

The 2014 Innovation in Governance Awards Program

Contact Information: MAYOR LIZ LEMPERT

Municipality: PRINCETON, NJ

Population: 28,000

County: MERCER

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City: PRINCETON

Zip: 08540

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Project Information

Initiative Title: CONSOLIDATION OF PRINCETON BOROUGH AND TOWNSHIP

Description: The historic consolidation of Princeton into a single municipality has enabled increased services at lower cost and a stronger financial position for the combined government moving forward.

The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort.

Project Specific Details: *(Please explain your innovation. Include up to 3 supplemental attachments if needed.)*

- How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?
- How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?
- Are there any measured savings or program improvements?
- Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent
- How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?

Please Attach a Supplemental Sheet(s) Noting the Details of Your Initiative.
(Supplemental Attachments NOT to exceed 3 pages)

Application Deadline: Applications must be received no later than Wednesday, October 1, 2014. Mail applications to NJLM Innovation in Government 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608 or send by email to MDarcy@njslom.org

*If you have any questions, please contact Michael Darcy at the League of Municipalities
609-695-3481 ext 116 or MDarcy@njslom.org*

CONSOLIDATION OF PRINCETON BOROUGH AND TOWNSHIP

On January 1, 2013, Princeton Township and Princeton Borough consolidated into one municipality named Princeton. A standing room only crowd of residents came to celebrate the unification. Before our historic merger, the former Borough and Township did what many other communities have been doing to get by: both towns shrank the size of our staffs (by nearly 20 percent through attrition between 2005-2012) and we cut back on services. For a few years, those efforts helped to stem the tide of rising property taxes. But if we continued down that road, eventually we'd cease being able to provide the services that our residents want and expect. Worse, we would face the prospect of raising taxes and decreasing services. Consolidation of the two Princetons paved the path for a better way.

SAVINGS Gross annual savings from consolidation totaled approximately \$2.4 million in year one, and are projected to grow to \$3 million annually by 2015. The savings are largely from reduced staff levels and employee health plan savings. Through consolidation, we reduced the size of the combined municipal governments from 235 employees in 2011 to 208 employees in 2014. The savings from consolidation are permanent and, in fact, are expected to grow in future years as the top-heavy salary structure of some departments becomes better aligned through retirements and attrition.

These savings are partially offset by a \$1.1 million increase in the cost of extending residential trash collection beyond the former Borough to the consolidated town. Princeton also incurred one-time transition costs, including employee separation, department relocations, tax map revisions, IT harmonization, and legal and consulting services. These costs were budgeted at approximately \$2.3 million and are to be amortized over five years. The state has pledged to reimburse Princeton 20 percent of transition costs and has so far paid \$350,000 of its commitment of up to \$464,000.

In 2013, for the first time in many decades, Princeton reduced its tax rate. This reduction of 3.4 percent and the reduced budget followed four years of no tax increases in the Borough and two years of flat taxes in the Township. All told,

Princeton's residents pay \$560,000 less in municipal taxes in 2014 than they did in 2008, in large part due to savings from consolidation.

SERVICES Even with lower taxes, some services have actually increased under consolidation. Trash collection is now offered to all residents. Before consolidation, Township residents had to pay for private hauling. Though leaner, the public works department is more efficiently deployed and now has the staff available to refurbish the benches and sweep the streets twice a week in the downtown. A more efficient deployment of equipment and manpower has also resulted in quicker snow removal.

Service has also expanded under our consolidated police force. Through attrition, we have reduced the size of the combined force from 60 to 51 officers. As a result, the Princeton Police Department now has a more cost-effective administrative command structure that allows for a more flexible deployment of officers and the return of services that had previously been trimmed due to budget cuts. For example, the department has created the Safe Neighborhoods Unit, dedicated exclusively to proactive community policing. There is also a new traffic unit, focused on enforcement and safety. Surprisingly, despite the smaller force, we are putting more cops on the street. Since consolidation took effect, many residents have remarked that our police are more visible than ever. The concern raised during the consolidation debate — that combining and shrinking the force would lead to reductions in police services — has largely disappeared.

In September of 2014, we launched a one-stop call center for all municipal inquiries, a service that neither the former Township nor Borough had the available staff or space to provide. "Access Princeton" is operated out of the former Borough police dispatch center. This streamlined process puts the emphasis on providing service and makes it easier for residents to report concerns from potholes to barking dogs. Residents can report issues directly to the call center by phone, or by email or mobile app. The municipality can now track the number of issues that have been reported and how long we take to respond.

PARTNERSHIPS AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES Other financial benefits of consolidation include savings on capital expenditures that would have been

greater had the municipalities stayed separate. For example, consolidation freed up space at the former Borough municipal hall for relocation of Corner House, a municipal counseling center that had been previously housed in a deteriorating building, alleviating the need to construct a new facility. In addition, the public safety dispatch facilities and communications systems in both municipalities had reached the end of their useful lives. They were replaced with a single system at significant savings. Moreover, the consolidated dispatch center provides better 9-1-1 services, including reduced call transfer and centralized dispatch planning and management.

As a consolidated government, we have strengthened our relationships with other community institutions. The municipality has partnered with the Princeton Public Library and the Princeton Public Schools to hire a joint network administrator for information technology. Each institution stands to gain from the shared position through lower costs and increased service hours. The schools, library and municipality have also started discussions about working together to reduce energy usage and adopt renewables.

As another sign of strengthened community relationships, the municipality signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Princeton First Aid and Rescue Squad. The squad will build its much-needed new headquarters at the site of the former Township's public works facilities, which have been sitting dormant. In exchange, the town will acquire the squad's existing buildings and property near the Princeton Shopping Center for possible use for affordable housing.

REPLICATING IN OTHER COMMUNITIES As the first major consolidation in the state of New Jersey in decades, we hope to be a model for others. We have detailed every step of our process online, from the Consolidation Commission's reports and recommendations to the key documents produced by the Transition Task Force, which was established to facilitate implementation of the merger. (<http://www.cgr.org/princeton/>) It is nearly impossible to find a town in New Jersey that doesn't struggle with controlling taxes and maintaining service levels. Consolidation can offer a viable way to cut costs by creating true efficiencies, and positioning governments for a healthier financial future.