Preparing for Multiple Health IT Initiatives At Once Using Common Project Management Techniques

Webinar Notes

August 15, 2011

Welcome

Before We Begin

Introduction

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This is being presented by Andrea S. Danes, Director, Healthcare and Human Services at CSG Government Solutions and also Paul Brannan, Director of Portfolio Management, Alabama Medicaid Agency.

Webinar begins here:

Indentify the Landscape

Monitor Listservs, Web announcements, and industry papers

There are industry papers and industry periodicals and other things that are coming out to provide a good understanding of what is happening in the industry and there are lots and lots of resources, a couple of which I will list on a slide here in a moment that you can get a handle on. Many of you are probably on the NMEH listserv and there is a lot of information exchanged there; not all of it will be relevant to what you are doing but the DELETE key is an easy exercise, and I suggest to people the value of that communication greatly outweighs the exercise and calories required to delete it a few times a day for those things that don't interest you.

Triage new initiatives to identify which are applicable

Not everything that comes out from industry papers, a listserv, or from the Federal Government is going to directly impact your program or if you have parsed it down in a more granular format, that component of the program that you are responsible for. So having someone who is monitoring and doing an initial triage to disperse those things appropriately and discard those things that are not impactful is definitely a time saving.

Prioritize based on internal and external deadlines and goals

We will talk a little bit more about MITA as we get into the latter part of the strategies but really understanding what the internal and external time lines and goals are is a challenge and I know

Paul has some real good information on that point. You have to understand what you are already tasked with and already working with in order to be able to prioritize what new things might come forward.

Document the findings

Document your findings in a place that can be found among staff. I would be willing to bet in most organizations the *Eligibility Emporium* that was just published, probably 20 to 25 people within an organization have grabbed 200+ pages and are independently and individually trying to digest what that means to the same organization. If you have someone in charge or appointed to do those sorts of things and then there is a synopsis that is shared with the broader group, you have that documentation of the findings and it expedites the Agency's understanding of the impact.

Centralize Updates

You should centralize those updates and have one place where people can go and actually see those synopses and other summaries that have been put out there and things that are impacting the organization.

Here are just a few resources that you can look at:

CMS Press Releases

This is at https://www.cms.gov/. This is one of the most critical for the Medicaid agencies right now and you may get press releases that have to do with the provider Webinar that they are hosting and things like that. Hitting DELETE is an easy thing to do if it is not of interest. There is a lot of valuable information that comes out through that channel.

NMEH List Serv

I am a huge proponent in being involved in the National Medicaid EDI Healthcare (NMEH) Workgroup. I am assuming most of you on this call are, and Kristi Grunewald is our current person there so if you need to get hooked up to the listserv, you can email Kristi Grunewald at Kristi.Grunewald@state.mn.us or you can email me. We can get you a packet as well.

Medicaid Initiative Timeline

This is at http://www.csgdelivers.com/fhi. This is something we developed and put out to the industry. Basically, it is an interactive time line that shows, by year, things that are required due to the different legislatives that have been released. When you click on one of those items, it takes you to a synopsis of the requirement and provides a link back to the national legislation. So it is a tool. Even on my phone, I have used it to remind myself when different things are due.

Workgroup for Electronic Data Interchange (WEDI) Listserv, conferences

This is at http://www.wedi.org/. The workgroup for electronic data exchange is a broader health care industry stakeholder group. They are dealing with a lot of the same issues that the States are dealing with from the Medicaid prospective. It is a good organization to get involved with. If your State is a member of WEDI there are as many openings as you have people to actually get on the listserv for the various work groups. There is no charge per person.

Modern Healthcare/Health IT Strategist

Modern Healthcare also puts out a little update service that has been helpful and they have some hot alerts and alerts that come out periodically. This is not an all-inclusive list by any means. This is a picture of the timeline I mentioned earlier and they are active links. When you see "Creation of a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services innovation," if you click on that you can find a synopsis of that requirement and the statute that made that happen.

Deploy Effective Project Management

Detailed project planning

We will start on the second strategy by posing the statement "My Agency manages large-scale projects with documented project management artifacts." One of my favorite artifacts is, when all else fails. bang your head here. Unfortunately, States are managing very large projects without any formalized project management. It is primarily because the people who are trying to get the work done can't find time in the day to stop and document what they are actually doing or getting done. That is a challenge and I completely understand that, but the longer term and the broader and deeper these projects are, the more vital that those key project management artifacts are really incorporated into the work itself. This is to make sure there are not two people doing the same thing or something being left undone because they thought someone else was handling it. There is a complete and concise articulated set of expectations not only for the outcome of the project in its entirety but for key milestones along the way and the status and health of the project.

Some key things from project management obviously are work breakdown structure and understanding what needs to be done, what time frames are realistic for accomplishing those tasks and most importantly, probably, resources that are going to be allocated to do that work. One of my key phrases I love to say when I go in and get to work with people is "getting to put one full-time employee (FTE) or two FTEs on a work breakdown structure does not people make" and it doesn't equate to real human beings so it is vitally important when you are planning the work that you are identifying real individuals who are going to be able to do those tasks. You should take into account the things they are already tasked with before taking on the responsibilities of this new project. In addition to that you should have solid communication plans so that everyone involved, all the stakeholders, have an understanding of how they will be communicated with throughout the life of the project with regard to the status of the project and challenges that might arise.

