

Chapel Hill Civil Rights Initiative

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

#Authentic Community Connections

Population: 59,246

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.)

Since November 2017, Chapel Hill's Historic Civil Rights Commemorations (HCRC) Task Force has been developing and practicing innovative public history, facilitated and supported by the Town of Chapel Hill. The task force has designed a human-centered, collaborative framework to initiate and implement history projects with the explicit goal of connecting community members, history makers, and historians with local government.

The history makers on the task force asked that this project begin by investigating what has been largely omitted from existing histories: the contributions of native Chapel Hillians—young, black high school students whose actions provided the catalytic spark for the direct action Civil Rights Movement in Chapel Hill.

The task force presented a timeline of Chapel Hill's Civil Rights Movement, developed using this framework, to Town Council in June 2018. Today, the project team continues to develop and implement public history projects and programs using our guiding values. We agree that our work is:

- **Inclusive & Collaborative.** We want to learn from the community through conversation and listening. We seek to find, document, and share stories that have not been fully told. We hope to bring new generations into the conversations about our shared histories.
- **Accurate & Contextual.** Resilient communities must reckon with their past in a collaborative, inclusive way. Such work allows us to enter honestly into difficult conversations about how we have arrived at our present and what we hope for our future.
- **Transparent & Ethical.** We want to honestly grapple with primary source documents, existing oral histories, secondary source accounts, and memories of living history makers. We seek to clearly document all sources used while acknowledging that history is imperfect. Our work is living history: open to new information and revision.
- **Timely.** When possible, we seek to honor our history makers for their actions within their lifetimes.

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?

In May 2017, Chapel Hill's Mayor Pam Hemminger met with a group representing nine young black men who were arrested following the early direct action sit-ins in Chapel Hill in 1960. In response to this meeting, the mayor formed the HCRC Task Force. The task force includes representatives from twelve community organizations, including area non-profits and faith organizations, local K-12 schools, research universities, as well as history makers and family members. Two members of the task force are elected members of the Chapel Hill Town Council, and Town staff serve as project facilitators.

The task force further engaged stakeholders by designing mechanisms for interactive community engagement online, in person, and by phone. Beyond the initial charge of the task force, members have broadened and expanded the work of the project team.

Current projects are being led by task force members include:

- -An innovative commemorative marker in downtown Chapel Hill at the site of the first direct action sit-in. – A series of critical oral histories and public discussion panels
- -Grant-funded printing of local history trading cards –An interactive online visual timeline
- -Art + Transit project displaying documentary photographs and archival documents in downtown bus stop shelters

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.

No private consultant was used.

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.

Chapel Hill's Historic Civil Rights initiative is replicable in other jurisdictions. Local governments have frequently played a role in local history preservation—from documenting historic buildings to maintaining local history museums. The work Chapel Hill has facilitated prioritizes community engagement and conversation over preservation. This initiative brings together human-centered design methodology with a collective impact framework, as put forward in the Stanford Social Innovation Review:

1. All participants have a common agenda for change including a shared understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
2. Collecting data and measuring results consistently ensures shared accountability.
3. A plan of action that outlines and coordinates mutually reinforcing activities for each participant.
4. Open and continuous communication across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
5. A backbone organization with staff and specific set of skills to serve the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

Staff members practiced a mutual learning mindset, learned from high value local government training programs. While the project outcomes are unique to our community, the framework is entirely replicable. We do not know of other local governments modeling programs based on this initiative.

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 most significant obstacle faced by the project team for this initiative was developing trust and mutual respect within the core team. Some members of the team came into the project wary, the result of prior negative experiences. By clearly communicating the goals of the initiative, practicing mutual learning behaviors, and consistently demonstrating commitment to the stated values of the group, the core team established a high level of trust with each other.

Current obstacles the initiative faces primarily stem from a desire to implement high value, high impact projects. Such projects have a wide range of stakeholders, and we are now broadening our networks to engage stakeholders more effectively in project planning and implementation.

