Quality and Productivity Commission

26th Annual Productivity and Quality Awards Program

"Investing in a Quality Future"

2012 APPLICATION

Title of Project (Limited to 50 characters, including spaces):

NAME OF PROJECT: BRINGING PLANNING SERVICES TO OUR COMMUNITIES

DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION/ADOPTION: JULY 2007
(Must have been implemented at least one year - on or before June 30, 2011)

PROJECT STATUS: X Ongoing _____ One-time only

DID YOU SUBMIT THIS PROJECT BEFORE? _____ Yes X No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Describe the project in 15 lines or less using Arial 12 point font. Summarize the problem, solution, and benefits of the project in a clear and direct manner

How does a department of 180 employees deliver local services to vast unincorporated areas of 2,650 square miles and help customers navigate through the complex land development process? The solution is to bring services directly to communities through staff with local expertise and extensive County experience. The Department of Regional Planning (DRP) strategically placed 13 staff in County civic centers and Building and Safety offices enabling them to collaborate directly with customers and multiple agencies. DRP has also continually expanded services with new office hours, designated planners, cradle-to-grave processing, technology improvements, and new one-stop appointments. The benefits for customers include significant cost avoidance estimated at over $1.9 million annually. Review time for small projects was reduced from an average of 26 to six days, a 400% efficiency increase.

(1) ESTIMATED/ACTUAL ANNUAL COST AVOIDANCE	(2) ESTIMATED/ACTUAL ANNUAL COST SAVINGS	(3) ESTIMATED/ACTUAL ANNUAL REVENUE	(1) + (2) + (3) TOTAL ESTIMATED/ACTUAL BENEFIT	SERVICE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT
$1,920,000	$520,000	N/A	$2,440,000	Yes

SUBMITTING DEPARTMENT NAME AND COMPLETE ADDRESS Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning 320 W. Temple Street, Room 1390 Los Angeles, CA 90012	TELEPHONE NUMBER (213) 974-6470
PROGRAM MANAGER'S NAME Annie Lin	TELEPHONE NUMBER (213) 974-6470 EMAIL alin@planning.lacounty.gov
PRODUCTIVITY MANAGER'S NAME AND SIGNATURE (PLEASE CALL (213) 893-0322 IF YOU DO NOT KNOW YOUR PRODUCTIVITY MANAGER'S NAME) Hsiao-Ching Chen DATE: July 5, 2012	TELEPHONE NUMBER (213) 974-6559 EMAIL hchen@planning.lacounty.gov
DEPARTMENT HEAD'S NAME AND SIGNATURE Richard J. Bruckner DATE	TELEPHONE NUMBER (213) 974-6401

We Support Plain Language

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CHALLENGE

The Department of Regional Planning (DRP) has 180 employees but must provide planning services throughout 2,650 square miles of unincorporated area. Planning services should be locally accessible because planning is fundamentally geographic-oriented; however, complete decentralization of DRP is not feasible due to its size, budget, and the interconnectivity of its various functions. This presents a unique challenge for DRP customers, particularly for property and business owners with small projects for whom this may be their only development project.

SOLUTION

The solution was to provide planning services in the unincorporated communities DRP serves and coordinate directly with agencies involved in land development.

Beginning in 2007, DRP significantly expanded its field service operation by nearly doubling the number of staff from seven to 13. It assigned well-qualified veteran planners with over 120 combined years of experience and various planning expertise. These planners have worked in or live near the communities they serve. They have the skills necessary to "hand-hold" applicants as they navigate through the County's often complex multi-agency permitting process.

The economic downturn required DRP to creatively improve its efficiency and productivity. It could not rely on simply increased staff. At the same time, it became even more critical for the public to receive expanded or expedited planning services during the recession in order to stimulate economic growth and investment. As a result, DRP made the following enhancements in its field operation, many of which were efficiency initiatives proposed by staff at no additional County cost:

- Schedule Change: Previously, field offices were not open to the public every day and planners were often assigned to serve multiple offices during the week on a rotating basis. To create uniformity and streamline counseling service, DRP modified public office hours in July 2011 to be the same as Building and Safety. All offices but one (due to low customer volume) were opened every DRP business day of the week. The change in office hours also gave planners an uninterrupted block of time to efficiently process and approve ministerial applications.
- Designated Planner: In conjunction with the coordinated and expanded schedule, planners were consistently assigned to specific field offices further improving continuity and obtaining local expertise. The same planner is now available to applicants and other County agencies over the entire course of their projects.
- Cradle-to-Grave Service, One Project-One Planner: Due to the schedule and consistent office assignment, small project applicants are able have a single point of contact (the planner) from initial counseling to final approval.
- Expedited Processing: With consistency and continuity in both schedule and staffing, project review time was reduced significantly.

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- New Services: DRP also began scheduling case intake appointments and initiated a new One-Stop program in the field. One-stops are meetings scheduled with applicants where multiple County development agencies provide in-depth project review before application filing to avoid costly changes later. Previously, one-stops were offered downtown only for complex subdivision cases and with a fee. Through coordination with relevant County departments, the County is now able to offer coordinated multi-agency counseling in the field to small projects that are critical to local economic revitalization. This new counseling service is free of charge and at no additional County cost.
- Technology Improvements: Previously, DRP when serving in the field used only Public Works' (DPW) network and had limited access to vital DRP resources. It prevented DRP planners from providing services quickly, effectively and comprehensively. DRP was able to install DRP's network at minimal cost by using retired computers of older models and by collaborating with Internal Service Department to reduce upgrade costs.

