



Final Report Meeker County Organizational Study

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Springsted Incorporated

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May 26, 2015

County Board of Commissioners
Meeker County Courthouse
325 Sibley Avenue North
Litchfield, MN 55355

Re: Final Report – Meeker County Organizational Study

Dear County Board of Commissioners:

We are pleased to present the Final Report for the Meeker County Organizational Study. A broad cross section of county officials was actively involved in this initiative and the employee-wide survey enabled county staff an opportunity to participate in a confidential manner.

The process was thorough and comprehensive. The Preliminary Findings were presented on February 12 and we received excellent feedback on the original findings and conclusions. The input received from county officials on the Findings was instructive and helpful in developing the First Draft of the Report. A meeting on the First Draft of the Report was held on May 5, and the discussion was a very important step in supporting our efforts to prepare this Final Report.

We want to thank each of you and your staff for your input and information. The County Administrator's Office and Personnel Committee spent considerable time on this project. We sincerely hope that the process and this Report will provide you with a road map for further discussion and action to address important issues facing Meeker County.

Respectfully submitted,

David Unmacht and James Schug
Springsted Incorporated

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Study Introduction

Meeker County, Minnesota retained Springsted Incorporated to partner in an organizational study of selected departments within county government. The County is seeking an objective evaluation of the Administration, Assessor, Human Resources, Information Technology, Auditor, Treasurer, Recorder, and Planning and Zoning Departments within the Courthouse, and the Social Services and Public Health Departments within the Family Services Center.

The County Board sought an objective assessment for the purposes of identifying organizational strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement. The major objectives of our study are to identify opportunities to improve efficiencies, to enhance coordination of effort, to strengthen communication and customer service, and to deliver high-quality services to the citizens of Meeker County. As we learned during the interview process, county staff and elected officials have strong thoughts, ideas and opinions about their workplace.

County Pressures

County governments across the nation have faced a multitude of complex challenges in recent years, including identifying efficient and effective delivery systems, meeting citizen expectations, and sustaining and maintaining mandated programs and services. These challenges come at a time of uncertain economic fundamentals and unstable financial resources. While these issues may at times seem insurmountable, there is growing optimism as state and national economic indicators improve.

Conventional wisdom, local practice and hard realities reflect that county governments cannot continue to operate by their traditional methods. Meeker County has joined with other counties throughout the state by asking important questions and delving into issues and business practices that were not previously raised or seriously considered. Raising these questions and probing into historical business practices is not easy, nor does it result in quick changes.

Meeker County is experiencing trends that are shaping public policy and service delivery decisions across counties of all stripes. These trends directly impact the policy work of the County Board, the operations of the County and the ability of its staff to perform their important day-to-day functions. We have identified eight common issues seen in a wide variety of public sector organizations:

1. Flat staffing levels
2. Limited budgets and resources
3. Continued increases in demand for services
4. Retirements and workforce changes
5. Need to be effective and efficient
6. Changing employee and community demographics
7. Evolving citizen expectations
8. Technology innovations and system changes

The business of managing county government today is very difficult. County Board members, staff, and stakeholders such as non-profits and contracting agencies, are all under great pressure to deliver value within a constrained financial and economic environment. To be successful in this environment, county

leaders must recognize these variables, manage them accordingly, and introduce change processes and creative ideas to move their organizations forward.

The County faces internal and external pressures to ensure that its programs and services are providing optimal value to citizens and the community. The County feels this is an opportune time to conduct an analysis to determine what actions, may be needed to strengthen the work of the staff and to improve customer service in the Departments.

Study Process

The experience of these two authors suggests that two components are critical to a successful study – *process credibility* and *outcome credibility*. Process credibility comes from the acceptance by all involved – in this case the staff and elected officials – that the methodology used are credible and objective. In addition, the relationship between the study authors and the individuals chosen for interviews needs to be transparent, open, and honest. For example, a pledge of confidentiality was critical to the willingness of individuals to participate, and we take such a commitment very seriously. At the same time, the pursuit of process credibility also requires that the authors be fair in employing criteria to determine which observations, concerns and issues are most relevant and reliable.

Outcome credibility is largely dependent on process credibility; when participants have confidence in the process, they are more likely to accept the study’s findings and recommendations. When both elements are present, the result is a more realistic picture of current operations, resulting in a report with more useful observations and recommendations, leading to more informed and deliberate discussion and action from County officials and staff.

Our foundation for this study was employee engagement. This was accomplished through interviews, focus groups and a confidential online survey. Participation in the survey was significant. We do not have the ability to identify the exact response rate, as the survey was sent to a larger group of staff than originally anticipated. We were diligent in our efforts to include only information pertinent to the areas of our study. County Board members were also interviewed for their insights.

Process Steps

The following steps are included in the study process.

1. Individual interviews with all five County Board members
2. On-site interviews and on-going communication with the County Administrator
3. On-site interview with 17 County officials on December 3, 2014
4. On site focus group interviews with over 45 staff members on January 14, 2015
5. On-site interviews with three County officials on January 14, 2015
6. Telephone interview with the County Attorney on February 6, 2015
7. Ongoing and follow-up telephone interviews
8. A review of County data and information including, but not limited to:
 - a. Personnel policies
 - b. Budget information
 - c. Staffing, salary, and personnel statistics
 - d. Population and levy comparisons
 - f. TANF audit
 - g. MH-TCM (IFCSP) audit
 - h. Human Services Performance Mgmt Report
 - i. Confidential online staff survey

- e. Care plan audit
- 9. Preparation and presentation of Findings on February 12, 2015
- 10. Receipt of County comments and input on the Findings on March 12, 2015
- 11. Preparation of the First Draft of the Report
- 12. Meeting on the First Draft of the Report on May 5
- 13. Preparation of the Final Report
- 14. Presentation of the Final Report on May 26

In the course of our study, we received significant input from the county staff, including elected department heads and County Board members. We believe that the input we collected has allowed us to draw valid and reliable findings and conclusions that should be of significant value to the County.

