

Beyond the Innovation Team: How to Build an Innovation Program that Engages Everyone

Park District of Oak Park, IL

#Relentless Creativity

Population: 52,000

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.)

In 2014, the Park District formed an innovation team to create a way to encourage new ideas throughout the organization. We purchased an online portal we branded as Launch Pad to provide staff the ability to submit ideas, comment, and vote on them. We also allocated a small amount of funding to launch them. However, we encountered many challenges to make it work.

Process: We lacked a clear process to vet the ideas, develop them, and determine their successes. As a result, the Innovation Team formed a clear vetting and criteria process. In addition, we recognized the need to nurture ideas from conceptual to implementation. We built a project management structure to vet the ideas, develop them, and determine what was successful or not.

Scope: Initially, we struggled with adopting ideas beyond low-cost process improvement. We developed two new avenues: 1) Big Ticket Items-for items that require substantial cost, we now use pitch sessions similar to the show Shark Tank. All staff vote on which big ticket items they want to fund. 2) Big Challenges-we also now have the innovation team itself using design thinking principles to address organizational-wide challenges.

Engagement: Launch Pad provides a venue for all staff to participate in innovation but we struggled to get participation beyond a small group. To combat this problem, we have implemented an awards program that encourages participation. We recognize every staff members' idea that we launch/fund, provide Moon Pie treats to the staff members with the highest comments and ideas posted, and annual plaques for the top community impact and internal improvement ideas. We also have monthly challenges and group activities to encourage posts. Finally, we have a "Le Good Try Award," a small skunk statue that recognizes ideas that don't work.

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?

At a staff retreat in 2014, Park District staff discussed ways to improve innovation within the organization. As a result of that discussion, an Innovation Team was formed and tasked with creating a way to support the implementation of innovative ideas throughout our organization. Launch Pad was rolled out to staff in 2015. However, participation was limited. As a result, the Innovation Team regrouped in 2017 to address three items that were missing from Launch Pad 1) Structure and Accountability; 2) Scope; and 3) Engagement. As a result, we developed a clear criteria, process, awards and other engagement activities that were unveiled that year. Part of the new structure was engaging department heads/managers throughout the process to ensure ideas are vetted, developed and implemented. The Team also recognized not all staff have access to Launch Pad and built a white board in the break room to engage these groups. Departments that weren't posting often were now being heard. The results have been greater organization-wide participation and ideas posted.

Finally, a live dashboard was developed with updates on the number of ideas launched and details about what they are. The public also has access to this dashboard as well promoting transparency.

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.

Our idea portal uses technology from a company called User Echo: <https://userecho.com/>. We pay a \$250 annual subscription.

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.

Our program is replicable in any sized community. There is often a stigma with innovation that it requires a large amount of resources, certain expertise, or a large amount of time. Our program is easy to implement and can be adapted by any sized organization. You also don't need any specific training like Lean, design-thinking, etc. to build a similar innovation program. To my knowledge, no organization has established a similar program with the reach

our program has. I have worked with Ed Foley in the City of Olathe, KS to share our successes which they have incorporated into their Idea Sandbox idea management program. We have also had conversations with Michael Davis and Durham County, NC about adopting the idea.

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?

Launch Pad is a great mechanism to engage all staff. However, we faced many obstacles that had to be overcome to make the program work as desired. First, we have 52 full-time staff and about 100 part-time in 16 locations, not including the number of seasonal employees we have. We are also open from 5AM-10PM 7 days a week. This structure makes it challenging to build an inclusive innovation program. As a result, we initially struggled to only engage a small section of our staff. To address this challenge, we built a comprehensive engagement program that includes awards, food, and fun. The results have been an 82% ('17 to '18) increase in ideas and comments. We also struggled with moving ideas from Launch Pad to implementation. In order for the innovation process to work, it required department heads/managers to review ideas. If they don't, it results in a bottleneck of ideas. To accelerate the process, we recently began meeting key departments to quickly vet ideas and receive updates on ideas under review or planned.

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 outcomes of this program are to increase the amount of employees engaged with the innovative process and launch more new ideas. Over the last year we have seen the amount of ideas implemented grow from 14 ('16) to 21 ('17) to 20 ('18 YTD). We have also seen the number of postings grow from 35 (September 2016-September 2017) to 195 (September 2017-September 2018) an 82% increase. We also recently did a survey measuring how successful we are being in achieving our outcomes and will be able to compare the results by the 2019 Conference. In 2018, we had 30 employees participate (20% of all full-time and part-time staff). 100% indicated Launch Pad was excellent or good at promoting innovation across the organization; 88% indicated we are building engagement and capacity for innovation; and 94% indicated we are getting good ideas off the ground. During our last Big Ticket Contest, we saw 47 employees vote (30% of our full-time and part-time staff). In addition to quantitative data, we have seen employee awareness of relationships improve. For example, some employees have built reputations in the organization as innovators. Our facility manager is known as the "grant guy" as he's constantly receiving grants to support new innovative projects. Launch Pad has unheralded "superstars" we can now recognize. All this data put together provides a strong strategy to measure how innovative our culture is.

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

We received J. Robert Havlick Award for Innovation in Local Government in 2017 for Launch Pad.

We also wrote an article on the program for the Alliance in the past (<http://transformgov.org/en/Article/106373>). We have also received press and recognition for ideas that have come out of Launch Pad including the recent Parks Passport program at TLG 2018 (<http://tlgconference.org/index.aspx?page=325>)

Presentation

Criteria:

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

Example Social Media Post

Don't Launch a Stinker! Come learn how to make an #innovation program get good #ideas off the ground and engage everyone throughout your organization.

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

Do you want to build an innovation program that has a high engagement rate? Does your innovation program lack accountability? Is your innovation program running out of gas? Do you want to make innovation fun?

Come learn how we built an innovation program around our online idea portal Launch Pad. We'll discuss how to build an innovation process, vetting, project management, engagement strategies, and how one size doesn't fit all. Then, we'll work in groups to develop your own innovation program. Moon Pies and Out of this World "Moon Man" awards will recognize top programs.

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?

See 16. We'll provide attendees an overview of our program. Then, they will work in groups to build their own innovation programs focusing on process, engagement and scope. We'll take volunteers to video tape their ideas and then have everyone vote live. The top program will receive an Out of this World "Moon Man" award. Session takeaways:

- Learn about how to build an innovation program that engages everyone
- Leave with a blue print for implementing your own program.
- Learn about common challenges with building an innovation program and how to overcome them

Anything else you would like to add?

In 2017, we received the J. Robert Havlick Award for Innovation in Local Government for Launch Pad. Even though we had a mechanism to engage staff with their ideas, we saw limited and diminishing results. This session will be a sequel to that award presentation that will show how important adopting a continuous improvement mentality is

around your innovation program. By building a structure, engagement, accountability, and scope we have met and exceeded our original goals around Launch Pad. Our next step is to share with the public the innovation we are creating by sharing the big ticket items and annual award winners via short videos on our social media platforms.