

## Neighborhood Engagement - The Power of People

City of Rancho Cordova, California

*#Authentic Community Connections*

Population: 73,847

### Innovation

#### Criteria:

- Initiative fundamentally changed a process, product or service (fundamental)
- OR
- Initiative builds upon existing knowledge to improve a product, process or service (incremental)
  - The initiative substantially stretched the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.

### Describe Your Innovation

*(When and how did this innovation get started? Do also detail how the program or policy innovative, how it has changed previous processes, products, or services, and how it has substantially stretched or improved the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.)*

The City of Rancho Cordova started the Neighborhood Engagement Program in 2012. Many neighborhoods in the City were still suffering from the recession; resident turnover had fundamentally changed neighborhood character, and many of the established neighborhoods were struggling with a loss of cohesion. The program's goal was to inspire residents' hopes and dreams for their neighborhood, build strong relationships among neighbors, and create a sense of community that promotes pride and leadership.

The City recognized the value in fostering strong neighborhoods, and working alongside our residents as partners, the City took the innovative approach to dedicate staff and resources to help build better and stronger ties in some of the more challenged neighborhoods. The traditional communication through City Council meetings and Brown Act notifications was not enough. We needed to do more than simply inform. The City wanted to engage residents. Most residents don't inherently have the experience or resources to engage and organize their neighbors to set neighborhood goals, but they do have the drive and the desire. The City's role was to provide the staffing, resources, and expertise to help them become organizers and leaders, and to empower them to strengthen their neighborhoods.

There are four critical strategies necessary to the City's program:

- Build neighborhood capacity, through facilitation, coaching, and activation; the City supports implementation, but residents drive it.
- Neighbors initiate ideas and implement activities that bring people together to improve their neighborhood.
- City staff help neighbors develop the leadership skills to identify and carry out projects that engage other residents, increasing social capital within the neighborhood.
- City, other local agencies, especially schools and park districts, recognize and coordinate with neighbors and one another to support resident determined goals for their neighborhood.

## Collaboration

### Criteria:

- Initiative demonstrated engaging stakeholders both internal and external.
- Initiative demonstrated high performance teaming, breaking down internal silos.
- Strategic partnerships and or community networks were developed as a result of the initiative

**In less than 200 words, what individuals or groups are considered the primary initiators of your program? How does the innovation engage stakeholders or demonstrate high performance teaming? What strategic partnerships and/or community networks, if any, were developed?**

Our Neighborhood Engagement Program empowers residents and neighbors to initiate change and improve their neighborhoods. Our residents are our key stakeholders, and the program is about helping them to engage with both the City and their neighbors. This program has provided an opportunity for residents to get to know one another and identify their shared goals. Each resident brings a unique asset to the group, which is more apparent as they work together on community projects. As the projects are executed and they see the results, the residents then feel more empowered and incorporated with the City's leadership training has helped build incredible high performing teams.

The program functions also focus on neighborhood assets and strengths, and it uses partnerships and networks with other government and public service agencies to drive success. Local elementary schools provide safe and convenient meeting places, and partnerships with the local businesses have provided funding support to the community. Our local non-profits engage to provide diverse services and work with residents to build networks and improve capacity. Our community service providers, such as our Police, Fire and Cordova Recreation & Parks District, build stronger relationships with the neighborhood groups which foster confidence and builds trust.

**If a private consultant was used please describe in detail their involvement, identify the consultant and/or firm and provide contact information. Maintain a 100 word maximum.**

Ron Dwyer-Voss is the owner and founder of Pacific Community Solutions, Inc. His work focuses on asset-based community development and organizing, community engagement and mobilization, participatory evaluation, education, and community health. Ron was key in drafting our City's Work Plan and Strategic Plan, provided training for City staff in asset-based community development and worked with staff to identify and build neighborhood leaders during the earlier stages of the program. Ron continues to provide guidance and to act as a resource for staff.

Ron Dwyer-Voss [ron@pacificcommunitysolutions.com](mailto:ron@pacificcommunitysolutions.com)

## Significance

### Criteria:

- Initiative addresses an area of concern for the majority of local government organizations.
- Initiative can serve as a model and replicated in other jurisdictions.

Please describe the extent to which you believe your program or policy initiative is potentially replicable within other jurisdictions and why? To your knowledge, have any other jurisdictions or organizations established programs or implemented policies modeled specifically on this project? Please also provide verification of the replication.

The Neighborhood Engagement Program is replicable and scalable in other jurisdictions. Governments are increasingly aware of the importance of resident engagement. Our Neighborhood Engagement Program is unique in that it dedicates staff and resources to help neighborhoods build the capacity and expertise, so that neighbors can engage and problem-solve in their own neighborhoods. By building these skills and resources in the community, the City is fostering sustainable community assets that will be available to residents and neighborhoods in the long term instead of focusing on City-driven, one-time community events or improvement projects.

The City's commitment to dedicate staff and resources addresses a challenge that many other cities face in building community engagement or asset-based community development efforts. Many jurisdictions rely on City staff with full workloads to engage with the community. The result is that staff are overloaded, split their efforts or try to hurry the process. This limits the effectiveness and success of the program because success is as unique as each neighborhood. By dedicating staff resources, providing staff training, and making a long-term commitment, our Neighborhood Engagement Program succeeds in developing lasting community assets and neighborhood relationships.