Executive Summary

Meeker County requested that we perform a review and analysis of several selected departments. As a result, this report is not a comprehensive study of all functions and components of the County. Some large departments were not included in the study, including the Sheriff's Office and the Highway Department. Although the County Attorney and Probation Services were interviewed for their perspective on County operations, this study did not include the functions and services that make up the county court system. Several organizational conversations in advance of the work plan were held between the County Administrator and the Personnel Committee.

Overall we found many positive qualities in Meeker County. Staff members are dedicated and committed to their work, and knowledgeable about what they do. The survey comments reflected a significant level of pride and investment in the present and future of the County; in short, opinions were strong because people care about the work, the organization, and their role in it. In addition, the county staff and Board members were generous in their time and attention to identifying areas of concern and improvement. We found six major themes were drivers of the issues and the work within the County.

The six themes are:

- Change in the County Board members
- Lack of a unified strategic direction
- Insufficient communication and information sharing
- The need to clarify roles and chain of command
- An outdated structure and traditional culture
- Competitive compensation; concern that salaries have not kept pace with the market

A summary outline of the present conditions within the County is best described by these four foundations: *current services*; *present culture*; *county needs and desired outcomes*. The aggregation of information in this manner is meant to inform and succinctly identify the major county characteristics.

- **Current Services:** lean, safe, steady, reliable, and traditional
- **Present Culture:** uncertain, changing, anxious, excited and ready
- **County Needs:** unification, strategy, direction, leadership, and investment
- **Desired Outcomes:** structure, change, efficiency, and improved morale

After considerable reflection and analysis, and with the stated intention that the implementation of some or all of the recommendations is truly the most important component of the study, the authors advocate for a simplified presentation and report. The majority of our recommendations are not unique to Meeker County; rather, they are related to issues common to other organizations, being nearly universal in nature. However, this does not make them any less relevant or important. These are strong organizational development ideas and will, if successfully implemented, change the County, its workforce and customer service. The study includes 20 recommendations for improvement across five areas: County Board, Staffing, Operations and Strategy, Structure, and Customer Service. We recommend the County Board consider all 20 recommendations and then engage in a prioritization process to determine which are the most important.¹

County Board Input

We learned that there are differing opinions and perspectives between the five County Board members that we interviewed. This situation is not unique to Meeker County, and is representative of many elected bodies across the state. However, based on our interviews and survey responses, these differences of opinion have an influence on the current conditions within the County. We share this information for the purposes of reflection and context as the County Board moves forward with discussions on the study. The County Board comments were not unlike the input received from all of our interviewees. Overall, a variety of comments were offered about individual members of the staff. Comments ranged widely; a representative sample of comments includes:

- I am most proud of the work of our employees.
- We have change going on in the staff with a new Social Services Director, new County Attorney and a new County Recorder. These are just three of the areas.
- The Board is sometimes split 2 – 2 – 1 and at times this is difficult.
- We need to look at our space and how we have offices arranged.
- We need to determine if our “lower” compensation is driving turnover.
- We need to establish a consistent employee evaluation process.
- Our County does well; I have not heard complaints about our customer service.
- I am interested in knowing how the County can become more efficient.
- Some of our departments do not cooperate as well as they should.
- We are not spending enough time on continuous improvement, leadership and strategy; we are too focused on daily operations.
- Do we need to focus more on training our staff?
- The relationship between the Auditor and Treasurer needs to be improved.
- Can we reallocate space to improve efficiency? For example, do we really need a room just for the County Board meetings?
- Can we combine offices to improve organizational performance?
- What can we do to address technology needs?
- The timing is right for us to take action to move ahead.

The study authors believe that the County Board is supportive of making changes to improve the work of the county. Based on the varying opinions, the outcomes of the study will require careful consideration and review.

¹ We understand from conversations with County officials that some of the recommendations may already have been implemented or are under way.

Findings

The purpose of a formal listing of findings is to provide an opportunity to identify the overall conditions existing within the County. Findings provide a foundation for further analysis and recommendations. However, to present findings in a fair light, there is a contextual understanding that must be established. The following eight points provide a foundation for understanding the value of our findings.

1. Each individual's opinions are formed through a unique set of experiences and perceptions. No set of findings can accurately describe every individual's perspective.
2. Findings are an aggregation of relevant ideas, thoughts, inputs, etc. Our listing of findings is intended to summarize the most important information in the study.
3. Findings are not ranked in order of importance, but attempts are made to organize them in a logical sequence
4. Findings often come across as obvious or already well known. This is unavoidable, as findings seek to portray facts and conditions through the study authors, who by design bring a perspective from outside the organization. Facts obvious to insiders may be remarkable to outsiders, and as such, the restatement of such facts is beneficial within an objective analysis.
5. Findings present a set of information representing a specific point in time; in reality, changes are constant, and some things may change over the course of a study.
6. Findings bring varying reactions and responses. Some will agree with a particular finding wholeheartedly, while others may find it objectionable. These roles may be reversed for the next finding on the list.
7. There is more to the County, its departments, its history, and the relationships between the various individuals than can be learned over the course of one study. It is common for those involved to know details outside the scope of our work, and for that knowledge to color opinions about both this report and the subjects it covers.
8. Findings are intended to be balanced, including strengths, issues and challenges.

Strengths

The following list of positive findings represents the assets and strengths of the County today.

- Based on the individual and small group interviews with the staff members, the employees voice a strong commitment to the County and to the well-being of the public to whom they provide services.
- County staff takes great pride in the work they do and in the service they provide. They are dedicated to their jobs.
- Both the staff interviews and survey results indicate that a high percentage (83%) of the employees report that they enjoy working for Meeker County and 72% would recommend the County to others as a "good place to work."
- The County has employees with many years of experience and they bring a lot of technical knowledge and professionalism to the delivery of important and mandated services. Every indication is that Departments provide good quality services that attempt to utilize best practices in their fields.

