

RE March 19 Draft Proposal and an Alternate Proposal to Consider

Pilot Program Implications of Preliminarily Changing Direction in Entirety

Pilot programs are designed specifically to help an organization learn how a broader implementation might work in practice. This helps assist decision makers in determining whether or not to move forward with a more permanent implementation once the pilot is complete.

Time and data collection/analysis are critical factors towards ensuring that an accurate assessment can be made towards properly determining the success of a pilot program. When changing course entirely during a small pilot program, it can affect these factors greatly when there is a limited amount of time (e.g. this pilot has only four sessions to collect data and assess).

As well, because there only segmented sets of incomplete data due to complete change in direction, of which some or all of the data in each changed direction may show some success – none of it actually shows a full set of representative data to accurately determine the performance of a particular chosen path.

In other words, changing course entirely during a pilot program of short duration (rather than first making incremental changes to address minor deficiencies before exploring an entirely new direction) is not beneficial towards decision making nor the pilot program itself when it is done for reasons other than to address significant deficiencies that cannot otherwise be overcome.

With all of these factors in mind, once the pilot is complete, new issues are raised. Since relatively minor deficiencies weren't addressed prior to changing course entirely, the deficiencies still exist at the time of decision making. This can result in increased complexity and uncertainty by having to make an additional choice of which direction to take (e.g. Path A, B, or C) since that choice needs to be made upon incomplete information.

It also means that regardless of which path is chosen, the pilot program then either needs to be extended to address the deficiencies in order to properly measure performance prior to putting in a more permanent implementation, or the deficiencies need to be ironed out during the rollout of the more permanent implementation. Both of these cases can result in participation fatigue, inefficient and ineffective expenditures, and changes which in the end can potentially harm the implementation greatly and in some cases even cause its eventual demise.

General Concerns of the March 19 Draft Proposal for Session #2 and Session #3

Continuing to apply past, current, and future feedback towards ongoing progress of the pilot program's implementation must be considered integral if the program is to reach its full potential within the limited amount of sessions available to do so. Most of the feedback fielded at session #1 is specific to that session and format utilized, which means that much of the feedback cannot be utilized towards a format change.

Success of the pilot program and achieving support of its potential integration into an open topic program for citizens, rightsholders, stakeholders, community groups, and leadership to connect together

informally on an ongoing basis will be greatly increased by continuing to place a high focus on feedback and leveraging available expertise towards the planning of the pilot sessions.

Utilizing that focus towards substantive decision making which follows logical steps of progression is a sound way to complete planning as it creates a solid foundation for decisions to be acted upon. It can also help reduce inefficiencies and increase effectiveness, which are critical factors especially when time is of the essence and the amount of sessions are limited.

Addressing the majority of deficiencies before moving onto exploration of new formats also creates a performance baseline of which to compare other potential formats against, and in the end enables the ability to provide solid recommendations to decision makers.

The proposed Micro Townhall and Closed Topic sessions do not appear to have applied these general considerations. Instead, it appears that focus and prioritization has been solely applied towards starting from the beginning with a new format, without appearing to have a solid case for doing so.

An example of a solid case to switch formats would be one that is indicating a much higher potential to deliver an increased set of benefits and results to the community and leadership via a new format, in comparison to the potential benefits and results delivered through enhancing the existing format with incremental changes that address the majority of deficiencies beforehand. Neither of the draft formats for session #2 and #3 appear to deliver a solid case of this nature.

Specific Concerns – Session #2 (Micro Townhall)

This format appears to be striving towards finding a compromise between a townhall and open space format rather than leveraging the strengths of each format, and significant deficiencies are introduced as a result. For example:

- Time inefficiencies and repetition is introduced due to the same questions being repeatedly asked as each member of Council switches table. This in effect naturally introduces participation fatigue as the questions need to be repeated after each member of Council switches tables
- The ability to address all of Council, get answers, and potentially have input acted upon is removed
- Having wholesome discussion on topics of interest and learning/working in a collaborative way “as equals” is negatively affected and potentially non-existent
- Participants at the table who have a minimum of common interest towards various matters that are being discussed other than their own, will spend their time waiting for discussions to complete and ask their questions rather than being engaged participants in the conversation
- Reporting primarily serves to indicate which questions were asked and how they were answered, rather than focusing on conversational points and outcomes
- The ability for participants to raise matters of concern is not enhanced, rather, the ability to be constructive with matters of concern is reduced

Specific Concerns - Session #3 (Closed Topic)

The proposed format for Session #3 in its current form is more applicable towards an event outside of this pilot program as it goes against the whole concept of informal open topic discussions. It is well recognized that public consultations on closed topics would likely benefit from further attention, however that is not currently in the CETF's mandate. The proposed format is one that is more along the lines of what the City already embarks on in the form of public consultations, albeit potentially better in a variety of closed topic scenarios.

