2023-2024 E.A. Danby Award Recipients

Named after AMCTO's inaugural President, the E.A. Danby Awards recognize and honour municipalities that have demonstrated outstanding achievement through innovation with respect to municipal management activities or practices. The E.A. Danby Awards focus on the three broad categories of municipal finance, municipal administration, and the implementation of legislation, across municipalities of greater than 20,000 residents, and less than 20,000 residents. Recipients of this award have demonstrated tangible results related to the efficiency and effectiveness of the municipal corporation.

Municipalities of 20,000 or more:

City of Toronto

Category: Implementation of Legislation
Project: Toronto Mayoral By-election

Only a few months into the new term of office, the mayor resigned, and a by-election was set for June 26, with nominations opening on April 3. With only four months of planning time, Toronto Elections coordinated the largest by-election in Canadian history. The team moved quickly to leverage existing successful plans from the 2022 general election while prioritizing equity, accessibility, and security. This included communication and outreach plans, recent voters' list amendments, readying and testing all equipment, re-booking 90 percent of the voting locations, and a recall of election officials to fill 15,000 positions. Setting a new benchmark for election readiness, the streamlined supply distribution model Toronto introduced in 2022 to deliver equipment and materials to voting places required minimal restocking to be ready for deployment.

Although administering a city-wide by-election within significantly compressed timelines was a tremendous challenge, Toronto Elections seized the opportunity to identify innovative inter-municipal opportunities to collaborate, share knowledge, and strengthen relationships. This included leveraging skilled talent and support from the City of Markham through a temporary secondment of a member of their elections management team, and establishing an election visitor program hosting 30 municipal staff from across 15 different municipalities to share ideas, strategies, and success stories around elections administration. The City also implemented an inter-municipal Adopt-a-Poll program where they welcomed 98 clerks' staff and other public servant support from 16 municipalities to assist on election day.

The City of Markham partnership provided Toronto with additional subject matter expertise and filled a gap to help the Toronto Elections team meet key objectives, while Markham gained hands-on insight into another municipality's election operations. The Markham resource was adept at policy development and the governing legislation of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, which allowed Toronto Elections to respond quickly to atypical challenges that arose due to the June by-election date and develop necessary policy. Policy-driven work included the development of a non-resident spouse attestation, a student identification policy clause, a Professional Activity (PA) day request to the Minister of Education, and drafting enhanced voting place procedures. This resource also took the lead on the Visitor Program to prepare the program itinerary, tours, and scheduling. Having someone available to focus on planning and implementation meant Toronto was able to offer learning opportunities during the by-election.

The Election Visitor Program provided a positive and personal opportunity for Toronto Elections staff to meet their counterparts from other municipalities. The program's collaborative nature nurtured and strengthened existing relationships while laying the groundwork for new future partnerships.

For the Adopt-a-Poll Program, having additional support staff positioned in 12 key voting places for election day provided enhanced efficiencies, and results from post-election surveys saw positive feedback on the format and implementation of the program, with great suggestions on how to expand in the future.

Overall, many lessons can be learned and adapted from the City of Toronto's mayoral by-election. Proving that together, Ontario municipalities can foster a culture of information sharing, multi-jurisdictional learning, and problem-solving for continuous improvement, the City of Toronto's mayoral by-election serves as a leading example of resourcefulness, collaboration, and innovative service delivery.

Municipalities of less than 20,000:

Municipality of Bayham and the Township of Malahide

Category: Municipal Administration
Project: Shared Services Agreement

After months of discussion and information-gathering, the Municipality of Bayham and the Township of Malahide implemented a reciprocal shared service agreement to support one another and respective municipal strategic planning.

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In this shared service, Bayham provides bylaw enforcement services to Malahide, while Malahide provides building services to Bayham. Both services are purchased by the hour as needed by the other municipality. To facilitate borderless provision of building services, an ePermitting platform is used to allow for remote permit submission, messaging, review, and issuance.

To date, the shared service has increased bylaw service levels in both municipalities by 100% and has further resulted in substantial building department cost savings to Bayham (approximately 43%) due to the on-demand service provision model and elimination of internal staffing inefficiencies, while providing Bayham with access to two qualified CBCO-designated building staff. By 2024, 90% of intakes for service delivery have transitioned to paperless using the ePermitting solution, helping to reduce each municipality's carbon footprint and administrative burden.

