



CITY OF BROOKLYN PARK, MINNESOTA – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Case Study Title: Community Engagement Initiative

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

CITY OF BROOKLYN PARK, MINNESOTA – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

SYNOPSIS

1. Intent of the idea/program/project/service and length of time it has been enacted

The City of Brooklyn Park is the sixth largest city in Minnesota with a highly diverse population. This is in sharp contrast to the community that was founded by potato farmers of northern European heritage. Today, nearly 49 percent of our residents are non-white and roughly 21 percent of those are foreign-born, including the largest Liberian population outside of Liberia. Working with so many different cultures and communities is difficult in the best of times. However, this significant demographic change in the community over the last two decades resulted in Brooklyn Park being a community of communities. People of different backgrounds were living near one another but not with each other. It was another indicator, a symptom, of a much larger problem – a lack of connectedness.

As a result, in December 2009, with the support of our City Council, the City of Brooklyn Park embarked upon a “Community Engagement Initiative” (CEI), where a community-wide strategic planning process was designed to engage and instill a shared willingness amongst our residents to intervene in achieving social control, developing shared expectations of action, and establishing a working trust amongst our diverse community. Utilizing a professional facilitated process and investing in several months of time, a core planning team comprised of city leaders, community residents and city staff came up with strategic goals and a new mission statement for our community, **“Brooklyn Park, a thriving community inspiring pride where opportunities exist for all”** and Core Values as follows:

- We believe that everyone has equal intrinsic value.
- We believe that diversity enriches community.
- We believe that trust is the foundation for building a healthy community.
- We believe that community thrives when each individual take responsibility to contribute.
- We believe that when a community supports all its members, it thrives.

The ground work for our CEI was laid through our Police, Recreation, Administration, and Community Development departments. City Programs such as our Neighborhood Action Program (NAP), Joint Community Police Partnership (JCPP), Multicultural Advisory Commission (MAC), Youth Opportunities Coalitions (YOC), and Business Forward Initiative (BFI) showed us the importance of building and maintaining relationships with all residents including our immigrant, minority, and business communities and how relationships are the foundation of our programs and outreach. The CEI sought to do this on a community-wide scale.

Our CEI focuses on leveraging key areas of youth, resources, and diversity. Specifically, we will seek, engage, and leverage all the resources of our diverse community to ensure that we

achieve our mission and strategic objectives; we will engage our diverse community to enhance acceptance and understanding of one another as we collaborate to achieve our mission; and we will ensure the success of all our youth by engaging and optimizing all community assets to achieve our mission.

We have held a series of Community Cafés at City Hall, area churches, businesses, and schools through an intensive mass marketing campaign. Over 400 individuals attended Community Cafés to give input on what would enhance our quality of life, our opportunities, what characteristic contribute to our quality of life, what detract, and what did they not want to see change as we plan for our future. These cafés were intensive discussions designed to engage every participant. Residents provided incredible feedback on what they valued in the community, what they viewed as barriers, and what untapped potential they felt existed. Participants left energized and encouraged about the possibilities for their community.

In summary, we have recognized that due to the dynamically changing demographics of our community, we needed to adjust the way we do business. The traditional communication methods, application processes, and orientations need to be adjusted to fit the needs of our diverse community. These earlier programs acted as our Petri dishes in how we do community outreach and engagement. This venture is a shared responsibility between elected officials, city staff, and community members in developing and implementing a plan for our shared community future and vision. This is a unique and massive venture for a city to undertake.

2. Anticipated and actual outcomes

Our Strategic Objectives include:

- By 2015, 90% of our community members express pride in being a part of Brooklyn Park.
- By 2015, 90% of our community members express that Brooklyn Park is a thriving community.
- By 2015, 90% of community members of Brooklyn Park express that opportunities they need to succeed are available.

These objectives are directly tied to a performance measurement program that identifies the indicators of success.

3. Costs and/or savings, if any

The City Council has approved a budget of \$132,000 per year for five years to actively engage in the Action Plans that were developed. We believe that is not a cost, but an investment within our community that will reap long-term civic engagement and pride that will ultimately lead to intangible cost-savings across all departments within our City including the police department, recreations/park, operations/maintenance, finance, and community development.

