



**2013 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS
Category Worksheet**

PARTNERSHIPS

Name of Local Government: Thompson-Nicola Regional District

**Project/Program Title: Smith Pioneer Park –Community Involvement -
Community Pride**

Project Summary Paragraph

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

This project involves a partnership between the Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD) and the Lower Nicola Community Association (Association) which resulted over \$120,000 in unanticipated community contributions. In addition minimal staff time was required in the redevelopment of the TNRD owned Smith Pioneer Park (Park).

By partnering with the Association to supervise and manage the project, the TNRD accessed individuals who were vested in their community, and who in turn engaged community businesses and other volunteers.

Working with the Manager of the Community Services, who is located in Kamloops, the Association served as an extension of TNRD staff. Engaging the Association resulted in a community commitment of \$40,000 in cash and over \$80,000 in donations of labour and services. This type of community involvement would not have happened had this been a TNRD driven project. Community Involvement led to community commitment and community pride in the redevelopment of the Park.

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. OBJECTIVE

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

The Park was originally developed as a community driven initiative in the 1980s, and was operated and maintained by the Association. Although the community was able to raise operating funds, it did not have the capacity to finance capital improvements. Rising liability insurance costs prompted the community to turn ownership of the park over to the TNRD in 2004, however with a small operating grant-in-aid the Association continued to manage and operate the park.

The TNRD, with offices based in Kamloops, provides services for a large number of unincorporated communities scattered over 45,000 sq. km. Lower Nicola, located 100 km. from Kamloops, is one of these communities.

The Park, once the focal point of the community, was seeing limited use due to visual appeal and safety concerns over aging and deteriorating equipment, and other park components.

The Provincially funded Community Recreation Program was announced, however the TNRD did not have the leverage funding required to make this a viable application. Also, with TNRD staff located 100 km. from the project site, project management would have required considerable staff time.

The Association had already raised \$40,000 to replace the playground equipment. When advised of the Community Recreation Program and need for leverage funding, the Association agreed to contribute the \$40,000 as leverage funding towards the project. Through the assistance of the Electoral Area Director, identified was an Association member who would work cooperatively with the TNRD to manage the project. The TNRD submitted an application and was awarded over \$214,000 in funding to redevelop the Park.

By partnering with the Association the TNRD implemented a project management model that not only provided leverage funding, but also put daily eyes on the project and, was also able to access resources and encouraged involvement from the community.

2. CHALLENGES

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

Lower Nicola is reflective of unincorporated communities throughout rural BC. Residents are resourceful and take pride their community facilities, and are often not receptive to local government involvement. The Manager of Community Services established a working relationship with the community representative who supervised the project. Having a community member as the visual project manager engaged the residents and local business. Had this project proceeded under TNRD direction there would have been minimal, if any, community investment. Consistent communication between these two individuals ensured the project was completed in a financially responsible manner and all funding requirements were met.

The community contributed \$40,000 in cash, \$51,358 in donated equipment and services and 1924 hours in volunteer time, which when given a conservative value of \$15 per hour equates to \$28,860. This is a total contribution of \$120,218, or 56% of the total funded amount of \$214,000. During the project unanticipated expenditures arose. Without community contribution the project would have been scaled back. As a result, the project completed as planned and additional playground equipment has been installed.

The TNRD as the owner of the facility has an obligation to mitigate liability by ensuring the facility is safe and maintained, and ensure that project management best practices are employed and all regulations are adhered to in any upgrade project. Geographical location and limited staffing would have made supervising this project a challenge. The community member supervising the project contributed 1000 in volunteer hours. Without this partnership TNRD staff would have had to contribute much of this time.

Funding programs are often over-subscribed, therefore funding applications must not only meet the required criteria, but must also contain components which makes them stand out. We believe the \$40,000 financial contribution from the community weighted heavily in the decision to approve this project.

3. BENEFITS

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

Other than a public elementary school Smith Pioneer Park is the only public access, recreation venue within Lower Nicola. There are no paved sidewalks, and with increased large vehicle traffic due to the development of an area mine, pedestrian or bicycle use along the roadway is unsafe, and is also not user friendly for those with physical challenges.

Project components include:

- upgrade to perimeter by repairing retaining wall and fencing;
- upgrade horseback riding ring fencing;
- resurfacing tennis court;
- upgrade playground equipment;
- reconfigure baseball field to a multipurpose sports field;
- install a perimeter walking track which is wheelchair and physical challenge friendly;
- upgrade underground sprinklers to conserve water usage;
- upgrade bathroom fixtures to conserve water;
- upgrade electrical fixtures to conserve energy; and
- improved park access to accommodate those with physical challenges or those in wheelchairs.

