

CHIPPEWA COUNTY
MINNESOTA

STRATEGIC PLAN

December 2021

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Vision, Mission & Goals

Vision

Deliver quality services with compassion and integrity.

Mission

To provide optimal community services while cultivating a culture of collaboration.

Goals

-  Create and support a respectful and engaged work environment.
-  Improve communication and collaboration amongst departments.
-  Ensure adequate training and resources are available for employees to efficiently do their jobs.
-  Ensure policies are consistent and cohesive.
-  Provide welcoming and helpful public service with a single stop.
-  Allocate resources to support the plan.

Background

Steering Team Members

- Michelle May, Auditor/Treasurer Coordinator
- Terry Ocaña, IT Director
- Jeremy Gilb, Highway Engineer
- Angela Arndt, Restorative Justice Manager
- Amy Rodeberg, County Recorder
- Derek Olson, Sheriff
- RaLonda Lens, Sr. Deputy Auditor/Treasurer - Tax
- Tammy Mortenson, Sr. Deputy Assessor
- Candice Jaenisch, Commissioner
- Becky Deterling, C&F Social Services Supervisor
- Vonnie Erickson, HR Specialist
- JoAnn Blomme, Environmental Technician
- Aimee Gourlay, Mediation Center Facilitator

History

In late 2020, the Chippewa County Board directed staff to form a Strategic Planning Steering Team (Team) to develop a Strategic Plan (Plan). The Team met regularly during 2021 to develop the plan, identify goals and objectives, and generate action steps. The Team was charged with being very intentional and hold each other accountable towards implementing the Plan after the development process. During the development process, the Team solicited employee feedback using a formal county-wide survey and opportunities for informal conversations, worked in small and large groups, and presented progress updates to the Board.

Strategic Planning Process

- Meetings 1 and 2: Team Survey
 - Planning and Vision (WHERE you want to go)
- Meeting 3: Team Feedback
 - Refine Vision and Mission Statements
 - Mission (HOW you want to get there)
- Meeting 4: Team Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis
 - Team completed an internal survey to identify the Countys SWOTs
 - Information was used to aid in the development of strategic goals
 - Plan for employee feedback
- Meeting 5: Employee Feedback
 - What did you learn from employees
 - Finalize Strategies
 - Objectives and Action Plan
- Meeting 6: Team Provide Feedback on Draft Plan
 - Finish Objectives and Action Plan

- Review and revise final Plan

Outcome of SWOT Analysis

GOALS

- Improve Employee Satisfaction
- Increase Communication and Collaboration between Departments
- Public Service Focused Work
- Organizational Efficiency
- Updated Technology
- Use Space Better

MITIGATE WEAKNESSES

- Inefficient
- Low Morale
- Lack of Training
- Poor Communication
- Old Technology
- Lack of Accountability
- Website Old
- Reactive

LEVERAGE STRENGTHS

- People
- Start of Policies
- Motivated
- Start on Technology
- Flexibility
- Public Service
- HR Department

Employee Survey Summary of Results

- An independent third party conducted an employee survey to assist the Team in the Strategic Planning Process
- The Employee Survey was conducted between Meeting 4 and Meeting 5.
- See Appendix A – Summary of overall employee survey questions
- See Appendix B – Letter to Board summarizing employee survey concerns related to Board

Desired Outcomes for Strategic Planning Process

- Employee morale improved over time (satisfaction surveys)
- Employees are heard, and know they are heard
- Clear, positive communication with employees
- Recognition and acknowledgement for employees
- Increased cooperation and collaboration among “silos”
- Clear steps are articulated – there is a plan for action
- Commitment and tools are available to act on
- Managers are engaged and accountable to act
- “Low hanging fruit” – take swift action to show we are committed

Strategic Goals and Strategies Developed

GOAL #1 Create and support a respectful and engaged work environment.

- *Increase interaction among employees and departments.*
- *Build capacity to understand and respect each other.*
- *Improve department structure to maximize engagement.*
- *Improve physical space.*

GOAL #2 Improve communication and collaboration amongst departments.

- *Optimize workflow for departments which need to work together.*
- *Identify areas to improve information sharing.*
- *Create communication plan and expectations.*

GOAL #3 Ensure adequate training and resources are available for employees to efficiently do their jobs.

- *Finalize onboarding training (include communication and collaboration expectations).*
- *Identify initial training required.*
- *Review and document employee training needs, requirements and trainings received.*
- *Understand and fulfill leadership training needs.*
- *Provide training for proper technology use.*

GOAL #4 Ensure policies are consistent and cohesive.

