

Multnomah County District Attorney:
Data, Technology, and Communication
with the Public

September 2009



Steve March
Multnomah County Auditor

Audit Staff
Shea Marshman

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.



Office of Multnomah County Auditor

Steve March
County Auditor

501 SE Hawthorne Room 601
Portland, Oregon 97214
Phone: (503) 988-3320

Fran Davison
Judith DeVilliers
Joanna Hixson
Craig Hunt
Sarah Landis
Shea Marshman
Mark Ulanowicz

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 10, 2009

To: Michael Schrunk, Multnomah County District Attorney
Ted Wheeler, Multnomah County Chair
Deborah Kafoury, Commissioner, District 1
Jeff Cogen, Commissioner, District 2
Judy Shiprack, Commissioner, District 3
Diane McKeel, Commissioner, District 4
Bob Skipper, Multnomah County Sheriff

From: Steve March, County Auditor
Shea Marshman, Public Safety Auditor

Re: Audit of the District Attorney's Data, Technology, and Communication with the Public

The attached report covers our audit of the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office: data, technology, and communication with the public. We reviewed the efficiency, effectiveness, and performance of these department-wide policies and practices that affect operations across the organization. We found a number of areas in which successful changes are under way as well as areas where improvements can be made. We recommend several changes to enhance productivity through use of existing technology and improved communication with the public, while preserving the integrity of the county's public safety system.

This audit and our recommendations arrive at a difficult financial time for the county, when departments, including the District Attorney's Office, have been asked to do more with less. Multnomah County is fortunate to have a District Attorney who has long been a proponent of using technology to aid decision making and promote efficiencies in the area of public safety.

We want to thank District Attorney Schrunk, Chief Deputy District Attorney Rod Underhill, and the other members of the District Attorney's management team for their cooperation and assistance throughout the audit. In particular, we want to thank the prosecutors, administrative staff, and information technology staff in the District Attorney's Office, who spent time facilitating direct observations of prosecutorial functions, answering our numerous questions, assisting us with retrieving data, and helping us obtain a thorough understanding of the complexities of the essential services they provide.

Cc LPSCC

Executive Summary

The Multnomah County District Attorney's Office (MCDA) is an important element of the public safety system, representing the state in the prosecution of criminal defendants. Prosecutors decide what cases should be issued, what criminal charges will be included, and what sentences should be recommended to the judge. If MCDA does not function effectively, public safety related to criminal prosecution may suffer. We analyzed MCDA's practices related to data-based decision-making, use of technology, and communication with crime victims, witnesses and the general public to determine whether functional improvements are needed.

The audit found that:

- Data are used effectively to support essential functions. Improvements in data collection techniques would help managers make better use of data to inform decision making and analyze policy outcomes.
- Existing technology is used to support legal research. Low cost enhancements to current systems show promise for improved efficiency.
- On-going efforts are being made to optimize case management tools using existing technology and to use electronic rather than printed documents where possible. Continued work will be needed to maintain the efficiencies that have been attained.
- Written and telephone communication with the public can be improved by simplifying word choice and clarifying management expectations through targeted training and policies.

Recommendations included in this report are intended to improve MCDA's ability to fulfill their mission of providing the citizens of Multnomah County with fair, timely, and cost-effective justice services. MCDA managers have already begun implementing improvements in several areas.



Michael D. Schrunk, District Attorney

1021 SW Fourth Avenue, Room 600
Portland, OR 97204-1193
Phone: 503-988-3162 Fax: 503-988-3643
www.mcda.us

August 27, 2009

Steve March, County Auditor
501 S. E. Hawthorne, Room 601
Portland, Oregon 97214

Dear Mr. March:

I wish to express my appreciation to you and your staff for the work you have performed in auditing the District Attorney's Office. It is important that the Board of County Commissioners and the public get accurate and relevant information regarding the services provided by their county government programs. As you know, this office is a recognized leader around the country in both the quality of prosecution and in innovative approaches to important public safety issues.

As your office also knows, the District Attorney's Office is responsible for prosecuting crimes committed in Multnomah County, the most populous county in the State of Oregon. At the time this audit was prepared, the office maintained a staff of approximately 223 positions (84.3 attorneys) in fifteen locations around the county and with a fiscal year 2008/2009 operating budget of approximately 26.6 million dollars. In calendar year 2008, the office reviewed over 28,000 cases, issued charges on 5,135 felony cases and over 15,000 misdemeanor cases, collected over 32 million dollars in child support and freed 189 children for adoption.

It is important to understand the overall responsibilities and work of the District Attorney's Office so that the results of this audit may be placed in their proper context. We appreciate some of your suggestions for program improvements in areas such as written and telephone communications and a viable brief bank for our lawyers. While we have reservations regarding some conclusions, we share the fundamentally positive view of the office outlined in your Executive Summary. Thank you for your work.

Very truly yours,

MICHAEL D. SCHRUNK
District Attorney