

OPERATIONAL STUDY OF CERTAIN FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

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Prepared for



COUNTY OF ERIE



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Overview of the Study

In October 2001, the Firms of Lumsden & McCormick, LLP (L&M) and the Center for Governmental Research, Inc. (CGR) were engaged by Erie County (the County) to identify opportunities to achieve service and efficiency improvements through reorganization of how various functions and departments carried out their work, commonly referred to as "reengineering." This report summarizes L&M/CGR's findings and recommended strategies which we believe the County can successfully implement to make its operations more efficient while continuing to provide a high level of service.

A key element of the study from its inception was to deliberately not accept the current basic organization of the County as an inflexible "given." The thinking was that County organization in New York State has been largely a product of the past, when all counties (including urban counties) were organized around a board of supervisors that acted as both executive and legislature. Under this arrangement, each operating department in all counties reported directly and only to its designated supervisor or committee of the board of supervisors. Thus, there was little interdepartmental contact and coordination and no unified oversight of the departments. In effect, each department operated as an independent unit, with oversight coming only from its particular legislative contact, and with countywide budgetary limitations being the sole unifying factor.

The board of supervisors was replaced in Erie County in the mid-1960s by a county executive form of government. This in theory provided central executive authority, but the underlying philosophy of operations for the County has remained essentially intact from the past – everything is organized around departmental operations, which may in some cases not be most effective or efficient.

The study therefore deliberately set out to investigate County operations from a functional viewpoint, rather than from the standard departmental orientation. L&M/CGR conducted a detailed evaluation of several major County operations and reviewed several other major functions from a broader, functional perspective. The County Charter and Code support a more centralized control and management style which in turn indicates that a functional organization of County activities seems appropriate.

The study was limited in scope to those departments reporting directly to the County Executive and County Comptroller, thus excluding departments managed by separately elected officials, as well as the County library system, Erie County Medical Center and Erie Community College. The principles identified are nonetheless generally applicable to all departments of the County. For instance, a Department of Fleet Operations (see below) could easily embrace Sheriff's Department vehicles under the guidelines outlined.

The project was further guided by the knowledge that the County was undertaking a second, far larger project, involving the replacement of its data processing system with a new generation of software (the ERP project). The ERP project actually began about three months after the commencement of this study, and will continue through 2004. An integral part of the ERP project is the mapping and blueprinting of the County's various procedures, processes, and future requirements, and finding the best practice available within the capabilities of the software selected. Essentially, the ERP project is concerned with the detailed, step-by-step business processes of Countywide and departmental functions, which will in many cases result in significant procedural changes.

