

CHOOSING NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Tiffany Bayley wrote this exercise solely to provide material for class discussion. The author does not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The author may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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The Neighbourhood Community Projects (NCP) votes had been cast across a small Canadian city in June 2019, and Jean Matthews was about to receive a tabulation of the results. How should she identify which community projects to pursue? Would neighbourhood residents be satisfied with the results?

NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Matthews was a recent university graduate who now worked at city hall. Throughout her undergraduate degree, she had gravitated toward quantitative classes, like statistics and analytics, and was keen to put her skills in action. Her manager, Kristen Newton, had the perfect project for her, and she quickly assigned Matthews to the NCP Committee.

The third annual NCP event was an opportunity for residents of the city to have their say in how a dedicated portion of the city's budget should be spent in their community. Residents were invited to submit ideas to city staff, who would then work with the residents to ensure ideas were feasible in terms of cost, ease of implementation, and impact on existing city plans or projects. Residents could request funding for things such as playground equipment upgrades, block parties, commemorative street signs, pollinator gardens, bike racks, and more. Ideas had to fall into one or two of the four main categories: culture, environment, park, and roads.

Once ideas were vetted by city staff, residents promoted them through door-to-door campaigns, social media, and posters. On a Saturday in early June, members of the community were welcomed to vote for up to three ideas for their neighbourhood. Community centres hosted stations where physical ballots could be cast, and online voting allowed citizens to participate remotely.

The event drew a great deal of support from the community, but the event also required a great deal of administrative resources before successful projects could be implemented. In addition to working with residents to refine their proposals, 23 polling stations had to be staffed across the city, and physical and virtual votes had to be tallied. Once the total votes were compiled, the NCP Committee had to consider both the popularity of the idea among the community as well as its cost, and then decide which ideas to pursue based on these considerations.

The city set aside CA\$300,000¹ to be split evenly across four neighbourhoods: Uptown, East, Downtown, and West. Each neighbourhood was allotted a maximum of \$75,000 that could be used toward any number of projects, and the proposed cost for a single project could not exceed \$50,000. This \$50,000 limit was a new restriction introduced in 2019; in previous years, a single project could request the full \$75,000 budgeted for the neighbourhood.

PROPOSED IDEAS AND PAST WINNERS

Throughout the campaign period, Matthews familiarized herself with the idea proposals (see Exhibit 1). She noticed that different ideas were sometimes proposed for the same location; for example, one citizen suggested building a playground, while another proposed installing Frisbee golf nets at the same neighbourhood park. Matthews also saw similar ideas proposed for a single neighbourhood; for example, three murals at different addresses were pitched for Downtown. Some ideas seemed to complement one another due to their seasonality, such as an outdoor ice rink and a bouldering structure.

Matthews decided to dig even deeper and so examined the winning projects from 2018 and 2017 (see Exhibits 2 and 3). She wondered if certain ideas were sure winners (or losers) and if the city would ever impose restrictions on the number of project types it would fund. Matthews decided to stop by Newton's office.

"Hi Kristen. Do you have a minute to go over the NCP proposals?" Matthews asked her manager.

"Sure Jean," Newton replied. "What's on your mind?"

Matthews explained, "I was looking over the past NCP winners, and a lot of them were for park improvements, but hardly any were related to roads or bike paths. Is that typical?"

"We're only in our third year," Newton said, "so it's hard to say what's *typical*. It all depends on the ideas that are submitted and vetted by our committee and on how the community votes."

"So, technically, a neighbourhood could keep getting more and more playgrounds each year?" Matthews asked.

"Well, revisions to the NCP guidelines aren't out of the question. Last year, city council debated whether it was fair for the same address to receive funding in two consecutive years, but no formal change to the guidelines materialized," Newton explained. "I do know that a thorough review of the NCP program is happening in September."

VOTING RESULTS AVAILABLE

On the Monday after voting day, Matthews arrived at work and opened the file with the voting results. Given the increasing popularity of the NCP event, Newton advised Matthews to come up with a way to allocate funds systematically that avoided cross-referencing ideas and that balanced costs.