- The County's financial position is strong. The County Administrator has proposed budgets that are fiscally conservative. In fact, some interviewees noted that the County may actually be too conservative to make necessary investments in citizens, staff and infrastructure.
- County staff knows the Meeker County community; many live and work in the area and understand the culture, people and communities they serve.
- *For the most part*, individuals and departments in the County do work well together and get along reasonably well.
- Based on reports compiled by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Meeker County measures up well in comparison with other Minnesota counties in efficiently and effectively delivering the state mandated programs.
- Public Health and Social Services expressed a desire to have more direct contact with county commissioners and would appreciate an opportunity to provide them with a better understanding of the services and programs their Departments provide for the residents of the county along with clarification of the state and federal mandates that govern the types and levels of services the county is required to provide.
- County facilities, even though some areas lack space, are in overall good repair. Departments are currently located within the various county buildings to allow for related services to be delivered in an efficient and effective manner.
- The county's social workers, public health nurses, and health educators appreciate the opportunities they have had for some flexibility in their schedules that allows them to deliver services outside of regular office hours, at times when program recipients are available

Challenges

In public agencies, especially county governments, the delivery of administration, human resources, financial and information technology services are essential functions. The extent to which they are applied, funded, supported and valued is one leading indicator of organizational depth, strength and success. The new Human Resources Director is establishing the role and providing good value. With only one person in that capacity in an organization as large as Meeker County, there are inherent challenges to what can be achieved in the organization. Although not significant enough for a stand-alone Finding, we anticipate providing ideas that may impact and shape the work and role of the Director in the Report.

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- **Information Technology.** A strong information technology foundation is absolutely essential to improve processes and systems. The work of information technology should be leading not reacting. Numerous comments were received on the value and work of the County's information technology services. The County lacks a strategic direction and there is no clear organizational role for the IT staff. Budgetary resources and decisions for IT work are not always centralized or coordinated. Staff members and managers in social services and public health departments report a critical need for more technology resources and IT support to make standard technology tools available for their use in providing services. Intranet, remote access to records, email encryption and updated computers are the four issues most frequently mentioned. There is need for improvements in this area, including better communication.

- **Board Dynamics.** The change in the County Board and how the work of the Board is occurring is confusing and a concern to the staff. Differences between the Commissioners' opinions and positions are not the issue so much as the Board's lack of definition in their role and relationships with staff. The Board-Administrator-staff communication channels and chain of command are not always understood. Staff does not always believe the Board is fully supportive of them. This has created a push to status quo, a lack of creativity and a downward trend in morale. Board opinions can differ; that is healthy. However, the Board must focus on direction, strategy and goals and create a consensus on roles and a common plan for the future.
- **Board Education.** There is a concern among social services staff that the county commissioners don't have a good understanding of the various services and programs that staff provide and that this leads to a lack of support by some commissioners for the work they do on behalf of county residents. These staff express a desire to have more opportunity to provide information to commissioners on the types of services being provided, their importance to the community, and the various state mandates that govern the types and levels of services that must be provided and the results that must be achieved.
- **Role of County Administrator.** There is a strong belief in re-establishing and strengthening the leadership role of the County Administrator position. It is generally agreed that the County Administrator is a strong financial expert and has the day-to-day workings of the County going well. This position is critical to organizational change and supporting a direction as established by the Board. The organization is seeking a more proactive approach to leading the county into the future; this includes a more visible presence, enhanced communication, and stronger leadership from the County Administrator.
- **Outdated Structure.** Meeker County remains in a classical and traditional state with the independence and autonomy of Departments. There is overwhelming testimony that the Departments do not share common goals and are internally focused. This is not helped by the County not having a unified vision or mission. Span of control in areas such as the Auditor, Treasurer, Recorder and Land Use Departments is very small.
- **Internal Differences.** The ongoing differences and lack of cooperation between the Auditor and Treasurer is a problem, creates a negative perception of the elected offices and their staff, and impacts the ability of the two offices to work together to provide optimal efficiency and customer service. The County Board and County Administrator do not have too many options to address this situation, but will continue to explore options to resolve this issue. One of the main questions from this study and the County's decision that will have the most impact on the future of the County is the willingness of the County Board to establish a direction and begin taking action to combine the Auditor-Treasurer and Recorder functions. This action will greatly increase your efficiency and service.
- **Communication.** A common opinion is that there is a lack of information being shared within the County. Staff believes they are not informed about what is happening and hence cannot feel invested or engaged. This lack of shared information creates confusion, the distribution of mis-information and uncertainty. A more effective communication plan can help to educate and inform the staff. There are many ways that this can be done, including scheduling more department head meetings, utilizing intranet, and countywide presentations.
- **Compensation.** Staff members have concerns that the past wage freezes and overall salaries have resulted in increased turnover, created more challenges in recruiting and retaining new staff members, and affected employee morale. Conversations have begun about conducting a

classification and compensation analysis. A study has not been done in many years and the market has truly changed, especially since the end of the recession.

- **Workplace Culture.** Testimony noted that employee engagement is lower than historical trends. Staff noted that they are interested in finding ways to connect with other employees and departments. Workplace culture is an important component of an effective workforce and it is advisable for the County to explore how to strengthen employee engagement.
- **Space.** The spatial relationships within the courthouse support the traditional individualized department structure and are not efficient. Testimony referred to a variety of issues including:
 - The Auditor-Treasurer and Recorder should be located together and on the main floor of the courthouse.
 - Is the mailroom location in a convenient place?
 - The County lacks good internal signage
 - The lobbies on the floors take up too much space.
 - Can the Board use the community room for their meetings and remodel and repurpose the existing Boardroom space?
 - Create workspaces separate from county employees to allow members of the public to have access to county data.
 - Points of entry – are there any safety concerns that need to be considered with the multiple points of entry into the courthouse?
- **Process Improvements.** There are several identifiable process improvements that could increase efficiency and save time. Some suggestions are:
 - Technology improvements: on-line time coding, automated payroll system and payment vouchers.
 - A joint effort between the Auditor and Assessor’s Office to better coordinate the work and timing of tax parcel processes (property transfers and splits).
 - Streamline tax collections between Auditor and Treasurer.
 - Workflow improvements between social workers, financial workers, and accounting staff in the Social Services Department.
 - Utilize the most efficient and effective model for conducting assessments for persons in need of long term services and supports, i.e. single staff model versus the current social worker/public health nurse team.
 - Establish a method for credit card payment for services.
- **Public Perception and Information.** There is a concern by staff that the county commissioners and the administrator could be more supportive of county staff members in face of public criticism and help the county residents gain a better understanding of the nature, complexity and importance of the many services provided by county staff. This public information should also include information on how most of the services delivered by the county are mandated by State and federal laws, rules and regulations.
- **Grant Funding.** Public health staff expressed concerns that there has been some reluctance by the Board to accept grant funding due to the financial match requirements and the likelihood of

