

# Management Partners



To: Ms. Cheryl Harrison–Lee, Interim County Administrator  
Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas

From: Byron Marshall, Project Director, NFBPA/i4x  
Andy Belknap, Senior Vice President  
Scott Meyer, Special Advisor, Management Partners  
Sharon Subadan, MPS, ICMA-CM, CPM, Special Advisor, NFBPA/i4x

Subject: Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City Kansas  
Organization Assessment

Date: August 31, 2022

---

## **Executive Summary**

Management Partners and its joint venture partner, The Institute for Excellence in Public Service (i4x), are pleased to provide this memorandum summarizing the results of our organization assessment of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City Kansas (UG). We were engaged to conduct a high-level evaluation of the overall organizational structure of the UG. The goal was to develop recommendations for optimization through adjustments that can yield immediate benefits, as well as recommendations where more in-depth review and analysis would likely yield significant long-term benefits. UG leaders were especially interested in identifying opportunities for organizational improvement, efficiencies, and potential cost savings.

To accomplish this work the Management Partners/i4x team conducted extensive interviews with UG officials and the directors of most departments. We also reviewed pertinent data and documents, including budgets and financial data, strategic plans, audit reports, performance metrics, and organization charts.

Any large, complex organization has opportunities for improvement and the UG is no exception. Our team found that 25 years after the consolidation of the city and county governments into the UG, systemic operational, organizational, and executive leadership challenges exist across the Unified Government. Some of the challenges are likely remnants of compromises from the consolidation; others are likely the product of incremental changes to fix a problem.

From a conceptual standpoint it helps to think of the UG structure as a consolidated city/county formation mostly in name and not in function. The government has barely begun to achieve the potential gains associated with this structure. This is true for a variety of reasons, some due to legal complexities but most due to the difficulty of and resistance to change. The unification solved an immediate financial problem and relieved the pressure for further change. A truly unified government, however, could be significantly nimbler and more responsive and would allow the UG to be more successful achieving its most urgent objective of economic development.

The following observations suggest high-level ways for the organization to improve its functioning and evolve into a more truly unified city/county government.

1. ***The UG's current organization structure results in an unwieldy span of control for the County Administrator.*** Reducing the number of direct reports will increase the time the County Administrator can devote to strategic thinking and building cooperative alliances both inside the government and with other entities outside of the UG.
2. ***The UG's current organization structure limits synergy between functional units.*** A reorganization that aligns functions and identifies functional consolidation opportunities can optimize performance across the organization.
3. ***Strategic and business plans for the UG and its departments are either non-existent, underutilized, outdated, or insufficient.*** A modern multi-year strategic planning, goal setting and evaluation process that cascades down through the organization can support the vision of leadership and efforts of a complex local government like the UG to act with intention and purpose and align resources with priorities.
4. ***The lack of coordination in the use of information technology across the entire UG exposes the agency to significant risk and creates inefficiencies.*** Centralizing information technology (IT) functions and adopting government-wide IT policies can enhance efficiencies, effectiveness, cyber-security, and communication.
5. ***Opportunities exist to consolidate functions and achieve increased collaboration with partner agencies to improve efficiencies and effectiveness.*** Just as internal functions could be improved through evaluation, collaboration, coordination, and consolidation, the UG's work with partners could also benefit from a similar examination of what is working well and where improvements can be made.
6. ***More effective communications within the organization would support a higher level of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration.*** Development of a communications plan that emphasizes strategic focus, the free flow of information, and open, frequent, and respectful interactions will provide a foundation for more effective work across the UG.
7. ***The organization would benefit from promoting a culture of continuous improvement.*** Improved communications will help develop this culture. Also needed is the articulation of mission, vision, strategic priorities, and measurable performance goals supported by regular evaluation.



## **Project Approach**

### *Interviews*

To gather information and perspectives about the UG, Management Partners interviewed a broad range of leaders across the organization. The interviews were designed to assess organizational functioning and opportunities for improvement. The following individuals were interviewed either in person or virtually:

- Mayor
- Interim County Administrator
- Four Assistant County Administrators
- Economic Development Advisor to the Mayor
- Chief of Staff to the Mayor
- Police Chief
- Fire Chief
- Emergency Management Director
- Purchasing Director
- Public Works Director
- Water/Wastewater Director
- Parks and Recreation Director
- Information Technology Director
- Performance and Innovation Manager
- Budget Director
- County Engineer
- Community Development Director
- Planning and Urban Design Director
- Economic Development/Land Bank Director
- Communications Director

### *Document and Data Review*

Management Partners reviewed the following documents and data provided by the UG or obtained from other sources.