Newton hoped this event would continue for many years, but she was aware that the current NCP guidelines were subject to revisions. She stressed to Matthews the importance of a method that could be applied again in the future and that could be easily adapted in the case that funding levels, thresholds on types of projects, or other changes were imposed by the city.

¹ All dollar amounts are in Canadian dollars.

EXHIBIT 1: 2019 IDEA PROPOSALS AND VOTES

Neighbourhood	Ballot #	Project	Location	Cost	Primary Type	Secondary Type	# of Votes
Uptown	U1	Story Walk in Park	97 Oak Rd.	\$17,000	Park		218
Uptown	U2	Outdoor Learning Space at Public School	72 Creston Blvd.	\$50,000	Park		1,709
Uptown	U3	Multi-Use Sports Pad	179 Hillside Rd.	\$42,500	Park		263
Uptown	U4	Bouldering Structure	3298 Killop Cres.	\$50,000	Park		217
...
East	E6	Brain-Training Games for Older Adults	999 Calder Rd.	\$50,000	Park	Culture	112
East	E7	Playground Equipment	603 Tarbert St.	\$50,000	Park		682
East	E8	Park Pathway	1062 Surrey Ln.	\$50,000	Park		148
East	E9	Natural Playground	1105 Harwood Cres.	\$50,000	Park	Environment	300
...
Downtown	D19	Garden and Music Project	129 Wilson St.	\$8,500	Culture	Environment	93
Downtown	D20	Storm Drain Painting	1265 Rockingham St.	\$8,160	Culture	Roads	179
Downtown	D21	Concert Series	28 Branwell St.	\$50,000	Culture		203
Downtown	D22	Picnic Area	1748 Mill St.	\$50,000	Park		43
...
West	W15	Shade Haven	679 Marigold Rd.	\$50,000	Park		72
West	W16	Benches and Free Little Library	582 Cheswick St.	\$2,720	Park	Culture	82
West	W17	Basketball Courts	19 Knightsbridge Rd..	\$42,500	Park		102
West	W18	School Yard Upgrades	1754 Murray St	\$8,500	Park		115

Source: Created by the case writer.

EXHIBIT 2: 2018 WINNING IDEAS

Neighbourhood	Project	Cost	Primary Type	Secondary Type
Uptown	Playground Upgrades	\$22,500	Park	
Uptown	Rock Garden and Pond	\$45,000	Environment	
Uptown	Bird Feeders	\$1,500	Environment	
Uptown	Butterfly Garden	\$6,000	Environment	Park
East	Collaborative Mural	\$75,000	Culture	Park
Downtown	Nature Literacy Event	\$12,000	Culture	Environment
Downtown	Trail Beautification	\$10,500	Environment	
Downtown	Fireworks Display	\$11,400	Culture	
Downtown	Wayfinding Signs	\$11,250	Culture	Roads
Downtown	Little Library Box	\$7,500	Culture	
Downtown	Summer Music Festival	\$21,930	Culture	
Downtown	Bat Boxes	\$960	Environment	Park
West	Playground Equipment	\$22,500	Park	
West	Boardwalk Repairs	\$12,000	Environment	
West	Skate Park	\$40,500	Park	

Source: Created by the case writer.

EXHIBIT 3: 2017 WINNING IDEAS

Neighbourhood	Project	Cost	Primary Type	Secondary Type
Uptown	Swimming Pool Upgrades	\$75,000	Park	
East	Toddler Playground	\$3,450	Park	
East	Outdoor Skating Trail	\$45,000	Park	
East	Pollinator Garden	\$26,550	Park	Environment
Downtown	Memorial Plaques	\$22,500	Culture	Roads
Downtown	Community Garden	\$6,000	Environment	
Downtown	Little Library	\$1,500	Culture	
Downtown	Bandshell and Garden	\$45,000	Culture	Environment
West	Educational Nature Walk	\$45,000	Park	
West	Skate Park	\$9,000	Park	
West	Food Forest	\$4,500	Environment	
West	Local Music Festival	\$16,500	Culture	

Source: Created by the case writer.