2016 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS APPLICATION BEST PRACTICES, Organizational Development & Improvements

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Name of Local Government
The City of Abbotsford

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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:

Involve Abbotsford

Project Summary Paragraph

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

Involve Abbotsford is a City-staff driven volunteer program that supports and fosters success for local arts, sports and non-profit organizations by providing relevant information and training to help them build on their existing services and support for community of Abbotsford.

The program is 100% City staff driven, and is organized and delivered with the support of several community organizations including Pita Pit, Connect Now and Tourism Abbotsford.

Now in its third year, the program is extremely successful and widely acknowledged by the community as an example of how the loyalty, experience and dedication of local government employees can serve as an example for all types of organizations to follow.

Project Analysis

1. SERVICE DELIVERY

How has the implementation of this program/project improved services within your local government and your community at large?

By bringing together city staff, local organizations/businesses and residents, in an environment dedicated to inspiring, informing and invigorating, we have a unique opportunity to connect in a more meaningful way. Through these direct, face-to-face

connections we are able to look for synergies, collaborations, learn best practices and share resources.

City of Abbotsford staff understand that meaningful collaboration between local government and community organizations is facilitated through the development of relationships. One of the challenges we face in our community is generating opportunities for those relationships to develop. Involve Abbotsford is an ideal platform for bringing local government and community together and provides an excellent opportunity for staff to learn firsthand what services the community needs most.

Through the seminars, the Involve Abbotsford planning committee has had an opportunity to hear directly from local organizations/businesses and residents so that their challenges and needs can be understood and address through our service delivery. This direct communication also helps the planning committee better identify what training/resources/tools would help improve the various services in our community.

Involve Abbotsford has evolved into a leadership development platform where we see past delegates transitioning into workshop facilitators, thus connecting delegates directly with the services that facilitator (or their organization) provides.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How has the program/project served as a tool for both staff development and organizational improvement?

Involve Abbotsford is a staff lead initiative. The Involve Abbotsford planning team has had the opportunity to gain hands-on project management and event planning experience while creating an opportunity for our staff to showcase the internal expertise within the City.

Many of the workshops over the past three years have been led by various city staff from a variety of departments (i.e. Marketing and Communications, Finance, Business and Technology Solutions, Corporate Services, and Recreation). In this way, Involve Abbotsford is also providing a cross organizational learning opportunity for staff which in turn supports our overall internal organizational improvement.

In seeking workshop facilitators and local sponsors from the community, this project has also been a vehicle for those staff to create and nurture new relationships with local businesses and community organizations in addition to the ones attending the symposium.

3. ECONOMIC IMPACT

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

We believe that it's important to leverage and highlight our existing, local government professional expertise. In this way, Involve Abbotsford becomes a platform to showcase our local government experts and connect them to our local community groups, organizations and businesses. It becomes a marketing platform for those workshop facilitators who have services to offer.

By offering a local, no-cost educational event, we are providing a high-value experience to our community while removing the typical barriers non-profit organizations often face (registration costs, travel, etc).

In order to ensure the cost-effectiveness of this event, the City relies heavily on the involvement of volunteers and in-kind contributions. All workshop facilitators are volunteers (we do pay a fee for the keynote speaker), and city volunteers support the event by running the registration table and by being room hosts.

Lunch is sponsored by a local business, again keeping the costs of the event low while providing another local business with a platform to promote their offerings.

By creating a platform that also promotes our local businesses, we are supporting their growth of those businesses which will then contribute to the economic development of our community.

4. TRANSPARENCY

How has this program/project improved upon accountability to the community's citizens?

