Information Technologies

Reason for the report

The 2003/2004 Grand Jury chose to conduct a review of the County's Information Technologies Department (IT).

Scope of the investigation

People interviewed
- Director of IT
- IT staff members
- County Administrative Officer (CAO)
- Members of the County Board of Supervisors (BOS)
- Various Department Directors

Documents reviewed
- 2002/2003 Grand Jury report
- Information Services Strategic Plan
- BOS Policy A-10, IT Steering Committee

Background

The 2002/2003 Grand Jury findings and recommendations on Information Services General Review, remain applicable this year.

Facts

1. Each county department is funded annually for technology (computers, software, systems, etc.).
2. Each department considers their own needs paramount when spending their allocated monies.
3. Departments spending their allocation make no effort to integrate with the other departments on technology.
4. No county-wide coordination to prioritize technology projects is made at any level of this county's government.
5. The County has an IT Steering Committee, whose written goal is to integrate county technology needs.
6. The IT Steering Committee is attended by lower level staff members who do not have authority to make decisions concerning information technology.

Findings

1. The BOS has no long-term vision pertaining to the future of information technology.

    *Response to Finding 1: **The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding.*** Per Board of Supervisors policy A-10, the County is currently reviewing and updating the Information Technologies Strategic Plan. This document has been in effect since November, 2000, and provides goals and objectives for County-wide technological improvements. This document provides an on-going plan that will be updated periodically as technology and the needs of the County change.   In addition, the Board approved its FY 2004/05 Goals in March, 2004, which include two items related to technology:

    - *Review and assess the County's technological capabilities and practices, and prioritize for cost effectiveness, security of electronic records, and service timelines and reliability.*
    - *Provide for streamlined processes through the application of technology, such as the implementation of an electronic agenda process.*

2. IT does not lead the county in technology advancements, nor does IT coordinate the needs of each department into a county-wide, prioritized, technology program.

    *Response to Finding 2: **The respondent disagrees partially with the finding.*** Per Board of Supervisors Policy A-10, "the Information Technologies department is ultimately responsible for establishing standards for the overall management and administration of information technology based programs for the County". With the approval of the revised Information Technologies Strategic Plan, the County would begin to implement standards that would be used on a County-wide basis. We have already started this trend by implementing a single system County-wide e-mail system. Countywide technology advancements and a prioritized technology program would be developed with oversight by the Information Technology Standards Sub-Committee (ITSSC), the Information Technology Steering Committee, the Chief Administrative Officer, and the Board of Supervisors.

3. The IT Steering Committee meets irregularly and provides no direction to the county's decision makers (ie: the BOS and CAO).

    *Response to Finding 3: **The respondent disagrees partially with the finding.*** At the direction of the Chief Administrative Officer, a new IT Steering Committee (ITSC) has been developed with representation from each functional group, effective June, 2004. The committee meets monthly to discuss IT issues affecting the County. As the ITSC becomes more familiar with issues pertaining to the effective use of technology, it will provide the direction to the county's decision-makers cited above.

4.   The lack of coordination between departments causes duplication of IT purchases.

        Response to Finding 4: <u>The respondent disagrees partially with the finding.</u> For the past several years, we have had a process in place whereby the purchase of hardware and software are reviewed by the IT department, and if necessary recommendations are made with regard to those purchases and their affect on technology within the County. For the most part this process has worked well, however; there have been some instances where a department has chosen to not implement the IT recommendation and duplication may have occurred.

5.   Individual departments make expenditures without coordinating the main frame interface needs of their new systems resulting in major impacts to the county's existing hardware, software, and IT personnel.

        Response to Finding 5: <u>The respondent disagrees partially with the finding.</u> As with number 4 above, for the past several years, we have had a process in place whereby the purchase of hardware and software are reviewed by the IT department, and if necessary recommendations are made with regard to those purchases and their affect on technology within the County. For the most part this process has worked well, however; there have been some instances where a department has chosen to not implement the IT recommendation, resulting in unanticipated impact to the County's existing hardware, software and/or IT personnel.

6.   The County does not aggressively pursue the use of technology as an advancement in methodology of doing county business for the purpose of economy, speed, or efficiency.

        Response to Finding 6: <u>The respondent disagrees partially with the finding.</u> Some County departments, such as Recorder/Clerk and Assessor, are able to do more work with fewer people due to the implementation of technology. For the past several years, economic constraints have not allowed for the aggressive pursuit of technology; however, we have attempted to continue the implementation and maintenance of those areas that will allow us to move forward more aggressively when funding is available. Examples include growth and maintenance of the Wide Area Network (WAN) and implementation of a single system e-mail. With managed planning through the IT Strategic Plan, it would be our intent to move in the direction of doing County business as economically, quickly, and efficiently as possible

<u>Recommendations</u>

1.   The County must work toward standardizing its software, hardware, and systems to insure all county employees can work together on the same systems efficiently.

        Response to Recommendation 1: <u>The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.</u> IT has been working with the Information Technology Standards Sub-Committee (ITSSC) and the ITSC to propose standards that address these concerns.

For example, we are in the process of implementing a single system county-wide e-mail system. We expect implementation to be complete by December 31, 2004.

2.   The BOS, CAO and the IT Director must take the lead on the IT Steering Committee with participation by other key department heads.

        Response to Recommendation 2: <u>The recommendation has been implemented.</u> At the direction of the Chief Administrative Officer, a new IT Steering Committee has been developed consisting of members from each of the functional groups.

3.   The BOS, CAO and Director of IT must create a multi-year strategic technology funding plan.

        Response to Recommendation 3: <u>The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.</u> Per Board of Supervisors Policy A-10, we are in the process of reviewing and updating the IT Strategic Plan that was implemented in November, 2000. Once approved, this plan will become the roadmap that will direct future technological improvements. It will be reviewed bi-annually, per the policy, to ensure that the future technological needs of the County are being met. We anticipate completing the revision, review, and approval of the IT Strategic Plan by October 31, 2004.

4.   The IT Steering Committee must be assigned the responsibility for integrating, prioritizing, and approving county technology projects, purchases, and funding.

        Response to Recommendation 4: <u>The recommendation has been implemented.</u> Per Board of Supervisors Policy A-10, the IT Steering Committee functions in an advisory capacity to IT, the CAO and the Board of Supervisors. At the direction of the Chief Administrative Officer, a new IT Steering Committee has been developed consisting of members from each of the functional groups.

5.   The IT Steering Committee must revise and update controls on purchasing of technologies, so that redundant systems are not purchased or adversely affect IT infrastructure.

        Response to Recommendation 5: <u>The recommendation has been implemented.</u> See the response to the previous recommendation.

6.   The County must aggressively pursue technological advancements with the objectives of reduction in cost and improvement in efficiency.

Response to Recommendation 6: ___The recommendation has not yet been implemented,___
___but will be implemented in the future.___ While some departments, often through the use of
special funding available from fees or trust funds, have pursued technology to lower costs
and improve efficiency, the County as a whole has not been able to aggressively pursue
technology due to economic constraints. In March, 2004, the Board adopted two goals
acknowledging the need to use technology to improve economy, efficiency and service.