Managing

We have issues in risk management and those are key and making sure that you understand what they are within the context of the project and being able to mitigate them effectively. We always characterize that an issue is something we are dealing with today and risk is something we anticipate might pose a problem down the road. Again, going into project management and making sure it is written down. If it is not written down, it really didn't happen. I would say from the Network Management Information System (NMIS) conference we had someone make a comment that they were struggling with full-blown project management and didn't have the resources to do that. I recalled a time when I was working with a State and we were dealing with our Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) project, and we started to have our working group meetings and at that time we did not take meeting minutes. We would spend hours going back over ground we had covered in previous meetings simply because people were not able to attend every meeting or remember why a decision had been made. So really being able to have that project management in place at whatever level you do it. Start with agendas and minutes.

Again, with all the different projects and initiatives that are going on in your organization one of the key things found as an opportunity for success is to centralize the project management function. Paul will talk about how Alabama has been able to do this successfully. Along with centralizing project management so that you know, from an enterprise perspective, what different projects are working on, what paths, and who is working on what end and also dependencies between them: Federate the project responsibilities. It is completely unrealistic to think that one person can manage the projects that have been created based on the Affordable Care Act, the eligibility factors that are coming out and health insurance exchange and HIPAA and all the other things that are coming at the Agency. If that individual is your star player they only have 24 hours in a day and we are not asking them to give all 24 to work.

You should federate the project responsibilities and assign specific responsibilities to certain individuals but then have them coordinate through a centralized project management process. Document those reporting procedures and align the various project schedules. This is something interesting we found when we did the seminar with RTI and AHRQ early in the year. The idea that there are a lot of things happening now that are probably going to require Medicaid and having access to more clinicians than you have on an ongoing basis. But those projects are pretty dispersed so you have your ICD-10 project which we know will probably need clinical support. You have a health insurance exchange and potential development of new benefit packages, and you may need some clinicians to weigh in on that. There is a lot of opportunity if you know you are going to need that additional support from clinicians, whether they are physicians or nurses, and you can identify them across multiple projects. There is a great possibility that you might be able to hire a number of those folks and have them work across the various projects where their skills and expertise are needed as opposed to having those projects in their own silos, where every time the project had clinical need you are looking for another body to fill that position.

It takes some coordination on the front end, but it is really challenging to get any type of resource at this point, so all leveraging and coordination across project is beneficial.

Risk and issue management can be coordinated. Facilitate cross-project status updates will allow you to identify cross-project interdependencies you are not otherwise going to realize until somebody says we are not going to make our deadline and somebody else says that is a huge problem for us. Clearly define governance and make sure everybody understands the reporting structure, who the executive sponsors are, who the frontline managers making key decisions in rapid succession are and who of the frontline staff are going to have to implement.

Engage in Strategic Planning

It is as simple as the old saying “a stitch in time saves nine” and as old fashioned as that sounds, it is absolutely true. If you don’t plan, people end up doing things twice, or two people work on the same thing not realizing it or have things left undone inadvertently and you realize at the end there’s a lot of back work to fill in. So clearly define your governance, establish overarching goals and objectives, and prioritize. You can’t do everything at once, and I think we are seeing it with eligibility modernization projects where people are setting an interim target to have something done at the end of 2013 but they are looking at the end of 2015 and thinking what can we be doing in the second phase. So prioritize and engage in real-time provisions and every project plan is a living, breathing document. It is something that should be adjusted because you will never know with a 2- to 3-year project everything that is going to happen and how to anticipate it accurately. You need to make sure that you have got real-time revisions keeping that thing alive. Allocate real resources, going back to the FTE not equaling a real person. Proactively communicate modernization plans and any ongoing initiatives that you have so that everybody that needs to know understands the multiple priorities on the projects and can report projects truthfully.

Leverage Federal Guidance as a Foundation

Let’s see a show of hands on agreement with the statement, “My Agency effectively leverages our Medicaid Information Technology Architecture (MITA) State Self-Assessment (SS-A) and other Federal guidance to measure progress toward goals.” (No hands were raised). I think everyone feels like they are drowning in paper right now but there is value in the Federal Guidance being published and the MITA framework.

Obviously, we have framework 2.0 and artifacts of the version 2.01 currently available to the industry and developed by CMS in collaboration with the States and industry partners. In addition to the framework it is also a broader initiative, and we know that there are three components which are business architecture, information architecture, and technical architecture. This is the best strategic planning tool available to the States. Those who have doubts about MITA have to realize that in the absence of any strategic framework MITA is definitely beneficial to the States who choose to leverage it as a strategic planning tool. We know that 2.0 is being evolved to version 3.0 and, at some point, CMS will be releasing that to the broader public.

Within the context of what was shared at the Medicaid Management Information Systems (MMIS) conference, we are still operating with MITA framework 2.0 and 2.01 artifacts, we know from things that were said at the conference that 3.0 has some changes. On this slide I have put the current next to the future so right now we have 8 business areas and we know that we will have 10 with 3.0 as the draft stands today. There are 79 business processes with their ability matrices going to 77 with 3.0. In 2.0 we saw informational and technical architecture that were substantially in development and those will be moved to a complete status with the publication of 3.0.