4. Innovative characteristics

The CEI teams are comprised of city staff, leaders, and community members coordinated initiatives to inspire pride, help make the community thrive, and create opportunities for all. It is a community-driven strategic and participatory process as opposed to a hierarchical or government top-down driven process. The visions, plans of action, and recommendations are implemented collectively by a team of community members, staff, and city leaders.

Below is a list of characteristics that make our initiative innovative:

Role of elected officials and city leaders - our elected officials play a significant and active role in our community engagement process. Two of our Council Members and the Mayor are core team members and the entire city council has voted unanimously in support of our “community engagement process” including the allocation of budgeted resources to invest in its efforts and initiatives. We believe that personal invitations from city leaders are essential to reach out to community members. This includes personal phone calls, letters, and in-person meetings from the City Manager, Police Chief, Mayor, and Council Members to invite community leaders and residents to be part of the process. Residents are more apt to participate in the process and be active in the community if they are *personally* invited as opposed to recruited in mass form.

The city as a mission-oriented culture - Community engagement is an invite to our community members, but a mandate for our staff. We believe that community engagement is not only a business model but a “practice” across departments and integral to our mission-oriented culture. We must instill the fact that our CEI is an intangible process as opposed to a short-term project. For this reason, we must brand our initiative amongst our staff and continuously assess what the role of our staff is in building a more connected community on a micro-level.

Community Feedback - We allow residents multiple avenues to be involved in the governmental process and value community feedback. There are multiple means and measures of engagement including participatory, voicing concerns, writing letters, voting or being involved in the process. Just because a community is disenfranchised, it does not mean they are not engaged.

Intergenerational leadership - one of our community engagement goals is an investment in our youth and the youth voice; as such, we are constantly seeking intergenerational leadership. We look at our initiative not through a limited timetable, but as a torch that we will pass onto the next generation to sustain its principles and efforts.

“Community Café” model – we utilize this model to engage and obtain feedback from our residents. Instead of traditional town hall meetings or open forums, we coordinate cafés at local churches, schools, recreations centers, and City Hall to obtain a representative feedback of how our residents feel on a certain issue such as our community engagement initiative; unified garbage hauling system; business community; redistricting; and impact of city ordinances to local residents. The cafes are structured with round tables and we engage each resident to participate in ‘conversational’ form and written feedback, which is individually recorded, recognized, and compiled, in a final report to our Council Members. We find this method of communication highly effective in reaching out to our diverse community.

Consensus Model - the initiatives follow a consensus model, which is a rarity, especially in government. It takes time to build a consensus. The buy-in and commitment from the community pays off for the time invested in reaching it. Most organizations that take on a strategic planning project have control of their staff, resources, and messaging; we do not have that luxury. This is a community-wide project. We must engage, motivate, and encourage all aspects of the community to get involved if we are to reach our goals.

Government relevant and relational – we link social issues to the governmental process that our diverse population can relate to such as transportation, healthcare, childcare, and employment. We strive to demystify the governmental process and erode the stereotype that process is only reserved or beneficial to those who have access to government officials and staff.

5. Obstacles and results achieved

While early in the process, we've delivered amazing results. This process has shifted our mind-set in how we interact with the public. We've begun to understand and embrace the fact that the people can do more than "the city". Staff now spends time engaging community partners and building capacity in the community, rather than creating new bureaucracies and programs. Our former Mayor Steve Lampi helped solidify this shift when he said, "We need to stop doing things *to* people and start doing things *with* people."

Since we started the initiative, the City has seen a 430 percent increase in the number of residents who have gotten involved in city groups and events. Our recent diversity celebration, *Celebrating the Many Faces of Brooklyn Park*, involved more than a dozen minorities on the multicultural planning team thanks to their participation in our Community Engagement Initiative. Our traditional commissions are now more reflective of the community than at any time before, increasing minority representation from 14% to 33% in just four years.

We partnered with a local non-profit, African Career, Education & Resource, Inc. (ACER) to bring together various ethnic communities of color in various forums and workshops to provide information and engage them in influencing planning and decisions around a transit project and how it relates to affordable housing, business development, job creation, and environment justice in the community. As a diverse community organization in itself as opposed to a traditional government entity, ACER converses with and engages participants on a non-partisan and non-governmental interest, which in turn, instills greater confidence, trust, support, and engagement from community members. This illustrates the concept of "Educating, Engaging, and Empowering" our diverse communities.

