

Best Practice

Quality of Life Survey

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

In order to develop a comprehensive Community Development Plan, Council felt it was important to consult with the people of Oxbow. Oxbow developed and implemented a Quality of Life Survey based on Federation of Canadian Municipalities Quality of Life Indicators. It was believed that involving the community in this process would benefit it in a number of ways.

A number of things made this practice unique when compared with other community surveys. First, the information collected was used as the primary directive to shape the strategic plan. Second, the complete results were made available to the public, including negative feedback, in order to make this process as transparent as possible.

This practice fits within the context of Community Development Leadership for a number of reasons:

1. It is a transferable model that can be conducted in any municipality by existing staff
2. Provides a baseline that, if conducted annually, allows a municipality to measure progress
3. Provides a basis for strategic planning
4. Engages citizens in planning
5. Allows sustainability
6. Allows council to plan for support where needed

THE PROCESS

- Obtained a copy of the survey used by Carlyle and adapted the questions for use in Oxbow.
- Put the survey on the website "Survey Monkey"
- Purchased an ad in the local paper explaining the survey
- Provided a story to the Oxbow Herald about the survey
- Put up posters advertising the survey
- Provided hard copies of the survey at the Town Office
- Collected data for 8 weeks
- Used the data to create themes and generate a summary report
- Ran an ad in the newspaper to announce the completion of the report
- Made the report available to the public with a request that citizens pick the three areas they thought were the greatest priorities
- Council conducted a meeting to plan and choose three priorities (subject to funding)
- Logic models were created with measurable outcomes for each major theme

- Plan that was developed by Council was implemented

THE RESULTS

85 people responded to the survey. An attempt was made to achieve a response rate of 10% (125 people) by making the survey available through a variety of mediums (online, email, hard copy), but were unsuccessful. The greatest challenge was to get responses proportional to the population. Council is optimistic that as the survey becomes an annual practice and citizens realize their input is valued, the number of responses will improve.

Positive results included:

- Council was able to include results of the survey in planning
- A baseline was established to measure progress
- Council was able to address some of the issues
- It reassured Council that they were appreciated for their work
- It let ratepayers know that their opinions are considered and valued
- It effectively engaged citizens in the decision making process
- The process can be done with little expense (Under \$250.00 not including staff time)
- Even with a low response rate, Council still benefits from the information provided

Negative results included:

- Despite the provision of the survey through a number of mediums, some individuals still felt left out
- It is difficult for Council to hear negative feedback regarding their work

As a result of the information collected from the Quality of Life Survey, Council has:

- Purchased weekly ads to provide free promotional space for businesses and volunteer groups
- Kept an updated Facebook page as a means of communication with citizens
- Worked with the local paper to share information that affects the community
- Contacted the local radio station to give routine updates about events
- Worked with the local Business Association to provide support as needed
- Nominated two local volunteers for awards
- Designated a person to sit on regional housing board to address housing shortage
- Designated a person to work with investors to build a fourplex
- Designated a person to create a database of volunteer committees
- Planned a volunteer recognition event for the spring
- Been in the process of developing a riverboat revitalization plan
- Partnered with neighboring communities for a culture and recreation initiative
- Installed a brochure rack at the Town Office
- Provided committee training to several committee heads on how to hold effective meetings

LESSONS LEARNED

- It is important to use plain language when wording the survey
- It is important to have a purpose for the information once it is collected
- Confidentiality is important
- A process needs to be devised to help incorporate all demographics in the survey