

# Far-Sighted

## Long-range focus allows city government to celebrate Baldrige recognition

**AMERICANS HAVE** grown accustomed to politics-as-usual, particularly during the nonstop coverage of the current race for the White House. The political world is one that seems to cater to whatever might get a candidate or elected official immediate results or a bump in the polls.

That's what made the accomplishments of the city of Coral Springs, FL, so astounding to those who saw representatives from the community receive its 2007 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. In the first year nonprofit organizations could apply for the honor, Coral Springs became the first local government in the nation to take home the award by proving the emphasis on the present at the expense of the future doesn't permeate every inch of the political scene.

The city made its first move down the path to Baldrige recognition in 1993 with the implementation of a total quality management program. Prior to that, however, its system fell in line with just about every other government in the country as a reactive entity.

Eventually, it became clear that the usual way of doing things wasn't getting the results city leaders wanted. That gave rise to the rigorous planning process Coral Springs officials and employees steadfastly adhere to today, even when staring opposition in the face—literally.

"Politicians often are paying the most attention to the squeaky wheel in front of them. They make decisions based on politics," said Susan Grant, the city's director of HR. "But the data analysis piece has really allowed us to move away from that reactive mode. Yes, there might be a single citizen in front of you at a commission meeting complaining about this or that. But our survey results might show that 99% of the residents feel differently.

"It really allows you to be thoughtful, to be proactive—using survey data, using other process data, using our environmental scan. All of that put together allows us to plan in a meaningful way."

More accurately, it allows Coral Springs to plan in a strategic way. The City Commission instituted the process of strategic planning in 1997, and in doing so created an ongoing system that started and ended where any good company finds its alpha and omega—its customers, which the city defines as residents and businesses.

### Welcome feedback

The two-year planning process includes the creation of strategic and business plans, which set priorities and objectives, and the budget, which makes the plans a reality by defining programs and services that will serve the community's citizens. But the bookends holding up the strategy development and deployment model are the city's customers, a focus evident in Coral Springs' multipronged approach to communicating with its customer base.

No medium has gone unexplored by Coral Springs, which disseminates information via its call center

### In 50 Words Or Less

- During its improvement efforts, Coral Springs, FL, de-emphasized immediate results.
- The resulting planning process became part of the city's corporate culture.
- The shift in philosophy led to robust financial health, lower crime rates and a Baldrige award.



OUTREACH PROGRAMS like this one at a local school are one way Coral Springs communicates with its customer base.

and website, e-mail, *Coral Springs* magazine, CityTV, CityRadio and the consumer-friendly City Hall in the Mall. On top of that are the citizen advisory committees and boards—one for each strategic priority—that meet monthly with a city staff member (usually a department head) and the annual Slice of the Springs meetings held in each of the city’s six geographic segments to give residents and businesses one more opportunity to provide feedback.

That customer-centric approach has yielded impressive results, including a 10-year run of residents’ quality ratings topping 90% and a satisfaction rating from the business sector that hasn’t dipped below 92% in the last four years.

Laying the myriad choices at the feet of the citizenry was actually the easy part of a dual-input setup that also includes data analysis of a multitude of measurements. The city didn’t always emphasize the latter portion, though, and it might not have if not for a sparsely worded note from the Florida Sterling Council, which awards a Baldrige-based honor in the state.

“[The measures] have evolved over time,” Grant noted. “On our first feedback report from the Sterling award, we had absolutely no strengths in any of the results categories. It’s pretty tough to see ‘Strengths: none noted.’ But that’s where you start. You have to

find out what you’re not doing right and what you need to improve on.”

What emerged from those humble beginnings is a measurement system that links to every activity outlined in the strategic and business plans. Process owners are tasked with tracking the process measures, which are aligned with in-process measures that determine whether the process will meet requirements.

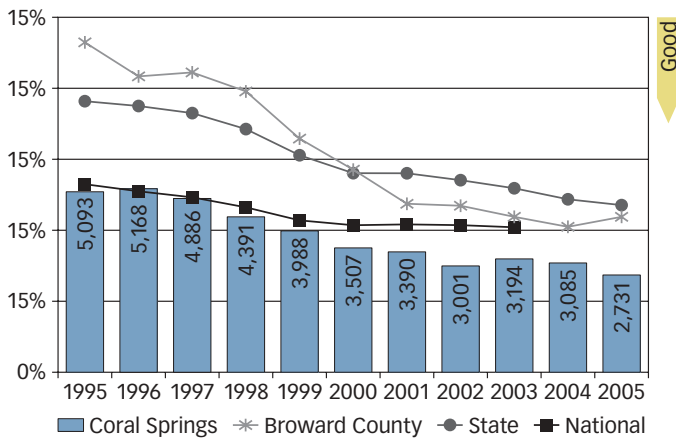
A prime example of the system in action is the tracking of emergency medical service response times. Results are analyzed daily to determine whether variation has occurred and, in turn, whether corrective actions need to be taken. Total response time is then broken down to determine the cycle times for four segments—intake, dispatch, turnout and travel—each of which have their own performance goal.

