In the last edition of The Huddle I had the opportunity to discuss with you some of the state’s process improvement accomplishments of 2017. We took a deep dive into the detail of different agency efforts and gave some perspective on what the state’s team members chose to improve across the enterprise. In this quarter’s issue, I wanted to paint a vision for 2018.

In 2017, the Center of Operational Excellence (COE) was able to create a strong foundation and each agency had significant wins to build momentum as we headed into the new year. This year the COE plans to take this success even further. As the enterprise continues to grow and take on more and larger projects, we are dedicated to making our state more effective, efficient, and customer focused. In 2018, I’ve set an ambitious goal for the enterprise of seeing over 200 projects or kaizen events executed across all code agencies. This would have the potential to free up over one-hundred thousand hours of actual work time and to return this to our team members here at the state. Take a moment to think about the impact this could have on the work that you do. Are there backlogs that could be reduced with this time or side projects that need to be completed? How would this affect our customers and help us to be more effective, efficient, and a customer focused state government? The possibilities for this are endless, but also crucial for carrying out our administration’s mission.

Another exciting feature the COE will be adding soon is a two day Certified Lean Leader program aimed at those of you who desire more training and experience in Lean. Those who participate in the program will gain an in-depth understanding of applying Lean to everyday situations in the work environment. The goal is to have all levels of leadership engaged in improving their work processes and to create a team environment that will eliminate barriers in the work place that cause stress, waiting, frustration, and delayed service to our citizens. On top of all this, we are also looking to train over 60 Executive Green Belts throughout the state. This training is focused on C-level staff within each agency in order to build support for process improvement. Lastly, we are looking to launch a test group for the Certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt (CLSSBB) program in order to address larger multiagency process improvement projects. This program will allow us the ability to move between silos to follow process improvement wherever it is needed and to ensure stable efficient operations. When the Silver Tsunami hits, we as a state will be ready for it! This is the year of progress and results. This is the year for each state team member’s voice to be heard and to give us insight on where to identify projects. The COE looks forward to working with you all to accomplish your goals and ours in 2018.

If you have ever wanted to get into process improvement at a deeper level, this is the year for you! If you want to learn more about some of the plans we have this year, either within your agency or across the enterprise, please reach out to your agency’s Process Improvement Coordinator or feel free to contact me directly at matthew.singh@nebraska.gov.
Last quarter we met two huddles that were utilizing our remote huddles because of their team’s location. Today we will be meeting a huddle from the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) to see how they used their QDIPs to help connect her team with all the work that is done in Human Resources.


Erinn is the Human Talent Director for the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. Erinn and her Human Resources Team goals involve accuracy of hire letters, waivers during pre-service, medical exams completed before start, and checking the Human Resource Information System for accuracy.

Erinn explained that her team was one of the first at NDCS to be using the QDIP boards. When Erinn and her team first began using the QDIP boards she explained with any change, there is an unknown at the beginning. The Human Resources Team realized the benefits of a quick daily huddle even though it was new. The team was able to connect on important topics and make connections to other work they were doing because of the quick daily huddle.

One great team building moment is when the team can discuss red days, or days that an issue comes up, because the team is able to work through what needs to be accomplished. The QDIP board is second nature now to the Human Resources Team at NDCS. Erinn is excited and proud that her division is paving the way to set the tone in their agency.

The Center of Operational Excellence is making an impact and contributing to the practice of process improvement beyond Nebraska’s borders. Check out the February 2018 issue of ASQ’s Six Sigma Forum Magazine for an article by COE Deputy Director Don Arp, Jr. on how best to conduct a process walk and a tool he created called the Process Walk Questions.

Some of the biggest advice Erinn can give to other Yellow Belts and their teammates is to just “embrace it.” Change happens every day and the benefits of change and the potential to grow are amazing.
When a life is on the line, every second matters. This mindset is critical for Nebraska’s AMBER Alert system to accomplish its purpose – disseminating information to the public quickly and precisely to help recover a missing, endangered child safely. “AMBER” stands for America’s Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response. Those words encapsulate the urgency, severity, and structure for how law enforcement agencies interact with each other and the public in an effort to find a child who has been abducted.

In 2017, Nebraska had two AMBER Alerts which involved five children. Thankfully, all five children were found safe, but the system encountered issues in 2017 that needed to be addressed. With the guidance of Nebraska State Patrol Process Improvement Coordinator Mark Watson, NSP personnel collaborated with partners from various fields to improve the process for issuing an AMBER Alert.

It was discovered that a phone service company had failed to deliver an AMBER Alert message to its customers in July. Though the issue came from an outside party, it proved to be a catalyst to assess the system as a whole and find areas of improvement.

The process improvement project included partners from the Lincoln Police Department, Omaha Police Department, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, and the Nebraska Broadcasters Association. The team determined there were numerous steps in the process for issuance of an AMBER Alert that could be eliminated, which could save a great amount of time. Together, the team determined which steps could be eliminated, and decided to create a new, online method for local law enforcement to request an AMBER Alert. The Attorney General’s Office also helped with clarification that it was possible to eliminate the time-consuming step of obtaining a physical signature from the legal guardian of the child. This allowed for an online request form to be used.

“This step was crucial to reducing the delays that we had previously seen in the process before a request for an AMBER Alert even reaches NSP,” said Captain Jeromy McCoy, NSP AMBER Alert Coordinator.

The project team made great progress with the process improvement, and during the project another great opportunity arose to provide another level of public safety for Nebraska. During discussions of the AMBER Alert system and the process improvement project, NSP planned, created, and launched a new, secondary alert system, designed for cases that do not meet the criteria for an AMBER Alert.

The Endangered Missing Advisory (EMA) allows NSP to send out public alerts in a multitude of circumstances under which a person is missing. The alert system has been activated three times, and it largely follows the same process that was refined during the AMBER Alert process improvement project.

