The City’s quality initiative represents a “work in progress.” Even as a Sterling Award winner, the City will continue to review services and programs with an eye toward making them cheaper, better, delivered faster and ultimately, more accessible to our customers. Here are six key lessons we’ve learned so far:

1. Implement Quality Throughout the Organization

Initially, we considered selecting a “pilot” department to test our quality initiative. However, we made a deliberate decision to implement the program simultaneously throughout the organization. Looking back, this was one of our best decisions. We found it takes the whole organization working together to understand key quality principles, and begin using them to deliver quality services and programs.

2. Match the Quality Initiative to Your Needs

Every organization’s quality initiative should contain the same basic elements. However, they should be tailored to your organization’s specific culture. When it comes to building a quality initiative, there is no such thing as “one size fits all.”

3. Use Quality Consultants Wisely

We used quality consultants on selected elements where City staff did not have enough expertise, such as creating customer service standards or process improvement training. And we used consultants to develop systems so we could pick up after they left. That way, we could evaluate and improve our approach to meet changing requirements.

4. Focus on Results

It’s critical to know the initial results the quality initiative is expected to produce. It’s equally important to communicate these results as soon as they happen. A quality initiative will take 5-7 years to fully implement -- far too long for most of us to wait for the pat on the back. Still, an effective quality initiative can produce many early “wins” -- sharing those as they occur will help create the enthusiasm necessary for full implementation and maximum results.

5. Avoid the Quality Teams Trap

It’s important to use limited resources for the organization’s core purposes. Initially, employees may believe that a quality initiative takes them away from their “real” jobs -- especially if special project teams are introduced too early. We decided to integrate quality into the key business processes that City employees use in their day-to-day jobs.

6. Linked, Streamlined Measurement

Measurement systems quickly get cumbersome even if you’re careful to keep them trimmed down. It is better to measure only what is critical and timely. Equally important, all measures should be clearly linked to implementation of strategic priorities. Measurement that isn’t used kills the credibility of the system and eventually, the system.