Washington DC Government Uses Lean Six Sigma to Reduce Costs and Time: Better Serving District Residents
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The District of Columbia has been using Lean Six Sigma as part of its Certified Public Manager® training program over the past five years with tremendous success. Lean Six Sigma combines the Lean principles of speed and waste elimination with Six Sigma focus on improving and sustaining quality from customers' perspectives. Carefully selected participants of the training program led by The George Washington University participate in Green Belt, along with other leadership training over a one-year period wherein they are required to complete actual Lean Six Sigma projects to solve problems in the DC Government in order to be certified. These projects over the years have identified about $27 million in savings in addition to more efficient processes that improve services for residents.

Some examples of cost saving Lean Six Sigma projects include reducing overtime in the 911 Call Center, reducing the number of expensive off-site medical visits at the Department of Corrections, reducing patient drop/return to service times in Fire Emergency Medical Services (FEMS) so existing ambulances are used more efficiently, improving and expanding the use of Fleet Share vehicles in the Department of Public Works (DPW) to reduce reliance on expensive government-owned vehicles and improving the sanitation ticket appeals process to generate revenue more rapidly.

Several projects focused on reducing cycle time in various processes. Examples include reducing cycle time for rental housing business licenses, Child Care Subsidy Provider Agreements, Foster Care Licenses in the District, Department of Health (DOH) Procurement, the Large Tract Review Process and discharge of patients into the community.

Additional projects helped the DC Government to identify programs that affect disconnect-ed youth, data management systems in the Health and Human Services Cluster, complete affordable housing data and management of DC Department of Human Resources (DCHR) Official Personnel Folders for both better sharing of critical data and improved compliance within various DC Government agencies.

To date, 78 DC Government employees have completed or are currently in the Lean Six Sigma Training Program. One hundred percent of those surveyed indicated that they use the Lean Six Sigma tools learned in the class in their current assignments. All of the participants would recommend the training to others and are interested in Black Belt Training. In fact, the Six Sigma methodology is so popular and successful that the DC Government is now proposing to offer a Black Belt program as part of its work force development. The program will further drive a disciplined, customer-centered, data-centered improvement culture throughout all of DC's participating agencies.

Many organizations, government or otherwise, experience similar inefficiencies and problems like the DC Government. So you may ask how do we get started with Lean Six Sigma? First, it requires your organization to listen to your customers/constituents, document what they are hearing, and prioritize the major themes they hear from customers. Six Sigma doesn't have to be complicated, organization-wide or address every problem the organization has at the on-set. Begin simply by asking these questions:
Where is the biggest pain? Start here! Pain can be further described as follows:
- Customers/citizens are complaining
- Cost is substantial/problematic
- Known problems are easily described

Next, an organization has to ask itself, Where are our most talented resources? Six Sigma spreads when people see with their own eyes the success it can allow teams to achieve. Therefore, picking projects that have the highest likelihood for success becomes critical during the early stages of Six Sigma implementation. In particular, ask where do we have the best:
- Leaders
- Analytical Resources
- Effective Teams that work well together

Even terrific teams can fail if their leadership does not support the effort, or if the effort doesn’t address one of the key leadership priorities/initiatives. The next question must then be, In which Agency/Organization is the top leadership willing to try Six Sigma?
- Go where the energy is highest!

Finally, in order to complete the project in a short period of time, ask this: Where do you have significant data already that would lead to effective project selection? When new data must be gathered to start a project, it requires experienced, skilled analytical people who have probably used Lean Six Sigma before. Wait until your organization has some experience, or use external resources to accomplish this data collection exercise first before you undertake an initiative in this area. Otherwise, ask yourself, “Where do we have either:
- Scorecards, Dashboards, or Metrics that are available and utilized?

Lean Six Sigma could provide countless benefits to your organization like it has in the nations’ capital. For more information on getting started or on formal Lean Six Sigma Training programs for Government, contact Ina Gjikondi at The George Washington University Center for Excellence in Public Leadership on 202-994-5313 or gjikondi@gwu.edu. You can also visit our website: http://cepl.cps.gwu.edu/