

2016 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS APPLICATION PARTNERSHIPS

Filled Friday, June 17, 2016

Name of Local Government

Columbia Shuswap Regional District, Regional District of North Okanagan, Regional District of Central Okanagan, and Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen

Project/Program Manager Name

Melissa Tesche

Title

Acting General Manager

Phone

250-469-6182

Email

mtesche@oksir.org

Administrative Contact Name

Elysia Zimmer

Title

Administrative Assistant

Phone

250-469-6187

Email

sirinfo@oksir.org

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

Yes

Project/Program Title:

OKSIR Service Review/Strategic Planning

Project Summary Paragraph

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

OKSIR has undertaken a multi-year project to review all aspects of the existing program, identify the benefits and costs, survey current stakeholder needs and new available technologies, and come up with a vision and plan for the next 20 years of the program. The project was divided into three phases: 1) service review and information gathering, 2) idea generation, exploration, and pilot projects, and 3) synthesis and stakeholder consultation. Each of the steps built on existing partnerships, but also built new collaborations: locally, nationally, and internationally. The project is currently moving into the third and final phase of synthesis and stakeholder consultation, and it has already resulted in some successful changes to the program.

Project Analysis

1. OBJECTIVE

Please explain the decision-making and thought process behind your decision to take on this initiative.

The OKSIR Program was built on partnerships over 20 years ago—between the participating regional districts and with the apple/pear industry and senior governments. OKSIR had achieved both the goal of codling moth control (populations were down by 94%), and a dramatic reduction in the amount of pesticides being used against the pest (96% decrease). However, times had changed since the beginning of the program—acreage and crop changes, new invasive pests, a changing climate, new technologies—but the Regional District’s common goal of working together to keep pesticide use to a minimum remained.

The Regional Districts undertook this project to make sure all stakeholders were still being best-served by the program, and that the pesticide savings achieved aren't undermined by the arrival of a new invasive pest that the region wasn't prepared for. The program set out to review the current operations and administration from top to bottom, dream big about new possibilities for the program, and set a future direction with input from all stakeholders.

2. CHALLENGES

Please provide examples of challenges you faced in taking on this program/project and how you overcame them.

Keeping Costs to a Minimum – Service reviews and strategic plans can be expensive when consultants are the only ones involved. OKSIR still needed to deliver their full operational program during the project, and prides itself on not having increased tax requisitions for the last six years. Under guidance from the Regional Districts, OKSIR worked to find creative partnerships that would meet the project objectives, provide a benefit to the collaborator, and keep the project costs down.

Finding Benchmarks for the Service Review – OKSIR is the only one of its kind in Canada and one of only a handful of area-wide sterile insect release programs in the world. It was a challenge to find a suitable external organization to do the service review. The Program reached out internationally to the FAO-IAEA, who agreed to send a panel of experts to do a review in exchange for OKSIR hosting their next research coordination meeting. In the spring of 2014, OKSIR hosted over 30 researchers/experts from around the world, and a panel of six stayed for the week after the meeting to perform the external review, at almost no cost to the program.

3. BENEFITS

Please provide examples of how this program/project benefited the community.

The communities benefits when the tree fruit industry is strong, when pest management practices are environmentally friendly, and when services are provided in the most effective and cost-efficient way possible. OKSIR, together with tree fruit growers, has kept a lot of pesticide out of the environment and supports the vibrant and idyllic agricultural lifestyle the region is known for.

This project will make sure that OKSIR continues to protect communities and support the tree fruit industry in the face of new pest threats and the changing climate. Cost-saving and potential revenue generating innovations through this

project will help ensure OKSIR remains financially sustainable, providing comprehensive services at the lowest cost possible.

Operational Benefits: The project has already had operational benefits. Many recommendations from the external review were implemented immediately, further streamlining operations and administration.

Benefits to Stakeholder Relations: Stakeholder relations have been strengthened through this project because it demonstrates financial prudence on the part of OKSIR and shows a genuine desire to stay current with the goals of the Regional Districts (reduce pesticides in their communities) and the fruit growers (support pest control efforts in an area-wide, environmentally-friendly way). Stakeholders also appreciated OKSIR using partnerships and creative collaborations to achieve the objects, keeping the costs to a minimum.

Benefits of Exposure: Some of the creative collaborations have resulted in national and international attention for the program, and other areas (New Zealand, France, Italy) are now interested in setting up similar programs.

4. INNOVATION

Tell us why you consider this project/program to be an innovative and/or creative initiative.

Service reviews and strategic planning processes are done in many local governments, but the second phase of this project is not as common. Phase two is entirely focused on exploring and testing out possible innovations to the program before committing to a strategic plan.

Technological Innovations: OKSIR has built partnerships to address a number of technological innovations. Can the program deliver sterile moths by UAS, instead of the more costly and labour intensive ATV method currently used? Will the program get the same results in other fruit growing regions of the world? Can the moths be shipped across the world in commercial quantities?

Service Innovations: New invasive pests have arrived and still more are waiting on the doorstep. Could the OKSIR adapt its area-wide approach and infrastructure to provide greater benefits to fruit growers? Could it add other pests? Help other crops?

Innovative Funding Ideas: OKSIR is investigating the possibility of generating alternative revenue to support and offset operational costs. The success of the program has meant that not as many sterile moths are needed for the program's operations, and the rearing facility owned and operated by the Regional Districts is

being under used. Could the facility run at full production and send the extra moths for use in other areas? Could these sales generate enough profit to offset costs at home?

5. GOALS

What did you set out to accomplish with the program/project? How effectively did you meet your goals?

