



**2012 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS
Category Worksheet**

BEST PRACTICES, Civic Engagement

Name of Local Government: District of Elkford

Project/Program Title: 2012 District of Elkford Local Government Awareness Week

Project Summary Paragraph

The District of Elkford participated in Local Government Awareness Week for the second year in a row in May 2012 and we were very excited about the outcome. In celebration of Local Government Awareness Week, the District of Elkford Mayor, Council and Staff hosted an Open House in the local mall, as well as a “Name the Bear” Contest for Elementary School Students and an “Elkford Is...” Video Contest for High School Students.

The Open House attempted to go above and beyond a stereotypical meet and greet or information session, and instead incorporated displays from each department that were manned by members of Staff and Council. Several visual displays, including a full-scale water service display, a video showcasing the new Elkford Community Conference Centre, photographs and other materials and supplies were included in the Open House as a way to engage citizens and provide them with concrete presentations of operations and processes.

Project Analysis

Please answer the question in 300 words or less in 11 pt Arial font (our judges value directness and brevity). If you experience difficulty answering a particular question, consider the aspects of your program that may relate to the question and show us how they are linked.

1. INSPIRATION

What was the inspiration behind the program/project?

One of the Guiding Principles identified by Council in the Official Community Plan, which was adopted in May 2010, was to nurture engaged citizens and increase two-way communications between the public and the District. The District participated in Local Government Awareness Week for the first time last year and found that it was successful in allowing the public to engage directly with Council and Staff.

The District of Elkford is continuously looking for new ways to engage with its residents and Local Government Awareness Week was a fun and interactive way to achieve this goal.

2. GOALS

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

The two main goals of Local Government Awareness Week this year was to provide a platform that encouraged and promoted dialogue about the ongoing activities at the District, as well as getting youth excited about promoting and embracing their community.

The feedback that was received at the Open House from the community on our projects and operations was useful and helped achieve our ongoing goal of improving community relations. The student contests were very successful, particularly the contest for local elementary school students. Both contests focused on having students interact and embrace the Elkford branding in order to further promote a sense of ownership and pride to not only our branding, but the community as a whole.

The elementary student contest, "Name the Bear", had students submit their proposed name for the popular Elkford Bear (which appears in a lot of our branding and promotional materials) and the reason why they thought the name was appropriate. We received twenty-five submissions – all of which were thoughtful, creative and fun.

The "Elkford Is..." Tourism Video Contest for high school students asked students to submit 40 second to 4 minute tourism focused videos that showcase Elkford's scenery, wildlife, facilities, recreational activities or any other aspects of our community that the students wished to highlight. Although the District only received two submissions, the quality of the videos was exceptional. Both video submissions showcased the student's technical and artistic abilities while evoking emotion and passion. These videos are posted on the District of Elkford's YouTube site (<http://www.youtube.com/user/DistrictofElkford>).

To further promote youth engagement and pride, the District offered monetary prizes to all of the winners of the two contests. The student received 50% of the prize money and the other 50% was donated towards a youth initiative of the winner's choice in his/her name. The students chose projects such as funding towards the construction of a new skate park, the Alberta Children's Hospital and Elkford Youth Soccer.

3. PARTICIPATION

a. How was the community involved in your program/project? Please provide measurable results.

The community was directly involved in Local Government Awareness Week because the District made a conscious effort to plan the event around the residents. The District chose the local mall as the location for the event because it is a central location that is frequented by most residents. Many youth of the community became directly involved by participating in the student contests.

b. Tell us about all levels of teamwork involved in making this program/project possible. Include a description of any barriers or challenges it was necessary to overcome.

Teamwork was essential to this project, as all departments were required to work together to coordinate the event. Each department identified the main projects, issues and information that they wanted to showcase at the Open House and effectively communicated with other departments to ensure that there was minimal overlapping of information. Department Heads worked cooperatively with their staff to pinpoint important topics, common misperceptions held by the public and what the displays should consist of.

