



Making Municipal Government Work

A City Practices Brief

August 2007

Municipal officials regularly seek to improve the ways their municipal governments work. Reorganizing government agencies and departments and streamlining work processes can result in cost savings and increased productivity for the municipality. Rethinking the structure and role of local government can also provide a positive boost in public perception as well as leading to a more beneficial relationship between government and community.

For more examples, visit the City Practices database on the NLC website, www.nlc.org.

Non-Hierarchical Community Policing Program

City: **Beaufort, South Carolina**

Population: 12,950

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Beaufort's community-oriented policing project has changed the way the city's police department operates. No longer a hierarchical and authoritarian organization, the department seeks involvement and input from all personnel levels as well as the community at large. Using a community team policing concept, which is a location based and needs driven approach, the department utilizes its work force more effectively. Teams are made up of officers from each division (e.g. traffic, drug enforcement, detective) to offer each neighborhood comprehensive police involvement. District officers work with their teams to identify neighborhood specific issues and devise appropriate strategies. Under this project, one neighborhood experienced a 40 percent drop in calls for service and a 20 percent drop in violent crime in one year. The project won the 1997 Achievement Award from the Municipal Association of South Carolina.

New City Management Plan

City: **Colorado Springs, Colorado**

Population: 360,890

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The New City Management Plan changed the organizational structure and culture of the Colorado Springs city government. Initiated with the support of the city council, the city manager, and a team of city employees, the Plan focuses on management practices based on stewardship. Key components include using a networked structure instead of a hierarchical one, redefining the role of manager as leader and not commander, focusing on missions and outcomes, and streamlining rules to allow city employees flexibility in accomplishing their goals.

Customer Service Enhancement Implementation

City: **Dayton, Ohio**

Population: 166,179

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Responding to citizen calls for a more efficient link between planning and implementation services, Dayton reorganized several city government departments to enhance customer service. Under the

reorganization, two separate departments, Planning and Community Development, were combined to form the Department of Planning and Community Development. Also, two new agencies were formed: the Office of Economic Development, and the Department of Building Services. By combining departments and creating new agencies, Dayton expects to increase customer satisfaction, flexibility, public input, and staff accountability.

City Infrastructure Improvement Funding

City: **Lake Worth, Florida**

Population: 35,133

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Lake Worth regained citizen confidence and passed a bond referendum providing needed funding for improvements to the city's infrastructure and to replace the existing fire station and expand the police station. The \$4.5 million general obligation referendum passed after a two-year education effort which streamlined government operations and showed citizens the responsible management of city business. Seventeen departments were consolidated into seven divisions, and a surplus account was established totaling 10 percent of the city's budget. Armed with these improvements, commission members and department heads attended the meetings of every civic group in the city; participated in precinct walks to inform and educate citizens; and received endorsements from both local newspapers. The bond measure eventually passed in March of 1996 with 66 percent of the vote as a result of these efforts.

Streamlined Permit Processing Plan

City: **Lancaster, California**

Population: 118,718

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Lancaster formed a committee to develop a permit streamlining process plan. The committee included volunteers from the building trades, and city staff representing the community development department, building and safety division, city engineer's office, traffic division, and finance department. The committee recommended improvements in six major areas: staff education and training in a new process that prepares workers on the "front-line" counter to conduct plan checks and finalize them on the customer's first visit; public information, in the form of two publications which explain the process for permitting; and interdepartmental communication, to improve and coordinate permitting efforts to make them a "one-stop" process. A guidebook was written which discusses design guidelines, policies, and procedures used by the city. The committee determined that they could reduce the use of conditional use permits by updating the city's general plan. They also established the preliminary review process which saves developers up to six weeks in the approval process. As a result of this process, many review and permit procedures are being handled in half the time and most projects no longer have to obtain previously required conditional use permits.

City Budget Restructuring Business Plan

City: **Northglenn, Colorado**

Population: 31,575

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Northglenn's Business Plan restructures the city budget to focus on providing services while consolidating government. The plan, which operates in two-year cycles, is part of an effort to save money, improve efficiency, and increase flexibility. It eliminates more than 60 percent of line items in the old budget and consolidates others. Replacing traditional city departments are "Service Centers," which provide services, and "Centers for Excellence," which seek citizen input on governance. Service Centers trade specialized divisions for more fluid structures that target staff to citizen needs as they arise. Centers of Excellence staff meet with residents to determine priorities. The city council developed the Business Plan as part of a broader strategic reorganization to address budget shortfalls.

Web-Enabled Financial Software

City: **Pasadena, California**

Population: 133,936

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Pasadena uses web-enabled financial software that gives managers in all 13 of its departments more flexibility in accessing city financial data and creating reports. The software allows employees to access accurate financial information without going through the finance department. In the past, the finance department had printed monthly trial balances, budget status reports, and financial transaction summaries for each of the other departments. The new software not only allows all departments to access their own financial data, but it also allows them to control inventory and plan projects more efficiently because their numbers are always available to them. The software is particularly useful to the water and power utility, which uses the detailed information about costs and allocations to determine the rates it will charge consumers.

Consolidation and Privatization Entrepreneurship

City: **St. Paul, Minnesota**

Population: 287,151

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St. Paul is making itself an entrepreneurial city through consolidation and privatization efforts, by selling city services/use of facilities to other governments, and by reinventing itself through ongoing innovation efforts such as the print shop and purchasing which have been consolidated with Ramsey County. The city also shares a building with the county. The city contracts out garbage collection, paramedic fee collection, and the collection of old accounts receivable. It sells services to other governments such as use of the city's fire training facilities. The efforts have four goals: emphasis on adding values to city services; organizing and providing services which are customer driven; a more effective organization; and a reduction in the cost of city government.

City Reorganization

City: **Webster City, Iowa**

Population: 8,176

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To correct inefficiencies in city departments, Webster City reorganized its staffing structure. The city's goal was to reduce the number of departments to five while refraining from demotions or layoffs. To begin with, twelve city employees, seven of which were department heads or assistant department heads, were offered early retirement. All seven of the department heads/assistant department heads and two others accepted the offer. Next, the number of departments was reduced to five: public safety (police and fire) public works (streets, water, wastewater), utility (electric generation and distribution), recreation/public grounds (parks, recreation, and cemetery), and administration offices. Job titles were simplified and job duties were combined to create more generalist positions. Salaries remained the same. The total cost of the reorganization was a little over \$235,000, but first year savings due to retirement and transfers were \$188,000 and annual salary savings in subsequent years are expected to be \$137,200. For this effort, Webster City received the 1998 All-Star Community Award from the Iowa League of Cities.

Service Improvement Strategy

City: **Windsor, Connecticut**

Population: 28,778

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Windsor's Service Improvement Strategy focuses on customers, cost control, and continuous improvement. When the strategy was first implemented in 1992, the town reorganized its departments into eight self-directed teams, or service units, with the authority to control and coordinate their own work.

Those units are: administration, building and land development, family services, health and environment, information services, library services, public facilities, and safety services. By shifting responsibilities from management to front-line workers, and creating a culture of service and partnership, the town continues to implement dozens of innovative service-oriented and cost-saving ideas. Between 1992 and 1998, Service Improvement Strategy saved the town \$10 million.

City Practices Briefs contain examples from NLC's City Practices database, available at www.nlc.org. Series editors: Bruce Calvin and Larry Foxman. For more information contact the NLC Municipal Reference Service at (202) 626-3130 or email mrs@nlc.org.