Aligning Strategic Business Planning, Budgeting and Performance Management Efficiently

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

#Reality Focused, Results Driven

Population: 1.1 million

Innovation

Criteria:
- Initiative fundamentally changed a process, product or service (fundamental)
- Initiative builds upon existing knowledge to improve a product, process or service (incremental)
- The initiative substantially stretched the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.

Describe Your Innovation

(When and how did this innovation get started? Do also detail how the program or policy innovative, how it has changed previous processes, products, or services, and how it has substantially stretched or improved the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.)

The innovation in concept was creating strategic business plans - not only strategic plans - that take the County from Vision to Action. The intent of strategic business plans is to align the goals to the business needs i.e., budget. Therefore, rather than have departmental strategic plans that might only include goals, strategies and measures, the County’s strategic business plans are all inclusive.

Essentially in the 3-year cycle, departments have developed its goals, objectives, strategies, actions, measures, and costs to achieve the goals. The strategic business plans are the core focus for use in developing the County’s annual budget, but the costs are uniquely identified in terms of categories of funding that will help maximize goal achievement. The categories are human capital, information technology, communications, and public information.

To support this effort, the County has aligned its accountability system to the department strategic business planning and budgeting cycle whereby it has created a new Performance Management System that is the first of its kind for local government and developed in partnership with Microsoft through its Dynamics 365 CRM.

The system allows the linkage across the strategic business plans, annual work plans and performance measures that help track year round performance. Information is used to populate dashboards so that leaders and the public can visually see how the County is doing on everything from its Vision to its Actions.
Collaboration

Criteria:
- Initiative demonstrated engaging stakeholders both internal and external.
- Initiative demonstrated high performance teaming, breaking down internal silos.
- Strategic partnerships and/or community networks were developed as a result of the initiative.

In less than 200 words, what individuals or groups are considered the primary initiators of your program? How does the innovation engage stakeholders or demonstrate high performance teaming? What strategic partnerships and/or community networks, if any, were developed?

The group that is the primary initiator of the program is the County Manager’s Office – Strategic Planning & Evaluation team. The team consists of a director and four Enterprise Management Analysts with backgrounds in non-profit leadership, education, local government and demography.

The innovation engages stakeholders by consistently allowing for the stakeholders to have insight on performance management, key initiatives (via work plans), and progress on executing strategic business plans. Because of the linkages in the system, stakeholders can understand real-time performance and be able to visualize the data in such a way that will help them understand if they are meeting strategic goals and/or accomplishing the work outlined within annual work plans.

Strategic partnerships and networks that include outside the County government organizations are the Emergency Medical Services agency (MEDIC) and the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library; both are users of the Performance Management System.

If a private consultant was used please describe in detail their involvement, identify the consultant and/or firm and provide contact information. Maintain a 100 word maximum.

The private consultant used to build the Performance Management System was Microsoft as they had to be the official architects of the Dynamics 365 CRM solution, in which they created. The County entered into an agreement with Microsoft to use CRMs as official workflow management solutions, yet the County’s Strategic Planning & Evaluation team had to provide the vision and logic for what was needed in the solution.

Significance

Criteria:
- Initiative addresses an area of concern for the majority of local government organizations.
- Initiative can serve as a model and replicated in other jurisdictions.

Please describe the extent to which you believe your program or policy initiative is potentially replicable within other jurisdictions and why? To your knowledge, have any other jurisdictions or organizations established programs or implemented policies modeled specifically on this project? Please also provide verification of the replication.

The County’s approach to strategic business planning and performance management was customized by the County’s Strategic Planning & Evaluation team, yet the approach can be used by any local government as the tools
Effectiveness

Criteria:

- Initiative addresses a community or organization need.
- Initiative has achieved tangible results.
- Initiative improved the organizational culture or the traditional approach to problem solving.
- Initiative has received recognition for its achievements, i.e. independent evaluation, national recognition, local press, etc.

Please describe the most significant obstacle(s) encountered thus far by your program. How have they been dealt with? Which ones remain?

The most significant obstacle has been changing the organizational culture and mindset by encouraging persons to not thinking incrementally or tactically but think strategically about the business. Although Mecklenburg County has been in the business of performance management and strategic planning since 2002, the County’s approach to departmental strategic business planning and alignment to the budget was just initiated in 2014 when the County built its framework and then in 2015 when departments began developing 3-year strategic business plans for FY2017-2019. Getting department directors to adopt a mindset of thinking out three years strategically and then tracking and reporting progress each quarter of a fiscal year has been different for them. Moreover, the added layer of ongoing updates to strategic business plans has resulted in additional work for the leaders as they are in a continuous planning/thinking mode throughout the year.

