

County Administrators Idea Exchange

Sunday, September 22, 2013

12:45-2:45pm – ICMA Annual Conference, Boston, Massachusetts

Welcome and introductions: NACA President Robert Reece, County Administrator, Pottawatomie County, KS

Thank you to ICMA-RC and The Ferguson Group for their sponsorship of NACA

Gregory Dyson – ICMA-RC appreciates its ongoing relationship with NACA, including a regular column on regulatory and budget issues and retirement issues. ICMA-RC is approaching \$50 billion in asset and recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. It has 1 million accounts with 9,000 plans, and continues to grow each year. It recently brought on the Commonwealth of Virginia as one of newest clients for 457 and hybrid pension plans. Previously, ICMA-RC served 200 communities in the Commonwealth; now there is potential to serve 835 clients. Last year ICMA-RC brought on close to 200 smaller plans. It engages in work that serves its mission of helping public employees build retirement security, including capacity to help pension issues by increasing actuarial staff to engage communities in discussions about what to do with pension plans. It has worked with a lot of communities in California regarding new state legislation on pensions. Stop by ICMA-RC's booth here in Boston; clients can sign up for one-on-one consults with RC financial planners. Tom Lundy, county manager of Catawba County, NC, serves on the ICMA-RC board and is incoming president.

Bill Ferguson – The Ferguson Group also appreciates its relationship with NACA, and sponsors a scholarship program for up and coming local government managers.

Idea exchange

Process improvements

Lake County, IL: Biggest complaint has been about the slow permit process. Several years ago the County built a one-stop permitting shop through process redesign and a new facility. Through consolidation, the County has been able to eliminate different steps in the process as well as some permitting requirements. There is now cross-training across departments, with multiple inspections by one person. It has taken years to overhaul the process, but the result has reduced complaints. Constituents can leave with a contract – here's what we're going to do and what's expected for all organizations; there is one project manager who pulls all the different permits for all the County agencies; and information is on the County's webpage.

Brevard County, FL: Has also dealt with the building permitting issue, as a high growth area. The county came together in a 7 counties/86 cities consortium for regional permitting. The partners have a common interface for state building code. This has been successful.

Also incident command for fire and rescue with a training system featuring a digital experience; younger firefighters and lieutenants love this. It's something that's created with screens and videos, like playing a video game. The County brings together the 600 firefighters in the County and also firefighters from the Cities for training, so they speak a common language.

La Plata County, CO: The County is launching into a process improvement process. With a new government team, they're trying to do it organization-wide and bring about organizational culture change. First the County is looking at the

foundation (why we're doing it) and then working with departments to teach the process, then having each director/elected official pick one process to conduct the exercise.

Dave Krings shared examples of different approaches (detailed in handouts). An analytical approach applies to anything—from building permits to the hiring process and sewage treatment. You don't go in as an expert in the process.

Fiscal neutrality

How to reach it? Do counties have policies in place? How to determine impact? Cost recovery?

El Paso County, CO: The County has been working on a process to determine cost recovery for the County and for developers. Twelve years ago the County was approving small-scale developers and the last developer to come on line would pay for infrastructure; the others slid through requirements. Discussions started on transportation impact fees in 1992, and after a very long, drawn out process and lots of discussion, a structure was approved in 2012. With the new program, each new builder is paying its way regardless of project size. Process is to recognize infrastructure finance system and issue a system of credits assigned per unit of construction. Incorporated into building department – regional enterprise. Now when a homeowner comes in and acquires permits, they're paying an impact fee or receiving a credit for amount of infrastructure that is put in place. The process distinguishes commercial vs. residential in an effort to ensure that certain people aren't paying too little or too much. Also, the County put in place a cost recovery process whereby developers can pay a fee of \$3,500 per unit (commercial) or join the county-wide transportation district which is a property tax assessment process. Most people opt into the district. If you opt to build infrastructure yourself – within 12 months have to get approved from county – initiates planning process. Phasing process – trigger process – approval for final plat, phase and trigger points – infrastructure must be implemented by trigger points.

