement for the county to start using metrics to evaluate financial and program effectiveness. As a result, the agency set out to develop a system to consistently collect performance measure data and began a phased approach to apply RBA to contracts, along the following timeline:

- Phase 1 (2013-2016)—Embed performance measures into all new RFPs/RFQs.
- Phase 2 (2017-2019)—Implement a data system to track performance measures.
- Phase 3 (2020+)—Have performance measures in place for 100% of all contracts with community-based organizations.

RBA performance measures are currently embedded in 93% of all contracts with community-based organizations in Alameda County. In order to work towards the goal of 100% RBA adoption, Alameda County had to take the following actions:

- Commit staff time to support ongoing management, implement trainings, coordinate the development of performance measures, and capture and input data into the online dashboard.
- Develop ongoing training for county staff and non-profit agencies to support implementation.
- Develop a training manual to serve as a desktop how-to guide for implementation.
- Launch an internal workgroup with consistent membership to coordinate RBA across divisions and departments. This workgroup develops the data management plan, builds capacity, and identifies and addresses other challenges that may emerge.
- Define clear roles and responsibilities for non-profit agencies, county program managers, county contract managers, and county program evaluators.
- Create a clear process for how data will be collected and entered into the online dashboard system, including a list of definitions.
- Develop RBA templates for request for proposals (RFPs) and scopes of work in order to consistently capture RBA performance measures. The

templates include the frequency for data collection, how the data will be calculated, and what tools will be used to collect data.

- Implement the online RBA dashboard to facilitate transparent communication about program performance and results as they relate to the county's goals.

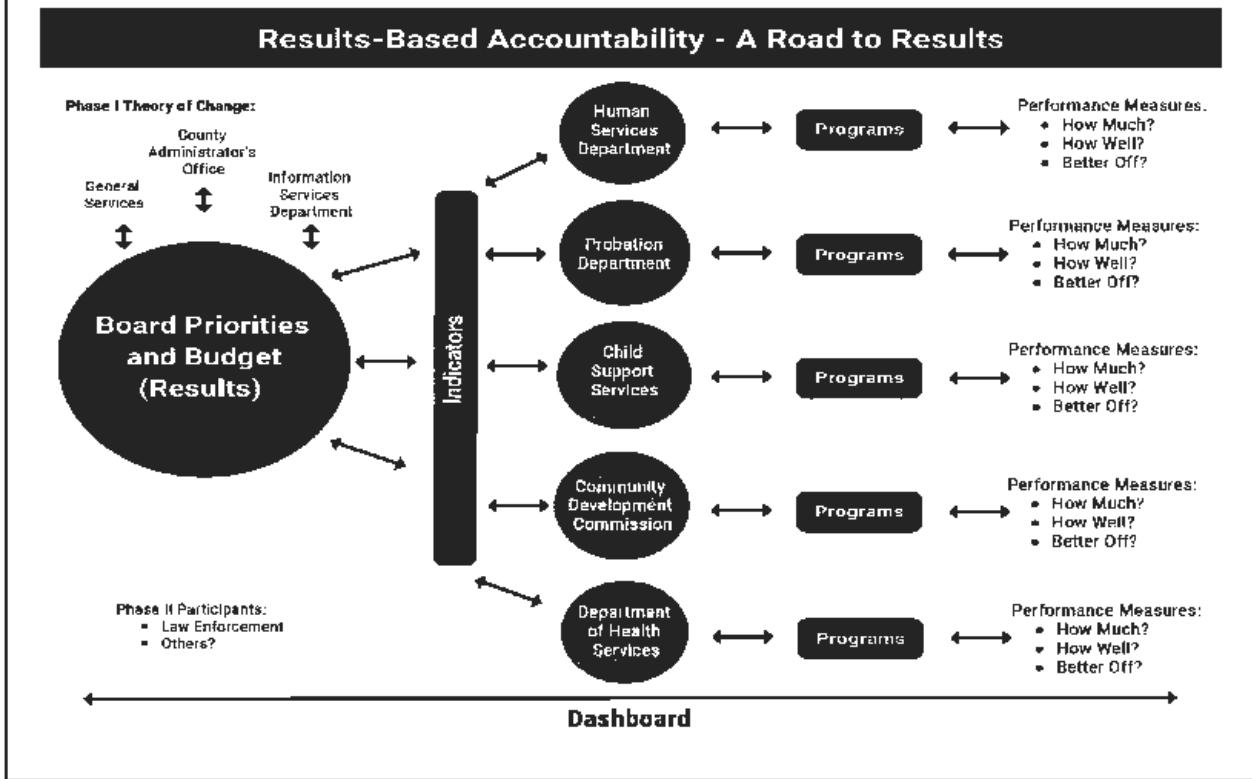
Santa Cruz County Human Services Department