future funding obligations to continue programs after the grant funds run out. Since most of their State funding comes in the form of grants, failure to accept this funding could result in an inability to provide essential public health services.

- **Performance Management.** Standardized job descriptions and regular performance reviews would provide an opportunity for constructive communication with employees regarding work rules and performance expectations along with positive feedback on the good work that is being performed. (Note: The human resources director has already begun the development of standardized job descriptions and a performance review process, and is conducting orientation of new employees on the County's work rules and personnel policies.)
- **Single-Case vs Dual-Case Assessments.** Public Health has a strong concern about the direction at the state and county levels to have assessments for long-term services and supports performed only by one person, and not by the two-person social worker/public health nurse team that is currently being used in Meeker County.
- **Regional Business Model.** There is also some concern in the Public Health Department that there may be a move to regionalize their service in order to meet the needs for specialized positions. The possibility of this change creates anxiety with some staff members.

Findings of Employee Survey

The staff survey that was conducted is an excellent tool for the county's use and consideration in this organizational study of Meeker County. The level of participation by staff members and the mostly constructive and consistent comments made by the respondents add to the validity and credibility of the findings, both the strengths and challenges. The survey that was offered to the departments' employees had a very good level of participation indicating that staff is interested in their work in the county. The opportunity the survey provided to respond anonymously added to the participation and served as a way to compare responses to the comments made in the in-person interviews. Most of the survey responses are consistent with the information provided in the face-to-face interviews, both individual and small group. The survey also provided an opportunity for staff to identify issues that are perhaps a concern for only a few and do not represent a significant percentage of the interviewees or survey respondents. The following are the survey highlights major points:

- **Enhance internal communication within the County.** A suggestion was made that the county administrator meets more regularly with department heads to update and share information regarding issues and events occurring throughout the county.
- **Conduct a compensation analysis.** There is a belief that the county's salary ranges and benefit levels have fallen out of line with those of other benchmark counties. Staff members also recommend that the human resources director perform a turnover analysis to determine the causes of recent turnover and assess what, if anything should be done to address it.
- **Positive relationships with community partners.** The community partners include not-for-profit human services and health organizations, schools, law enforcement, and other units of government.
- **Increase technology foundation.** Several references were made to the need for more technological tools to help staff carry out the duties of their job.

Suggestions from Staff Comments

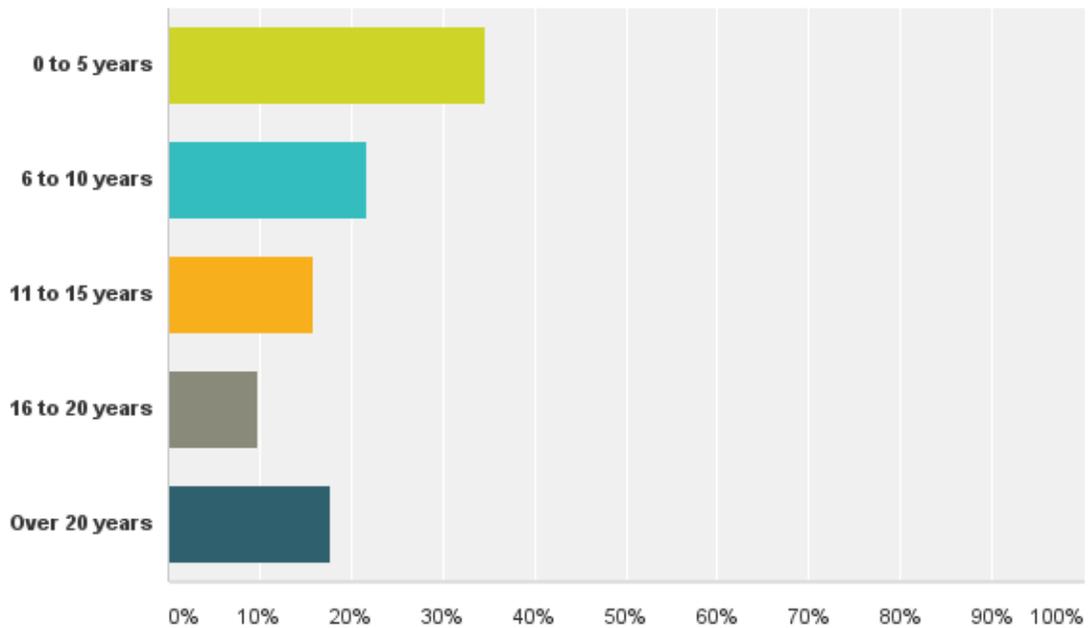
Some additional comments and suggestions made in the survey, but not with any significant frequency were:

- Dress code standards to increase professionalism.
- Build camaraderie by holding regular and organized staff engagement activities, including an annual county social event.
- Consider Paid Time Off (PTO) to replace the current sick and vacation leave policies.
- Develop a formal policy to govern schedule flexibility across the entire county.
- Consider a better way to orient new employees in order to create a consistent process for welcoming new employees and teaching them what they need to know about the county organization, its culture, and rules.
- Convene a group to discuss the need for mutual respect throughout the organization,

The following quantitative results were realized from the staff survey

Q1 1. How long have you worked for the County?

