

Program Excellence Award for Citizen Involvement

POPULATIONS OF GREATER THAN 50,000



GAIL STEPHENS

ICMA's Program Excellence Award for Citizen Involvement recognizes successful strategies designed to inform citizens about the local government services available to them and to include citizens in the process of community decision making. The award concentrates on such areas as community consensus building and adult (non-student) citizenship education. A second Program Excellence Award for Citizen Involvement in the greater-than-50,000 population category is awarded to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and Chief Administrative Officer Gail Stephens for the Provencher Bridges Project.

better project for the citizens served.

The project originated when the city determined that it needed to replace the Provencher Bridge, a bridge located in downtown Winnipeg that was built in 1918. In 1998, a project advisory committee (PAC), made up of representatives of various sectors of the community that would be affected by the bridge was formed and asked to maintain communication with their constituencies to disseminate project information and bring forward their views. The public consultation process was then launched publicly with media releases and a newsletter.

In the fall of 1998, the collaborative planning process began, focusing on developing a common knowledge base regarding issues such as the bridge's structural condition and historical value, surrounding land use and development plans, traffic planning data, and special interest needs.

Once the groundwork was laid, PAC next focused on developing broad-ranging project goals. After consulting with their constituencies, PAC members generated eight possible bridge alternatives that could be divided into three categories: (1) restoring the old bridge; (2) restoring the old bridge and building a new span; or (3) replacing the old bridge with a new one. After a technical analysis of these alternatives was conducted, the PAC evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of each

option by comparing them to the project goals.

The four bridge alternatives that the PAC decided were most viable were then presented to the general public for input. From this, a comprehensive public-opinion survey collected and analyzed preferences among different sectors of the community and the reasons for these preferences.

The PAC considered the feedback and reached consensus on an alternative: to replace the old bridge with two "paired bridges," one primarily for vehicles and commuter cyclists and another exclusively for pedestrian and recreational users.

At the outset of the Provencher Bridges public consultation process, there was significant uneasiness among stakeholders about whether the process would work. Could such diverse groups come to a consensus regarding the bridge?

In the end, the stakeholders most directly affected by and interested in the project succeeded in reaching unanimous agreement on the future of the bridge. Several elements contributed to this success, including the inclusive manner in which the process was handled, that each of the affected parties had representation, that communication was consistent and ongoing, and, above all, the city trusted that the public consultation process, although it might not be easy, was the best way to ensure that the bridge would reflect the needs and desires of citizens. ♣

The city of Winnipeg's Provencher Bridges.

A comprehensive public consultation process does not make planning a project any easier. Nor does it make it less expensive. Yet, as Winnipeg, Manitoba's experience in planning and building the Provencher Bridges demonstrates, public consultation does result in a