Initially, Santa Cruz County Human Services Department applied RBA to all contracts over \$50,000, but now the vast majority of all the department's contracts include RBA. Leadership within the county directed the department to implement RBA, and this system has helped the county to better track and communicate the results of their investments. In addition to better tracking investment impact, this direction led to the implementation of the Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments.

On April 21, 2015, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors embarked on a change process to increase collective impact on shared outcomes and to improve the funding model for safety net services by promoting the use of Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) in county-funded services. The board wanted to transition from the current community programs funding model to the new model of CORE Investments. The focus of CORE Investments is to advance the implementation of proven EBPs, and RBA is then applied to track a common set of performance measures and results (Timberlake, 2017). The board outlined the following five goals for CORE:

- Take a measured and deliberate approach.
- Focus on community-derived results from nine strategic plans. (<http://www.sccoplanning.com/?tabid=4470>)
- Collaborate with jurisdictional funders, strategic plan representatives, and service providers.
- Create an open and competitive application process to generate innovative and evidence-based interventions from local community-based non-profits.

FIGURE 1
RBA Phase I Theory of Change



- Acknowledge the need to collectively learn and evolve. (Timberlake, 2017)

The CORE Investments model launched with a joint investment from Santa Cruz County and the City of Santa Cruz with an initial investment of \$3.9 million to \$4.1 million per year for a three-year cycle beginning in Fiscal Year 2017–18. The Board of Supervisors also set aside an additional \$150,000 each year for emerging or otherwise unmet safety-net needs (Timberlake, 2017). The following conditions or results areas have been established for the Santa Cruz CORE Investments: Health & Wellness; Lifelong Learning; Economic Security and Mobility; Social, Cultural and Civic Connections; Healthy Environments; Safe & Just Communities; and Stable, Affordable Housing. An individual program cannot shift a result area, but collectively all the programs related to Lifelong Learning and Education, for example, can contribute to improving community results.

Sonoma County Human Services Department

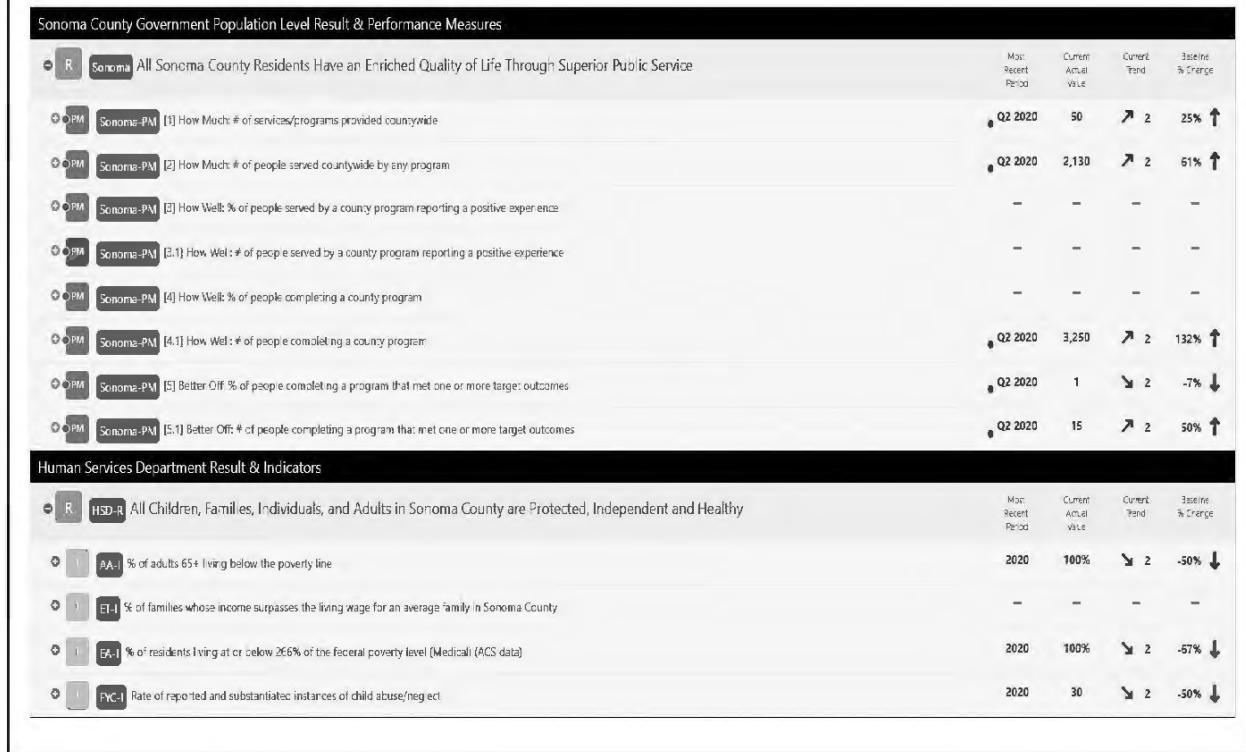
On April 2, 2019, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors adopted a set of Contracting Principles for safety-net service programs. These Contracting Principles set out to achieve the following goals:

