

National Association of Counties

2009

Achievement Awards



Tough Times Programs

June 2009

National Association of Counties

2009 Achievement Awards



2009 Achievement Awards– Tough Times Programs

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**Compiled by
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About NACo – The Voice of America's Counties

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation's 3,068 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public's understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.

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Introduction

As our nation continues to battle through an economic recession, counties and communities across America are faced with many financial hardships and challenges. From cutting internal governmental costs to providing supplementary assistance to its residents, counties are in need of new approaches to cope with these “tough times”.

This publication is intended to showcase some of the positive practices being conducted at the county level so that others may benefit from their innovative ideas in an attempt to cut costs, stimulate economic growth, and aid residents who have been hit hard by the economic downturn.

✓ Arts and Historical Preservation

Miami-Dade County, FL
Population: 2,376,014

The Economic Impact of the Arts

The *Impact of the Arts in Miami-Dade County*, a study that documents the local impact of county arts programs, verifies the strong positive relationship between arts and the economy. Because of the rapid rise in the county’s arts and cultural industry, a study was conducted to determine if its success had a positive economic effect. The results from the analysis were extremely favorable.

The study, conducted by one of Miami’s economic development agencies, focused on two areas: the economic impact of spending by the cultural organizations and the impact of event-related spending by these organizations’ audiences. It concluded that, in total, the arts generate \$922 million annually to the local economy while also providing over 22,000 jobs. It also found that for every grant dollar invested by the county into a cultural non-profit organization, \$27 in additional funding from other private and public sources were generated.

The survey discussed its economic theory which depends on dividing the economy into two sectors: the export sector and the local sector. Exporters (such as manufacturers, hotels, department stores, etc.) obtain income from customers outside of the community. This “export income” enters the local economy in the form of salaries, purchases of mate-

rials, and dividends, becoming income to local residents. Residents then can spend their money either locally or for goods imported from outside the community. The dollars re-spent locally have a positive economic impact for the county as the money continues to circulate within the community. Arts programs serve as a prime way for residents to spend their income locally, helping to stimulate its community’s economy.

Overall, Miami-Dade County’s study shows the tremendous economic benefits from having successful arts programs. The arts have the ability to generate quantifiable and significant returns on investments, revitalize neighborhoods, and provide high quality experiences for county residents and visitors.

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✓ Civics Education and Public Information

Los Angeles County, CA
Population: 9,519,338

Foreclosure Prevention Project

As the nation’s economy has continued to spiral downward, the number of foreclosures upon homeowners has risen dramatically. This foreclosure crisis hit especially hard in Los Angeles County where, in the course of two years, the number of foreclosures rose from 2,206 in 2006 to 37,257 in 2008, a striking 1500% increase. In order to respond to the changing needs of Los Angeles county homeowners, the department developed the Foreclosure Prevention Project to provide enhanced services to its residents.

The three primary components of the program were public information and outreach, counseling and loan modification assistance, and fraud investigation. As the need for information began to grow, the Department of Consumer Affairs took steps to make the information more accessible and to develop new content to deal with some of the latest issues that were arising. In order to get information

into the hands of the people who needed it, new brochures were created and distributed to the public. Additionally, the county developed a homepage feature on foreclosures that brings together all of the department's information in one easily accessible location which is immediately visible to anyone visiting the department website. The department also partnered with neighborhood housing services to conduct foreclosure workshops that addressed questions and provided additional information to citizens.

In the past year alone, the county department provided over 1,600 people with foreclosure counseling, with the primary goal being to keep people in their homes. The department staff assisted in hundreds of loan modifications whereby they act as intermediaries between the lenders (usually a bank) and the homeowner.

Adding to the difficulties that homeowners face during foreclosure are fraudulent consultants who victimize desperate people. In exploiting vulnerable residents' situations, crooks offer fees to save a person's home (ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars) then provide no service, leaving the victim in greater debt. In 2008, the department addressed this situation by discovering and investigating 104 cases of foreclosure fraud.

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✓ Civics Education and Public Information

Macomb County, MI
Population: 1,709,434

Senior Drug Awareness Program

The economic crisis in America has caused many families to move back in with their aging parents or relatives. As foreclosures continue to rise, the once quiet home of a senior citizen is now becoming a long-time shelter for sons, daughters, and grandchildren. Since the medicine cabinets in many seniors' homes are filled with pills, these homes are becoming places where prescription medication theft and abuse exists.