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 initial program outputs and outcomes were to:

- -Deliver to Chapel Hill Town Council a living document (that is, open to revision and new information) of Chapel Hill's community history of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s
- Develop a collaborative process for collecting community history that brings history makers, historians, civic officials, and community members into conversation and agreement
- Design a mechanism for interactive community engagement
- -Develop a set of recommendations for future commemorations

In meeting our project outcomes we explicitly recognized and defined success as broad engagement and participation from community participants, staff, and other key stakeholders. Our goals have focused on participatory mindsets and behaviors in project participants. To that end, we measured project team attendance and participation, community inputs collected (that is, shared memories, documentary photographs, or other primary source material), and the number and type of community interactions. These allowed us to not only measure the collaborative process, but also to assess and adjust our mechanisms for community engagement.

As this initiative continues to grow and change, so do the project goals and measurements. Moving forward, we further seek to:

- Deepen our self-awareness as an organization that is one part of a larger community system –Prototype and test new processes for co-creating collaborative, community-driven initiatives
- Attract and welcome participation and collaboration from diverse community groups
- Establish participatory collaboration model as “way of doing business” rather than a special initiative
- Explore and develop the skills of participants to increase project capacity
- Develop and facilitate partnerships with and among local organizations in both the public and private sectors
- Enhance participants' understanding of how local culture and history connect to their current lives and the lives of all community members
- Develop new ways of measuring the impact of the projects

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

The work of the task force was presented to Chapel Hill Town Council on June 13, 2018. The video of that presentation, as well as the task force report, can be viewed on the Chapel Hill Town website:

http://chapelhill.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=7&clip_id=3514

Local News coverage via <https://chapelboro.com/news>: Fahey, Kelly. "Chapel Hill Collecting Civil Rights Stories" April 16, 2018 –McConnell, Brighton. "Historical Civil Rights Task Force Presents Findings to Chapel Hill Town Council" June 20, 2018

Presentation

Criteria:

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

Example Social Media Post

The Historic Civil Rights Commemorations Task Force is creating a timeline identifying people, places and events reminding us of the struggle for #civilrights in #ChapelHill in the '60s AND the role our town played in our nation's Civil Rights movement.

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

Like many communities throughout the country, Chapel Hill—a mid-sized college town in the South with a complex social history—finds itself facing challenging decisions about its future: a rising population, changing demographics, rapidly increasing housing costs, gentrification, and new development are all altering a once idealized pace of life. Nearly sixty years after the Greensboro Four and the start of Chapel Hill's own early direct-action civil rights movement, protesters at the state's flagship public University of North Carolina, tore down the controversial confederate monument, Silent Sam. As the country grows increasingly diverse demographically and as viewpoints become more polarized than ever, resilient communities must recognize these trends and begin to reckon with our past in a collaborative, inclusive way. Such work allows us to enter honestly into difficult conversations about how we have arrived at our present and what we hope for our future.

After listening to and learning from the community about its needs and interests, the Town of Chapel Hill and its governing Town Council deployed Chapel Hill Public Library staff to collaborate with history makers, community members, and historians to document and commemorate Chapel Hill's Civil Rights Movement in an inclusive, community-driven public history initiative.

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?

An effective conference session must marry the useful with the inspiring. To that end, a presentation on Chapel Hill's Civil Rights Initiative will:

- Communicate with clarity and precision relevant, useful information.
- Model the participatory design of the initiative, inviting attendees to practice replicable design thinking tools during the session.
- Inspire participants into action through storytelling and documentary photographs.

Participants will leave the session with strategies for developing an inclusive, collaborative framework that can be applied to a variety of community initiatives.

Anything else you would like to add?

The Chapel Hill Civil Rights Initiative was led by Town staff in the Chapel Hill Public Library. Public libraries have been re-envisioning their role in community life in surprising and innovative ways. The Public Library is now seeking to build on the public history work in this initiative to develop a community-driven local history and culture center. This project seeks to leverage the public library's position as a trusted community hub to develop a collective impact model for the co-creation of a civic institution centered on community culture and history. By situating such work under the leadership of the public library, this project seeks to expand the role of the public library within communities with the collective impact aim of building resilience.