



**2013 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS
Category Worksheet**

BEST PRACTICES, General

Name of Local Government: District of Maple Ridge

Project/Program Title: 2012 Citizens Report - Reimagined

Project Summary Paragraph

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

The District of Maple Ridge produces an annual Citizens Report each year to provide citizens with a summary of the financial data for the previous year, as well as highlights of the District of Maple Ridge Work Plan. For the 2012 project, we decided to reimagine the report away from the more formal 'annual report' format used by many communities and presented the information as a magazine modeled after one of Canada's more popular news magazines, Maclean's.

Information in the 2012 Citizens Report was provided in a narrative style with extensive use of photographs. Layouts were done to mimic magazine production to create a more engaging and readable document that citizens would be compelled to read. The link to the publication is: <http://bit.ly/12uc3EM>.

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.

Remember to include measurable results whenever possible.

1. SERVICES

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

The Citizens Report is distributed as part of a local community event held each May, the Ridge Meadows Home Show. At the Home Show, the District of Maple Ridge hosts a booth which is attended by Council and staff volunteers who hand out copies of the Citizens Report while

engaging event goes in dialogue. In past years, we have distributed as many as 300 copies of the Citizens Report over the three day event.

In 2013, more than 800 copies of the publication were collected by event goers. The design and layout brought them to the rack in the District's booth and they pulled out copies based on their perception this was a magazine, versus the same old Citizens Report.

The whole idea of a Citizens Report is to get citizens to read the material and become informed and engaged in their community. By changing the format of the publication into something that is more compelling, we had a record number of people pick up and read the report. It is one thing to be transparent; it's another to be engaging.

2. EFFECTIVENESS

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

The Citizens Report is produced annually and there are 1,000 copies printed. The digital version is placed online at *mapleridge.ca*. In past years, there were typically two or three hundred copies of the publication left at the end of the year, and at the Home Show we'd often find copies of the publication in the garbage bin at the end of the aisle.

Within three weeks of this year's Home Show, our supply of 1,000 copies was exhausted. No one found any of them in the garbage bin at the Home Show this year. Feedback from citizens has been gratifying. Clearly, this format resonates. An interesting comment came from a spouse of one of our Council members. They contacted us and complimented the District of Maple Ridge Communications Department on the publication, noting that they had read it from cover to cover, before realizing that it was the 2012 Citizens Report. They thought it was a new magazine.

Maple Ridge has won numerous industry awards for our annual Citizens Report over the years from industry associations, but the objective and goal is to have citizens pour through the pages and read about their community in great detail.

3. ECONOMIC IMPACT

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

In 2011, the production of the Citizens Report was moved from an outside supplier to an internal project managed internally by District of Maple Ridge staff. We also benefited from using outside photography and production services from local experts in the community. It is difficult to

capture the voice of an organization using an outside agency to create a report of this type. The outside supplier was typically delivering the project at a cost of between \$14,000 and \$16,000 dollars annually. The production of the 2010 and 2011 Citizens Report by the internal team streamlined the project timeline and cost structure, and delivered a finished product that was seamless from the outside production model.

By managing the project internally, using local creative talent, and competitive printing quotes, the District has been able to deliver this project for approximately \$10,000, a 40% savings from past years. Additionally, we've been able to generate more material that can be repurposed, such as photography and editorial content that can be used on the District's website and in other publications.

One of our goals is to showcase the talent of local designers and photographers, and through their work, showcase our beautiful community. A secondary goal is to have the story of our work told through the voices and eyes of District staff and area residents. This approach creates a more personal and memorable narrative in the publication.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY

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

We paid particular attention to reformatting the financial data contained in the 2012 Citizens Report to make the information more accessible to citizens who may not have a background in corporate finance. All of the data that is part of other community reports is within ours, we've just packaged the information the way that a magazine would, so that citizens can better understand the finances and activities of the District.

Work Plan highlights have been packaged into articles that allow citizens to understand the activities of various departments in a format that is easy to comprehend. Instead of long lists of projects that are easily forgotten, we have focused on projects that are part of development themes in Maple Ridge.

We have also gone to great lengths to highlight the accomplishments of citizens in our community that contribute to making our community special. Photographs are used extensively throughout the publication to illustrate key concepts and work.

Accountability is enhanced when we engage more effectively with citizens and provide them with better and more comprehensible accounts of our work on their behalf.

5. AWARENESS

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

The format of the publication is designed to encourage citizens to pick it up and delve into the contents. Typically, annual reports are very formal and the content is very dry. This report format is designed to mimic Maclean's magazine because that's the kind of publication that our citizens are subscribing to and picking up at the grocery store.

Every aspect of the publication has been designed to encourage people to pick it up. Instead of an 'institutional' cover, we went with cover image and story that feeds off the interest in crime labs in the news and popular culture. We packaged the financial data as a special report with an introductory article on 'reserve funds' and tried to relate that to household budgeting.

