Manitoba Planners Conference Feb 23-25, 2012
"Beyond Surviving: Planning To Thrive"

Title of presentation: CED Choice Matrix: A path finding tool
Presented by: Wayne Kelly / Gary McNeely
Date: February 23rd, 2012

Wayne Kelly and Gary McNeely, researchers with the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University spoke about their CED matrix website project as a project that has fostered the development of a website that, once live, will help community economic development practitioners and communities make better tool choices. What does this mean to the rest of us laypeople? It means the purpose of the project as Kelly said was to "*make community economic development tools more accessible to practitioners as we are inundated with thousands upon thousands of tools making finding tools or the one we might want for our project difficult to find.*"

Who knew this was a problem? Apparently it is and has been simmering for some time. As Kelly described the CED website and its potential to house thousands of economic development tools on one website the audience, made up of planners, CED practitioners, EDOs and municipal politicians, not only nodded with enthusiasm but a few wanted to know when it would be "ready". In their presentation Kelly and McNeely took the audience through the regular paces of their research project: the purpose, why doing the project is important and what they hope to accomplish. By far the most intriguing aspect of their presentation was the participatory nature of the project. The authors collaborated with community groups to find out what would be beneficial from such a website and the interactive potential of the social media component of their choice matrix website.

So what do communities want from a Choice Matrix website? Kelly reported that although communities didn't necessarily know tools by name, they certainly knew which tools worked in their communities. According to the authors, communities viewed: analyzing, planning, implementation, reviewing and organizing. Gaining this type of feedback was important to the project Kelly and McNeely conducted, as it gave direction on how to organize the choice matrix website so communities could search for tools in whatever development phase their project was in.

The utility of incorporating a participatory approach was driven home when McNeely asked the practitioners in the audience if they always used the same kinds of tools or hired consultants. Two people said they regularly hired consultants. Kelly said that one of the purposes of this project was to help communities find a tool that would help them save money: "*so maybe you can look at our choice matrix website before you hire a consultant".*

Kelly and McNeely went on to describe the social media potential of the CED choice matrix. They described creating an interactive dialogue process on the website so practitioners could provide on-

going tool reviews, feedback and discussion on various issues. Kelly pointed out that this was an excellent way to engage more isolated rural communities. To measure the social media temperature of the room Kelly asked how many people presently used Face-book. The majority of people raised their hands and participants hummed in unison as Kelly, who works outside his community, explained that he now feels more connected to his community because he follows his community's Face- book site. A Brandon University professor in the audience asked about the potential of blogging and using Twitter as part of the project. Kelly said that blogging about tools and using Twitter are great ways to increase interaction and dialogue and to keep momentum going.

As their presentation winded down there was clear enthusiasm in the room about the potential the CED Choice Matrix website and what it could offer to communities and to practitioners. Again, I say, who knew?

Summarized by:

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