

## City of Hillsboro's Eureka! Challenge

City of Hillsboro, Oregon

*#Extensive Internal Collaboration*

Population: 100,000

### 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.)*

We created something we call the Eureka! Challenge to allow high-performing employees the opportunity to temporarily step out of their normal jobs and try to solve larger issues which either directly or indirectly affect citizens through either City performance or City service delivery. Five to seven employees at a time are given a month away from their normal job duties to serve on a short-term innovation team. The employees partner with City departments to research, ideate, prototype, and recommend changes to the organization. Those recommendations are then owned by the department. Team members periodically assist with implementation as needed. Quantum Leap To our knowledge, no existing innovation teams follow this high-intensity, short horizon team model. During our research into innovation teams, Bloomberg Philanthropies graciously allowed us access to their consulting group to discuss innovation models. Their comment: the time we allocated our participants likely wouldn't be enough. The combination of speed and thoroughness with which our teams move is unprecedented. Changed processes We had no dedicated resource available to focus on some key issues and we didn't have the typical year researching an issue before moving on to ideation, so we changed our approach. By focusing our efforts on issues where the team already has a strong understanding, we compress the investigation phase. We focus on describing the issue using design thinking tools, benchmarking other organizations facing similar problems, and then dive deeply into root causes before quickly transitioning to ideation.

#### Stretching boundaries

The process is both exhausting and exhilarating for team members. The intensity of the experience forges bonds between members and those with whom we interact. The handoff between the team and executive staff bypasses the traditional reporting structure with its inherent delays and gets the best ideas, piloted and in front of decision makers in 30 days.

## 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 City Manager shared an idea for the program in 2015 as an extension of our internal process improvement program, Eureka!. In order to allow departments to absorb the loss of an FTE for a month, the City Manager and key Directors engaged stakeholders one-on-one to discuss utilizing this program as an opportunity to solve long-standing issues as well as providing a path for increasing bench strength. Support for the program was developed by engaging stakeholders with initial outreach through one-on-ones and then offering stocktakes weekly in which the Directors involved sat with our City manager to review the team's progress and offer coaching to the team. For our first project, How to be an employer of Choice, we engaged with local partners including Intel as well as regional partners like Tualatin Valley Parks and Recreation, Metro, and connected with the City of Austin, Texas whose efforts are clearly best-in-class since they were listed as one Forbes top 100 employers in the nation two years in a row. These relationships, whether mentor and mentee or collaborative partnerships, were essential to the success of our program.

**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.**

Because of the intense nature of the project, we asked for help from a team dynamics consultant, Michelle Rios, through her organization, THRIVE Im+powered, LLC. Michelle and her partner, Phil Incorvia, helped us overcome expected stress and conflict through careful pre-project coaching using team members' DiSC profiles, improvisation techniques, and cohesive team behaviors. Although the month was not conflict-free, thanks to Michelle's insights we were able to turn conflict into a constructive tool and achieve our goals while building participants' relationships and skills. THRIVE! Im+Powered Leader, LLC 2260 SW 178th Avenue Aloha, OR 97003 (503) 882-8828 michelle@thriveleader.com www.thriveleader.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.

From the perspective that any organization that allows vacations has to respond to longer term absences. This idea capitalizes on existing practices where roles are temporarily back-filled. An organization's ability to successfully use this model may be limited to those with departments who have enough employees to really share the load laterally. Aurora, CO launched a project in 2016 called SHIFT which incorporated 50 employees over a period of four months. In their model, the employees simply worked extra hours and split their focus between normal operations and the project. To my knowledge, no one else has tried this model, however, using the resources an organization has to drive innovation in short bursts is clearly replicable.

## 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?

To implement the team's findings we are facing a new set of tasks requiring approximately 20,000 hours to execute. This is in addition to specific costs of change. For example, the team recommended moving toward equity in benefits provided for FT and PT staff. Currently, PT staff do not receive many benefits available to full-timers. Before the organization would implement such a significant change, many hours of research and analysis must be done. To address this, we've created a three year roadmap to gradually absorb the workload in HR and the City Manager's office. Our City Manager assigned other action items to Directors across the organization. Additionally, the team has continued to meet regularly with Executive Staff to assist wherever possible in implementing the quick wins. Aside from the capacity impact, effectively communicating the significance of the teams' work and the status of each recommendation throughout the organization has been and continues to be a top obstacle.

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?

Changes to enhance benefits for part time staff are a clear outcome of the project. Additionally, increased communication with remote staff through digital signage has been implemented. Objective measures we are still working to collect include reduced voluntary turnover [no data on 2018 yet], and an increased number of applications for open positions.

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

Not that I'm aware. We co-presented at ELGL18 in Golden, CO with the City of Aurora, CO on Employee Engagement, and presented locally at the Oregon City/County Management Association Conference in Bend, OR.

## Presentation

### Criteria:

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

### Example Social Media Post

The City of Hillsboro has a culture of innovation and a dedication to providing the best services possible for our community. One way we do this is through our Eureka! Challenge where six, diverse employees volunteer to work together in a 30 day sprint to solve one wicked problem

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

Breaking up is hard to do. Have you ever enjoyed being part of a team at work so much that it felt like a breakup when the project ended? We have. As a manager or an employee, do you want to be part of something special that drives real change in your organization? We were. Stop by our session to hear more about the Eureka! Challenge. The City of Hillsboro, Oregon has a culture of innovation and a dedication to providing the very best services possible for our community. To further those goals, we created something we call the Eureka! Challenge to allow high-performing employees the opportunity to temporarily step out of their normal jobs and try to solve larger issues which either directly or indirectly affect citizens by improving City performance or City service delivery. Annually, five to seven employees are given a month away from their normal job duties to serve on a short-term innovation team. The employees partner with City departments and collaborate with other organizations to research, ideate, prototype, and recommend process or policy changes within City operations. Those recommendations are then owned by the partner department. Team members periodically assist with implementation as needed.

**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?**

- How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational? The topic of innovation is pervasive in both private and public sector organizations. We provide some insights into the differences between continuous improvement and innovation. We also share some interesting stories from our unique experience and then relate the incredible pressure of solving a problem under tight time constraints to an escape room experience. We've created an "Escape the THWADI" escape room in a box and shared it with up to 100 conference attendees in the past year.

Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction. Our presenters serve as activity facilitators and work with tables of 6-8 people who act as competitive teams in trying to solve the Escape puzzles faster than their counterparts.

Actionable "takeaways" from the session? We can provide a booklet uploaded to the conference site which includes our lessons learned tips. We can also recommend criteria to use in selecting a project to get your feet wet in innovation for cities of any size. We share our experience in selecting team members, which cities can immediately use in building their own innovation capacity.

[Anything else you would like to add?](#)