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February 2011

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Project Case Studies

Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Series



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Rollin' on the River



Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Series



Land Use & Economic Development

Mahoning River Corridor
Mahoning County, Ohio

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Tom Pascarella
Matthew Flemming
John Hoornbeek

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Rollin' on the River

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2009, the Fund for Our Economic Future (FFEF) and citizens in northeast Ohio awarded a grant to support a project by the Mahoning River Corridor Initiative (MRCI). The MRCI is a consortium of communities situated along the Mahoning River in northeast Ohio that seek to coordinate their efforts to developing economically. The grant provided supports the MRCI's "Rollin' on the River" project, which seeks to implement an interactive website featuring in-depth information about sites – particularly former industrial locations – available for economic development in the Mahoning River Corridor. By working together, members of the "Rollin' on the River" collaboration hope to pool marketing efforts to promote economic development in nine communities along the Mahoning River corridor, as well as the Youngstown, Ohio region as a whole. The region has been hard hit economically over the past few decades by the loss of steel mills and other heavy industry, and community leaders saw the need to promote economic development as cost effectively as possible.

Organizers recognized that innovation requires a new mindset about working together instead of continuing to rely on piecemeal individual efforts. This project demonstrates a collaboration involving numerous communities and local agencies, and it draws on the expertise and resources of a local university. Participating communities share in providing the matching funds for the project. After completion of the project, they will also share the cost of managing the website, which is intended to provide enhanced economic development services throughout the region as a whole while reducing costs to individual communities.

During months between the summer of 2009 and the summer of 2010, the "Rollin on the River" project moved forward expeditiously. As of summer 2010, most of the data for inclusion on the website had been gathered and the website design had been completed. In the fall of 2010, the website became operational. What is more, the collaboration among communities has yielded ancillary benefits, as two of the participants in this collaboration (the Cities of Youngstown and Girard) have forged a joint economic development agreement that has resulted in an expansion of V & M Star, a company that is building a new pipe mill on an old industrial site near its existing Youngstown plant. Yet another JEDD is being developed by the City of Niles and Weathersfield Township.

The greatest lesson shared by "Rollin' on the River" partners is a rather simple one. Collaboration can result in substantial cost savings and efficiencies, and it can build trust among participants. As communities work together and learn that they share many obstacles with their partners, they get to know one another, laying the groundwork for trust and payoffs from potential future collaborations. In fact, this collaboration also demonstrates that these payoffs actually occur. Also, through the work of project leader Dan Mamula, the project highlights the importance of individuals who commit themselves to progress through hard work and relentless effort.

When forming a collaboration of this kind, the following questions should be asked:

- 1) Are there potential partner organizations which already have a good trust relationship with your community?
- 2) Are there institutions which already exist which could lend credibility and support to your project?
- 3) Does your community have committed leadership to grow and sustain the collaboration?



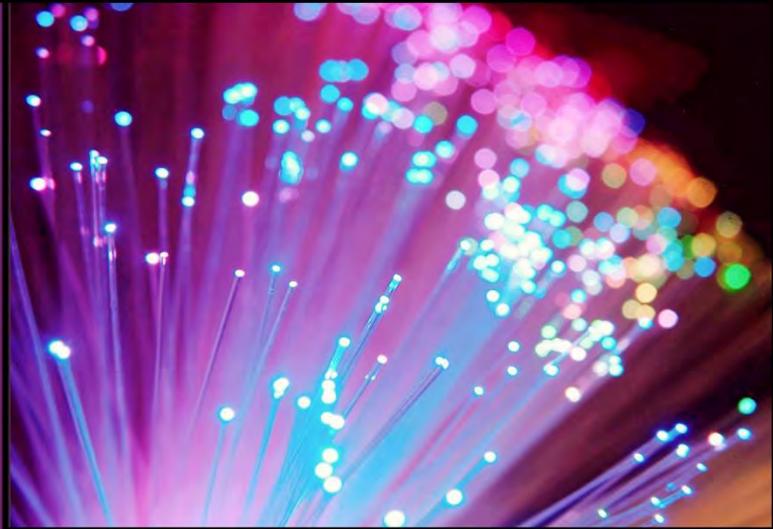
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Mahoning Youngstown Regional Information System



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Improving Effectiveness in Information Technology

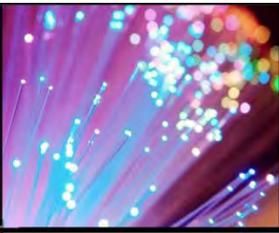
Mahoning County and Communities
Mahoning County, Ohio

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Mahoning Youngstown Regional Information System

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A group of six local and regional governments in Northeast Ohio, burdened with outdated computer systems and limited budgets, decided to work together to update their IT systems and establish interconnectivity among themselves to improve services and save money. The project partners are seeking to create the Mahoning Youngstown Regional Information System (MYRIS) to establish interconnection of the government units with high-speed broadband networks for the purpose of services in three areas: access to critical law enforcement information, disaster recovery services and general IT services.