During 2008, the Macomb County Department of Senior Services Victim Liaison began seeing an alarming pattern: many of their senior clients were missing prescription medications. Knowing prescription drug theft and abuse was prevalent among seniors, Senior Services sought to fill an unmet need by educating seniors on how to safe-guard medications, what drug paraphernalia looks like, what the signs of drug addiction are, and what to do if a loved-one is found abusing drugs. Working with faith-based agencies, nonprofit agencies, school administrators, the local community college, and many private individuals, the county coordinated a conference to educate seniors and promote awareness about this issue.

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✓ Community and Economic Development

Miami-Dade County, FL
Population: 2,376,014

Economic Stimulus Package

In 2008, Miami-Dade County created an Economic Stimulus Program to address the national economic slowdown and its severe impact on South Florida's building industry. The Office of Capital Improvements, working in tandem with twelve of Miami-Dade's capital departments, identified approximately \$600 million in funded capital projects that could be accelerated over the next 18 months if a combination of innovative administrative actions and new legislative policies were adapted.

This effort to fast-track county capital contracts is aimed at boosting South Florida's construction industry and cushioning the effect of a decline in the housing market. Because this economic crisis has been harsh on Miami's building industries, thousands of jobs in the building professions (architects and engineers) and trades (carpenters, welders, and electricians) have been lost. By expediting the timetables on capital contracts, the county is taking measures to put work back on the streets immedi-

ately. Not only would this program curtail job losses in the construction industry, but the county could potentially benefit from lower prices in a highly competitive marketplace.

The Economic Stimulus Package called for the county to take aggressive steps during the first 30-120 days of the program to compress construction contracting timetables. The procurement process for professional service agreements and construction contracts was streamlined to reduce the time to award qualifying contracts. The resulting efficiency has reduced each architectural and engineering procurement cycle by approximately 90 to 120 days. This aggressive, pro-active approach accelerated close to \$300 million in county projects.

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✓ Community and Economic Development

Lake County, OH
Population: 227,511

Emergency Rent and Mortgage Assistance Program

County staff and Fair Housing Resource Center, a multi-dimensional nonprofit agency, collaborated to meet housing market challenges faced by area residents. The program provided emergency rent or mortgage assistance to income eligible households who experienced and recovered from a financial crisis.

With the initial allocation of \$120,000 in funding from Community Development Block Grants and a limit of \$2,000 per household, the Emergency Rent and Mortgage Assistance Program intended to stabilize the housing of at least sixty households. Its secondary objective was to explore the terms and conditions in the housing market experienced by low income households in need by directing them to the Fair Housing Resource Center.

Applicants to the program were required to demonstrate that their rental or mortgage delinquency

was the result of a crisis; that the crisis was alleviated, and the resident was unlikely to fall behind in the future. Since the program's implementation, 66 rental households and 19 owner households were assisted. The average rental rescue assistance was \$1,300 per household, and the average mortgage rescue was \$1,800 per household. After this first objective was met, the program's secondary goal was accomplished as the program's existence gave hope to others who had housing affordability problems by providing an avenue and incentive for them to seek housing counseling service.

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✓ Community and Economic Development

Hennepin County, MN
Population: 1,116,200

A Library's Response to the Economy

Repercussions of the nation's economic downturn have hit dramatically in Minnesota's largest county, Hennepin. With foreclosure rates climbing to 23 per 1,000 households and the unemployment rate rising to 6.9%, many people are struggling to find meaningful employment at livable wages. Despite their economic woes, business in the county's libraries has flourished as more people use free resources to help cope with difficult economic situations. Because of this fact, the Hennepin County Library emerged as an ideal candidate to provide resources for County residents during this economic downturn. It has taken a three-pronged approach in responding to the economic crisis.

First, the library worked to expand their Jobs and Small Business Centers to more libraries located in neighborhoods strongly affected by job loss and business closings. The library expanded its partnerships with Workforce Centers and other community partners to provide access to services for displaced workers through job training, job-seeking skill development, and other important resources.

Additionally, the library partnered with the county's Taxpayer Services Department and the Minnesota

Home Ownership Center to offer foreclosure workshops free to the public. These workshops provide homeowners with information about what happens during foreclosures in an attempt to make the process less disruptive for the family involved.