- Operating and capital budgets
- Annual comprehensive financial reports
- Strategic plans
- General plans
- Contracts with service providers
- Legislative audit reports
- Job descriptions
- Community survey results
- Broadcasts of Board of Commissioner meetings
- Newspaper articles
- Charter of the Unified Government



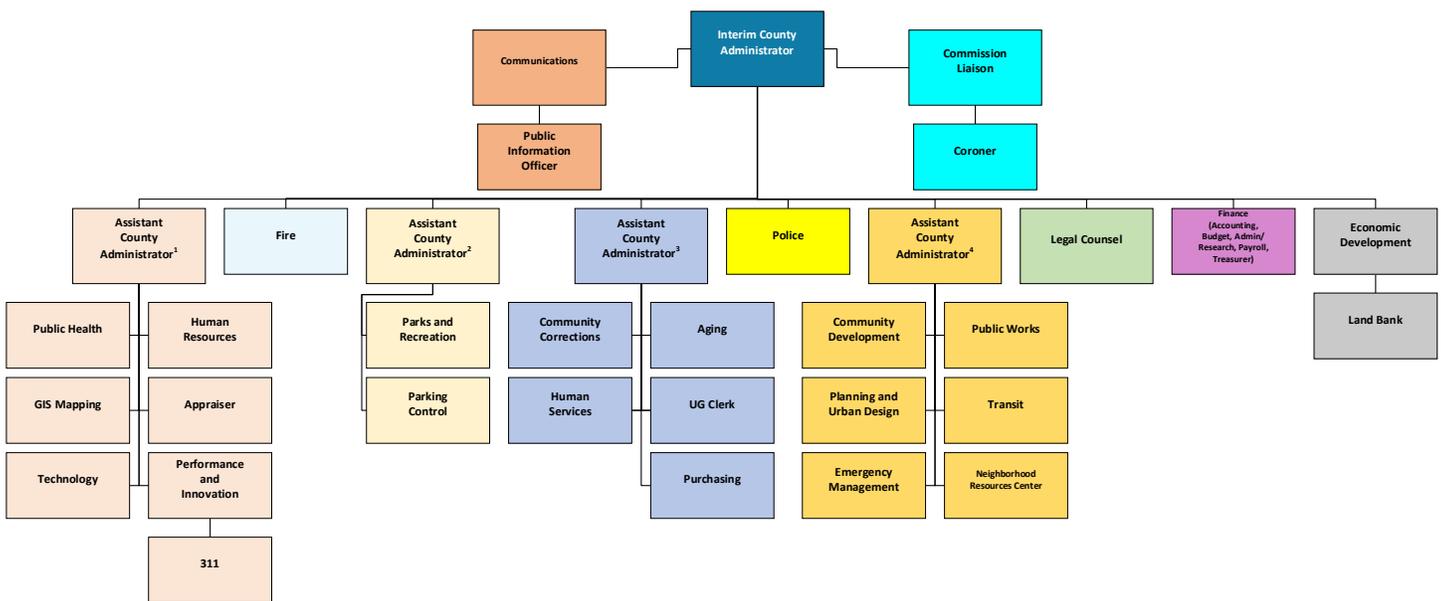
- Organization charts

## Opportunities for Organizational Improvement

### Organization Structure

Organization structures evolve over time, with changes that respond to specific circumstances layered over one another. This is especially true in large and complex organizations such as the UG. A realignment that may have made sense in one context may not be effective at a future point in time, especially given changes in priorities, staffing, technology, fiscal conditions, and other factors. The functions of the UG are currently misaligned, exacerbating the lack of strategic focus, communication, and collaboration. The organization’s current structure is shown in Figure 1. The organization chart is colored to show those functions that are currently aligned under the same supervisor.

Figure 1. Current UG Organization Structure



The promise of a unified government with the size and complexity of this organization is best realized through units and departments that are functionally aligned to take advantage of synergies and improve coordination and communication, thereby increasing overall effectiveness and efficiencies.