The State self-assessment process does establish the enterprise goals and objectives. One of the key things that has come out of the SS-A process is being able to get the executives into a room. These are the real tough leaders within your organization and the vision for what that enterprise should look like in the next year, 5 years, and 10 years. It has been my great pleasure to work with several States. It is very revealing and there is a lot of engaging conversation. A vision that can be articulated throughout the organization really helps people understand why what they do is so important for those broader goals and objectives. Another key component is mapping the State processes to the MITA definitions. We are all familiar with working with the "as is" and developing your "to be" goals for business information and technology. In the current version, business is the only architecture that has an assessment component but, again from what was mentioned at the conference, we know that with 3.0, information and technology will also have assessment components.

The development of a road map or transition plan that you can submit to CMS with your APD is a critical part of strategic planning. Use that State assessment as a dynamic planning tool to measure the progress that you make and use it as a communication tool. One of my favorite stories is a State that would periodically find itself swaying in the wind of legislative direction and that found it really challenging to communicate back to its legislature how the new fad of the day was seemingly unreasonable. The time frame was going to impact the things that that Agency already had underway. Being able to use MITA to show the road map and be able to go back to the legislature and say we mapped for you in that timeframe but this is what is going to get pushed off if we do that. If you only get one resending of a request because of the ability to articulate your proactive strategic plan, it is well worth the investment. It also provides multiple analysis options for you.

The seven standards and conditions are another piece of Federal guidance that has been shared and I think it is key and critical that we heard the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) say at the conference that this does not just apply for the 90-percent match for eligibility modernization funding but rather the seven standard and conditions are a requirement for any financial partnership CMS has with the State including MMIS modernization activities. Not speaking on behalf of CMS but that's certainly what I heard in Austin. Let's take a quick look at the list.

- *Modularity Stand* is talking about open interfaces and the ability to use a business rule's engine and have a more modular approach to modernizing systems.
- *MITA Condition* is aligning to the MITA framework and increasing in MITA maturity.
- *Industry Standards* is ensuring alignment with and incorporating industry standards. I think one of the key differences I can say we all understand in HIPAA you have to take in a standard format and put back out a standard format. The industry standards condition really requires you to begin doing business differently based on those standards and integrating them, if you will, into the heart of your business which we also find the operating rules we will be doing.

- *Leverage Condition* is how you can create something that can be shared either within your Medicaid enterprise with other State agencies or ultimately from State to State.
- *Business Results Condition* is making sure that things are happening with a specific goal in mind and that everything that is created moves toward that end goal. The reporting condition having access to accurate data in real time format and dashboard reporting is a key example here so that you can better make decisions about the organization of the Medicaid program and better serve your beneficiaries.
- *Interoperability Condition* is making sure that the things that happen with Medicaid are also functioning seamlessly with HIE and HIX and other Federal agencies.

The Exchange reference architecture and technical guidance 2.0 and pending regulations we have some MPRMs we are looking at now. We will be expecting performance metrics in the fall, as mentioned at the conference and I am pretty sure there will be other things coming out. We know there is a lot of Federal guidance to be leveraged and much more coming. Again going back to the first point, find a way to keep that constant change and flexibility.

Wrap Up

So we will wrap up by saying whether you feel like you are hanging on by your fingernails or had a victorious day at work, these are some keys to moving forward:

- Identify the landscape and know what and when.
- Deploy effective project management so be sure to document to manage your initiative and communicate, communicate and communicate through the organization.
- Engage in strategic planning which is really an investment in enterprise-wide planning and dynamic in nature.
- Leverage Federal guidance as a foundation. It is a path to the cash and we know if you want access to the Federal money, you have to make sure you are leveraging their guidance as a foundation and it is truly a comprehensive tool for use in establishing your objective.

So I contend that success is within reach.

Avoiding Project Management Problems (Paul Brannan)

I wanted to thank Andrea for doing an excellent job of talking about a lot of things we can do to help us be more successful in working with our projects. One of the questions you may be wondering is, is it necessary to do all of that and be organized and go through all of those steps. It seems like an awful long process, so to get you thinking about that I am wondering if any of you have had any problems with your projects that IT seems to have.

Most of you are probably familiar with the Standish Group and a chaos report that they publish on a regular basis. In 2009 they mentioned that only 32 percent of projects are delivered on time, within budget and with required features. My initial reaction to that is, that is just IT projects. Doing a little bit more research, it is actually true that IT projects have a large failure rate but it is not just IT projects. We have found in our Agency here in Alabama that projects that don’t have IT components still have the same lack of success rate and it is somewhat discouraging. At the MMIS conference Andrea and I were making this presentation and after asking everyone to stand up and I asked them to sit down unless their projects had been successful in their estimation. Success we defined as being on time and delivering everything they had planned on delivering on the project within the budget and not a single person could stand. Every person had at least one project that had been a failure for them and with the number of projects we have coming down the pipe in the next years, we can’t afford to have failures.