## Effectiveness

### Criteria:

- Initiative addresses a community or organization need.
- Initiative has achieved tangible results.
- Initiative improved the organizational culture or the traditional approach to problem solving.
- Initiative has received recognition for its achievements, i.e. independent evaluation, national recognition, local press, etc.

Please describe the most significant obstacle(s) encountered thus far by your program. How have they been dealt with? Which ones remain?

The Maintenance phase has been the biggest challenge. Our program methodology includes four phases: Start Up, Leadership and Cultivation, Sustainability, and Maintenance. Once a neighborhood has achieved sustainable leadership, City staff start to transition from frequent involvement with the group into more of a maintenance or supportive role. The maintenance phase ensures that neighborhood leaders are successful in keeping the neighborhood group active and energized. Staff continues to stay connected with these leaders to assist where needed to ensure success.

However, neighborhoods sometimes cannot stay in the Maintenance phase and regress to an earlier phase. For example, leadership in an established neighborhood might regress due to fatigue, discouragement or conflict. This requires attention to get leaders back on track and re-engage residents. Or, in neighborhoods with higher resident turnover or with socio-economic challenges, efforts can stall as leaders become unavailable due to job changes, family illness, rent increases or other circumstances that take them away from the neighborhood. Once a neighborhood is established and has strong, trained, confident leaders staff can focus on new neighborhoods.

**What outcomes did this program or policy have? Could you share one or two objective measures that demonstrate these outcomes? Ultimately, how did you measure the change based on the intervention, and why do you believe in the credibility of this assessment?**

The City's Neighborhood Engagement Program has been thoughtfully planned to make use of every resource and asset available in the community. The primary reason for its success is the dedication and passion of our resident community leaders, and the City's commitment to the program.

In July 2018, the City conducted neighborhood community surveys within the active program neighborhoods. The goals of the survey are to assess resident's views, satisfaction living in their neighborhoods, perceptions of whether their neighborhood is improving as a community, personal safety, and involvement in community projects and their willingness to become more involved. These baseline surveys should help us objectively measure each neighborhoods program.

- The outcomes of the Neighborhood Engagement Program include:
- Increased social capital in targeted neighborhoods
- Established a stronger partnership with the schools
- Engaged community leaders that represent their neighborhood
- Increased trust between residents and the City staff
- Improved resident pride in the targeted neighborhoods
  - Engaged and empowered citizens that are willing and ready to work to improve their neighborhoods
  - Improved quality of life for residents through tighter community ties and neighborhood identity
- Created a replicable method that we can apply to other neighborhoods
- Increased neighborhood demand for the program as they see the results in our targeted neighborhoods Other successful neighborhood events implemented from this program include:
  - National Night Out – generating over 200 attendees
  - Neighborhood Block Parties – generating over 1000 attendees
  - Free Tree Planting Events – generating over 100 participants
  - Neighborhood Trunk or Treat Events (3 years in a row) – generating over 1,500 attendees
  - Neighborhood Christmas Parade (3 years in a row) – generating over 2,000 attendees
- Installation of a Little Library in the Park
- Helping launch a Water-Wise Landscape Program

**Has the program received any press or other media coverage to date? If yes, please list the sources and briefly describe relevant coverage.**

We have submitted a number of Grapevine (local paper) articles on the various Neighborhood Engagement projects, such as:

Trunk or Treat event - Christmas Parade - Neighborhood Block Parties - National Night Out One project, "100 Trees in Lincoln Village" was covered by our local news station - Good Day Sacramento.

## Presentation

### Criteria:

- Presentation will be delivered by a team.
- Presentation will be highly interactive and engaging.

### Example Social Media Post

The @CityofRCordova Neighborhood Engagement Program began in 2012 to utilize City resources to bring neighbors together to organize and implement neighborhood goals and activities to build a sense of community across Rancho Cordova. #TLG2019

**Please write an abstract or short description for your innovation that would make conference attendees say "Well, I need to attend this session!"**

Empowering residents to build social capital within their neighborhoods and manage their neighborhood investments. Meet the Neighborhood Engagement Program!

This session will present an overview of four critical strategies to achieve a successful neighborhood engagement program. See the results of several distinct neighborhoods' success and challenges. Attendees will take away the importance of relationship building and receive actionable skills and examples on how to use the tools they learn in their communities.

**How will you make the session creative and unique?- How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational?- Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction.- What will attendees be able to have as an actionable "takeaway" from the session?**

There is nothing like sitting through a lecture or boring case study. You tune out and your mind begins drifting after 10 minutes into the session. We find personal stories and success is a powerful tool to build human connections as we learn from one another. It helps create a connection with your audience. This session provides a unique method that most municipalities are not familiar with but want to achieve.

We hope to connect with our audience through collaboration, including short breakout sessions to engage, brainstorm ideas and regenerate minds from just listening. We use exercises and polling questions to keep and open communication, participatory and positive energy level.

Attendees will take away the importance of relationship building and receive actionable skills and examples on how to use the tools they learn in their communities.

### Anything else you would like to add?

One of the great privileges the City received was an invitation from the NeighborWorks America organization to attend their annual Community Leadership Institute (CLI) in Los Angeles in 2017. The City's Community Engagement Manager was invited along with six members of the community to attend this three-day institute representing the City. The CLI brings residents from all over the country to work together to address community challenges. Over the following year, the team worked together on a community project, with funding provided by NeighborWorks America.

This is a unique and innovative program benefiting both our residents and the City. Our Neighborhood Engagement Program makes each of us proud to live in the City of Rancho Cordova! It has been one of the greatest highlights of my career!!