While the state of Nebraska has not had an AMBER Alert since the completion of the project, two of the three EMAs that NSP has issued have utilized the new online request system for local law enforcement. That allows local law enforcement to make their request for an AMBER Alert or EMA much quicker and removes duplicative data entry in the process for issuing the alert by NSP. Both steps make it possible to issue the alert faster, spreading the word to the public with more rapid delivery.

“Our ability to issue alerts for cases that don’t meet criteria for an AMBER Alert is critical to our public safety mission,” said Colonel John Bolduc, Superintendent of the Nebraska State Patrol. “The creation of the EMA was an important offshoot of the AMBER Alert project.”

The updated AMBER Alert process has improved the system and maximizes every step to get critical information to the public quickly that will help find an abducted child. The improvement that is unquantifiable is the impact to the safety to all Nebraska children.
In Lean Six Sigma not every project or idea requires a full scale process improvement project. Sometimes decisions need to be made much faster or do not require the in-depth analysis of a project. What can be used in this case is the Executive Decision Checklist, following the Plan Do Check Act (PDCA) format. This is a nine step process that is often used to gather enough data to make a quick informed decision based on a hypothesis developed from limited data.

The PDCA decision making model is broken down into the four categories. The objective in the “Plan” phase is to identify the key or root problem. In the AMBER Alert article, the objective was to improve the timeliness by which an Amber Alert can be issued.

In the “Do” category, Executive Green Belts work with Certified Green Belts to gain a functional understanding of the problem or issue using a variety of Lean Six Sigma tools. Some of which we have discussed in earlier articles, such as Quality, Delivery, Inventory, and Productivity (QDIP) boards, and Pareto charts. With the functional knowledge gained, the Executive Green Belt can now make the decision.

As a part of the “Do” category in our Executive Decision making model, the Green Belt from the Nebraska State Patrol (NSP) project, discussed earlier in this issue, guided leadership through the use of Lean Six Sigma tools, such as process maps. This helped the leadership team to identify a way of making the system better and implementing it online.

The last two phases have one step each. First, in the “Check” phase, we have a couple of different tools to verify the decision made in our previous steps is producing the desired results. The most common tool used for this is the QDIP board. With a QDIP board you can verify the effectiveness of the change(s) made. The final step is “Act” which is used to determine if additional steps need to be taken and the whole process has proven to be successful. At times, even with a successful project, there is room for improvement or a new opportunity to be identified. The creation of the Endangered Missing Advisory (EMA) alert is an example of how State Patrol leadership was able to identify an opportunity for improvement when the situation did not warrant a full AMBER Alert.

Everyday people at the state of Nebraska are working to improve the lives of Nebraskans using DMAIC projects, Kaizen events, and Executive Decisions. While each project may effect a single group, such as nurses or endangered individuals, all Nebraskans are served by a more efficient state government. Lean Six Sigma, through the use of Green Belts and Executive Green Belts, can bring about greater efficiencies and benefit all Nebraskans.

The Center of Operation Excellence is pleased to announce in early 2019 the Lean Six Sigma Black Belt Program will be launching. This program will allow currently certified Lean Six Sigma Green Belts to pursue the next level of belt certification by obtaining their Black Belt. The Black Belt certification is one of the most highly coveted and revered positions within process improvement. In order to qualify as a candidate for this program, the individual must first go through a yearlong mentorship program as a Green Belt with the State’s Master Black Belt, Matthew Singh. The candidate will then need to complete an intense five weeks of in class training, pass both written and oral exams, and complete enterprise wide projects. Those who obtain their Black Belt certification will be responsible for training and mentoring Green Belts to the highest of standards, lead enterprise wide Lean Six Sigma projects, and be called upon by the Governor’s office and agency leadership to solve the most difficult issues.

Pictured above are Andi Bridgmon and Heather Behl who are currently working with the Center of Operational Excellence to beta test the training before launching in early 2019.
This month’s featured Green Belt is Teresa Curry with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Teresa is originally from northeast Nebraska and received her undergraduate degree from Chadron State. After completing her undergraduate degree, Teresa moved to Lincoln and earned her M.B.A. In July of 2017, Teresa brought her past work experience in operations and leadership to the Nebraska Department of Agriculture as their first Process Improvement Coordinator. Soon after beginning her position, Teresa completed two full weeks of in-the-classroom training and successfully passed a multiple choice exam, written exam, and an intense day-long simulation project as part of her Green Belt Certification.

The next step to obtain her Green Belt Certification, was to successfully complete two Lean Six Sigma projects within assigned timeframes. For the first project, the team, the team was able to reduce an identified delay by 33% and began utilizing a central location for their weekly itineraries.

The second project focused on public information requests and the process to fulfill these requests. The project team was able to make significant improvements and reduced process steps by 44% and process time by 61%.

For the final step in completing the Green Belt Certification, Teresa needed to successfully present her two projects and explain the methodology in an oral exam to the Center of Operational Excellence’s Master Black Belt, Matthew Singh. Teresa successfully passed this with high marks and was awarded the Center of Operational Excellence’s distinguished Green Belt Candidate award at a celebration lunch with the Governor.

When asked to about sharing advice on process improvement, Teresa stated, “Change is hard, creating a culture where change is accepted is key. Good ideas are out there, get them and be open to exploring solutions from a variety of perspectives.”

Governor Pete Ricketts and Matthew Singh, Director of Operational Excellence, present Teresa her Green Belt Certification during a belting ceremony on January 29th. Teresa was one of seven honorees who received their Green Belt. In total, the State of Nebraska currently has 23 Green Belt teammates.
Questions? Or have a suggestion for process improvement in your area? Please contact your agency’s Process Improvement Coordinator

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