

MERCER COUNTY SHARED SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2010

Accomplishments

In 2007, Mercer County received funding from the NJ SHARE Grant program to fund the position of a Shared Service Coordinator for a 3-year period. In 2007, the County held its first Shared Service Conference and conducted a municipal survey to determine potential areas for shared services and consolidation. A subsequent survey was conducted with all 11 school districts. A steering committee began to meet regularly to determine means to initiate shared service projects. The Office of Shared Services/Shared Services Coordinator has served as project lead/manager on all shared service projects outlined in this report. In that capacity, the office was responsible for all grant applications and reports related to feasibility studies or implementation funding. The office serves as lead agency to coordinate county entities with vendors and NGO's and is responsible for the development of RFP's, project specifications, shared service agreements, contracts and resolutions.

I. PUBLIC SAFETY

State Police Communications System – Garden State Network (GSN)

Migration to County LAN

In 2008, the NJ State Police announced discontinuance of the network communications architecture between the State Police and 376 of the state's municipalities in order to cut costs to the state. The project aims to reduce 376 line connections between the state and municipalities down to 21 (counties will serve as direct hub for municipalities rather than the state).

The Office of Shared Services executed shared service agreements with all municipalities except for Hopewell Borough and Pennington who will be administered through Hopewell Township's system. The county covered initial costs to install the system and T1 lines for each municipality with municipalities agreeing to cover monthly service costs and any additional upgrades or repairs. *Annual costs Mercer municipalities will save the state are estimated at \$83,000.*

Emergency Preparedness

In 2008, as part of "National Preparedness Month" the county hosted a training seminar *Crisis Leadership and Decision Making for Elected Officials* for Mayors and key municipal officials to better understand the roles and responsibilities in planning for and responding to a catastrophic disaster incident in Mercer County. The seminar was funded by Homeland Security and presented by the National Response and Rescue Training Center (NERRTC). Attendees included Mayors, Council members, and OEM Coordinators.

Continuance of Operations (COOP) and Continuance of Government (COG)

Government has a fundamental responsibility to provide uninterrupted essential services to the public, regardless of circumstances. For this reason, Mercer decided to develop Continuance of Operations (COOP) and Continuance of Government (COG) plans which will describe how personnel, equipment, and other governmental, non-governmental, and private resources will support the reestablishment of essential functions. Plans identify critical and time sensitive applications, processes, and functions, to be recovered and continued, following an emergency or disaster, as well as the personnel and procedures necessary to do so, such as business impact analysis, business continuity management, vital records preservation and alternate operating facilities.

In 2009, the Office of Shared Services coordinated the contracting of consultants James Lee Witt & Associates and served a project lead for the county in the development of COOP & COG plans for all municipalities and the county (includes individual plans for 40 county departments/agencies). Plans will be completed by the end of 2009 and culminate in a tabletop exercise to test the implementation of the county plan. All municipalities participated except for Ewing & Trenton who were therefore provided with a template plan. *Project consulting costs of \$203,110 were covered by Homeland Security funding with cost savings for municipalities of \$82,800.*

Emergency Vehicles

FOAM TRUCK

In June of 2009, the Freeholders voted unanimously in favor of a specialized foam truck as necessary apparatus to be shared by all fire companies in the county. The truck contains a special type of firefighting foam that can extinguish ethanol fires which is important as we move toward alternative fuels. The truck was purchased from Holland Twp, NJ for \$15,000. The Office of Shared Services coordinated all logistics of the acquisition and development of shared service agreements between the county and Fire Chief's Association.

RESCUE VEHICLE

Also in June 2009, the County approved the allocation of Homeland Security grant funds to Hightstown Engine Company #1 for the purchase of a specialized rescue vehicle to serve as a regional asset for Mercer, Middlesex and Monmouth Counties. This acquisition was spearheaded by Mercer County Active Fire Chief's Association and the Suburban Fire Chief's Association. The Office of Shared Services executed the Memorandum of Understanding between the County and Hightstown Fire Company.