This collaborative approach to the purchase and operation of technological advances holds the potential for these communities to maintain services at lower costs than would be possible if each community tried to upgrade their capabilities on their own. MYRIS will also improve services to the communities by enabling them to more readily update and share information relevant to law enforcement, emergency services, and other areas.

While the project has moved forward, unexpected obstacles have slowed the progress. Some of the problems are traceable to insufficient foresight and planning. For instance, early plans did not account for recurrent annual costs to operate the new system, and the lack of an early needs assessment has hindered communities' ability to easily identify specific benefits of collaboration that enable them to garner financial support for the project. Finally, funding concerns have slowed the effort at times, although it does appear that they are likely to be addressed in ways that enable the project to move forward.

There has, however, been progress. Recently, the township of Boardman estimated an anticipated cost savings of approximately \$50,000 per year as a result of its impending agreement to bring broadband capability to the township through MYRIS. The group has purchased needed equipment and they have also established a web portal that allows additional flows of information relevant to law enforcement and court bookings of prisoners. In addition, the project team has recently built support among key emergency management leaders, and their support is likely to strengthen the collaboration's case for additional community investments that are necessary to address the need for ongoing financial support.

While it is probably too early in the evolution of this project to draw final conclusions regarding what is to be learned from it, some lessons are emerging. The current project leader emphasized the value of early assessments of participant needs to bring appropriate focus on the specific benefits of the collaboration. In addition, this case study also suggests a need to recognize that recurring operational costs are often required to implement collaborative efforts. The case also points to the need to develop back up funding sources and personnel to move the effort forward if planned funding sources do not materialize, or if the persons involved in the project need to change.

When forming a collaboration of this kind, the following questions should be asked:

- 1) Do the Communities involved have a written plan which supports the collaborative process?
- 2) Have the long-term costs of maintaining your collaboration been considered fully?
- 3) Are there alternative sources of funding under consideration should your primary source fall through?



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Efficiencies and Cost Savings for **Public Health**

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Improving Efficiency in Public Health

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Summit County, Ohio

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Efficiencies and Cost Savings for Public Health

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Accurate disease tracking is vital to local health districts' emergency response, public health education, and preventive public health services. Without key data on demographics, disease trends, and rates of transmission, it is difficult to effectively direct funding and resources to these critical programs. This can create program redundancy, increased costs, and increases in mortality and morbidity. Unfortunately, even in neighboring public health districts, data is not always shared. This lack of communication between districts with adjacent and overlapping jurisdictions proves particularly problematic in urban areas because disease transmission rates increase when interactions among individuals in the population increase. These problems associated with a lack of data sharing have affected many public health organizations, including the three health departments of Summit County, Ohio: Summit County Health District (SCHD), Barberton Health District (BHD), and the City of Akron Health Department (AHD).

In the Spring of 2009, Summit County Health District and the City of Akron Health Department chose to apply for funding through the Efficient Government Now grant program. Their proposal, "Efficiencies and Cost Savings for Public Health," was developed as a joint response to limited data sharing and the related issues discussed above. There were several factors which influenced the initial decision to collaborate, including a highly mobile population which increased the likelihood of disease transmission, incompatible hardware and software between the two health departments, and the need for technological changes in information management systems which would be cost-prohibitive if taken on individually. Cooperation was made easier as partners had successfully collaborated in the past, while advances in technology simplified the options available for improved data sharing.

"Efficiencies and Cost Savings for Public Health" did not receive EGN grant funding, and plans to improve data sharing between the two entities halted. The participants believed, however, that the cost-saving issues which partially drove the original EGN application might be addressed instead by merging health departments. The partner agencies hired an area nonprofit agency to assess the feasibility of a merger between the two departments. Their study found that consolidation between SCHD, AHD and additionally, BHD, would indeed result in significant cost savings. After considerable discussion, all three health departments chose to merge, creating the Summit County Combined Health District. Although consolidation has only begun, cost savings have already emerged as a direct result of sharing of facilities and maintenance expenses.

