CASE STUDY | This is My Neighbourhood

Calgary, Alberta

This case study is based on a webinar presentation from Kendra Varoney and David Plouffe of Calgary, Alberta, to the *Neighbourhood Strategy Leaders Community of Practice,* in September 2016.

Initial Opportunity

This is My Neighbourhood Calgary is a four year pilot project with the goal to become more citizen centric by helping residents become more active. This initiative is also meant to create more open communication and reduce barriers between the City of Calgary departments and to foster greater collaborative opportunities between the City and its residents.

Business Units

As a core intention of the *This is My Neighbourhood* initiative is to foster greater collaboration between departments within the City itself, each business unit within *This is My Neighbourhood* is a department of the municipality. Six business units are working together internally to serve the residents of Calgary.

The six units are:
- Calgary Fire
- Calgary Neighbourhoods
- Calgary Recreation
- Calgary Park
- Calgary Community
- Calgary Housing

> *City Profile: Calgary*
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> *Population: 1,239,220*
> *Density: 1501.1/km^2*
> *Motto: "Making Life Better Everyday"*
> *Website: http://www.calgary.ca/SitePages/cocis/Scripts/DefaultNav.aspx*

"Every neighbourhood could use improvement from the city in some shape or capacity"

Time Line

1. Get Ideas

This stage of *This is My Neighbourhood* was focused on engaging with various stakeholders. To engage a diverse number of people, Calgary went to where the people are. Various events around the city and places where large groups of people visit were the main areas of focus. This stage of the initiative comprised the first 6-9 months of the project.

2. Create Neighbourhood Vision

Toward the end of the first year, all of the partners, strategists and neighbourhood partnership coordinators worked with the residents to identify their unique neighbourhood vision. Each neighbourhood had a different vision. Some of the focus areas included: neighborliness, cleanliness, parks and safety.

3. Choose Improvements

After the neighbourhood visions were finished, the next step was to choose what was possible to complete. This was done by encouraging the neighbourhoods to select *which* improvements they wanted to implement. Many of the programs sought to progress neighbourhood identities, and some suggestions were quite grand, but they were never dismissed. Public art and education programming, lighting improvements, and clean-ups were the most popular amongst different neighbourhoods. This step of the timeline took the entirety of the 2nd year.

> ## Scale
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> *This is My Neighbourhood* is not a large-scale initiative. There are no large projects like building new roads or overpasses. The small, localized scale of this program makes it easier for residents to better their own community. Some of the results of this small infrastructure are park benches, garbage cans and special events.

4. Implement Improvements

The final two years of the pilot will expand the project to 14 new neighbourhoods. Each of the new neighbourhoods will belong to separate wards. This will foster buy-in from each councilor, allowing all of them to see the benefits of the program. It also forces *This is My Neighbourhood* to be inclusive of all community voices, rather than focusing solely on neighbourhoods with particular features or attributes.

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Challenges

The challenges identified by project leaders include:
- Prioritization of programs – it was difficult to decide which program would be more beneficial
- While ideas were never dismissed ideas, a lot of what residents requested were not sustainable, beneficial or feasible
- Getting the attention and participation of residents
- Inconsistent levels of engagement – some neighbourhoods were over-engaged and others were under-engaged

Learnings

Key learnings shared by the project leaders include:
- Residents are key stakeholders
- Strategically choose neighborhoods from data and collective thought; continue trying to engage neighbourhoods that are not chosen, but at a different capacity.
- Provide information to residents and be more transparent about planning activities, funding, etc.

Successes

Specific successes the project leaders identified include:
- Lawn Chair Theatre
- Community Play Day
- Basketball Nets
- Pickle Ball Courts
- Community Fitness programs
- Senior Programs