

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards
Fairfield County, Ohio



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Table of Contents

Improving Productivity by Engaging Employees Category: County Administration and Management	2
Turnaround Plan for Dog Adoption Center and Shelter Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety	9
Connecting Economic and Workforce Development Category: Community and Economic Development	17
Fairfield County Board of Commissioners	26

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio



Improving Productivity by Engaging Employees

Program Summary

Strategic planning is important for all organizations. The problem is that the planning process is time consuming and can have little relevance for employees if they do not see results. The problem can be further exasperated if employees are not engaged. To engage employees, Fairfield County used a comprehensive approach for an electronic strategic planning process. The county coordinated its strategic planning across departmental lines, showed how it valued its employees, and refreshed communication activities. By focusing on ways to engage employees in all components of the planning, productivity increased.

Within one year, the county created its first-ever county-wide strategic plan, implemented policy changes to improve recruitment and retention of employees, developed new tools for employee assessments, implemented a plan for merit-based pay, increased opportunities for communication (creating an ongoing dialogue with employees), and enjoyed new interdepartmental work groups whose work decreased expenditures and increased revenues. There was organizational change to benefit the public.

The three-part approach to engaging employees provides actionable guidance for other counties who want to engage employees and keep them engaged to increase productivity. Organizational culture was improved and strengthened with positive artifacts showing the values of teamwork, accountability, and courtesy.

Improving Productivity by Engaging Employees

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2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

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Efficient Strategic Planning Processes Involve Employees

Counties are faced with complex challenges in many service areas, including justice, public safety, health, human services, transportation, infrastructure, and financial management. Multiple departments are governed by different elected officials and department heads who, while cooperative, are often unconnected or disengaged with one another. Leaders are faced with connecting departments to define and meet common goals. The problem is strategic planning at a county-wide level is a major time commitment, and engaging employees in the process can be daunting.



No one is eager to spend hours of work on planning, especially if the resulting product has limited value. Yet, Bryson (2018) asserted strategic planning in the public sector is best when there is extensive use of analysis and synthesis in deliberate settings. Ellinger, Keller, and Ellinger (2008) found that increasing interdepartmental connections and documenting exchanges of information were helpful in improving performance and in strategic planning. There is a need for engaging employees and strategic planning.

Further, in Fairfield County, as in many other areas of the state, there were market pressures making it increasingly difficult to attract and retain employees. Private sector job opportunities were becoming more plentiful and lucrative. The county was struggling with its ability to offer attractive benefits and rewards to employees. County leaders were not inclined to increase tax revenues to improve the ability to compete. Instead, the county wanted to engage employees to develop strategies to be of better service to employees and to the public.

Engaging employees was important. Employees have expertise and information to make strategic planning relevant. In addition, employees will feel more engaged when they are trusted to participate in important decisions. To that end, Fairfield County developed an efficient strategic planning process to involve more than 850 employees and 50 partners in an electronic process for strategic planning. In addition, a unique approach was taken to ensure relevance of the plan by demonstrating quick action for a theme that arose from the planning. The aim was to create an ongoing conversation with employees, furthering employee engagement.

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

The County Used a Program with Three Components



The program consisted of three components: strategic planning, valuing employees, and communication. This was a comprehensive effort to engage employees, with a broad approach to strategic planning which underpinned a communication plan as well as the implementation of 20 recommendations to support employee recruitment and retention (of which eight recommendations resulted in policy changes).

Research shows that employees who are engaged are more productive. (Seijts & Crim, 2006). Therefore, the ultimate beneficiary of such an approach is the public.

The first component of the program was strategic planning. An electronic process was used to first communicate the common mission and confirm values. Then, an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats was conducted, also electronically. More than 212 responses were received from a group of about 900. Some responses were incomplete (perhaps listed only strengths or only weaknesses). The response level garnered a general snapshot of employee input. Patterns arose from the review of the responses.

“Word clouds” from the SWOT analysis were created to demonstrate the most often reported concepts. The responses were then synthesized into five themes. These themes were further reviewed in face-to-face settings to determine if the themes and initial actions accurately depicted a mid-term strategic approach for the overall county operations, knowing that there were multiple, departmental strategic plans in existence, as well.

There were links made to departmental strategic plans, which aligned with overall themes. The resulting five strategic themes were:

1. Fighting the opioid and drug epidemics & implementing community responses
2. Valuing employees & improving recruitment and retention of employees
3. Improving technology and records retention services
4. Improving business opportunities
5. Securing funding and monitoring expenditures to provide resources to meet demands on services

Following the review and analysis, the resulting strategic plan and its themes were initially discussed in public meetings from May 2018 – August 2018. Those meetings included County Commission meetings, elected official and department head meetings, Fairfield County Family, Adult, and Children First Council meetings, and community group meetings, such as Lancaster/Fairfield County Community Action Board meetings. Kellie Ailes, Director of Lancaster/Fairfield County Community Action, stated, “I was excited to hear about the county’s

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

plans. The insights from the plans provided even greater synergy between our organization and our county government. That directly translated into better opportunities for people in our community.” From August 2018 forward, there have been ongoing efforts to reach out to employees for updates to the plan. As the organization learned more about shared goals, new projects emerged.

For example, the County Commissioners provided property and a building for a crisis stabilization effort of the Alcohol, Drug, Addiction, and Mental Health Board, which helped to keep costs down and move the project ahead. “We were able to develop our project plans once the critical component of property acquisition was addressed. The collaboration developed because of strategic thinking across departmental lines,” stated Rhonda Myers, ADAMH Board Director.