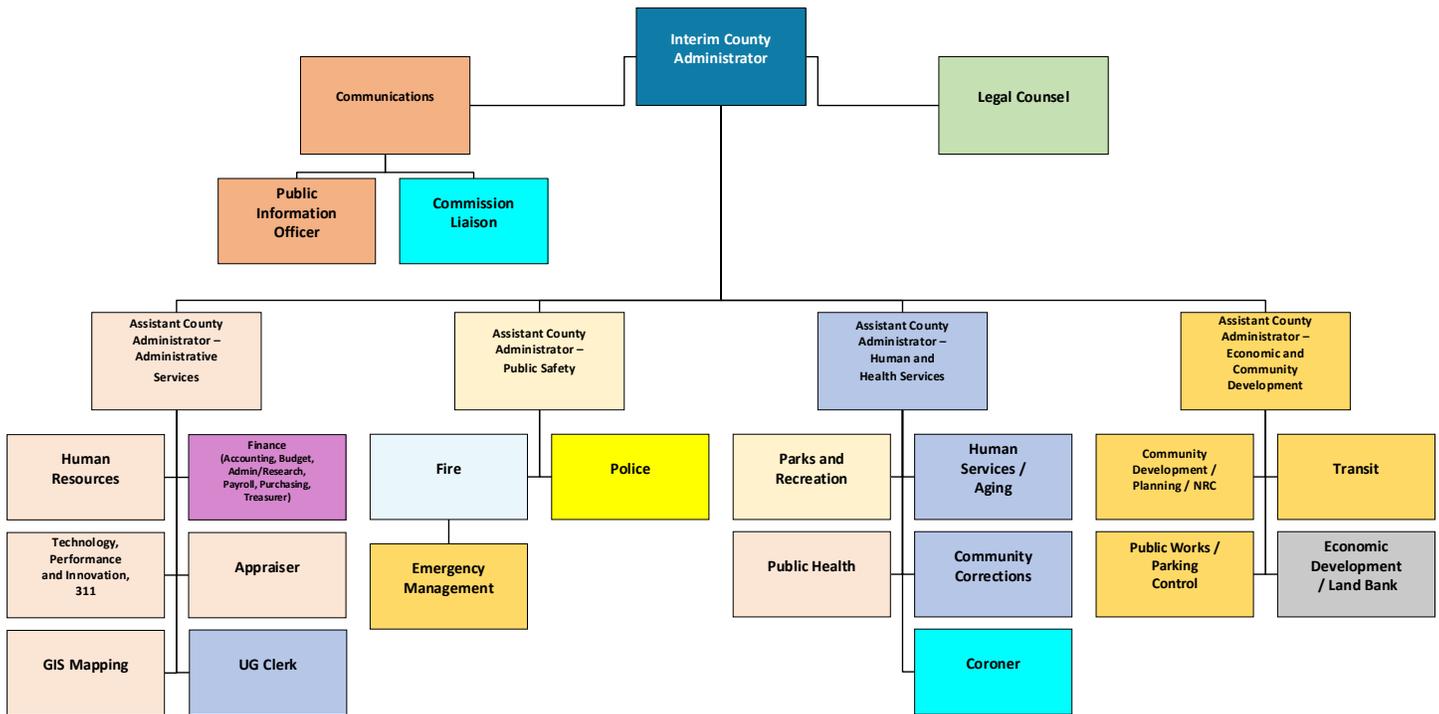
**Recommendation 1. Evaluate the placement of functional units within departments and the overall organization structure to properly align functions in the organization.**

**Recommendation 2. Undertake targeted organizational restructurings to take advantage of synergies and improve coordination.**



Through our interviews and analysis, we developed a potential organization structure that could enable the UG to function more effectively, as a truly unified city/county government. Figure 2 shows a more functionally aligned organization structure with reduced spans of control (retaining the colors for each department from Figure 1).

Figure 2. Potential New Organization Structure



The above restructuring accomplishes the following:

1. **It reduces direct reports to the County Administrator from 11 to 6.** The six direct reports are four Assistant County Administrators, Communication (including Public Information Officer and Commission Liaison), and Legal Counsel.
2. **It aligns complementary/related functions under Assistant County Administrators (ACAs).** The groupings are Administrative Services, Public Safety, Health Services, and Economic and Community Development.
3. **It aligns administrative services functions under one ACA.** This ACA would oversee Finance (including Purchasing), Human Resources, Technology (including Performance and Innovation), GIS Mapping, Appraiser, and Clerk. This ACA would also support the Election Commissioner, Register of Deeds, and Legislative Auditor.
4. **It aligns public safety functions under one ACA.** This ACA would support Police and Fire (with Emergency Management reporting to Fire), as well as the Sheriff, District Attorney, District Court, and Municipal Court.



