

The 2017 Innovation in Governance Awards Program

Contact Information:

Municipality: Village of Ridgewood

Population: 24,936

County: Bergen

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Project Information

Initiative Title: Outsourcing the Management of Crossing Guard Services to Improve the Day to Day Operations Within the Ridgewood Police Department

Description: Outsourcing the Management of Crossing Guard Services to Improve the Day to Day Operations Within the Ridgewood Police Department

The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort. Innovations must have been implemented during the time period June 1, 2016 - September 30, 2017

Project Specific Details: *(Please explain your innovation. Include up to 3 supplemental pages 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 Monday, October 2, 2017. Mail applications to NJLM Innovation in Governance, 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608 or send by email to CBradley@njslom.org

*If you have any questions, please contact Ciara Bradley at the League of Municipalities
609-695-3481 ext.128 or CBradley@njslom.org*

**OUTSOURCING THE MANAGEMENT OF CROSSING GUARD SERVICES TO IMPROVE THE
DAY TO DAY OPERATIONS WITHIN THE RIDGEWOOD POLICE DEPARTMENT**

The Village of Ridgewood has the largest school district in Bergen County, with six elementary schools, two middle schools and one public high school. The Village of Ridgewood has been in compliance with Safe Routes to School since 2008, and the Village also follows the MUTCD and NJDOT rules and recommendations of providing crossing guards for school crossings. There are 30 school posts for the crossing guards, which service the elementary and middle school children.

As is the case in almost every municipality in New Jersey, there is a challenge in being able to manage and staff all of the crossing guard posts, on a consistent basis, throughout the school year. In addition, there are costs associated with a crossing guard program, such as training, management, workers' compensation and unemployment compensation costs, during the summer months. In the Village of Ridgewood, management of the crossing guards was under the supervision of the Traffic Bureau of the Police Department, including training of the crossing guards, handling internal and citizen complaints, long term scheduling, hiring of guards, personnel issues, and site reviews. A Police Records Clerk handled notifications from the crossing guards and replacement scheduling for daily absentee assignments. However, after 11:00 a.m., the duties of the Police Records Clerk became the responsibility of the patrol supervisor to coordinate. The Village of Ridgewood was also severely understaffed with alternate crossing guards, with only two on the roster. If the alternate crossing guards were unavailable, police patrol officers covered the morning posts. Afternoon posts were covered by a parking enforcement officer (PEO), and by police patrol officers. The time spent managing the crossing guards, including the daily absences, averaged two to three hours per day.

Another challenge was crossing guard absenteeism, which caused the Ridgewood Police Department to cover an average of 551 school posts per school year. Crossing guards were allowed to call out for any reason, including illness, a doctor's appointment, bad weather, nice weather, or wanting to spend time with their grandchildren. Due to the high absentee rates of the crossing guards, most of which were covered by police patrol officers, there was a shortage in providing police services, and it was often the case that only one or two police officers were available to take calls. The hours when the crossing guards work are also when the Police Department's call volume rises, due to increased traffic and other complaints around the schools. Since fewer police officers were available, the complaints of cars passing school buses and cars not stopping for crossing guards were unable to be addressed. In the 2014 school year, from September through December, there were ten times where there were no police officers available for emergency calls because they were all on crossing guard posts. In fact, police officers covered between four to seven crossing guard posts, in a single day, during that time frame.

During the 2015 school year, corrective actions were taken, including doubling the number of alternate crossing guards, calling the PEOs in the morning to see if they would come in early to cover a morning post (this was voluntary), and holding over a PEO that was going off at 3:00 p.m. to take the first school post in the afternoon. This caused an increase in PEO overtime costs, but it allowed more police officers to be on the road. These changes reduced the amount

of posts covered by police officers in 2015, but overtime costs went up and the same management and attendance issues still existed.

The estimated total cost of running the crossing guard program was approximately \$310,000 a year, with \$195,000 of that cost being the total salary for all of the crossing guards. In 2014, when police officers covered crossing guard posts, \$47,365 was spent in salaries for police officers to cover the posts; and \$28,800 was spent in salaries for administrative tasks done by the Police Department to manage the crossing guards. In 2015, approximately \$3,000 in salaries was spent for the PEOs to cover the guard posts. The bottom line was that the Village of Ridgewood was spending a lot of money and still not fully addressing the challenge of covering all crossing guard posts while at the same time putting enough police officers on the road, to cover the call volume and enforce violations around the schools.

