



## Innovation Award Application 2014



## Successful Use of the Citizen 'Task Force' to Address Long-standing Issues

Pam Brangaccio

City Manager

City of New Smyrna Beach, FL

210 Sams Avenue, New Smyrna Beach, FL 32168

(386) 424-2108

[pbrangaccio@cityofnsb.com](mailto:pbrangaccio@cityofnsb.com)

Describe the Program/project/ product/ service innovation:

Citizen “task force” committees in New Smyrna Beach enable citizens to develop and recommend solutions to long-standing issues. The task force committee format brings citizens together in an open forum to discuss workable solutions. The task force committees are supported by city staff and consultants who make presentations at task force meetings without a charge for their time. The intent of the project was to improve the setting of priorities and organizational focus, and to improve decision making on long-standing community issues by using a “task force” approach to increase citizen engagement and transparency.

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

This type of “hands off”, less formal method of developing solutions to long-standing problems brings people to meetings who normally wouldn’t attend or get involved. The recommendations made by the task force committees have been well-received by the City Commission and a number of the recommendations are being implemented.

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What makes this a quantum leap of creativity?

Through the task force method, citizens who are not usually in formal leadership positions are appointed by the City Commission to work together to develop recommendations. During this process, individuals begin to take ownership of the recommendations, and develop good working relationships with their fellow stakeholders and members of the community. The task force meetings have a “community meeting” feel rather than a formal “city meeting” feel, which tends to attract and encourage other citizens to attend the meetings, sit in the audience, and provide input during a section of the agenda that is reserved for audience input. This style of meeting uses consultants, but they are not compensated for their time. Employees of other local governments who have addressed the same issues have also made presentations for consideration.

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Who benefits?

The task force approach noticeably increased open discussion from many individuals and gathered varied perspectives for solutions. The task force method puts the control of the meeting with a chairperson who is appointed by the citizen task force, and the meetings do not seem to have the same formality as other city meetings. Citizens who are not usually seen in formal leadership roles are now given the opportunity to take ownership and create new initiatives while recommending solutions to long-standing issues.

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

City staff believes that the first time the task force methodology was first used was three years ago, to provide recommendations for the development of the FY 10-11 city budget. The City Commission appointed citizens to a city “budget task force”. The budget task force met for several months and made recommendations on the city budget. This experience, as well as the creation of a “citizens’ academy”, brought a feeling that the city was open to recommendations from citizens. Both of these efforts received positive comments, and City Manager Pam Brangaccio recommended to the City Commission that the task force method be used to study and make recommendations on the City’s Sports Complex, and the need for more parking in the beachside area, two long standing community issues.

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What risks were taken?

It typically takes a long time for citizens to see results from planning efforts. The lengthy time frames that are necessary for planning capital improvements or other programs are difficult to understand in a rapid-paced world. Encouraging citizen participation and promoting transparency are themes that are reinforced through utilizing the task force concept.

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

Costs for the task force committees have been nominal. Cost items include: advertising for meetings, paying hourly city employees to attend night meetings, copying program flyers, and electricity for buildings. In regard to savings, one value of using task force committees is that consultants, professionals, company representatives, and staff members from other local governments have agreed to make presentations at meetings without payment for their time. It is a way for a professional to introduce a firm to citizens and city staff, while the city gets the benefit of the professional’s advice and expertise. For example, the City’s parking task force heard several presentations including an architect who works for a construction firm that regularly builds parking garages. The architect visited several possible sites for parking garages and gave a quick and informed opinion as to whether or not each site was a good candidate for a parking garage. Additionally several local government employees, including one from a beach city in another county, and one from our own county, spoke on their experience in designing parking lots in popular beach areas. Another example involves the City’s Sports Complex where representatives and Task Force members presented information at no cost regarding stadium lighting, field maintenance and general construction.

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

The City has appointed two task force committees in the last two years, and they have successfully addressed two long-standing issues. The task force setting tends to attract citizen input and helps to facilitate a consensus for making recommendations. With city

officials taking a less prominent role than in other settings, the meetings have less of a “city meeting” feel and more of a “community meeting” feel. The reports and recommendations from these task force committees have brought a level of confidence that the issue addressed was thoroughly studied, widely discussed, and brought together the citizens interested in that topic to consider it with the assistance of information provided by professionals.

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

New Smyrna Beach City Manager Pam Brangaccio championed this initiative along with staff members, Tony Otte, Economic Development Director, and Matt Musgrove, Sports Complex Manager.

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Any additional information you would like to share?

Please see attached resolution and Task Force recommendations as an exhibit of how one of our task forces progressed.