



2011 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS Category Worksheet

BEST PRACTICES, Website

Name of Local Government: District of West Kelowna

Project/Program Title: District of West Kelowna Website

Website Address: www.districtofwestkelowna.ca

Project Summary Paragraph

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

In October 2009, the District of West Kelowna launched a new [website](#) aimed at improving accessibility to municipal information online by:

- Adding a variety of easier-to-navigate online tools including quick links to bylaws, contact information, events, maps and news and drop down menus to aid in navigation to resources related to the business and services of [Mayor and Council](#) and various municipal [Departments](#);
- Introducing new web-based municipal services to taxpayers and customers such as [bid opportunities](#), [delegation requests](#), [e-subscription service](#), [forms](#), [homeowner grant applications](#) and [recreational program registration](#) (online homeowner grant application and recreation program registration services have been added within the past 10 months);
- Eliminating the need to travel to Municipal Hall or reproduce paper documentation thereby reducing environmental impacts and increasing efficiencies for users and the municipality.



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. PURPOSE

- a. If this was a pre-existing website, list the basic changes implemented. If this is a new website, tell us why you created it.

The [District of West Kelowna Website](#) was designed to present a professional and attractive corporate online identity and improve user interfaces with further objectives of enhancing customer service and increasing site usage. The original website consisted of three basic pages – a homepage, a documents page and a Mayor and Council page – to offer an interim online presence for the new municipality (incorporated December 2007) until adequate staff could be hired and a budget could be established to support a more comprehensive official website, which was ultimately launched in October 2009. By contrast, the new website contains more than 600 pages, more than 3,100 photos, and nearly 6,500 documents providing information on programs, departmental services, bylaws, news, events and more.

- b. How did you determine what your priorities were?

Priorities were determined through consultation with staff, direction and advice from the Information Services Department, research of website best practices in neighboring municipalities and consideration of budget constraints as a newly incorporated municipality. Priorities were then confirmed via a Strategic Communications Plan presented to and approved by Council.

- c. On average, how often is your website updated?

The District of West Kelowna's website is updated daily. New content is always being provided with the addition of photos, documents, news, events and/or new or updated pages. The District has four webmasters and no less than a half dozen content providers capable of updating photos, documents, news and event items and various other resources.

2. CONCEPT

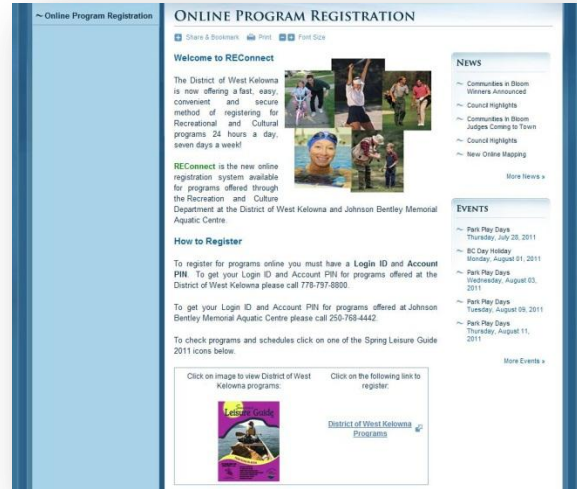
What do you want your website to accomplish?

The District of West Kelowna's website is accomplishing its goals of improving efficiency, increasing usage and providing easy-to-access resources and current information. Staff and clients are able to quickly access information via a six quick links, eight drop down menus, six homepage interface icons and a search bar. The [homepage](#) also provides links to the District's most recent news and current events. Unique visits (UVs) are increasing according to the District of West Kelowna's monthly monitoring statistics (e.g.: 9,775 UVs in June, 9,156 in May and 8,593 in April). As a policy, news; events; [Council highlights](#), full [Council agendas and minutes](#) are updated to the website as soon as they are approved enabling the latest municipal information to be viewed online.

3. EFFECTIVENESS

How is the website more efficient and/or effective than it was before? If this is a new site, explain what old processes for disseminating information or doing business you improved upon.

The website is more efficient and effective as a result of: a coordinated team effort to keep the website up to date with the latest information; the addition of online services such as the [REConnect online registration program](#) and the [Home Owner Grant application service](#); new easier-to-use navigation tools such as quick links, drop down menus and homepage icons; and increasing user awareness as a result of newsletters, press releases and advertising, which drive the public to the website. Previous to the development of the new website members of the public were required to come to Municipal Hall to obtain forms and standalone documents, apply for recreational programs and the homeowners grant and phone or email staff to make inquiries about departmental programs and services. The new website reduces the amount of staff time required to provide these documents and services and to answer various inquiries. It is anticipated that the effectiveness of the website will increase once the District expands to social media such as Facebook, which is expected to occur in 2012.



