



Innovation Award Application 2014



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Describe the Program/project/ product/ service innovation:

A recent Gallup poll found that seven out of every ten employees in the United States are not mentally “showing up” for work. These disengaged employees are more prone to mistakes, often infect the culture of the workplace, and cost the national economy an estimated \$450 to \$550 billion in lost productivity every year. As a recent organizational study illustrated, The City of Hamilton, Ohio is not immune to these challenges. However, the City has a wealth of knowledge, experience, and expertise among its employees. Currently, City of Hamilton employees have over 8,200 combined years of experience with the City and this statistic does not include additional professional and personal experiences within the community. Many employees are life-long residents of the area and each has a distinct perspective of service need and delivery in Hamilton. The City of Hamilton Employee Innovation Challenge (or Innovation Challenge) was created to provide a forum for innovation while encouraging idea sharing and maximizing employee experiences to improve the organization and enhance services for the community of Hamilton. The inaugural Innovation Challenge was implemented in late 2013 and we hope to sustain its success through continued annual implementation. The Innovation Challenge provides employees the opportunity to anonymously submit any idea that improves a process, addresses a challenge, or leverages an opportunity within the community. A preliminary selection of idea proposals by a diverse panel yields team leaders who then select a cross-departmental work group from submissions of employees interested in assisting in the development of the project. Teams have around six weeks to develop full proposals that are then shared with upper level management, executive leadership, and the City Council for selection and implementation based on approval.

Short description of the importance, internal impact, and community benefits:

An organizational study conducted by IBM Global Business Services in May of 2013 illustrated the significant need for a shift in organizational communication and culture to respond to low employee morale, concerns regarding limited communication, and other challenges faced by the City of Hamilton. A variety of immediate and on-going approaches were created to address these concerns, including the Innovation Challenge. Implementation of the inaugural Innovation Challenge offered an avenue to achieve organizational impact relatively quickly through the acceptance, consideration, recognition, and implementation of employee-generated ideas. More importantly, the program served as a starting point for the development of a more collaborative culture that continues to encourage innovative internal operations, enhance idea sharing across divisions, and facilitate more effective operations for the City of Hamilton as we work to serve the community.

What makes this a quantum leap of creativity?

As a rust belt community, the City of Hamilton has been faced with a variety of challenges in recent years as the organization and community work to address the discord between long-established operations and the agile, innovative, and untraditional strategies needed to sustain the City’s recent revitalization. Transitions in policy have often moved faster than changes in culture, and executing the Innovation Challenge required brave steps by employees at all organizational levels for the inaugural implementation to be successful. From administrators who supported the program’s introduction and supervisors who worked to encourage participation to employees who overcame the established culture of their respective divisions to share their ideas, introducing, facilitating, and implementing the Innovation Challenge for the first time required a significant change in the culture

of the City of Hamilton as employees re-envisioned solution sourcing. Any idea with the potential to improve a process, address a shared challenge, or leverage an opportunity within the community was eligible for inclusion in the Innovation Challenge. 42 distinct ideas ranging from cell phone usage policy changes and an integrated internship program to technology integration between departments were submitted from 13 different departments. Instead of being referred via the traditional vertical “chain of command,” these creative approaches to improve operations were directly referred to upper level management for review, consideration, feedback, and approval for implementation.

Who benefits?

The scope of the benefits of the Innovation Challenge is as large and diverse as the citizens served by the City of Hamilton. Improved operations achieved through increased collaboration and open idea sharing benefit local community members receiving City services as well as employees who have experienced a change in organizational culture and communication. Innovation Challenge participants have also gained recognition as ideas are validated by administrators through feedback and implementation. Additionally, participants in the inaugural program also forged new interdepartmental relationships, increasing opportunities for collaboration to support better connected City services.

How was the program/project/product/service initiated and implemented?