Lastly, the county established and expanded a program called “Freedom Ticket” to provide a variety of services to people released from correctional facilities such as job resource workshops, how to start a business, where to go for legal advice, shelter, and housing information.

Overall, Hennepin County’s program responded to the growing needs of its populace by utilizing the library’s vast resources to meet the needs of the community. These free programs and services connect people to the resources they need to make informed decisions and live safe and productive lives. This program’s success illustrates how libraries can be a great resource to assist communities in difficult times.

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✓ Community and Economic Development

Wayne County, MI
Population: 2,061,162

Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention

The Wayne County Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program (MFPP) provides comprehensive education, counseling, referral, intervention, and other support services at no cost to Wayne County residents who are in delinquency, foreclosure, or who have a mortgage product that the resident thinks may become a problem. Aimed at true frontline foreclosure prevention, the program’s in-house and local agency arranges for counselors to provide education, direct counseling, perform foreclosure status assessments, and financial status assessments for homeowners. The program also assists in the negotiating resolutions with residents’ lenders.

The MFPP can be accessed by phone, online, or in person. Developed by the county’s Department

of Technology, the program’s website is the centerpiece of the program. By accessing the site, residents can register online, starting the intake process electronically. The data bank allows local housing counseling agencies to register as network partners and accept cases from residents. The databank essentially matches up the supply of foreclosure counselors with the residents in need of their services in a priority format; those with scheduled sheriff’s sales are prioritized and moved to the top of the queue.

The Foreclosure Prevention Program also acts as a conduit, connecting residents to other critical local resources that assist with immediate needs such as clothing, food, utility payments, etc. Lastly, the program evaluates each resident’s situation to determine the reason they are facing a foreclosure event and assists them in finding resources to address the long-term root cause of the issue.

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✓ Community and Economic Development

Hennepin County, MN
Population: 1,116,200

Foreclosure Prevention and Response Program

Hennepin County, like many other counties across the country, has experienced the negative consequences of the housing foreclosure crisis. Since 2005, the county’s total number of foreclosures rose over 300%. In response to the mortgage meltdown, commissioners formed a cross-departmental Foreclosure Task Force to focus on prevention, stabilization, and recovery.

Among the Task Force’s chief recommendations was the creation of a lead staff person to serve as a central contact for county foreclosure information and resources. The county designated two staff members to implement the education and outreach of the Task Force’s recommendations which included the following: \$1.25 million for the city-county initiative to remove vacant and boarded houses from severely impacted neighborhoods; the creation of a

data center to improve the county's ability to track the foreclosure issue and allow such data to be easily shared; the mailing of over 10,000 foreclosure information inserts in tax-delinquent notices to home-owners; and the creation of foreclosure mini-workshops for home owners and renters in Hennepin County.

Thus far, over 200 people have attended the county's twelve workshop seminars. Because tenants of properties are often unaware of the potential for foreclosure, many are left in vulnerable situations. The county's effort to keep its residents informed and offer them financial counseling is a helpful tool that can reduce the amount of foreclosures and help to stabilize its communities.

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✓ Court Administration and Management

Suffolk County, NY
Population: 1,419,369

Small Claims Assessment Review Petition e-Filing Program

Due to the downturn of the housing market, the Suffolk County Clerk's Office was faced with the challenge of processing an unprecedented number of Small Claims Assessment Review Petitions from residents who wanted their property assessments reviewed. Because New York State law allows property owners to petition the court for review of their property appraisal before a specially trained state hearing officer, the county was being challenged to sort through the burdensome amounts of paperwork in order to meet these residents' demands.

In order to cope with this dramatic increase in petitions, the county created an e-Filing program in which all residents could complete the petition in a write-able online format and simply serve it upon the Suffolk County Clerk's Office electronically. Not only did this system decrease the hassle that the county's previous system placed on the petitioner, but it also enabled the County Clerk's Office to meet the increased demand of petitioning without

the need for the escalation of overtime, saving the county significant personnel.

