

E Foundation official: A way to get more bank for Oklahoma's buck

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The frustrations regarding recent state revenue measures are palpable and understandable. Critical government functions are jeopardized whenever such funding gaps appear, and typically passed on to the average Oklahoman through cuts in service or higher fees. Measures to cover this gap must address root causes. Our state needs a systematic framework to ensure, as far as it is possible, that such foundational inadequacies are addressed.

There is such a solution. Lean Six Sigma is actually two compatible manufacturing ideas. Lean Six Sigma uses a data-based, bias-reducing framework to identify and solve root-cause problems through a process called DMAIC (define, measure, analyze, improve and control). At the base of the discipline is “continuous improvement,” meaning that increasing the quality of service is a never-ending quest: meet the needs of the customer (or taxpayer) as completely as possible while continuing improvement.

These techniques have served the private industry well. Made famous by Jack Welch, the former chairman and CEO of General Electric, the discipline has expanded into virtually every field. It's estimated that every Lean Six Sigma project has the potential to save 2 percent to 4 percent of an organization's bottom line. However, just as effective as the return itself is the signal to the organization's culture that a focus on efficacy is the top priority. The prime advantages of Lean Six Sigma are that it's adaptable, systematic and effective, making its potential introduction to state government such an intriguing possibility.

One way that Lean Six Sigma would help Oklahoma's government is through reducing overtime, which is a huge cost to the state that has the potential to increase dramatically, should a Department of Labor ruling go through. State agencies should strive for continuous improvement, not only in quality of services delivered but in the process of that delivery.

Another possible area of growth would be cycle time reduction, which reduces the amount of time needed to provide services. This could increase the quality of the work itself, lower costs for state agencies and expedite service for citizens. By eliminating unnecessary tasks from state employees' responsibilities, we could have a leaner, more effective state government.

I led a project at Oklahoma City Community College that clarified the cost savings of reducing the number of personal printers on campus and moving to a centralized printing system. This simple change was projected to save hundreds of thousands of dollars and illustrates a prime advantage of Lean Six Sigma: no employees lost their jobs because of the project. Focusing on efficacy leads to more sustainable outcomes than mere efficiency.

At the E Foundation for Oklahoma, we have developed a program to do just that. SoonerStat has the potential to streamline service delivery and cut costs, allowing agencies to meet their critical public missions for less. Oklahoma can realize this cost-saving, culture-shifting model by implementing the expertise that has been successfully leveraged in the private sector for decades. Rather than simply raise revenue to fill gaps, why not become a more sustainable and efficacious enterprise for taxpayers?

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