

Mecklenburg County's Customer Focus Positions it for a Tough Economy

In 2001, Mecklenburg County, the largest county in North Carolina, faced numerous challenges. Rapid population growth meant a continuously growing demand for new infrastructure which made debt service one of the county's fastest growing expenses. At the same time, there were debilitating reductions in state funding which resulted in radical across-the-board cuts in county spending and programs. Complicating matters, the county's strategy and funding decisions swung back and forth between widely divergent ends of the political spectrum every two years. The county was struggling with two diametrically opposed ideologies: that the county should be all things to all people and, yet, should not raise taxes.

It was within this climate that Mecklenburg County Manager, Harry Jones, sought a way to make planning, budgeting, and performance affordable for county residents. As part of this process, the Board of County Commissioners set a bold and unifying vision for the County, "By 2015, we will be a community of pride and choice for people to live, work, and recreate."

To date, the County has achieved over 50 percent of its goals for 2015 and has improved performance in nearly 20 percent of remaining goals, thanks to a customer- focused management approach driven by results and implementation of a balanced scorecard to measure those results.

"The balanced scorecard and our Managing for Results approach have transformed the way Mecklenburg County operates," said County Manager Harry Jones. "They have helped us be more transparent in how public funds are used,



County Government Earns the Award for Excellence

Mecklenburg County's focus on citizens transforms government performance, and helps it position itself for tough economic times – and earn itself the Balanced Scorecard Institute's highest honor along the way.



and more accountable for the results we achieve with those funds."

"Our goal is to achieve real results that improve the lives of all of the residents of Mecklenburg County," said Jones. "Our balanced scorecard keeps us focused on our customers and improving our results."

For example:

- In 2008, the county met its 2015 goal on a mental health index designed to measure increased access to and use of mental health services.
- End of grade math scores for Mecklenburg County students jumped from 66 percent performing at or above grade level in 2007 to 82 percent in 2008.
- Citizens' level of satisfaction with county recreational opportunities improved from 86 percent in 2007 to 92 percent in 2008.
- Public awareness of the county's responsibilities, services and results increased in 2008 and, in fact, exceeded the 2015 goal.

Complete results are outlined in the county's recently released 2008 Performance Report. The county is now a model of transparency, releasing its annual performance results on its Web site, at county offices and libraries, and in local media.

The county's profound transformation and success has earned Mecklenburg County the Award for Excellence from the Balanced Scorecard Institute in Cary, NC. The Balanced Scorecard Institute chose Mecklenburg County as an award recipient because, said CEO Howard Rohm, "in translating plans for the future into actions for today, this organization has done everything right. Using our balanced scorecard Nine Steps to Success Planning and Management System™, Mecklenburg County built an enduring framework for profound transformation, guaranteeing future success."

"Using the balanced scorecard has helped us identify our priorities and any reductions in spending will be made in the context of those priorities."

- County Manager Jones

The balanced scorecard approach has helped the county prepare for tough economic times. In past downturns, the county had implemented cuts across-the-board and eliminated vacant positions, often with unintended consequences. One year, several vacant positions in the county's Tax Collector's Office were eliminated, leaving the county without enough staff to handle an increase in questions from taxpayers or to process tax payments.

"Now, any decisions about budget and funding will be made with a full understanding of the impact that they will have on our service to Mecklenburg County residents and on our long-term goals for the county," said County Manager Jones. "Using the balanced scorecard has helped us identify our priorities and any reductions in spending will be made in the context of those priorities."

Given the current economic climate, Jones was asked if the county will be able to achieve all of its ambitious goals for 2015. "We feel very good about what we've accomplished so far, and we're realistically optimistic," said Jones. "We're optimistic that we'll achieve our goals, but realistic that it's going to be a difficult task."

About the Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Mecklenburg County government serves over 1 million residents throughout Charlotte, Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Matthews, Mint Hill & Pineville, NC. Mecklenburg County was formed in 1762 from the western part of Anson County and the first official governmental action took place in February 1763. Learn more about the history of Mecklenburg County government at www.mecknc.gov.



Other transformation awards received by the County:

- 2003 Achievement Award for Mecklenburg County's Managing for Results Initiative (National Association of Counties)
- 2005 City & County Performance Management Award (The Performance Institute)
- 2004 Achievement Award for Mecklenburg County's Program Review (National Association of Counties)
- 2007 NACIO Awards of Excellence for Mecklenburg County's 2006 Annual Performance Report (National Association of County Information Officers)

About the Balanced Scorecard Institute (BSI)

BSI provides consulting, training, and professional certification services to organizations worldwide related to strategic planning, balanced scorecard, KPI/performance measurement, and strategic project management.

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