As the strategic thinking continued, there was clarification of purpose. Employees in the public sector have service as their cause, and seeing the purpose in the forefront of communications in a living document helped to renew the unity of purpose. From the discussions about the strategic plan, there was more awareness about the importance of valuing employees, which was a strategic theme, and one in which there were fewer linkages among departments, perhaps because appointing authority (hiring and firing) at the county is decentralized. To keep the discussion about strategies relevant to all departments, quick action was taken to demonstrate how the county valued employees.

The second component was valuing employees. Shortly after the strategic plan was adopted, an initial interdepartmental work group focused on the theme of valuing employees. The desire was to retain employees and recruit new employees to meet the county mission. The county was in a competitive environment and wanted to improve efforts in recruiting and retaining employees. After researching the evidence in the fields of public administration and management, the work group developed 20 recommendations in the categories of: organizational culture, communications, and employee involvement; financial rewards; performance assessment; career development and training; work-life balance; and health, wellness, and benefits. Generally, the recommendations in each of the categories were:

Organizational culture, communications, and employee involvement

- Add at least six new public meeting dates annually to engage employees at multiple locations.
- Advertise opportunities for employees to be involved in interdepartmental work groups.
- Ask employees what they want.

Financial Rewards

- Increase opportunities for merit-based financial rewards.
- Implement a vacation leave conversion program.

Performance Assessment

- Implement new performance assessment tools that are easy to use.
- Increase opportunities for merit-based personal time.

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

Career Development, Training, and Recognition

- Provide an array of tools for supervisors and managers to review, such as written documents to help with implementing job shadowing programs, leadership development programs, mentoring programs, supervisory training, and various training modules (soft skills and technical skills).
- Adjust the travel and expense reimbursement limits for professional conferences or events held in metropolitan areas if expenditure levels are approved by the appointing authority and estimates are documented prior to the attendance at the professional conference or event.
- Place in the policy manual multiple options for departments to institute for employee recognition.

Work-Life Balance

- Update the vacation accrual schedule to allow employees access to vacation within the first year of employment and to accrue more vacation sooner. (This allowed employees to use vacation at the end of the probationary period of 6 months and to obtain an additional week of vacation at intervals of 5, 10, 15, and 20 years.)
- Adjust the sick leave conversion policy to allow employees using up to 56 hours of sick leave annually to convert sick leave to personal hours on a scaled program.
- Add a holiday to the county approved holiday schedule for the Friday of the Fairfield County Fair, to encourage attendance at the fair, improve business opportunities, honor agricultural values, and promote social and family activities.
- Encourage elected officials and department heads to examine flexible work schedules and the concept of teleworking.

Health, Wellness, and Benefits

- Implement a centralized onboarding program to communicate benefits to new employees.
- Continue the tuition reimbursement program, introduced as a pilot program.
- Continue to improve health and well-being through exercise equipment offerings.
- Pilot the use of filtered water machines as part of the wellness program.
- Introduce a new Health Advocate program to help employees and their families understand benefits.
- Annually, communicate full compensation and benefits to employees.

By October of 2018, all recommendations, including the policy changes, were formally adopted. Rachel Elsea, Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners, an employee with a flexible work schedule, stated “Written policies often sound beneficial to employee life balance, but, are difficult to implement to achieve a meaningful work-family balance. Fairfield County has a structured benefit package that can be easily accessed to assure that personal and family needs are met while at the same time maximizing the productivity that the residents of Fairfield County expect and deserve.”

The legitimacy of the policies was grounded in honest relationships with employees and ethical conduct of leaders. Leaders gave new attention to performance assessment, compensation analysis, and merit-based pay. Braun and Peus (2018) linked authentic leadership to job

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

satisfaction through work-life balance perceptions. The second component of the program encouraged employees and brought about a desire to increase communications even more.

The third component was to refresh the communications strategy and communication plan. County leaders knew that if employees feel disconnected, they will not understand why decisions are being made and will not feel a part of the decision-making process. In addition, they knew that making connections can be complex given the hierarchy of county government. While respecting the structure of county government, the county developed new approaches to keep the conversations about strategies alive. Five new actions were taken to:

1. Create a work group to examine technologies, the use of video communication (especially for large groups of people), website improvements, and a more unified social media approach for communications with internal and external stakeholders.
2. Add four new public meeting dates to the “special” dates calendar (a communication tool to list dates for public meetings and communication opportunities outside of the regularly scheduled Board of Commissioners meetings), with the purpose of informing and engaging stakeholders.
3. Add at least six new public meeting dates to engage employees at multiple county buildings or locations. These meetings are known as “Time with the Commission.”
4. Create opportunities for employees to be involved in work groups.
5. Conduct additional face-to-face strategic planning sessions.

Employees feel more supported when leaders listen. To complement the in-person exchanges, an electronic idea box was implemented. The purpose of the electronic idea box is to keep a sense of conversation with employees going. Managers also put in place an array of motivational tools, such as an electronic “going the extra mile” reward system, customer service training, and multiple wellness initiatives. Motivational tools strengthen the relationship between organizational support and organizational culture.

Engaging Employees Resulted in Increased Productivity

By engaging employees, the county developed a county-wide strategic plan, demonstrated it valued employees, and improved its communications – within about one year. Commissioner Dave Levacy, Board of Commissioners President, stated, “We have been encouraged with the increased information exchanges with employees. Innovation comes at all levels of an organization, and we continue to learn more and accept new ideas for improvement.” The program has improved administration of the government, resulted in new tools to improve organizational culture, upgraded working conditions for employees, and provided information to facilitate effective policy making. The approach provides actionable guidance for organizations who want to engage employees and keep them engaged.