It is not just projects outside of Government. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) report indicates that 413 IT projects valued at over $25 billion were poorly planned or poorly performing or both. That is distressing so the question is how do we actually fix them? Has somebody thought about that and how do we go about solving that kind of problem? I was looking for evidence that someone had done that in a government center and found just north of the border in Ontario the Special Task Force on the Management of Large Scale Information and Information Technology Projects were trying to come up with some solutions and issues that we were just talking about. In 2005 they gave these recommendations:

- They recommended creating an executive position for project delivery. In other words, make sure someone is high up on the organizational chart with a lot of authority whose main goal is to make sure projects actually finish on time, within the budget, and most importantly deliver what they were supposed to do.
- They recommended reducing the size of projects so instead of having one big project, they found it was better to perhaps divide projects into smaller pieces to make things a little bit easier to handle.
- They recommended making sure that there is a solid business case for every project. We need to understand exactly what we are doing when we do this project--the process, what we are planning and what we are hoping to achieve. Is there really is a value proposition to pursue it in the first place?
- They recommended establishing a professional project management capability and not just deciding to manage projects by the seat of our pants but actually putting some things in place that will help us be organized in the way we manage projects.

- Also, to make sure in any particular time frame we don't bite off more than we can chew, they recommended limiting the number of significant initiatives taken on during any given period. Someone might argue that we need to give the Federal government this particular last bullet point as they seem to be throwing more and more initiatives our way but still we need to try to limit what we are trying to accomplish at one point.

I chose Lucy for this slide because after reading the recommendations, my initial take is I already knew that. I knew we had problems and projects weren't as successful as they ought to be and I had a gut feeling that those were some things that would help us to solve it. It reminded me of something my daughter has reintroduced me to—"I Love Lucy"—and at 13 she is a big fan. One of the things that she likes about Lucy is that she can see the problem that Lucy is getting in to before Lucy does. If you have watched the show you understand that everybody knows Lucy's plans are not going to work out well but she seems to be oblivious to all that. She doesn't understand that it is going to be a poor choice to make. So I am wondering why we continue down that same road knowing it is going to be problematic and why do we continue to pursue the same strategies when they aren't very successful.

In my mind I have decided this is not necessarily a good thing that this is the way that we typically go about doing our projects. Some questions I thought were worth asking are: If we know the problems in managing projects, why do they continue to persist? Why is it that our lessons learned are really lessons unlearned? If the recommendations that are made to solve our problems are as they appear, why aren't more people doing them? Really for all of us who try to manage projects in one shape or form whether IT, not IT, or, like most of us, managing hybrid projects that have an IT component in them, what does this mean we should be doing or what should we do differently?

There are three things in particular I think are foundational before you start establishing anything else relative to our project management. I want to talk about those and serving as a foundation for what Andrea has shared with you and some other things that you may have. I think if you don't have these you are really setting yourself up for failure. The first one is: <u>insist on accountability</u>. We need to make sure as we, as project managers, have accountability all the way up to the top of the organization and are making sure that we manage our projects in a structured and organized manner. We are going to use a lot of the principles and guidelines that Andrea just shared with you. That means leadership from the very top, if possible.

In Alabama we were very fortunate that the desire to have a portfolio management or project management office actually began with our commissioner. There were some of us down in the trenches that had seen the need for that, but she really had the vision to set that up and decided that we needed to establish it. She asked me, last summer, to write up what it would take to establish such an office. I presented a presentation of what I thought it would take and basically she gave me the opportunity to try to make that so. I guess that is one reason you need to be careful what you ask for because I had no idea she would ask me to lead the proposal after I presented it. The good thing is that we already had support from the very top. If you know Alabama and the Alabama Medicaid structure, you know that our commission is appointed by our Governor and you may be aware that in the election in November our incumbent governor was no longer eligible to run again. He served two terms so we had a new governor. It is what I like to say “if your commissioner is appointed he can also be disappointed.” So we had a new commissioner and a new governor, and one of the first things I needed to do in introducing myself to the new commissioner is to make sure we had his support. Also being accountable in managing our projects and showing the value of what we were trying to do and making sure we, as an Agency, were going to follow the process and that would give us a better opportunity to be successful.

What happens if you don’t have that active involved leadership from the top? I would encourage you to get it as high up the food chain as possible. If you can only get it within your department, then maybe you want to set up these principles within your department to begin with and then plan to expand it later on. If you can only get it within your work area hopefully as you use these principles in your own work area you can have others see the success that comes from that and be interested in joining in.

You also need to have sponsors who are active and contributing. Project sponsors often, in my experience, have been people who have been figureheads only. They have been named as a sponsor and they have given you the charge to go off and do a project and come back and talk to me when you are finished. And they don’t want to be involved until it is time to do user testing. We need sponsors who are active and really involved in the project, who are not just looking at the project and what is going to happen when it is finished but who are involved, if not in the day-to-day tasks, in the major issues and milestones and problems that confront each project.

Part of accountability also means simplifying things and if your government Agency tends to have bureaucracy, you want to cut through that for your project management. Set up principles that allow decisions to be made as quickly as possible and by the people likely to be able to make the best decisions right there on the spot if possible. You are going to have to have accountability in my mind to at least be successful.

The next thing you need to do is understand your capacity. There is only so much one person can do, and maybe you are tired of telling people that but it really is true. If we are going to be successful in projects, we can’t be willing to take on all good ideas that happen to come our way. So we understand just how much we can do and if we don’t have the capacity to do the things that we think need to get done, how are we going to take care of that? Simply saying that we are going to do more with the same amount of employees may not necessarily be the answer.

When I talk about capacity I am talking about a number of things. I am talking about making sure we have the money to do the projects that we want to do. In a number of States, right now, with 90 percent funding, coming up with the 10 percent State share is hard. We need to make sure we can follow through on that commitment when we file our APD that we will have the State share available and if we don’t, we don’t need to attempt to accomplish the project. If we are not getting any Federal match, we need to make sure that we understand what the project is going to cost and we have a commitment if the money is not already available that by the time it is needed, it will be made available.