4. ACCOUNTABILITY

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

The District of West Kelowna has been able to improve upon its accountability to West Kelowna residents by:

- Publishing full, current and past annual [budgets and five-year financial plan](#) documents online



- Publishing the full [Council agenda](#), including full staff reports, and minutes online
- Publishing upcoming council meetings, public hearings and public consultation meetings directly onto the [homepage](#)
- Publishing [Council Highlights](#) of the latest meetings direct to the District homepage after every council meeting
- Providing the public with a live [webcast](#) of Council meetings
- Publishing Council's annual [Strategic Priorities](#) documents and [Citizens' Survey](#) results online
- Providing links to the latest [events](#) and [current news](#) of District initiatives directly on the homepage simultaneously in conjunction with releases to the press and neighbourhood associations
- [E-notifying subscribers](#) (240 active subscribers; July 2011) of Council meetings, public hearings, bid opportunities news and events
- Creating new pages in the past year for the 2011 Local Government Election, [Official Community Plan](#), several master plans currently under development, transit (awaiting final approval), [policing](#), [parks services](#), [major capital projects](#) (with monthly progress updates), [business development office](#), [water services](#), [water conservation](#) and [sprinkling regulations](#), [consumption based billing information](#), water meter reading tips and an online water rate [calculator](#), turbidity indexes ([see example](#)), [fire hazard ratings](#), [new secondary suite regulations](#), [advanced GIS mapping system](#) and quick links on the homepage to maps and bylaws.

The screenshot shows a web interface for a 'WATER RATE CALCULATOR'. On the left is a blue navigation sidebar with a tree view of site categories. The main content area has a header 'WATER RATE CALCULATOR' and a sub-header 'Figuring Out Your Bill'. Below this is a paragraph of introductory text and a 'WATER CONSUMPTION CALCULATOR' form. The form includes a text input for 'Water Consumption (m3)', a 'Calculate' button, and a 'Clear' button. Below the input is a table with columns for 'Water System' (Pritchard, West Kelowna Estates, Sunnyside, Westbank, Lakeview) and rows for 'Flat Rate', 'Consumption', 'Charges', and 'Quarterly Total'.

5. AWARENESS

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

The 2009 Citizens' Survey indicated that 6.19 per cent of respondents received municipal information through the website, while the 2010 survey indicated that 16.29 per cent received their information from the website. For a recent Shape Your Community Open House on June 16 featuring three master plans, an exit and online survey indicated that 21.3 per cent of respondents learned of the event through the District of West Kelowna website, surpassing advertising in newspapers (our traditional form of advertising; 18.9 per cent), stories in the news media (16 per cent) and advertising on a popular online news source (Castanet; 19.5 per cent). The

municipality plans to continue to promote the website's presence with cross promotion in the District's quarterly newsletter and entrance into social media, subject to Council approval and a staff usage policy. Furthermore, subscriptions to our e-notification service have gone from 76 in December 2009 (two months after the website launched) to 240 currently (July 26, 2011).

6. INNOVATION

What makes your website innovative and creative? And/or what made your process innovative and creative?

The website is innovative and creative in that the District of West Kelowna provides a live [webcast](#) of Council meetings, Committee of the Whole meetings and public hearings, allowing residents to view from their work or home computers or smart phones in real time. Edited versions are provided later so the public can fast forward and rewind through the meetings. Also of note, West Kelowna was the first Canadian municipality to use Vision Internet of California to design the website. The company has subsequently gone on to develop other internet sites in Canada including Grande Prairie. The District of West Kelowna website is a feature product on [Vision Internet's website](#). While not unique to the District of West Kelowna, other unique and innovative services incorporated into the site include: online recreational program registration; e-notification, with full story and photo text; an online Home Owner Grant application system; parks pages that allow the user to search by type or name; a mapping site; and a multi-system water rate calculator.

7. SUSTAINABILITY

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

The District of West Kelowna has invested in one full-time Communications Supervisor position and one full-time Communications and Grants Coordinator position to share in the duties of updating website content, in addition to other job responsibilities. Approximately one-quarter of Communication staff's time is dedicated to updating website content each week. In addition, Communications staff receives assistance in updating webpages, photos and documents from at least one content provider assigned in each of the municipality's six departments. On the technical side, one of the municipality's six full-time Information Services department staff oversees website operations and liaises with Vision Internet, the California-based site designer as needed. Another of the IS staff members works with the website technician and Communications staff to integrate the GIS system with the website. For example, GIS has recently provided mapping links, which the District will be incorporating into more than 100 individual park pages in 2011. The budget for the continued operation of the website is included in the \$851,391 Information Services department (2011 amount, with allowances for inflation through 2015) and \$713,024 Corporate Services department (2011 amount, with allowances for

inflation through 2015) budgets, which are contained within the 2011 – 2015 Financial Plan (adopted April 26, 2011).

