

Innisfil Public Library, Innisfil ON

2013 Transforming Local Government Conference Case Study Presentation Application

Case Study Title

Sparkling Ideas to Ignite a Creative, Dynamic Community: Transforming the Role of the Public Library in Innisfil

Case Study Category

Organizational Design

Jurisdiction

Innisfil, Ontario

Primary Contact

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Would you like the application to be considered for an Innovation Award – **Yes.**

Would you like the application to be considered for our Rapid Fire Session? – **Yes.**

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Intent of the Project

The future of public libraries is uncertain as they are faced with many challenges, including relevance in our technologically advanced society and threats to budgets. With these realities in mind, the Innisfil Public Library (IPL) embarked on a Strategic Planning Process in the fall of 2011. On the heels of the *Inspiring Innisfil 2020 Plan* that had recently been completed by the Town of Innisfil, the Library was intent on developing a new, unique and vital source of value in the community. In 2012 we released a new Strategic Plan which introduces a transformation to our service delivery model and has activated a culture shift for IPL and the municipality. As the hub of the community, IPL has been instrumental in demonstrating that Innisfil is a very *cool community*.

The first step was the hiring of consultants to collect information through a number of means: community consultation through focus groups, interviews with key community leaders, Town Council and Town Administration, staff workshops and in-depth brainstorming with the Library Management team and Board. Being more than just books, bigger than our branches, a community hub, and being able to provide a unique, creative experience for residents were flagged as areas to focus with the new Strategic Plan. From this point, we looked for inspiration from other libraries that were taking a novel and innovative approach. IPL discovered a model of library service in Scandinavia, particularly in Aarhus, Denmark, that spiraled a new way of thinking. The traditional design of the library being a storehouse for information, and its users as being passive recipients of this knowledge was non-existent. They were transformed into digital media spaces and co-laboratories, where residents could come together, learn new skills, create something unique and exciting, and engage with the latest technologies. IPL saw this model as one to strive towards. Collaboration, creation, capitalizing on local expertise and the sharing of knowledge within the community became key features for IPL. Imagine – taking a skill from the library!

New ideas and visions of reinventing the IPL percolated, and with the guidance of the consultants, the IPL Board released a new strategic Plan in April, 2012. Our new vision was simple, yet exhilarating - *Sparking Ideas to ignite a Dynamic, Creative Community*.

We'll pursue our Vision by focusing on five Strategic Directions:

- *Make the library a hub for discovery and experience*
- *Design and construct creative, collaborative space*
- *Develop a strong community presence*
- *Cultivate a "hacker ethic"*
- *Foster a culture of Innovation*

These strategies do not describe all that the IPL must do in the next five years; instead they describe the five key areas where the IPL must chart a new course and embark on new directions to better serve the community in the future. Each one of these initiatives seeks to provide access to new and emerging technology, inspire critical thinking, provide new avenues for collaboration and interaction, and empower the community to develop new transferable skills.

Costs

Community consultation, including a community survey/study component - \$35 000.00

Gala to celebrate the unveiling of the new Strategic Plan - \$7 500.00

Design of the Strategic Plan and printing - \$2000.00

Empowering IPL Board and Staff to embrace a radical new approach to library service, and creating an exciting culture shift for the community – *priceless!*

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Innovative characteristics

1. We involved as many people from the community as possible. Community members contributed their ideas and visions, as well as their skills in the areas of graphic design, marketing, and the arts to make the Strategic Plan a reality.
2. We acknowledged the importance of working in partnership with the Municipality, and aligned our Strategic Plan with the Town's recent *Inspiring Innisfil 2020 Initiative* –we have the common goal to make Innisfil a better place for all residents. Stronger relationships and more partnerships have been formed.
3. We took our consultant's report and said 'this is a great start', but realized we wanted more! When starting the process, the consultants commented that if we were not willing to end up in a totally different direction, we were wasting our time. Many public libraries are hesitant to drastically change direction from a traditional model – we were not! This bold, innovative decision making has enabled us to be accountable to our changing community.
4. We held additional workshops and brainstorming sessions with Management and Board to push ourselves further, looking to new ways of interacting with the community and becoming top of mind for all residents. The first drafts were reworked and fine-tuned extensively.
5. We used the *Dream with a Deadline* model by Jacques Horovitz and Anne-Valérie Ohlsson. Our strategic plan fits on one page, has a simple, forward thinking vision, and a number of measurable outcomes.
6. We looked for talent in our community – using a local marketing and branding company, we were able to implement a new brand for IPL and a marketing campaign that coincided with the release of the Strategic Plan.
7. Our Community Strategic Plan Booklet is simple and engaging, with real pictures of our community members.
8. We released our Strategic Plan with style – a wine and cheese Gala at the library with an Oscar winning keynote speaker.

Obstacles

Initially, we anticipated that there may be resistance from the Board, employees, Council and/or the community. Through the implementation of a communication strategy, developed and donated by a local marketing consultant, we were able to get buy-in from all parties, and have had a very favourable response from the community.

Outcomes

New positions have been created that focus on community development, user experience, maker culture, new technologies, community collaboration and media skills.

Current employees have been empowered to take on new roles and responsibilities, learn new technologies, and revise the planning of current programs and events to include more of a hands-on/maker component.

Board and staff meetings have been revamped to involve more hands-on training and education in a variety of areas, including electronics, new technologies, 3D printers, robotics and other creative experiences. Staff have brought forward new ideas and are contributing many exciting and previously unrecognized skills to the organization.

Community members have been encouraged to share their skills and expertise with others at the library, in the form of workshops and live demonstrations.

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Plans are underway to build an extension to our largest branch, which will include new community spaces, such as a performance space, creation labs and office space. Small makerspaces and digital media labs are being developed in current branches. In addition to providing convenient, free access to collections, information and works of art and entertainment, we will become the place where these materials are created and where residents have access to the specialized equipment, facilities, staff and other resources to explore their creativity, imagination and innovation.

A new marketing campaign has been implemented that describes how we have 'more inside' our library, and invites the community to 'discover more'.

IPL is fully embracing the idea of reading, writing and interacting across a range of platforms, tools and media. This notion, known as *transliteracy*, encompasses everything from handwriting, print, TV, radio, films, art, and digital social networks. IPL is uniquely situated as a catalyst for building these skill sets among our community members.

Applicable Results and Real World Practicality

IPL's new Strategic Plan has been shared with many other libraries in Ontario, and across Canada. It was used as an example of a successful Strategic Planning process in a session presented during the the Canadian Library Association Conference in June 2012. The directions we have highlighted are applicable to other library systems, as well as local governments which are interested in transforming their organizations to better meet the needs of the community.

Job descriptions have been altered to recruit employees with diverse skill sets. These have been shared with other libraries, and have been used as examples of the need to change organizational roles to better fit the changing demands of the library environment. This shift can be applied to other local governments that are in need of changing the organization to meet the needs of their communities.

Consultants

Dysart & Jones and dma Planning & Management Services Inc.
24 Harbourside Drive, Unit 2
Wolfville, NS B4P 2S3
www.dmaconsulting.com

The consultants led the community, staff and Board consultation and provided an in-depth report of their findings. As well, they provoked IPL Board and staff to challenge their traditional concepts of library service and to stand in the future. With their guidance, we were able to stretch our thinking, and transform our organization.

Presentation Style

- Video prepared by IPL staff communicating the organizational shift, with real comments from community members, Board, staff and our consultants
- PowerPoint presentation with key features of the process and outcomes; how this shift has vastly changed the role of the library in the community; the impact this makes for municipal government.
- Hands on learning with some 'maker projects', including robotics, arduinos or a 3D printer.