**Alliance for Innovation**

Transforming Local Government Conference

Program Synopsis

**Case Study Title:**

Creating a Local Government Culture of Innovation through External Partnerships

**Case Study Category:**

Organizational Wellness

**Jurisdiction Name:**

Richmond, Virginia

**Jurisdiction Population:**

Population: 204,000

**City/County Manager Name:**

Byron C. Marshall, Chief Administrative Officer

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Richmond’s submission for the Alliance for Innovation Annual Conference would like to be considered for an Innovation Award. (YES)

Richmond’s submission for the Alliance for Innovation Annual Conference would like to be considered for the Rapid Fire Session. (YES)

**Project Leader:**

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**What is the intent of the project/program/service?**   
Utilizing and maximizing available resources throughout your community and region are important elements for the successful implementation of innovative solutions to local government challenges and issues. The City of Richmond has begun an initiative to leverage area resources, both internal to City Hall as well as external, to build community support, awareness and involvement at addressing these challenges. Through our partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University, City leadership was able to capitalize on resources not typically available for them to investigate possible solutions to challenges facing our community. Through creating direct yet open ended capstone projects for Master's degree programs, Richmond has been able to capitalize on their educational programs with students that are eager to support creative projects and find actionable recommendations to overcome obstacles and challenges. The best outcome from this partnership was overcoming the typical challenge facing governments in internally collaborative projects where leadership and ownership of projects becomes a barrier to large initiatives. Through this partnership with VCU, Richmond was able to pursue solutions to projects that require cross departmental involvement as well as collaboration from community resources to maximize impact and deliver results particularly in devising strategies to mitigate poverty in low-income neighborhoods.  
  
**What are the costs, if any?**   
The costs are minimal for the partnering with an area college or university to support an innovative project. The costs may become a factor depending on what the outcomes of the capstone projects create for options and recommendations to address your challenge or issue. To address the challenge of costs, one element of the capstone project deliverables, is to research possible funding sources such as foundations, philanthropic organizations and other partners that may already be working in the area of focus for the project.   
  
Cost has yet to be a challenge with this endeavor.  
  
**What are the savings, if any?**   
Savings are difficult to calculate, however through the utilization of college students in a structured program with outcome specific capstone projects, potential cost savings can be calculated and identified through the course of the semester or year long program involvement. A key savings will be in the minimizing of the internal costs of resources usually needed to complete the research, interviews, calculations and other efforts to complete the tasks. Reducing the strain on existing city resources required to devise, research and implement an innovative project is a major savings of time and minimizing the impact on city operations.   
  
**What are the innovative characteristics and explain how they improved the organization.**   
1. Create a culture of innovation to pursue solutions to challenges and issues facing the city  
Creating an innovative culture in local government is a challenge, particularly in budget tight times as spending valuable resources, especially in employee time or adding employees, can be difficult to justify. Utilizing these resources allows for new approaches to challenges to be pursued and implemented.  
  
2. Mitigated fear of failure of working on these projects to outside of City Hall  
Pursuing creative solutions to complex challenges creates the opportunity for certain projects to fail or not come to fruition. By utilizing eager and qualified college students, local government can remove if not reduce the fear of failure as this challenge is now the focus of the students. This also allows for removing the constant and ever present "NO" word as an obstacle to try ideas.  
  
3. Ability to apply creative concepts and ideas to devise solutions beyond the city hall  
College students are willing to look beyond the present operations and seek new ideas and best practices to projects that tend to be overlooked when researched internally to local government  
  
4. Introduced new potential employees that are trained, educated and experienced with working with City Hall to the prospect of working for local government  
  
**Please tell us about the obstacles you encountered when creating and/or implementing this program, if any.**   
"We don't work that way." "It's against the law to do that" or simply "NO" were typical obstacles.  
  
Other obstacles faced in this approach to improving overall organizational wellness through collaborating with the educational development of master's degree pursuing students was the value of the work they would complete and the ability to implement the recommendations outlined through the project. This was encountered on several instances, however, due to the structure in which the university operates for such projects, implementability is a value that VCU sought in all projects. Pursuing actionable results is crucial to successful partnership in this environment, as well as having an open mind to receiving recommendations and solutions that might not be the norm or typical. This also created an obstacle in which expectations of what solutions would look like might be different than anticipated, which is the exact purpose of this program.  
  
Providing a department with additional resources that are qualified, available and eager to solve a challenge was a valuable asset used to overcome most obstacles. Allowing for creativity to be a key purpose and function for the final deliverable made for unexpected and new approaches to correct issues that have needed to be addressed for a long time.   
  
**What were the outcomes – cost savings, for citizens, any performance measures information, etc.?**   
All of the above are possible. Through developing an environment for which innovative projects can be safely pursued, in cooperation with city departments, and in conjunction with community organizations measurable outcomes and attainable measures of improve are vital indicators of a successful innovation project. As part of the final deliverable for each Capstone project, injecting the need for identifying cost savings, where they will be realized and expected, forecasted of budget impact and other operational improvements are a vital component of this program. As solutions involve internal and external agencies and departments, outlining relevant and necessary performance measure and metrics for measuring success is also an expected deliverable. Identifying data and information needed to validate and prove these metrics are important as well. All of these elements create ways in which the students can prioritize recommendations and solutions to local government challenges and also validate the value of their work through explaining how other approaches may or may not have the desired impact.   
  
**What are the applicable results and real world practicality?**   
Examples of the process in which Richmond has pursued Capstone projects with VCU will be explained and shared. Outlining the process in which projects are managed and expectations detailed and pursued as well as a typical timeline roadmap for projects to begin and complete. The sharing of the final product and next steps to implement these solutions will be shared as well. The best part of this program and approach is that while there are elements that are unique to Richmond and VCU, the key deliverables and elements that make up the Capstone project approach is a sharable real world usable approach that is practical and possible for all local governments to pursue. Past, present and future innovative capstone projects that Richmond and VCU are pursuing will be shared as well to express the applicable results and real world practicality.  
  
**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.**   
We want to know how you will make your session creative and unique.   
-An outline of how innovative solutions face challenges in cities around the country and an explanation of the process in which researching, outlining recommendations, navigating legal and policy challenges, and other components of these solutions takes strong leadership, multiple departments, and the usual political obstacles that are encountered when pursuing such projects design and implementation.  
-The presentation would then present the example of how Richmond utilized the award of the IBM Smarter Cities Challenge selection in 2013 to forge a strong partnership with VCU Master's programs to provide talented students to complete the work needed. This partnership allowed for removing the departmental obstacles of resource availability, ownership, leadership, involvement, and other issues and have the students navigate this environment and detail as part of their final report, the roles and responsibilities of city departments and staff.   
-The ability to actively research similar projects from across the country and forge best practices and results from those examples to express success for the locality. Also researching potential community partners and organizations to support operations and sustainability are provided.  
-Qualified and trained graduate students now have government experience, potential hires  
-Lastly, will be an overview of the project roadmap for this initiative in Richmond as well as an example of the Capstone project scope document and final report.