The Innovation Team (a group of representatives from the City Manager’s Office, Economic Development Department, and Fellowship program) had a conference call with Central Regional Director Greg Stopka of the Alliance for Innovation in late June of 2013 to discuss opportunities for addressing organizational culture challenges through innovation and the resources offered by the Alliance for Innovation. After several “brainstorming” activities and group discussions facilitated in that meeting, the Innovation Team created the Hamilton Employee Innovation Challenge. The program was conceived with the purpose of responding to employee concerns that communication was hampered by organizational divides (vertically and horizontally) and that employees consequently lacked opportunities to share ideas. Less than one month later, the program plan, presentation materials, and timeline for implementation were presented to the City’s Large Management Team who approved implementation of the Innovation Challenge program and pledged departmental support for implementation. An extensive timeline (provided in the final section of this application) was used to guide the following implementation steps: 1) Present Innovation Challenge program to Large Management Team (LMT) and Executive Leadership Team (ELT) for implementation approval 2) Make presentations to City departments to explain program and hold Innovation Challenge open house to share information and answer questions 3) Ideas anonymously submitted by employees at all levels 4) First round projects selected by panel of Innovation Team members and executive leadership 5) Selected project team leaders review applications from employees interested in developing full project proposal and select team 6) Innovation Team works to support idea authors not selected by review panel to provide feedback or assist with swifter implementation of smaller projects 7) Project teams fully develop proposals over approximately six weeks 8) Formal proposals made to LMT for feedback and suggestions 9) Project open house held to share information with other employees 10) Formal presentations made to Council and ELT 11) Review of full proposals 12) Selection and approval of projects to be implemented 13) Implementation of projects. The Innovation Team also served as a liaison between

administrators, supervisors, and Innovation Challenge participants throughout the program. Each team selected for proposal development and presentation was matched with an Innovation Team partner to assist throughout the Innovation Challenge and during initial implementation (if approved).

What risks were taken?

Implementation of any program that seeks to change the culture of an organization carries the risk of rejection from employees at all levels of an organization. In anticipation of recruiting ideas and garnering support for the Innovation Challenge program, the Innovation Team considered possible sources of contention. The City was facing significantly limited budgetary resources as well as a strong culture of skepticism regarding vertical communication. After discussing the best ways to respond to these concerns and related questions, it became evident that the Innovation Challenge was absolutely critical in the context of the organization. While budgetary constraints would certainly play a role in implementation decisions, the Innovation Challenge offered an opportunity to identify areas of potential savings, whether process or product oriented, and in the economic environment of the City, it was essential to identify any opportunities to save money. The Innovation Team feared that the organizational culture could prevent participation of employees, but realized the opportunity to gather valuable information regarding employee engagement, regardless of the number of participants. If no employees participated, the lack of idea submissions would further illustrate the need for organizational culture change and creation of alternative idea sharing arenas. Even if a few employees participated, the program would allow administrators and supervisors to identify employees who were courageous enough to take appropriate risks and share ideas while also illustrating that many employees didn't feel that they were in an environment that encouraged comfortable idea development and communication. If many employees participated, the Innovation Challenge would illustrate the value of a formal idea sharing process as well as demonstrate that many ideas likely had been previously suppressed by communication barriers. Review of the 42 ideas submitted through the inaugural Innovation Challenge illustrated common themes as well as unique approaches to improved operations and most importantly illustrated the need and opportunity to further improve organizational culture, structure, and operations.

What, if any were the costs and/or savings?

Implementation of the Innovation Challenge was completely free of cost as the planning, administration, and management of the program were done as part of regular job responsibilities of existing City staff. Cost savings generated by the Innovation Challenge encompass both direct, monetary savings as well as more indirect savings through intangible benefits less easily monetized. Although still in the initial stages of implementation, a variety of projects approved through the Innovation Challenge expect direct cost savings associated with implementation. A proposal to reorganize the bids and contracting process by utilizing new technology and open source software shared by a neighboring municipality is anticipated to save the City \$320,000 over five years of implementation and will completely offset the purchasing cost of new software through increased competition and lower costs. Another submission regarding planned purchasing and use of Police vehicles could save the City approximately \$10,000 per vehicle while also allowing for more efficient capital planning. Other programs selected for implementation, including a skilled student internship program and City employee volunteer program, are anticipated to reduce overall costs and improve operations by freeing staff for more essential tasks. Some projects, such as a plan to digitize document management, are expected to realize savings over the long term as employee productivity

increases with the support of necessary technology and increased efficiency. Additionally, less tangible benefits are expected as a result of the Innovation Challenge's implementation. Cross departmental collaboration facilitated through the Innovation Challenge is likely to produce savings in increased productivity supported by improved communication. It is also likely that the positive organizational culture change resulting from emphasis on recognizing employee ideas will increase morale and engagement, resulting in money saved through reduced turnover and related training.

