

Common Problems With Current Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) Systems

How Important is it to Leverage an Automated “Tickler”, “Reminder” or Alert Tool?

According to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (ACF), who is responsible for reviewing and assessing the relevancy of each state's SACWIS system... there are problems that exist within SACWIS systems that are common to each state.

In order to ensure you continue to receive funding on your SACWIS project - these issues need to be tackled. Obviously, knowing up front what some of the more common problems are - will help drive you in the right direction.

Ticklers, alerts and notifications are all critical components of an effective case management plan. Empowering your team to stay in front of their critical tasks, appointments and due dates is essential to keeping them focused. When this type of data is more visible – no cases “fall through the cracks”.

For most agencies, the current SACWIS systems either contain too few or too many tickers. Too few and you risk support to the caseworkers; too many and the caseworkers ignore them, however both have meaningful ramifications. Imagine if every time you turned on your computer a message popped up that said you had 75 things you needed to do – you'd probably not want to turn on your computer or you would ignore the pop up.

1 So it's not only important to have the ability to set ticklers and reminders, but you need to be prudent on how you schedule your time. Having access to a case calendar is important so that every time you set a new “tickler” for a client, you have the ability to see what other items are also scheduled for other clients on that day. This helps you schedule your appointments evenly across the week and month. Remember the goal is using a tool that can best help you manage the information for the clients you serve.



Tickler “Task” Reminders

Here is an example of some of the different tasks that can and should be set that would fall under this category:

- Ticklers – every 30 days... time to do a new case plan. For ongoing follow up or when circumstances change – every 90 days
- Alerts – will tell you that there is something critical that you need to do today.
 - An example – an Intake of a case on child abuse has come in and within 2 hours – a caseworker needs to be out investigating that case.
 - A good system will contain alerts so that when a new Intake is recorded and assigned to a caseworker – an alert will show up on their screen that tells them they have a new investigation to conduct
- Notifications – are generally documents, notes or messages that go out to other parties (non-users) of the system. Family members can be notified of upcoming events or meetings, or court hearing for example.



If you’re a caseworker and you are not getting useful information back in the form of ticklers, alerts, reminders, reports, etc., from your system – the chances are higher that you may fall behind in your case management duties, put already vulnerable children and families... at more risk – OR, not use the system altogether.

ACF looks for “effective” use of ticklers, alerts and notifications that are sufficiently automated, clear... and self-policing. For example - if you receive a tickler that says today you need to do a new case plan,

and you complete that case plan... you should be easily able to check a complete box (or have the process automated entirely)... so that tomorrow when you login, that “tickler” should be gone off your dashboard. These types of automation controls allow the caseworker to remain focused and limit the amount of manual administrative, “clean up” work.

If you need to delete the tickler or go thru a manual process to remove it - that’s a problem. If you’re a caseworker that is very busy, you clearly cannot click through to delete multiple ticklers. Another option could be to “automatically clear at day’s end” or “automatically clear once the new case plan is recorded and saved in the system. The process could also be controlled by a supervisor preference. A supervisor could elect to have the process automated or manually marked as complete.

Another option could be a scenario where a caseworker retrieves a list or runs a report to see which “ticklers” were removed today, last 30 days, etc.,

2 Tying in Your Supervisor

When a critical task becomes delinquent, how do alerts escalate? Do alerts escalate properly to the appropriate supervisors or managers, automatically? Let’s say a scenario presents itself where an alert is

reported (a caseworker who needs to investigate a case within 2 hours of a child abuse notification)... and in this case, the work hasn't been done and the 2 hours is now 3 or 4 hours... what happens? Or, what if a client report or critical piece of information needs to be entered into the system within 24 hours and is not – does the supervisor get a report of incomplete tasks, ticklers and alerts? These should be all tied to the business rules and workflow of the system.

Incident data visibility is important. Caseworkers and supervisors should be able to easily identify missed opportunities and delinquent activities or caseloads. A report could easily accomplish this.

The Keys to Avoiding These Issues...

Know the most common pitfalls to avoid - there are many issues listed here and on the accompanying documents that are common problems to most SACWIS systems. Read them, understand them and incorporate solutions to these problems into your plan.

Forming a strong, subject matter team (advisory board) - it's important to form a team of internal and external "experts" when designing your system. Your staff must be experts in SACWIS or have a close relationship with experts in SACWIS policy, regulations and requirements.

Your development team must be experts in web-based, enterprise-level case management design (5,000 or more users). An expert development team can help guide you in *system interaction and workflow*, but more importantly help to ask the right questions - how should this work, how the fields and forms relate to each other, If/Then scenarios... if this happens, then what should happen next..., for example. It's extremely important to work with a vendor who can incorporate your business rules and policy AND be open and flexible to change those rules or policies as needed.

Don't start from scratch - leverage a vendor with a development platform that allows for rapid configuration and development to occur - and supports end-user staff collaboration/issue management with other members of the project team and development/vendor staff.

Starting with a development platform like the [Visions Server Development Framework](#) will save many hours of development over using raw Java and HTML, which can equate to thousands of dollars in savings.

