

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2016.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Henrico County

Program Title: Creating a Living Culture of High Performance

Program Category: Organizational Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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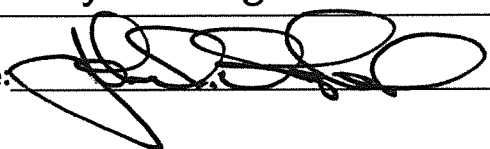
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Name: John A. Vithoukas

Title: County Manager

Signature: 

1. Short Overview of the Program

Henrico County embarked on an initiative to enhance its culture so that all employees become “leaders at all levels”, customer service is refocused to emphasize the customer *experience*, departments develop teams of thought leaders to tackle issues, and leaders become “employee engagement managers”. This was accomplished by delivering a series of training sessions for all levels of management, followed by discussion groups exploring concepts of high performing organizations (HPOs).

The first strategy began with three days of training with top county leaders facilitated by an external vendor followed by training for other levels of managers by internal staff. The second strategy involved the same group of top leaders meeting on a regular basis to discuss ways to become a higher performing organization. Some sessions were facilitated by the county manager himself, and others by community leaders as guest speakers. The final strategy involved discussion groups of middle managers strategizing on ways to implement selected HPO concepts in their areas of influence.

Results show clear evidence of employee engagement strategies throughout the county, increased use of thought leader groups in several agencies, and employees at all levels taking on key decision making roles and providing suggestions on ways to improve services.

2. Problem/Challenge/Situation

After emerging from the recent recession, it was clear that local government was not in the same position as a decade before. The environment had changed and resources continued to

be constrained while the demand for services by the public increased so there was the need to react differently to those demands.

With change comes the potential for employee performance to slip, customer service to suffer, and new leaders to struggle to identify and communicate the need for specific outcomes that are valued by citizens. The County needed a consistent vision from the top ranks so employees had clear direction on what these changes meant for them. Building on the strong leadership and culture that Henrico County already had in place, county leaders began to take a hard look at the organization's culture in the context of where it needed to go. Leaders asked difficult questions and challenged the status quo to identify key areas for focus. This process was essential to become a local government filled with engaged employees who not only met, but exceeded, expectations of its citizens.

Previously used strategies were examined and tested. In some cases, new strategies were needed that empowered employees to see themselves as leaders, regardless of their position and title, so they could make the decisions that serve the citizens in the best way. Expectations for managers evolved to permit them the time and space to do "the work of leadership" – taking the time to think and act strategically to develop and lead a high performing organization.

3. How the Program Was Carried Out

Henrico County emerged from the recent recession in 2013 in reasonably good shape. There had been no layoffs of employees due to budget cuts; no services to citizens had been eliminated; tax rates had not increased; and we maintained our triple A (AAA) bond rating.

Despite these encouraging results, the business of local government was changing and Henrico County government was also experiencing transition in leadership at the top with significant turnover among county upper managers. During the years of 2012 and 2013, there was 38% turnover among top leaders, including three new deputy county managers, a new county manager, six new agency heads and 16 newly promoted or hired assistant agency heads. While most of this turnover was due to retirements after long years of service or promotions into higher-level positions, it did reinforce the need for a consistent vision from the top ranks so that employees had clear direction on what this new culture meant for them.

The Department of Human Resources partnered with the County Manager to develop an initiative with three strategies, each aimed at exploring and implementing the elements of a high performing organization. In the first strategy, training was provided to all levels of management. In the second strategy, agency heads met throughout the year to explore leadership topics, address challenging organizational situations, and share stories of successful citizen initiatives and interactions. The final strategy involved discussion groups of middle managers having in-depth conversations about implementing selected HPO concepts throughout their areas of influence.

Henrico County chose to focus their HPO initiative around certain core elements: *Employee Engagement and Leadership at All Levels* (employees having the autonomy to act to deliver service, and to be involved in key business decisions); *The Work of Leadership* (leaders taking the time to focus on work that is important, but not urgent); *The Customer Experience* (emphasis is placed on the experience itself being positive, even when the customer's specific request cannot be met).