2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

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2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio



Turnaround Plan for Dog Adoption Center & Shelter

1. Abstract of the Program

When dog adoption and shelter services do not meet public expectations, such services become a priority for turnaround. Prior to the turnaround plan for dog adoption and shelter services, there were numerous gaps in services. Many topics had become issues of public concern, including the topics of euthanasia, the quality and quantity of medical care for dogs, the professionalism of dog shelter employees, the level of stakeholder engagement, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the public safety operations. To close service gaps and to improve overall operations, the county applied leadership principles and utilized management, communication, and change implementation strategies to achieve a turnaround of the operations. The Dog Adoption Center and Shelter program (DACS) emphasized evidence-based management practices, transparency, collaboration, stakeholder involvement, and professional development. The county has seen measurable improvements in the medical care for dogs, the professionalism of shelter staff, the engagement of stakeholders, and the effectiveness and efficiency of operations. Adoptions have increased; euthanasia has decreased; and more dogs are returned to owners. In addition, the turnaround plan can be modeled by others to improve services to the community at large while honoring the complexity of diverse public perspectives.

2. The Problem and Need for the Program

Individually, service gaps for the Dog Adoption Center and Shelter (DACS) program were unnoticed. However, the culmination of multiple deficiencies led to the largest public response to any issue in modern Fairfield County history. Stories about shelter operations became hot button issues on social media and later became front page news. Protests, contentious public meetings, numerous negative stories in the media, and thousands of emails and phone calls became the reality for county leadership. At times, negative responses were from areas well outside of the physical boundaries of the county. Controversy in the role of dogs in human lives made the issues far-reaching.

In recent times, people have markedly changed their perceptions, their relationships, and their uses of animals and animal products. Many of these changes have occurred in our lifetimes, and in rural areas, the changes in the perceptions have come with controversy. Some people grew

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

up on farms and had considerable contact with livestock and wildlife. As such, the primary role of dogs was often associated with hunting or farming, and some people continued to think of the role of dogs primarily as property or at least with the priority of livestock, farming, or hunting in mind. This was contrasted by others within the county and outside of the county who understood the primary role much differently.

By many, dogs are loved as if they are children. People have close relationships with dogs as companions, something much different than property. For some advocates, the lives of dogs are as important as the lives of humans. Because of this, there were emotional reactions to discussions about dogs. Discussions were made even more complex because of the legal definition of dogs as property. The complexity of the public perceptions impacted the turnaround plan for DACS.

Because of the complexity and the coexisting gap in services, there was a need for improvement. It was important to have an ongoing evaluation of stakeholder concerns and to understand how leadership could implement change to meet varying expectations of the public. There was a need to turn to leadership principles, founded in evidence, to improve the operations. This need differed from a need to improve technical services. It was a need for a complete turnaround in operations to address long term goals as well as the public outcry.

The initial outcry was not the result of a single incident or inefficiency; rather, it was the aggregate of weaknesses that led to distrust of the organization. At the time, approximately eight years ago, the dog shelter was primarily relying on paper documents and outdated filing systems which led to inefficient and inconsistent record management. Utilization of technology was minimal; there were little to no efforts to connect with the public. Basic health examinations and care practice were underutilized, creating unhealthy situations for dogs in the shelter. Euthanasia rates as high as 39% existed. Shelter management restricted access to vested community stakeholders. These weaknesses were fostered in a work environment where staff received little training, customer service was hindered, and groupthink was predominant. It was time to develop a turnaround program.

The county leadership envisioned an organization providing the best possible animal care with properly and efficiently trained employees in an improved environment. The critical prerequisite for the turnaround plan was leadership focused on the aspects of modeling the way, inspiring a vision, challenging the processes, enabling others to act, and encouraging one another. Through collaboration of county officials, animal advocates, veterinary experts, and other stakeholders, new leadership at the shelter created the DACS model as a turnaround program.

3. Description of the Program

The DACS model was based on evidence within nonprofit and government studies, academic journals, and white papers from the fields of veterinary medicine and animal behavior. Further, county leaders turned to research on animal sheltering best practices from around the world. The aim was to utilize evidence-based best practices to improve the quality of care for animals, regain integrity through professionalism, include stakeholder collaboration, and enhance the

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

level of public safety services. Summarized below are the objectives, the timeframe for implementation of the turnaround plan, the clientele being served, and the county role.

Objectives - Initial objectives of the program, developed after researching evidence in the disciplines of shelter management and public administration and after gathering public input, included key actions:

- a) Perform an analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the shelter.
- b) Develop a mission statement to join the multiple perspectives of stakeholders and the strategic vision of the county, setting a foundation to guide future decision making.
- c) Develop partnerships with experts in animal care and animal sheltering.
- d) Improve the reliability and efficiency of the shelter by implementing new web-based shelter management systems.
- e) Implement new strategies to improve the physical and mental care of dogs.
- f) Reduce euthanasia rates by improving the adoption process, increasing the number of dogs returned to their owners, improving the kennel environment to reduce stress, and improving animal evaluation techniques.
- g) Improve standing in the community by creating a volunteer program, participating in public events, and working to educate citizens and children on dog related topics.
- h) Identify and utilize training opportunities to improve organizational knowledge.
- i) Improve community incentives to spay and neuter.
- j) Create an online presence through social media and an integrated webpage.