BENEFITS

1. **Customers save money and time using field services.**

For FY2011-12:

Walk-in customers to the field	19,262 customers
Miles saved avoiding the drive downtown	941,153 miles
Gas cost saved ($0.52/mile)	$529,862
Parking fee saved ($10/visit)	$192,620
Time saved avoiding the drive downtown	31,371 hours

[Note] Please refer to Page 6 of the application for explanation of calculations

2. **More walk-in customers use field services.**

Performance measures demonstrate the continued growth in customer satisfaction for DRP field services. DRP's field services program has gained popularity, particularly during FY2011-12: it now handles approximately 75% of walk-in appointments and takes in 78% of site plan applications, a significant enhancement in DRP's service delivery.

3. **Improved customer service through efficient and expedited case processing.**

While many DRP projects are complex and thus require longer review time, a large number of small projects have moved forward quickly. During FY2011-12, there was a significant increase in productivity and decreased review time for small project applications processed through DRP's creative field operation. For example, the average processing time was reduced from 26 to 6 calendar days, an over 400% efficiency increase. This resulted in over $600,000 savings for applicants who were able to open their businesses or begin development 20 days earlier. The new field service improvements greatly facilitated case processing, reduced backlog, and saved applicants considerable time and money.

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4. **One project-one planner provides personal face-to-face service.**
   In processing small projects, DRP planners who counsel the customer and handle the submittal also often review the project, thus ensuring accountability. Whenever feasible, planners will also schedule individual appointments with applicants and if the project is ready, they will approve it at the meeting. This arrangement provides friendly "over the counter" service and eliminates some uncertainty in project development.

5. **Enhanced interdepartmental coordination and integrated service delivery.**
   DRP strategically locates it field services in County civic centers and Building and Safety offices where they collaborate side-by-side with many County agencies, including DPW, Fire, Public Health, and Assessor. For example, during the 2009 wildfires, DRP staffed the Local Assistance Centers, attended community meetings, personally met with fire victims via one-on-one counseling sessions and County multi-agency appointments, and coordinated expedited review of rebuild projects. One fire victim who had spoken with a field planner at a community meeting had retained the planner's business card for three years. She later contacted the planner directly to rebuild and her project was approved within one week.

   The integrated one-stop service offers County consultation services to the public free of charge. The comprehensive and interactive feedback from multiple departments helps applicants design projects that comply with all County requirements, streamlining the review process for everyone. The DRP planners often serve as the customers' project facilitators. They are familiar with DRP and other agency regulations and local issues and thus can provide a "heads-up" on potential costly development obstacles (such as lack of roads, access or water, sensitive environmental resources, costly infrastructure improvements, etc.). This is particularly valuable for inexperienced property owners and small developers because (1) they can't afford to hire a project facilitator, and (2) their tolerance for risk due to project uncertainty is much lower.

County Strategic Plan Goal 1: Operational Effectiveness

As a result of the various field service enhancements — consistent hours, designated planners, cradle-to-grave processing, one-stop counseling, technology upgrades — DRP's strategic field operations are significantly more efficient, effective and streamlined. Field operations provide timely and expedited delivery of customer-oriented public services. Through personal interaction with the public in the field, DRP demonstrates, on a daily basis, that the County cares about its customers.

County Strategic Plan Goal 3: Integrated Service Delivery

The smart enhancements in DRP's field operation maximize opportunities to improve customer outcome through continuous integration of services with multiple County departments. The field improvements focused on creating a customer and business-friendly environment by providing coordinated, streamlined and accessible field services without additional County cost.

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$1,920,000	**$520,000**	$ **N/A**	**$2,440,000**	☒

Cost Avoidance

Public cost and time avoidance from field services is a direct economic stimulus.

Gas Money Saved	$ 529,862
Parking Fee Avoided	$ 192,620
Traveling Time Spared	$ 302,424
Project Delay Avoided	$ 618,667
Project Coordination Time Saved	$ 277,015
Total	**$ 1,920,587**

- Gas Money Saved = (# of Visits Avoided Going Downtown) × (Total Round-Trip Mileage between each Field Office and Downtown) × ($0.52/miles County Gas Reimbursement)
- Parking Fee Avoided = (# of Visits) × (Average Downtown Parking Rate $10)
- Traveling Time Spared = (# of Visits) × (Total Round-Trip Mileage) × (Average Traveling Speed to Downtown 30mph) × (County Living Wage $9.64/hr)
- Project Delay Avoided = (# of Projects with 6 days Turn-Around) × (Estimated CA Average Property Value $1,000/month based on Current Low Interest Rates) × (20 Days Savings) ÷ 30 days
- Project Coordination Time Saved = (# of Projects Approved in the Field) × (Average 2 days per Project) × (8 working hours/day) × (County Living Wage $9.64/hr)

Cost Savings

- Cost savings due to continuity and efficiency by scheduling designated planners with consistent hours. Estimated savings is 20% of field staff time.
  13 staff × 2,000 (hours per year) × $80 (average hourly rate) × 20% (estimated time savings) = $416,000
- Cost savings due to the field services' ability to directly collaborate with other County agencies resulting in reduced consultation time, increased productivity and more efficient project review. Estimated savings is 5% of field staff time.
  13 staff × 2,000 (hours per year) × $80 (average hourly rate) × 5% (estimated time savings) = $104,000