Strategy One: Training for Management Employees

County Manager, Deputy County Managers, Agency Head Training

In the first stage of this strategy, all deputy county managers and agency heads joined the county manager in an exploration over three days of the essential components of HPO. Guided by a facilitator, himself a former county manager in another locality, the group learned about the factors leading to employee engagement, the five questions all HPOs must answer about service and measurement of success, organizational philosophies that inhibit high performance and ones that nurture it, and more. This huge investment of time allowed Henrico's thought leaders to really focus on this important initiative in a collaborative environment.

Assistant Agency Head Training

Beginning in October 2014, assistant agency heads gathered as a group for training that focused on different organizational leadership philosophies and their various management beliefs and behaviors in relationship to these philosophies. Various philosophies were examined and discussed with a goal of encouraging even better communication and developing higher performing employees who feel empowered to make decisions to benefit the customer.

Understanding these organizational philosophies at the top was key to achieving the goal of greater employee engagement. The assistant agency heads as a peer group used this time to begin the work of leadership to explore ways to improve the customer experience, and examine the hard questions essential to moving to a high performance state.

Middle Manager Training

In January and November of 2015, all middle managers were invited to attend an HPO class. Participants completed the same organizational philosophy assessment completed in 2013 by all agency heads and later the assistant agency heads. Within this cohort, middle managers explored their thoughts on these leadership philosophies and how they could help achieve the goal of developing and leading a high performing organization. They considered what practices needed to continue and what needed to change to achieve optimal performance going forward. Managers created plans in the class for implementing their strategies and addressing concerns.

First Line and New Supervisor Training

Beginning in April 2015, all newly promoted and hired supervisors were required to attend a class called *Vision to Performance for Supervisors*. This class further streamlined the concepts of HPO into a four-hour class focusing primarily on the relationship between managers and employees in high performance organizations. This module is now offered several times a year and is a core component of the Role of the Supervisor series of classes.

Strategy Two: Ongoing Sessions for Top Leadership

At the end of the three-day upper manager training, the County Manager vowed to continue the discussions begun in the session, and he challenged agency heads to develop strategies for implementing these high-performing concepts in their individual agencies.

True to his word, the County Manager hosts ongoing HPO sessions, where top leadership meets at least twice a year to continue the exploration into key components of a high performing organization. So far, agency heads have answered the questions: What has been happening in the direction of HPO since the training event and what do we need to start doing and what do we need to stop doing to be a high performance organization?

Sessions focused on myriad topics all related to the vision. One focused specifically on areas of outstanding customer service. Each agency head described what he or she had been doing to implement HPO concepts in their agencies, and then shared stories of "The Henrico Way" – a way of describing service that focuses on the customer experience. Another focused on the customer experience from the standpoint of generational differences in the community.

Several sessions featured speakers and facilitators who engaged the group around HPO concepts. One facilitator presented the topic of servant leadership. The presenter was a retired state Supreme Court Justice, who defined servant leadership and its relationship to local government. During another session, the group heard from a community leader about the value of "Unusual Coalitions." He encouraged county leaders to reach out to others who may think differently in order to find a common purpose of service to the community. One session invited a college president and former local education leader to address the group on the topic of lessons from Lincoln's presidency.

For the one-year anniversary of the original HPO training, the group gathered for a discussion of HPO initiatives throughout the county. This session revealed the many and varied ways that HPO concepts were being implemented in agencies.

Strategy Three: Middle Manager Cohorts

Middle managers have unique challenges in implementing HPO because of their placement *between* the upper management tier in the organization and the supervisors and employees directly serving customers. They are often the ones tasked with carrying out HPO initiatives.

Because this group is so important to the success of this initiative, two groups of middle managers have met several times this winter and spring to discuss issues related to HPO concepts. Sessions explore employee engagement, identifying stakeholders, and leadership at all levels, and overall strategies for implementing HPO concepts. Participants have the opportunity to increase their self-awareness and challenge beliefs that could be holding them back from being a better HPO manager.

HPO Going Forward

There is no end for Henrico County as we explore ways to be a higher performing organization. All agency heads continue to meet regularly and all newly promoted and hired supervisors will continue to attend an HPO class. All new employees hear directly from the County Manager in New Employee Orientation about his expectations of them and to answer questions about the culture of Henrico County. Certain training classes available to all employees continue to be identified in the catalog as "Vision to Performance", such as *Exploring the Henrico Way: What's Yours to Do?*, *Leading with the Spirit of Ownership*, *Covey's Lessons on Leadership at all Levels*, and *Delivering Feedback when you are not the Boss*.