The key has been to write the publication in language that is accessible to citizens. They responded by taking the publication from our booth at the Ridge Meadows Home Show based on being interested by the material on the cover.

6. TEAMWORK

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

The project 'editor or publisher' is the District of Maple Ridge Manager of Corporate Communications. He met with the District's General Managers to get ideas on key projects and themes for each area and then assembled the full project team consisting of the local photographer, production design team, and two key District staff members who managed the internal project timeline.

The first meeting set the project parameters and publications size, and then then ideas were pitched for the report content. All members of the group discussed and refined how the themes could be explored and presented visually, and a rough mock-up of the report was created.

The designers then began working overall page formatting, and the photographer, working with District staff members, began taking any custom images required for the project. The project was written by District staff members, with feature articles being generated by the Communications Manager and refined and edited by his colleagues.

At key points in the project, the team met to review content development and the project tracking checklist to ensure the team was on course. As content was ready, the designers began to layout pages and fed them to the team members for comments. General managers

were given proofs of their pages, and technical experts from finance reviewed the details of the finished pages to ensure that the numbers were accurate.

Once all the pages were complete, an overall proof was done to harmonize the pages and it was sent to the printer three weeks before the reveal date. The 1,000 copies were delivered two days before the Home Show and the digital version was placed online.

Six people, working seamlessly over an eight week production cycle created this work.

7. INNOVATION

What makes this program/project innovative and creative?

While there are variations between the Citizens Reports of each community, they are often very derivative. The goal with this publication was to break the mold and see if information could be presented in a new way, using the popular media as a template rather than comparisons to corporate or government reports.

By using the visual tools of popular media, we created a more inviting presentation for citizens.

8. SUSTAINABILITY

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

By doing the project as a team, and integrating District staff and outside resources, the template for the project is repeatable in future years. The District staff member who created the project tracking checklist has created a project template that can be replicated with new staff members easily. This year, we used a new design team and one of the District staff members was new, and yet the project went as smoothly as the previous year due to the overall project planning. This model of producing the report is substantially cheaper than an outsourced project. Based on comparison to previous years, this project was brought in for 40% less than outsourced versions from past years. The bonus is that District staff get to extend their experience and collaborate more directly with the outside creative team. This increases our organizations capacity for other projects throughout the year.

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?

The best practices for this project are:

- All photography is available to be repurposed in other online and print communications.
- Local vendors used to showcase talent of the community.
- More readers of the publication due to it looking like a commercial publication.
- The ability to repurpose pages of the publication for internal use.
- The 'single voice' of the publication is achieved with the in house writing and editing.
- Digital and print versions are essential.
- Using one paper stock, as with most magazines, is cheaper to print versus cover and inside page printing models.
- District staff are more engaged in this publications and it circulates more widely internally.
- Mailing copies to people mentioned in the publication and to key members of the community extends the people 'championing' the project.

10. TRANSFERABILITY

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

For smaller organizations, this type of publication can be created by an outside team, with strong direction by a member of the staff. For larger organizations, the capacity to produce this type of publication likely exists within the organization. The result is that the finished product has a better voice and better reflects the organizations, versus a production that may be formal and un-engaging.

The key is to use local creative talent who share a passion for the community. Great photography is critical and you need to create a collaboration that will allow them to have a voice in the content development.

11. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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

Give your Citizens Report to your friends and family. Ask them if they understand the content. Ask them what they would like to know about the community.

The key for us has been to remember that the work we do is for the public, not for our peers. Therefore, we need to look at the ways that our community accesses information and replicate the style and format that will allow them to process the information that we create.

We need to strip our publications of the jargon of government and use the language of the community. Where we have statutory requirements to present some data, how can we help the community to process this information. This is particularly important for the financial data. Simplify.

Also, as we did, reach out to your local newspapers and see if they will share visuals for the community timeline. They often have great images that have been used only once. A lot happens in a year, we need to connect our work with the cadence of life in the community.

Get a great photographer as a key member of the team. The visuals are essential.

12. TELL US MORE

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

This is a huge departure from the normal format of Citizens Reports. In particular, the cooperation of the Chief Administrative Officer, General Managers and Council in presenting the information in this more user friendly format was critical. It was a leap of faith for the leaders in our organization to allow us to proceed with this style of publication, but the speed with which the community snapped up copies demonstrates that the risk was worth it.

There are talented creative people in your community. By engaging them, and their talents, and cross pollinating with your staff, the final result will create a stronger emotional connection with citizens. Write about people, and demonstrate benefits.

We are all proud of our work and our communities. The 2012 Citizens Report captures 12 months in the life of Maple Ridge because it's a mirror to our piece of the world, not a copy of another communities' format.