Name of Local Government: City of Kamloops

Project/Program Title: Mobilizing Citizens to Report Civic Issues

Project Summary Paragraph
This project involved implementing a freely available mobile app called ‘myKamloops’ that allows residents of Kamloops to easily and quickly report civic infrastructure issues such as graffiti, potholes, sign down, drainage issues and the like. App users take a photograph, video or voice recording of the issue, choose from a pick-list the type of issue, optionally write an issue description, and identify the issue location on a map. Once issues are submitted, City employees use a web-based ‘dash board’ to receive and process issues in order to provide to field crews so that issues can be resolved.

Project Analysis

1. INSPIRATION
Civic issues are difficult to describe using phone and/or email so it seemed like a smart phone based solution, available both to employees and the public, which allows a photograph and the (location-aware) smart phone to describe and locate civic issues, would be a great application of technology as a solution to this problem.

2. GOALS
Project objectives:
• Simplify the task of reporting civic issues for people
• Encourage more, and more timely, civic issue reportage
• Reduce infrastructure maintenance costs through earlier detection of issues by improving civic issue reportage

Based on our results analysis, we believe we have achieved these objects.

3. PARTICIPATION

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

The community was involved by the City of Kamloops making available to residents of Kamloops a free app (called ‘myKamloops’) for them to use to report civic infrastructure issues. To date (since Jan 18th, 2012) there have been 1,500+
app downloads, 220 unique civic issue submitters, and 585 individual civic issue submissions.

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.

We performed a 4 month pilot of the app using 60 City employees (who had smart phones) and 8 clerical staff from 4 different City departments (for receiving and processing issue submissions via a web-based dashboard). After reviewing the results of the pilot we made process changes (to simplify issue status notifications back to submitters) and modified our public launch roll-out plan (timing, initial staff-up, type of launch, etc). We then did a public launch of the app to residents announcing its availability using local media (article 1, article 2) and other means (City website [www.kamloops.ca/mobileapp], industry magazine [MISA Interface, May, 2012], conferences [MISA Spring meeting, 2012], URISA BC [Nov, 2012], annual calendar advertisement, quarterly utility bill insert, etc) to get the word out to the public.

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

By, 1) improving the amount of infrastructure issue reportage, and, 2) by decreasing the amount of time it takes to become aware of an infrastructure issue, money has been saved by knowing about a civic issue and/or knowing about a civic issue sooner. While no hard dollar figures can be easily determined, it is logical that it is cheaper to fix a pothole (for example) when it is small as opposed to when it becomes large. By making it easier to report such civic infrastructure issues it makes sense that they get reported sooner than they would have otherwise. It is also felt that other, less direct savings, are being achieved though examples like better and sooner graffiti removal thereby discouraging more graffiti (downtown Kamloops is now, generally, graffiti free!), drainage/flooding issues corrected before they become worse/re-occur, and liability/risk-related cost avoidance through early reportage of ‘sign down’/trip hazards and the like.

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

We have received nothing but good feedback from the public about this program based on, 1) how easy it now is to report civic issues, and, 2) that the City has added this additional civic infrastructure issue reporting method thereby further encouraging citizens to take ownership of their civic infrastructure and their local government services by reporting when infrastructure needs to be repaired or corrected. We feel that this helps to encourage civic pride.
6. AWARENESS
How has this program/project created more awareness in the community about local government actions?

Through the media, mail outs, and other means (see 3b above), the City has promoted the use of the app and the City’s desire to provide great public services by trying to ensure that when there is an infrastructure issue the City is notified about it as soon as possible so that it gets corrected with the least amount of service ‘down-time’ as possible.

7. INNOVATION
What makes this program/project innovative and creative?

• First local government in BC to implement a mobile app for this purpose
• First City of Kamloops mobile app
• Proactively encourages the public to report civic issues (beyond phone and email)
• Innovative use of a smart phone app by taking advantage of the strengths of smart phones: 1) they’re mobile so can be used in the public space to report public infrastructure issues, 2) they have a camera to take photos of civic issues, and 3) they can determine their current geographic location and hence simplifies for the submitter how to describe the location of the issue.

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

• Affordable, annual cost of the program is now included in City’s annual budget
• Staff in 4 City departments are trained on the system and respond daily to issues that are submitted by forwarding issue reports to field staff.
• The system works, and works well, helping to solidify its ongoing City (and public) support (2nd year of operation with continued support expected)
• Ongoing publicizaton of the program ensures that the public continues to use the system

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?

There really aren’t any similar programs (other than the public being encouraged to report civic issues using the phone and email).
This is a winning idea in that it actively includes citizens in the business of civic government by encouraging them to report civic issues (by making it easy to do). It is logical to conclude that this engenders civic pride and saves taxpayers money by helping to reduce infrastructure maintenance costs.

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

This program is 100% transferrable to all other local governments since the app is a purchased system (no hardware or software development costs) and therefore affordable and long-term sustainable, it is configured to each local government’s needs, and all local governments own civic infrastructure that they need to maintain and early and better reportage of issues with that infrastructure can only help to reduce a local government’s infrastructure maintenance costs.

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

Perform an internal pilot of the app first to both increase awareness among staff and to prepare them for the public launch. Ensure civic issue handling processes are well understood by all affected staff and (to the degree possible) are made the same in all departments who handle civic infrastructure issue submissions. Prepare a well-thought out public launch communications plan.

12. TELL US MORE
Please share any other information you think may help us better understand your submission.

It is inherently difficult to use traditional means for reporting civic issues – phone and/or email – for the following reasons:

1) It typically requires the submitter to return home (or to someplace where they have access to a computer or phone) in order to submit an issue – making it less likely that an issue is going to be submitted given the time lag since discovering the issue

2) An issue submitter has to know the phone number or email address of City Hall before being able to submit an issue requiring the public to first look up this contact information before being able to report an infrastructure issue – making it less likely that an issue is going to be submitted

3) They say, “A picture tells a thousand words” – it is inherently difficult for a submitter to verbally/written describe a problem accurately so that field crews
can gauge the type of issue, severity/priority, and equipment/materials needed prior to investigating an issue

4) It is inherently difficult for a submitter to describe the location of an issue unless it happens to be directly in front of or near a house with an address. Many issues occur in back lanes, in parks or along roadways where there is no obvious addressing making it difficult to provide an accurate location for an issue

All of these problems are solved with the myKamloops app.

1) Issues can be submitted in the field using a smart phone – no requirement to return home to submit an issue

2) City Hall contact information is stored in the app therefore the submitter doesn’t have to find it

3) A photo, taken using the smart phone app, accurately describes the issue for City staff

4) The smart phone knows its geographic location therefore provides this in map form as part of an issue submission