



## Victoria Recognized as the Canadian Organization of the Year for Public Participation

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC – The City of Victoria brings home top honours as the *Canadian Organization of the Year* at the North America conference of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), in Portland, Oregon.

"As Mayor of Victoria I'm proud of our residents, our business owners, our staff and council - meaningful engagement involves everyone," noted Mayor Lisa Helps. "It involves real dialogue on an ongoing basis and a commitment to 'better is always possible.' This award is a recognition of steps we're taking, all together, to make Victoria great."

Brian Gilbert, President of the Canadian Affiliate of the International Association of Public Participation, said the City was recognized for:

- Its recognition that they did not have a culture of public participation and explicitly setting out to change that by creating a strategy and embarking on a committed implementation of it.
- This application not only demonstrated the organization's commitment to engaging the public using IAP2 values and principles as a foundation but also shared how the organization is using these same values and principles internally to support staff engagement. This demonstrates that the leaders of the organization have a good understanding of P2 and are committed to its integration into the way the organization works. This internal emphasis provides evidence of staff engagement is influencing the organizational approach to public participation. The application also effectively demonstrates the shift from an organization with zero emphasis on P2 and a low trust rate amongst its citizens to one that is committed to internal and external integration of P2. The creation of a Citizen Engagement and Strategic Planning department emphasizes the organization's commitment to integrating P2 with the city's overall strategic direction.
- Impressive sustained effort to change culture of the organization. New protocols, support from elected and administrative leadership, examples of new ways to engage internally and public.
- The organization also recognizes that it is a continual evolution→ recognition of where they started, where they are today and where they need to head next, all with a plan on how to achieve it.

Recent examples of the City's efforts include:

- Webcasting Council and Committee meetings
- Hosting an interactive e-Town Hall
- Improving budget information to make it easier for citizens to guide financial decisions

- Aligning strategic planning and budgeting processes to ensure community priorities guide financial decisions
- "Ideas Boards" in City parks and public spaces to capture community energy and ideas
- Removing barriers to City events, by "going to where the people are", investing in online tools, including a consultation portal, and growing social media
- Realigning City services to locate citizen engagement, open government, customer service, and strategic planning functions in one area to build greater accountability and public input into programs and services
- Increasing opportunities for public facilities, to be used by public, providing for art space, learning space, hackathons and soon, possibly weddings
- Focused efforts to engage voters in elections and take pride in the democratic process

Victoria adopted the IAP2 core values for public participation in 2011 and soon became one of the first municipalities in the country to develop a civic engagement strategy. Since then, the City has been working hard to refine engagement approach and practice to build relationships and trust, and most importantly, garner greater public involvement in City decision-making.

Current focus remains on making City information and services easier to access, working with Victoria's 13 great neighbourhoods to build stronger relationships and capacity, and engaging youth in Victoria planning and decisions. For the first time, in 2016, the City will allocate specific funds for the community to decide how they will be invested.

Hear more about the City's public participation evolution and organizational commitment to "better is possible" at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6i9zXEkwv&feature=youtu.be>

The City now competes for Organization of the Year, against winners from other Affiliates in the worldwide IAP2 Federation. The Organization of the Year awards will be announced at the IAP2 Australasian Conference in Perth, Australia, in October 2015.

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**For More Information:**

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