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Innovation Study Title **_"Community Engagement Initiative"_**

Category **Community Relationships**

Jurisdiction Name **Brooklyn Park**

City/County Manager **Jamie Verbrugge**

Population **75,781**

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CITY OF BROOKLYN PARK, MINNESOTA – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

SYNOPOSIS

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 <u>all</u> residents and inspire a social movement. The ground work for our CEI was laid through our Police, Recreation, and Administration departments. The Neighborhood Action Program (NAP), Joint Community Police Partnership (JCPP), Multicultural Advisory Commission (MAC), Youth Opportunities Coalitions (YOC) all showed us the importance of building and maintaining relationships with our immigrant and minority communities and how relationships are the foundation of our programs and outreach.

From January to May 2010, we held a series of Community Cafés at City Hall, area churches, 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 three-hour 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.

During this same time period, a Core Planning Team was created to ensure oversight, follow-up, and implementation of the CEI. Thirty-one (31) staff, business owners, and community members were individually interviewed to form the **"Core Team"** that started an amazing journey together to unleash the potential within our community by developing priorities for the City's intended future. As a result and based upon the ideas and feedback from the Community Cafés, this group created our City's new mission statement, ***"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.

In March to July 2010, we created an **"Action Team"** comprised of city staff and residents to decide the steps and strategies needed to be taken to make the Core Planning Team's values become reality. A **"Measurement Team"** also comprised of city staff and residents were also created to decide the criteria to determine what success of these values would look like.

Currently, we are recruiting team members to formulate our **"Civic Engagement Teams"** in the following core areas: **Engagement, Youth, Diversity, and Measurement.** The Civic Engagement Teams will play a critical role in implementing the strategies, end results, and steps to achieve identified results within a defined budget to ensure our core values become a reality.

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 Core Planning Team comprised of City Staff, leaders, and community members coordinated several "community cafes" to obtain input/feedback from the community. Based upon the tabulated results of community feedback, the Core Team defined clear goals, vision, priorities, roadmaps, expectations, research, and mutual understanding to develop a set of core community values, new mission statement, and realistic strategies for achieving its mission.

This project follows 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.

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."

It's been a challenge to unlearn decades of standard practice. But the results speak for themselves. 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. And 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.

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.

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 intimated 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

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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?**

The City has developed an enhanced database of all volunteers in the community and we currently utilize Volgistics (http://www.volgistics.com), an online database tool used for tracking, recruiting, and coordinating volunteers. The City of Brooklyn Park has over 1100 volunteers inputted in this database.

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.

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."*

The associates of TSL recognize four stages in the transformation process. They are:

- Developing People and Systems
- Declaring the Intended Future
- Creating the Intended Future
- Learning from Experience and Adjusting the Plan

Consistent with the mission and core values of our CEI, all stages of the TSL transformation process are characterized by inclusion, consensus, long-term commitments, and building and maintaining trust and an internal locus of control.

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. 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 innovative "Service Delivery" platform can be best described by the illustration below. By utilizing this framework, we've increased the percentage of residents who contribute their time and energy to improving their community by 430 percent.

Network Building and Managing	Organization and Coordination	Evaluation and Measurement	Facilitation	Development and Leverage of Community Resources	Marketing and Communication	Effective Volunteer Management	Cultural Intelligence
• Positive collaborations with others • Relationship	• Proven organizational skills • Create a structure	• Ensure reflection and evaluation, make sure we do it effective	• Facilitation skills • Facilitate inter-	• Work w/manage BP Foundation • Solicit money, services,	• Advertiser of community • Spread word "what we do", communicate	• Train volunteer leaders • Inspire/motivate touch community	• Love for people • Patience as a practice

building and connector • Dinner, attending events, tickets ($) • Continue with non-text outreach (creative) • Network in community • Community contact resources / network • Connector, strength finder • Flexible schedule • Build a Comp Community network based on relationship	enabling a culture of informal service ▪ "UBER" project mgr • Able to organize Community Connections, DB, relationships, groups • Coordinate implementation teams		departmental coordination	donations • Mobilize and coordinate resources	▪ Encourage and motivate people ▪ Ability to assess volunteer (community) motivations skills ▪ Recruit, train and support volunteers ▪ Create positive P.R. and be a cheerleader	▪ Knowledge of BP ▪ Show up at events "out of uniform" ▪ Authentic participation ▪ Create and sustain of culture of welcome and hospitality ▪ Neutral party (represent all the groups and volunteers) ▪ Knowledge of community ▪ Cultural connectivity ▪ Culturally intelligent approach vs. cultural competence

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.

D. **Has the health of the community improved as a result? If yes, how?**

Not directly tracked.

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 sites like Facebook, Twitter and Nixle 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.**

The performance measures report has identified approximately 30 community indicators below showcasing our performance to date. (Actual report going to print in Nov 2011)

DIMENSION	DRAFT INDICATORS
Economic vitality	• Tax Base / Paid • Unemployment • New Business / expansion/ closure • Families receiving assistance
Safety	• Juvenile/overall crimes & victimization • Livability/Neighborhood/complaints • Neighborhood cohesion/communication • Physical/Environmental Factors Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design – Code Enforcement
Education	• 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	• Foreclosures • Affordability • Number of owner occupied residences • Housing options/life cycle • Number of housing starts by type
Sense of community	• 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	• Recreation and Parks quantity and utilization rate • Facilities quantity and utilization rate • Culture/Arts/Events quantity and utilization rate
Access	• Health, fitness
Appearance	• Vacant home / business quantity • Compliance with appearance standards / code violations • Landscaping/green space quantity and maintenance • Public property maintenance standards
External perceptions	• 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, handouts and, hopefully, a long "Question and Answer" session.