4. Financing and Staffing

The greatest cost came from the original three days of training. Most of the other vendors only charged honorariums or gave a reduced government rate for facilitation services. All costs are outlined below:

Vendors	\$13,066
Binders and copies	\$300
Training amenities	\$1,475
Total	\$14,841

Staff resources included the training and consulting services of two individuals from the Organizational Learning and Talent Development Division of the Department of Human Resources. These individuals designed and delivered content related to HPO principles to managers in the county. The manager of this division also functions as the HPO coordinator, securing vendors for the training delivered to county upper managers.

5. Program Results

To show we are successfully meeting the goal of developing and leading a high performing organization, we need to share evidence of any of the following being implemented in the county: efforts to increase employee engagement and employees acting as “leaders at all levels, initiatives to be more responsive to citizens, and indications that agencies were involved in “the work of leadership.” To date, an impressive number of HPO initiatives have been

implemented throughout the county. A total of 64 different departmental strategies have been specifically identified. Below are just a few of the examples of HPO initiatives or actions that have been implemented or are ongoing:

- Employee engagement surveys resulting in strategies to improve the work environment and assign tasks to more closely align with employee interests.
- A cashier making a suggestion of a way to improve customer wait times in line.
- A cross-functional HPO committee recommended that employees have name plates on their desk and the office be given a “face lift” to improve the customer experience.
- Line staff included in strategy and work sessions. An employee suggested homeowner maintenance workshops, which has been a successful customer initiative.
- Line staff responsible for coordinating an attorney tracking system.
- Initiative aimed at empowering foremen to handle feedback and coaching responsibilities directly rather than relying on superintendents. In the year before this initiative, foreman only accessed resources for advice on supervisory duties three times. In the two years following, they reached out over 20 times for advice and took action from that advice, *resulting in improved employee performance.*
- Establishing an audit team, led by line staff. This has resulted in recommendations for improved customer service, including a suggestion box.
- Forming a “core leadership team” which meets to discuss ways to increase leadership capacity of the department’s employees, employee motivation, and the need for changing roles and approaches to citizen services.

- Line staff gathering and analyzing data to determine work load of ambulances to identify maximum hours of utilization. Having a Performance Measurement Initiative that looks at developing performance matrixes.
- Setting aside one day a month for its managers to meet to discuss “big picture” topics such as employee engagement, collaboration, and ways to increase impact for customers.
- Soliciting line staff feedback that led to an improved physical space for customers. This agency also developed a system that tracks inspector services so that when a customer calls it is easy to identify their specific inspector.
- Created a work group of customers to develop a plan for training, and create policies around clinical care. A grant funded project, coordinated by line staff, provides tele-psychiatry services, greatly increasing access to these services.
- Staff engaging with citizens during weekly visitation. They use this time to answer parent questions and to address any concerns brought up.
- Developed a Citizen’s Academy where citizens from all of the districts in the county meet regularly to learn about county services and departments.
- Moved the majority of its “headquarters” staff into centers across the county. This increased access to staff for customers. It had the added benefit of staff being able to see customer needs and concerns first-hand.
- Surveyed customers on how service could be improved. *This led to the agency beginning to accept credit cards for payment.* Also more space between work cubicles was created to allow for more privacy and a better overall customer experience.

6. Brief Summary

When an organization is performing well, has no major issues or problems, and is able to function at a competent level and manage its budget, it would be easy to “rest on your laurels” and not look deep inside at ways to improve and provide even higher levels of service. It takes courage for an organization to ask the key question: Despite being successful, how can we be even higher performing as an organization?

Henrico County put together an initiative aimed at changing its culture to one where all employees are viewed as leaders at all levels, where being a good engagement manager is an essential component of all managers’ jobs, and where positive customer experiences must come from a daily effort by staff to view interactions from the customer point of view. All of this was accomplished because leaders have taken the time to step away from the busy operational tasks and displayed the discipline necessary to do the work of leadership.

Asking and answering tough questions about the very essence of public service and the purpose of local government to create meaningful change is not easy, but the results speak for themselves. Throughout Henrico County, leaders at all levels are communicating and practicing a vision that inspires strong outcomes, an outstanding customer experience and employee satisfaction.