Since transitioning to this shared service model, bylaw services in both municipalities have improved and allowed both organizations to more comprehensively address complex bylaw files and long-term plans. This includes modernized fees that are more aligned with adjacent municipalities and increases that align with strategic plans. Additional capacity from increased service has also resulted in more reviews and updates of bylaw policies, new approaches to revenue generation, and bylaw enforcement to help offset municipal capital costs.

This shared service model is unique as a reciprocal agreement that is not centralized in one municipality. This has allowed for a strengthened municipal partnership between both organizations as one relies on the other and vice versa for effective service provision and delivery. In a reciprocal arrangement, there is more balance. What one municipality gives up in respect of one service, they obtain more of in the provision of another, which allows each organization to effectively specialize in a needed service area.

This model can be easily scaled and adapted to other municipalities of similar sizes and the use of technology through ePermitting or other similar solutions can help support service delivery. Municipalities are increasingly pressured to find creative service delivery approaches to mitigate costs and tax and/or service delivery impacts to residents. The ability to collaborate and work together not only demonstrates the capacity to problem-solve but also demonstrates an organization's ability to plan ahead and align strategic goals where it makes sense to do so. The Municipality of Bayham and the Township of Malahide are looking forward to continuing to work collaboratively and building on this arrangement for years to come.

Certificates of Merit – Municipalities of 20,000 or more:

Municipality of Lakeshore

Category: Municipal Finance
Project: 2024 Budget App

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Previously, the Municipality of Lakeshore budgets have been long-form documents presented in a PDF format. This often resulted in accessibility issues, with final documents being hundreds of pages long, making it hard for council, staff, and citizens to find specific financial data on departments and divisions. For the 2024 budget, Lakeshore decided to transform its budget into a fully interactive digital application, the first in the region, through Microsoft Power BI.

The Budget App allows users to quickly find the information they're looking for through interactive navigational elements, charts, and graphs. This new version of the municipality's budget can be viewed online or on a mobile device, giving citizens access to budget data from wherever they are. This new app is AODA-compliant using Power BI's built-in accessibility settings that account for reading order, alternative text, and navigation descriptions.

By implementing this new user-friendly solution, the Municipality of Lakeshore simplified its budget process, cutting production time by weeks. Finance staff were able to incorporate last-minute changes from council and quickly update versions to have the latest information included in the final app. Lakeshore is small in comparison to the other municipalities that have used Power BI to present their budgets. This software allowed Lakeshore to use APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) to integrate with the municipality's accounting system and build the visuals necessary to create a more interactive and accessible budget. This flexibility allowed staff to provide residents with the first-ever five-year financial forecast, allowing Lakeshore to expand its transparency and build trust with the community.

As taxpayers, residents should know where their levy is allocated to hold council accountable and represent their best interests. By integrating additional plans and policies and providing complete breakdowns of expenses and revenues with the app, budgetary decisions are more easily accessible as the final budget and documentation provide the reasoning behind the decisions. For Lakeshore, overall resident feedback about the app has been positive.

Resident feedback was measured through a community response survey that revealed that 73% of respondents found the Budget App intuitive to use. Only 10% noted a slight learning curve in the intuitive use of the app. 30% of respondents strongly agreed that the Budget App was easier to navigate than before, and 63% agreed it was easy to navigate. The survey also indicated that residents found the data overall more straightforward to digest. 63% of respondents found the content easy to understand, with only 3% finding it difficult to understand.

Internally, the efficiency of using the online Power BI platform saved the finance department between 70 and 105 hours of work between the 2-3 staff members who lead the municipality's budget process. By pivoting to developing an internal system, Lakeshore saved about $15,000 in licensing fees. The introduction to Power BI has seen a snowball effect, with more departments finding ways to use it in their work.

The Municipality of Lakeshore is the first municipality in Southwestern Ontario to adopt a new interactive budget app, but it may not be the last. This project is easily scalable and adaptable for other municipalities using Power BI or similar software to collect and display data.

Certificates of Merit – Municipalities of 20,000 or more:

Town of Milton

Category: Municipal Administration
Project: Digital Records Management Solution (DRMS)

Traditionally, digital records management solutions require staff to manually import records into a software program, requiring users to operate within this software to access records, to work within records and to manage the lifecycle of those digital records. The Town of Milton did not take a traditional approach to managing exponential growth in digital records. Instead, Milton found a solution that would meet all of its compliance needs for managing digital records, but would also reduce the change management impact on its workforce and improve efficiencies for staff with enhanced search capabilities.