5. **It aligns health and human services functions under one ACA.** This ACA would support Human Services (including Aging), Community Corrections, Coroner, Public Health, and Parks and Recreation.
6. **It aligns economic and community development functions under one ACA.** Responsibilities for this ACA are Community Development (including Planning and NRC), Public Works (including Parking Control), and Economic Development (including Land Bank).

An additional option would be to hire or designate one of the ACAs as a Deputy County Administrator, and perhaps hire an Assistant to the County Administrator to help coordinate internal operations. This would allow the County Administrator more time to devote to strategic level issues and work with the Mayor, Commission, Board of Public Utilities (BPU), regional planning commission, school districts, the state, surrounding jurisdictions, the business community, and other entities on issues of long-term importance to the UG and the community.

It should be noted that while complementary services are aligned under ACAs, care should be taken to avoid creating silos. Instead, cross-functional teams should be encouraged to address UG-wide goals or issues. Community Corrections, for example, may reside in the Health and Human services cluster of services because it has substance abuse treatment and workforce re-entry components designed to prevent recidivism, but it also has a parole and probation component that requires close policy alignment with the District Attorney, District Court, the Sheriff, and Police Department. Increasing flexibility and adaptability in addressing cross-cutting issues will require clear communication of mission and responsibilities, coordination, training, and communication between the ACAs regarding measurable outcomes and resource allocation.

### *Management System*

A management system is the array of policies and practices used to plan, manage, and assess the work of an organization and the performance of staff in achieving results. It encompasses the full range of processes that a management team uses to operate the government. This can include:

- Strategic Planning
- Work Planning
- Operating Budget Planning
- Capital Improvement Budget
- Information Technology Planning
- Financial Sustainability Planning
- Communication
- Executive Management
- Departmental Management
- Project Management
- Performance Management System
- Commission Support
- Agenda Preparation
- Commission Referrals
- Administrative Policies and Processes
- Organizational Development
- Hiring and On-Boarding
- Succession Planning
- Employee Relations
- Employee Recognition
- Performance Appraisal Process



Defining the management system in use enables officials to identify what is working well, where gaps exist, and what can be improved.

**Recommendation 3. Develop a common UG management system integrated with departmental business plans that can be used at the divisional and program level by management staff.**

**Recommendation 4. Train all UG management staff in how to use the management system and participate in business planning.**

Articulating the UG's management system will likely identify opportunities for improvement that will benefit the organization in the future. It will also identify the components that are working well, those that are not as important to use any longer, and the "holes" in the system. By making the management system explicit, UG staff can refine and strengthen it and clarify what it is and how it is to be used. This will create a clear Unified Government management system that will be transparent throughout the enterprise and teachable to new managers.

### *Strategic Planning*

Strategic planning is fundamental to successful work planning. It enables the goals of the organization to be aligned with the annual budget processes and helps use resources intelligently. Periodic review and updating of a strategic plan ensures that current realities (internal and external) are taken into consideration and appropriately factored into the operations of the organization.

The UG does not have a culture of developing formal plans, executing those plans, and measuring results. Countywide and departmental strategic and business planning is needed, followed by implementation planning.

Initiating a modern multi-year strategic planning process geared to a complex local government like the UG would benefit the organization. The strategic plan should be focused both internally and externally, with goals that are integrated. Budget allocations should be tied to the goals, priorities, and outcome metrics of the strategic plan. Departments should then develop business plans that tie measurable objectives to strategic goals to support the priorities of the strategic plan.

**Recommendation 5. Develop an organization-wide strategic plan.**

**Recommendation 6. Develop a departmentally based annual business planning process.**

Economic development emerged in interviews as a particular concern for many UG officials. A specific, proactive, comprehensive, and coordinated economic development strategic plan developed with the input of the UG's Economic Development Division, Community Development, Planning and Finance Departments, and community and regional partners would support the efforts of the UG to improve its economic development and redevelopment efforts.



