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Final Copy of Case Study

Status:

Laureate

Year:

2013

Organization Name:

MITRE Center for Veterans Enterprise Transformation

Organization URL:

www.mitre.org

Project Name:

Eliminate Veteran Homelessness

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:

Human Services

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

In 2009, President Obama challenged the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to eliminate homelessness among veterans by the end of FY 2015. Achieving this goal required a new level of insight into managing VA's interdependent programs. The VA had to ensure it allocated resources appropriately, especially as it confronted potential budget reductions. VA's Deputy Secretary, W. Scott Gould, requested a computational model that could demonstrate the impact of potential reductions on the President's goal. MITRE quickly responded by bringing expertise in systems modeling to the Homeless Program Office. MITRE partnered with the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans to gain the insights of their SMEs as, together, they developed the Eliminate Veteran

Homelessness (EVH) model. Key tenets of the EVH Model were: transparency of the development process; a dynamic, causal model of program relationships; and assumptions based on quality data. The model had to withstand rigorous scrutiny of external stakeholders, including OMB and HUD. To provide statistically meaningful results, the model ran hundreds of times with varying input assumptions, taking over an hour. The VA, however, needed rapid turnaround during the budget process. By leveraging an internal high-performance computing cluster, MITRE reduced run time to minutes. During the budget process, VA successfully used the EVH Model to demonstrate that a budget reduction could preclude them from achieving the 2015 goal, and to present other potential impacts: longer periods of homelessness and higher recidivism rates. Finally, the model helped VA establish the need for additional investments to meet the 2015 goal. Today, the EVH Model is an impactful management tool for the VA. It helps justify their budget and can help them optimize their resources based on quick, accurate scenario testing. All of which is helping the VA get closer to its goal of eliminating Veterans homelessness.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

The EVH Model was initially implemented to support the FY2013 federal budget cycle that concluded in December 2011. Ongoing refinements to the model structure and new data capture activities were conducted in support of the FY2014 budget cycle.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

Refinements are being made continuously, in response to changes in programs and data availability. In addition, MITRE is working with the VA to optimize the tool's usage, particularly in terms of ongoing program management, resource optimization, regular reporting, and critical decision-making.

Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

The system dynamic approach facilitated a collaborative effort with VA, providing a new platform for discussing homelessness as an interdependent system of programs within VA and among federal and community partners. Vince Kane, Director for the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans and



responsible for the VA's primary homeless prevention program, noted that the tool was pivotal in demonstrating the need to expand permanent housing capacity and rapid rehousing resources. A direct outcome of its use was that funding was expanded in 2013 and the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program is now resourced at a capacity to assist more than 75,000 Veterans and their family members escape homelessness and achieve housing stability.

Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

Yes. Implementing a modeling capability that relates the program budgets to outcomes, based on a combination of historical data and subject matter expertise, provides a valuable tool to help substantiate and respond to budget requests and also provides a critical platform for investigating program tradeoff decisions. This approach is an ideal fit for the VA Eliminate Veteran Homelessness program and is expected to have broad applicability elsewhere within VA and across the federal government.

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)

A critical component of the model development project was gaining buy-in from a large stakeholder contingent representing organizations within VA and key external partners. Given the time constraints, success in this area required a transparent development process, which ultimately served two purposes. First, openness fosters trust; policy modeling always requires some degree of simplifying assumptions, and these decisions must be understood by the stakeholders before they can have confidence in the model results. Second, the model team needed to hear and respond to the stakeholder concerns throughout the development process to ensure the model would be used properly. The ongoing collaboration with the stakeholder community was critical to completing the model and determining how and in what circumstances it would be used. Finally, because the model was socialized with VA's federal partners, HUD and USICH, those stakeholders continue to participate in its usage. The model continues to support all three agencies in mutual planning as they work toward the goal of ending veteran homelessness by the end of 2015.