The CETF's current mandate is to specifically facilitate informal open topic conversations between citizens and leadership. The current mandate is not to facilitate closed topic formal sessions where citizens are limited to a specific topic and cannot have their questions and concerns addressed on other topics of interest to them.

Pre-determining the format and methodology of session #3 at this point in time prior to receiving and considering the feedback from session #2 prevents the ability to utilize that feedback towards the path chosen for the next session of the pilot program.

Revisiting the Successes of Session #1 – Open Space

The facilitation resulted in ample opportunities for everyone to listen and speak, and helped to deliver a friendly atmosphere where attendees were able to converse with each other as equals. Citizens enjoyed the collaborative communication and felt like their opinions mattered.

Providing the opportunity for everyone to listen to others views and speak towards specific topic focuses, spurred quality dialogue and allowed conversations to naturally flow further through a rich interchange of ideas and views.

The democratic decision-making process around what the event topics would be primarily focused upon was well received. Topical focuses at tables were current and relevant, with participants having diverse interests and belonging to varied communities within Nanaimo.

Overall, the event generated an insightful exchange of ideas and resulted in high quality discussion content that aligned with the City's Strategic Priorities and Strategic Plan Values.

Problem solving was frequently at the core of conversations, which remained productive through active participation and created an environment of constructive conversation and collaboration.

Proposal for Session #2 - Enhanced Open Space Session

Much of the feedback which was not integrated into session #1 from the July/August feedback due to time constraints, was again identified by the participants at session #1 as being of importance towards enhancing its value.

Being that there is a considerable amount of identified areas to be addressed and that there has been no attempt to address deficiencies expressed in the feedback, the Open Space format has not yet been explored to enough of an extent to consider its potential for community focused informal open topic engagements beyond the pilot program. As well, with a minimum of Council being in attendance at session #1, the results cannot yet be properly assessed as there was a minimal of citizen/leadership interaction which may or may not have had an effect on satisfaction and the feedback provided.

Below is a refined list of potential feedback items to address that can be worked on prior to session #2. Due to the limited time available prior to session #2, the CETF would need to prioritize and select which of the following items the CETF determines it would like to address as enhancements for the next session, and action those items.

Potential Items to Consider Towards Delivering an Enhanced Open Space Session

1. Further define facilitation requirements and processes; work with the session facilitator to address the following
 - a. Better equalize conversational time available per participant
 - b. Balance discussions of policy focuses versus specific project focuses
 - c. Refresh conversational focus upon initiation of focus sessions after break intervals
 - d. Develop ways to improve the conversational experience through addressing the dynamics of when staff or council are present and participating
 - e. Address the subject of cross-event discussions that leverages input from prior session
 - f. Improve the ability for segments of interest to receive sufficient focus; encourage conversations to focus in on subjects contained within broad topics
 - g. Lead into solution building when identifying problem factors
 - h. Enhance diversity of input with steps that further encourage participants to engage at multiple tables within the session
2. Increase value of input
 - a. Improve the reporting process to better encompass the conversations that take place, nurture the feedback loop, and lead further towards downstream leveragability and assisting decision making
3. Improve time constraint factors
 - a. Increase the overall amount of time allotted for the session
 - b. Increase the amount of time available for each focus period
4. Increase attendance/participation
 - a. Grow the areas of outreach and improve promotional efforts to increase attendance through increasing awareness and understanding of the event
 - b. Integrate the session with an online component in order to further increase community involvement from a broader spectrum
 - c. Increase the attractiveness of event for citizens in general, leadership as a whole, and younger generations
 - d. Engage other rightsholders and stakeholders to become involved such as First Nations, non-profit entities, neighborhood associations, and other community organizations

References

Session #1 Feedback Analysis:

<http://fairweb.com/stuff/Public%20Engagement%20Pilot%20Program%20-%20Initial%20Event%20Feedback%20Analysis%20v1.2.pdf>

Session #1 Raw Feedback:

https://www.nanaimo.ca/meetings/pdf/Supplemental/CE171128SPublic_Engagement_Pilot_Program_-_Nov_23_Feedback.pdf