



## **CASE STUDY:**

# **Supervisors' Academy provides Empowerment and Organizational Change**

## **The Client**

One of the largest cities in the United States and a major Great Lakes port with globally renowned legacies.

## **The Situation**

A new administration signaled that business as usual in city government practices required change. Leadership also acknowledged the demand to improve existing performance and management process, and to raise the level of individual initiative and accountability among city workers. The existing processes supported a status quo attitude and required a transformation to reflect the vision of the new administration. It was decided to revise the city's performance philosophy as part of a goals-based governance system.

## **The Challenge**

The city needed to provide leadership skills training for supervisors within the context of a cultural change. At the same time, the city wanted to:

- Encourage supervisors to assume decision-making responsibilities
- Promote cross-departmental cooperation
- Provide a foundation upon which other leadership training could be built

## **The Solution**

IRI Consultants collaborated with the city to create an integrated training initiative that enabled supervisors to have greater decision-making responsibility without



waiting for additional instructions and direction. To provide the tools needed to move the city toward these goals and objectives, IRI designed the Supervisors' Academy to instill pride and a sense of empowerment among city employees. The Supervisors' Academy focuses on the concept that in today's environment, there is no prescribed set of "right" answers, rather multiple sets of best options. The academy teaches participants how to make informed decisions from these options.

The Supervisors' Academy applies real-life scenarios, using a variety of teaching tools, to challenge the question: "What are the barriers that keep you from getting work done?" Role-playing allows the participants to differentiate between perceived barriers, barriers that they can deal with, and barriers beyond their control. In a highly interactive environment, the participants find they share more common problems than individual and/or disparate problems with others.

## **The Results**

The Supervisors' Academy develops a sense of excitement, encouragement, and personal satisfaction in the participants. But, it also uses a series of critical measurements that provides a system of ongoing feedback to city leaders, defining new and recurring barriers. These barriers are gathered on the first day of the five-day academy, sorted into categories, input into a database, and analyzed. The data serves as a barometer for the city regarding concerns of the supervisors and shifts in attitudes over time.

## **Lessons Learned**

The city has profited measurably from the Supervisors' Academy. Not only has the academy provided individual learning skills for the participants, but it has provided a platform for coordinating the goals of the city to improve its long-term performance, work processes, and communications. This organizational development emphasis uses social science to accomplish objectives. It targets the city's culture, including systems, processes, and rewards. By working on "people" issues, it allows positive and lasting change at a relatively low cost.