

Story County, Iowa

Strategically Planning *Building a Solid Foundation*

Excellence in Action Award Nomination - 2014



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Submitted September 2014

1. Abstract of the program



In 2013, ISAC selected Story County to participate in a strategic planning pilot program, offering the County the opportunity to be professionally-guided through a process to develop a foundation for a county-wide strategic plan, identifying an overarching mission and set of goals. The Pilot Program defined guiding principles for Story County officials and established implementation strategies and basis for prioritization.

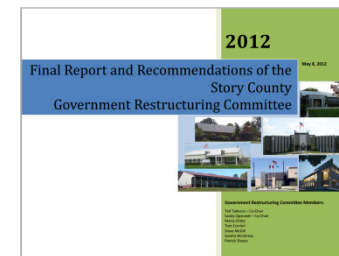
The Board received the product of the pilot program and took necessary steps to officially adopt the *Strategic Plan – Story County, Iowa Fiscal Years 2014-2015*. County staff offices were tasked with the implementation of the various strategies, continuing to build on momentum introduced in 2012. The 2012 CPAT – Community Planning Assistance Team – Report, along with the Government Restructuring Committee Final Report (2012) outlined recommendations and strategies for Story County to undertake. The 2013 planning work to Story County steps forward, building on the past suggestions and refining and prioritizing based on needs and economic realities.

As we enter into Fiscal Year 2015 we aren't simply planning – we are successfully doing - based on our strategic planning work. Projects, policies, and much more being realized as we look forward based on the solid foundation.

2. The problem/need for the program

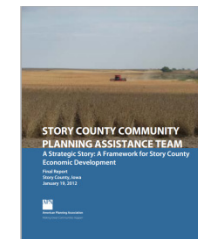
Like many counties and municipalities, the economic downturn starting in 2007 impacted Story County's budget, causing the need for careful evaluation of our services and programs. Through this process, the Board of Supervisors was able to reduce expenditures through deliberative budgeting practices to ensure continued levels of services were maintained. To build on this, the Board further recognized the need for establish a firm foundation to build on and set a clear future course for Story County. Clearly, setting forth a strategic plan was a logical step.

The need for this endeavor was further recognized through both the CPAT – Community Planning Assistance Team – Report of January 2012, and the Government Restructuring Committee Final Report. In 2011, the Story County Board of Supervisors appointed the Government Restructuring Committee (GRC) to review the day-to-day operations of Story County government. The GRC charge was to “explore the structure and function of Story County government as allowed by State of Iowa Code: Section 331. The work of the Committee was to be thorough, fair, and not politically motivated. Ideally, most citizens would view any Committee recommendation as an unbiased proposal to improve the function and representation of Story County.” Through their work, the GRC Committee recommended establishing a strategic plan and creating strategies to incorporate to facilitate effective communications with the public, amongst elected offices, and employees.



As identified by the American Planning Association in the CPAT report, the momentum was moving in a positive direction in Story County.

APA agreed to support a Story County CPAT because of the importance of the Supervisors' economic development efforts, their commitment and the likely success of the project. Story County has demonstrated that they have the necessary combination of political leadership, staff expertise, community support, regional partnerships, and financial resources.



The CPAT report recommended that under “Focused Leadership” that:

Businesses of Story County continually create plans and strategies for growth. The County needs to do the same. By identifying its strengths, existing assets, and relationships, the community can begin to form a vision of what kind of place it will be in ten or twenty years. Once the vision is known, it is imperative that the County Board of Supervisors stay focused and maintain the enthusiasm for achieving a brighter economic future. Decisions must be calibrated to the long term vision, and resources budgeted appropriately.

In 2013, following these recommendations and sensing the “time was now”, the Board of Supervisors set forth in partnership with other Story County elected officials and department heads to set forth a path by engaging in strategic planning. As a result, many positive programs and initiatives have successfully followed.