Health exchanges

El Paso County, CO: State of Colorado is implementing its own exchanges with a very different process. What's really happening of concern – the County has always afforded some type of health care coverage for full, part-time and job share employees. Now it can't afford it, so it's reducing part-time hours and changing its job share, forcing those employees into the exchange. Small group employers are heavily impacted – they were paying \$680 per family per month, and it's jumped to \$1,400 per month. There's lots of debate especially within the state, with concern about healthcare plans for small and midsize companies and their affordability and coverage. Plans offered on exchanges are very different, with high deductibles. The County grandfathered requirements, set up direct relationship with hospital, and set up own County healthcare clinics, where it's able to provide services at a much lower cost. The healthcare act will have a significant impact on the business community and state. Open enrollment October 1 – December 31.

La Plata County, CO: Another issue in Colorado is the significant impacts on departments of human services; the number of people eligible for Medicaid will jump, La Plata County is trying to gear up but unsure of impact. It's adding staff to keep up with the potential workload. Also looking at employee healthcare clinics.

Not necessarily related to employee side, but on EMS services – will our reimbursement be changing? ALS vs. BLS is still a little foggy. We may send a nurse instead of Paramedic or EMT depending on what we're allowed to do. This could be a whole different delivery system/operating system potentially.

Clark County, WI: Wisconsin did not jump on federal plan. Impacts on staff. Last Friday, the state sent out 180,000 notices to individuals who would no longer be eligible for BADGER (Medicaid supported system), with a shift of 160% to 100% of poverty level under the new healthcare system. Wisconsin counties are full service; they provide human services. These people will have questions. Kids might still be eligible for BADGER, though their adult parents are not. Questions will come to staff to manage. 30,000 new cases in consortium of 10 counties (Income Maintenance).
Sunday, September 22, 2013

Reimbursements by clients back to human services / parity ACA – mental health costs, developmental disabilities. Some of costs may be reduced for state-county partnership due to federal subsidy. What’s full/part time? How many Counties are doing analysis – what do we do?

Fayette County, GA: Moved all part time employees to 25 this year – because can’t do it in reaction to healthcare. Debate continues over private EMS.

IT infrastructure

Cumberland County, ME: The strategic planning process included 40 recommendations, one-half to do with technology. The County is focusing a lot of energy on IT services and shared services to municipalities. Looking for examples of success stories.

Eau Claire County, WI: 100,000 population. Four or five years ago, the County built a consortium of 20 partners – including local governments, hospitals, and the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire campus – to build a broadband/fiber optic network. The consortium received \$18 – 19 million in federal grant funds and is just finishing the project, which will lead to high end communications redundancy. The project is high speed fiber optic cable running between buildings – wireless – so participants are able to get onto secure network through high speed redundant loop. The effort provides the opportunity for healthcare system to communicate among facilities and for radio communications (fire, EMS, public works) infrastructure – tower-to-tower able to piggy back and build a redundant loop.

Sussex County, NJ: Shared services virtualization of desktops – won a Government Technology award. Rural county but good success story for affordable level of IT services to municipalities.

Arlington County, VA: The County serves as a consolidated local government (no towns or cities). Through collaboration with schools, they lay fiber together to support general government and school operations but also to offer free WIFI access to community in parks and public spaces – “Connect Arlington”. The project included another partner – Dominion Power Company. When the power company goes in and digs up streets – the County lays its fiber so it doesn’t have to pay to dig up streets.

Loudon County, VA: The County faces a challenge in connecting rural areas to high speed and broadband connectivity – push on STEM – one of schools as a pilot project gave out Apple devices and sent them home but kids didn’t have broadband connectivity. What is the county government’s role in getting the private sector to expand/extend broadband services into the community? Franchise agreement specifies a cost per gigabyte – video data transmissions are a lot of money. Is there anybody out there who has had success in getting private sector to provide broadband services in rural areas?

Humboldt County, CA: This is a community equity issue. So much of the way we push out information is over the internet. California has a statewide fund and is pretty successful in working through them to get redundant broadband to county through a different route. Another successful partnership has been through tribal relationships; one of the tribes is licensed as a competitive local exchange carrier – they are bringing fiber in. The County’s role is waiving permit fees to dig up roads.