We need to make sure that we give ourselves sufficient time to carry out the contemplated work. One of the things I have told project managers and senior staff within the Agency is that worse things can happen than our project being successful but late. We need to make sure we don't rush to meet a deadline while we fail to achieve value and the benefit or at the risk of being really successful in what we were looking to do. We need to make sure we have enough people to actually do the work and we need to think about strategically as well and understand that if I give a person two jobs to do, then they are not going to be productive as much as they were when they had one job. Multi-tasking takes time. If a person has seven projects to work on and juggle, they are not going to have an hour to devote to each one of those if they are working seven hours a day because they are going to need time to shift gears, transitioning from one project to another, and it is going to be inefficient. We need to make sure we have people we can dedicate as much as possible to one particular project.

This can be problematic in some States and ours is a good example. Within our merit system staff we have no one that is a full-time project manager. They do that in addition to some other job. This is a problem for us so a lot of what we do with our project managers is to try to help them find ways to offload their other tasks to be more efficient. We have to have some way of knowing what type of resources we have and if we don't have enough to be able to do it, what are we going to do? Are we going to augment with contractor staff or defer some projects to a later date? We need to have a good idea of what we are going to do.

We also not only need to make sure we have enough warm bodies but also have the capacity to absorb the impact of change. There is only so much change someone can handle before they begin to freak out. You have probably seen people who have become battle-weary from change after change after change where they are no longer able to cope with what is happening and they have to take a vacation or, in some cases, change careers. It is usually not that drastic for people but, as an organization, you need to realize there is only so much change you potentially can have and be careful not to expose your staff to so much change in a short period of time or they may not be able to assimilate all of it.

One of the things I should have mentioned on the Change slide before we moved to this one is as you move down the list towards the bottom is that it is increasingly difficult to measure what your capacity is.

I wanted to mention change your culture. We tend to do things in an organization a particular way. A lot of times we reward some things that weren't necessarily good in our organization. For example, often because we want to hear that projects are successful, that projects are being very productive, that projects are accomplishing what we wanted them to do, we encourage people to give rosy pictures of their project. We are a little bit behind but we think we can catch up. Or we may have spent more money than what we thought but we anticipate we are going to be able to save a little bit later on. Or we think we are going to be able to handle this without any problem. They haven't taken the time to look at what is involved with the project. It is important within your culture that you allow people to be honest. Allow them to be open and say what they think and that you allow them to think outside the box and use new ways of doing things that may work from how you have done it within your organization. You are also going to have to emphasize the importance within your group of allowing people to fail. If you have someone within your Agency who still has the burden of the failed project hanging around their neck for next 5 years, no one else will want to take on a big project for fear that it will happen to them. Failure is a way of learning. We need to take Thomas Edison's idea that he hasn't failed but rather found another way it didn't work. Failure is an option for us when we are trying and have done our level best.

We also need to be open when we have problems. If your project has a problem that is delaying its completion, that needs to be announced ahead of time. You have probably been in the project meetings and reporting that things are going well and it is succeeding and on track until about 2 weeks before delivery. Then we are behind and we don't think we can finish on time. In all probability, that didn't just creep up overnight. What actually probably happened was that things were getting behind all along but they thought they could catch up and didn't want to let others in on what was happening. It needs to be ok that you have a problem; not only should it be acceptable but it should be encouraged. You need to have a project management culture where it is ok to brainstorm ideas together, to allow people to discuss their problems openly, and to allow people to be able to collaborate to come up with solutions. If, in your organization, your project is not in a green status then you've got issues and nobody is going to tell the truth about the projects. We have seen that happen in our Agency from the vendor community and the internal community and people perceived that it wasn't ok to be behind, over budget, or missing a deadline. They weren't open about telling what was going to happen and the end result was when it finally came out our options were greatly limited as to what we could do to come up with some kind of preventive solution and be able to change things. If we had known earlier, we may have been able to devote additional resources if possible or at least to have had a better migration so our failure or at least our partial success would not be so problematic.

You need to be willing to change the culture within your organization and tell the truth to the extent that if being honest and open and sharing problems is not really accepted in your group, that is something you need to work on and change. That needs to start with people from the top down because that is who the folks are afraid of. What will the higher ups say or do if we actually say our project is a failure? They may not fund us in the future if we can't accomplish anything nor will they give the project to someone else thinking we are incompetent. We need to understand all of us are working together to try to be successful and we will work as a team to either succeed or fail.

One of the reasons we have to change this is the quote from Mr. Einstein: if you keep on doing what you have always done, then you are always going to get what you got. It is a funny way to think about it, but if your projects are not as successful as you want, you really need to consider: do I need to continue down the path that I am walking? In my mind some of the things you need to think about changing are: do we have accountability for using good project principles from the top down? What do I need to do to try to get that buy-in? Do I really understand what my capacity for doing projects is? It may be that the reason we are not being successful is because we are trying to do more than we are capable of doing and we need to change that. We need to stop and think: is it really ok to be open and honest in my project and be able to discuss accurately what is happening? If it is not, then look at changing that.

