## Leading for Collaborative Innovation

### Town of Chapel Hill, North Carolina

*#Relentless Creativity*

**Population:** 59/246 (2016 Census Estimate)

## 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 Town of Chapel Hill was facing a turning point. For years, executive leadership championed the idea that, as the silver tsunami hit the organization, internal candidates would be prioritized over external candidates. This reasoning was driven by the idea that Chapel Hill, a college town with a deeply engaged citizenry, is a special community and that it is easier to teach internal candidates than it is to hire external candidates with technical skills but who may struggle to adapt to the community's expectations. However, the Town hit a snag – when the tsunami started to hit, internal candidates were not performing well in the assessment center process. So the question became a simple one – do we prioritize culture over skills? Or skills over culture?

Town leadership was stubborn. It maintained its belief that we should value culture over technical skills. At a crossroads, the Town developed the Leading for Collaborative Innovation (LCI) program, an in-house leadership development program designed to increase the capacity of leaders to innovate and solve problems from a collaborative perspective.

This program was a significant investment, both in terms of dollars and time. LCI uses a cohort model where 12 - 15 employees are selected after completing an application and interview. The program was open to all employees so employees could self-nominate themselves, rather than having each department submit a candidate. Employees who are accepted then work on teams to design and implement an innovation project over the next seven months.

Once a month, the entire cohort convenes for a 2-day module to learn about the innovation skills identified in The Innovator's DNA and discuss how they apply to their team project. The employees receive leadership assessments and coaching. The program then culminates sharing project results with the Town's Senior Leadership Team.

## Collaboration

### 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?

The primary initiators of the program included the Town Manager, the Town's Director for Organizational and Strategic Initiatives (Manager's Office), and the Town's Learning and Development Manager (Human Resources). Regarding stakeholder engagement, the first few modules in the LCI program are focused on the innovation skills (1) associating and (2) observing. Program participants apply these skills with their projects through various stakeholder mapping and scanning techniques. Examples of stakeholder engagement techniques applied by LCI teams include focus groups, surveys, and one-on-one interviews, amongst others. Some notable examples of stakeholder engagement include:

- 1-on-1 interviews with Council Members to understand what successful community engagement looks like
- Focus groups with community members to understand what successful community engagement looks like
- Focus groups with employees across the organization, Department Heads to frontline employees, to understand how we can make collaboration more effective and efficient

### 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.

The Town did engage consultants to help design and implement the program. The Town has worked with these consultants on various organizational development efforts for the past ten years, so they are familiar with the organization's culture. During the LCI program, the consultants give lectures, conduct workshops, and bring in speakers at each month's module. The consultants also conduct an assessment center at the beginning of the LCI program so LCI participants can learn more about their unique leadership abilities and set goals for their development.

- Anne Davidson Consulting, asdavidson@earthlink.net
- Beth High, HighRoad Consulting, highroadconsulting@gmail.com
- Steve Straus, Developmental Associates, skstraus@developmentalassociates.com

## Significance

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 LCI program model is replicable in other jurisdictions. We have observed that many local governments are creating innovation offices or innovation directors as a centralized way to manage innovation in their organizations. However, we have noticed that most of these offices or initiatives focus on specific aspects of innovation, such as process improvement or data analytics. What makes the LCI program unique is its focus on innovation as a competency, and tying the curriculum to the innovations practices identified in The Innovator's DNA, written by Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen. This focus empowers employees to innovate regardless of the situation they face, whether it is about improving a process or designing a completely new idea.

We see this program as replicable because it is clear that other local governments have resources available for innovation academies and/or offices. We also see this program as replicable because it simply requires an adjustment in thinking and creating innovation trainings on innovation as a competency that you do every day – not just on days when you need to improve a process.

To our knowledge, no other jurisdictions of organizations have created programs or policies modeled on the LCI program.

## 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 are the barriers program graduates encounter after the completion of the program. They have asked questions like, "how can I innovate if my department head stops us from doing anything that has a chance of failure?"

In response the Town has engaged in a several initiatives to foster innovation and help LCI graduates find a network so they can continue to innovate in cross-departmental projects:

1. Creating an organizational value of 'Collaborative Innovation'. Clear definitions and a shared vocabulary assist the organization in cultivating, supporting, managing, and evaluating efforts around innovation and collaboration. This approach includes a focus on the users (i.e. Town employees), asking questions on what 'innovation' and 'collaboration' means to them, and collecting data from their responses to inform a definition for collaborative innovation.

2. Joining the Alliance for Innovation and AFI Ambassador program. The Town joined the Alliance for Innovation to give LCI graduates additional opportunities to network. The Town is currently creating an AFI ambassador program

to serve as a Board of Directors for the Town's innovation program. They guide the build-out of the Town's Innovation Eco-System through program ideas, resource identification, and priority setting.

## 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?

At the initial launch of the program, the Town Manager stated the following as the program goal:

"To develop leaders who know instinctively how to think systemically, work collaboratively, lead innovation (generating ideas AND implementing them) and produce effective outcomes for the betterment of the organization and community.

We aim to:

- Increase leadership in current roles
- Develop internal candidates for future leadership roles"

With this goal in mind, we can review whether this program was effective by looking at a few different metrics related to organizational development and career progression.

First, looking at the makeup of the Town's Department Directors and Assistant Directors, we can compare 2015 (the year before the program was initiated) with 2018 and determine if the number of internal candidates within Town leadership increased. In 2015, there were 23 total people in this group. 65% were internal candidates who had a role with the Town prior to becoming a Director or Assistant Director (15 people total) and 35% were external candidates (8 people total). In 2018, there are 27 total people in this group. 85% of this group were internal candidates (22 people total), whereas the other 15% were external candidates (4 people total). This is an overall increase of 20% more internal hires who make up the Town's Department Directors and Assistant Directors since the initiation of the program.

Second, we can look at the percentage of employees who completed the program and received increased leadership responsibilities, such as additional staff supervisory responsibilities or managing a Town-wide project, or received a promotion. Of the 38 employees who completed the program, 14 have received additional leadership responsibilities (37% of total), and 11 have received a promotion (29% of total).

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

No, it has not.

## Presentation

Criteria:

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

## Example Social Media Post

The local government leadership landscape has changed. We now need leaders who know instinctively how to think systemically and lead innovation. How do we empower all employees to innovate?

Come learn about Chapel Hill's in-house innovation-building program!

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

The local government leadership landscape has changed. We now need leaders who know instinctively how to think systemically, work collaboratively from a shared mindset, lead innovation (generating ideas AND implementing them) and produce effective outcomes for the betterment of their organizations and communities. This session will introduce you to some of the current research on how we learn to lead for collaboration and innovation and share a model program for applying these concepts in local government.

### 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?

By making it an innovation cage match! This fast-paced and interactive session will share the 9 innovations generated by the LCI program teams, the process they used, and the audience will have a chance to upvote and comment on  them in real time using live survey technology tools.

You'll walk away from this session with ideas you can immediately put in motion in your city, county, or  town.

### Anything else you would like to add?