



ICMA 2017
Program Excellence Awards

Community Partnership Award

City of Surrey, British Columbia

The Right Decision Project

50,000 and Greater

OVERVIEW

The City of Surrey, British Columbia commissioned the manual *The Right Decision: Evidence-based Decision Making for Government Professionals* and its companion workbook in 2015 as part of its Emerging Leaders Program (ELP), launched by the City Manager in 2014 to develop high performing individuals throughout the organization. The books were developed through a partnership with the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) and published in December 2015.

Using a mix of theory and practical information, the books strip evidence-based decision making down to the basics and guide government professionals through the steps required to make informed, transparent and justifiable decisions.

The books were distributed to approximately 400 City of Surrey front-line managers and have become a go-to resource for making decisions and evaluating programs. They were also part of the impetus for the development of an Office of Continuous Improvement by the City Manager.

The project's reach has extended beyond city boundaries through: free distribution of the manual and workbook via UFV's online resource library at <http://cjr.ufv.ca> (approximately 2,000 views to date), Surrey's receipt of the 2016 Professional Development Award from the Canadian Association of City Administrators (CAMA), a speaking engagement at a local government conference in the United States, a university course on evidence-based decision making, and translated versions of the books that are being used in academic settings in China.

PROBLEM ASSESSMENT: CHALLENGE AND NEED

Cities today face myriad challenges, from the aging population that is seeing many managers retire in the next decade, to increasing public demands for greater efficiency and more transparent decision making. It is critical that cities both invest in tomorrow's leaders and actively seek opportunities to be more efficient, effective and accountable.

The Right Decision project meets these needs in several ways. The manual and workbook addressed an unmet need for Surrey and other cities by providing a practical new tool for evidence-based decision making that is specifically focused on government staff and administrators. It served as an exceptional learning opportunity for the City's Emerging Leaders Program by providing participants with deeper organizational knowledge, along with practical research, writing, editing and project management experience. It also leveraged a relationship with a partner outside the government realm – the University of the Fraser Valley – to develop the content, enhance the ELP participant experience, and broadly share the books for free.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND COSTS

The notion for ELP was conceived by the City Manager in 2014 as part of his continuing effort to meet the challenges and demands of building a world-class city. ELP was officially launched in December 2014, with 20 participants selected from all areas of the organization.

Work on *The Right Decision* began in spring 2015, following a request across the City for proposals for projects that would provide high quality learning opportunities while addressing a challenge or need within the City. Among those who stepped forward was Fire Chief Len Garis, who had participated in the development of two earlier installments of *The Right Decision* series for the police and fire services. He proposed that ELP work on a version of *The Right Decision* that would specifically target government professionals, while leveraging the City's relationship with the University of the Fraser Valley.

The ELP participants were requested to provide feedback on the manual (co-authored by Garis), and to develop examples, real-life case studies and content for the workbook. For this latter task, they interviewed City departments to identify typical challenges, and then developed examples and case studies to illustrate the material and serve as the basis for exercises. Among the criteria was transferability to other governments and regions. The ELP team then assisted in

editing the manual and collaborated in writing and editing the workbook. The books were published in December 2015.

Costs: In-kind contributions from City staff and the University of the Fraser Valley meant that hard costs were limited to the design of the two books (\$2,350), and the printing of 1,050 manuals and 800 workbooks (\$15,000). ELP leverages in-house management and materials to mentor and teach the participants, so hard costs are minimal.

TANGIBLE RESULTS / MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Advancing the public service:

- The content, examples and case studies were specifically chosen for transferability. The availability of the books for free online is helping to facilitate wider adoption of evidence-based decision making – ultimately leading to more informed and accountable decisions by all municipal governments, regardless of resource level and location.
- The project won the 2016 Professional Development Award from the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators, drawing widespread attention to the free resource and evidence-based decision making through both industry news and mainstream media coverage. Additionally, based on the CAMA award, the City’s Planning Manager (an ELP participant) will speak at the Alliance for Innovation’s Transforming Local Government Conference April 18-21, 2017 in Tulsa, OK.
- The books were translated into Chinese in 2016 (available at <http://cjr.ufv.ca>) and are now being used at Yunnan Police Officer Academy in Kunming, Yunnan, China.

Strengthened relationship with the project partner: City staff participated in the development of an online course based on *The Right Decision* that was piloted in fall 2016 at the University of the Fraser Valley. It is being shopped as an online credit course to undergraduate

programs such as Peace Conflict Studies and Business Administration, and is being positioned for a face-to-face course for the Criminal Justice and Leadership graduate program.

Well received: The books have been enthusiastically received, both within the City and by other governments. Due to high demand, a second print run was required within weeks of the initial printing. Up to March 2017, the books had approximately 2,000 online views. When the books were first published, the City was receiving daily inquiries or positive feedback from other governments and organizations. There continues to be a steady level of external interest, with inquiries and kudos received from across North America, China and Europe.

Professional development:

- The project provided ELP participants with skills and experiences such as: organizational knowledge (learning about other department functions / challenges), team building (working as a team to complete the project, and collaborating with staff from across the City), project management (seeing a project through within strict timelines) and research (investigating typical City challenges for potential examples and case studies).
- The City has distributed the books throughout the organization, and staff have incorporated the processes into their day-to-day decision making. The project has helped firmly embed evidence-based decision making in the City of Surrey culture.
- ELP's work and the project's development were intended to help break down silos and involve people from all areas of the organization. The relationships formed have helped to encourage a whole-city approach to decision making and problem solving.
- The project and the positive external feedback has strengthened staff pride and engagement throughout the organization.
- Based on the success of the project, the City Manager is working to implement an Office of Continuous Improvement with dedicated staff in 2017.

Greater accountability and transparency: *The Right Decision* helps municipal governments meet the requirements of accountability and transparency to their citizens by making sound decisions that can be clearly linked back to research and data.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The benefits of partnering with other organizations were clearly demonstrated. The partnership with the university provided a deeper and more meaningful learning opportunity for the ELP participants than Surrey could provide on its own, while providing a platform for sharing the book broadly.
- The project demonstrated how joint research and professional development activities can help to promote cross-departmental collaboration and staff engagement.
- There is a great demand among government professionals for information and guidance in working better and smarter, and cities can help advance the public service by considering how their in-house professional development projects may translate elsewhere. The City recognized at the outset that *The Right Decision* would likely garner widespread interest, so selectively curated the manual and workbook content to ensure it would be relevant to other government organizations.

RAISING AWARENESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGER CONTRIBUTIONS

- When promoting the project externally, the City of Surrey has underscored the importance of the staff and management contribution.
- The CAMA Award brought widespread awareness of the project and the development of Surrey's Emerging Leaders Program by the City Manager. The award also led to a 2017 speaking engagement to city officials from across North America.
- The project featured the Surrey logo on the cover, a forward by the City Manager and endorsements from other communities' City Managers.