To exemplify our efforts in promoting a more diverse workforce, our local Human Rights Commission has been recently awarded a prestigious, national 2012 Multicultural Forum on Workplace Diversity's Winds of Change award, which recognizes an organization who has demonstrated sustained support of workplace diversity; has raised awareness of workplace diversity issues; and has been a catalyst for change for workplace diversity or impacted change

within an industry, organization or community. The voices and feedback of our diverse community members have prompted the City to create a taskforce and assess our current departmental hiring/advertising practices and develop a diversity action plan detailing how we will increase the pool of minority candidates for future job openings in their area. Due to the dynamically changing demographics of our community, the City of Brooklyn Park recognized that we needed to adjust our traditional communication methods, application processes, and orientations of traditional government to fit the needs of our diverse community.

Furthermore, the prominent and national Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) presented its 2012 Gary P. Hayes Memorial Award to City of Brooklyn Park Police, Chief Michael Davis, whose character, record of leadership, and commitment to better policing led a major wave of improvements in American policing. Specifically, he was recognized for his instrumental leadership and efforts in establishing community policing and domestic violence prevention programs in Brooklyn Park, his leadership in reorganizing the Police Department to provide greater accountability, his implementation of systems to create leadership opportunities for Brooklyn Park officers, his commitment to research in the field of policing, and other accomplishments.

We are also the recipients of the National League of Cities 1st Place Cultural Diversity Award for our overall community engagement initiatives. Our Joint Community Police Partnership has been nationally recognized by the Department of Justice as to how we overcome institutional barriers by working directly with our immigrant communities to build trusting relationships and formulating key partnerships with minority community leaders, residents and organizations.

It should also be noted that the City of Brooklyn Park was recently selected amongst a highly competitive pool of nationwide city candidates to participate in the *Community Engagement Leadership Institute* at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California in January 2012. The event was by invite-only and included the communities of Seattle, Washington; Hawaii; Detroit, Michigan; Dona County, New Mexico; Brooklyn, New York; and Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The conference allowed a unique opportunity for our City to share the successes of our community engagement initiative and learn the best practices from select cities nation-wide on how we can better improve and sustain our program. At this conference, we received consistent feedback that our community was the most organized, inclusive and ambitious and that we would serve as a great example of teaching other communities how to replicate our program of revitalizing people, neighborhoods, and overall community through our innovative community engagement initiatives.

While we certainly recognize the fact that we have a long ways to go in terms of increasing the ethnic and racial representation in the government process, we are proud of our short-term wins in how we have encouraged citizen involvement in local-government sponsored activities and have enhanced the appreciation of cultural diversity as a way of life in our municipalities. In terms of obstacles, it has been a challenge to unlearn decades of standard practice. We still struggle with biases, stereotypes, and assumptions of community residents. The concept of volunteerism is very different in various cultures, as well as the interpretation of government role. While we are able to get people "on board," sometimes it's a struggle to get people to

“stay on board.” Unfortunately, life happens for most and while hearts and passions are in the right place, personal, familial, and professional commitments often prevent those from contributing the full potential of their talents and skills. We also struggle with hyper-advocacy (one person or group trying to do it all) and hyper-innovation (same people, different missions, motives, or agendas) of organizations and community groups. We also have a hard time engaging those on projects that are 100% reflective of the community.

6. Any new issues/problems, or unintended consequences (things you didn't expect) realized as a result of the identified effort

The increased number of residents wanting to be active in the community generated a need to improve our volunteer database to better connect people with their interests. We were able to secure a new software program that allows the City to sort volunteers by interest. This database can be and is shared with the community groups also seeking volunteers. It's a useful tool for helping track the number of volunteer hours donated to the community. As mentioned above, the maintenance of the database has been challenging as volunteers tend to go on and go off various teams and projects. The hyper-advocacy and hyper-innovation as described above was also unexpected. We also did not realize or anticipate that there are often times a division amongst existing groups and cultures and the need to be sensitive to those issues.

INNOVATION STUDY COMPONENTS

1. Innovation / Creativity

A. How did the idea/program/service improve the organization?

By creating a Community Engagement Initiative where there is shared responsibility between elected officials, city staff, and community members in developing and implementing a plan for our shared community future and vision, we have increased the number of resident engagement and involvement in city groups and events by 430%. Minority participation in commission participation has also increased from 14% to 33%.

