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Chesterfield County-the Road to Customer Focused Service through Training and Development

Chesterfield County, with a population of approximately 311,000, is a local government nestled in the heart of the Commonwealth of Virginia, adjacent to the Capital City of Richmond, encompassing 446 square miles. The county, with an adopted FY2008 budget of \$1,103,407,700, provides a wide range of award winning municipal programs and services including public safety, health and welfare, parks and recreation, cultural activities, community development, water and wastewater services, and public health. Programs and services are delivered in a variety of ways - in person, on-line, by telephone and mail, via print and electronic media, as well as physical facilities (parks, libraries, airport, etc.) through a diverse and talented workforce.

Chesterfield County is currently in the forefront among local governments in creating its own corporate university, Chesterfield University. Ranked 38th on Training Magazine's Top 125 listing in 2009, Chesterfield University brings a wide variety of mission centric learning opportunities to county employees while enhancing organizational effectiveness. The curriculums, organized in six Schools of Learning, are linked to one or more of the county's seven strategic goals, eight core competencies and nine values. Learning opportunities enhance career development, reinforce employee performance expectations, drive the business strategy and encourage "*learning for a lifetime*". Chesterfield County has made learning more efficient, while streamlining the process and maximizing county resources.

Customer Focused Service is an organizational value, a strategic goal and one of the core competencies in the County's performance evaluation system. Each employee is evaluated annually on their competency in customer service. These principles are supported by

instructor led, classroom training and special learning initiatives conducted by Chesterfield University.

New Employee Orientation sets a strong foundation for new employees to develop an understanding of the county's service culture. The county's customer service standards are introduced and employees are challenged to consider their department's customers and their requirements.

Within 90 days of hire, we reinforce and expand our customer service training with two required courses in Exceptional Customer Service, where employees are tasked with both pre-work and in-class activities to define their specific customers and practice their service skills in scenario-based exercises. Designed to bring the customer experience to the classroom, this learning ensures that employees have full understanding of the county's and their department's service strategy and standards and a clear understanding of the customers they serve. Level 3 evaluations completed by 51% of the employees who attended these classes indicate they are applying 95% of the learning objectives from the two classes on the job.

The county's Guide to Services is discussed as a key support tool for employees to reference in reinforcing and transferring this learning to their job.

After training is completed, the county monitors progress using several internal indicators in order to understand current trends and make improvements that will have a positive influence on customer satisfaction. These include the CARES System (which tracks the number of county complaints and compliments received), individual department performance measures, citizen surveys, community focus groups and individual performance plans. The Internal Audit department does periodic "secret shopping" to check on compliance with the County's customer service standards (which were developed in response to data from Citizen Satisfaction Surveys conducted every two years). This focus on customer service has helped the county achieve improved service marks on our overall Citizen Satisfaction Index which, for the second consecutive year increased 6 percentage points to 83% in 2006 compared to the ACSI index of 68%.

In February 2009, Chesterfield University introduced R³ = Reaching for Real Results. This new offering is "portable learning" designed to bring a 1 hour learning module to county departments for inclusion in a

department, staff or unit meeting. The first learning module, entitled *Servicing the Difficult Customer*, is intended to reinforce the concepts covered in our instructor led courses and promote the transfer of learning from the classroom to departmental service delivery. It was developed in response to the County Administrator's concern that the stress of the economy may make our customers more difficult to serve. A facilitator and participant guide have been distributed to departments. These sessions can be used to reinforce departmental processes and customer service standards. It is intended departments will facilitate their own meetings but Chesterfield University staff can assist if needed.

Beyond the introductory training, specific offerings are custom designed upon request to meet the business needs of individual work units. Chesterfield University added a new dimension to its customer service curricula with the purchase of an innovative course, Customer Star Service, and subsequent customization to include business specific case studies. This curriculum is designed to improve frontline customer service skills through the application of a six step model, the use of simulations to apply learning in a safe environment and, finally, taking live customer service calls in the classroom and receiving immediate feedback. Building Inspections was the first department to take advantage of this new curriculum to certify their customer service representatives. To that end, employees attended 32 hours of classroom training, applied the six step service model to live service calls from citizens, and passed an exam. The department has maintained skill levels by continuing a "secret shopper" process throughout the year, followed by meetings to provide feedback and coaching for improved performance. The Planning Department also completed this training prior to the opening of the new Community Development Building. Eligibility workers from the Social Services Department completed a modified version of this training prior to the opening of the call center. In addition to specific customer service classes, other courses Chesterfield University offers in interpersonal skills continue to support employee success in delivering world class customer service.

Chesterfield University also offers consulting and training services to external customers. Customized customer service classes have been developed and delivered for the Virginia Institute of Government and several localities in Virginia.