

The Challenge

From the 1960s to the turn of the century, Stafford County, Virginia's population quadrupled. A rural county where everyone knew each other turned into a more populous locality with a wider range of needs and services than ever before. By 2008, the process of allocating funds to support agencies which helped citizens was in need of an overhaul.

Staff realized the process and the structure for determining how the money was allotted for assisting citizens was not efficient. Partner agencies completed an application supported by tax records and if they provided a good financial audit, they received the funds. Basically, the same agencies received money year after year. Newly identified agencies did not receive money because the limited resources had been allocated to existing agencies who received funding in prior years.

In addition, many of the partner agencies are regionally based and serve the surrounding localities such as Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County. There was no efficient way to compare the level of funding to these agencies among the localities and to gather sufficient data on how the agencies were serving them.

Stafford County's Board of Supervisors and County Administrator Anthony Romanello asked the Budget and Human Services departments to develop a more

efficient way to allocate resources. The goals were to: examine the program more closely to evaluate how its aims served the citizens of Stafford County; to avoid duplication of services; and to improve communication and cooperation among localities with regards to partner agency funding.

The First Step

Donna Krauss, of the Human Services Office, and Donna Olsen, from the Budget Office, developed specific criteria with which to evaluate the partner agencies programs. They examined the following five questions:

1. What services does the agency provide?
2. What are the targets of the agency's services?
3. Is it effective for the citizens of Stafford County?
4. How do they hope to improve their services?
5. Are they managing their finances well?

Krauss and Olsen developed a process whereby a committee of county staff would score applications based upon the above criteria. The resulting scores would be linked to dollar amounts for recommendations for funding to the Board of Supervisors.

The process was put into place for the first time in Fiscal Year 2010.

Working together

After the first year of evaluations, Ms. Krauss and Ms. Olsen were able to discern more clearly the particular information they needed to make decisions on requested funding. They felt the applicants were not giving them enough information. They also saw the need to establish a more regional approach with the surrounding localities.

In October of 2010, Stafford County held a roundtable discussion with the City of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania County, King George County and Caroline County. The roundtable also included representatives from the United Way. The purpose was to discuss each locality's process and to see if they could duplicate some of the United Way's successful strategies in evaluating and funding multiple agencies.

Out of that meeting, a new "uniform" application was created. Initially, Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania and Stafford were the only localities who agreed to use the uniform application. By 2011, Caroline and King George were onboard as well.

The uniform application utilized components of the United Way's logic model which helped them narrow down what data they needed to best evaluate the agencies. The United Way's logic model is recognized as a standard tool used to evaluate outcomes and measures. The United Way trains partner agencies on how

to use the logic model. Ms. Krauss and Ms. Olson decided to use the logic model as a piece of the application process because many agencies were already trained and familiar with it.

While localities don't share individual applications between themselves, they do give each other the resulting funding numbers. They know the funding was determined by the same set of criteria and applications they all use. The whole funding process was standardized and became more equitable and fair.

The Cost

No extra cost was incurred by making the change in the process. The staff members already in place reviewing the requests were the ones who came up with the new process. Some manpower hours were diverted to the committee that initially reviews the requests but existing employees were used. The new forms replaced the old forms.

How does this help?

By assessing the information shared throughout the process, Stafford County may reduce or increase the appropriation to an agency based on our localities needs.

The uniform application has made both the localities and the partner agencies more accountable. The process also has become more seamless across the localities and

helped with interagency and inter-government cooperation. The process helps promote the Board of Supervisors' overarching priority for the community to be fiscally responsible.

Anthony Romanello
County Administrator
Stafford County, Virginia

Date