Establishing a project management office is what I think is necessary to be successful as an organization. Andrea has talked about that already and part of that is having a group that is responsible for not just for a single project, but for making sure all projects work together. When you are working on individual projects, your tendency is to grab a resource here and there and you don't care where else they are working as long as you can get some of their time. To do the right project and to do projects right, you need to have a group that is responsible for making sure that all of your resources are accounted for on the time they spend on any project and also that the projects they are assigned to are the ones that are paid for by the Agency. It is not that easy to establish a project management office. I know we have found that changing culture, in particular, has been somewhat troublesome for some people—that if we do things differently than what we have always done, they are not sure if they are able to get the information, or able to have the control that they have needed. We have been able to do that, by showing value. I would also encourage, as you go through this process, to regularly and consistently promote the value that you bring to the organization and have more projects completed in a timely manner and have less problems and rework and actually measure what you are doing so you can share that what you are doing is a benefit to your Agency and the people who are working there. Unless you are willing to do that, all these principles and guidelines are really going to be just half of the solution. You may be able to get a better handle on things in your particular area and on things that are happening to you. But as far as changing things in your organization, it is going to end up being less successful than you would like for it to be. That has certainly been our experience in Alabama.

If you have questions about what we have done and how we have established our Portfolio Management Office or you just need someone to talk about a particular issue, I would be glad to share email or give me a call. Just like Andrea, I will be glad to help in any way to get that going. I am turning it back over to Linda.

Questions and Answers

Welcome. Thank you, Paul, that was very interesting. I am turning to the participants and I urge you to either use the chat window or raise your hand to ask a question and we will open up our question and answer session. So any questions for Andrea or Paul? I am sure everyone out there has multiple projects.

Question: Paul, this is Utah. *What project management tool do you use for portfolio management?*

Answer: I am glad you asked about that and it is an important consideration if you haven't already done that. When we established this, we intentionally had no formal project management organization. We set it up last July, and we began with just some paper templates and Excel spreadsheets. We did that because one of the things we wanted to do before we got an electronic tool is to collect requirements. We wanted requirements not just to fit what the project management office wanted but also what our needs for project managers are. One of the things we found in surveying our project management landscape is that we had project managers all over the board as far as technical expertise and abilities and because of that, it took some time and a lot of discussion back and forth before we decided to even bring one in as a proof of concept. We kicked off last month a proof-of-concept validate tool that we think is going to be useful. We chose the Microsoft Office Enterprise Project Server (2010 version) and one of the reasons we did is that our Agency is also moving toward SharePoint as our repository and means of doing a lot of the things for our Agency. It had the best tie-ins with SharePoint.

What we are trying to do in the proof-of-concept phase is to see if this tool is going to be easy enough to use with some templates and some hand-holding for our less advanced project managers. We want to see if this will be over their heads or something they can actually use right out of the gate.

Andrea said, obviously for an organization like ours we are managing multiple projects across the country and we have also selected that same technology. We use it to varying degrees depending on the depth of the project. I don't want this to turn into an ad for any particular project. I would just say if there is anybody listening that would have a suggestion for another technology that could be considered, it might be a good time to throw that on the table too.

Question: *This is Utah again and can you have a portfolio management with strictly Microsoft® Project or do you have to have the Enterprise server to really show a portfolio that shows the resource allocation etc.?*

Answer: To my understanding it is doable without the server version but it is very problematic. The other reason we are looking at the Enterprise tool is that we have, as part of our office, a governance board that is made up of our Chief Financial Officer, Chief of Staff, IT Director and our people over our provider recipient areas that meet on a regular basis to prioritize projects. The Enterprise Server tool is a way to automate a project idea all the way through a project proposal and a business plan approval and actually having it prioritized in a portfolio. There is a piece of the project tool that will actually do that for you as well and simply tracking the resources so that functionality made it interesting to us as well.

To echo a little bit of what Andrea said, I think the key in looking at what you are wanting to do is to make sure, before you start looking, that you have clearly identified your needs and have put those into some kind of requirements form, and then compare the tools you are interested in using against those particular requirements. If you are interested in talking offline about some of the experiences we had with this particular tool, that is fine. I know there would be plenty of salesmen who would be glad to tell you about their software and what it will do.

If there are others on the line who could tell us of others that would be good. I am aware of Primavera and would like to know what other options there are.

Question: This is Linda, and we have question from Rob in DC about managing multiple mandates and projects and staff. I would also like to go to Tina Scott's question because I think it maps onto this discussion. Her question is: *Do you require vendors that manage projects to use specific base software to be able to upload it to your office to keep track of projects and keep to the master timeline?*

Answer: This is Paul. The answer, at least to this point, is that it depends. If we have a vendor who is doing a task for us and there is no State staff involved, we will allow them, if they have a tool that meets certain requirements for interface, to be able to do that using whatever they use. However, if they don't, we require the minimum for them to be able to import into our tool. The reason for that is that we want to be able to keep up with how our State staff resources are being used and if they are being required to assist on the project, as is probably the case, and the vendors are not all doing them by themselves. We have some State staff who are involved with them on a fairly regular basis. We want to be able to accommodate that and one of the key value points of our office has been being able to provide a means for people to objectively say they have left to work on this additional project and how much time they don't have and what we are going to do to resource the project adequately.