Shared/Regional services

Johnson County, KS: 550,000 population; part of Kansas City metro area. Decided to put together a Core Four consortium/symposium that included executives of Johnson County, Wyandotte County, Kansas City, and Jackson County; collectively these local governments represent 4 million people. They created a partnership amongst themselves to ameliorate county/state boundaries to create shared services. This represented a culture change for department

heads to find pathways for efficiencies and shared services. The first effort was a feel-good meeting. The results were minimal to begin with but attitudes and expectations are changing. Among the results:

- Emergency managers will blow sirens on same day at same time.
- There are compacts to honor each other's bidding process – if a contractor hasn't paid taxes in one county they will not be selected in another county.
- IT fiber optic sharing.
- If one's jail is at capacity, move inmates across borders.
- Case workers to share information/coordinate services.

Bigger conversations – it is difficult to have meaningful conversations among politicians. Transit – airport. Mid America Regional Council is working on a consensus model. “We're experimenting. Not sure where we'll end up but pathway to get some energy to make some meaningful changes. Stay tuned!”

Phil Smith-Hanes mentioned that **Yolo County, CA**, has a lot of successful collaboration with cities. It's an agricultural area; they have an interest in development that occurs in cities but that has impact on the tax base of the unincorporated county. Yolo County has formed partnerships with cities around different interests like economic development. The structure is called “Two-by-Twos” – two members of each city council are paired with two members of the board of county supervisors for meetings and discussion.

Eau Claire County, WI: There is a city, county, school district consortium for shared services, with resolutions to create another standing commission with bylaws; three elected officials from each entity sit on the commission. Service optimization analysis (Craig Rapp) – survey work, work groups in community – 50-60 potential joint projects – Consortium has analysis matrix with point values – top 6 – shared health insurance, purchasing, permitting, land records modernization/baseline mapping, etc.

Loudoun County, VA: also pursuing opportunities for shared services / efficiencies.

Sonoma County, CA: Analysis was conducted for shared fleet services, but this didn't happen because city jobs would have been at risk. There are partnerships around health and human services, with the goal to invest early and prevent child abuse, etc. These partnerships include lots of input from nonprofits, with agreement on principles to follow best practices to be effective, setting criteria for issuing contracts for compliance with these best practices.

Preparation for aging/baby boomer retirements.

Pottawatomie County, KS: Within three years, we will have six department heads retiring; this will create quite a void, with lots of institutional knowledge going out the door. How do we manage the transition?

Boone County, KY: Extensive countywide contingency committee of top administrators so transition isn't that traumatic. Every professional within the organization is given the challenge of identifying who their successor is. They are putting people in place, restructuring, hiring additional contract attorneys during the transition.

Sonoma County, CA: The County has established two cohorts of local leaders' academy – this is shared leadership development with cities conducted once a month over a six-month period, where participants receive training from local government managers. The academy has been very well received and has also helped to build bridges among jurisdictions.

Also conducted a survey – what training form do people prefer? 40% prefer classroom. About to launch reconstituted training program. Identify competencies that are key for management positions. Also developed/developing a book entitled Leadership Code.

Sunday, September 22, 2013

The county has had waves of retirements over last 15 years with peaks. The county has built academies in partnership with council that represents management, with agreement to not be a bargaining organization but to partner to develop training and academy to bring up first line of managers, etc. Course material is available if anyone is interested.

Civility

Sevier County, UT: We fought the Tea Party and we won. The county had raised taxes, then the Tea Party circulated petition. If 10% sign, they can block tax increases. The Tea Party members were uncivil. They suggested local government staff should be unpaid volunteers. Staff went on radio to dispute. Tea Party members would call and complain about lack of service; “an aggressive but small minority paralyzed us for a while. Sometimes it is important to push back.” There is a group that publishes everyone’s salary in the state. “They take salaries for every employee and add all the benefits and say that’s your total compensation which it is. Then they would compare against private sector, but just the salary.”