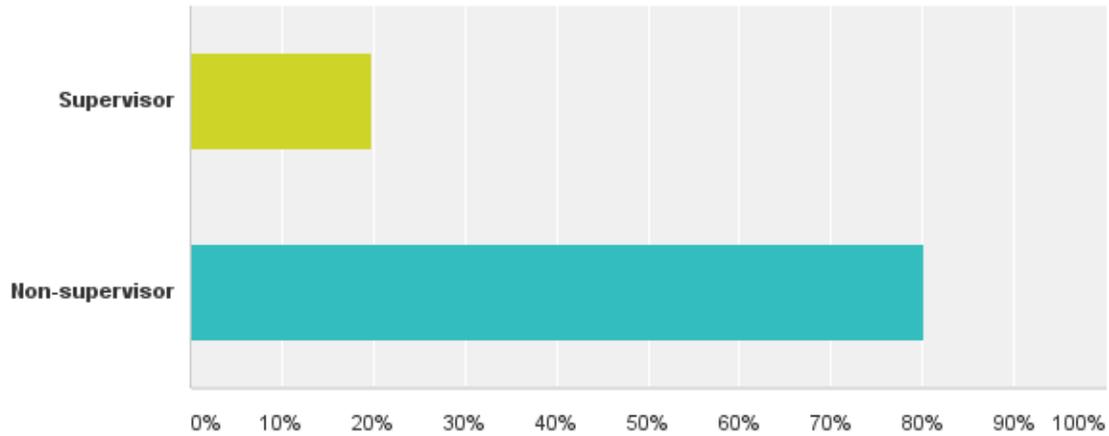
Answered: 101 Skipped: 0



Question Number One: The distribution of responses within the survey across staff tenure was good. No one age group dominated and all tenure groups of staff participated. A common trend is to have more new employees participate in organizational surveys and this was true in this study.

Q2 2. My position is:

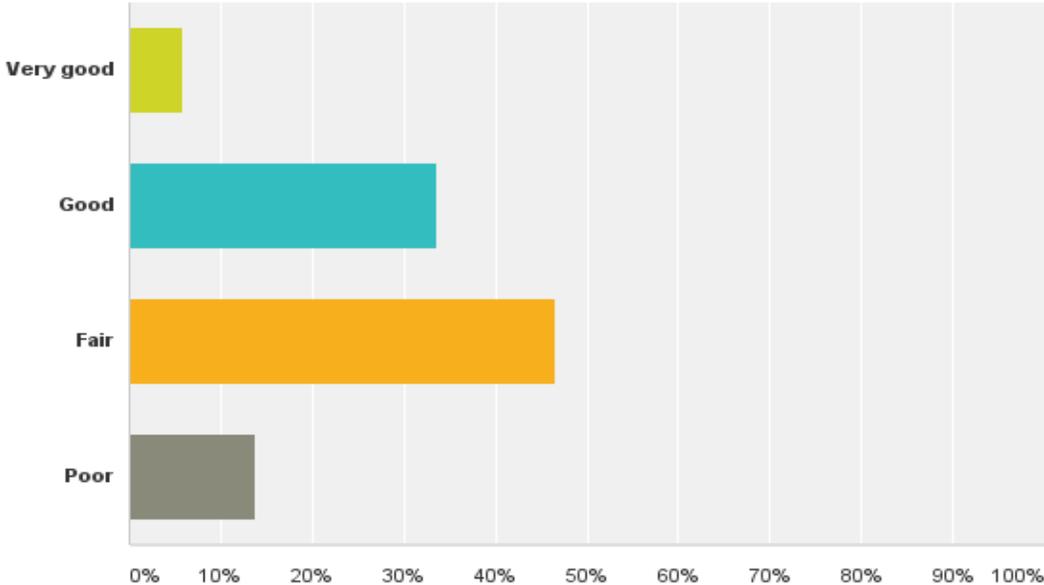
Answered: 101 Skipped: 0



Question Number Two: Slightly less than 20% of the survey respondents were supervisors. In order to fully understand this value we would need to know what the overall percentage of supervisors is in the County. However, for validity purposes, this is a good representation of participants.

Q3 3. In your opinion, what is the level of coordination and cooperation between departments within the County?

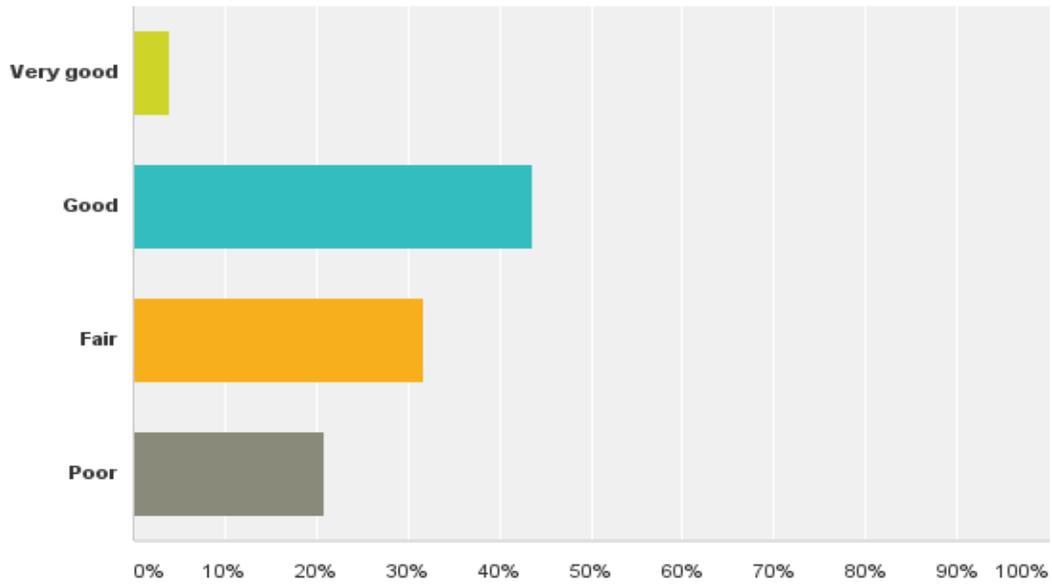
Answered: 101 Skipped: 0



Question Number Three: Over 50% of the staff felt the level of coordination and cooperation between departments was Fair or Poor. This is a high percentile and must be an area of priority for the County.