One of the most important lessons from this merger process cited by Donna Skoda of SCHD, was the need to start planning collaborative projects early. This proved critical to dealing with the political obstacles mentioned above. Flexibility, as illustrated by actions of all three partner organizations, can generate new opportunities when old ones fail.

When forming a collaboration of this kind, the following questions should be asked:

- 1) Are there alternative sources of funding under consideration should your primary source fall through?
- 2) Are the leaders in the collaboration flexible and visionary?
- 3) Can alternative ways to achieve the goals of the collaboration be found?



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Sustain a Greener Ohio



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Cost savings in GIS mapping

Stark County, Ohio

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Sustain a Greener Ohio

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, communities throughout the United States (U.S.) have become subject to federal storm-water control regulations that require mapping of local storm-water systems. Local jurisdictions in Ohio and elsewhere struggle with how to pay for and meet the requirements of these unfunded federal mandates. This case study demonstrates how nearly a dozen entities in Stark County, Ohio chose to work together to save money, completing the required mapping more effectively and efficiently than if each community were to “go it alone.” Their collaboration, entitled “Sustain a Greener Ohio,” is allowing participating jurisdictions to share costs of hardware, software, training, and personnel, and to take advantage of existing technology and expertise. One such shared resource is the Geographic Information System (GIS) managed by the county’s Regional Planning Commission (RPC). By tapping into the RPC’s GIS and administrative capabilities, the participating communities are developing a unified and comprehensive map of their storm-water systems. Project leaders estimated that attempting this project separately would have cost the participating storm-water districts a total of more than \$1.4 million over a five-year period. However, by collaborating on this project under the leadership of the Stark County RPC, the communities expect a savings of more than half a million dollars. Over the long run, this approach to compliance with federal storm-water mandates will not only save money, it will also enable better service, problem identification, and emergency response for the region.

The project is off to a rapid start, in spite of the fact that it did not receive an EGN grant. Participants committed financially and contractually to the project in 2009. By fall of that year, necessary personnel were being hired, and the mapping began in earnest by November 2009. A grid map of all storm water sewer districts determined that the project would require the completion of 417 grids. By early 2010, 45 grids had various levels of inventory finished and the project is on schedule to be done prior to the February 2014 compliance deadline.

The project offers lessons for other communities dealing with unfunded mandates. First and foremost, it suggests that communities faced with mandates from external sources should take time to communicate with others who are similarly affected. By combining forces, communities may find that they can comply with requirements more cost effectively if they work together. They may also find that the end product can be better as well. Second, the case study suggests that stable institutions with existing ties to the collaborating entities can become great assets in support of collaborative progress. In this case, the Stark County Planning Commission appears to be serving this purpose. Other lessons offered by project collaborators include: stay focused, as it is a long road from inception to implementation, and make sure collaborators understand how the project will benefit their entity. Also, promote proactive, rather than reactive, decision making. At a forum held at Kent State University (KSU) in February of 2010, another county in Northeast Ohio showed interest in this collaborative approach, and it is now attempting to implement a similar project using lessons learned through this project.

When forming a collaboration of this kind, the following questions should be asked:

- 1) Do the partners involved share a clear understanding of, and focus on, the goals of the collaboration?
- 2) Do the collaborating partners have a realistic understanding of how the finished product will benefit their community?
- 3) Are collaborating partner’s leadership styles proactive rather than reactive?



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Westshore Regional **Fire** District



Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Series



Efficiency in Emergency Response

Westshore Communities
Cuyahoga County, Ohio

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Westshore Regional Fire District

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A group of seven municipalities in Cleveland's western suburbs are exploring ways to merge their separate fire and EMS operations to form a single fire district that could cover more than 75 square miles and serve more than 250,000 constituents. The intent of this Westshore Regional Fire District project is to use economies of scale to provide the most cost effective solution to the citizens' fire and emergency needs. This collaboration builds on relationships that originally developed when most of these communities together formed the Westshore Council of Governments (COG) in the 1970s. This organization has an established history of successful partnerships -ranging from sewer and SWAT team projects to a regional dispatch center, WestCom- which has served as a model for other regions and communities since its creation in 2006.

