

Making Magic Happen – How Bold Can Government Be?

Boldly using Polk County Trusty Work Program Case Study Title

Polk County Board of County Commissioners Jurisdiction Name

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Synopsis

With the economic downturn and the passing of a Florida Constitutional Amendment reducing property taxes (the main source of General Revenue funds) the Polk County Board of County Commissioners was faced with budget deficits in the tens of millions each year for budget years 2007 through 2009. During this time due to hiring freezes and reduction of unfilled positions, the Purchasing Division found ourselves short staffed as the staffing level was reduced from 14 to 10.

Faced with the same workload but fewer employees to complete the work, the Division had to take a hard look at the work each staff member was doing. Clerical work that was still being handled by procurement staff had to be reassigned. This reassignment left clerical staff overwhelmed since their numbers had been reduced as well.

The question was how to get the work completed without adversely affecting the response time to other User Divisions and the public.

Management at the Purchasing Division knew they had to be innovative and act boldly. Inmates from the Polk County Trusty Work Program had been used periodically to help with work in the Purchasing Warehouse. They had helped move furniture, re-organize and clean the warehouse. Male trusties had been used for other manual labor but never before had a trusty been used to assist with office work. We found that no other Polk County Division had ever used trusties in their offices either, but we knew this would give us the extra assistance needed without any cost to the County.

We contacted the supervisor of the Polk County Sheriff's Office Trusty Work Program and he explained to us what would have to be done in order to request a female trusty to work inside our office. He also stated that the trusty would not be able to have access to telephones, computers, or the internet; absolutely no communication to the outside world. This posed a problem since some of the work we would need to have done would include working with specific computer programs. We were instructed to write a letter justifying the reason(s) why we wanted a trusty, exactly what tasks this person would be performing, and requesting the trusty use a computer but have no internet access.

With the use of the trusty approved, we had to ready our office for her arrival. We had our IT division remove access to everything, such as internet access and County network drives, on the computer that she would be using. The computer was left with only the specific files and programs necessary for her to complete the tasks assigned. The telephones from the copy room and the office the trusty would be working out of had to be removed as well.

Now that the office was ready, staff had to be prepared for her arrival as well. A trained staff member had to be present in the office at all times the trusty was working. Purchasing had several staff members trained on the proper supervision of a trusty as well as the specific rules and regulations that must be strictly adhered to in order to ensure that there would be a trained staff member in the office whenever the trusty was working.

With the office ready, the staff ready and the trusty ready to come to work, the question was which of the many tasks needed to be completed should we start on first?

Florida Statute (FS 119) requires the majority of public documents to be available for public view. When a public records request is received it must be completed within a reasonable amount of time. However, when Purchasing receives a public records request we have to pull the files, sort through each one to identify the proper pages requested and either copy or scan the requested pages. Since older files were kept in file cabinets in the warehouse, public records requests could be very time consuming.

The Purchasing Division intended to begin imaging all solicitation documents and various procurement files to make public records more readily accessible for the public and less time consuming for staff. However, even if we did have the staff time to start from this date forward, which we didn't, what about the back log of files dating back over three (3) years? With current staff scrambling to get bids out, back, reviewed, and awarded, this would have to wait....or would it?

The decision was made that this project would be a great start for our new trusty. Her work would revolve primarily around the imaging software and the copier/scanner so it fit within the parameters set by the Sheriff's Office. For this project the main duties of this trusty would be to organize the files in the warehouse, prepare them to be scanned, pull staples, insert predetermined dividers, and remove post-it-notes, etc. The files would then be scanned into the system and the completed files identified for destruction.

We knew that having these files scanned for easy access would be an asset to the Division and a great start on imaging being a standard part of our work process. We also knew that having no cost associated with this work would be a great thing for our budget. What we didn't know was the impact this could have on the trusty themselves.

When a trusty starts we understand that they only have a limited time with us, therefore it is imperative we have a fast learner and someone who is going to work to get the job done as quickly and accurately as possible. Since January we have had three (3) long term trusties. As a trusty is preparing to leave we request they assist in finding a suitable replacement. The trusty then discusses the job duties and the qualities needed with the Trusty Work Program Supervisor to assist the Supervisor in selecting a suitable candidate. We also require that that trusty train their replacement. This is an added benefit to the Purchasing staff in that our time is not taken to train each replacement but it has also lead to the development of leadership skills in the outgoing trusty.

Development of leadership skills and life skills is an unexpected outcome of our project. These individuals are developing leadership skills, organizations skills, computer program knowledge, and they are getting experience working in a professional office setting. We believe that what they've learned by working with us will help them as they re-enter society. They can now say (where maybe before they couldn't) that they have these skill sets.