Q5 4. In your opinion please rate the level of communication that presently exists within the County?

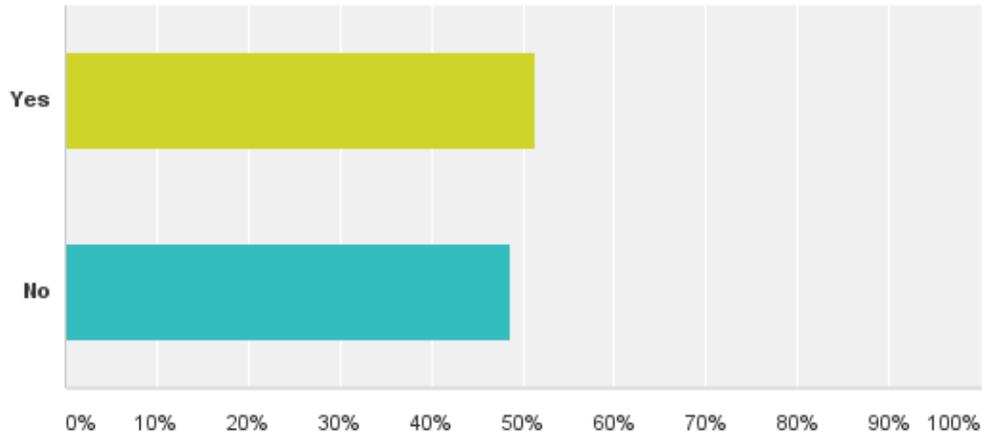
Answered: 101 Skipped: 0



Question Number Four: In a parallel response, again slightly over 50% of the staff felt the level of communication that presently exists within the County was Fair or Poor. This too is a high percentile and an area of priority for the County.

Q7 5. Do you believe there are partnerships, collaborations or cost sharing that can be done with the other counties and public agencies?

Answered: 70 Skipped: 31

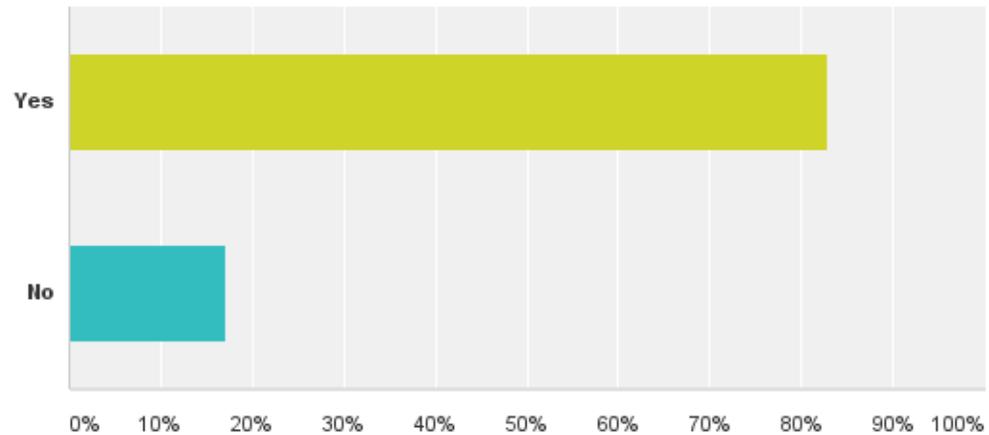


Question Number Five: With almost identical responses, the staff is split on whether they believe there are partnerships, collaborations or cost sharing that can be done with other counties and public agencies. This question is worth following up with staff on and is included in one of our recommendations.

NOTE: The final three survey questions presented here show a drop-off of 31 persons answering the questions, from 101 responses to 70. In consulting with the survey experts, it appears that the 31 staff members that skipped these questions probably did so accidentally, not realizing that there were more questions on the next pages of the survey instrument. There is no practical way of fixing this outcome after the fact, and it is the opinion of the consultants that the information provided in the summary of the survey is still valuable in learning more about the opinions and feelings of the County staff regarding their satisfaction and concerns with their County employment. This is true because survey findings are compared to interview findings to draw conclusions. In Meeker County's case, the two were consistent and thus reliable and valid.

Q11 7. Do you enjoy working for Meeker County?

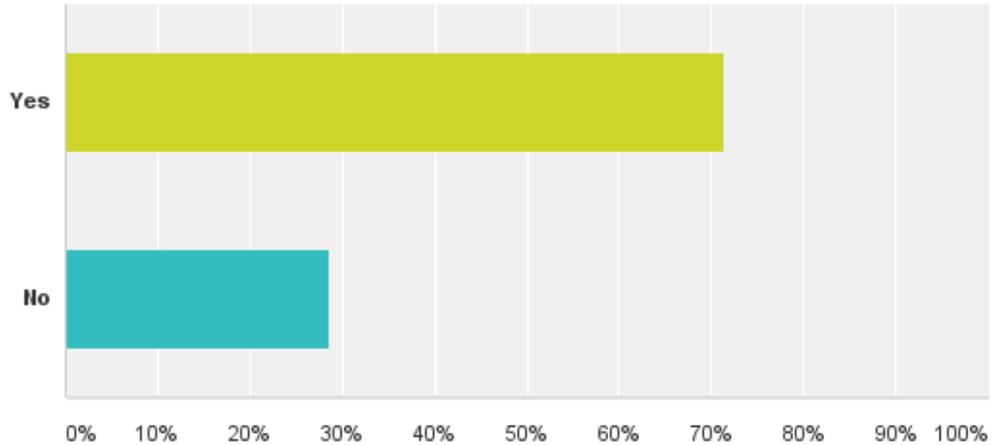
Answered: 70 Skipped: 31



Question Number Seven: Over 80% of the staff who answered this question said they do enjoy working for Meeker County. This is a high response rate. However, 31 of the respondents skipped the question so this could be an area to explore further in considering opportunities for more employee engagement, involvement and communication.