In many ways, this project is a logical next step in the ongoing collaborations within the COG, which already include a regional fire investigation unit and a regional approach for fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) training. The participating communities each have their own small fire departments, which increasingly cross jurisdictional boundaries to help meet rising demand for emergency services throughout the region. By combining into one regional fire district, organizers hope to formalize and standardize collaboration that is already happening in an ad-hoc fashion, thereby improving efficiency, effectiveness, and overall service to the citizens.

This is a complex and involved collaborative effort, so organizers are proceeding stepwise, using an experienced consulting firm to guide the process. Initial plans call for a study to evaluate current conditions, followed by formulation of a strategic plan, and then implementation of the plan that is formulated. The COG hired a firm experienced in regional consolidation projects to lead the study, develop recommendations, and possibly assist with implementation. Thus far, the consulting firm has completed the study and offered recommendations on possible courses of action. The COG and participants in the collaboration are now reviewing these recommendations as they move forward in the formulation of their Strategic Plan. After devising its plan, the next stage will be its implementation.

While it is perhaps too early to draw final lessons from this collaboration, the project's leader, Mayor Deborah Sutherland of Bay Village, offers observations regarding lessons to date. She suggests that extensive and open communications are important, as is a group focus on the end results. And, she suggests, for a project as complex as a full integration of a half dozen or more fire and EMS districts, the assistance of seasoned professionals also appears to be needed. And finally, she points to the need for leaders to maintain their professionalism by "leaving egos at the door" while consulting fully with affected parties at all levels across all entities involved. A final point is worth mentioning regarding lessons, and that is that a project of this size and magnitude is probably best addressed by an organized group with much experience in working successfully together. In this case, the Westshore COG appears to be fulfilling this role.

When forming a collaboration of this kind, the following questions should be asked:

- 1) Has there been consistent openness and communication between collaborative partners from the beginning of the project?
- 2) Do the partners involved share a clear understanding of and focus on the goals and benefits of the collaboration?
- 3) Do partners have positive relationships based on a history of successfully working together?



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Countywide 911 Dispatch



Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Series



Efficiency in Emergency Response

Ashland County Communities
Ashland County, Ohio

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Countywide 911 Dispatch

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, advances in communication technology have led to the creation of new and innovative means of transmitting information, and these changes are affecting emerging services. For many years, requests for emergency services came almost exclusively in the form of phone calls. Now, there are many requests for help that come via text message, email, and other forms of new technology. Emergency response systems categorized as 911 centers are governed by the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), and must comply with standards and systems put forward by NENA. In recent years, NENA has come to recognize the need for emergency response systems that are compatible with emerging communication technology, resulting in the development of Next-Generation 911 (NG911) standards.

These standards -which include text message logging, advanced call logging, Voice over IP (VoIP), and security for these communications- promise a new wave of emergency response in America . The new standards will be required for all 911 response centers in 2014. The Ashland Countywide Regional Dispatch submitted an EGN application to expand their current dispatch collaboration to comply with the new NG911 standard. Their application requested funds to purchase Next-Generation 911 compliant dispatch servers, call logging equipment and workstations for the Countywide Communications Center. The project was not funded, but the applicants are continuing their collaborative efforts to comply with the new standards by purchasing individual elements of NG911 technology in a piecemeal fashion. As a result of limited resources, some of the changes which the original application proposed have been reserved for completion at a later date.

Although this project has not gone as originally planned, project supervisor William Bragg was quick to highlight the lessons that this collaboration illustrates. First, this project is evidence that collaboration can produce cost savings, even if these savings only represent a reduction in otherwise mandatory expenditures. While the project requires additional expenditures to comply with the new NG911 standards, joint purchasing of the needed equipment for one collaborative dispatch center still represents a significant reduction in the cost relative to the funding that would be required if the parties to the collaboration chose to provide dispatch services as individual jurisdictions. Second, this project illustrates that collaboration is not a simple process. It involves negotiation of the wants and needs of multiple entities. Third, the project highlights the conflicting responses of the public to collaborative projects. Citizens demand improved services, but they are often hesitant to endorse implementation of expensive public sector projects. Thus, in spite of setbacks, the City and County of Ashland continue to work towards NG911 compliance, with the goal of completing necessary technological updates by 2014. While individual elements of the NG911 requirements are quite expensive, the joint purchasing of these elements helps to reduce these costs.

When forming a collaboration of this kind, the following questions should be asked:

- 1) Is there coordination and cooperation among collaborating parties?
- 2) Is the public aware of your project? Do they support it?
- 3) Are there alternative sources of funding under consideration should your primary source fall through?