- *Create one set of foundational county policies which apply to everyone.*
- *Evaluate and establish consistency of departmental policies.*
- *Ensure roles and expectations are clear and understood.*
- *Train all supervisors on performance evaluations.*

GOAL #5 Provide welcoming and helpful public service with a single stop.

- *Complete a space study.*
- *Implement physical space plan.*
- *Improve public signage.*
- *If needed, provide a greeter to assist customers.*

GOAL #6 Allocate Resources to Support Goals.

- *Develop criteria to prioritize actions.*
- *Obtain alternative funding.*

Conclusion: The Chippewa County Board adopted this plan on December 28, 2021 and will review the goals and action steps on a semi-annual basis. Progress updates will be provided for the ongoing development of this plan.

APPENDIX A - Summary of Overall Employee Survey Questions

Q1. On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very respectful) how respectful is your work environment? (Please explain your response in the space below.)

Average Rating: 6.96

Responses indicate many feel the workplace is respectful, however there could be improvements on communication, respect across all levels of the organization and even with the public. A few responses noted the Respectful Workplace Policy may help the organization, but that more work needs to be done in this area.

The County is focused on creating a respectful and engaged work environment. Respect must occur between employees, supervisors, vendors, and the public to ensure quality services and a supported work environment. The Strategic Plan includes tasks to establish team building opportunities, interdepartmental workgroups, and increased collaboration.

Q2. On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very supportive) how supportive is your work environment to doing your work? (Please explain your response in the space below.)

Average Rating: 7.46

A good portion of responses from this question indicate employees feel supported. However, some comments also indicate employees wish for more support from their supervisor and coworkers. Based on these responses, the Strategic Plan includes several tasks to improve communication and interaction between departments and employees, as well as build capacity to understand and respect each other.

Q3. What first step or steps might help move Chippewa County towards achieving the goal of a respectful and supported work environment?

The employee survey gave many valuable suggestions for creating a respectful and supported work environment. The summarized comments include:

- More accountability at all levels of the organization*
- More and better communication at all levels of the organization*
- Continuous training*

Q4. On a scale of 1 (not much improvement) to 10 (a big improvement) could collaboration and communication with another department improve public service?

Average Rating: 6.78

Generally, the comments were supportive for collaboration between departments. There are some departments that already collaborate very well and there were suggestions for better collaboration. Suggestions to improve collaboration include:

- Improving general knowledge of each department to better serve the public*
- Improve understanding on how each department plays a role in a larger process*
- Unit meetings to update workers on current issues*

- *Be responsive to department requests*

To improve collaboration, the Steering Team is recommending the following actions:

- *Lean/Kaizen/Continuous Improvement events to educate on processes*
- *Utilize digital workflow programs to reduce location and physical barriers*
- *Create an inventory of departmental information to identify who uses it and who needs it*
- *Improved explanation of the 'why' when it comes to communications on programs, processes, and policies*

Q5. On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high quality) rate the quality of your communication interactions with other departments below?

Average Rating: 6.84

Over half of the responses were generally positive. However, the communication between county facilities could be more frequent or improved to help build rapport between employees in different departments or across buildings. In addition, some responses indicate communication levels vary by department and a county-wide assessment of communication is challenging.

Q6. What first step or steps might help move Chippewa County towards achieving the goal of improved communication and collaboration amongst departments?

Survey suggestions included the following recommendations:

- *Create a team of members from each department to discuss labor issues*
- *A County newsletter*
- *Supervisors, administration, HR, and other relevant parties will meet with different units to answer questions and explain policy and procedures*
- *Getting to know each other on a more personal level to improve understanding*
- *More social or team-building activities*

Q7. What training have you had while employed at Chippewa County that you highly value? (List below.)

Recommended Trainings from the survey include:

- *Implicit Bias Awareness*
- *Leadership trainings*
- *On the job shadowing*
- *St. Louis County Health & Human Services training*
- *Job specific training (law enforcement, MAXIS, etc.)*

Q8. Within practical limitations, what additional training would enhance your ability to serve the public? (List below.)

The County recognizes the diversity of the county's workforce and training needs will vary by position. Below are some suggestions, but this is not an all-inclusive list.

Some Suggestions include:

- *Microsoft applications and computer training*

- Job specific training (DHS, Deputy Recorder training, Child Protection training)
- Dealing with conflict and confrontation
- Personality training, cultural humility training, motivational speakers
- Mental health awareness

Q9. On a scale of 1 (not well at all) to 10 (very well), how well do you understand the County's policies and how to put them in practice?

Average Rating: 7.53

Most comments indicate the policies are readily available and easy to understand. There were some suggestions to make policies more beneficial to employees and enforcement could be more consistent.

Q10. On a scale of 1 (not well at all) to 10 (very well) rate how well the policies are applied?