The County Manager’s Office staff has reinforced the importance of managing to departmental strategic business plans and includes questions for the department to respond to about how the strategic business plans align to the budget request.

To-date, there is minimal resistance to the concept as the County is entering its second 3-year strategic business planning cycle for FY2020-2022.

What outcomes did this program or policy have? Could you share one or two objective measures that demonstrate these outcomes? Ultimately, how did you measure the change based on the intervention, and why do you believe in the credibility of this assessment?

The outcomes the program had are several:

1. More transparency into the goals of each department (approx. 24 departments)
a. Evidence includes the development of strategic business plans and data and information that highlights how well the departments are doing towards goals

2. Early findings that budget investments in strategic business plans have helped achieve initial goals for the departments and for the County
   a. In FY17, the County invested $9.7 million into department strategic business plans
   b. In FY18, the County invested $8.8 million into department strategic business plans

Findings:
1. Increase employee satisfaction with County security services. Increase from 81% to 83% to 88% from FY16 to FY18
2. Decline in the time required to process voter registrations form 7.88 days to 9.55 days to 4.96 days from FY16 to FY18
3. Increase in the % of Audits Completed within the Allotted Timeframe from 83% to 89% to 91% from FY16 to FY18
4. Across departments, new partnerships that have not been done prior to the development of 3-year strategic business plans
   a. Office of the Tax Collector developing an affordable housing strategy to acquire foreclosed properties and set aside a subset for individuals who are low income. This partnership was with the other County department focused on homeless services called Community Support Services
   b. The Social Services department working with senior citizens to help them remain in their home by partnering with the Office of the Tax Collector to determine what approaches could be applied to help the senior citizens with paying their taxes.

Has the program received any press or other media coverage to date? If yes, please list the sources and briefly describe relevant coverage.

No, not formally.

Presentation

Criteria:
- Presentation will be delivered by a team.
- Presentation will be highly interactive and engaging.

Example Social Media Post
Do you know how to move from Vision to Action! Mecklenburg County's Award Winning Strategic Business Planning Approach can tell you! Check us out at mecknc.gov today! #TLG2019
Please write an abstract or short description for your innovation that would make conference attendees say "Well, I need to attend this session!"

For many local governments, strategic plans are rare. However, over the last decade government officials have realized the importance of strategic planning and have begun implementing departmental level strategic plans. In an uncertain and changing political, social and economic environment, strategic business plans provide organizations a roadmap to success. Such roadmap allows organizations to align plan goals and objectives to the budget development process as well as determine how to allocate resources.

Given little known about strategic planning for governments, the way an organization engages individuals and gains buy-in to planning is critical in today’s times and when organizations are not familiar with a good approach to strategy development and execution. The purpose of this webinar is to share and discuss with attendees Mecklenburg County’s approach to informing leaders and decision-makers on the importance of planning, inspiring others to develop quality departmental strategic business plans, and engaging a core group of strategic business planning teams to assess and report progress made with plans.

Attendees will also learn about Mecklenburg County's early wins in the first year of strategic business planning efforts, as well as lessons learned as well as review fun data visualizations that reveal our successes!

How will you make the session creative and unique?- How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational?- Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction.- What will attendees be able to have as an actionable “takeaway” from the session?

How will you make the session creative and unique?

We will use an online voting system that will allow persons to engage with each other and use via their phones. 3-5 questions around strategic business planning will be asked of the group and the responses will help kick off discussion on the topic. Each PowerPoint slide will be with images rather than just text.

How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational?

The goal will be to discuss our approach and what we did to be successful as well as lessons learned. The entertaining part will be in our visual display of data highlighting our measures of success associated with strategic business plans and investments made in the plans.

Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction.

The session will center on what are the unique approaches to adult learning and include: engagement via phones and voting material, presentation with a few slides, and then an interaction with the data followed by conversation on what we did well and what are the lessons learned. The wrap up will be with questions provided by the audience as well as a share and learn session that we will call open mic at round tables.

What will attendees be able to have as an actionable “takeaway” from the session?

The attendees will have the top 5 things they can use to get started today. The information will be provided on notecards they can provide to their organizational leaders or use for themselves.

Anything else you would like to add?

Mecklenburg County is really excited to submit its proposal to the Alliance for Innovation. We will be more than glad to talk about as much or as little of our approach as the conference planners need. We believe we have a great
story to tell and one that we can share for others to use and apply in their own respective organizations. And, the evidence of that is that many forward thinking local governments have wanted to "study" what we do so they can be better as organizations moving forward. In 2018 alone, four organizations have outreached to us, one has asked for the Director of Strategic Planning & Evaluation to do two webinars on our approach, and one has asked the Director of Strategic Planning & Evaluation to do a presentation at a conference.