This is a full day of collaboration between the City staff and our citizens. We have the opportunity to learn together, converse together, ask questions, and explore answers. It provides an ideal venue to address and alleviate challenges. Staff select and deliver workshop topics directly related to those challenges. Past City-staff led workshops include:

- City Council 101: So, You Wish to Speak to City Council?
- How to Plan a Special Event within the City
- Budgeting 101
- Continuous Improvement – out with the waste

Past workshops led by organizations/business owners include:

• Grant Writing For Success

• Creating a Community Using Social Media

• Positioning Your Organization For Success Effective Market Research

• Business and the Arts

• Creating a Culture of Engagement

• The Intergenerational Workplace

• Sharing your Message with Video

• How Tourism can Help Local Businesses

5. COLLABORATION

a. Tell us how colleagues/departments worked together to come up with innovative solutions.

Involve Abbotsford is delivered through three key staff from the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department: the Volunteer Coordinator, the Community Developer and the Healthy Abbotsford Coordinator. Although they are the planning/implementation team, they liaise with staff from multiple departments when exploring topic areas and looking for workshop facilitators.

The event is held each year on a Saturday in May. Planning for the event starts the September of the previous year which allows the planning team to spend eight months to work together and build upon the previous year's success.

Once the planning team has an outline and vision for the event, they seek input from many other leadership teams.

b. Tell us how your Council/Board provided a supportive environment for implementing change.

This event is proudly supported by Mayor and Council. Each year the symposium is officially opened with remarks from our Mayor (or Councilor in his/her absence). Abbotsford City Council fosters an environment of innovation and community collaboration, which in turn fosters excellence within our staff team.

6. INNOVATION

What makes this program/project innovative and creative?

To the best of our knowledge, Abbotsford is the only community that provides annual staff-led support to the community in this way. Each year the format of the symposium changes as we continue to find new ways to engage our delegates and provide an exceptional and inspiring learning experience. It is a unique example of bringing together local government, organizations and businesses to create something that is truly open to everyone in the community.

Involve Abbotsford is a low-cost, City led project that engages local organizations and businesses, residents and staff so that we can harness and showcase our local expertise. By having staff on the planning team that are in regular contact with many of our local organizations, we are able to ensure that this event meets their needs.

This project also supports, and is supported by the Abbotsford Speakers Bureau. This bureau is comprised of local experts (in a variety of fields) who are willing to volunteer their time to do community presentations, lunch and learn workshops etc. We are able to draw speakers for the event from this bureau and also promote the bureau to the participants so that they can bring high-quality learning experiences into their own organizations and workplaces.

7. SUSTAINABILITY

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

In 2016 Involve Abbotsford had a 50% increase in registrations from 2015. The continued growth that this project shows each year is a testament to the solid processes that are in place. The staff time required to organize and deliver this event is supported through three positions and their corresponding budgets within the department. For each position, this event assists in expanding the reach of their respective work with the community: community outreach and support, volunteer development, health networking and community capacity building.

With a large team of volunteers (workshop facilitators, registration desk hosts, room hosts) and engaging local businesses for sponsorship, this is a very sustainable event for the City. The rental costs of the host facility are donated by the City.

9. BEST PRACTICES

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

The foundation of this project is collaboration between municipal government, non-profit organizations and local businesses. It is a strong example of how having a planning team that includes a variety of staff who are connected to the community, can really bring a community together to create something that benefits everyone. From securing volunteer workshop facilitators, to securing a food and beverage sponsor, the whole project is about working together through all levels of the community.

10. TRANSFERABILITY

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

This project is a model of designing and delivering a community-based day of learning that could be replicated by any local government. The Abbotsford Team would be happy to assist any municipality looking at replicating this initiative. Some recommended planning areas to focus on include:

• An organization should establish the planning team which encompasses key staff members who currently have strong connections to the community.

• It is recommended that a collaborative session of brainstorming of key issues local community groups and businesses are faced with in order to determine what type of workshops would best inspire, inform and invigorate best organizational practices.

• An outreach and connection with community and staff members to engage local experts who are able and willing to host relevant and meaningful workshops.

11. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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

Engage your local volunteers and local businesses and harness the professional knowledge contained within your local government staff team. Every local government has a wealth of professional experts who are eager to be part of something that has a mission of making a difference in their community. Many are just waiting to be asked!

12. TELL US MORE

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

• Website: www.abbotsford.ca/involve