

Panel Discussion

Moderator: Donna Canestraro

Panelists: Robert Dawes, Lakshmi Mohan, Pat Schaffer, Greg Shinn, Edward Canfield

A series of questions posed by the moderator provided the framework for a lively discussion of the challenges of integrating information to build data repositories.

Greg is an active member of the local provider community in New York City. He discussed the factors that were critical to his continued participation in the HIMS project:

- It takes vision. The organization has to position itself to further its own mission. In his shelter's case, leaders realized they needed to be at the forefront of technology in order to best serve their clients. They started this effort by establishing their own database to track services and clients.
- When he heard about HIMS, he realized that getting in on the ground floor of the project would give his organization an opportunity to influence the end product. Participation in HIMS enabled him to make sure the system would include his shelter's information and meet his business needs.

Ed has a deep knowledge of the NYS Welfare Management System and was a critical member of the project team. He commented on key data issues:

- Data queries have to come into line with the project. It's vital to understand where the data comes from.
- Meta data is also very important. You have to know the data and what they mean.

Lakshmi has worked with many organizations in similar efforts to use information in new ways to support decision making and planning. She compared the HIMS project to others she has worked on in the public and private sectors:

- She compared a data warehouse project for Kaplan Education Centers to her work on HIMS. Both involved the same kind of work, especially data issues.
- Cleansing, defining, and standardizing data are involved in every data warehouse project. Public or private, large or small, all organizations have to deal with these issues.
- You have to look at the actual data and understand it before you can resolve these issues and design a good system.