**Leadership Excellence and Enhancement Program (LEEP)**

1. **Problem Assessment**

The City of Denton (COD) organization was in need of a leadership development program to address some impending organizational challenges. Like many other municipalities, the COD is threatened with the loss of institutional knowledge as more and more of our employees are eligible to retire or are approaching retirement eligibility within the next few years. As the economy continues to improve, we also face the threat of losing talented employees—potentially some of our future leaders—to organizations that can better fulfill their career needs. The continued growth of our city and our organization has strained many of our existing resources, policies, processes, and/or procedures. The organization needed to address these issues in a constructive manner so that solutions could be identified and implemented. The purpose of the leadership development program is to:

1. Provide a formal program for developing leadership and management competencies in employees that exhibit the potential for advancement to City of Denton leadership positions.
2. Provide a project task group to examine specific issues facing the City and consider alternative and innovative ways to solve challenges.

Our challenge will be to identify individuals that show leadership potential and provide an opportunity to develop additional professional skills. Retaining employees that have exhibited strong leadership potential will be another challenge.

While there is no fool-proof solution to these challenges, the COD recognizes that continued investment in employee development and retention through a competency-based leadership program is a good step. The program includes small group, classroom style training that focuses on building leadership competencies (e.g., strategic thinking, project management, decision making, conflict resolution, etc.) that are needed in our organization. Participants are also exposed to real organizational challenges and asked to generate recommendations for addressing the issues.

1. **Program Implementation**

In 2013, the COD implementation team consulted and contracted with the University of North Texas (UNT) to provide the curriculum and instruction for the majority of the courses at COD facilities. The curriculum includes (1) 80 hours of UNT led classroom training, covering 13 competencies, (2) a 3-day orientation facilitated by COD staff which is designed to help participants gain a better understanding of local government as a whole, the City’s strategic focus and impact on the community, a deeper understanding of the culture we are trying to build, and a greater exposure to the variety of services we offer, (3) identification of a project(s) which UNT professors facilitate and assist in the development process, and (4) quarterly mentorship luncheons with the City Manager (CM) and Assistant City Managers (ACMs). These luncheons allow participants to ask questions of interest to them that the CM and ACMs can answer or allow the mentors to provide feedback on project issues.

Participants must present the project ideas, implementation and sustainability costs, as well as long-term benefits to the CM, ACMs, and the City Council. Once projects are completed, the project team(s) make a final presentation to the City Council.

A graduation and awards ceremony is held for participants. This includes recognition at a City Council meeting. Participants were provided a cash award of $1,250 for significant contribution to the City from the successful implementation of their project.

*Cost of Program*

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| *Cost of the Leadership Excellence and Enhancement Program* | *FY 14/15* |
| UNT Contract  | $26,400 |
| Training costs related to orientation, mentorship luncheons, supplies, etc. | $2,570 |
| Graduation related costs including cash rewards | $12,133 |
| Funding allocated to Projects* Project 1
* Project 2
 | $62,000$125,000 |
| Personnel and Overtime costs | \* |
| Total Cost for FY 14/15 | $228,103 |

\*Not tracked because those costs are included in individual department budgets. It is difficult to differentiate employee time while participating in the program verses other work.

1. **Overall Leadership Excellence and Enhancement Program (LEEP) Outcomes**

In FY 14/15, two projects were chosen and two teams were formed. Participants chose which team they wanted to join. Participants, led by the Project Management professor, developed the project ideas, and then presented those ideas, along with implementation and sustainability costs and long-term benefits to the CM, ACMs, and the City Council. Both projects from FY 14/15 were implemented and processes have been put in place for continued improvement.

*Project 1: Now and Next*

Project Now and Next is a cultural change initiative that utilized a comprehensive approach to evaluating and improving the organization’s performance management and succession management. This project resulted in the CM requesting immediate attention to and completion of all employee performance reviews that were outstanding. The recommendations from the project group resulted in the purchase of Human Capital Management software which integrates our learning, performance, and compensation management systems. The integration of these processes allows for ongoing feedback, aligns employee goals with organizational strategy, gives supervisors the ability to see and address skill and competency gaps, and uses performance data to guide development, merit initiatives, and leadership planning. HR will begin implementation of this software later this year.

*Project 2:**Destination Denton*

Destination Denton examined research that indicates that economic growth pivots on the perceptions held about a community by prospective businesses and industries looking to relocate. This perception is based largely on the first impression formed while traveling through the community. The team chose several common roadways as well as the Denton County Transit Authority (DCTA) light railway. The team explored the factors surrounding right-of-way maintenance and the economic impact to the City due to the neglected rights-of-way, researched the historical efforts to maintain these areas and the organization responsible for previous and current maintenance, and looked at alternative funding options and desired outcomes. The long-term outcome of this project is to establish a comprehensive maintenance program for TxDOT and non-TxDOT rights-of-way by:

* + Developing maintenance standards for public rights-of-way,
	+ Providing regularly-scheduled, broad-based maintenance cycles, and
	+ Providing on-demand maintenance services (48 hour response to complaints).

The City Council authorized funding at $125,000 for three years beginning in FY 14/15 as a pilot project.

Since the first LEEP class only graduated in 2015, long-term results from the program would be difficult to assess this early, but looking at the short-term, we’ve had some very positive results.

Several participants have benefited through promotion or have been provided greater responsibility since participating in the program. Two participants have volunteered to facilitate in the COD Training Academy. A mentorship program is in development that is an offshoot of one of the projects. A significant outcome has been the continued interdepartmental relationships between the participants as well as the strong business connections built while researching and developing the projects. Many of the business connections built as a result of the projects, such as Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT), could pay huge dividends in the years to come.

1. **Lessons Learned from Inaugural LEEP Program**

As with any new endeavor, we knew there would be lessons learned and challenges that we would need to overcome. The administrative team kept a list of lessons learned and reviewed and made changes immediately and/or before launching the second class. Minor administrative changes were made as UNT and COD coordinated materials and information for participants. Three more significant challenges included the following: (1) Participant time away from the job. While the actual classroom time was very exact, the amount of extra time spent on project research and development was an unexpected consequence for the supervisors of some participants. The CM sent out a memorandum to the supervisors of participants in the first class that addressed the importance of the program and expectations that the participants should be allowed the time necessary to attend the activities associated with the program. For the second class, a supervisor orientation was provided to review the details of the program and time impact; (2) Overtime pay for non-exempt employees as some departmental overtime budgets were stretched to the limit. The CM and ACMs did not want to prevent non-exempt employees from participating due to overtime restrictions, so they agreed to have discussions with supervisors as needed; (3) The need for additional time to meet with UNT instructors. The support needed to assist with project development was unexpected and the professors’ time was not budgeted. For the second class, the UNT contract was negotiated to include an hourly rate that can be applied when a professor consults with participants outside of the specific classroom hours.

1. **Summary**

The inaugural LEEP class more than met the expectations of both the COD and UNT. The UNT professors’ were impressed with the participants’ work ethic as well as the quality of work done on the projects. The projects were well received by City Council and the COD Leadership Team. The projects were both examples of important issues faced by the City that, due to shortage of time and dedicated staff, might never have been addressed. The cost of addressing these two areas with outside consultants or contractors would have been costly and time consuming. Using LEEP participants provides opportunities for developing project management skills, developing cross-departmental relationships, and identifying future leaders that might be hidden under layers of higher management. The emerging leaders from the first LEEP class along with the potential of the current class is indicative that the COD has a bright future.