**Recommendation 7. Develop an economic development strategic plan in coordination with regional partners.**

*Communication*

Communication in any complex organization is challenging. Within UG this challenge is exacerbated by the fact that the “unification process” was extremely ad-hoc and communication protocols were never established. Feedback we received in interviews with UG officials included:

- Communication between executive leadership needs improvement;
- Communication from executive leadership to staff needs to improve as staff are sometimes not aware of the administration’s strategy, goals, and directives; and
- Department staff work in silos and do not communicate well, which results in duplication of effort and resources and/or gaps in implementation and strategy.

Communication within high-performing teams requires a strategic focus aligned throughout an organization, the free flow of information, a shared agreement that no topic is off limits, and frequent and respectful interactions among team members and other individuals in the organization. A concerted effort to evaluate communication efforts within the UG and identify ways to improve them would benefit the organization as a whole and support other efforts to improve work. Regular cabinet level meetings between the County Administrator, Assistant County Administrators and department heads should also be implemented. This will help keep UG senior executive leadership informed, build a strong management team, and monitor progress towards UG goals.

**Recommendation 8. Initiate weekly meetings between executive leadership with consistent agendas linked to management plans.**

**Recommendation 9. Develop and implement a communications strategy and plan for UG staff to deliver a consistent message and ensure the ongoing implementation of key initiatives.**

*Additional Opportunities for Improvement*

In addition to the areas discussed above, our interviews and analysis identified specific issues within the UG that merit additional evaluation and potential action. Each is described below.

*Development Review*

The development review process is a highly visible and complex function of a local government. The significant resources the private sector devotes to develop property requires a particular sensitivity to the time and quality of review for residential and commercial developments. Finding a balance between the public policy and legal requirements of such work, and the need for frequent users of the development review process to feel they are well-served by it, is the challenge faced by local governments across the country.



In the UG, the development review process involves various departments and divisions that do not effectively coordinate or communicate. Information available to applicants about the development review process seems to be insufficient for helping them understand the process and requirements. There are many opportunities for improvement within the UG's development review process, and it would benefit from a structured evaluation. The evaluation should seek to improve the development review process to reduce uncertainty for development applicants and increase transparency about the process. This should be done in conjunction with the implementation of the Accela system.

**Recommendation 10. Initiate an evaluation of the development review process to identify opportunities to simplify it.**

*Capital Project Delivery*

A local government's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) represents a significant investment of resources that contributes to the fabric of the community. Administering a CIP carefully and responsibly engenders trust and accountability with residents. Delays and cost overruns have both financial implications and may undermine public trust. It is important that projects meet budgets and schedules and that performance metrics on projects are tracked. An assessment of a local government's CIP function can identify whether it is operating in an efficient and effective manner, is aligned with master planning, economic development, and asset management and relies on best practices to deliver projects that benefit the community. It also can save significant sums of money.

We examined the 2016-2017 CIP and selected 19 projects of different types to see how many were completed on time and on budget. These projects had a total value of \$54.9 million. We found that 7 of the 19 (36%) projects appeared to have been completed on time and on budget (based on reporting in subsequent CIP budgets). These seven projects totaled \$13.4 million in value (24.4% of the total value). The projects are reported to have been completed exactly on budget, suggesting that changes to the scope were made to meet the budget. A more detailed audit would be required to confirm whether this is a regular practice.

We found that four projects dropped off the CIP report for unknown/unexplained reasons. While these represented about 21% of the projects selected, they contained only \$1.85 million of the aggregate value or 3.4%. Two projects were completed on time and below budget. These two projects represented about 9% of the total project valuation, and they were completed \$1.8 million below budget in total. Five of the 19 projects (26% of projects and 62% of total valuation) were completed late and over budget.

In our preliminary evaluation of the UG's capital project delivery process, the Management Partners/i4x team found that Public Works, the Board of Public Utilities, and private utilities exercise limited coordination. There is limited knowledge of a clear long-term capital management and improvement strategy, and any existing strategy has not been communicated well throughout the organization. Significant opportunities for improvement and cost savings exist within this area, and a detailed review would identify them.



**Recommendation 11. Develop a CIP strategy that is aligned with master planning, economic development, and asset management.**

**Recommendation 12. Implement a CIP delivery performance measurement reporting system to improve delivery of projects on time and on budget.**

### *Engineering and Utilities*

The UG currently has three separate engineering groups: Public Works, Development, and Utilities. Having the Board of Public Utilities exist as a separate administrative arm of the UG entity creates duplication and represents an opportunity for cost savings and efficiencies. Wastewater and stormwater share crews but there is separate management of those crews.