Timeframe for Development and Implementation of Turnaround Plan - After reviewing evidence in the field, the county began the process of implementing change in 2014. A first step in change implementation was to search for a new dog shelter director. Rather than seeking a leader with trainable aspects, such as the technical qualities associated with animal care, the county chose to focus on seeking a leader with a passion to make a difference in the community and demonstrated skills in overcoming challenges. Almost immediately upon selection of new leadership, work began on developing relationships with stakeholders and seeking input from advocates and experts. By the fall of 2014, the county had a stakeholder informed mission statement that combined and reflected common goals. In addition, work was completed on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.

In 2014, work began on using the insights gained during the collaboration efforts and analysis to create targets for measurable improvements. One of the first actions taken was to form a contractual relationship with the Fairfield Area Humane Society. This partnership focused on two key additions. First, a highly experienced humane officer would advise on topics relating to the care and wellness of the animals in the shelter. Second, the Humane Society would provide basic vaccinations for all dogs that entered the shelter. In addition, the shelter employees joined the Humane Society in their community outreach initiatives by hosting quarterly vaccine clinics at the dog shelter. The relationship gave community members a first-time opportunity to see shelter staff and humane society staff working together towards a common goal.

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

Also, in 2014, training initiatives were introduced to all staff members. Staff members were encouraged to attend trainings, and some received certifications from the National Animal Care and Control Association, the Humane Society of the United States, and the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy. Additionally, all shelter employees were required to complete 16 credit hours of training from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Ohio Ethics Commission training, and monthly in-service trainings conducted by shelter leadership. Employees were encouraged by the attention given to training, and the organizational culture improved as new knowledge was gained.

In 2014 and 2015, the DACS team made numerous strides with the use of technology to improve efficiency and better connect with the public. The dog shelter was one of the first county agencies to adopt a social media policy and began using both Facebook and Twitter to connect with county residents. In addition, the shelter signed a contract with PetPoint Data Management System to provide web-based information in real time.

Also, during this time frame, the shelter created partnerships with local veterinarians to improve the quality of care and well-being of all dogs that entered the shelter system. The veterinarians assisted the shelter by making recommendations for policy improvements regarding the physical and behavioral health of the animals in the facility. Things like exercise time, socialization techniques, and reducing animal stress by altering the physical environment were all very important improvements.

By 2015, one hundred percent of the dogs that entered the shelter's custody received a basic wellness examination on intake, were vaccinated, and were dewormed. Dogs that were not redeemed by their owners were then examined in more detail, were spayed or neutered if needed, were microchipped, and were placed on heartworm and flea preventative treatments before being made available for adoption. Also, in 2015, the DACS improved the adoption process by using a standard dog adoption questionnaire designed to help match dog personalities with potential adopters. The questionnaire's main purpose was to get the potential adopters to think about the adoption process and look for potential lifestyle conflicts before the adoption occurred. Thus, the communication tool and the thinking it brought about created more positive outcomes for the public and the dogs.

In 2017, another major milestone was reached with a change in the dog licensing system to incentivize spaying and neutering. A dog license for a dog that is spayed or neutered is now substantially less expensive than a dog license for a dog which is unaltered. Evidence in the field supported the change in policy.

Now, the DACS is operating with a much more favorable view from the community. Public expectations are being met or exceeded. The program is enjoying frequent public interactions, a highly popular social media and volunteer program, numerous media appearances and positive press, and greatly improved animal care statistics. The outcomes are positive and recognized within the county. Additionally, the DACS has become a desirable place of employment where it is commonly viewed as a supportive and positive atmosphere where talent can build a career or begin developing for a career in a different county or within a different department. Further,

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

resources continue to be invested in the program to build upon its successes. For example, a second facility was opened in 2019.

Clientele Being Serviced- The clientele served are those who have interactions with the DACS, such as the public, dog owners, and advocates. In addition, dogs entering the shelter system are also viewed as clients and are the beneficiaries of the improved care and medical guidelines. This was a critical philosophical change to meet full stakeholder expectations. The improvements impact the health of the animals being released into the community. More generally, the public is the ultimate beneficiary of the more efficient and humane public safety operations.

County Role in Implementation and Additional Partners- By providing supervision and direction, the County Commissioners were main actors of the turnaround plan. By providing county resources for communications, facilities, technology, and human resources, the county kept costs of the turnaround program low, sharing resources across all county programs. Further, county leaders supported the changes with policy, funding, and training. The County Auditor played an integral role in maintaining the county's dog license registry.

There are numerous other partners who have been essential to DACS. Local veterinary professionals and advocates have volunteered. Even other governmental agencies, such as state prisons and county Child Protective Services, have been impressed with the transition and have created mutually beneficial partnerships. Most importantly, the public played a key role in setting expectations.

4. Responding to Economic Downturn

DACS operates from a special revenue fund comprised primarily of revenues created from dog licensing, and such funding is impacted by changes in the economy. As such, sustainability has been a principal focus of financial planning. Resources have been used in ways designed to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the shelter in visible and measurable ways. For example, the turnaround plan included a step to add vaccination as part of the intake protocol. While there is a greater cost to vaccinating dogs immediately on intake, the improvement to the overall health of the shelter population results in lives saved. This type of improvement requires training and investment, but the overall positive effect can be observed in decreasing euthanasia rates, increased financial donations, increased adoption revenues, and increased community support. The inclusion of vaccinations is one example of long-term thinking when considering the immediate use of resources.