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Western Reserve Joint **Economic Development** Zone



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Land Use & Economic Development

Western Reserve Communities
Summit County, Ohio

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Western Reserve Joint Economic Development Zone

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Summit County, Ohio, three communities are seeking to create a 250-acre shared economic development zone around a new highway interchange. This collaboration is attempting to replace competition between neighboring communities with cooperation. The cities of Cuyahoga Falls, Stow, and Hudson proposed to develop the Western Reserve Joint Economic Development Zone (JEDZ), in which the political subdivisions would share in both the costs and the revenues generated by business development around the new intersection.

The JEDZ is expected to facilitate development of a medical corridor, whereby the three cities would invest equally and reap the benefits equally. A unique aspect of the Efficient Government Now (EGN) proposal submitted by this group of communities is their desire to develop a common development plan that would guide future land use, zoning, and site plan standards within this economic zone. This project, if successful, could serve as a model for other joint economic development zones.

The project was set back when EGN funding it sought did not materialize during the summer of 2009. While Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) have been signed, the development of a master land use plan has not proceeded with funding not yet allocated. And, while the final JEDZ agreement is not fully completed, it has been drafted and is receiving generally positive consideration in the councils of each of the communities involved. Project leaders thus anticipate continuation of the JEDZ portion of the project in the coming months. Funding is still needed, however, for the regional planning portion of the project.

This case study yields at least two lessons. First, external funding for collaborations with up front costs may be important to leverage community funds by counteracting financial reasons for delay. Second, strong teamwork and the development of trust among public officials across jurisdictions can enable progress, even when other forces are not favorable to the success of the collaboration.

When forming a collaboration of this kind, the following questions should be asked:

- 1) Are there alternative sources of funding under consideration should your primary source fall through?
- 2) Are the leaders in place working together to develop positive relationships across jurisdictions?



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Oberlin District Fleet Management



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Cost Savings in Fleet Maintenance

Oberlin, New Russia, and
Oberlin School District
Lorain County, Ohio

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Oberlin District Fleet Management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three entities in northeast Ohio – the City of Oberlin, New Russia Township, and the Oberlin City School District, all in Lorain County – proposed to collaborate on fleet management services. The project was expected “to include equipment maintenance for light duty vehicles, heavy equipment, and school buses; joint fueling; and construction of a storage facility to extend the life of school buses” [language from Efficient Government Now (EGN) grant application].

At the time of the proposal, all three entities separately managed their own fleet operations at diverse locations within a few miles of each other, and the school district's buses were stored outside in a residential neighborhood. However, after the City of Oberlin built a modern vehicle maintenance facility in 2007, talks began about expanding the facility's capabilities to provide maintenance services for all three entities. The collaborative partners believed that additional up-front investment in training, tools, equipment, and an additional mechanic at the facility could provide all three organizations with more comprehensive service than any of them could support on their own, thus saving money and improving service over time. The proposed project also included plans to build a storage facility for the school buses to provide shelter and thus extend the life of the buses for more long-term cost savings.

The project was budgeted to cost approximately \$550,000, the bulk of which was targeted for construction of the bus storage facility. Organizers applied for a \$150,000 EGN grant to help cover the costs, but did not receive the grant. In the end, the proposed project was shelved, due in part to failure to obtain an EGN grant or other external funding, and the national economic crisis that led to declining revenues for the school district leaving no discretionary funds for construction of the storage facility. This failure to move forward reveals one of the major lessons learned from this case, namely that collaborative projects requiring capital investments (i.e., buildings, major equipment) still need substantial up-front investment. They therefore require a recognition that savings (payback) will occur over the long term rather than immediately.

Another lesson derived from this case deals with scope of the project to be undertaken. In hindsight, organizers recognize that this project was probably too ambitious, and perhaps should have focused more modestly on the maintenance aspect as a starting point and consider a bus storage facility at a separate time. However, the idea of developing shared vehicle maintenance and fueling services appears to have merit, and may still be a viable alternative for regions with multiple fleet services that could look at ways to combine services and reduce redundant expenditures. The supplementary lesson in this regard is that it is important for participants in this kind of collaboration to see real benefits to participating in this kind of joint vehicle fleet maintenance type of arrangement.

When forming a collaboration of this kind, the following questions should be asked:

- 1) Is the goal of the project obtainable? If not, are there more realistic alternatives?
- 2) Are there alternative sources of funding under consideration should your primary source fall through?
- 3) Do the collaborating partners have a realistic understanding of how the finished product will benefit their community?