



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 26, 2021
CONTACTS: Paul Guequierre, pguequierre@naco.org
Carri Brown, carri.brown@fairfieldcountyohio.gov

Fairfield County earns 5 national achievement awards

WASHINGTON – Fairfield County, Ohio, has been recognized this year with five Achievement Awards from the National Association of Counties (NACo). The awards honor innovative, effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents. NACo recognized Fairfield County for the following programs:

Achievement Award Category: Human Services
Sustaining & Improving Guardianship—Giving Marginalized Citizens Voice

Achievement Award Category: County Administration & Management
Improving County Services During a National Crisis

Achievement Award Category: Arts, Culture, and Historic Preservation
Inspiring Placemaking with Mural Art

Achievement Award Category: Personnel Management and Training
Speed Mentoring with Follow-on Coaching

Achievement Award Category: County Administration & Management
Ongoing Preparation for Bond Rating Presentations

A summary of each program follows this press release. A slide show presentation is also included with the press release.

Dave Levacy, Fairfield County Board of Commissioners President, stated, “We are thrilled the National Association of Counties has honored good work Fairfield County employees and elected officials are accomplishing to improve public services. Given the challenges of the past year, the record number of awards is especially encouraging.”

NACo President Gary Moore said, “Over the past year, county officials and frontline employees have demonstrated bold, inspirational leadership. This year’s Achievement Award winning programs illustrate the innovative ways counties build healthy, safe, and vibrant communities across America.”

Nationally, awards are given in 18 different categories that reflect the vast, comprehensive services counties provide. The categories include children and youth, criminal justice and public safety, county administration, information technology, health, civic engagement and many more.

###

The National Association of Counties (NACo) strengthens America's counties, including nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo unites county officials to advocate for county government priorities in federal policymaking; promote exemplary county policies and practices; nurture leadership skills and expand knowledge networks; optimize county and taxpayer resources and cost savings; and enrich the public's understanding of county government. www.naco.org

In Ohio, 14 Achievement Awards were issued this year to the following counties:

Fairfield	5
Cuyahoga	3
Franklin	2
Hamilton	2
Montgomery	1
Summit	1

For more information about Fairfield County's awards, contact Carri Brown, County Administrator, carri.brown@fairfieldcountyohio.gov or 740 652 7096.



SERVE • CONNECT • PROTECT

1

2021 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards - Abstracts

Achievement Award Category: Human Services (Judge Vandervoort, Probate Court) <i>Sustaining & Improving Guardianship—Giving Marginalized Citizens Voice</i>	2
Achievement Award Category: County Administration & Management <i>Improving County Services During a National Crisis</i>	2
Achievement Award Category: Arts, Culture, and Historic Preservation <i>Inspiring Placemaking with Mural Art</i>	2
Achievement Award Category: Personnel Management and Training <i>Speed Mentoring with Follow-on Coaching</i>	3
Achievement Award Category: County Administration & Management <i>Ongoing Preparation for Bond Rating Presentations</i>	3
<i>Fairfield County Commissioners and Juvenile/Probate Court Judge</i>	4

Sustaining & Improving Guardianship—Giving Marginalized Citizens Voice

Fairfield County was experiencing a problematic trend of an increasing need for guardianship services. Cases had increased 195% in five years, and there was a 228% increase in the number of indigent cases. The problem was a lack of guardians, a role typically served by attorneys, along with a growing need to provide services for marginalized citizens without financial means. To overcome the problem, Fairfield County transitioned from an attorney-based system to one focused on social services. Collaboration was key in terms of funding the program, improving referrals sources, and developing procedures. Now, intensive case management services have improved for clients, with an increase in contact hours per ward of 273%; there is no waiting list for services. The program benefits are both quantitative and qualitative, with many success stories showing improvement in residents' quality of life. The new guardianship services are sustained by multiple partners and have given marginalized citizens voice, a say in their lives and levels of independence. The innovative program has engaged multiple partners and stakeholders, giving an example for small or medium-sized counties to model, especially if there is no dedicated funding stream for improvement.

Improving County Services During a National Crisis

The crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic forced public servants to fight the spread of the virus while managing its repercussions and maintaining a continuity of services. The problem was there was no clear road map for the change that was needed, even if there was organizational readiness for change. The pandemic presented a situation that was very complex, turbulent, and challenging. Fairfield County set out to improve county services during this national crisis by taking decisive action, communicating well, and continuing essential services – even providing additional services. The county met the objectives of improving services (building trust with the public by showing continuity of services); providing new services (such as virtual services for marriage licenses, court hearings, public assistance, and educational support services); developing opportunities for community and employee engagement; conserving general fund resources (while avoiding layoffs and furloughs); designing a communication plan to reach all citizens; and quickly and creatively using resources to address community needs. A shared services model resulted in improved job satisfaction, connection with purpose, integration among departments, and improved job knowledge. Above all, a great lesson of the pandemic was highlighted: We need one another to solve problems and make a difference in our community.

Inspiring Placemaking with Mural Art

The arts have much to offer a community. Fairfield County sought to inspire placemaking with mural art to encourage healing when the community suffered a loss of one of its young citizens while he was serving in the military. His mother worked for the county, and the community was heartbroken. The purpose of the project was to promote local talent and engage the community to convert an empty wall into a public canvas with a lasting, positive effect on the community conversations to support gratitude for the military. Employees were engaged in organizational citizenship behavior as they volunteered to help with the project in support of their coworker. Information derived from the project helped improve understanding about public policy to allow for

variances in zoning rules, permitting placemaking murals within the historic district directly on the face of a building. As the mural was unveiled, there were community conversations to arise, grounded in gratitude for the service of veterans and inspiring private moments of thankfulness. These conversations were especially appreciated during the pandemic when there were feelings of loneliness and despair. The project helped to inspire intergovernmental cooperation and coordination. There are now additional murals planned.

2

Speed Mentoring with Follow-on Coaching

To address a need for a cost-effective mentoring program that was not overly burdensome, Fairfield County implemented a speed mentoring program. Mentors and mentees were provided instruction and lists of sample questions to support short, lively conversations with mentees taking turns with mentors. The group exchanged contact information and followed up with one another throughout the year. Based on a pattern of communication during the pandemic, a follow-on coaching tool was prepared to help participants obtain communication skills that honored diversity of opinions. With 104 participants in the program, employees indicated they felt engaged in the program and obtained new skills or answers to questions. Many reported how they felt encouraged during a time of stressful time based on connections they made during the speed mentoring program. The in-person aspects of the program will continue once the pandemic subsides.

Ongoing Preparation for Bond Rating Presentations

Fairfield County implemented a program to proactively prepare for bond rating presentations. Objectives of the program were to increase organizational knowledge about bond rating requirements, increase the internal reviews conducted about budgetary and management items, update cash reserve and debt management policies, prepare long-term financial plans, and maintain the excellent bond rating the county had achieved. By obtaining elected official and department head buy-in and participation, the county initiated regular reviews and developed an ongoing process to maintain qualitative and quantitative records to prepare for rating presentations. Senior leaders indicated the process of preparation contributed to their learning. New employees appreciated the opportunity to engage in the process and stated the process helped them learn about county government. Records about qualitative factors, such as narratives about management collaboration and budgetary flexibility, are now readily available. The program helped management connect more and understand the value of these connections. There is improved knowledge about how qualitative factors impact the financial condition. An excellent bond rating was maintained, even during the pandemic. Cost savings were achieved.



Commissioner Dave Levacy



Commissioners Steve Davis



Commissioner Jeff Fix



Judge Terre Vandervoort