Fire Dispatch

The Office of Shared Services worked with the Mercer County Office of Emergency Communications and the Mercer County Active Fire Chief's Association to increase the provision of dispatch for more municipalities. The county currently provides fire dispatch for 9 municipalities: Ewing, Hamilton, Hightstown, Hopewell Borough, Hopewell Township, Lawrence, Pennington, Princeton Borough and Princeton Township. *Savings for municipalities not yet calculated.*

HAZMAT

The Office of Shared Services assisted the CEHA Coordinators and the Office of Emergency Management in the preparation of shared service agreements Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with all 13 municipalities that will be served under shared service agreements executed with Trenton, Hamilton, and West Windsor to serve as county umbrella agencies to oversee and coordinate HAZMAT response services.

II. PUBLIC WORKS

In 2007, the County Department of Transportation & Infrastructure received requests from municipal public works directors to meet and discuss potential areas for shared services. The Office of Shared Services began hosting regular roundtable meetings through which two initiatives were achieved.

Countywide Equipment Inventory

In 2008, the Office of Shared Services developed an equipment inventory of county and municipal public works equipment. The goal of this inventory is to encourage more sharing of equipment and reduce purchases for new equipment. *Participating municipalities: East Windsor, Hamilton, Hopewell Twp, Lawrence, Princeton Boro, Princeton Twp., Robbinsville, and West Windsor.*

Countywide Stormwater Maintenance and Compliance - Regional Vehicle Wash Facility

In 2009, the county contracted with engineering consultants to conduct a feasibility study for a regional vehicle wash facility so municipalities can comply with stringent NJDEP storm and waste water regulations. Two site locations were identified in Lawrence and Hightstown. Consultants developed design specs and costs estimates for these two sites which could each serve as regional facilities. Estimated costs: Lawrence- \$1.4 million and East Windsor/Hightstown - \$1.2 million.

The cost of the study was \$30,227 and was funded through a NJ SHARE Program grant. *Municipalities interested in shared regional facilities include: East Windsor, Ewing, Hamilton, Hightstown, Hopewell Twp, Lawrence, Princeton Borough, Princeton Twp, Robbinsville, and West Windsor.*

III. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Since 2007, the Office of Records Management (ORM) has acquired funds and coordinated through the Office of Shared Services on shared services projects for all 13 municipalities. All of these projects were funded 100% by the Public Archives and Records Infrastructure Support (PARIS) Grant. The Office of Shared Services has hosted annual meetings for municipal clerks to discuss shared service projects in the preparation of grant applications. In 2010, the PARIS grant program was indefinitely suspended but all unexpended funds awarded will be honored towards current project completion. These projects include: records inventories; organization & preservation; purging; EERMS (electronic records management system) and joint archival materials and equipment purchases. *Funds for shared services projects with municipalities total \$873,000.*

Countywide Records Retention - Records Storage Facility Feasibility Study

In 2009, Mercer contracted with SSP Architects to conduct a feasibility study for a Countywide Records Storage Facility. The study was funded through the PARIS grant - *study cost \$68,815.* The study determined an estimated need of 109,000 total square footage, which includes 34,000 sq.ft. for housing voting machines. The county currently leases warehouse space to store the voting machines. The study also looked at potential warehouse space for sale and resulting in a cost analysis for available warehouse space at 2424 E. State St. with estimated renovation at \$2.15 million and estimated purchase price of \$2.45 million. *Municipalities interested in a countywide records storage facility include: East Windsor, Ewing, Hamilton, Hightstown, Hopewell Twp, Lawrence, Pennington, Robbinsville, Trenton, and West Windsor.*

IV. MISCELLANEOUS PROJECTS

Weights & Measures

In 2009, the county took over administration of W&M for Hamilton. The Office of Shared Services made grant application and received NJ SHARE Implementation Grant funds in the amount of \$23,857 to cover costs for additional equipment needed to handle the volume of inspections in Hamilton. *Estimated annual cost savings to Hamilton: \$142,000*

Discount Wellness Program

Mercer entered into a shared service agreement with Bergen County to share a Wellness Discount Program which provides discounts for individuals with minimal or no health insurance. This program, which is now offered in 10 NJ Counties, offers discounts by participating companies on prescription drugs; hearing exams and hearing aids; eye care; dental care; and diabetic supplies. The Office of Shared Services served as project lead in getting this program up & running. To date 6,500 brochures have been disseminated throughout the county. Bi-monthly reports will be provided to the county to show activity from discount card use (no report available at time of this writing).