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✓ Court Administration and Management

Maricopa County, AZ
Population: 3,072,149

Accountability Court—A Problem Approach to Support Enforcement

Non-Compliance Court, commonly referred to as "Accountability Court", was created under the authority of the Maricopa County Administration for the purpose of monitoring and enforcing support orders (both child and spousal) resulting from repeated violations or accumulation of debts. A case is eligible if all support arrearage amounts have been reduced to a formal written judgment after review by a judicial officer. Cases can be referred to the Accountability Court in two ways: referral by a judicial officer or an Affidavit of Non-Compliance. Both methods order the obligor to appear in court, and if such a requirement is not met, the filing of contempt, issuance of an arrest warrant, or entry of a judgment can occur.

Obligors in the Accountability Court appear once a month during the first phase of their involvement with the program, and they continue to appear in court until all arrears are paid in full and a consistent pattern of support orders has been established. As the obligors move through the program, exhibiting compliance with the court, they are rewarded with less frequent appearances and preference on the court calendar.

The program begins with the obligors observing court proceedings. They then report to an orientation session that describes the goals, objectives, incentives, and expectations of the Accountability Court program. Most importantly, the obligors are given charts illustrating the length of time it would take them to pay off their arrears and what their payments must amount to in order to rid themselves of their debt. This is a powerful motivator for obligors

to find ways to increase their support payments.

Because of the economic downturn, many people (especially single parents) are struggling to meet necessary financial demands. The Accountability Court provides parents and ex-spouses with a means to keep their financial obligors accountable for both past and future support payments.

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✓ Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Miami-Dade County, FL
Population: 2,376,014

Mayor Carlos Alvarez Mortgage Fraud Task Force

Because of the economic crisis and the overwhelming amount of foreclosures in Florida's Miami-Dade County, many desperate homeowners sought refuge in the assistance of mortgage lenders who turned out to be frauds. The FBI reported that mortgage fraud is one of the fastest growing white-collar crimes in the US, and this suspicious financial activity has reportedly tripled in the past four years. To exacerbate the situation, Florida was ranked first in the United States for mortgage loans that contained alleged fraud against the lenders, and Miami-Dade County leads the state in these incidents. While the FBI typically handled mortgage fraud investigations, its office only had a one million dollar threshold and, consequently, 98% of incidents were not processed.

To address this issue, the Miami-Dade Police Department implemented the Mayor Carlos Alvarez Mortgage Fraud Task Force, a public/private partnership created to reduce mortgage fraud and prevent victimization of individuals and businesses through effective education, legislation, regulation, law enforcement, and prosecution. The Task Force has five separate committees: law enforcement, legislative, regulatory, business partnership, and education. Each division has their own responsibilities to facilitate investigations of mortgage fraud and prevent future schemes.

To date, there are 575 active investigations, and the law enforcement division has made over 100 felony arrests. Additionally, the legislative committee has altered Florida State Statutes in order to assist the county in the prevention of mortgage fraud behavior.

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✓ Employment and Training

San Bernardino County, CA
Population: 1,709,434

BNSF Dispatcher Training

In an effort to meet employer needs and respond to an industry shortage, the San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board's policy has been to provide assistance to businesses with employment and training needs. So far, the Workforce Investment Board has provided training dollars for programs such as Vocational English as a Second Language, Diesel Mechanic Training, and for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe project, their highlighted training program.

The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad Company experienced a problematic shortage of dispatchers in its San Bernardino command center. In order to both employ local residents instead of non-county residents and sustain its partnership with BNSF, the Workforce Investment Board contributed \$93,000 to prepare 20 individuals for careers as dispatchers. The 15-week training program included training at San Bernardino College and Tarrant County Community College in Texas and concluded with four weeks of work experience at BNSF San Bernardino dispatch facility. Fourteen trainees were hired as dispatchers with a starting pay of \$50,000 a year. Those individuals who stay on the job for a year will receive a pay boost to \$70,000 a year.

By meeting the needs of the business community, the county's Worker's Investment Board helped ensure the county's economic strength as well as being dutiful to job seekers and workers desiring to

advance their careers in their own community.

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✓ Environmental Protection and Energy

Pike County, KY
Population: 68,736

Pike County Energy Strategy

Pike County, Kentucky has been appropriately named “America’s Energy Capital” for its vast reserves of minable coal and recoverable natural gas as well as its surplus of timber and biomass resource. However, despite these extensive natural resources, the county found itself identified as an “at risk county” by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Thus, the county recognized that the outflow of present, available labor and the loss of the next generation workforce due to non-existent professional opportunities required immediate action.

