

A Look at Efficient and Effective Government

By Heather Bacus, Director of Human Resources

Across the nation, organizations are driven to do more work with less resources and staff due to economic challenges and government is no exception. The Board of County Commissioners (BCC) establishes goals every year, and one of their focus areas for the 2013-15 budget cycle continues to be efficient and effective government. The purpose of this goal is to facilitate the organization's capacity to govern and manage effectively in the rapidly changing and challenging environment. This goal has several objectives:

Define optimal/acceptable levels of service – With shrinking budgets and staffing levels, we are challenged with delivering the same levels of services our customers expect. Only through effective communication can we understand and adjust priorities to provide a realistic level of services in each department. During FY 2007, our staffing numbers peaked at 1409 employees—today we have approximately 1000 employees, a decrease of 29 percent of our workforce.

Continue developing the web presence – With a focus on intuitive interface and service delivery, departmental web pages and online services are being redesigned. Customers will find it easier to get information and access services from any computer or mobile device. By utilizing technology to help customers assist themselves with common tasks, staff can focus on providing assistance for complicated requests and service needs.

Follow up on the employee survey with a focus on retention strategies – Best practice research shows the quality of the supervision an employee receives is critical to employee retention. Improving that is among the programs being developed to improve our current employee culture and ensure the hiring of best-fit employees from the beginning.

Expansion of the employee wellness program and use of the Employee Health Center – Through expansion of this initiative, studies show we will continue to have healthier employees and bottom line savings in our annual health care costs. While national health care costs continue to increase, Charlotte County has saved \$9 million, and the employees have saved \$1.5 million since 2009.

Increase community outreach of the Board of County Commissioners – The County Commissioners are continuing to increase their public presence by offering town hall and community feedback meetings as well as coordinating a Charlotte Assembly to further involve citizens in forging and refining a blueprint for the County's future. An enhanced "Contact Us" button on the new website provides another among several opportunities to ask questions and provide comments to the Board. More online citizen input services are being developed.

Enhance credibility of the organization – We have fostered a workplace that values customer service, partnership, integrity, stewardship, innovation and respect for all. Building upon this foundation, a new customer service program is being developed to greatly improve experiences for internal and external customers at every level of the organization.

Proactive strategies for intergovernmental relationships – Charlotte County Government continually seeks out innovative partnerships that will improve our community and efficiencies. We are very excited about a partnership with the Charlotte County Public School District to provide students with hands-on opportunities to work alongside experts in their field. Our departments can provide unique projects involving research and career exposure with many

topics, such as resistance testing on mosquito larva, hydroponic gardening, water purification and filtration, and computer networking. We have also partnered with the Charlotte Technical Center to offer two new classes this year: “Drinking Water Operators Training” and “Wastewater Operators Training”. At the end of each course, students will have an opportunity to complete each certification test.

Explore ombudsman concept for process improvement – The Community Development department has added a new position, Permitting & Development Ombudsman, to improve customer experiences. The ombudsman will provide enhanced customer service by assisting business representatives, customers, and the public with information about the County’s permitting process and by guiding them through each step of the process. Additionally, the Ombudsman will act as a liaison with other County departments on behalf of applicants to help resolve issues as they arise.

Continued focus on efficiencies – Charlotte County Government has been able to handle staff reductions by using technology. We are implementing many changes that will allow departments to work more efficiently, such as paperless processes using digital signatures for approvals, mobile apps for field employees, on-line applicant system, and forms developed electronically as a workflow process.

As you can see, many initiatives have been researched and implemented in order to continuously improve how government services are delivered to the citizens of Charlotte County. Our hope is that you will see a positive difference in the goal of efficient and effective government. Please take the time to express appreciation when you receive an excellent customer experience with Charlotte County employees.