

2005 ICMA ANNUAL AWARDS

Program Excellence Award Submission for Innovation in Local Government

Management - Intergovernmental Cooperation: The Peel Children's Water Festival

Scope

The Regional Municipality of Peel, located in Ontario, Canada, is made up of the Cities of Brampton and Mississauga and the Town of Caledon, and is home to over one million residents. The Region provides a variety of essential services, including the provision and distribution of clean, safe drinking water. The Region of Peel's 2001 Official Plan points out that "the sustained social, economic and environmental well-being of the Region is dependant on the proper protection, management and conservation of Peel's water resources and related natural systems". In light of this, one of the Region's objectives is "to promote public awareness and education initiatives with respect to the protection and conservation of water resources". A significant component of this public awareness and education is the Peel Children's Water Festival.

The Peel Children's Water Festival is a six day environmental education event attended by nearly 10,000 Peel elementary school students and residents annually. Participants experience over 50 hands-on water-related interactive activities, discussions, demonstrations, displays and exhibits that challenge participants to think about the importance of water to both the human being and the environment, in addition to the role of water in the development of the economy. During the week, the Water Festival is open to students in grades two through five, with approximately 1000 students pre-

registered per day. On the Saturday the event is open to the general public with attendance of approximately 4000 people. The event is free of charge to all participants.

The Region of Peel has been involved in the Water Festival since its inception in 1996. Largely in response to tragic events in the town of Walkerton, Ontario in 2000, where seven residents died and 2300 fell ill as a result of contaminated well water, the Region of Peel expanded its community outreach regarding the municipal drinking water treatment. This included raising the profile of the Children's Water Festival and taking on permanent responsibility for its financing and coordination in 2001.

The success of the Water Festival is largely due to the cooperative efforts of a number of community partners including the all levels of government, private sector organizations, non-profit groups, and local school boards. Approximately 500 secondary school students, 100 per day, are recruited from the local high schools and trained to present the hands-on activities to the younger children. On the Saturday, the Region of Peel recruits staff internally, as well as from the participating partners to run the activities.

A key partner in the Peel Children's Water Festival is the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), a non-profit, non-governmental agency which receives approximately 50 percent of its annual funding from the six municipalities in which its boundaries lie. The TRCA's mandate is to promote conservation and protection of lands and waterways within its watershed boundaries. Approximately 20 percent of the

TRCA's property falls within the Region of Peel, and a relative proportion of the TRCA's municipal funding is provided by the Region of Peel.

The TRCA is one of the few community partners directly involved throughout the entire planning process as well as in the delivery of the Festival itself. Planning begins in September, the Festival itself runs for six days at the end of May. The TRCA provides an ideal venue at Heart Lake Conservation Area, a natural park with open green space, trails, rolling hills, a kettle lake and a sand beach. The TRCA contributes significant resources to the planning and execution of the Water Festival, including providing direct input at the steering committee level, development and delivery of several activities, creation of a detailed site map, on-site maintenance, plus a live trout release, wildflower planting and bat night during the Water Festival.

Measurable Outcomes/Results of the Program

The goals and objectives of the Festival are:

- ◆ to educate children about the importance of water conservation, environmental protection, technology and ecology at a formative time in their development;
- ◆ to communicate to the residents of Peel the importance of preserving, protecting and enhancing Peel's natural environment and resources ;
- ◆ to position the Region of Peel as a leader in educating the community on water issues and the environment, and to demonstrate its commitment to water quality and the health of the Region; and

- To empower children to initiate change within their homes, their schools and their community.

An evaluation report produced by Peel staff used the following indicators to measure the success of the festival: monitoring media coverage for content and tone; counting the number of participants who attend; collecting and compiling feedback from participants including teachers, elementary students, parent chaperones, the general public, volunteers, and Festival organizers (evaluation/feedback forms were provided to all groups); monitoring the number of visitors to the internet and intranet web sites; and monitoring the number of telephone and E-mail inquiries to the Region of Peel regarding the Water Festival. Gathering such extensive feedback allows for improvements to all areas of the Festival, including planning, implementation and delivery, without bias. Based on the feedback from the previous year's Festival, 37 recommendations were made to improve planning and delivery of the Water Festival.

Lessons Learned During Planning, Implementation & Analysis

Changes in the planning and organizing committee structure have allowed those involved in planning the 2005 Water Festival to become more empowered, efficient and effective. Changes in the area of public communications will reduce advertising costs. However, the role of the Festival's community partners, especially the TRCA, is of overarching importance. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's expertise and support adds significant value to the program, ensuring the success of the Peel Children's Water Festival year after year.