Question: *Can we go over some options for project management when you have multiple mandates and projects and a small staff to work with?*

Answer: This is Andrea, and I would say, back to one of my earlier points, that you don't have to go into full-blown project management to begin moving down that path and putting communication, documentation, and some constraints to support the weight of the project. So from an overall project management perspective, there are a couple of ways for States to go about it. If you are asking for vendor support on something, you can ask them to provide project management in addition to actually doing the work and put that in place for you. If you are talking about projects where there isn't vendor support and doing these things with State staff only, work with the State staff like I gave in my example and do something as simple as creating agendas and meeting minutes. Have action items at the bottom where you can status back around on those action items, be it a very simple bulleted list of issues or risks and something is better than nothing. Depending upon how many people you have involved and how large the project is, at least getting something in the form of documentation is going to move you down that path. It is definitely not a one size fits all.

This is Paul. To add to what Andrea said, I think it is important to look for overlap and coordination between projects. One of the things in Alabama that we are doing in making our revisions to health care reform is that we want to move from specific State district offices to service centers that, ultimately, in 2014, will be a one-stop-shop for health insurance. We are already looking to establish those across the State so we can have those up and running ahead of time. We are also changing a little bit on how we do delivery of care for our patients through our global delivery network that we are establishing with our physicians. It is a pilot project and it just so happens that it is piloting in our North Alabama area in the same place we are about to establish a new customer service center. So in working with both of these projects, one of the things I have tried to do is work with our public relations staff to make sure that in their messaging area that they combine both of those and use that in a blitz to try to inform both of our recipients and our providers about the changes that are happening and try to kill two birds with one stone.

A lot of times there is overlap between projects and to the extent that you can find opportunities that you will be able to accomplish work for multiple projects without duplicating the efforts, I think you always have a win there. The other thing is that, in some cases, we have to make difficult decisions in saying that, at a minimum, you can defer or at least stagger implementation on certain projects depending on how much change they impose on the Agency. In some cases it is better to be late but be successful than to pursue a schedule that you think ultimately that is not very realistic.

Question: *This is Utah again following along the same line. Paul, unfortunately in our business, the due dates and the workload are not under our control and internal pressures, be they legislative, Federal, or other source mandates. You and Andrea mentioned several times don't under-resource projects. The question is, have you run into situations where you just plain don't have the resources and because of the PMO, have been able to go to the legislature and obtain additional workers, or how have you handled that?*

Answer: This is Paul. What they have tried to do in handling that is that they have those situations and are actually in that situation right now. With health care reform, estimates in Alabama are that there will be in 2014 a half a million more Medicaid recipients in the State, whereas right now we have a million. So we are looking at a 50-percent jump in the number of lives that we will be covering for Medicaid. In looking at staffing as there will be an increase in staffing and for our State, like many other States, we have a hiring freeze. We can't even fill vacant positions in the State. What we are trying to do and have had some success in the past when we have run into situations like that is try to promote what we were trying to do as a value proposition. That is, if there was some way we could show that by giving us these new positions with staffing or even bring in a contractor necessary to do what we needed to do, here is what is going to come from it. We tried to calculate and show and anticipate tangible benefits in addition to just saying that you are going to be violating Federal regulations. It is a big stick but we are trying to use the carrot to try to entice and we have had a little bit better success in getting people to buy in to what we were doing.

We tried to make it a value proposition on this particular contract or giving us the additional staff but the value to the Agency is going to be this much. A lot of that depends on developing a good business case for whatever it is that you are requesting.

This is Andrea. To add to what Paul said, if I could find a way to make project management artifacts get more staff for States I am pretty sure that would be the only thing I would need to do for the next 10 years. I do think that anything you can point to in writing that justifies any kind of request whether it is hiring positions or filling requests for reallocating staff. We use the word repurposing a lot right now with people who are doing something today and giving them training to do something different tomorrow. Any time you have a sound and more objective approach for justifying those requests, you have a better shot at getting it done. Project management artifacts can certainly support that but there is no way I would have claimed that I was actually increasing head count with project management.

This is Paul. To echo one thing that Andrea said, they are beginning to look at that in our Agency as well and maybe something you want to think about in Government and project management is looking at which projects are most important and making sure you do the ones that are most important with the most value first. We look at those projects and things that we aren’t doing on an ongoing basis. If your staffing problems get severe enough, something that you might want to do, and we have looked at it in some areas, are some of the new things that we want to initiate, things we have people doing day to day as part of their initial duties.

It may be that some of the people who don’t technically have time to work on projects would be doing something of more value to the Agency if they actually deferred or quit what they were doing and we suffered whatever impact came from that and a lot of the value that comes from doing this new initiative. That is something to think about and, at least in our State, traditionally has been outside of the box.

Question: *Andrea and Paul, I was wondering, I know we talked about engaging the leadership and getting buy-ins so you sort of have that top-down but what about working with multiple staff that have competing priorities and are working partly on your project and working on other projects? Are there any tips to engage that in the work to get energy going and in the project or multiple projects going?*

Answer: This is Linda. I was starting to think about this when Andrea was talking about a couple of things about making a point person responsible. For example, when centralizing updates and documenting findings and monitoring listservs, it occurred to me that something when people are devoting small chunks of times to projects, they might not see the particular value of that, so I am wondering if you have some ideas to engage people who are spread thin on multiple projects and you really need their attention?