5. Use of Technology

The turnaround plan could not have been implemented without the use of technology. This is one lesson that has been helpful to other departments, especially because sheltering is not immediately thought of as a program where technology is critical. Social media has drastically improved the shelter's communication with the community. The shelter uses social media to post messages, photos, videos, infographics, and educational information. One particularly effective use of social media is the practice of posting information about stray dogs. Every time a dog is

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

found, a picture of the dog with a brief description is posted. The process has led to an increase in the number of lost dogs being returned to their owners.

Another type of technology that has helped improve the dog shelter's functionality is microchips. When dogs are sent to the veterinarian, they are implanted with a microchip. Then, when a dog is adopted, the new owner's information is registered with the microchip company. The microchip provides a permanent way to identify the dog in the future.

Yet another important use of technology is the utilization of the shelter's Lost and Found registry on the shelter's website. A long-standing tradition for many shelters is for people to call in to the shelter to notify them of a lost or found pet. Shelters traditionally write this information down, which is not particularly helpful in returning dogs home. The subjective nature of animal description by breeds is particularly challenging and often renders the phone call method useless. To combat this problem, DACS partnered with the software company Shelter Buddy to add an official Fairfield County Lost and Found dog registry to the shelter's webpage. The public can complete an easy online form and upload a photo of a dog so that lost or found pets become publicly viewable online. This helps to reunite lost pets with their owners, and it has promoted fostering which keeps dogs out of the shelter.

An additional innovative use of technology is the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). GIS helps the shelter identify trends in the animal population, such as the location of disease outbreaks, areas with higher incidence of dog law violations, and licensing patterns. One useful partnership with GIS is the creation of a shareable map of all dogs in the county's dangerous and vicious dog registry. This map helps identify homes with potentially dangerous dogs so preventative measures can be taken to help ensure employee and public safety.

6. The Cost of the Program

The costs of any turnaround plan may include direct costs for services, such as those for animal care, supplies, or training. They may also include increased staffing costs. In the case of DACS, there were minimal increased costs based on the changes in staffing and leadership, comparing the previous costs to the current costs. Yet, the critical pre-requisite for the turnaround plan was skilled leadership, willing to implement the leadership qualities of modeling the way, inspiring a vision, challenging the processes, enabling others to act, and encouraging one another.

The most significant direct costs of the program were costs associated with animal care and supplies. The total cost of veterinary care in 2018 was almost \$42,500. Veterinary care costs include both routine care categories (such as examinations, spay or neuter surgery, and rabies inoculations) as well as more intensive care (such as emergency care, trauma care, treatments for various diseases, amputations, and other surgical procedures). Supply costs include the costs of basic vaccinations, medications, diagnostic tests, and other supplies used to provide care for the dogs in the shelter. In 2018, the cost for these basic supplies was about \$12,500. These annual costs of animal care were new costs of the program and an agreed upon expense for the turnaround plan.

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

Another cost is associated with training. Dedication to improvements in professionalism comes with a commitment to staff for training and development. DACS spends nearly \$3,000 annually for staff trainings. Taken together, annual direct costs of the DACS program are about \$58,000. Other costs of the program are indirect or are shared among multiple departments.

7. The Results of the Program

The results of the DACS turnaround program have exceeded expectations. The initial ten objectives have been met. The use of social media has resulted in more dogs being returned to their owners. Improvements in the social and behavioral care of dogs led to a decrease in euthanasia, improvements in public perception, and a boost to employee morale. The adoption process was improved to include all dog breeds, a pre-adoption form, permanent ID microchip, vaccinations, and spay/neuter approaches, which led to healthier dogs and more adoptions. The turnaround plan resulted in positive awareness programs, many with cross disciplinary collaborations and educational goals.

Specific results of the program include:

- Since 2014, euthanasia rates reduced from 39% to 9%, with most of these required euthanasia cases derived from medical concern, aggression, or court order.
- Adoption rates, unidentifiable at the inception of the turnaround plan, are now more than 50% of intake.
- Further, more than 34% of intake return to owners; this means 84% of dogs brought into the county shelter are now in homes. About 7% are transferred to other organizations, such as advocacy groups. Strong stakeholder relationships have resulted in positive benefits for the community.
- By encouraging professional development, offering training, and supporting staff, leaders have enabled employees to act. Now, many shelter employees are viewed as subject matter experts and are often called upon for advice. The work environment and organizational culture have improved with the addition of sound absorption panels, donated artwork, and safety tools. Employees report reduced stress, improved morale, and improved safety.
- Finally, by adjusting dog licensing fees to reward owners who spay or neuter dogs, there has been a 33% increase since 2014 in the number of spayed or neutered dogs in the population. This is an important long-term approach for the community.

8. Worthiness of a National Association of Counties Achievement Award

The DACS turnaround program is worthy of a National Association of Counties Achievement Award because it is mission-based, engages stakeholders, and has measurable

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

results for public safety. The program offered new services, filled gaps in services, incentivized the public to participate, improved the administration of an existing county government program, upgraded working conditions, and enhanced the level of citizen participation. The ongoing program promotes intergovernmental cooperation and coordination in addressing shared problems by providing a model for a turnaround approach. The program improved services for dogs and the community at large, demonstrating a respect for life while honoring the complexity of diverse public perspectives.



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2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio



Connecting Economic and Workforce Development

1. Abstract of the Program

Fairfield County took a leadership role to collaborate with many organizations helping employers fill job openings. Historically, while there had been groups assisting in workforce development, the goals were not always aligned. Fairfield County's Economic Development Department became the *Economic and Workforce Development* Department to organize stakeholders (educators, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and local governments) with the aim to connect economic and workforce development. This change spurred a cohesive approach to create an attractive labor pool for companies looking to expand or relocate in the county.

