

Program Excellence Award for Innovations in Local Government Management

POPULATIONS OF 50,000 AND GREATER



Sedgwick County, Kansas

The recipient of the 2004 Program Excellence Award for Innovations in Local Government Management in the 50,000-and-greater population category is Sedgwick County, Kansas, and County Manager William P. Buchanan for the Nonprofit Chamber of Service of Sedgwick County, Inc.



Sedgwick County, Kansas (pop. 450,000) has always been committed to serving the community through partnerships with local nonprofit

organizations. This commitment has helped improve relations among more than 200 local nonprofits and funders; enhanced their capacity to work, learn, and plan together; and facilitated the development of best practices for nonprofits. It was in this spirit that the county brought together leaders of nonprofit organizations interested in enhancing the quality of community services to form the Nonprofit Chamber of Service.

Sedgwick County's leadership role in this endeavor began in 2000, when the county partnered with Wichita State University's Hugo Wall School and Self-Help Network to produce a report, *Enhancing the Delivery of Public Services by Nonprofit Agencies*. Following issuance of the report, County Manager William Buchanan recommended that the county partner with the Kansas Health Foundation and asked Self-Help Network to facilitate a process to turn the report's concepts and ideas into tangible results and action. A "design team" comprised of nonprofits, county government officials, and local funders was established to plan a process by which nonprofits could increase their capacity to meet their own needs.

In 2001, the county initiated a series of retreats for nonprofits and funders to discuss how to better work together, streamline and improve contract monitoring and reporting, establish best practices in the use of national accreditation findings, create a checklist for a strong nonprofit, and plan future joint activities for capacity building. From these retreats emerged 20 local nonprofit directors and representatives whose purpose was to explore the development of a nonprofit association and to assist and be a voice for the Wichita nonprofit community.

Input from this working group led to two developments. First, Sedgwick County supported a conference at which representatives from three nationally recognized nonprofit associations discussed their own experiences in starting a nonprofit association and described the benefits to the nonprofit community. Through these discussions, Sedgwick County's nonprofits clarified what they hoped to gain from an association. Second, a joint committee of funders and nonprofits was formed to find ways to expand the pool of nonprofit board members. This committee developed the Leadership and Governance Development Project, which brings together "up-and-coming" business leaders to serve on boards and committees of local nonprofits.

In 2003, Sedgwick County brought together more than 70 nonprofits and funders to clarify the mission, produce a set of guiding principles, and create a one-year strategic plan for the Non-



Sedgwick County Manager Bill Buchanan leads a discussion among nonprofit representatives.

profit Chamber of Service. Soon after, a group of nonprofit directors became incorporators for the Nonprofit Chamber, and the group met to draft the chamber's bylaws and to complete the requirements for it to achieve nonprofit status. Nonprofits and funders then met again for a final review of the bylaws and organizational activities of the chamber, and for the nonprofits to sign letters of intent to join. To date, more than 110 nonprofits have signed up.

In January 2004, the Nonprofit Chamber of Service held its first annual meeting with nearly 100 participants. A board of 15 nonprofit directors was elected and has since held two board meetings to begin planning initial services.

The Nonprofit Chamber of Service assists the nonprofit sector in Sedgwick County in five strategic areas: capacity building, interagency collaborations, research, board and leadership development, and education and nonprofit sector advocacy. The chamber has enhanced the quality of community services by providing a strong collective voice for nonprofits, communicating with funders and government officials, sharing resources and education to help build internal capacity, and influencing the public policy environment to build community capacity. ■