As a result of this project:

- area daycares are using the Park;
- the local public elementary school has expanded its phys-ed program by purchasing tennis rackets;
- the multipurpose sports field allows for practices and games within the community rather than having to travel to Merritt;
- the Tennis Club out of Merritt can now offer local lessons;
- the riding ring provides a safe area for riding horses and for those learning to ride;
- the walking path encourages activity by providing a safe place for seniors and those with physical handicaps
- the ongoing operating costs are reduced with the upgrade to energy efficient and water conserving components;
- there a safe place for the community to gather which provides recreational opportunities for participants of all ages and physical abilities;
- there is overall increased Park use;
- there is an increase in community events; and
- renewed community pride and involvement.

4. INNOVATION

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

Traditionally local government owns and operates its facilities or contract out services through a tendering process. This partnership engaged the community members who have a vested interest and pride in the project. Local government had access to infrastructure funding but did not have the required leverage funding or the manpower capacity to supervise the project.

This collaborative, but hands-off approach, opened the door for volunteerism and community involvement. Community members contacted their neighbours and friends and area businesses who viewed this as a community project. Local businesses provided donations or a discount in services. Awareness that funds were available, and work was taking place, engaged the community, and many came forward to assist and offer their time and services.

Having a focal point within the community to be proud of, where residents can gather, is vital to maintaining the social fabric of rural BC. Regional districts and smaller municipalities have limited resources to manage these types of facilities. Engaging local resources can be invaluable in providing community services. This project has also resulted in a new appreciation, in Lower Nicola, for local government's role in the community.

5. GOALS

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

Initially the TNRD's goal was to try and access funding to upgrade the Park. This goal was not only met, but exceeded.

As noted above without community contributions, unexpected expenditures would have resulted in a scaled back version of this project. With the community's help, not only was the project completed as planned, additional playground equipment was purchased.

In addition, the TNRD realized that with community partnerships it has the capacity to more effectively provide more services by building relationships within the community.

6. SUSTAINABILITY

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

The TNRD, as the property owner provides the required liability insurance coverage.

Operating and maintenance is provided by the Association and its members through an operating and maintenance agreement between the Association and the TNRD.

Through an established service area, the Association receives an annual grant-in-aid. Some of the project upgrades will result in reduced ongoing operating costs.

Renewed interest in the community has increased volunteerism which allows the Association to hold more fund raising events.

Established within the community is the realization that although TNRD is the local government and a regulatory body, it is interested in partnering to assist in reaching community goals.

7. TRANSFERABILITY

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

With the exception of the lower mainland and larger municipalities within the interior, the remainder of BC is made up of small municipalities and unincorporated communities. Improvement districts and community associations have, and continue to be, the service providers for much of rural BC.

Regional districts often cover a very large service area, have a limited tax base and unlike larger municipalities, do not have the staffing to comprehensively oversee service provision.

Regional district offices are usually located within one of its member municipalities and seldom is there a local government representative in the unincorporated community. Partnering with community groups can expand local government's capacity to provide services. This model can be transferred to any local government.

8. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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

A key component of this project was the involvement of the Electoral Area Director. In this case the elected official was instrumental in getting the message to the community that the funding was available, and the need for leverage funding. Although the TNRD had previously worked with the Association on a project funded through Federal Gas Tax, the elected official was involved in providing the TNRD with assurances that the individual overseeing the project was capable and would work cooperatively with the TNRD staff to ensure TNRD requirements were met. As the residents representative the elected official was also able to provide the Association with assurance that the TNRD was acting in the best interest of the community.

Also recommended is that the local government representative meet with the community members. Visiting the community and meeting with community group members establishes a human identity for local government, build bridges and provides the foundation for future partnerships.

9. TELL US MORE

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

Lower Nicola is not unlike any other unincorporated community in BC. Rural parks were developed as community driven initiatives and maintained by the community. Communities want to retain autonomy over their facilities and are hesitant to accept any involvement from local government. When the Association approached the TNRD for assistance it was very clear community members wanted to maintain autonomy in managing the Park. Agreed was that the TNRD would assume ownership, which would provide costly liability insurance and the Association would continue to operate the facility.

As equipment aged, Park use diminished. Although there was a core group of community members who worked diligently to raise funds to and keep the Park operating community pride in the facility also suffered.

The transfer of \$40,000 to the TNRD was contingent on securing Community Recreation Funding. Once word spread in the community that funding was secured community members started to come forward. Once work began, area businesses also came forward with donations of equipment and materials or discounts on services. As improvements were

made park use increased. Having the community member act as a project manager further reinforced this was a community project. Although the TNRD has ownership of the property publicly realized, through this process, is that the Park belongs to the Lower Nicola community. Through community involvement is renewed community pride.

10. PARTNERS

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

- Lower Nicola Community Association
- Thompson-Nicola Regional District
- Local businesses who donated time and materials
- Community members and organizations who provided letters of support for the funding application and later volunteered time

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

The Association had already raised \$40,000 towards the replacement of playground equipment. The offer to allow the TNRD to use these funds was an indication that there was a community commitment to this project.

The identified project manager was a grass roots community member who had also worked with the TNRD on a previous project funded by Federal Gas Tax.

The support of the elected official provided a political intermediary and trusted liaison in the initial stages of this project.