

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

BETTER MUNICIPAL PRACTICES: Grants Night: Accountability and Transparency The Town of Beausejour

Municipalities across the country understand the importance of informing their taxpayers where taxes are going. What taxpayers do not always realize, is that in addition to paying for services, municipalities also support a wide variety of community organizations. These organizations work for the public good and serve municipalities by providing services that they might be required to otherwise provide. These services can vary greatly and range from senior citizen or youth associations, to historic societies and community beautification committees.

One Manitoba town has developed an innovative approach to inform its taxpayers about the support it provides to community organizations. The Town of Beausejour held its first Grants Night on May 30, 2006. During this ceremony, Council took the opportunity to highlight the Town's financial support to different community organizations.

The process leading up to Grants Nights actually began in September of the previous year. The Town invited all those community organizations that had applied for municipal grants in the past to submit applications for the upcoming year. The Town also invited each organization to present the details of their projects at the Town's annual financial plan hearing, enabling Council to better understand the needs of the organization and the details of their projects. This helped Council to better estimate the amount they would budget for grants in the upcoming year.

During the Town of Beausejour Grants Night, the municipality announced several grants, including:

- Beausejour Handivan, to enhance transportation for seniors in the area.
- a seniors organization to assist with various programs, such as choir and exercise activities;

Municipalities know the importance of informing the public where tax dollars are going.

Grant ceremonies are an opportunity for the municipality to let the public know about its support for community organizations.

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- an association for community living;
- an organization that helps in the maintenance and improvement of a park;
- an historical society to assist with the expenses of a museum;
- a committee that assists in the beautification of Beausejour.

The Town also announced that it was providing a loan to the community centre to heat the curling rink more efficiently; a compressor system will take the heat discharged from the compressors that make the ice and circulate it back into the facility. The loan is repayable in 7 years.

A grants night such as the one at Beausejour has benefits for municipalities, community organizations, and the public alike. For municipalities, a grants ceremony increases public accountability and transparency, demonstrates the municipality's support to diverse groups, and strengthens their relationship with the community.

For community organizations, publicizing municipal grants increases their accountability for the funds received since they are expected to deliver their particular service back to the community. In addition, a grants event is a networking opportunity for organizations to meet each other and share their ideas and best practices. In the case of the Grants Night at Beausejour, since media attended this event, organizations also had the opportunity to make themselves better known in their community.

For the public, a grants ceremony helps them know where their tax dollars are going and realize how they are contributing to their own community.

Beausejour's first Grants Night was a huge success; it generated a lot of public interest and enhanced community spirit. The Town of Beausejour is planning more grants events in the future, and is looking forward to continue sharing with the community.

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Grant ceremonies also improve the accountability and transparency of Council.

For more information on service sharing, Successful Municipal Practices, and the Tools for Change program, see the Association of Manitoba Municipalities' website, at www.amm.mb.ca.