The county’s energy plan, therefore, sought to utilize its vast resources to develop its economy through sustainable, high-wage jobs, while also contributing concrete solutions to the energy crisis facing the country. The energy plan has called for feasibility studies to demonstrate its capability to construct and house energy plants and research centers.

Working jointly with private industries, the county planned for the development of the American Energy Research Center as well as the construction of a coal-to-liquid plant, a biomass ethanol facility, and the regional headquarters for a natural gas company. The county’s energy strategy has identified specific initiatives that will create jobs, lead the region to energy-efficiency and independence, and ensure long-term economic stability for the county.

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✓ Fiscal Management

San Diego County, CA
Population: 2,813,833

HHS Contractor Financial Reviews

With growing pressure on the county’s budget and financing due to the tough economic times, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency established its Contract Support Financial Reviews Unit to provide the monitoring of all county contracts. Because the HHS holds over 900 contracts with 500 different organizations accounting for over \$400 million per year in essential services for residents, many financial and auditory risks exist. The county wanted to ensure that thorough management controls were in place in order to reduce the potential for negative audit findings.

The Contract Support Financial Reviews Unit is responsible for conducting audits of all HHS contractors. These audits include a review of the organization’s internal controls, accounting system, fiscal stability, expenditure allowance, and compliance with specific funding regulations. The purpose of the audits is to identify and correct financial issues in a timely manner and conduct on-going monitoring for serious fiscal weaknesses.

This practice provides large counties with an effective way to efficiently manage funding regulations. It can be rather easily replicated by other county governments (especially in large counties) to maximize their resources in adhering to funding regulations. Because of the new audit controls, the county ensures funding levels and makes certain to the public that their taxpayers’ dollars are being put to appropriate use.

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✓ Human Services

Boulder County, CO
Population: 291,288

Housing Crisis Prevention Program

Boulder County's Housing Crisis Prevention Program addresses a pressing community issue in a way that both meets residents' immediate needs and prepares them for continued stability. The program targets low-income families in crisis and provides up to four months of financial assistance, while requiring the families to attend training and education in financial self-sufficiency.

Applicants apply for an initial two months of financial aid, after which they must attend financial management/life skills classes before becoming eligible for the final two months of funding. Thus far, a total of \$329,474 of financial assistance was awarded to 185 families. Of those families, 74% were able to avoid foreclosure or eviction due to non-payments of mortgages or rent and another 69% were able to avoid eviction due to non-payments of utility bills.

This program recognizes that there are many factors affecting a family's stability. Financial education and counseling help clients learn to manage their money and avoid pitfalls that can lead to or exacerbate financial crises.

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✓ Libraries

Clackamas County, OR
Population: 367,000

Creation of a Library District

Because of the elimination of \$12 million in federal funding, the Clackamas County General Fund, which had been the primary source of library support, did not have the necessary financing to continue to sustain its libraries. Therefore, many of the county's libraries were under threat of closure. In order to gain the necessary funds to save its libraries, the Board of County Commissioners authorized a

ballot measure that would allow voters the opportunity to establish a stable and permanent tax base to support libraries throughout the county. Each of the 13 cities inside the county had to agree by resolution to be a part of the proposed library district, and once that happened, the county got the message out to its citizens. The proposal went to a vote of the people and was met with a resounding 'yes.'

This newly established district's goal is set aside a long-term dedicated revenue stream for library operations. The tax rate for the library district is about 39 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. With the average assessed value of the home being \$205,800, the average county homeowner would pay an additional \$81.78 each year to fund the district. Following the passage of the ballot measure, libraries throughout the county would be required to meet the Oregon Library Association threshold standards for hours, staffing, and library materials, in comparison to the varying standards and operating procedures from one library to another that formerly existed.

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✓ Personnel Management

Camden County, GA
Population: 43,664

Institute of Organizational Excellence

In a time when everyone is being asked to tighten their budgets and counties are facing revenue shortfalls while attempting to maintain the same levels of service expected by the community, oftentimes the budget cuts come first from areas directed toward employee education, training, salary increases, and programs. Because Camden County's budget constraints were forcing the county to make difficult decisions regarding its employees, morale amongst the staff was low, and many believed they were not valued members of the county.

The Institute of Organizational Excellence was established to identify and implement programs to

boost employee morale and education, demonstrating to them that they truly are invaluable assets to the government. This program was also established to incorporate new and innovative resources to provide the employees with the tools necessary to supply the community with the most efficient and effective services.

