



**Title:** Cities Unlimited: A Partnership Between the Cities of Coon Rapids and Brooklyn Park

**Category:** Organizational Wellness

**Jurisdiction(s):** City of Coon Rapids, MN (in partnership with the City of Brooklyn Park, MN)

**Population:** Coon Rapids – 63,000, Brooklyn Park – 77,000

**City Managers:** Coon Rapids, MN - Steve Gatlin, Brooklyn Park, MN - Jamie Verbrugge

**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.

**Project Leader (Primary Contact for case study notification)**

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## What is the intent of the project/program/service?

The Cities Unlimited program between the Cities of Coon Rapids and Brooklyn Park allows the cities to share internal expertise and resources in non-traditional ways. Inevitably, a city will be faced with a situation where they need outside expertise in order to address a challenge, which often means outsourcing to a consultant. Under the Cities Unlimited program, cities are allowed to share, or trade, their own internal experts with another city as a way to save financial resources and to develop internal talent. Of course, not every situation can be solved by “borrowing” staff from another city, but when feasible the program can be very beneficial.

For example, the City of Coon Rapids decided to create an employee Innovation Team and recognized the need for outside help in order to get the program started. The City of Brooklyn Park has several employees who are trained facilitators and were familiar with the type of initiative being undertaken by Coon Rapids. The Brooklyn Park Team developed and led a series of facilitated meetings that allowed the Coon Rapids Team to better understand their challenges, group dynamics, and how to move forward. In addition, the City of Coon Rapids has coached Brooklyn Park staff on improving their performance measurement program and the two cities have been able to collaborate on a number of training programs. These collaborations have saved both cities money, and have helped each city to learn from another to develop their own expertise.

## What are the costs, if any?

Costs, if any, are minimal. The program only requires the use of existing staff and resources.

## What are the savings, if any?

The potential cost savings could be significant. In the Innovation Team example used in question #5, the City of Coon Rapids would have spent several thousand dollars to have a consultant provide the meeting facilitation in the manner done by the Brooklyn Park Team. But for the Cities Unlimited program, Coon Rapids may not have been able to afford the cost to hire an outside facilitator to assist in the project. Without the assistance, Coon Rapids would have spent a great deal more time developing their program and the likelihood of creating a successful program would have greatly diminished. With Cities Unlimited, they were able to access the right resources at the right time, for the right reasons. Financial savings can be achieved; however, the real savings come in the time saved by having an expert help in a process versus developing an initiative from scratch.

## What are the innovative characteristics and explain how they improved the organization.

- Strengths based – cities share expertise and learn in the process
- Collaboration – blurs the lines between arbitrary political boundaries to achieve improved services
- Comes at little to no additional cost – generally only includes staff time
- Goes beyond simple networking and formalizes professional development and sharing of resources within the local government management talent pool

Please tell us about the obstacles you encountered when creating and/or implementing this program, if any.

- Allocating time – each city has own priorities, which doesn't always allow for sharing

- Workload questions – can be difficult to find time to share with another community
- Skepticism - this is a new approach that had never been tried before
- Determining an equitable trade for services - coming to agreement on what's an adequate payback for services contributed into the shared pool
- Sustainability – creating second and third-level connections to sustain the model (i.e. not just limited to executive level collaborations)

What were the outcomes – cost savings, for citizens, any performance measures information, etc.?

- Cities gained expertise without the cost – Coon Rapids learned about the facilitation method used by the Brooklyn Park employees and has now sent several staff members to training. In turn, city staff has used their new skills to help address several key issues within the city.
- Creates connections where they did not exist before. Staff in both cities has been able to network with one another and make connections about mutual interests and issues. For example, the Coon Rapids was able to lend a hand to Brooklyn Park during their annual festival by providing golf carts after a chance conversation between two city employees.
- Breeds additional opportunities for sharing. For example, a staff member at Coon Rapids is helping the City of Shoreview implement a HR software program. This opportunity arose through conversations regarding sharing employee expertise and will save the City of Shoreview the cost of hiring someone to implement the program.

What are the applicable results and real world practicality?

- Collaboration of this type happens frequently. Making it into a formal program has expanded the potential and has allowed us to think of non-traditional ways to share knowledge.
- Reduced costs
- Very easy to create
- Loosely modeled after Jim Collins' "fire bullets, not cannonballs" in that we are pushing the envelope to test this concept. In the future, the cities may expand the program even further and would consider developing a document/website that would identify experts in communities so that participants would know what is available.

Was a private consultant used?

*If yes, describe their involvement; and identify the consultant and/or firm, including contact information. If no, enter N/A.*

N/A.

Briefly describe what your case study presentation might include.

Presentation would be co-presented by the Cities of Coon Rapids and Brooklyn Park and would likely include:

- Illustrated examples of the model
- Handouts and brochures highlighting the successes of current practices
- Prezi presentation or combination presentation with video.