

IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND RESIDENTS

GROUP MEMBERS

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Leadership Academy
Improve Communication Between Government and Residents
Group Report

Group Members: Jerry Liston, Diana Dunn, Sharon Hunsicker, Shari Switzer, Tina Rodgers and Janet Kennedy.

Introduction

At the Leadership Academy retreat in September, the above group members decided to concentrate their efforts to increase the lines of communication between county government and residents. While there are avenues to locate information on county services, many citizens are unaware of how to access this information. The group undertook the task of making this information more available. The way in which to go about this would be of debate for the first few months of meetings.

Project Selection

The group members brainstormed ways to reach the goal of increasing communication between government and residents. After two months of deliberations, two ideas made it to the final decision making session.

One was to air a monthly program called "What You Should Know" on Channel 19. John Davis was contacted and was open to the idea of adding this program to its weekend continuous play lineup. Several group members toured the studio and met with a technician and Stacy Davis to discuss the logistics of implementing such a program. Topic ideas for an entire year and guest hosts were outlined.

The second option was to work with Riverview Hospital to update the Hamilton County Resource Manual, more commonly known as the "Orange Book." Mary Faye Collins of Riverview expressed a need for assistance in updating this much used manual. A comprehensive listing of county organizations and services are listed in the "Orange Book" and distributed to important information sources throughout the county, including the chambers of commerce, schools, libraries and more.

In December, the group voted by a majority, but not unanimously, to pursue the update of the Hamilton County Resource Manual. Based on past experiences with the production of brochures and publications, two group members expressed their concern that the information gathering and production of such a publication was more time consuming and complex than might be expected. They expressed a desire to undertake a project that would have tangible results (a

finished product) at the end of the leadership year. However, the two members amicably agreed to go with the majority vote.

Carrying out the Project

The group reviewed the resource manual and divided it into sections, with each member taking four or five categories. Each group member was responsible for mailing out a letter and update form to all organizations in his/her categories. The group members did the addressing, folding, stuffing and sealing of envelopes and Riverview took care of the postage and mailing. Following the mass mailing, a press release was mailed to area media. As the applications came in, they were picked up from Riverview and sorted to distribute to the appropriate group member. A list of the number of resource manuals that were requested from each organization was maintained. Each group member then organized the returned forms and made follow-up calls as feasible to those that did not respond.

A point to note was that the lack of direction from Riverview in how they wanted this information input caused a long delay. This issue was in question from January through April. The first database program they requested that we use was not available to any of the members and it took many follow-up calls to Margaret McBride of Riverview to determine what our other options were. A group member made phone calls to several computer specialists to determine what program would be appropriate in this situation. The majority of the specialists recommended Microsoft Access, which is what we decided to use in April. Due to the lack of time left in the Leadership Academy year, a group member arranged for a former co-worker to enter and layout the information for a minimal fee (\$400), half of which was paid by Riverview and half by the group's Leadership Academy funds. This phase of the project is underway at this time. All of the updated Resource Manual information is scheduled to arrive at Riverview on disk by the second week in July. At that point, they have the choice of utilizing the data entry/graphics artist person we found or handle the production and distribution on their own. Approximately 700 updated Hamilton County resource manuals have been requested.

Conclusion

Even though most group members considered themselves to be aware of what services and organizations are in existence in Hamilton County, all members admitted that there was more

out there than they had ever imagined. Another point that was noticeable was that there were many changes since the last update of the Hamilton County Resource Manual. It appeared that many nonprofits had streamlined services. The group members who did not work in nonprofit organizations gained a better understanding and appreciation of the struggle involved in "keeping the doors open" and "justifying your existence," which seem to be catch phrases for nonprofit managers.

Now that this information is being put on a database, future updates of this important directory will be much easier to undertake. Updates, deletions and additions can be performed with the stroke of the key rather than starting from scratch, which has been the method for past editions. While we had hoped to see the project through to its fruition, we believe we have provided the information and resources necessary to see that it is. The group members have learned a great deal about the county, both through the Leadership Academy sessions and the undertaking of this project.