We also adopted an innovative style in community engagement by using the “Community Café” method as opposed to traditional open forums and town hall meetings. The “Café” method randomly places residents in small group circles allowing for the free flow of conversation and relaxation akin to what one would have at a coffee shop. We facilitate the topics and monitor the groups for each discussion and ensure that each member of the group has an equal opportunity to share his/her viewpoint without fear of being intimidated or condescended.

The Cafés are organized in advanced in community locations and we provide the tools and utensils including markers, boards, paper, and supplies to allow each group to make a brief presentation to the entire room. The information and feedback from each discussion is also tabulated and recorded in which City Staff then turns into a final report to present to senior-level management and/or the City Council. As a result of this

innovative method, over 400 individuals in the City of Brooklyn Park have attended Community Cafés to give input on what would enhance our quality of life, our opportunities, what characteristic contribute to our quality of life, what detract, and what did they not want to see change as we plan for our future resulting in the City's new mission statement and core values as described in the synopsis.

As a direct result of this feedback and presentation, before staff begins a new initiative we start by identifying the community-led initiatives that offer the same/similar program or service. In this way, we tap into the built-in capacity of the community we serve and allow for the appropriate allocation of scarce resources. Furthermore, the city council has adopted the delimiter that they will not adopt any new program or service unless it is consistent with our core values and contributes to our mission; not allow past practice to interfere with the consideration of new ideas; and not make decisions without soliciting and understanding the points of view of those affected by them.

B. Were new technologies used? If yes, what methods and/or applications were implemented?

To provide you with an example of how our innovative CEI and technology has interacted to produce critical and economical results across all our departments, we are utilizing our volunteer database to create a neighborhood map of where all of our volunteers reside and coinciding that map with our crime mapping/statistics at our police department.

In turn, when a crime occurs in a specific neighborhood, we can contact that volunteer to help us spread the word more quickly about crime prevention, alerts, and safety tips than if our police officers had to go door-to-door or print up flyers. This interaction with our volunteers and community members allows for a stronger sense of neighborhood engagement, which in turn results in reduced levels of crime and crime prevention resources.

We are also investing in a web-based portal akin to the "Boston Navigator" ([www.bostonnavigator](http://www.bostonnavigator.com/)) that will allow community organizations, programs, and services to independently input their data and provide information about programs, services, and resources in the community for youth and residents. We are also launching a new city website that will be more user-friendly; provide greater access to community feedback/information; more resourceful to businesses; and be more interactive and service-friendly.

C. Was consultant used? If yes, describe their involvement and identify the consultant/firm and their contact information.

Yes, we utilized the consultancy services of Transformation Systems, Ltd (TSL) (<http://www.transysltd.com/>) located at 49C Creekside View Dr., Asheville, NC 28804.

TSL focuses on *“transforming a human system results from commitment to a common purpose over time. The creativity of people, combined with a structured process for planning and implementation, are essential ingredients. TSL provides the structured process and the people within the system provide the creativity and effort. Ultimately, fundamental change in an organization requires a corresponding shift in its culture what we refer to as a transformation.”*

2. Outcomes achieved:

A. What customer/community needs and expectations were identified and fulfilled?

Brooklyn Park is the largest city in the Northwest Hennepin Region with a population of 75,781. Brooklyn Park is the second most diverse city in the state of Minnesota with Immigrants and minorities constituting almost 47.8% of the total city population (24.4% African American, 15.4% Asian, 6.4% Hispanic, 0.5% American Indian, and 0.1% Pacific Islander) and approximately 30% of the population is under the age of 20. The city also has an unemployment rate of 7.6% and Brooklyn Park residents have incomes below the poverty line accounting for 9.5% of the population, while almost one-fifth (19.3%) of children under 5 live in poverty.

Given the community’s change in demographics, we needed to actively place an emphasis and research on minority and immigrant engagement and our business community. We are a natural pilot community to implement the research and best practices to reach our increasingly diverse populations around a common vision and values. We have increased the diversity of staff within our cadet positions at the police department; interns with Code Enforcement and Community Development; and our Human Rights Commission is working with our Recruitment Team across all departments to develop new strategies to encourage minority applications in staff, volunteer, and commission positions.