Groups previously stated it was difficult to engage with local businesses, even as the businesses were struggling to fill job openings. But the concerted effort was welcomed by employers. Partners became more engaged; manufacturers opened their doors for tours; and more than 40 businesses helped create a Career Readiness Endorsement for nine local school districts. The county created training grants which ultimately led to new jobs - more than 40 jobs for expansion of local businesses and 300 jobs from a manufacturer locating to the county. The 342 jobs incentivized by the training grants translate to about \$1,024,000 in additional local tax revenue. Connections of Economic and Workforce Development are increasingly important to the county.

2. The Problem and Need for the Program

There was a gap in services of workforce development in the community. There were many organizations doing good things, but there was no clear leader and no clear ownership. Discussions with local businesses showed that filling jobs was their number one priority. Yet businesses didn't know who to work with regarding developing the local workforce. Nobody was bringing these groups together to collaborate and make an impact for the economy.

Businesses within the county were having difficulty filling more than 1,000 jobs, with open positions for entry level and skilled workers. More than half of the jobs in the county were filled by workers from outside of the county. The county had to think beyond its borders to help fill

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

jobs. Also, many local businesses, especially in the manufacturing sector, were concerned about the number of Baby Boomers in their workforce nearing retirement.

In addition, Fairfield County's proximity to the growing state capital, Columbus, resulted in more than 50 percent of its workforce heading to Franklin County for jobs. With Fairfield County having its lowest unemployment rate in 18 years, it had become increasingly difficult to find a population looking for work. There was an aging population of workers, especially in manufacturing, and there were open positions in manufacturing which offered good career opportunities. Yet many in the community followed the national mindset that manufacturing jobs were dangerous and unstable.

The retail segment employed the largest number of workers in Fairfield County. That sector was experiencing problems. Industry players, such as Sears and Elder Beerman, had closed, and it was projected that other chain retailers would follow suit and close brick and mortar locations. As stores closed, workers would need training to develop skills for more in-demand jobs.

Partners in workforce development were facing multiple challenges. The Workforce Opportunity Innovation Act Workforce Development Board for the area, a five-county region, struggled to engage its members and at times couldn't even garner a quorum for its meetings. Local schools had gained minimal traction in developing students into a future local workforce. Schools would maintain that businesses did not spend enough time with the schools, and businesses remarked that schools were not responsive to their needs. There was a potential labor market within these schools. Today, one-third of all high school graduates in Fairfield County don't attend college right after high school. That means there are 700 potential high school graduates who can enter the workforce every year. The county turned to a concerted effort to combine Economic and Workforce Development to solve problems and meet the needs presented by the gap in services.

3. Description of the Program

Fairfield County's Economic Development Department, under the direction of the County Commissioners, developed a strategy to assume the leadership role of Workforce Development in the county. The department added Workforce Development to its name and leveraged its role in the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance, a public-private partnership, to meet with various stakeholders in the community to assess current efforts in workforce development and identify gaps in service. The various discussions led to the following conclusions:

- Businesses with manufacturing and skilled trade positions had both the largest skills gap in its workforce and the hardest time attracting new workers.
- Healthcare and sales/service companies provided good career paths for workers and had higher paying jobs. Although their hiring needs weren't as great, they were starting to see their labor pool decline.
- When it came to entry-level employees, companies wanted someone who had a good work ethic, could pass a drug screen, and had a history of good attendance. They

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

could train the workers for any job-specific skills needed. They just needed to find people willing to work.

- Wages were increasing because of the dwindling labor pool. This resulted in more local opportunities to earn a living wage without having to leave the county.
- Businesses relied on temporary employment agencies to fill positions because there was nowhere else to turn for help.
- The area “one-stops” (OhioMeansJobs Centers) did not engage enough with local employers or help provide enough solutions. “One-stops” are centers to assist job seekers, employers, and youth with job search assistance, employee recruitment, job training, and other community services.
- Fairfield County businesses saw an increase in the number of hires that came from outside of the county. This was due to the higher unemployment rates in the neighboring Appalachian counties as well as a lack of manufacturing, skilled trade, and healthcare companies in that area.
- Schools were interested in career development as they were beginning to understand that a focus on just preparing students for college wasn’t working. Most students (62%) weren’t attaining a college degree.
- Career Tech programs were all two-year programs, and students had to decide to enroll for these programs during their sophomore year of high school. There was a lack of skilled trade programs in Career Tech. So, not only were there not many options for career training that would connect students to high paying jobs with local employers, there was no practical pathway for career development for those not seeking a college degree (and again, the majority were not obtaining a college degree).

Based on stakeholder feedback, the Fairfield County Economic and Workforce Development Department focused on the following five objectives (with initial activities, timeframe for development, clientele served, and county role listed for each objective):

1. *Better serve job seekers by revamping the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Workforce Development Board, known as Area 20 WDB.*
 - a. The Fairfield County Commissioners stepped up to make the Economic and Workforce Development Department the Administrative and Fiscal Agents for the Area 20 WDB to help improve services to the area. The Area WDB provides services to a five-county area.
 - b. Sixty percent of the board members were replaced in the first year to increase participation. A lack of attendance and apathy were no longer acceptable. New members were vetted to make sure they would dedicate time needed to help lead the Board.
 - c. New goals were negotiated with the state. Although goals were reasonable, the Area WDB asked for higher goals in some categories to help push local providers toward excellence.
 - d. Providers of services for youth were procured with more focus placed on performance.

