

**THE MAYORS' PARTNERSHIP FOR PROGRESS** brings together mayors and city managers from cities and villages throughout Appalachian Ohio to share information and resources and tackle common issues faced by municipalities throughout the region.

**A CALL TO ACTION:**

Our region suffers from a lack of many essential services. The lack of affordable transportation, childcare, and internet access are just a few of those very deficits of services for low income families. This is greatly exacerbated by the increase in low wage jobs that often have variable working hours. This challenge is more severe in communities like ours in which the available jobs often require a long commute and non-traditional working hours. The reality is that the economics of many low income workers is overwhelming. The greatest issue that impacts all the other sectors is the opioid epidemic. Local municipalities and non-profits lack the resources to provide criminal justice services, prevention/treatment and other needed intervention resources.

Despite these challenges the municipalities in Southeast Ohio have managed to improve local infrastructure through ARC, CDBG and OPWC funding. These communities have also championed innovative approaches to dealing with opiate addiction, prevention and treatment. The Mayor's Partnership has been a strong advocate for sharing information, suggesting best practices and providing support between the communities in the MPP. The Mayor's Partnership has provided information and training in USDA Housing programs, EPA standards and Asset Management, Water and Wastewater funding and requirements, Fire safety and First Responder programs and a myriad of other topics relevant to the needs of Mayors and Councils in Southeast Ohio.

**WHAT A COMMUNITY BASED INTERN CAN DO:**

The Mayors Partnership for Progress has no shortage of exciting opportunities to gain experience while contributing your expertise. Projects may include but are not limited to:

**Municipal Home Rule**

The Ohio legislature has acted to thwart Home rule in the areas of minimum wage, Mayor's courts, gun control, plastic bags, local hiring, predatory lending and many others. These state laws need to be reconsidered and further erosion halted.

**Project:** Research the last 20 years of home rule erosion: Detail the occurrences of state interference or erosion of "Municipal Home Rule" by legislative initiatives since 1980. Collect interviews of the impact on communities from this loss of oversight. Make recommendations for the areas in greatest need of restoration.

**Shared Services**

We have a long history of collaborative efforts in our region. Recent challenges with finding sufficiently trained fiscal officers and water treatment staff have continued. We welcome the opportunity to explore a cooperative effort with Local Development Districts to consider housing shared personnel to provide these or other essential services for small communities within the MPP region.

**Project:** Research and recommend most likely areas for shared services among water, wastewater, fiscal, safety and infrastructure services.

### **Maintain and Expand Water Assistance Programs**

The MPP was successful in obtaining funding for a limited low income water assistance program in cooperation with Community Action Agencies. The program needs to expand the benefit level to \$500 and address the varied living arrangements low income families face. Assistance should be based solely on financial need. Our regions water systems need greater federal and state support to meet EPA quality standards. Funding from the new state water assistance program should be targeted to improve water systems without raising rates.

**Project:** evaluate 2019 performance of this program: Contact all Community Action Agencies and gather data on utilization of these funds in 2019. Also, get feedback on strengths and weaknesses of this effort. Create an impact statement showing the benefit and future need for this assistance.

### **Improve Community Audits**

Small, rural communities lack trained staff that can manage the requirements of the State Auditor and the UAN (Unified Accounting Network) system. Municipalities often get “red flagged” for matters that present no danger to the funds provided through the appropriation of tax revenues. When communities get assigned to a “high risk pool” their audit costs can increase by anywhere from 300% to 800% and this presents a substantial burden on the finances of the municipality. In many cases, these communities participate in the “Ohio Treasurer’s Checkbook” which is a mechanism for transparency in which communities voluntary participate. The MPP believes that the state should provide auditing services not through fees, but a line item for just such a purpose. We supported the AOS efforts to obtain additional state funding for its operation. These funds need to be focused on reducing the cost of audits. We would also encourage a significant expansion of training opportunities provided through the Auditors offices.

**Project:** review prior year audit data: Review information gathered by 2019 interns relating to major areas of problems for MPP communities in audits. Prepare various forms of instructional materials (videos, PowerPoints, etc.) to share with communities requesting this data and arrange for several training programs (by qualified instructors or existing fiscal officers) to be shared with MPP member communities.