

Building Department Outpost Executive Summary for Challenge Award

Overview:

The Building Department Outpost was created to better collaborate with the community and private business transforming how building department services are provided in Nevada County.

Challenge:

Have you ever had to obtain a building permit or wanted to build your own house? The mere thought of this can be daunting let alone going through the actual permit process. Entering a County office to discuss these types of projects can feel uncomfortable and sterile. Many customers often look at the experience negatively before they even enter the County office. In a rural community this is exacerbated since community members often have moved or live in the area to get away from heavy government regulation. In addition to submitting required County paperwork for permits, customers need to employ architects/engineers, obtain construction plans, hire multiple contractors, get plans printed, obtain guidance and advice, and much, more. This often requires running around with multiple visits to different offices and sites. It's also insult to injury when customers have to wait upwards of an hour prior to being helped by County staff. The Nevada County Building Department assists an average of 200 customers per week with approximate wait times from 15 minutes to one hour.

Innovative Solution:

The satellite outpost and program is unique because it combines governmental and private services improving customer service, transparency, and provides expedited project processing. The Nevada County Building Department and the Nevada County Contractors' Association (NCCA) created a satellite office (Outpost) and kiosk within the NCCA office allowing applicants an alternate location for County services. At the Outpost, customers can obtain building department services in a friendly and accessible environment without shorter wait times. Customers can get help with application submittals, obtain over-the-counter permits, receive over-the-counter project plan reviews, project resubmittals, fees estimates, and receive answers to general building permit and plan review questions. Customers can also talk with the contractors' association about choosing the right contractor, utilize their blueprint printing/copying services, and even consult one of the many design professionals that have offices within the building. This collaboration between the County and local contractors' association is unique and very effective. At the Outpost a customer can consult with an architect, employ a contractor, print plans, obtain development advice, and submit for building permits in a single visit and only walk 30ft. The Outpost is currently staffed Thursdays from 8:30am to 12:30pm. Additionally, a computer is available for customers to access online building department services any day of the week. Customers can use the unstaffed kiosk station to schedule inspections,

submit online permits, complete online property research, and print handouts/forms. One of the best parts about the Outpost outside of improved customer service overall is that this program was implemented without any additional cost to the department, contractors' association, and/or customers.

Results:

The Outpost creates an improved customer experience in a welcoming environment. The response and feedback from customers to the Outpost has been overwhelmingly positive. A frequent comment from customers is that they will go to the Outpost for County services in the future due to the positive experience and friendly/fast service. Common customer wait times at the Outpost are less than 10 minutes. The Outpost is a great resource due to it including all pieces to the puzzle; the local County Building Department, the Contractors' Association and local development professionals. The experience is not only positive for the customer but also for County staff. Staff members frequently request to staff the Outpost due to the change in atmosphere, positive customer interactions, and interactions with the design community. Since the implementation of the Outpost employee retention has improved as there has not been any staff turnover for positions working at the Building Department front counter. The Building Department is also starting to see new customers that staff have not met with previously. The positive atmosphere, improved service, and one-stop-shop environment has brought customers out of the dark and into the light of ensuring their properties are in compliance with local and state regulations. The relationship between the County, Contractors' Association, and development community has become much more tightknit, improving positive communication between development stakeholders.

Replicability:

One of the best parts about the Outpost is that it can be replicated easily by any County, City, or State agency with little-to-no cost and without needing to hire additional staff. All communities have contractors' associations and development professionals with offices that would be more than happy to accommodate a governmental satellite office space. A simple office space can be setup utilizing existing equipment or by purchasing new equipment with a minimal budget. This small office/customer space requires only 70sqft.

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