Within the UG itself there is a relatively small engineering function in Public Works with 12 engineer FTEs. Another four engineer FTEs are in the development review section. These engineering functions could be grouped together, thereby improving communications as well as career development opportunities. Since most development review engineering functions are related to public works, doing so should also reduce miscommunications and improve overall performance in this important area.

The Board of Public Utilities (BPU) is an administrative arm of the UG, but it operates as a separate organization. Thus, the UG forfeits the efficiencies that could be gained by consolidating the two organizations.

Integrating engineering staff would also improve the ability of the UG to accomplish civil engineering work more efficiently and effectively. There are at least 15 civil engineering positions within the water utility portion of the utility operation that would integrate with the public works and development engineering functions within UG if public utilities were part of the UG. In addition, there are 69 administrative and management positions within the public utilities operation that appear to overlap similar types of functions within the UG. This is evidence of redundancy.

It was also noted that within the Department of Public Works the largest single division is the Water Pollution Control Division with approximately 121 FTE. This division includes maintenance workers and equipment operators assigned to both wastewater collection system and stormwater maintenance work. (Stormwater management has become more of a priority with a new user fee and additional management efforts over the last several years.) It appears that while the maintenance crew is one team of employees, management of the wastewater function and stormwater function is divided between the Water Pollution Control Division and Public Works. This is undoubtedly a hinderance to efficiency and effectiveness. This subject may well have been behind a published initiative objective in the 2021-22 Budget (page 492) which stated, "Upcoming projects include rebranding Water Pollution Control and creating internal work efficiencies throughout the department leveraging division expertise to work cohesively". This objective should be pursued.



There are opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of engineering and utilities within the UG that can be identified through a more detailed assessment.

**Recommendation 13. Evaluate consolidating one or more engineering organizations to eliminate redundancy and take advantage of economies of scale.**

**Recommendation 14. Explore integrating BPU into the Unified Government.**

**Recommendation 15. Explore combining the management of wastewater and stormwater maintenance and repair.**

### *Information Technology*

The rapid pace of change within the field of information technology (IT) requires local governments to spend significant attention, time, and resources to ensure their internal and external customers' needs are met. In the UG, those needs are not managed in a consistent manner across the government.

The Knowledge Department within the UG is the locus of most IT expertise within the UG. At first impression the department would appear to be under-resourced. It includes between 32 and 46 FTE, depending on whether one counts the GIS and 311 functions as core IT functions. Industry standards suggest an IT staffing ratio of roughly one IT FTE for every 23 FTE for an organization of UG's size, which would imply a staffing level of perhaps 100 IT FTE (see for example, "Ratio of IT Staff to Employees", *Workforce.com* [<https://workforce.com/news/ratio-of-it-staff-to-employees>].)

However, upon further study it becomes clear that the Knowledge Department is not a centralized service provider and that within the UG individual departments retain their own IT resources. For example, the Police Department appears to have about 12 FTE devoted to IT functions. Other departments also have their own IT staff.

This is not an uncommon situation and can occur when departments cannot secure the services they need from the Knowledge Department. However, it has resulted in an abundance of disparate enterprise platforms that may not all communicate appropriately or be designed to maximize efficiency and effectiveness across the UG organization. In addition, unified strategic planning and decision making about IT investments has become fragmented and ineffective. Investments tend to be made based on departmental and not organization-wide priorities.

Centralized IT security is essential for decreasing risk exposure to the County and acquiring cybersecurity insurance should be a top priority.

**Recommendation 16. Centralize information technology functions to enhance efficiencies, effectiveness, cybersecurity, and communication.** IT liaisons should be stationed in departments in rotations while maintaining alignment with central IT policies and procedures. The UG may wish to consider outsourcing some or all IT functions to a capable vendor.



**Recommendation 17. Develop, adopt, and implement UG-wide (including the District Attorney, District Court, Sheriff, etc.) IT policies that support cybersecurity needs, including acquiring cybersecurity insurance.**

**Recommendation 18. Develop an IT master plan that includes an audit component for various enterprise software across the organization with the goal of consolidating and updating enterprise software.** This should include a plan to retire unused software, retire on-premise servers and move to cloud storage, and identify opportunities to reduce paper and automate functions.