3. Description of the program

The Strategic Plan identified many specific programs and policies to which to dedicate staff time and resources. The successful implementation of the Strategic Plan by the Board requires, above all, ongoing review and realization of the priorities it sets forth. As part of the implementation, the Board further refined program elements as related to *Communications* and *Capital Improvements Planning*. This section provides additional details for these two specific program areas, but many more successes have been, and will continue to be, achieved because of the solid foundation set by strategically planning and building on synergy created through the process to bring forward new initiatives.

Story County, Iowa Communications Plan

In January 2014, the Board of Supervisors formally adopted the Story County, Iowa Communications Plan, defining the following goals:

- Provide transparency in government
- Share Story County's vision with general public and decision makers
- Improve communications between the Board and its constituents
- Ensure the public and County employees have factual information
- Provide emergency response communications.



Key to the Communications Plan is the definition of "target audiences", "strategies", and "action steps" specific to achieve the goals listed above. In all, Story County highlighted thirteen strategies to incorporate system-wide in daily activities to achieve our goals. 2014 successes mid-way through the year include: two quarterly versions of "Our Story" - the public newsletter printed; seven issues of



"County News" (the employee newsletter) released; State of County address recorded and published in both audio and written format; speaker's bureau definition and presentations drafted; release of monthly columns in local newspapers; enhanced presence in social medial; meetings with township trustees, school officials and city leaders in a community meeting format; pre-recorded "Get to Know Story County" conversations on the names and faces and issues in Story County; and more, with many new and exciting projects yet to be launched. Annually, the Board of Supervisors intends to evaluate the Communications Plan to determine degree of success for each strategy and revised as necessary and look forward to the new year.

Story County, Iowa Capital Improvements Plan

The Board of Supervisors adopted the first Capital Improvements Plan for Story County in February 2014. The steps towards the CIP adoption and implementation started in May 2013, with the identification of the CIP on the Board's Strategic Plan, which states:

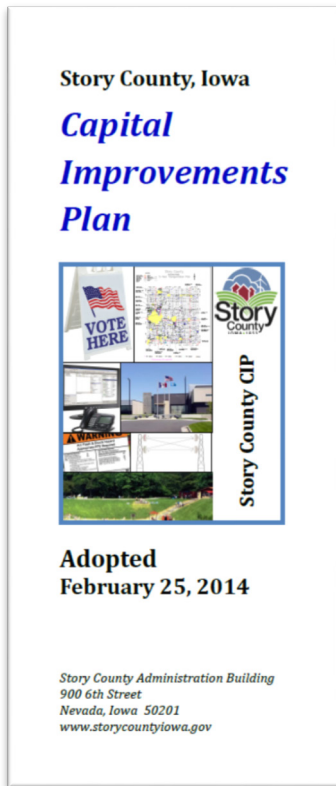
Develop Capital Improvements Program

Benefits: Better schedule public improvements that require more than one year to construct. Provide an opportunity for long-range financial planning and management.

The adoption of the plan followed a seven-month process that engaged County staff in the formation of the Plan. In July 2013, the CIP Task Force formed, and their first steps were to identify working definitions, prepares inventory of current facilities; survey status of previously approved projects, prepares financial analysis, and develop forms. The CIP Task Force then reviewed and ranked requests submitted by County departments and prepared a five-year schedule of projects.

The Draft CIP was presented to the BOS in November 2013, and public comments sought through the beginning of 2014. The adopted CIP runs on a fiscal year basis – July 1st through June 30th, and defines projects on a five year timeframe. It will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary.

Review of the CIP for fiscal year 2015 began by staff in August 2014 and new projects may be added and/or existing projects modified for the Board's consideration in March 2016. The CIP has become a crucial tool for the Board to use in their budgetary decision-making.



4. Use of technology

Story County is striving to maximize its use of social media and enhancing our website continually in order for the effective delivery of information to the public. The Strategic Plan, as well as the various projects that have stemmed from the plan, are online for public review. Internally, forms have been created that allow County staff to submit CIP requests electronically, and the newsletters and other outreach strategies are being distributed to staff in electronic and paper copies. Story County has also used Survey Monkey to gather public input on various programs and policies proposed. A key strategy as well in our Communications Plan is to identify new methods of community engagement, suggesting that as technology continues to evolve and change how information is exchanged, we must look to different methods of community engagement to enhance opportunities for public involvement.