Central Counties Cooperative Caucus

Throughout 2009, Mercer met with Middlesex, Monmouth, Somerset and Union to discuss potential areas for regional shared services. Areas identified included: Transportation; Corrections; Information Technology; Public Health; and Purchasing. Each county hosted a roundtable on a topic. Mercer held a roundtable on Corrections from which discussions began with Middlesex on sharing their Youth Detention facility and option to house overcrowded inmates from adult corrections.

We also coordinated with Middlesex and enter into an agreement for shared paratransit, predominantly through sharing transport to three VA facilities for medical care and to clinics, pharmacies, physicians, regional veteran service offices or job service offices, and other available community services.

Ongoing Initiatives

I. Interoperable Radio System

The FCC is mandating for public safety radio communications interoperability by 2013. Phased implementation will be achieved over the next 3 to 5 years through equipment upgrades funded through Homeland Security.

In 2009, the county contracted with consultants Intertech & Assoc. to conduct an assessment of radio systems countywide and the development of a strategic plan for countywide interoperable radio communications between municipal fire, police, EMS, County Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Office of Emergency Communications (OEC), County Sheriff's Office, County Prosecutor's Office and the NJ State Police, hospitals and colleges. Cost of study = \$130,000 and was funded through 2008 Homeland Security funds. *Estimated costs to achieve a fully interoperable trunked radio system countywide (county & municipalities) = \$7.16 million. Cost for county only: \$4.8 million.*

II. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Aerial Pictometry

Since 2007, the County Planning Division has been working with the Office of Shared Services, Records Management, Taxation, Emergency Management, County Clerk and Transportation & Infrastructure/Engineering in developing applications for GIS and Pictometry.

Planning has developed a GIS database that along with the above mentioned departments has significant benefits to municipalities, but it will only be of value if information is consistently updated and maintained by key county and municipal users under the jurisdiction of a GIS administrator. The county is currently looking at the various software programs contracted by different vendors and ways to merge this collective data for greater efficiency and a more streamlined shared system/platform for all users.

In 2008, Mercer held an informational seminar on GIS and Pictometry where the pictometry software was provided to municipal representatives on an external hard drive. *Cost to county for harddrives: \$3,600.*

IV. Joint Insurance Funds

The county is currently undergoing a feasibility study with Conner Strong to explore potential savings for shared Health Insurance Funds (HIF) and Joint Insurance Funds (JIF). County entities participating in the study include: MCCC, MCVo-Tech, MCSSSD, MCBOSS, and MCIA.

V. School Districts

The Office of Shared Services has hosted a series of roundtable discussions with the County Superintendent of Schools, District Superintendents, and Business Administrators to identify areas of expanding shared services. Out of these roundtables we determined four areas for focus which all 11 school districts have participated in and we will continue to explore:

- Energy Audits
- Solar installations at schools
- Shared Broadband Network
- Cooperative Purchasing / Joint Bids

Opportunities

I. COUNTY AND REGIONAL

A. County Dispatch

- Does the potential exist to consolidate municipal & county public safety answering points consistent with State 9-1-1 Commission recommendations?
- Expand dispatch at the County Emergency Communications Center to include 9-1-1 and EMS
- Hopewell, Ewing, Lawrence and Pennington have explored a shared central dispatch

B. Countywide Tax Assessments and Revaluation

C. County Health Department

D. Regional Police Academies

E. Solar Energy

- MCCC and Mercer County Technical Schools have both received proposals for solar
- MCCC is exploring a ground solar farm installation and the technical schools are looking at rooftop installations
- Mercer County School Districts are interested in solar rooftop and parking lot installations

F. Energy Systems Upgrades

- Mercer County Parks and DOT are exploring LED lighting
- Opportunity to expand into COOP purchase to include municipalities and school districts
- Geothermal is another potential area for consideration for facilities in probable locations
- Other energy saving equipment replacement purchases could be explored