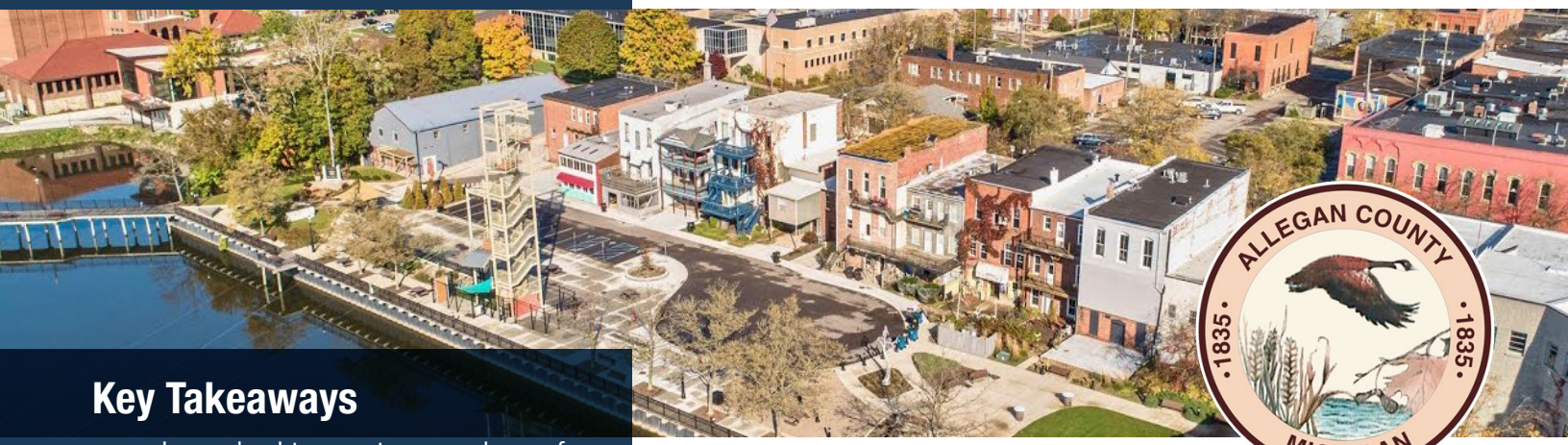
CASE STUDY

Allegan County – R.I.C.H. Conversations

MERS
Municipal Employees' Retirement System



Key Takeaways

- Launched to meet core values of Respect, Integrity, Commitment and Honesty (R.I.C.H.).
- Forum for organizational updates, benefits information, leadership access, and employee questions.
- Awareness of County departments, services, elected offices, and strategic priorities.
- Engagement through mix of information, interaction, giveaways, and fun.
- Recognized and anticipated monthly event.

MERS IMPACT AWARD
Best-In-Class Retirement Benefits

Municipality Profile

- 600 employees which includes 911 Dispatch Center, Sheriff's Office, Road Patrol and Corrections, Youth Home, courthouse, elected officials and their departments, Health Department, Administrative Departments, Parks and Recreation, Facilities, and more.
- About 120,000 residents.

Situation

In 2020, County leadership reviewed employee engagement survey results and identified employee connection as an area for improvement. Staff needed greater visibility into priorities, services, and information affecting their work and benefits.

County leadership recognized the need for a consistent communication platform that would go beyond policy updates and create meaningful dialogue between leadership and employees. The goal was not only to inform employees, but to make the experience personal, engaging, and fun. Allegan County launched R.I.C.H. Conversations with Rob and Guests in September 2020.

Process

The R.I.C.H Conversation meetings are held on the third Friday of each month and are open to all benefit-eligible employees. Led by Robert Sarro, County Administrator, featuring guest speakers, the sessions typically run 60 to 90 minutes and are designed to be informative, interactive, and accessible.

Executive leadership sets the agenda, with Human Resources coordinating many of the topics. Content is selected to support consistent messaging and commonly includes:

- Organizational priorities and current issues
- Employee feedback and questions
- Benefits, financial wellness, and overall employee wellness
- Professional development and safety
- County department, elected official, and new employee introductions

The program has evolved as employee needs have changed. Following subsequent feedback, the meetings were expanded to strengthen awareness of departments, elected offices, employees, and County services across the organization.

Strategy

Allegan County designed R.I.C.H. Conversations to be more than a traditional staff meeting. The approachable format gives employees useful information while showing a more personal side of County leadership. Humor, friendly banter, games, prizes, and occasional employee-led entertainment help create an environment where employees can learn, connect, and have fun in the process. Strategies include:

- Interactive discussion and opportunities for questions
- Guest speakers from across the organization
- Department, elected official, and new employee introductions
- Games, trivia, and friendly competition that employees look forward to
- County and vendor-sponsored swag and giveaways
- Leadership banter and occasional employee-led entertainment
- Recorded sessions and slides posted to the County intranet for later viewing

The meetings also provide a venue for addressing organizational changes and emerging issues. Leaders have used the program to clarify information, increase awareness of County services, discuss compensation and benefits topics, and provide updates regarding the MERS recordkeeper transition. By creating a familiar and recurring communication channel, Allegan County is better positioned to share employee benefit information in a timely, accessible, and consistent way.

Throughout the program, discussions frequently connect back to Allegan County's Strategy Map and R.I.C.H. values, helping employees see, understand, and embrace the organization's strategic priorities.

Results

R.I.C.H. Conversations have developed a strong reputation within Allegan County and have become a recurring forum for communication and engagement. To date, County officials have seen positive results including:

- Typical live attendance of 60–80 employees.
- Approximately 20 additional views of recordings and slides after a meeting.
- A recent session reached 85 live participants, the program's largest reported attendance.
- Employees receive more consistent information about organizational priorities, services, leadership, benefits, and workplace resources.
- The format creates greater visibility across departments and helps employees connect their work to the County Strategy Map.
- Games, giveaways, and interactive segments help make the meetings an anticipated monthly event rather than a routine information session.

The program also proved useful during the MERS recordkeeper transition. The April session gave employees an opportunity to receive information and ask questions, helping to address confusion particularly around creating an account with Empower.

MERS
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