B. Has service delivery been enhanced?

Our engagement efforts have helped spurred new policies such as expenditures of our community engagement funds and customers service as mentioned above. Over 100 staff has also been trained in High Performance Organization (HPO), motivating them to come up with solutions to issues/problems across all staff levels without the consequence of a hierarchy.

C. Did the initiative process improve access to your government? If yes, how?

Yes. Not only have we had more visits to our community website (www.brooklynpark.org), but we have increased participation in community outreach meetings and events as described by the statistics above. Furthermore, diverse community-led groups are applying for joint grants with the City of Brooklyn Park and we have created several opportunities for talented residents to join our diverse

commissions (Budget Advisory, Charter, Citizen Long-range Improvement Committee, Human Rights, Planning, and Recreations and Parks) or volunteer with our special events. We want every voice within our community to be heard. Our new website and ongoing customer service/feedback channels will also help improve community access to our government and information.

3. Applicable Results and Real World Practicality

A. What practical applications will be shared?

In short, we will showcase our “Community Engagement Initiative” and how we respond to, motivate, inspire, engage, and celebrate a highly diverse community through innovative marketing campaigns, branding techniques, recruitment methods, and untraditional facilitation forums (i.e. Community Cafés) within a conservative budget to reach a new mission within the City and a set of core values designed to motive and represent all residents within the community.

To illustrate this application, the City was hoping to have 300 attendees at the Community Cafés. We knew from past experience that the typical response rate to meetings via advertisements was 3 percent. We also knew from past experience that people typically need to be reached three times before the message would sink in. Therefore, we developed a recruiting process that measured the number of “impressions” or times a resident would hear about the project. We developed a series of multi-media outreach efforts through print, television, robo-calling, and social media that had a total 90,000 impressions for residents. As a result of this innovative method, over 400 individuals in the City of Brooklyn Park have attended Community Cafés to give input on what would enhance our quality of life, our opportunities, what characteristic contribute to our quality of life, what detract, and what did they not want to see change as we plan for our future resulting in the City’s new mission statement and core values.

B. How applicable is the idea/program/project/service to other local governments?

In the 21st century, local governments are starting to see a significant change in their demographics/populations and they need to respond proactively than reactively. Real engagement and identifying “capacity” in the community will be a must-have capability for managers/leaders in this economy; as such, this is a program applicable to all local governments going forward.

Our Mayor, City Manager, and Chief of Police are committed to this project and will provide valuable testimonies to their peers about the importance of using volunteers leaders and volunteers in achieving community objectives. Brooklyn Park has received many national awards on our innovative approaches to serving our community and our staff speaks at many national conferences. Our CEI Program has been or is being presented at the Police Evaluation and Research Forum (PERF), International City/County Management Association (ICMA), and League of Minnesota Cities (LMC).

C. What results/outcomes will you share?

We will show the improved engagement numbers described above; the initial results of our community survey; an upgraded website that is being designed by residents/for residents; statistical outcomes; and our current strategies and goals as we move into the implementation stage of our initiative.

D. Indicate any performance measures if any.

DIMENSION	INDICATORS
Economic vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax Base / Paid • Unemployment • New Business / expansion/ closure • Families receiving assistance
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juvenile/overall crimes & victimization • Livability/Neighborhood/complaints • Neighborhood cohesion/communication • Physical/Environmental Factors Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design – Code Enforcement
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduation rate & dropout rates • Transiency & truancy • Engagement in college or technical training programs • Internships/Service Training • Informal learning opportunities (gardening, travel groups, community education) • #, types & participation in schools Pre-K through higher education
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreclosures • Affordability • Number of owner occupied residences • Housing options/life cycle • Number of housing starts by type
Sense of community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in community activities & participation • Programs, participants, volunteer hours • Types & sharing of communication within neighborhoods (homeowners associations, apartments, other groups, churches, virtual/electronic, social media, networking)
Amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation and Parks quantity and utilization rate • Facilities quantity and utilization rate • Culture/Arts/Events quantity and utilization rate
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health, fitness
Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacant home / business quantity • Compliance with appearance standards / code violations • Landscaping/green space quantity and maintenance • Public property maintenance standards
External perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media reporting collection from all forms of information providers (tally of positive & negative reporting)

4. Innovation Study Presentation

Our innovation study presentation will involve PowerPoint, video snippets, handouts and, a pecha kucha session to kick off the fast paced presentation.