### *Fleet*

Fleet is another function of local government that requires periodic analysis to ensure that equipment and vehicles purchased and the maintenance performed match evolving needs. Over time, fleet customers can acquire vehicles and equipment that are not essential to their operations, units may be misapplied, or units may represent overlapping resources that could be consolidated for optimal use. Downsizing to less expensive and more economical units such as electric vehicles, centralizing pooling, sharing equipment with other public agencies and using commercial car leasing firms can also optimize the fleet function. Fleet policies that establish criteria for new vehicle/equipment requests, take-home vehicles, and annual usage standards for retaining units can also help maximize resources. In addition, we found that there are multiple fleet management operations (for example, the fire department currently operates separately from central fleet) that reduce operational efficiencies and opportunities to take advantage of economies of scale.

In our preliminary examination of the UG's fleet policies and practices, we identified the following ideas for improving performance.

**Recommendation 19. Consolidate fleet operations into one operational unit.**

**Recommendation 20. Conduct a fleet utilization study to ensure the UG's fleet is optimized to meet departments' needs.**

**Recommendation 21. Develop, implement and enforce a uniform take-home vehicle policy.**

### *Purchasing*

Purchasing policies and procedures are another area of local government that often provide many opportunities for improvement. In the UG, we found that purchasing policies are often not followed and have not been updated since 2007. In addition, we observed that purchasing card usage seems high. The purchasing function is decentralized and lacks regular audits. While purchasing cards can improve efficiency it is equally important to hold card users accountable for adhering to purchasing policies.

**Recommendation 22. Assess current purchasing practices to identify needed improvements and update the purchasing policy and procedure manual.**



**Recommendation 23. Conduct periodic audits of purchasing card usage.*****Ongoing Initiatives***

In an organization as large and complex as the UG, there are many initiatives underway that must be completed. They will require executive support and strong change management. These include implementation of the organization's new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Accela and Project Docs; the assessment and potential reorganization of Government Center space; and updates to the countywide master plans, area plans, and economic development strategic plan. However, we found in our high-level assessment that there does not appear to be an organized management approach to supporting new initiatives and completing organizational improvements. This is not unusual, and it is one reason many new initiatives fail or are abandoned in organizations. This weakness should be rectified to make the UG an organization that consistently implements new initiatives successfully.

The new ERP, Accela, and Project Docs are especially important as they directly correlate to improving efficiencies within the development review function in particular, as well as purchasing and IT. Preserving forward momentum on these and other initiatives will require sustained attention. This in turn requires consistent attention from upper management.

**Recommendation 24. Establish an executive steering committee led by the County Administrator to ensure existing initiatives are completed and implemented effectively.*****Organization Assessments***

Periodic reviews of departments are a best practice for local governments. In many respects, an organizational assessment program is the fundamental building block of any effective internal audit program. This is a necessary element for any local government committed to continuous improvement and effective management. It is typical for these assessments to identify significant opportunities for cost savings and service improvements

As noted above, typically organizational assessments are done at the department level. The UG recently completed organization assessments of the Finance and Human Resources Departments. Generally, a specific scope is developed for the department being evaluated, but most assessments consider the following topics:

- Budgeting effectiveness;
- Capital asset management;
- Personnel management and practices including succession planning;
- Effective procurement practices;
- Service delivery options;
- Risk management;
- Disaster management and business continuity;
- Strategic planning and enterprise planning and integration with organizational strategic planning; and



- Useful benchmarks.

This practice should continue throughout the UG on a consistent basis. Implementation plans should be developed with measurable outcomes for each organization assessment to ensure there is a strategy to fulfill the recommendations for improvement.

**Recommendation 25. Initiate an annual process of assessing operations to improve efficiency and effectiveness in individual departments and other organizational units.**

## **Conclusion**

The creation of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas in 1997 created a fresh political dynamic that allowed the community to solve urgent problems. Unfortunately, once the presenting fiscal issues were resolved, further development of a truly unified local government structure stalled. This is not unusual in local government where emergencies are often required to spur urgent action. Fortunately, leaders and staff have an ongoing opportunity to realize the goal of unified government because the framework is already in place.

Realizing those opportunities will require careful, intentional effort that includes:

- The identification and hiring of a senior Executive Team, including a County Administrator and Assistants capable of implementing significant organizational change;
- The support of elected officials for the County Administrator and assistants;
- A focused strategy for leadership and staff that is aligned throughout the organization;
- Change management that will successfully integrate a culture of continuous improvement; and
- An approach that tackles short-term, immediate recommendations in the current budget.