This is Andrea. Great question. Linda and I tag on to what Paul said to that earlier, and I think that applies here. It is really making informed decisions about who is working on what whether that is the best use of their time. If there tend to be five people in the provider unit, each working on different projects, does it make sense to make each one the lead for each of the five projects or work on the same functional unit together and have the same base knowledge? Making decisions like that requires that you have a pretty good understanding of what the initiatives are and that those projects are not being done in silos and you can actually step back and take a more global look at who is being asked to do what. I have seen multiple instances where there is a State self-assessment happening and an eligibility modernization plan going on and something going on for HIPAA, and in all these places the provider enrollment needs are being pulled in over and over again or the member management are being pulled in over and over again, especially if that work has been parsed out to multiple vendors. Those vendors are not going to necessarily know that they are tagging the same people for similar sets of information.

I think I would pull it up to a higher level and say any coordination you can do at an enterprise level to man what projects are happening doesn’t necessarily have to be at a Microsoft® server level’s information but if this information is on somebody’s white board and these projects are happening and here are the general time frames and we know these three out of the eight are going to require staff, have them come into a room and talk about what they do daily. I think keeping people motivated is partly not asking them the same thing over and over again. And helping them to understand the bigger picture and why their input is so valuable can help them be really efficient in the use of their time from an enterprise standpoint.

This is Paul. One of the things that helps is getting people willing to discuss things with you and to make sure they perceive that you are helping and enabling them with the pain points that they have. They just don't see that these are people who are advocating project management and they are coming in and imposing all of these additional processes and templates and things they have to fill out and that they are actually looking at things to try to help them. Sometimes in our project training that we do for our project managers, we realize we don't have full-time project managers, we try to address with some project training. We had someone come in and show them how to organize their Outlook inbox and how to manage their email in a timely manner because they found that it was all eating them alive. So being able to help them save 15 or 20 minutes a day going through their mailbox was a valuable win for them. By providing that kind of information they can get more things done on projects as they become more efficient.

This is Andrea. Two other things that occurred to me when Paul was talking and I don't want to steal any thunder but I know AHRQ is aware of a series of trainings that Jody Holmes in Iowa put together and hopefully at some point in the future we can work on sharing that more. Jody really took it to heart that she wanted to help her staff be better project participants. She put together a series of sessions that helped them understand why their input was valuable and what they needed to do to effectively and efficiently work on the projects and I can't say enough about how valuable I think that was. You can definitely tell that the Iowa team grasped that well. One final thought I think chocolate is a great motivator so put chocolate in your meeting rooms.

Question: Sharon Hill asks *What exists to leverage multi-State approaches to Federal initiatives.*

Answer: This is Andrea. I know SoCio has a collaboration tool they were promoting pretty heavily in Austin. In working with my NMEH subgroup co chair with the HIX and eligibility modernization, we were talking about a conversation that is happening between Massachusetts and Rhode Island right now on leveraging something that is being created in one place for sharing in another. I think the short answer is that there is a ton of stuff that people are trying to get started but I don't know that anything has emerged that is really the key path to collaborating and sharing things from State to State.

Question: *How many people do you direct as the Director of Portfolio Management, and do your staff members have experience with Medicaid coming in?*

Answer: This is Paul. The answer to that question is twofold. As far as direct reports in our office (because we, like all the other areas in our Agency, didn't have enough staff), we initially brought in two full-time contractors who assist me in establishing the office. One had extensive Medicaid experience and one did not but was very good with project management and project management training. Indirectly, I supervise all of the project managers within the Agency so anybody with that title. This can be somebody who has credentials or someone who has been thrown on a project. In our matrix I have some responsibility to make sure that they are working successfully. We do a lot of development of both our policies and procedures for the Agency as well as our training in a collaborative mode with all of our project managers meeting together to share both the pain and the expertise. One of the things that has done for us is, because it has been the process from the beginning, I think we have achieved pretty good buy-in from them and they are feeling like it is something they can live with because they have been a part of it.

This is Erin Grace from AHRQ and I wanted to go back to Sharon's question of what exists to leverage multi-State approaches to Federal initiatives. Andrea had mentioned the SiCio initiative and in addition, CMS has a number of communities of practice on very specific Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) topics and I think they have kicked a couple off and one of them has to do with IAPDs. We will have a couple of communities of practice; one starts on Wednesday called State Medicaid Agencies Participate in State HIE and we will be managing another one later. ONC also has a number of communities of practices and Medicaid agencies are welcome to participate in any of those communities of practice. So that is another way to share information across States on how you are addressing Federal initiatives.

This is Linda. I want to explain to folks that we do have a listserv and you are all subscribed to that. It is listserv@list.ahrq.gov and the instructions are on the screen. It is easy to follow; you just send a message to listserv@list.ahrq.gov and on the subject line type Subscribe. In the body, type sub Medicaid-SCHIP-HIT and your full name and you will get a message confirming your intent to sign up.

I want to point out for folks on the next slide we do appreciate your evaluation of these Webinars and immediately following the Webinar, you will get an evaluation form on your screen. We hope you will take a minute to complete it. We would like to get your feedback, and input is extremely important to us and helps us improve future sessions and to ensure that we provide the best possible assistance to your Agency. If you don't have time to complete the evaluation immediately following the Webinar and would rather receive the form via email, please contact Diana Smith at dianasmith@rti.org and she will be happy to send that to you.