What are the lessons learned that other local governments can learn from?

Implementation of the Innovation Challenge program not only illustrated concepts specific to the City of Hamilton, but also highlighted a variety of larger lessons applicable to other local governments. First, there will never be a "perfect" time for implementation of an innovative program. Certainly, introduction and execution should be appropriately planned in relationship to key organizational factors, but there will always be challenges. The organizational culture or countless other factors may not seem absolutely ideal or especially receptive, but by introducing an innovative program you create opportunities to identify organizational characteristics that would have otherwise been unknown. Even "unsuccessful" programs can help discover larger organizational challenges that may not be identified through traditional organizational studies or regular operations. Second, provide a variety of opportunities for idea expression. Many participants in the Innovation Challenge program requested that in the future we allow them to submit pictures or other materials rather than simply submitting a written application. Providing variety in timing (annual vs. constant opportunities), format (written, illustrated, video, and others), and structure (limited in scope vs. open-ended) serves to increase the number of employee engagement opportunities while also attracting different types of participants and ideas.

What department and/or individual(s) championed the innovation? If a contractor was used, please list the name and their contact information.

A group, aptly titled "The Innovation Team," was formed in response to Hamilton City Manager Joshua Smith's State of the City Address in 2012. This group of representatives from the City Manager's Office and Economic Development Department was originally tasked with exploring opportunities to leverage environmentally sustainable resources and coordinating projects across the two organizational divisions represented. However, the group has grown swiftly in response to the changing needs of the City, and now includes all of the City's Fellows, which represent three different departments within the organization. The Innovation Team transitioned to focus on changing the organizational culture while addressing shared challenges through the inaugural Innovation Challenge after a recent organizational study by IBM identified that employees were concerned with vertical communications and felt disengaged. The group continues to work on additional projects and anticipates future growth in size and diversity as a result of the successful implementation of the Innovation Challenge.

Any additional information you would like to share?

The following materials further illustrate the rationale and implementation process of the Innovation Challenge. Please see the supplemental video (<http://tinyurl.com/lstjzur>) and informational pamphlet also included with this application for more information.

Employee Innovation Challenge Informational Packet

What is it?

The Innovation Challenge offers an opportunity to change your community and improve the City as an organization by sharing ideas that help improve processes, address shared challenges, or take advantage of unique opportunities. Your idea, no matter how big or small, has the potential to be implemented and make an impact here in Hamilton.

Why participate?

Each of us has a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities that characterize Hamilton. City employees have more than 8,200 years of combined experience living, working, and playing in Hamilton. Leveraging this knowledge to generate new, creative ideas about the ways to best approach operations provides an opportunity to share valuable insights to restructure programs, address challenges, and take advantage of opportunities unique to Hamilton.

How do I get more information?

An information packet outlining the structure, expectations, and key deadlines of the Innovation Challenge will be released on August 8th via email and the City intranet. An Innovation Challenge open house will also be held on August 12th from noon until 2 pm in the 5th floor break room (Suite 510) of the City Building (345 High Street). Members of the Innovation Team, a group of individuals tasked with encouraging creative approaches to City operations, will be available to answer questions in person and explain the process of participating in the Innovation Challenge. Innovation Team members are also available now and following the kick off of the Innovation Challenge to speak to your department or a group of interested employees. Please contact Mercy Montgomery (montgomem@ci.hamilton.oh.us or 785-7186) to schedule a brief presentation and Q & A session.

General questions may be submitted to: innovationchallenge@hamilton-oh.gov

How do I submit my idea?

Idea Week begins on August 8th with the release of an informational packet and form and runs through Thursday, August 15th at 11:59 pm. A brief (500 words or less) official form asking for basic information about your project concept can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/kblul36> and will be distributed at the beginning of Idea Week. The form may be submitted via an online form (preferred) or as a paper copy. Please contact Jacob Stone at (513) 785-7072 to request a paper form.