Sonoma County, CA: Board shifted to having speaker cards – prior to this, anyone who wanted to speak up could. The board chair would open up and people would line up. With speaker cards, they sit and they get called up. On the back of the card there are notes about expectations on civility. Remarked upon especially during discussion of contentious issues; this provides a little bit of policing. No one knows who turned in the card when. Chair has the ability to control/diffuse the order of speakers – rather than building into crescendo.

Arlington County, CA: Arlington Way/Civic Engagement – two to three years ago, the County was challenged with several processes; something wasn’t working and the County stepped back and took a look at role of local government. One of outcomes was a series of trainings for staff – is it fair to send chief engineer out by himself to explain a controversial project? The trainings have built capacity for having more productive meetings. 100 employees have gone through internal civic engagement training, with positive outcomes.

Arlington County is also developing training for volunteer commission members to be effective, with challenging behavior in the past by some commission members.

La Plata County, CO: Realizing it didn’t orient board and commission members, the County developed an internal training program to help them understand the difference between being citizen and commission members, sunshine laws, civility. Also formed mini job descriptions for expectations; commission members have to sign commitment statement that describes how they will treat staff, public, etc.

Johnson County, KS: The County has been talking about civility for the past few years. Are we seeing a lack of civility increase, plateau, or diminish? There is a sense that extreme positions are not as welcome as they were before. It is not so much the issue as the way it is presented sometimes. Personality and character are factors.

The extreme voices are not a huge influence on governing body itself, but as they have not been heard and are very frustrated at federal and state levels, they come to the county board room as their voice. That is their outlet. Impact of common core - 1 of 5 supervisors is a member of the group and helped facilitate discussion around implementation. A simple pass through agreement – county superintendent was pass-through from the governor’s office for training. 50 people showed up to oppose something I had nothing to do with. Health care, coal, clean energy, endangered species act. They don’t feel like they have a voice for these issues anywhere else.

Pottawatomie County, KS: I see that as well. That’s been happening the last few years in KS. Not that long ago it was the left that was doing this stuff – it plateaued out.

Humboldt County, CA: It is the 'Left' for us. We had an Occupy. It's not just one or the other. The Occupy movement was actively opposed to the concept of civility. Occupy members marched around the conference table chanting at the administrator for 1-1/2 hours. The incivility has plateaued but it plateaus at a different level each time – overall tenor has gotten a tiny bit worse.

One of the things we do wrong is we give them the platform; we can tell the commission not to acknowledge that party or that platform. Professional Q&A. Don't engage with them if they are not being civil.

Rick, NC: The Tea Party is alive and well in North Carolina. More and more counties are not just dealing with citizens coming to meetings, but on the board. On its seven-member board there are three factions, with 4 Republicans and 3 Democrats, with the Republicans divided into traditional Republicans and Tea Party Republicans. Dynamics are interesting.

Johnson County, KS: Movement in American government goes back to Andrew Jackson or even Boston. We do good things and we need to tell the world. We provide basic services – police, fire, and sewer – but at the County level we get sucked into national campaign issues.

Luzerne County, PA: We have a new county government. A few are hammering us with right to know requests – every email, every document –they want us to do nothing but respond to their requests. PA has heavy right to know laws; County staff has to review everything in order to not release privileged emails.

Sarasota County, FL: If you're a county board member corresponding with another one or the county manager, it automatically goes up on the web. We are putting all of our "right to know" requests and results – checks issued, contracts - up on the web. \$10,000 spent. Get ahead of issue, be transparent. Suggestion to tell citizens how much it costs to fill the requests.

El Paso County, CO: You have to invest the time in the educational process. Understanding the responsibilities the County has as a regional government is key.

Dave Krings shared a similar experience a couple of years ago in Hamilton County, where the board put together a commission review committee. They talked about the form of government – what is the most efficient way? At the end-after a wide divergence of opinions and recommendations, the only issue with consensus was the council-manager plan. Focused discussion – benefits of professionalism.

Tampa Bay, FL: Planning commission work – Sunshine state open meetings and records – citizens are not stupid – they are confused or don't understand – the more open you rate about process, outcomes, measures, you end up getting people behind you. The more people know – the more other people will capture and use at public meetings. In FL open debate – when "crazies" speak people discount it somewhat – the more info out there that citizens have to work with.