

History indicates that the growth of our nation was based on sharing.

“Generosity and sharing are greatly valued. Most Indians freely exchange property and food. The respected person is not one with large savings, but rather one who gives generously.”

Indian Values, Attitudes and Behaviors - Joann Sebastian Morris

Times are now dictating that we must consider returning to the values of the Native Americans who first settled this country and taught our founding fathers. They valued sharing out of necessity. We evolved into a society that cherishes home rule. As our country and our economy has grown, we have to revisit those philosophies. Economic survival will once again require sharing of our resources.

In 1991, Somerset County took the bold step of employing the services of a consultant to survey municipalities and school districts to determine:

What is being shared?

What do communities want to share?

What are the obstacles to sharing?

This proactive stance was taken in anticipation to slow economic growth for the state and the resulting decreases in state aid, increased reliance on local property taxes to fund essential services, and necessary expenses outpacing revenues, particularly in public education. In the nearly two decades since this initiative began, these predictions have become undeniably true.

Somerset County’s Shared Service initiative has continued to be driven by the public’s demand for a high level of service and resistance to higher taxes. Because of the foresight and commitment of both political and business sector leadership since 1991, Somerset County has remained ahead of the curve.

The Somerset County Business Partnership has taken the lead in advancing the cause of Shared Services because new development, whether in the corporate, industrial, retail, or residential sector, will increase the demand for municipal services. In order to maintain service levels, costs must be minimized. There will be growth in Somerset County. We are working on all levels to ensure that it is Smart Growth.

The following pages will show the methods utilized by municipalities school districts, and County agencies to save nearly \$20 million annually, savings that directly benefit taxpayers. The Somerset Shared Services Coordinating Council, a board consisting of representatives from each of the participating entities, and the Somerset County Municipal Managers Association meet regularly to detail needs and develop methods of sharing. It is to their credit and because of their creativity, that the taxpayers save and the governments maintain service delivery.

In 2007, 21 municipalities, 17 school districts, Somerset County Vocational and Technical Schools, Somerset County Educational Services Commission, Raritan Valley Community College, and 7 departments of Somerset County government with leadership provided by the Board of Chosen Freeholders participated in these initiatives.

The success of recent years has served to further enhance the reputation of Somerset County as the flagship for shared service initiatives in New Jersey and beyond. As this reputation has spread across the state, other governmental agencies have reached out to the Somerset County Business Partnership to share expertise and learn the methodology that has led to success.