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

- e. An employer services representative was contracted to cover all five counties. This placed a focus on providing consistent services to businesses with a priority on meeting workforce needs.
- f. The Area WDB created a committee to expand apprenticeship programs in the area.
- g. The Area WDB expanded to add a representative from K-12 education to help prioritize workforce in school environments and learn more about the educational sector needs.
- h. Better defined parameters and performance measurements were included in the contracts for services.

Timeframe for development and implementation: The Economic and Workforce Development Department became the Administrative and Fiscal Agent for the Area 20 WDB in March and June, respectively, of 2016. New contracts for services were procured in April of 2017. The employer services representative was contracted in May of 2018.

Clientele being served: Clients served include adults, dislocated workers, youth, and local businesses.

County's role and other partners: The county holds the key leadership roles of administrative and fiscal agent for the Area WDB. The county accounts for pass-through funding of federal grants and ensures organized management of the board. It partners with the state, other counties, multiple county agencies, and business stakeholders. The county's leadership role and decision to combine economic and workforce development set the stage for performance improvements.

2. *Utilize the Workforce Development Training Grant to assist with business retention, expansion, and attraction.*

- a. A new local grant program, derived from county general revenue fund dollars, was created to offer incentives to businesses in the county. The purpose of the grant program is to train new workers. Funds can be used to cover payroll training costs, expenses related to trainers, or programming costs. By design, the grant minimizes the amount of paperwork and administrative tracking so companies can focus on their businesses. The application process is simple and efficient, with businesses narrating how the training will help them improve the number of jobs offered or retained in the county; this is something they will already have been documenting as they coordinate their strategies.
- b. The Fairfield County Economic and Workforce Development Department worked with its partners in other economic development departments in the county to help identify businesses that are considering expansion. The economic development professionals are continually encouraged to discuss possible workforce training grant awards to support expansion or retention plans of businesses.
- c. The training grant application is included when creating packages to incentivize manufacturers to relocate to Fairfield County. The grant is used to leverage state workforce funds and is a competitive advantage for the county, as compared to other communities looking to attract new businesses.

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

Timeframe for development and implementation: The workforce development training grant program was created in 2015. Its parameters, application, and agreements were updated and improved for ongoing documentation of results in October of 2018.

Clientele being served: The clients are businesses looking to expand or locate in the county. The public benefits with an improved economy and more job opportunities.

County's role and other partners: The county is the critical leader. The Board of County Commissioners funds the grant program and approves all awards in an efficient, administrative process. Key partners are businesses. Multiple entities help identify businesses and include the grant materials in aggregate incentive packages.

3. *Improve attitude toward careers in manufacturing for workers, parents, and students.*
 - a. To show junior high students that manufacturing jobs aren't "dirty, dangerous, and a dead end," the county partnered with local businesses and schools to provide tours of manufacturing plants. Each October on Manufacturing Day, junior high students get to see how technology is changing manufacturing. Some of the tours include a visit to Ohio University-Lancaster's Engineering Technology Lab.
 - b. As a complement to Manufacturing Day, an Engineering Technology Summer Camp was created to allow students the opportunity to spend a week using various manufacturing processes to create products.
 - c. A communication strategy was employed to include school professionals in public meeting discussions about connecting economic and workforce development so that the concept of manufacturing was part of the organizational discussion and a part of the educational institution discussion. A summit for county leaders was held in 2018.

Timeframe for development and implementation: Manufacturing Day events started in October 2016 and have continued each year. The Engineering Technology Camp began in July 2017 and will have its third camp in June/July 2019. Discussions about connecting economic and workforce development began in 2015 and have continued today.

Clientele being served: The clients are junior high school students in Fairfield County. The public and educational institutions are also clients in terms of increasing organizational knowledge.

County's role and other partners: The county coordinates and promotes Manufacturing Day and the Engineering Technology Camp. Ohio University-Lancaster and Lancaster City Schools create the curriculum and host the camp. The County Commissioners provide forums for discussion, review, and analysis.

4. *Identify students who are career ready and connect them with local employers offering full-time, full benefit positions.*
 - a. The Career Readiness Endorsement was created to identify students who have a good work ethic, consistent attendance, and desire to start a career. Teachers and

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

counselors at local schools work with students to certify the students are career ready.

- b. A Career Readiness Expo was initiated to allow students and parents the chance to meet with local employers to understand career opportunities available in Fairfield County.
- c. Local business and county leaders attend schools to speak in the classroom about careers in their industries. Sectors include manufacturing, healthcare, skilled trades, public utilities, and sales/service.

Timeframe for development and implementation: Stakeholder meetings began in February of 2017. School programs were developed in the summer of 2018 and launched for the 2018-2019 school year.

Clientele being served: The clients are high school juniors and seniors entering the workforce after graduating high school. Businesses benefit from a better-informed workforce. The economy benefits with more youth ready for careers.

County's role and other partners: County Economic and Workforce Development leaders coordinate the program and meet with schools and students. Local schools work with students to attain the endorsement. Business professionals are engaged. They interview students and participate in presentations.

5. *Increase the number of graduating high school students who have career-readiness skills.*
 - a. Local school and one-stop employees work with students to teach them how to write a resume.
 - b. Students take assessments and courses to learn about business writing, critical thinking, business math, getting started with computers, and how to be successful in the workplace.
 - c. One-stop representatives go to schools to present workshops to teach students how to interview for jobs.
 - d. Local business professionals perform mock interviews with students and provide feedback to help them improve interview skills.
 - e. The Career Readiness Endorsement can be used as a pathway to graduation to help students receive their diploma and enter the workforce.