The Institute of Organizational Excellence provides in-house computer training to county employees, offering courses in Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, and Access. Additionally, the program mandates in-house employee training in customer service. The program also partnered with National Seminars Training to provide audio and webinar conference workshops for employees to attend. Lastly, in recognizing the importance of higher education, the county has taken steps to assist its employees' academic development through a Tuition Reimbursement Program. The county provides a certain percentage of reimbursement to an employee's tuition at an accredited college or university based upon the grade they receive in the class (50% for a C, 80% for a B, 100% for an A).

In total, these programs have been a successful way for the county to educate and train its employees while keeping within the rigid constraints of the county's budget. Camden County estimated that they saved upwards of \$500 per person for training their employees in their Institute of Organizational Excellence programs rather than outsourcing the training to offsite computer schools. The program has estimated its annual savings at over \$10,000,

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✓ Personnel Management

Oakland County, MI
Population: 1,194,156

Voluntary Separation Incentive Program

Oakland County realized that a significant reduction in revenue was going to be needed in its upcoming year. The Human Resource Department staff, in

conjunction with the Fiscal Services Department, developed a "Voluntary Incentive Program" to give elected officials and department heads an opportunity to prioritize, restructure, and reorganize their operations.

The goal of this program was twofold: to provide opportunities for department heads to reduce their department expenditures by reorganizing and restructuring their operations, and to reduce the overall number of county positions without laying off any employees—the latter of which being the difficult part. Therefore, the county developed a separation incentive that could be offered to employees who were already eligible to retire but still remained in the workforce.

The program offered eligible, non-represented employees the opportunity to retire with an incentive of a one-time lump sum payment equal to one week of pay for each year of county service. Of the 3,500 full-time employees in the county, 341 were offered the incentive and 152 accepted it. The cost of the incentive was a one-time payout of \$5.6 million dollars. However, the county is estimated to save \$10.5 million every year going forward. This program, therefore, allowed the county to reduce expenditures instead of raising revenues by increasing property taxes, creating a "win-win" scenario for all parties involved.

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✓ Personnel Management

Collin County, TX
Population: 491,675

Sheriff's Office Temporary Pool

Collin County, one of the fastest growing counties in Texas, was struggling to meet the demands of a fast growing population without increasing staff or overtime. One such area was the Sheriff's Office Detention Facility. The facility had recently implemented a Video Visitation Program designed to provide a method whereby family and friends can visit

inmates by using video cameras and a telephone. However, the number of visitors tended to fluctuate significantly, and, due to the program's small civilian staff, employee absences placed an undue burden on the department resulting in overtime compensation. Because of security requirements and skillful knowledge, outside agencies were not an effective means of relief.

To meet the needs of the Sheriff's Office in a cost effective manner, Collin County developed its own pool of screened and trained temporary employees. The Human Resources Department, working in collaboration with the Sheriff's Department, ran the application and hiring process. Using primarily former law enforcement workers and past volunteers, the group of temporary employees was hired to meet the needs of the program.

The county has already saved \$7,200 and is anticipated to save between \$20,000 and \$30,000 annually using this pool of temporary employees. Overall, this group of internal temporaries met the Department's fluctuating need while reducing expensive overtime costs.

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✓ Personnel Management

San Diego County, CA
Population: 2,813,833

Finance Academy

To meet the needs of succession planning efforts and to improve the consistency in financial management skills across the organization, the County of San Diego created the Finance Academy, a 10-week training program for County financial professionals. The program was designed to strengthen the financial management skills of the staff, skills that are becoming more valuable in today's economic climate.

Forty individuals were selected from throughout the organization for each session of the Finance Academy, ensuring that the students would have a broad range of experience. Finance Academy classes cover a variety of financial and performance topics designed to build context and provide tools for appropriate financial decision-making. Classes are taught by County Finance Directors and staff with expertise in various areas including revenue, budgeting, debt management, purchasing, audits, and financial systems. The Finance Academy gives employees who are in a financial role the opportunity to learn the concepts and management strategies unique to County finance, while also building the skills and understanding of more seasoned employees.

Created jointly by the Chief Financial Office and the Department of Human Resources, the Finance Academy has proven to be a cost-efficient and effective means of ensuring strong financial management for the county.

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