Finally, that data is reported to the State of Florida Department of Health in just one of a series of programs Coral Springs is involved in to see how it stacks up against numbers gathered from across the state and country.

### Compare and contrast

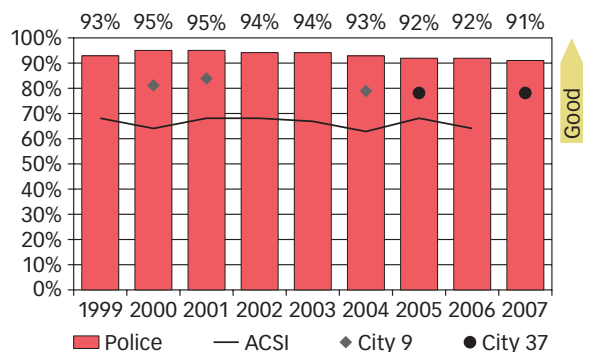
Not too long ago, the city cast a wide net with its benchmarking activities. Prior to the most recent Baldrige cycle, however, the decision was made to be

## Crime rate incidents per 100,000 (composite index indicator) / FIGURE 1



The City of Coral Springs’ crime rate is lowest in Florida and the fourth lowest in the nation for cities with populations of 100,000-499,999. The city had the 10th lowest overall crime rate in the United States in all categories.

## Residents’ quality ratings for police department / FIGURE 2



Coral Springs compares favorably to city 9 and city 37 (the only other ICMA benchmark cities with a similar question in their resident surveys), and the American Customer Satisfaction Index for police service in suburban areas.

more selective, despite the dearth of data among its governmental brethren.

“Finding comparison data in the public sector is not easy,” Grant said. “It’s probably not easy in any sector, but we think it’s more difficult for us because government doesn’t have a long history of performance measurement. In the past, we just kind of pulled comparisons from wherever we could get them. One of the bigger improvements we made in this cycle of the application was being more systematic about our comparisons.”

That meant scanning the roster of the International City/County Managers’ Assn. (ICMA) Center for Performance Management and culling a list of 80 to 100 cities to the 20 highest-performing entities that are demographically similar to Coral Springs. And when certain numbers aren’t available, the city doesn’t hesitate to contact those comparable cities to procure the data.

There are times, however, when the ICMA measures fell short due to differences in the participants’ climates, economic situations or state laws. Coral Springs addressed those shortcomings in 2005, when it teamed with 10 local Florida governments to form the Florida Benchmarking Consortium. The group, which has since expanded to 37 members, makes it possible for participants to compare performance data when it’s necessary to include regionally specific factors.

But the city doesn’t stop there. The police department, for example, provides performance data to other departments in Broward County, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Uniform Crime Reporting System of the U.S. Department of Justice and FBI.

Those efforts led, in part, to a crime rate that has been cut nearly in half over the last decade to 2,731 incidents per 100,000 people (see Figure 1)—the lowest crime rate in the state and the fourth lowest in the nation among cities with populations between 100,000 and 499,999. As a result, quality ratings for police have been above the 90% mark every year since 1999 (see Figure 2).

On paper, those are just a lot of numbers, lines and bars. In reality, it was the proof that sold the quality movement to any skeptic that came along.

“Getting over those humps was difficult at first,” Grant recalled. “We had to produce results that backed up what we were doing. If those didn’t come—and they didn’t come right away—it was going to be a hard sell. You have people asking why they should do business this way. But when our results showed this was what made our customers happy, it wasn’t a tough sell.”



TECHNOLOGICAL INVESTMENTS make it easier for the Coral Springs Police Department to serve the community and contribute to a consistently high quality rating for the department.

### WINNING APPROACH

Like how this year’s nonprofit Baldrige award recipients attacked their improvement projects? Did they miss some opportunities? Make your opinion heard in the article’s comment section at [www.qualityprogress.com](http://www.qualityprogress.com) or e-mail [editor@asq.org](mailto:editor@asq.org).