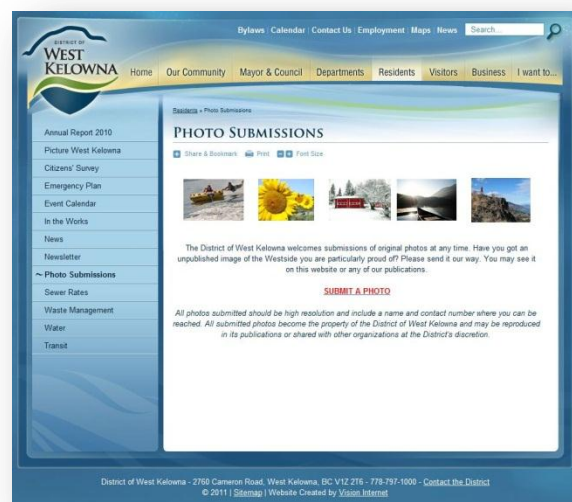
8. BEST PRACTICES

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

As a new, small municipality with limited resources, the District of West Kelowna is not able to afford a full-time staff person to add and update web content. Staff works effectively as a team to keep the website updated. This collaborative effort increases efficiencies in a small municipality because the Communications Supervisor and Communications Coordinator can act as webmasters who simply double check departmentally posted content to ensure it has a uniform look and feel with other web pages; that links and menus are functioning properly; and, that grammar and spelling are double checked before publishing. Having a content provider in each department allows Communications staff to rely on the expertise of those staff members, and their detailed knowledge of various subjects and files. This saves Communications staff from having to research content and double check the details with staff before publishing. Communications staff is then able to focus on publishing or updating news and events items, Council Highlights and general information pages.

The District of West Kelowna is proud of its design interface, which allows departments to create individual banners and unique pages for special programs or unique services ([Communities In Bloom](#), for example). This has proven particularly useful for [West Kelowna Fire Rescue](#) (WKFR), for example (also see photo provided at end of application), which had its own website prior to incorporation. The standalone website was incorporated into the municipality's website. The unique department banner allows WKFR to distinguish itself from other departments, and allow some independence, while still ensuring all users are directed to one District of West Kelowna address.

The website includes a [photo submission](#) option. The District of West Kelowna has now used this function successfully for two years, promoting photo submissions through an annual [photo contest](#). The contest is promoted through the website, in the media and in the municipality's quarterly newsletter. In 2010, the contest generated over 130 unique photos, which the municipality received permission to use in its newsletters, annual reports,



various promotional materials, and master planning documents such as the [Official Community Plan](#). Weeks of staff time would have been required to take as many photos and process all the corresponding consent forms required from the subjects. By contrast, the photo contest takes only a few hours to plan, advertise, and award prizes to the winners. Consent is received online. A photo album function on the website allows the municipality to post all the photos for the public to see and for the amateur photographers to gain a little attention for their work, creating a win/win situation.

9. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

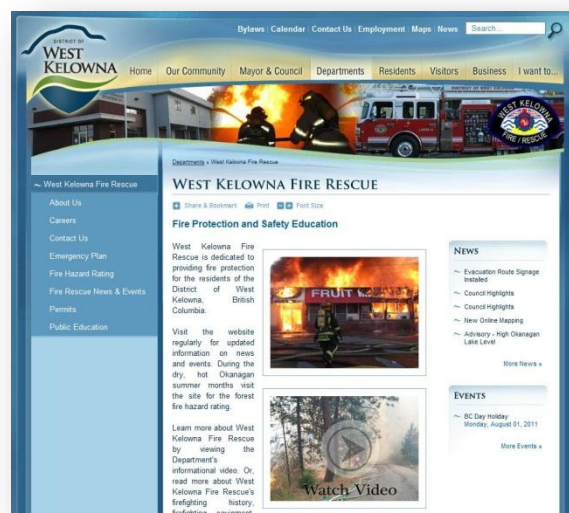
What helpful advice would you share with other communities looking to embark on a similar project?

The District of West Kelowna is currently working on creating various templates that will help ensure a uniform esthetic for the website and allow for a more effective and efficient page publishing process for departmental content providers.

10. TELL US MORE

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

The District of West Kelowna is constantly seeking ways to improve its website. User comments are received at info@districtofwestkelowna.ca. The service request is evaluated by staff to determine if the suggestion can be incorporated into the site to make the website more user-friendly. For example, in the last year, the District of West Kelowna has added Maps and Bylaw quick links to the homepage as a result of requests from members of the general public. The District was able to make these changes within 48 hours of the service improvement requests.



West Kelowna Fire Rescue Home Page – Unique Department Banner