Q13 Would you recommend Meeker County to a friend as a good place to work?

Answered: 70 Skipped: 31



Question Number Eight: Over 70% of the staff who answered this question said they would recommend Meeker County to a friend as a good place to work. This is a good response rate. However, 31 of the respondents skipped the question so this could be another area to explore further in considering opportunities for more employee engagement, involvement and communication.

Best Practices in Organizational Design

When evaluating or considering a redesign of a public agency, it is appropriate and important to consider best practices and guiding principles in your consideration. The information below is designed to help you consider and discuss your options.

In practice, a design or redesign of structures is intended to increase coordination and integration of services, to combine similar functions, and/or to alter the present span-of-control environment. Cost savings are often a desired outcome, but experience has shown that this should not be the sole determinant or consideration. It is also important to note that in many cases, there is an up-front investment of resources required to merge, create or change an underlying structure. This is especially valid if an underlying structure has not been altered in some time. As you consider your options, these considerations should be included in your thoughts.

In making your decisions, consider whether the reorganization will accomplish the following:

- Improve integration and coordination of work in units that share functional areas.
- Rectify situations where span of control is unequal or inconsistent.
- Provide consistent focus on community, organizational and strategic issues.
- Repair existing structures that do not meet current expectations, standards or trends.
- Enhance the level of organizational consistency in policy, operations and culture.

Similarly, as you seek to find the best option, there are five considerations to avoid or be cautious of:

- Reorganize work around current personalities.
- Reorganize out of convenience, as opposed to logic and anticipated outcomes.
- Reorganize around historical conflicts or problems.
- Reorganize to consolidate control and power or to take it away.
- Reorganize believing that restructuring by itself will fix organizational issues.

Catalysts to changing structures often come in several forms:

1. A change in personnel (especially top leadership or senior management)
2. A facility/space change (new or renovated building)
3. A change in policy from the County Board (new strategies or goals)
4. A change in service philosophy (from a two to one stop model)

It is not uncommon for public agencies especially county governments to have several motivations at work at the same time and that is certainly the case in Meeker County. We believe the County has the right motivation and motivations for a change in the design of your organization.

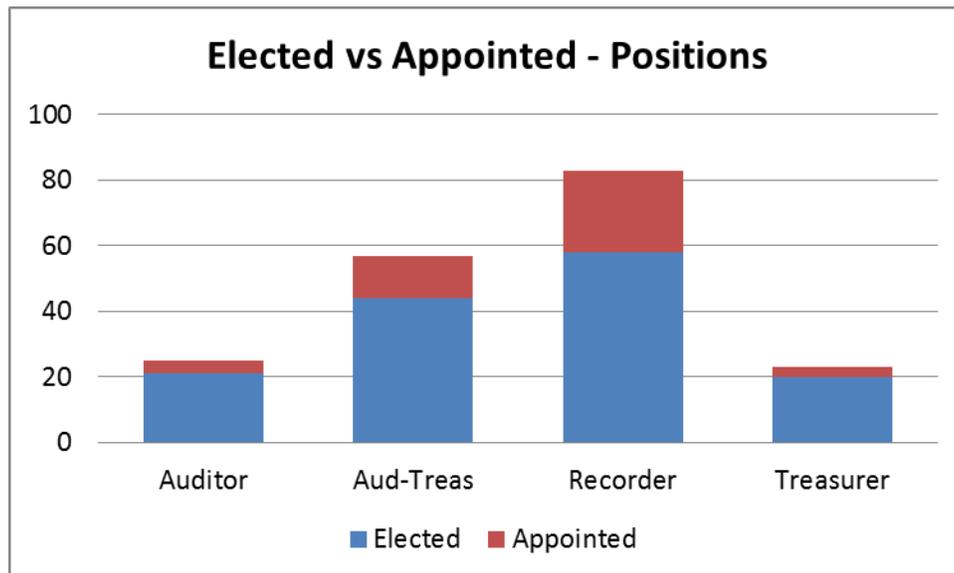
Summary of State-Wide Data on Elected Offices

Among the 87 Counties in Minnesota, there are distinct differences in how the five traditionally elected department heads are structured. All counties have an elected county attorney and sheriff, and in all likelihood this will not change. However, in the case of the Auditor, Treasurer, and Recorder the forms and functions vary across counties.

The decision to consolidate one or more of these offices and/or moving them from elected to appointed is certainly a state-wide trend. Within the past two decades we have seen a variety of changes including combining one or more of the offices, changing from elected to appointed status and integrating them into larger departments or divisions with other services and programs. The organization of the offices is not based on any geographic or metro-rural distribution. These decisions are a function of the county's culture, history, needs, politics, and policies. At the same time, the structure changes are truly a local policy decision.

Why are counties reviewing and evaluating their structures? There is a series of inter-related concepts that drive the question. These are not the same in each county, but often include many of these ideas:

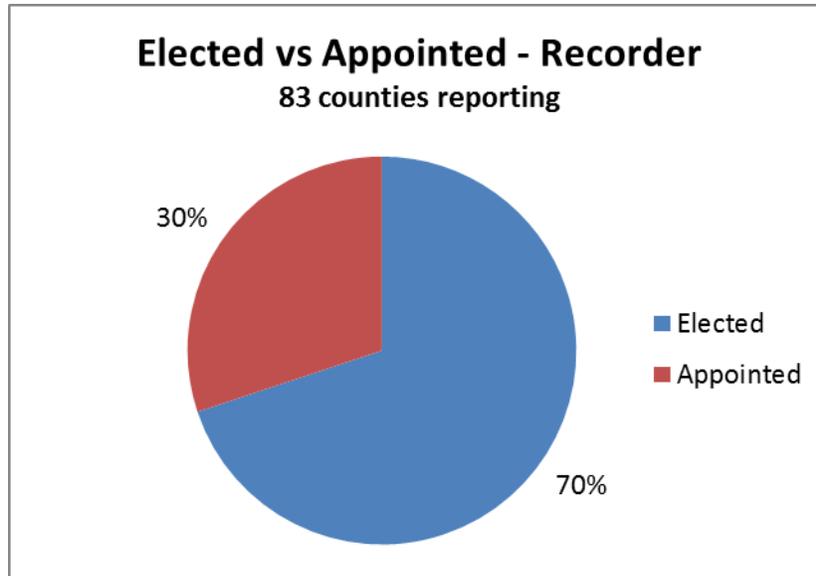
- The offices are the retail arm of county government.
- The traditional checks and balances have evolved and changed.
- The offices are co-located within the same building
- The offices are about the same size of staff and budget
- The work of the offices is transactional
- The offices need to enhance and improve coordination and communication
- The services can be more efficient in a combined department
- The county can reorganize, cross-train and ultimately save money



Meeker County retains the historical structure of three independent offices. Within Minnesota there are only 18 counties (21%), including Meeker that retain this traditional organization of the Auditor, Treasurer and Recorder offices. 44 counties have combined the Auditor and Treasurer's Offices yet retain the elected status. 4 counties have an appointed Auditor, while 13 counties have an appointed

Auditor-Treasurer combined. Of the counties that have not combined the Auditor and Treasurer's offices 20 counties have an elected Treasurer and 3 have an appointed person in the office.

The Recorder's office retains a larger share of elected positions with 70% of the counties having an elected Recorder; 25 counties have made the change to appoint the County Recorder.



Recommendations

We offer the following 20 recommendations to enhance and improve the organizational efficiency and effectiveness of Meeker County. The list is not in any order of priority or ranking. We tried to group the ideas into major categories for ease of consideration and review.

Policy and Board

1. Streamline Board meetings by incorporating Social Services Board meetings into regular County Board meetings. (Note: This has already been accomplished by the County Board.)
2. Conduct and hold County Board Work Sessions to discuss ideas and policy issues on a regular basis. (Note: This has been accomplished by the County Board and the Administrator by scheduling a County Board work session for the fourth Tuesday of each month. This will provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussion of issues than the regular Board agenda permits.)
3. Designate County Administrator or designee as County Board Clerk.
4. Develop a more unified vision and direction for the County including clear goals and strategies. Hold a retreat to move this forward.
5. Engage with county staff, for example, consider rides-along and meetings with department staff to increase Commissioners' understanding of county services and address the concerns about "micromangement".

County Staffing

1. Fill Social Services Director position in a timely manner. Ensure the new Director is a great fit for the County and department.
2. Review the performance management system in place. There are a series of ideas to enhance the system including developing a standard employee evaluation program. (Note: The Human Resources Director has begun to develop this system and process.)
3. Provide more training opportunities for employees and supervisors.

Strategy and Operations

1. Increase communication and information sharing. One method for this is to hold more regular department head meetings and utilize intranet.
2. Strengthen the application and role of IT in the County. This includes developing an information technology strategic and operations plan. (The County Board approved the hiring of an additional IT staff person to provide improved support to the many staff technology users throughout the organization. Staff appreciation for this increased level of IT service has already been observed.)
3. Conduct a market and compensation study. (Note: Consideration of a market compensation study is being discussed.)
4. Build a strong foundation in human resources, both tactically (day-to-day) and strategic.
5. Conduct a space study in the county courthouse. (A facilities study is being considered to address the existing space challenges in the Courthouse and to plan for the efficient re-use of approximately 13,000 sq. ft. of space in the Family Services Center that is coming available to the County as a result of the decision of the school district to relocate the school staff currently housed there.)
6. Evaluate and prioritize the process improvements identified on page 8 in the Report.
7. Address the issue of assessments for long-term services and supports in the Social Services and Public Health Departments.

8. Develop a team of staff to explore the survey result questions on communication, coordination and partnerships. Have them bring back a work plan in an agreed upon timeline.

Structure

1. Re-consider the elected status and further evaluate the benefits of combining offices, functions and departments to improve customer service and increase efficiency.
 - a. The County Recorder's Office could be included in either scenario.
 - b. Auditor and Treasurer Departments.
 - c. Consider creating a Land Use Department which may include Assessor, Planning & Zoning, and Building Official.

Customer Service

1. Utilize website to make county services and data more readily available to the public. (Note: A new and improved County website is in development and will be brought on-line in the near future).
2. Develop a set of standards for excellent customer service.
3. Consider a social media policy

Upon reflection and consideration, what is the purpose of a study? Simply put, it is about the citizen and the customer. The ultimate benefit of improvements to the County's culture and structure is the public and the services that are provided. This point should be front and center in all considerations and discussions. The County has strong staff with great potential. Change is hard and that is what this report is all about, making timely, important and proactive changes to move the County forward.

One of the first steps for the County Board and staff is to prioritize the recommendations. Not all of them are a high priority and many of them can be worked on simultaneously. Some will require financial resources and may need to be budgeted for in the future. A strong, positive and healthy conversation about each of these is a great first step. There are clear steps that can and should take place after the completion of the study. All county officials are instrumental in the next steps, the County Board, County Administration, the Department Heads and the employees. The following considerations and actions are recommended:

County Board Considerations

- Discuss and adopt the Final Report as a guide and road map.
- Meet in a work session to further discuss each recommendation.
- Provide financial resources as needed to move decisions forward.
- Identify performance expectations and set goals for the staff.

County Administration Considerations

- Develop a plan of action to implement changes pertinent to the County Administration office.
- Develop a plan of action for decisions made by the County Board.
- Seek employee input and ideas on specific parts of the employee survey.
- Be open-minded to ideas, suggestions and input from staff.

Department Head Considerations

- Understand that traditional relationships and historical paradigms are changing.
- Commit to engage in process to introduce system improvements.
- Identify resources and barriers to your success.
- Report results and findings to the County Board and Administration.