



## CITY OF BROOKLYN PARK, MINNESOTA – *BUSINESS FORWARD* INITIATIVE

**Case Study Title:** *Business Forward* – Inviting a Fresh Perspective

**Case Study Category:** Community Building

**Jurisdiction Name:** City of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota

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Please consider this application for an Innovation Award and the Rapid Fire Session.

## **Initiative Overview:**

*Business Forward* is a community-wide initiative that involves a wide range of partners that affect the business climate in Brooklyn Park. The goal of the initiative is to produce tangible outcomes that will lead to an improved business climate in the community as well as enhance communication and collaboration between the business community and stakeholders.

The idea for the initiative initially started as feedback from the City's business retention efforts, governance Task Force, City Council, and Mayor, that had identified a desire to effectively evaluate the business climate and connect with the business community to make Brooklyn Park a better place to do business. In order to accomplish this, staff conducted a visioning process that resulted in the desired outcome to: (1) involve community partners that affect the business climate in Brooklyn Park, (2) effectively and efficiently engage the maximum number of business participants in an ongoing and sustained manner and (3) produce tangible outcomes that will lead to an improved business climate in the community.

The preliminary goals of the initiative were to:

- Identify areas for improvement in Brooklyn Park's business climate
- Create a community action plan providing direction for various agencies to work toward an improved business climate
- Improve communications between the City, business community and other stakeholders

## **Getting Started:**

Initially, the greatest obstacle faced was generating enthusiasm for the initiative within the business community. Staff hosted a kick-off luncheon, featuring Corey Koskie (former Minnesota Twin's player and Brooklyn Park business owner) as the key-note speaker to show the business community that the City was ready to listen and respond to its needs. Nearly 100 business representatives attended the event where they learned about the initiative and discovered how they could participate.

After the initial kick-off event, the City encouraged businesses to attend one of three community cafes. In order for staff to remain neutral and secure honest feedback, a private sector meeting facilitator was hired to direct the community café feedback sessions. The cafes were designed to extract the raw emotions and concerns of the business community effectively capturing unfiltered realities of challenges facing businesses in the communities. The approach from Ellen Watters of Civic Source ideally suited the type of experience and facilitation style desired for the *Business Forward* Initiative. Watter's brought several years of experience facilitating and managing groups and has worked closely with leaders in the public, private, and non-profit sector. Watter's expertise in collaboration building and fostering relationships between key stakeholders, particularly in the business community, made her an ideal fit for the initiative.

In the community café format, business participants sat at tables in groups of five to seven people to discuss questions related to the meeting topic. A table facilitator (staff member) took notes about the conversation at each table. The notes were later compiled and used to develop an action plan presented to the Task Force.

**Costs/Savings:**

Expenses to-date:

| <b>Category</b>           | <b>Expense</b>      |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Advertising and Marketing | \$ 2,639.14         |
| Meeting Expenses          | \$ 3,151.91         |
| Professional Services     | \$ 5,450.00         |
|                           |                     |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>\$ 11,241.05</b> |

To date the initiative has not had direct impact on reducing the budget. The implementation of future recommendation may result in cost savings, with the goal of increasing tax collections.

**Innovation:**

The *Business Forward* framework was developed through a thoughtful, well-planned approach. An internal staff team representing multiple work groups was established early on in the planning process. The team brought a wide range of perspectives and fresh ideas on how to overcome the anticipated obstacles described below. Through this thoughtful approach, a replicable model was developed. The process created actionable outcomes as a result of the engagement from the business community. A number of surrounding communities have expressed interest in implementing the model in their communities.

The feedback received from the business community has been positive. In the past, businesses felt they did not have an avenue for providing their input for expressing their concerns other than the traditional, formal regulatory processes. Participants in *Business Forward* specifically indicated their appreciation of the City's willingness to truly hear their honest input. That input was then used to create an action plan that will minimize the barriers to the successful development of businesses within in the community. *Business Forward* is changing the nature of how city government interacts with businesses.

**Obstacles:**

Through the early visioning process, the internal team defined what victory looked like. The group also indentified strengths, benefits, weaknesses and dangers. This process helped the team identify early on what the obstacles to success would be, including: Participation, Effective Marketing, Political Support, and Buy-in. The identified obstacles informed how the outreach was structured to enhance participation and dispel the publics' perception that City-supported initiatives are ineffective and not meaningful, while balancing the policy makers' agendas.

**Outcomes:**

The *Business Forward* Task Force was established in December 2011 and met twice per month between January and March 2012. From the applications received, the members of the Task Force were determined based on geographical distribution and industry representation. The group reviewed the feedback identified through the cafes and produced recommendations designed to make Brooklyn Park a better place to do business. Several key themes emerged from the Task Force that became the implementation framework of *Business Forward*. Those themes included: Incorporating the Voice of Business Going Forward, Enhancing the Image and Marketing of Brooklyn Park, Valuing Business as a Customer, Providing Easier Access to

Information and Resources, Improving Business Regulation, and Attracting and Growing Businesses.

There was also a *Re-Connect to Business Forward* luncheon held in mid-March 2012 where the Task Force reviewed its draft recommendations with the business community and solicited feedback before the recommendations were finalized by the group later that month.

With finalized recommendations in hand, staff has started implementation. The following is a summary of the key actions currently underway:

1. Establishment of the Business Forward Advisory Board
  - a. The board will include broad community representation with different types, sizes and locations of businesses, similar to the *Business Forward* Task Force plus a Planning Commission and City Council representative.
    - i. Monthly meetings will be held to discuss and provide recommendations on a variety of business related matters as well as general education of city-related topics
    - ii. Initial board selection to be reviewed by Task Force, with future appointments made by the board.
  - b. Applicants are currently being solicited through a variety of avenues including a direct mailing to the business community, chambers of commerce, and a press release to the local media.
2. Modifications to the Sign Code
  - a. Meetings were held with representatives of the business community in June 2012. At these meetings, staff presented a number of suggested changes to make the sign code more business friendly. Based on the feedback received, staff will begin preparing draft modifications to the sign code for review by the Planning Commission and City Council in fall 2012. The proposed modifications will be reviewed with these business representatives prior to presentation to the Planning Commission.
3. Host an Annual Business Forum
  - a. The event is scheduled for October 11, 2012 and will feature a key note speaker as well as an update on City-related items.
  - b. Vendors such as the local higher education institutions, chambers of commerce, etc. will be invited to exhibit at the event.

A number of other items are also being advanced. Related to enhancing the image and marketing of Brooklyn Park, staff has started researching examples of “Live Here, Work Here” campaigns that could be replicated in Brooklyn Park.

To make it easier for businesses to find information and resources, staff is working on creating business packets and ‘how to’ resource sheets and cross training additional staff to be able to better help businesses through City processes and respond to their questions with a high level of customer service.

Throughout this process, both new and long-term businesses indicated they felt connected to the City for the first time, got their questions answered, and believed their insights into how the City can better serve businesses were heard and will continue to be heard.

**Presentation Style:**

If selected, the team would present using an interactive audience participation PowerPoint model.