

2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program

Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

Deadline for Nominations: March 3, 2015

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance**

Name of program being nominated: Citizen Engagement Program

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Sedona, Arizona

Jurisdiction population(s): 10,000

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: December Year: 2013

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Karen Daines

Title: Acting City Manager, Assistant City Manager Jurisdiction: Sedona, Arizona

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact: Lauren Browne

Title: Citizen Jurisdiction: Sedona, Arizona
Engagement
Coordinator

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Sedona's Journey to More Meaningful Citizen Engagement

Background: Passionate People in an Inspiring Place

Sedona is host to incredible red rocks and also about 10,000 very passionate citizens. Most of them are here because they're drawn to the city's beauty, weather, and culture. The generally older population of citizens settle into retirement among the sunny weather and small-town living. This creates a hot bed for citizen engagement because people have the time to devote to civil service.

The Problem: Efficiency Issues Identified

The City of Sedona's original public input system consisted of eight Commissions. These Commissions had a Chair, a Vice Chair, and five or more other Commission members, all committed to three-year terms. The Commissions were bound to Open Meeting Laws, which while they have many benefits, it meant the Commissioners were not allowed to discuss issues outside of Commission meetings. Also because of Open Meeting Laws, citizens who attended commission meetings could discuss a topic not on the meeting agenda for only three minutes in the public forum portion of the meeting. Overall, communication felt limited.

Furthermore, Commissions operated in subject matter silos, yet most of the issues or projects touch on various disciplines. As a result, multiple commissions would end up working on one project, often without the others' knowledge, duplicating effort and potentially working at odds with each other.

Similarly, there was a disconnect between City Council and Commissions. Commissions would pursue leads and projects that they thought were warranted, and later when they would be presented to City Council, the Council would not approve the direction of the project. This was frustrating for everyone involved.

Lastly, City staff time was a focal point in that each Commission needed a staff liaison. But with no coordinator hired, staff was spending hours a week on Commission issues, taking away from normal job duties. And understandably since Commissioners were volunteers, not paid staff, they weren't expected to perform like staff. Most Commissioners wanted to participate in their local government, have their voices heard, and give input, but they didn't have any intention of functioning like staff, or spending countless hours doing work staff would do. Nor did they typically have the background and experience to do so. To top it off, large groups weren't always conducive to productivity because everyone had different views on major issues, making consensus an elusive concept. Thus, a lot of the work fell on the City staff to lead, manage and implement projects.

The Solution: Restructure

In the fall of 2012, the City Council directed staff to review the role of the citizen boards and Commissions, and to make recommendations on the reorganization of these groups. This was the catalyst for innovative changes to how Sedona implements its citizens' input. Staff came back with a bold recommendation for Sedona to move away from the citizen board structure and adopt a completely new model of citizen engagement. Council directed the City Manager to create a work group to develop a specific implementation strategy, which resulted in a new Citizen Engagement Plan. Meanwhile in Fall 2013, the City Manager's Office hired a Citizen Engagement Coordinator to help with the finalization of the plan and to get the hopefully soon-to-be approved program off the ground. In December of 2013, after much consideration, City Council approved the Citizen Engagement Plan. This meant other than the state-mandated Planning and Zoning and Historic Preservation Commissions, the remaining six were disbanded.

The decision to sunset the Commissions didn't come lightly -- most of 2013 was consumed with the political firestorm over the mere idea of eliminating Commissions. City Council meetings were packed with concerned citizens who saw the new program as too risky and too divergent from the Commission structure. However, staff remained positive and infused that thinking into City Council, building momentum in the concepts that the Citizen Engagement Plan focused on.

The Details: the New Plan

The plan has several components, the first of them being to gather community input. This is executed through suggestions, comments and concerns gathered by the Citizen Engagement Coordinator, City staff and City Council. The input that is gathered goes through one of three courses of actions to make sure everything is acted upon or in the hands of City Council: 1. staff can address it immediately at their level, 2. the issue is put on the City Council's agenda as soon as possible, or 3. the issue is presented to Council at its annual prioritization meeting.

