

Lean Government Case Study: Jacksonville, Florida's Top Cop Wins with Lean

John Rutherford was first elected Sheriff of Jacksonville, Florida in July of 2003. He was re-elected in 2007, and then again to a third term in 2011. Not long after his third term win, Jeff Fuchs, Director of the Maryland World Class Consortia, spoke with Sheriff Rutherford in his office to discuss his success in leading the lean transformation of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.



How Lean Began in the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office

Shortly after taking office in 2003, Sheriff Rutherford assessed his department. "I thought to myself, 'There are a lot of things around here that we could do better...if we only had the people.'" Then, something happened that changed everything.

"We got into lean because of a bad internal situation that we discovered during a reorganization of departments," says Rutherford. The "bad situation" involved an officer "who had been squirreling away money" from seized vehicles and property for five years. "Part of the reason this happened was the way we were set up: vertical chains of command and horizontal processes."

The unfortunate situation prompted Sheriff Rutherford to look for ways to improve departmental processes. Several local businesspeople encouraged him to consider lean principles, and after educating himself and key staff members in lean tools and principles, he developed a ten-point plan to assure excellence in the department and he launched an initiative with lean as its centerpiece. It wasn't long before Sheriff Rutherford saw clearly that lean was "a perfect fit" for his agency.

Lean Takes Hold Across the Department

The Sheriff's Office early efforts with lean proceeded just as they would in a private company. First, Rutherford turned to the Jacksonville Lean Consortium, and they advised the Sheriff and his team on how to get started. The Consortium stressed that buy-in comes first, then, immediately after, deployment starts, and goes from the bottom up. Leaders commit and people improve.

"First, they said, this has got to be from the top down. Then you've got to get a group started," he said. "You have to be very successful in the beginning. Look for the low hanging fruit."

From there, Rutherford and his team worked to get everyone involved and to begin anchoring lean thinking into the culture. "We had a lot of rapid improvement events, so that everybody got a little taste. Then, I went to all the event report outs, to show my support for [lean]. When you start recognizing those people doing the lean improvement work – when staff and others see how important it is to me – then it becomes important to them. ...Once they see that this is not a "program", not a flash in the pan...well, you can't buy the goodwill that creates."

The Sheriff's Office Continuous Improvement Unit supports internal training and development of the department's employees and officers, all of whom are primarily responsible for finding and implementing improvement opportunities every day. The CI Unit received their training through the Jacksonville Lean Consortium and the CI Unit has, in turn, trained more than 1,500 officers and civilian staff in lean concepts and tools.

Over the last eight years, lean has spread to all areas of the department. Everyone works to improve the part of the department in which they are working. Lean gets better results than the conventional approaches used in other government offices. Ideas are more innovative, employees are more engaged, and the department gets faster and more substantial performance results.

At one point, the local detention facility experienced an overcrowding problem. With a capacity of 3,300 inmates, the prison population was reaching four thousand. After studying the matter, a Sheriff's Office panel recommended building a new wing of six hundred eighty-four new beds at a cost of \$32 million, which was an unaffordable proposition. Sheriff Rutherford sent the panel back to work, this time with the support of seasoned lean practitioners. A new answer came back: How about 894 beds for eighty-four thousand dollars?

Inmates in the prison's metal shop constructed the new bunks, which were built into the walls to save materials. Existing cells had sufficient room for additional inmates, which eliminated the need for new bricks and mortar. In the end, office employees used existing labor, materials, and space to create new capacity that saved taxpayers millions.

Not all improvements have been huge in scope or dollar value savings, and some have improved the department in ways that may not first appear obvious or substantial. But each improvement contributes to service quality to the community, efficiency, safety, or the morale of his people.

Sheriff Rutherford explained one example with school crossing guards. "When school crossing guards are absent it means I'm tying up a police officer, which affects public safety. So, when we looked at the reason why, we found out that it was the ninety day hiring process. These crossing guards only get paid minimum wage. They step up to do it mainly because they love the kids, and then we put them through such a ringer to get hired.... Ninety percent of the people in the process said, 'You know what? I love kids, but I don't love 'em *that* much.' And then they drop out of the process."

"Our lean event dropped that to seven days. We get something like ninety six percent of the applicants staying in the process. Our crossing guard staff stays full. We don't have to send officers out to man those corners, and it turns into a huge savings...a huge savings."

Sheriff Rutherford holds this case and others up as examples of what lean can achieve. "We just made a better process," he says. "We didn't lay anybody off. We just made the process quicker. It's about improving service. It's not just about cutting money all the time. [The focus is on] that continuous improvement triangle of speed, quality, and cost."

What Lean is About

Sheriff Rutherford understands that lean is not about driving ruthlessly toward financial objectives at the expense of people. Lean is not "mean". Lean is about creating a culture where people can contribute meaningfully to improving – everywhere, all the time. "If a leader's focus is only on saving money, I don't think they'll be anywhere near as effective [as a true lean thinker], because they're already off track a bit. Your first concern has got to be your people. This is why we embraced it in the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. Not just for the dollar savings – that's a part of it – but because it is better for your people."

"Not only do I get great processes, but I get happier people working in those great processes, so this is exactly what we were looking for. As leader, my responsibility is to build an organization where people want to achieve. I do that by providing jobs worth doing, removing obstacles, and rewarding them for successes – that's lean."

Results and the Future of Lean Government in Jacksonville

John Rutherford recently was elected to a third term as Sheriff of Jacksonville. He states very emphatically that his reelection success was based largely on results achieved through lean. "We took over thirty million out of our budget because of lean." That figure does not include, by the way, the cost avoidances like the local prison mentioned before. "If you throw in the money, not that we saved, but that we didn't spend," Rutherford observes, "the cost that we avoided was also huge."

Citizens are obviously pleased with the results, although they may not be clear on how they are being achieved behind the scenes. Trying to get citizens to understand lean and how important it has been to law enforcement in the city of Jacksonville would be a difficult task. Sheriff Rutherford does not try to make citizens experts in lean. "They see the results," he says. "And that's good enough for them."

Enthusiasm among staff for the Jacksonville Sheriff Office's lean effort is reflected in the number of employee suggestions, which went from about three per year to more than a hundred. All suggestions are responded to within 35 days, and Rutherford estimates that about half are implemented.

What future goals does John Rutherford hold for lean during his third term in office?

"What I'd like to see is where the lean office eventually goes away." He goes further to explain that, "These guys and gals don't need anybody to come in and do something to their areas because that's their responsibility. And that's what we want to drive home: Every officer out there should be thinking about process improvements. That shouldn't have to come from us. That's where I want to get to: Where everybody's just thinking all the time in a lean way. They're thinking, 'we can we do this better.' And that's just part of the culture."

The city of Jacksonville and the state of Florida have taken notice of the Sheriff's Office success with lean. They are using Sheriff John Rutherford's success as a model and are gearing up to expand his model to other areas. "The fire departments are ready, Rutherford notes. "Other agencies are watching and they are ready, too."

As of this writing, Florida's governor, Rick Scott, is designing a statewide lean program that will span all agencies and departments. The Sheriff's Office is one model Governor Scott and his team will use to design their approach.

To Learn More About Lean Government:

Learn how the Maryland World Class Consortia can help your government organization use simple and effective methods of continuous improvement to increase service levels, shorten response times, reduce cost, and improve employee satisfaction.

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