Phase 1 – Service Review/Information Gathering (Complete)

Goal: Ensure current services are relevant and desired, and are being provided in the most efficient, scientifically-sound, and cost-effective way, through:

- 1) Economic benefit and cost analysis,
- 2) Independent statistical analysis of control techniques, and;
- 3) Full external review of program,

The first phase of the project was a success. The program has completed all objectives and found the process extremely helpful. OKSIR has implemented most of the recommendations coming out of the first phase.

Phase 2 – Idea Generation, Exploration, and Pilot Projects (Completion in Spring 2017)

Goal: Investigate possible innovations and ideas that would provide added value for both the communities and the tree fruit industry, and explore possibilities for generation of alternative revenue streams that could support program costs and offset or reduce tax rates.

Thus far, all of the projects look like they could become a part of the future direction of the OKSIR, should the stakeholders approve. The pilot program in New Zealand has shown enough promise that other countries have also contact OKSIR for pilot programs. OKSIR is now investigating ways to expand them commercially. The Program is piloting projects on two other pests, and the first UAS flight trial is scheduled for August 2016.

Phase 3 – Project Synthesis and Stakeholder Consultation

Goal: Provide the Program's stakeholders with the results, and host consultations to gather input on their vision for the OKSIR Program into the future. The project is just entering the third phase.

6. SUSTAINABILITY

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

This project is financially and operationally sustainable because it is being done through partnerships, which is why it is being nominated in the Partnerships category. The program has allocated a substantial amount of management time and the sale of excess moths has provided a small budget designated for the review and planning process, but most of the work has been done through identifying common goals and mutually beneficial projects in each of the phases.

7. TRANSFERABILITY

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

This project had a large scope, but would certainly be scalable to any local government program or department. In fact, service reviews and strategic planning should at some point be undertaken by most programs, even when the current program are successful. The three phase approach has served the program well, and could be implemented in similar projects.

Building partnerships locally is important, but this project has shown that national and international collaborations are also possible.

The project also demonstrates the benefits possible when local governments partner with researchers and educational institutions. With the Benefit-Cost Analysis, for example, OKSIR had a high-quality analysis completed for a small fraction of what it would have cost to have done through a consultant. The researcher who completed the analysis was able to publish his findings and share them at economic conferences, and OKSIR further benefitted from the additional exposure.

8. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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

We would recommend that local governments think creatively and broadly about the types of partnerships that are possible. Although partnering with another organization may be a slower process than hiring a consultant, it can often result in high quality results at a fraction of the costs and provide benefits to all parties.

We would also recommend that local governments not be intimidated when approaching national or international organizations. We found our regional initiative was well-received, even at much bigger scales. Big ideas might happen at the national and international levels, but local governments are often where those big ideas are implemented.

Finally, we would recommend local governments be patient and allow time between the service review stage and strategic planning stage to investigate possibilities without committing to them. The small scale pilot programs have taken a significant amount of time, but they will be critical to informing the strategic planning discussion with program stakeholders.

All resulting documents and reports are available on the OKSIR website, www.oksir.org, and OKSIR staff have been sharing both the overall program and project results at industry group meetings, board presentations, and conferences on the local, national, and international stage.

9. TELL US MORE

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

In 2015, OKSIR was awarded the prestigious IPM Award of Excellence, given out by the 8th International IPM Symposium held in Salt Lake City. The program was nominated by the national Pesticide Risk Reduction Program of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada in Ottawa.

New areas are trying to set up programs similar to OKSIR, and many have failed—not because the science of sterile insect technique or area-wide approaches to pest control isn't sound, but because the political will, partnership, and vision isn't there. The OKSIR Program as a whole is a successful, innovative, and interesting partnership between the partnering Regional Districts. OKSIR has been good for the communities, good for the growers, and good for the economy.

The efforts of the participating Regional Districts—to ensure the program stays current, continues to benefit all stakeholders, and remains environmentally and financially sustainable—deserve to be recognized. They have met the project goals by developing existing and new partnerships, showing the old African proverb to be true: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

10. PARTNERS

a) Please list all the partners involved in this initiative. (no word limit)

The project has involved, or will involve the following partners over the last five years. Some partners have been involved in more than one stage, but are only listed once for brevity.

Phase 1 – UBC-Okanagan, Okanagan College, Food and Agriculture/International Atomic Energy Association Joint Programme

Phase 2 – M3 Consulting Group (Unmanned Aircraft Systems Research and Development), US Department of Agriculture, BC Ministry of Agriculture, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Pesticide Risk Reduction Program, Ottawa), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, New Zealand Plant and Food Research, Canadian Food Inspection Agency

Phase 3 – BC Fruit Growers Association, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Summerland Research and Development Center), BC Tree Fruits

b) Why did you choose to work with this/these particular partner(s)?

Regional Districts – The communities within the program’s service area are major stakeholders in the program. Agriculture is a life style in the Okanagan, and the Regional Districts needed to partner together to decrease pesticide use—agricultural pests don’t respect jurisdictional boundaries.

Industry Groups – Fruit growers, represented by the BC Fruit Growers Association and BC Tree Fruits are also major stakeholders in the program, so it makes sense that they play a role throughout the project.

Senior Governments – The Provincial and Federal Governments have made substantial investments and played a pivotal role in the establishment and guidance of the program over the years—especially the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Summerland Research and Development Centre.

Research Institutions – OKSIR needed sound analyses and innovative ideas, but did not have the budget to send projects out to RFP or bring in consultants. Partnering with research institutions has resulted in benefits to both parties with high quality results.

International Organizations – OKSIR had to look far afield to find similar programs and experts in sterile insect technology and area-wide pest management. Although OKSIR is a regional initiative, organizations like the FAO-IAEA were happy to partner because there were mutual benefits.