4. ECONOMIC IMPACT

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

The project had minimal impact on long-term economic development; however, a lot of information pertaining to economic development was readily available at the Open House (i.e. building permits, development permits and land use information).

5. ACCOUNTABILITY

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

The efforts made to engage with citizens and provide visual and concrete examples of District projects during the Open House made the District's accountability to citizens more evident. The District has always strived to engage with its residents through our branding, website, advertizing, newsletter, social media and much more, and Local Government Awareness Week has provided the District with yet another avenue to make Staff and Council more accessible to residents of the community. Local Government Awareness Week has helped to not only make the District more accountable to its citizens, but also has helped us to continue to remove the barrier between "us" and "them".

6. AWARENESS

How has this program/project created more awareness in the community about local government actions?

The Open House incorporated every department within the District, as well as Council and an overview of our Community Conference Centre project. Various displays were placed inside the mall and general information on building permits, business licenses, property taxes and other day-to-day operations were provided.

The Public Works display included an interactive display of the workings of residential water services, a power point presentation on the seasonal duties of the department, and information on water conservation and bleeder line valves. The Leisure Services Department's display included information on programs offered by the Recreation Centre and Aquatic Centre, as well as highlighting pool and outdoor safety. The Fire Rescue & Emergency Services Department provided information on Volunteer Fire Fighter Recruitment and the District's Wildfire Fuel Reduction Program. A display was provided for Mayor and Council that emphasized the major projects that Council had embarked on during their term.

The display that received the most attention was on the Community Conference Centre and many residents stopped to chat with Councilors and Staff about the opening of the Centre (which occurred in June 2012) and their thoughts and opinions on the project.

Our student contests allowed the youth of community to directly engage with the Elkford brand and also helped to create a sense of ownership towards the brand. The students were very excited about the contests and those who did participate exceeded our expectations with their enthusiasm and creativity. The success of our branding has continuously gained momentum and various projects, such as the student contests, aid in allowing residents to embrace the brand and feel as though it truly represents their community.

7. INNOVATION

What makes this program/project innovative and creative?

The most innovative aspect of our Local Government Awareness Week this year was our student contest. In 2011, we hosted a student poster contest and a student essay contest. The level of participation from students was rather low and there was not a palpable level of enthusiasm about the projects. This year, we attempted to create contests that would spark the creative interests of youth and make them feel included by asking for their perspective and opinion.

Next year, we plan to invite the two local schools to participate in the Open House and tour District facilities in order to further educate youth on the role(s) of local government within their community.

8. SUSTAINABILITY

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

Staff time and resources have been allocated for a similar project to occur again in 2013. A significant amount of brainstorming and debriefing took place after this year's events to help identify pros and cons of the events. The District placed one staff member in charge of doing the overall planning for next year's events. This person will coordinate with each department, set a theme, and coordinate the event.

We plan to host the Open House in the new Community Conference Centre in 2013 and send out personal invitations to various user groups and organizations.

9. BEST PRACTICES

What sets this program/project apart as a winning idea? Why should it be considered a best practice, in comparison to other similar programs?

Elkford's project incorporated all aspects of district operations, and all levels of staff, from public works employees, to senior managers and Council. The event included engagement with all members of the community, from seniors to youth. By taking the Elkford message into the schools, it helps bring awareness to the activities of local government, as well as help to increase community pride and ownership.

10. TRANSFERABILITY

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

The process that Elkford used could be essentially used by any local government that is willing to allocate the resources and time to organize these events. The District plans to continuously build on the event year after year. As such, any local government that initiates a process of community engagement can build on it from year to year.

11. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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

The best advice that we have to offer to other communities is that organization and cooperation are key to a successful event! Departments need to work together to create a unified and cohesive image, in order to provide a professional display to the public. Staff will need time to be able to organize an event of this nature, and will need to work together to ensure that all of the important projects and aspects of the organization are being addressed.

12. TELL US MORE

Please share any other information you think may help us better understand your submission.