The trusty currently working with us stated “...It really built my self-esteem to know that I can be an asset to society, and the work force. Not only did working in an average office environment, with normal, working citizens build my social skills and morale, it also taught me to interact well in a work environment. It was also very helpful in getting me ready for employment when I am released. I learned many valuable skills and received some leadership skills that will help me in the future. ...I am very appreciative and grateful to have had this opportunity”.

However, no plan goes off without a hitch. Some of the obstacles that we have faced are that the trusties are short term. We can only have them work for us long enough to serve out their sentence; therefore, there is high turnover. We started this project in January and have gone through three (3) trusties. We have also had some scheduling conflicts with Purchasing staff and have had to make changes to ensure that a trained staff member is in the office at all times. To help reduce the conflicts additional staff members have been trained.

We began using our first trusty in January 2010. Our expectations were simply to prepare the files and get them scanned. Because this was a new project we didn't know what to expect but have been very pleasantly surprised with the output of the trusties. To date they have completed 75 boxes of files (approximately 134,000 sheets of paper)! With the exception of current active files all 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 solicitation files have been organized, prepared for scanning and scanned into the system. This work was completed with approximately 600 hours of free labor. Had Purchasing had to hire a temporary employee to perform this task it would have cost approximately \$7,900.00.

The Polk County Purchasing Division decision to be innovative and bold in using the Sheriff's Office Trusty Work Program has really paid off for the County, the program participants, and the public. Work that needed to be done is being done timely and at no cost to the County, the trusty's themselves are learning valuable skills and the public will have quicker response times for public records requests.

With the majority of the necessary backlog of scanning complete, the trusty is able to handle other clerical tasks. They have begun filing, scanning current contract and vendor files, moving unused files to warehouse, and assisting the Senior Buyer with preparing County surplus for auction. With a little “out-of-the-box” thinking, the types of tasks that they can assist with are innumerable.

Presentation Components

1. Innovation/Creativity

- a. How did the program/project/service, etc. Improve the organization?

Purchasing was able to complete necessary clerical work tasks without tasking current staff and without any cost to the County.

- b. Were new technologies used? If yes, what methods and/or applications did you implement?

A new imaging system, Document Manager, was used to organize scanned files for future electronic retrieval. Documents had to be sorted and prepared for scanning. All staples, paperclips, post it notes, etc, had to be removed. The files were then scanned using our copier/scanner and saved to an electronic file where they will be uploaded into Document Manager.

- c. Was a private consultant used?

No, all work was done with current staff and trusty participants.

2. Outcomes Achieved

- a. What customer/community needs and expectations were identified and fulfilled?

Our internal customers need to have their requests for procurement handled in a timely manner and the community needs to have their public records requests handled in a timely manner and in compliance with the Public Records Law. Due to the trusty handling the imaging of the procurement and contract files, procurement staff was free to process internal customer requests for procurement without having to stop and process public records requests. Now that the files have been scanned, any member of the community that requests a copy of a file can have it sent electronically. This will save time and effort on both the requesting party as well as Purchasing staff.

- b. Has service delivery been enhanced?

Yes. Not only for public records requests, but now that the trusty has moved on to handling other basic clerical tasks our staff is free to handle more involved requests.

- c. Did the initiative improve access to your government? If yes, how?

Yes. With one phone call a citizen can request access to public records contained within Purchasing and have it emailed to them as an electronic attachment. They no

longer have to come to Purchasing and often times the electronic copy is more legible than a reproduced copy would be.

d. Has the health of the community improved as a result? If yes, how?

Although the physical health of the community may not have been improved, we feel that the emotional and mental health has been. If our quotes from our current trusty are any indication, the trusties used in this program will be re-entering society with a more positive attitude and higher self-esteem. They will also have developed leadership and social skills they may not have had before. Hopefully reducing the rate of recidivism and improving the “health” of our community.

3. Application Results and Real World Practicality

a. What practical applications could you share if selected?

When you put your mind to being innovate and BOLD there are numerous tasks that can be completed through a program such as this. Basic clerical tasks considered time consuming and even boring by regular staff become an opportunity to shine for these trusties. The cost savings would be practical for any organization.

b. How applicable is the project/program/service to other local governments?

This service could be applicable to any local government that had this type of detention program or would consider implementing this type of trusty program. Consideration would need to be given to the geographic proximity of the office to the location of the trusties.

c. What results/outcomes will you be able to share?

In addition to the overall cost savings and workload assistance we would like to share the benefits realized by the trusty’s themselves. We would want to share how to be bold enough to make a difference in someone’s life and the community.

4. Case Study Presentation

a. Briefly describe what your case study presentation might include.

Our presentation would include a PowerPoint presentation, statements from trusties, and a video reenacting the processes we went through.