

Tomorrow's Chinatown Program – Summary of Lessons Learned

Innovation and pilot projects require a growth mindset and significant permission-space to try new approaches. This work needs to be scoped in a manner that is different, including the governance structure and escalation framework. Measures of success for innovation projects need to consider different parameters beyond the traditional “time, budget and performance”. Recognize this is easier said than done.

A “one size fits all” approach to community consultation is not effective, and is not conducive to positive results when working with equity-deserving communities. As the program and project work matures and evolves, so should the corresponding community engagement and communication plans. On-going engagement should be pro-actively measured and monitored throughout the phases. Static approaches generally will not work.

In undertaking transformative work with cultural considerations, deliverables must ensure longevity and allow change as new ideas emerge. Innovation and “new ways of doing” are vital to the city-building process. Policies and strategies written today may need to change tomorrow. By incorporating review timelines that take place periodically, or are triggered through other formal amendments related to higher-order policies, provides clarity and built-in mechanisms ensuring plans can evolve.

Communication is not just about sending messages; it is also about making sure these messages are received in the manner intended. It is particularly important in the case of sharing and receiving feedback for escalated matters. Follow-up questions and de-briefs proved to be important i.e. “*What were our take-aways from this workshop?*” or “*What changes should be made in the future based on what was discussed and how soon should these changes be made?*”

Emotionally charged work can lead to burn-out and turn-over of staff. Throughout the program, Administration and community members engaged in difficult, yet necessary conversations about episodes of historic and systemic racism, which has framed long-standing mis-trust of The City. Such work should begin with a broader and deeper understanding of the community. Moreover, this work requires patience and time for reflection and recovery as part of the overall planning process. Project timelines should be nimble and agile to respond to such needs. One should also be mindful that The City is on a journey towards becoming an anti-racist organization. Ongoing anti-racism work is still needed to learn from and respond to the collective experiences shared by Calgarians.

Monitor continuously the impact being made. Set up indicators and regular check-ins to ensure discrepancy between the desired impact and the actual impact, particularly on community consultation activities. The sooner the issues are identified, the easier it is to diffuse. Set up the project work so staff can be agile and responsive to timing and circumstances

Stop and ask, never guess. If it is observed that program work is not having the intended impact, stop and ask what is causing this reaction. Continuing with the same approach with the hope it will get better by itself rarely works out.