Timeframe for development and implementation: County professionals and partners envisioned and documented the program elements in the fourth quarter of 2017. Businesses began meeting with students in October of 2018.

Clientele being served: The clients are juniors and seniors entering the workforce after graduation. Businesses benefit from a career ready workforce.

County's role and other partners: The County Economic and Workforce Development staff coordinates the businesses' visits to schools. The one-stop staff work with students on job interview and job searching skills, and local business leaders give interview tips and offer tours of their businesses to allow students to see what it's like in the workforce.

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards

Fairfield County, Ohio

4. Responding to the Economic Downturn

Connections with economic and workforce development are necessary to respond to economic downturns. The connections keep all stakeholders informed and help to coordinate strategies. Funding streams for the program are diversified by leveraging funds from both public and private entities. Funding comes from local businesses (investing in the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance) and competitive grants from the public and private sector, as well as federal, state, and local governmental funds. Typically, federal workforce funds increase when unemployment is high which will allow for continued investment in this program if the economy suffers. The connections, however, must continue to ensure a competitive county economy.

5. The Cost of the Program

Apart from the workforce training grants, the cost of the program is about \$240,000 annually for direct services. WIOA funds were shifted from the previous administrative and fiscal agents. County general fund dollars supported most of staffing costs. Such staffing costs, while redirected to the combined focus on economic and workforce development, were not new costs.

The Engineering Technology camp was supported through the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance investors, a grant from AEP Ohio, a grant from the Ohio Electric Cooperatives, and in-kind services from Lancaster City Schools, Ohio University-Lancaster, and various manufacturers. Program costs of the Career Readiness Endorsement program were financially supported by partners, such as the Fairfield County Educational Services Center, the Lancaster City Schools, and South-Central Power.

Fairfield County's Workforce Development Training Grant Program is funded through county general fund dollars. About \$540,000 is planned for a five-year period.

6. The Results of the Program

County leaders have met the original objectives. The county has engaged schools, parents, employers, workforce organizations, and local governments in developing a strong workforce and improving the economy. Results include:

- a. The Area 20 WDB is a fully engaged board and regularly exceeds 75 percent attendance. There are no longer concerns of reaching a quorum. The Area 20 WDB has met all its performance measures negotiated with the state for the past two years. Social media pages have been created, and the level of engagement has been high in all five counties. For example, there are 1,409 "likes" on the one-stop Facebook page. The Area 20 WDB was rebranded as the South-Central Ohio Workforce Partnership to offer a fresh perspective to businesses. The Employer Services Representative has met with more than 50 employers and has created job fairs and other employer-specific programing.

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

- b. The Fairfield County Workforce Development Training Grant has been used in two expansion projects that have resulted in 42 new jobs and about \$1.5 million in new annual payroll. It has been offered in four different business attraction projects. It was effective in landing one of those projects. A large manufacturer will expand into Fairfield County and will create 300 new jobs and \$14 million in payroll. It is estimated that the 342 jobs that the training grant incentivized will result in an additional \$1,024,000 in local tax revenue.
- c. Manufacturing Day events have introduced careers in manufacturing to more than 200 local students from seven different school districts. There have been seven different manufacturers who have provided tours. The Engineering Technology Summer Camp has had 45 students attend in its first two years. Due to demand, the camp has expanded from one week to two weeks. Thanks to funding from the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance and grant partners, the camp remains free to its attendees.
- d. The Fairfield County School's Business Advisory Council has officially adopted the Career Readiness Endorsement as its first official program. Seven schools from throughout the county are working with students to help them receive the credential. The program was submitted to become an industry-recognized credential through the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). A representative from ODE was impressed with the program and has shared it with others throughout the state. There are more than 40 employers affiliated with the program. Excitement has built to where businesses have asked to hold a "Career Signing Day" to help recognize students who are starting their career right after high school.
- e. Local employers are embracing the opportunity to help students become career ready. Five different employers have met with classes to discuss careers in their industries. Fairfield County's Economic and Workforce Development team has met with students from seven of the nine school districts in the county to discuss local careers and what businesses look for in an employee. Some schools have even adopted the Career Readiness Endorsement as their capstone project so students who are not going to college after high school can focus their time on becoming career ready.

7. Worthiness of A National Association of Counties Achievement Award

Historically, the fields of economic development and workforce development have been separated, each with its own set of goals, programs, and in many cases, outcomes. In Fairfield County, leaders took the opportunity to understand the shift to a knowledge-based economy and the trends in technology-based manufacturing; they then synthesized this understanding into an approach to effectively connect the two fields of economic and workforce development. The connection promoted cooperation and coordination of multiple stakeholders to address a shared problem.

The program is worthy of a National Association of Counties Achievement Award due to its unique approach to solving a workforce problem, measurable results, provision of new services, improved governmental administration, and enhanced citizen participation. The county engaged

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

dozens of stakeholders from schools, businesses, and local governments and took the lead in building effective strategies. While many economic development departments do support workforce initiatives, Fairfield County's Economic Development Department is steering the change. Fairfield County asserted economic development *is* workforce development. You can't grow your economy without growing your workforce. Fairfield County used multiple strategies to advance the program, and there are components other counties can model to meet their needs.

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2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio

Fairfield County programs are under the direction of the Fairfield County Commission.



Commissioner Dave Levacy, President



Commissioners Steve Davis, Vice President



Commissioner Jeff Fix