

Leveraging Technical Expertise Locally

Recommendation:

That the July 27, 2009, Deputy City Manager's Office report 2009DCM045 be received for information.

Report Summary

This report presents the results of consultation with TEC Edmonton, Edmonton Economic Development Corporation, and City Administration on the benefits, a potential approach to and examples for leveraging technical expertise locally.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the May 6, 2009, Executive Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration consult with TEC Edmonton, Edmonton Economic Development Corporation, and the general technical community on opportunities to facilitate and better capitalize on incorporating work and research done via the City's purchasing, standards and business practices, and report back to Executive Committee.

Report

The City of Edmonton Strategic Plan, The Way Ahead, articulates a vision and direction for the City of Edmonton. Within the Strategic Plan four principles were created to underpin the development and the implementation of the plan. One of these principles, Innovation, encourages and enables continuous improvement and exploration in the adoption of new

techniques, technologies, products and ways of operating in order to improve results and lead progressive change.

Background:

- Edmonton Economic Development Corporation and TEC Edmonton, in partnership with the University of Alberta, were engaged to look at opportunities for technology organizations to present their products and services to City Administration.
- The industry sectors represented by TEC Edmonton include: Information and Communications Technology, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences and Agri-Value.
- Administration would provide guidance and direction on procurement processes for these organizations and identify business challenges for potential solution creation.
- Recommended approach reflects research conducted from municipalities across North America on business incubator programs.
- "There are two ways to spread light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it" – Edith Wharton.

Edmonton Economic Development Corporation and TEC Edmonton have identified the following possible benefits to local technology firms:

- A low risk test or pilot opportunity with a supportive customer providing feedback
- Potential third-party validation of a product, firm, and / or opportunity that would provide valid references
- Potential additional revenue for start-up firms while in the early stages of developing new products

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- Opportunities to use the City as a reference customer if the pilot is successful for both parties
- Education for the firm in how to engage with large and complex buyers
- If done correctly could provide a multiplier effect for the entire sector (i.e. even if not selected for a pilot, valuable lessons will be learned along the way).

Administration benefits could include:

- Access to new and powerful technologies and products to provide solutions to problems identified by administration
- Administration may be introduced to possibilities through technology that previously had not been realized (“you didn’t know what you didn’t know”)
- Low risk / low cost / high potential impact if using a pilot based approach
- Additional reputation and support benefit for the City. Directly supports economic diversification.

City of Edmonton Law, Risk, and Materials Management areas were consulted to provide feedback on this concept. Utilizing the City’s Professional Services Agreement process would provide the appropriate risk mitigation and legal protection for all interested groups.

A pilot process is recommended leveraging concepts similar to the University of Alberta Idea-Fest or local technology Demo Camps. This is based on the free flow of ideas and challenges in an engaged discussion.

The scope of this pilot would focus on:

- Small entrepreneurial organizations
- Prototype the approach – keep it simple
- TEC Edmonton would identify potential attendees and review with Administration
- Products must be usable and available for testing

The first session, held in Q3 of 2009, would focus on the City of Edmonton identifying business problems and communication of priorities to TEC Edmonton associated companies:

- Vision and long range goals
- Three year priorities
- Organizational structure and services
- Opportunities within City of Edmonton
- City of Edmonton procurement processes

A second session would be held approximately four weeks later with TEC Edmonton members presenting possible solutions to opportunities identified:

- Presentations on possible approaches / opportunities to the City
- Networking session for review and discussion

If opportunities are identified where existing project funding is available, Administration would engage the potential organizations through standard procurement processes.

This pilot also supports the concept of the knowledge economy and leverages the capability of local educational institutions.

It focuses on retaining and accelerating the success of high-impact innovation-based start up companies in the Edmonton area by strengthening the partnership between TEC Edmonton and the City of Edmonton. This in turn promotes the development of an entrepreneurial culture and the infrastructure to nurture and sustain scientific and technology-based enterprises.

Results and learning from these potential pilots will be reported back to Executive Committee including requirements to sustain and continue this type of approach.

Focus Area

Diversify Edmonton's Economy