Average Rating: 6.6

Application of policies seems to vary depending on the interpretation or the supervisor/department. The survey indicates that adding the HR position should help with creating more consistency as to how policies are implemented. Countywide training on policies is also recommended to ensure consistent communication regarding the intent of policies.

The Steering Team is recommending a review of all County-wide and departmental policies to ensure they are up to date and identify any inconsistencies. HR will conduct training on policies with new employees and when new policies are implemented. The Steering Team is also recommending an improved onboarding process to ensure all new employees receive appropriate training at the start of employment and fully understand the county's policies. Performance evaluations will also be conducted at least annually for each employee including supervisors and department heads. County will focus on supervisory training for conducting performance evaluations, onboarding, administering policies, and communicating with employees.

Q11. Are there any policies you feel need to be updated, added, or reconsidered? If so, please list them and explain below.

Generally, all policies should be reviewed on an annual basis. The Steering Team is recommending the ongoing review of countywide policies and making regular updates to stay current with changing laws, statutes, and best practices.

Suggested policies for review include:

- Funeral leave
- Inclement Weather policy
- Dress Code
- Telecommuting
- Emergency Service Volunteer Policy
- Wifi Availability in County buildings

Q12. On a scale of 1 (not helpful at all) to 10 (very helpful), rate how good Chippewa County is at welcoming and helping the public in a single stop?

Average Rating: 6.14

The survey responses indicate that we are generally helpful, but improvements could be made to create a more welcoming environment with better signage and wayfinding. Directing the public to multiple buildings can create confusion and frustration. In addition, survey responses indicate that we are public servants and need to be accessible to the public as much as possible.

Q13. What first step or steps might help move Chippewa County towards achieving the goal of a one stop shop customer service model?

Several survey responses indicate that providing better customer service should first start with being more approachable and reinforcing the value of public service. We need to improve the attitudes of our employees to be helpful and respectful of those we serve.

Other suggestions include:

- A space study to determine potential reconfiguration of offices*
- Combine all departments under one roof*
- Improve signage*
- Combine offices with similar purposes and clientele*

The Steering Team is recommending the County work with an architect to evaluate opportunities to improve the physical environment to create more operational efficiencies and improve service for the public. The Steering Team is recommending the establishment of a workgroup to evaluate department organizational structure to maximize engagement, eliminate duplication of tasks, and streamline the service offerings. The Steering Team is recommending the development of a capital improvement plan to ensure buildings and equipment are properly maintained.

Q14. How could the County Commissioners better support employees in succeeding at Chippewa County?

See Appendix B

Q15. Please provide any other comments or suggestions for the Strategic Planning Steering Team in the space below.

Other suggestions include:

- Activities or fundraisers that will bring departments together*
- Have staff involvement in strategic planning initiatives*
- Implement a suggestion box*
- Create a more positive culture*
- Thank you!*

*APPENDIX B – Letter to Board Summarizing Employee Survey
Concerns Related to Board*

To: Chippewa County Board of Commissioners

From: Strategic Planning Steering Team

Date: December 27, 2021

RE: Employee Survey Responses

During the Strategic Planning development process, the Steering Team conducted an employee survey for ALL employees. The survey was very successful as we had over 70% response rate. Employees were asked fifteen questions about their experience as a Chippewa County employee and how the County could improve as an employer and a service provider. A summary of the survey responses will be provided as part of the final Strategic Plan.

However, the survey asked one question specifically about the County Commissioners:

“How could the County Commissioners better support employees in succeeding at Chippewa County”?

A summary of the responses for your consideration is outlined here:

- There was a total of 65 responses to this question. Many of the responses indicate employees feel supported by Commissioners and generally had positive remarks.
- There were a few key areas of improvement noted in the survey as listed here:
 1. A common response focused around employee outreach and building connections with employees. Some examples include:
 - a. Be more present in the buildings and be approachable
 - b. Gain a deeper understanding of the work being done and who we are
 - c. Collaborate across all levels of the organization
 - d. Ask for new ideas and gather feedback from employees
 - e. More open and transparent communication with employees
 2. The next common response focused around compensation and benefits. Some examples include:
 - a. Increase wages and benefits
 - b. Make sure the County stays competitive in the market for wages
 - c. Consider additional benefits for long-term employees
 - d. Review the pay grid regularly
 3. Other Comments:
 - a. Hold supervisors accountable
 - b. Keep an open mind to new ideas
 - c. Evaluate staffing levels (both too much or not enough)
 - d. Invest in training for both employees and supervisors

The Steering Team is respectfully submitting this memo to you for consideration. We recommend the Board consider these responses when making future decisions.