The mention of City Council's annual priority setting meeting is important because this is the mechanism to catch all of the input that isn't handled immediately at the Staff level for City Council to listen, discuss, consider, and prioritize citizen issues for the possible inclusion in the City's Annual Work Plan.

If City Council decides to include a citizen issue in the City's Annual Work Plan, it will then be implemented by City staff since the projects included in this work plan are assigned to a staff member with specific objectives, a timeline, and possibly a budget.

The other component to the Citizen Engagement Program process is to focus on engaging the citizens in the City's decision making process when projects and ideas need public input. Thus the idea of work groups were created, which function as advisory boards on specific issues and

topics the staff is working through. These work groups operate alongside staff and are task-focused. The idea behind them is citizens who serve on the groups know when they meet and for how long each time, understand the task that needs to be completed, and have a timeline of when the group's work will be completed.

A great example of a work group that the Community Development Department formed in early 2014 was the Design Review Work Group, which was comprised of developers, architects, staff, and others in the design/build community. Their goal was to help staff refine and simplify the City's design review process to make it less cumbersome and easier to navigate. Within six months and six meetings, this was accomplished with the adoption of a new design review procedure.

Broaden the Reach: Tap into Online Polling and Social Media

One of the community issues to tackle was how to engage with people that historically, haven't been active in citizen engagement like teens, and those in their twenties and thirties. To answer this need, the Citizen Engagement Coordinator launched [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) accounts. These accounts are filled with program updates and pictures of the work groups and their progress.

Additionally, the City chose the Mindmixer platform to host an online engagement hub, which was named [Engage Sedona](#). Aimed at reaching audiences that don't have the time to participate in a work group, Mindmixer makes it really easy for people to provide input on the decisions that the City is working through. The Citizen Engagement Coordinator and other interested City Staff post questions on Engage Sedona for the public to respond to. Additionally, Staff and City Council comment on the public's responses, creating a two-way dialogue.

Measure the Successes: How the Program is Faring

In the first year of the program, the success is obvious. In the Commission system that was sunsetted, there were 44 participants, and in just one year the Citizen Engagement Program has had more than 180 people sign up through the Volunteer Registry that was created, with over 130 of them already plugged into one of the 25 work groups that were in operation last year. This also means that the City received meaningful input on 25 focused topics or tasks.

Additionally, there are work groups with members in their twenties, thirties and even teens.

Regarding Engage Sedona, in less than a year after launching the platform, there were already 400 comments on 19 topics, and over 1,400 visitors to the site.

Cost Analysis: the Benefits Outweigh the Costs

Because a lot of the work on the Citizen Engagement Program is done with the help of volunteers, most of the costs of the program are directly associated with the salary of the 30-hour per week Citizen Engagement Coordinator, which with salary and benefits, equals about \$44,000. Add about \$4,000 in program costs for coordinator supplies, promotional materials and volunteer appreciation, and that totals to \$48,000. The former system required an estimated \$112,500 annually in staff time with little being achieved in the way of results or deliverables.

The new program still requires a time investment from staff, specifically facilitating the citizen work groups. However the time spent is now productive, resulting in the completion and implementation of projects and programs that have the support and buy-in of the community and City Council.

Lessons Learned: Civic Participation Touches Your Core

What the City of Sedona learned through this process is that change is difficult, no matter how well-intended, and that the commissioners were heavily invested in their roles. It was critical to

ensure that the new transition was handled with sensitivity and care, making sure to hear from everyone before a decision was made.

And once the storm passed and program was in full swing, the City realized how important it was that they thought outside of the box for a solution that truly addressed the needs of city-level citizen engagement. The City of Sedona really tried to move away from the one size fits all model and create opportunities for everyone who wants to get involved in their local government in a way that's rewarding for them and provides meaningful input for the City, maintaining that symbiotic relationship that is essential for communities to thrive.