Highlights of the types of technology and software programs we've incorporated include:

- Social media – Twitter and Facebook
- Website
- Survey Monkey
- Microsoft products (Word, Publisher, Excel, PowerPoint)
- Adobe



5. The cost of the program

The Strategic Plan was successfully created with the assistance of ISAC funding. Through the 2013 pilot program, ISAC covered half of the costs for process facilitated from the Institute for Public Affairs (IPA), with total project costs to not exceed \$3,000. Story County's expense to IPA was \$1,246.69.

In addition to the direct expense for the facilitation services, there was staff time for those elected officials and department heads that attended meetings, provided input (throughout the process) and ultimately presented the strategic plan to the Board for consideration. Staff time is the only expense realized for the projects that have followed on the strategic plan work. The CIP and Communications Plan were both developed in house by County staff, and the specific strategies defined therein are being implemented by County staff as well. Minimal direct costs have included printing, but that has not exceeded \$500 for all aspects of the programs described herein.

6. The results/success of the program

The specific elements of our Strategic Plan include:

- **Develop full bridge maintenance plan.**
- **Develop Equipment Replacement Plan with financing program.**
- **Advocate for moving to one Assessor for the entire Story County.**
- **Develop program to relocate County Attorney's Office to one location and to enhance security.**
- **Offer enhanced in-house employee training and development program.**
- **Maintain balanced budget**
- **Mental Health-Disability Services redesign**
- **Develop Capital Improvements Program**
- **Develop structure for merit pay plan; make decision on implementation once structure has been established.**
- **Enhanced security for all public county buildings**
- **Funding for economic development planning initiatives**
- **Dakin's Lake expansion**
- **Hickory Grove Lake sewer project – project design**
- **Transition to paperless document management**
- **Drainage ditch maintenance program**

From the list, eleven of the fourteen items are clearly underway and progressing with achievable milestones. The remaining three are still viable elements regarding which discussions and steps will begin later this calendar year. The Board of Supervisors has clearly followed the “marching orders” given in the Strategic Plan and progressed forward; realizing the critical importance the Plan has placed over the past two years.



We have a clear path. The Strategic Plan has set that, and we are following that path and building projects and programs that continue to provide outstanding service to our citizens.
-Paul Toot, Chair



In the words of Winston Churchill...

“Failing to plan equals planning to fail.”
-Rick Sanders, Vice Chair



Story County Supervisors chose to engage in strategic planning as a way to have established goals with achievable outcome by establishing partners from both public and private sector for the long term betterment of Story County.
-Wayne Clinton

7. Worthiness of an Award

Story County started out by putting words on a page, identifying steps we collectively felt would continue to take us forward. The Board of Supervisors formally adopted these words, establishing a Strategic Plan to follow. We framed it and put it on the wall in the public meeting room. We placed the Strategic Plan online for our citizens to read and understand. We distributed copies to libraries and city halls throughout the county.

We did all, that, but, we didn't just leave it at that. We started right at working on achieving success. We identified key County staff to help manage specific projects such as the CIP and Communications Plan explained in this application. We looked outside the box, trying to identify solutions not necessarily vetted by county governments. Our goal was – and continues to be – to ensure we addressed each and every element of our Strategic Plan, and if we are able to successfully implement, that was a fantastic outcome. If we find roadblocks that limit our ability to take an element forward, we at least are looking at the issue and recognizing our limited role to continue to implement that item. We've realized many successes so far – Dakin's Lake Expansion, CIP, Communications Plan, Motor Grade Lease Program, as just a few examples – and we recognize the role our strategic plan played in where we've come and where we are continuing to go. Story County is setting the bar high for ourselves, and we are making sure collectively we are reaching the bar and beyond, not just for now – today – but to ensure our current quality of life is present in for our future generations.

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