All identifying information will be removed before concepts are submitted to a judging committee made up of representatives of the Innovation Team, Executive Leadership Team, and City Council. Ideas will be reviewed anonymously and the judging committee will select up to six (6) first round winners. You can also submit ideas at any time throughout the year by using the Employee Suggestion Box that will soon be provided on the City of Hamilton intranet.

What happens if my project gets chosen as a first round winner?

You (and your partner if you submitted the idea as a pair) will become Project Leader(s) and will be matched with an Innovation Team member who will provide additional resources and assistance. You will have the opportunity to build a project team of up to 6 people from applications submitted by other employees interested in helping develop your project proposal. You will be required to select at least one (1) team member from outside your department* to involve different perspectives and promote collaboration in the development of a complete plan.

**If no project interest applications are received from outside the Project Leader(s)'s department, the Project Leader(s) will not be required to select a team member outside their department.*

Teams will have around six (6) weeks to develop complete project proposals, which will be presented to the Hamilton City Council and Executive Leadership Team (ELT). After reviewing the final program plans, the Council and ELT will make the final decision regarding further action, including implementing and/or funding project(s) as appropriate and feasible.

What are my responsibilities if I get selected to be a Project Leader?

As a Project Leader, you are expected to accomplish the following:

- Select a team of employees to aid in the development of your concept
- Facilitate an “All Hands” team meeting to outline roles and responsibilities of project development
- Manage the project team to accomplish specified goals
- Exhibit your completed plan at a Project Open House for City employees
- Create a complete proposal and project presentation
- Present project to Large Management Team for feedback and guidance
- Present and submit project proposal to the Hamilton City Council
- If selected, implement and/or support the implementation of your plan as appropriate

What information do I have to include in my project plan?

Proposals will be expected to include basic information, including:

- A thorough description of the project concept as well as the importance of project implementation
- A budget outlining basic, estimated expenses or revenues created through operations, savings, or profit generation
- Proposed timeline of implementation

What resources do I have?

Throughout the development process, Project Leaders and Teams will be provided:

- Support from departmental heads as necessary
 - time during the workweek (as appropriate) to work toward the completion of project proposals over the course of the Innovation Challenge
- A designated Innovation Team member (matched based on skills and experience) to provide support and relevant materials throughout the development process
- Materials outlining project deadlines and other important information

What's the process like?

All of the following events are listed by **tentative date**. Changes to the following timeline may be necessary and will be announced appropriately via City communications. A full, detailed timeline of specific dates and deliverables will be released in conjunction with the Innovation Challenge kick off on August 8th.

- August 8th, Innovation Challenge Kick Off
- August 8th-15th, Idea Week
 - Participants will be given one week to develop ideas and submit a basic outline through the online form
- August 16th-21st, Review of Submissions and Selection of First Round Winners
- August 22nd, Announcement of First Round Winners and Call for Project Team Member Applications
- August 22nd-27th, 3 pm, Project Team Member Applications Accepted
- August 28th, 5 pm, Final review of all Project Team Member Applications
- August 29th, Project Team Rosters Announced
- Beginning of September, All Hands Meeting for Each Project Team
- Early September-September 26 (~4 weeks), Project Development
- October 1, Preliminary Presentations to Large Management Team for Feedback
- October 1-October 11 (~2 weeks), Final Project Development
- October 14, Project Open House 3-5 pm
- October 16, Presentation to Mayor and Council and Executive Leadership Team
- October 16-22, Consideration of Project Proposals by Council
- October 23, Announcement of Winning Project(s) Selected by Council
- Implementation of Projects as Planned and Budgeted For

Recent Successes

Several projects approved through the Innovation Challenge are primed for implementation or are already being enacted in the City of Hamilton. The “Green Team” proposed a City employee volunteer program to improve the appearance of parks and public spaces to create a sense of pride and ownership among residents while supplementing the work of the Public Works Department.

The group has planned four projects since receiving approval from the City Council and Executive Leadership Team and collected around eight full bags of trash at their first clean-up event as well as broken snow sleds, swim goggles, and a perfectly good football.