This new solution identifies and classifies records within the Town's existing repositories (shared files, SharePoint and email accounts), where digital records are being accessed and used by Town staff throughout the workday. This solution also provides efficiencies and improved corporate knowledge for staff with an enterprise-wide search tool that offers Town staff fast and relevant search results from its repositories with custom filters developed specifically for Milton.

The Digital Records Management Solution (DRMS) began with crawling all data, which provided valuable insight into all the digital records within the Town's existing records repositories. This back-end automated IT process identified records for classification and where records retention schedules could be applied to manage the digital record lifecycle. The initial crawling of the Town's digital records identified a significant number of redundant, obsolete, and trivial (ROT) records, specifically close to 23,000 duplicate records, that could be easily identified for future destruction to free up valuable server storage and improve records search capabilities.

The new solution, DocuSearch, identifies and tags records retention requirements for records in the Town's existing repositories, where records are being accessed and used by Town staff throughout the workday. Milton's staff have not been required to manually import records into a software program. Staff have not been required to learn a new software program or change how they work in digital records every day. The DocuSearch tool has also improved and modernized the response to Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests.

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Since the launch of the DocuSearch tool, it is estimated that over 500 hours of staff time has been saved and the following crucial information about digital records is now available to the Town to support future lifecycle management and plan accordingly:

- Number of digital records (3,666,701 files) and amount of storage (5.16 terrabytes or TB)
- 95,000 redundant, obsolete and trivial (ROT) files that could be identified for destruction
- Over 1 million files that were identified for potential destruction
- Over 15,000 duplicate files were easily identified and were deleted according to retention rules, freeing up over 18 GB of server storage within a short period of time

As a result, it is anticipated that there will be improvements to capital investment planning for Town server storage and capacity in future budgets. While not tangible yet, it is expected that the DRMS will reduce the Town's data storage footprint, which has positive carbon impacts in the reduction of physical storage devices required for storing and backing up data.

Milton's experience and approach can be easily replicated for other municipalities that are looking to more easily manage their digital records. This project demonstrates that there are opportunities to manage digital records where they currently live within existing records repositories and that transformational change among an entire workforce is not necessarily required. The Town of Milton's experience with digital records management has shown that innovation is key, and the "traditional" approach is not always best.

Certificates of Merit – Municipalities of 20,000 or less:

Town of Tillsonburg

Category: Municipal Administration
Project: Citizen Portal

The Town of Tillsonburg's new mobile app provides citizens with access to municipal services on the go. From paying bills to sharing concerns, citizens can engage with the Town and effortlessly be part of their local government – anytime, anywhere.

The mobile app was designed in conjunction with the Town's website, and both projects were undertaken simultaneously. By tackling these digital service enhancement projects as one initiative, the Town was able to ensure a seamless experience across devices— with a similar look, feel, and functionality regardless of device.

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While the responsive design of the website helps ensure solid performance on any device, the mobile app elevates users' experience by letting residents navigate to the most popular information by large visual icons more suited to the small screen.

One of the most popular features of the mobile app is the Report a Problem function. Using large, easy-to-understand visual icons, the user selects a type of concern and works through a series of screens that gather information specifically required in that case type. The Report a Problem feature then disseminates this information directly into the Town's digital work order system where it is automatically assigned to staff for further investigation/resolution. This has enabled staff to quickly action a response. With the app feeding data directly into the Town's digital work order system, staff managers are able to track key performance indicators and monitor departmental performance. These analytics are useful when making budgeting decisions, allocating resources, and identifying future strategic projects and improvements.

Given Tillsonburg's 17% population growth between 2016 and 2021, this website and app initiative has also enabled the municipality to meet new residents' needs without the expense of adding multiple customer service personnel. Additionally, in the event of future business interruptions—such as a resurgence of COVID-19— the app and website limit the need for face-to-face interaction with staff.

Overall, the app has helped the municipality build trust with the public by ensuring there is greater accountability/tracking of resident issues and more efficient response to concerns as they are submitted. Both the app and the website enable residents to conduct business with the Town at their convenience.

Congratulations to all 2023-2024 E.A. Danby Award recipients!