- Ensure that policy priorities are addressed in a coordinated and strategic manner;
- Ensure that resources and services are distributed equitably and fairly across regions;
- Promote a fair, open, and competitive process for vendor selection; and
- Reduce confusion among vendors as how to obtain funding from the county.

RBA was identified by the Sonoma County safety-net department leadership team as an approach to operationalize the Contracting Principles and to effectively evaluate program performance.

Upstream Investments identified the Human Services Department as the managing partner for

FIGURE 2
Sonoma County Dashboard Example



implementation. Phase I implementation was completed at the end of Fiscal Year 2019–20. At this stage, the Probation Department, Health Services Department, Child Support Services, and Community Development Commission applied RBA to one contract, and Human Services applied RBA to one contract in each of their four divisions. (See *Figure 1*.)

Recommendations for Scaling RBA in Sonoma County

Sonoma County will benefit from scaling RBA to all county contracts with non-profit agencies. This recommendation is based on the key findings from the Alameda County Social Services Agency and Santa Cruz County Human Services and the success of RBA Phase I implementation in Sonoma County. RBA offers a transparent approach to easily monitor the success of Sonoma County's investments across departments.

The following key considerations should be discussed by Sonoma County leadership in order to ensure successful adoption of RBA across county contracts with non-profit organizations:

- Implement a 3- to 5-year phased approach to apply RBA to all safety-net department contracts. Start the adoption with all new procurements over \$50,000 and work with departments to identify an annual number of new contracts for adoption.
- Support a cross-departmental RBA workgroup with clearly defined roles to facilitate coordination across departments and address challenges as they arise.
- Add additional staffing upon completion of Phase I to support implementation and ongoing management. Facilitate trainings, develop performance measures, collect data, manage the online dashboard and facilitate Turn the Curve

monitoring. The following is the recommended staffing for the Human Services Department Planning, Research, Evaluation and Engagement team: 0.50 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Program Development Manager; 0.50 FTE Program Planning and Evaluation Analyst; and 0.50 FTE Administrative Aide.

- Develop a customer relationship management (CRM) database for data collection and to track frequency and timeline for monitoring contracts. The cloud-based Social Solutions Apricot data system can be utilized for \$2,000 annually.
- Adopt and implement an online dashboard to transparently share program impacts. Once fully scaled, the estimated cost to include all contracts in the dashboard is \$25,000 annually. The dashboard will include results and population-level indicators for each department and performance measures for each contract. Furthermore, the contract performances measures will aggregate to county-wide performance measures. (See *Figure 2*.)

Lastly, identify a funding source, such as CORE Investments, to test the impact of a collective funding model on a specific result area.

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