



Update: The National Interoperability Community of Practice

In 2010, Stewards of Change™ led creation of an online community for HHS practitioners to share real-world experience and advance interoperability for consumer benefit. Now, NICOP is in full swing, and new members are invited to join the conversation.

ONE OF THE MANY IDEAS that garnered strong interest from participants at last year's national Stewards of Change conference was development of a community of practice and knowledge repository, to sustain the momentum toward interoperability gained during the conference and build ongoing professional relationships. Attendees cited a lack of any "single stop" as a significant gap and key inhibitor to progress in the field. They expressed interest in establishing a central online meeting place that would offer 24/7 access to pertinent information, encourage discussion and provide convenient ways to work collectively on topics of mutual interest.

To that end, in early 2010 SOC convened a group of about 30 conference participants to discuss what we've come to call the National Interoperability Community of Practice (NICOP). Over the next few months we crafted a draft charter (see next page) and constructed a password-protected Web site (go to www.stewardsofchange.com to request access).

Children and families don't experience their needs in silos, but the funding streams, service delivery models, technology systems and policies that undergird them typically operate in fragmented and isolated ways. Unfortunately, this lack of coordination, communication and sharing of crucial data can have tragic consequences. Until the formation of NICOP, there had not been a national clearinghouse that documents best practices, researches key operational considerations, publishes best/worst practices or provides technical guidance about planning for interoperable systems.

One of the first targeted uses of NICOP came in support of the November conference "Addressing the Myth and Reality of Confidentiality and Privacy in Cross-System Information Sharing," hosted by the University of Pennsylvania's Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research and Stewards of Change. Participants explored the topics of confidentiality and information sharing in detail; the NICOP site serves as home to a tremendous amount of related material, including case studies, templates and white papers, from multiple jurisdictions across the country.

Stewards of Change will continue to build and support NICOP in 2011. We encourage your input and participation to make it a more robust community addressing a wide range of HHS interoperability interests and concerns and improving consumer outcomes.

THE NICOP CHARTER

Statement of Purpose:

NICOP is established to advance the development and improvement of interoperable health, education and social services systems in order to improve both the effectiveness and efficiency of services. Our existing systems are unable to communicate and share comprehensive information to best serve the consumer. This flaw has led to a system that is not as effective or efficient as it could be.

There is growing momentum and urgency to increase collaboration, service integration and policy making as well as tangible funding support, given the increased investments in health information technology and education. However, there is no entity that is currently aggregating and/or disseminating information about interoperability initiatives among federal, state, county, local and private organizations. As a result, learning about successes, failures, benefits and costs is not readily available or shared, which contributes to redundancy, reinvention, reluctance and replication of unsuccessful efforts. The availability of this information will assist innovators in tangible and practical ways as they pursue individual interoperability initiatives. This community of practice will also provide a unique forum for dialogue among practitioners, policy makers and leaders across the program and administrative continuum and all branches of government.

The current state of our systems is characterized by services that operate in silos. The categorical silos under which services operate today inhibit an advanced consumer-centric approach to holistic service planning and delivery. This structure does not support the dramatic or rapid improvement in outcomes and operational efficiencies that are desired, needed and possible. NICOP supports interoperability among all systems where it benefits the clients and/or protects public health and safety.

NICOP Will Support Interoperability By:

- » Convening interested parties both virtually through an online community-of-practice Web site and through conferences and other events.
- » Serving as a multisector/multidisciplinary voice representing its diverse membership across private, local, county, state and federal providers.
- » Educating the public, stakeholders and policy leaders about the value of interoperability.
- » Playing a central organizing role by aggregating knowledge, sharing and disseminating information and promoting ongoing dialogue about interoperability initiatives across all levels, providers and other stakeholders.
- » Promoting the adoption of standards while taking care not to inhibit innovation. Standards and promising practices that reduce barriers to interoperability, including but not limited to privacy, confidentiality, funding and technology standards, will be shared by group members.
- » Supporting and encouraging the evaluation of current and prior efforts to implement interoperability and sharing the results of such evaluations. Evaluations should include efforts that worked, those that did not work, and those that worked other than as planned.
- » Developing and supporting the case for systemic change by gaining support from consumers, providers, advocates, judicial leaders, government stakeholders and innovators who take the risks to implement the change.
- » Providing unvarnished perspectives and feedback about actual and perceived barriers to interoperability, including barriers to information sharing, with colleagues and political leaders at the local, state and federal levels.
- » Promoting the policy making and program flexibility needed for the development of fully interoperable systems.
- » Creating and maintaining a clearinghouse of materials, guidance, memoranda of understanding, court orders, white papers and policy documents regarding interoperability strategies and information-sharing practices around the nation. This includes learning from other sectors, including business, medicine, military, other federal administrations and international efforts.

Expected Outcomes:

NICOP outcomes include the advancement of interoperability through sharing information, promoting promising/best practices, identifying existing or proposed business process models, and evaluating and supporting innovation. Ultimately, this work will promote a client-centered framework for services, improve outcomes, and reduce the cost of designing and implementing interoperable systems as well as the cost of care for all health and human services systems.

Membership:

Membership will include representatives from the private and public sector, all levels and branches of government, tribes, industry, private foundations, academia, and organizations that are expert in all aspects of technology, management and service provision. There will be representation from all areas of service provision, including consumers, health, child welfare, education, social services, public health, behavioral health, homeless services, juvenile justice, law enforcement and courts.

Core Principles:

1. NICOP promotes a client-centric rather than funding-centric approach.
2. NICOP's scope is "big picture" and comprehensive.
3. Our customers include organizations that serve children, youth, elderly, families, disabled/special needs individuals and the intellectually challenged.
4. Confidentiality and privacy are important and should be protected at the same time information is shared.
5. Our role is to educate, disseminate and advocate.
6. We provide a community of practice for people working in public and private systems to share information and knowledge and collaborate with colleagues.
7. All levels and branches of government are represented.
8. We view the role of technology to support and enable changes emerging from the business needs and operational considerations from programs.
9. Technology should be flexible, reusable, geographically unconstrained and collectively funded.
10. Innovation should be encouraged and precede standardization.
11. We accept a responsibility to review past integrative projects and policies to ensure that their lessons—both successes and failures—can guide current efforts.
12. Open reporting processes for NICOP should be encouraged to ensure accountability.
13. Communication between members, stakeholders and interested citizens shall occur in a transparent manner.
14. We encourage an ongoing effort to improve the way "success" is measured by drawing on the best science available and incorporating the use of longitudinal data linkages across systems.
15. We urge that technical solutions be undertaken to support and enable the noble end goal of better outcomes for children, families and communities—and not as ends in themselves.