

TECHNOLOGY IN PRACTICE

NORTHERN KENTUCKY AREA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT: STREAMLINING THE ADRC PROCESS BY MAXIMIZING USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The Northern Kentucky Area Development District (NKADD) is an umbrella organization that includes an Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) and an Area Agency on Aging (AAA). NKADD is based in Florence, Kentucky and serves Boone, Campbell, Carroll, Gallatin, Grant, Kenton, Owen, and Pendleton Counties. NKADD has a longstanding commitment to maximizing the use of technology solutions to achieve streamlined, integrated and paperless ADRC processes that improve customer service and community access to information and resources.

Background

In the early 2000's, NKADD issued a request for proposals to update their case management department from a paper-based to an electronic system. Up until this point, NKADD had been using only paper for assessments, referrals to providers, and internal communications. In 2004, in order to move to a computer-based system and improve capacity to meet new federal reporting requirements, the organization decided to purchase the SAMS software system (a product from Mediware Information Systems) to input and track data. Since then, NKADD has continually worked to streamline their process by leveraging technology. The development of an ADRC system in the state beginning in 2006 provided further impetus to use technology to foster one-stop access to long-term services and supports information and assistance. In time, they brought their providers on board, and also became a part of a broader statewide database.

Implementation

NKADD seeks to use technology to update the intake process for all programs, maximize community access to information and resources, maintain live waiting lists,

increase communication efforts with their provider network, and provide comprehensive coordinated case management services. Working towards these objectives is an ongoing process that requires engagement of agency staff and of local and state partners. After purchasing the SAMS software in 2004, NKADD's providers were brought into the system in 2005 to input their own agency data. Then in 2009, NKADD was one of the first AAAs in the state to merge into the Kentucky Statewide Database. This database uses the same software platform (SAMS). While this process was not without its challenges, participating in the statewide database has been a lynchpin of real-time data exchange. For example, staff are able to search for a caller's service history across regions and monitor as individuals move on and off wait lists. Developments in the software have brought further integration of components such as Information and Referral and Case Management. In 2014, the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver Program was brought on board.

Impacts

Technology provides a critical foundation for the work of NKADD's Aging and Disability Resource Center. As the entry point for information and assistance on, and access to, key

home and community-based services, the ADRC has become the lifeline to programs and services for older adults, persons with disabilities, and caregivers. Having the ability to search a statewide database with a few clicks of a button, maintain a waiting list in real time, and easily review conversations and tasks from other ADRC specialists allows the ADRC to operate efficiently and effectively. Administratively, the ADRC has access to critical data on clients' use of services, and this functionality also allows for more powerful data reporting. From a program that was based heavily on paper-based processes, the current ADRC now operates with very little paper. Technology supports and streamlines key functions from initial contact and intake to assessment, referral, and more.

Lessons Learned

Through this transition to a technology-based system and statewide database, NKADD learned several important lessons.

- **Buy-in is critical.** Management, staff, providers, and funders are all key partners in undertaking a technology initiative. For example, staff needs to become familiar with the hardware and software; management needs to find value in the technology; leadership needs to make data a priority; and funders need to see that the use of technology increases the amount of information available and the ability to pull data and report on it.
- **Do not underestimate the need for training and technical assistance.** To assist staff in learning new software, it is important to develop training manuals to train staff and provider agencies. A handbook that outlines topics such as intake, journaling, assessments, and provider unit entry is also a helpful resource when implementing a new system. Training tools need to be updated regularly. NKADD also found that it had to provide technical assistance to provider agencies.
- **Recognize the need for IT capacity.** Having the necessary staffing support ensures that the software is used correctly. Therefore, it is helpful to have software administrators on staff.
- **Technology is an investment of time and money.** A new technology initiative may require a significant

financial investment, and it is essential to carefully evaluate the costs and benefits. This cost-benefit analysis helps agencies know if they are ready to make the financial and time investments that come with implementing new technology. NKADD found, for example, that the streamlining achieved through the use of technology saved at least one FTE—more than the cost of the annual license agreement. Agencies should also think broadly about ways to finance the initial and ongoing costs related to technology. A local foundation helped NKADD offset the initial purchase. Ongoing costs are shared with providers.

- **Delineate roles and responsibilities.** When partnering on a technology initiative such as a shared database, document roles, responsibilities, and procedures for implementing and managing changes. Doing so requires a dialogue among partners to address diverse needs.
- **Evaluate technology vendors and products not only based on today's needs.** Overtime, both technology and an organization's needs will change. A vendor that regularly maintains and updates their technology products and provides on-going training is critical in keeping up with changing needs.

Looking Ahead

For NKADD, the adoption of technology is not a one-time event but an ongoing process. Shannen Kelch, Senior Human Services Specialist, explains that, "I do not believe that the use of technology in our agency will ever be fully implemented simply because technology is always changing." The agency is currently working on redesigning its website to provide a place where consumers can access resources and information at their fingertips. They are also working on including a pre-screening tool on their new website that feeds directly into the database to help streamline the referral process.

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