



16 Mahoning Agencies to Share \$100,000 Grant

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The cost of keeping up with technology is increasing, making it difficult for smaller government agencies to keep up.

"So if we can all come together and do something together and look at combining our efforts, we think that gives us a chance to provide a lot better services for a lot less money," said John Laplante, executive director of ACCESS.

ACCESS currently helps schools in Mahoning County share technology resources. Now, with a \$100,000 local government innovation grant from the state, ACCESS will help townships, cities and counties follow the same path.

In Mahoning County, there are many different networks that connect governmental entities. Two of these are the ACCESS network and the MYRIS network. The Mahoning County Regional Shared Service System (MCRSSS) project would look to combine these networks into a single shared information system.

The MYRIS network was originally funded by a \$120,000 grant in 2010, and has the purpose of connecting local governments. The current project participants in this MYRIS network are Struthers, Austintown and Boardman.

"And you look at who all of your partners can be. Not just schools with schools, but schools with governments, and boards of developmental disabilities, and park districts, and everyone working together to try and drive down their costs," said Randy Cole, president of the State Controlling Board.

The grant will help the local governments save on technology, but that's just the beginning of the conversation on shared services. Several local leaders said they are trying to think outside the box on ways to cut back costs and still get the job done.

"This year we were able to contract with the city of Lowellville for street sweeping. And that was a shared service we felt we could provide them where it will be a cost savings for the Village of Lowellville and at the same time be a revenue stream for the community," said Struthers Mayor Terry Stocker.

Several smaller townships said they also would like to pull together to get better rates on health insurance and even fuel for their vehicles.

"I believe that what's going to happen is it's not going to be a matter of communities wanting to have to do those types of things. We're going to have to do them. Unless you go back to the taxpayers," Stocker said.

The state is compiling ways various communities throughout Ohio are working together and putting them onto one website so others can use the plans as road maps for their own areas.

And state officials said this collaboration in Mahoning County will hopefully be a great example of partnerships.