In trying to find a better way to manage the crossing guard program, the Ridgewood Police Department did some research and found that in other areas of the country, crossing guard services are outsourced. Beginning with the 2016 school year, the Village of Ridgewood went out for a competitive bid for a company to run the day to day operation of the crossing guard program, and All City Management Services (ACMS), was the sole bidder, at a price of \$325,000 a year (July to July). ACMS is a company which was founded in 1985 in California, and after privatizing and working with over 200 cities and school districts in California, expanded nationwide in 2012. ACMS took over Ridgewood's crossing guard program in the summer of 2016, to ensure they would be ready for the beginning of the school year. ACMS recruits, hires, trains, manages, performs background clearances, administers payroll, provides substitutes, supervision, investigates all complaints, provides problem resolution and communicates with schools and municipalities. They also maintain comprehensive General Liability, Worker's Compensation, and auto insurances to cover their clients and employees. Because the crossing guards were no longer employed by the Village of Ridgewood, the liabilities of injuries on the job and unemployment costs were no longer borne by the Village. The crossing guards employed by the Village of Ridgewood were hired by ACMS at the same salary and the same vacation/holiday compensations that the Village provided them. Training, assignments, day-to-day management, personnel issues, complaints about a crossing guard's performance and supplying uniforms are all the responsibility of ACMS.

Since the Village of Ridgewood was the first municipality in the State of New Jersey to outsource the management of the crossing guards, the legal aspects also had to be researched. ACMS was already employed by multiple cities in Michigan, where they have similar laws to New Jersey in that the crossing guards are under the direction of the Police Chief in both of these states. The Village of Ridgewood already had a similar situation because the Police, Fire, EMS and 911 dispatchers are not employed by the Village of Ridgewood, but rather by a central dispatch agency, which is run under Ridgewood's authority and under the direction of the Police Chief, by a civilian director. In essence, the dispatch function, which is under the authority of the Police Chief, has been outsourced to another entity. The Village Attorney found, because of the similarities of the Dispatch Center and Michigan law, there were no issues in using an outside contractor to manage the crossing guard program as long as the contractual agreements gave final authority to the Ridgewood Police Chief.

In evaluating the 2016 school year, the positive outcomes of the partnership with ACMS and the Village of Ridgewood are the following:

1. The Police Department only covered 13 crossing guard posts in the 2016 school year, in comparison to 666 posts in 2012; 478 posts in 2013; 510 posts in 2014 (390 by Police Officers and 120 by PEOs); and 360 posts in 2015 (180 each by Police Officers and PEOs).
2. Less than two hours per week, as compared to the previous two or three hours per day, are spent by the Police Department in the management of the crossing guards, which includes checking with the local ACMS supervisor and discussing issues, such as missing signs or motorists not stopping for the crossing guards.
3. The Police Department is now able to address traffic complaints, parking issues, conduct motor vehicle stops by the school and conduct community policing tasks. In the 2016 school year, the Ridgewood Police Department conducted 691 calls for service related to traffic safety and community policing around the schools during the morning and 555 calls in the afternoons. This is almost double the enforcement from 2015, and triple from the 2014 school year.
4. ACMS has helped with assessing the need for crossing guards and the times they are needed. For the 2017 school year, the Police Department was asked to have the crossing guards begin and end their afternoon shifts 15 minutes earlier. ACMS did a count of how many children were walking through the posts, in the afternoon, and the result, after doing a three-day count, was that every crossing guard post but one, had from two to nine children using the crossing guards in the final 15 minutes of the existing timeframe. That assessment would have taken weeks to complete, using the Village's former method of sending police patrol officers out to various crossing guard posts to do counts.
5. ACMS is also proactive by providing the Police Department with use counts of children at each crossing guard post, at the beginning and midterm of each school year. This assists the Village of Ridgewood in evaluating the needs of each individual crossing guard post, without the Police Department investing hours investigating it by using police officers to do the use counts.

Although outsourcing crossing guard services costs the Village of Ridgewood slightly more, it allows for a much greater police presence and enforcement during school hours. It also allows the time which was previously spent by the Traffic Bureau in managing the crossing guard program, to be better spent on other safety initiatives. The stakeholders in this process, have all been positive about this change. The crossing guards have expressed their satisfaction with the program, which allows them an opportunity to move up in ACMS. The parents' complaints have dwindled. The schools have positive things to say about the program. The Police Department as a whole, as well as the individual police officers, are supportive of the change, as they are now able to perform their primary function of enforcing traffic and parking violations around the schools during school hours, as well as responding to emergency calls.

In conclusion, outsourcing the management of crossing guard services is an initiative which can easily be undertaken by other New Jersey municipalities, for the betterment of all of their stakeholders. In fact, the Village of Ridgewood was so pleased with the results of this program, that an optional one-year renewal of the program was authorized by the governing body for the 2017 school year, with the expectation that it will become a permanent program in the Village of Ridgewood in future years.