

2016 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS APPLICATION BEST PRACTICES, Excellence in Action

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Name of Local Government

Regional District of Central Okanagan

Project/Program Manager Name

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The Mayor/Chair is aware that I am submitting this application on behalf of my local government.

Yes

Project/Program Title:

Promote Responsible Dog Ownership

Project Summary Paragraph

Please provide a summary of your project/program in 150 words or less.

A service review in 2012 recommended changes to the Dog Control service to promote Responsible Dog Ownership. Some of the recommendations were:

- Increase in compliance with licensing requirements;
- Increase in the level of service cost-recovery;
- Decrease in the number of dogs impounded without licenses.

Project Analysis

1. SERVICES

How has the implementation of this program/project improved services in your community?

Licensed dogs are easier to reunite with their families. It reduces the draw on resources in trying to locate owners, and reduces the amount of dogs that are sent to other agencies such as the SPCA for adoption. In 2012, the average percentage of dogs impounded without licenses was 64%. The first quarter in 2016 it is 25% which is a 61% decrease in dogs impounded without licenses.

In August 2013, strategic plans were made to launch a region-wide campaign to increase licensing. The My Dog Matters rewards program was created to reward licensed dog owners by providing them with benefits with local businesses offering discounts and incentives. Businesses who join the program choose the rewards they offer and benefit from free advertising (RDCO website, Facebook, brochures).

Participating businesses are seen as pet friendly. They are able to potentially create new relationships with more than 21,000 licensed dog owners at no additional cost.

2. EFFECTIVENESS

How is the program/project more efficient and/or effective than it was before?

The implementation is seeing a significant increase in licensing. At the end of 2012, there were 12,818 dogs licensed in the Central Okanagan. As of May 31, 2016, there are 21,979 dogs licensed which is a 72% increase in licensing. (We believe that there are about 30,000 dogs.)

Information: A communications program focused on the need, purpose and benefits of licensing. Road signs, news media coverage, radio ads featuring the catch phrase “Are you Harboring a Fugitive” was launched. October, 2013 was advertised as an Amnesty month where dog owners could license their dog at no charge which resulted in an increase of over 4,000 new dog licenses. This was the largest increase in licensing in one year in Regional District’s history.

Students were hired for the summers as Dog Ambassadors visiting parks and beaches with a set of information handouts for distribution to educate and inform dog owners regarding responsible dog ownership – license, leash, pick up and control.

Removal of Barriers: The Regional District’s online licensing program was completely revamped to provide the ability to purchase new licenses online and improve the usability and functionality of the website. By the end of February 2016, 50% of dog owners used the online process and that figure is continually growing which equates to less dog owners visiting local government offices to purchase or renew a license which allows their staff to focus on other priorities.

3. ECONOMIC IMPACT

How has the program/project saved the community money and/or resources or encouraged economic development?

An increase in the level of service cost-recovery from dog licensing equates to a decrease in the level of taxpayer contribution to the service. In addition, the My Dog Matters rewards program benefits new and existing businesses by targeting dog owners who license their dog. Participating businesses have reported that they have seen an increase in customers. Currently, there are 58 businesses participating

in the rewards program who are offering discounts on products and services. (City of Toronto has 49; City of Calgary has 65).

Dog tags are now permanent instead of annual saving tax dollar purchasing new tags each year.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY

How has this program/project improved accountability to citizens of your local government?

The Regional Board adopted a policy of Zero Tolerance for dog owners without a license. Fines amounts for no dog license was increased to \$300. The publicity surrounding the higher fine amount got the attention of dog owners who have skirted their responsibility to license their dog. Dog owners are getting on board which provides more opportunities to educate them about the value of dog licensing, promotion of responsible dog ownership and the services provided by Dog Control.

5. RESULTS

How has this program/project resulted in excellence in action in your community?

Many other communities in Canada have taken the approach of Zero Tolerance and introduced a rewards program with extensive advertising. However, the Regional District has surpassed the success in comparison to other local governments. For example, Calgary was an example in their higher licensing compliance which we studied to model after. In Canada, it has a high ratio with 8% or 8 dogs licensed for every 100 citizens; the City of Toronto has 3% of dogs licensed; Vancouver: 3.3%. The Regional District of Central Okanagan, however, has 11.2% or 11 dogs licensed for every 100 citizens making it the national leader.

6. TEAMWORK

Tell us about the teamwork involved in making this program/project possible.

Our municipal partners are a valuable resource for providing information and accepting payments for dog licenses throughout the year. Working with our Communications Director, we strategically designed our communications, advertising, news releases, public service announcements to dog owners well in advance of any increased penalties through enforcement specifically targeting licensing.

Veterinarians partnered with the Regional District to provide increased communication regarding licensing. Participating pet stores also increased exposure to the benefits of licensing

7. INNOVATION

What makes this program/project innovative and creative?

The Regional District uses Vadim as our financial software. It is commonly used by Canadian local governments as it tailors to the needs of government services. The Regional District was the first customer to provide payments and registrations for permanent dog tags online. The online licensing module was crafted by Regional District staff and developed by Vadim. Because of the success of the online module promoting excellent customer service, Vadim is using the Regional District as a model for other local governments and repackaging the module for their use.

Advertising for licensing was published in a humorous manner to bring light hearted attention to a serious subject – the need for dogs to be licensed in the region, such as “Are You Harboring a Fugitive” featuring radio ads with the commentary from the police, “Come out with your paws up”!

8. SUSTAINABILITY

What measures have you put in place to ensure the continued operation of this initiative?(e.g. staff time, resources, financial)

The program is sustainable as it is an integral part of Dog Control services. Changes are currently underway to reduce costs with paperless billing for renewal notices, an app which provides real time information for the My Dog Matters rewards members and participating businesses to promote their services. We anticipate that the amount of businesses will grow to take advantage of the free advertising and positive message that they promote responsible dog ownership through licensing.

9. BEST PRACTICES

How do the processes behind the program/project, and the subsequent results, serve as an example of best practices?

With high licensing compliance, impact to taxpayers for the Dog Control service is reducing. The service becomes more user pay.

10. TRANSFERABILITY

How is this program/project transferable to other local governments?

Frequently, the Regional District provides consulting and advice regarding the success of licensing, and the My Dog Matters Rewards Program. In addition, the financial software commonly used by BC local governments is Vadim. As stated earlier, the online module is available to other local governments.

11. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

What helpful advice would you share with other communities looking to embark on a similar project?

Be consistent. Be strategic. Be positive and start with the belief and understanding that most dog owners are responsible and want to encourage other dog owners to be responsible. Be prepared to enforce zero tolerance for licensing to support the bylaw.

Communicate, and work with other local governments. You don't need to reinvent the wheel.

12. TELL US MORE

Please share any other information you think may support your submission.

(No response)