

The 2019 Innovation in Governance Awards Program

Contact Information:

Municipality: Town of Westfield, NJ

Population: 30,000

County: Union

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City: Westfield

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Project Information

Initiative Title: The Westfield Rink

Description: As part of the Town of Westfield's commitment to improve services to residents without using taxpayer dollars, we initiated our first significant public/private partnership with the installation of a temporary outdoor ice rink at Gumbert Park, converting an underutilized town asset into one with broad community benefit paid for by a private operator.

The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort. Innovations must have been initiated or completed during the time period June 1, 2018 - September 30, 2019

Project Specific Details: *(Please explain your innovation and include up to 3 supplemental pages if needed.)*

- How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?
- How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?
- Are there any measured savings or program improvements?
- Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent
- How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?

Please attach a supplemental sheet(s) noting the details of your initiative.
(Supplemental attachments NOT to exceed 3 pages)

Application Deadline: Applications must be received no later than Monday, October 1, 2019. Mail applications to NJLM Innovation in Governance, 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608, Attention: Ciara Bradley or send by email to CBradley@njlm.org

*If you have any questions, please contact Ciara Bradley at the League of Municipalities
609-695-3481 ext.128 or CBradley@njlm.org*

2019 INNOVATION IN GOVERNANCE AWARD

THE WESTFIELD RINK

WESTFIELD, NJ

How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?

As part of the Town of Westfield's commitment to improve services to residents without using taxpayer dollars, we initiated our first significant public/private partnership with the installation of a temporary outdoor ice rink at Gumbert Park, converting an underutilized town asset into one with broad community benefit paid for by a private operator.

The Westfield Rink's location is on a portion of the New Jersey Green Acres site at Gumbert Park that serves as a public basketball court. The flat, spacious area was identified by local hockey rink owner Ken Anderson (Arena Realty Partners, LLC) as an ideal location in terms of space and infrastructure.

In the agreement reached between Arena Realty and the Town, with approval from Green Acres, Mr. Anderson is responsible for all site maintenance, utilities, skate rentals, group reservations, and restoration of the site to its prior condition. The Town is responsible for a small set of incidental expenses, including public safety/crossing guard wages and Public Works on an as-needed basis. The agreement details that any resulting profit from the rink will be split 50/50 between Arena Realty and the Town.

How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?

Overall use

The presence of The Westfield Rink expanded ice time availability in the area, allowed hockey to grow in Westfield, and provided recreational skating opportunities for residents of Westfield and other nearby towns.

The Westfield Rink hosted approximately 22,000 uses across 675 sessions and 810 hours of usage during the four-month operating seasons which ran from November 2018-February 2019. This included high school practice, hockey clinics, youth games and practices, skating clinics, family hockey, adult open hockey, and public skating sessions. The typical weekly schedule included at least three 1.5 hour public skating sessions, with an additional slot used for community activities, special events, or for an additional public session. School holidays and vacation periods included extended daytime operating hours and additional public sessions.

In terms of total users, Westfield accounted for 60%, followed by Garwood, Cranford, Scotch Plains, Springfield, Mountainside, Clark and other municipalities as far as Chatham.

Demonstrated benefits

The establishment of The Westfield Rink allowed for:

- The Westfield boys' hockey program to add ice time for all teams and continue the operation of a third team
- The Westfield girls' hockey program to grow from 23 to 36 girls while adding a JV team, and more than double their ice time – which would not have been possible without this additional capacity
- The Cranford hockey program (42% of whose players are Westfield residents) to expand its programs
- Freed up time for the players and their families by not requiring as much travel to rinks in Union, Bayonne, Newark, Woodbridge, West Orange, and other sites
- The offering of a girls' hockey clinic featuring a female professional player
- The offering of a "blue puck" clinic led by the Westfield High School boys' team for beginner players
- The offering of 15 learn-to-play hockey sessions
- The allotment of 177 hours of open hockey time for players of all ages
- The allotment of 145 hours of open public skating with over 4,400 uses by Westfield residents and 2,900 uses by residents of other towns
- Five Westfield elementary school skate nights that showed increased participation rates over those held previously in other locations
- One Garwood community event hosted by the Garwood Recreation Department
- Two adaptive needs skating events co-sponsored by Union Thunder Hockey and the Union County Office for Persons With Disabilities & Special Needs
- 15 learn-to-skate clinics for beginner skaters
- Five instructional curling events
- Special community programs, including a grand opening celebration and a public skate following the Town Tree Lighting event
- Employment for 26 new hires from the Westfield community to support rink operations

Community concerns

While there was clear support and enthusiasm for the rink in the community, some residents in the site's immediate vicinity expressed concerns regarding traffic flow, parking, noise, lighting, and aesthetics. As a result, a Rink Advisory Committee was established, comprised of local neighbors, Mr. Anderson, a Town Council representative from that ward, Westfield Recreation Commission members, a Westfield Hockey representative, and the Mayor of Garwood.

Are there any measured savings or program improvements?

Measured savings

As part of the contractual agreement, the Town of Westfield received upgrades to sidewalks and picnic areas valued at approximately \$36,500. In addition, upon closure of the rink, approximately \$6,600 worth of concrete blocks and stone dust was donated to the Westfield DPW and \$1,400 of shrubs were planted. These were year-round improvements to the site that outlasted the rink's seasonal presence.

Program improvements

The Rink Advisory Committee was established to provide a conduit between the rink operator and the neighbors, hockey community, Recreation Commission, and governments of Westfield and neighboring Garwood in order to address issues/concerns that arose during the rink season. Actions included bi-weekly committee meetings, a listening session at Town Hall, and an ongoing issue tracker throughout the season to log issues raised by neighbors.

The Committee also produced a 2018-2019 report on rink operations at the conclusion of the season, which provided recommendations for ongoing improvements that were incorporated into the renewal agreement – including schedule changes for hockey game hours to address noise concerns, the utilization of sound blankets, improved lighting, and fenced screening at the site.

Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent.

The Westfield Rink is a temporary facility. After an initial contract period of one season (November 2018 – February 2019), and with the approval of the New Jersey Green Acres Program, the Town of Westfield and Arena Realty Partners, LLC recently signed a renewal for two additional seasons (through 2021).

How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?

This project demonstrates the power of collaboration and innovation to solve for gaps in municipal resources. In this case, The Westfield Rink provided a facility for the underserved local hockey community, as well as additional recreational ice opportunities across many community groups – school events, learn to skate, family hockey, adaptive skating, and even curling lessons – all consistent with Green Acres' mission of enhancing recreational resources for public use and enjoyment.

By working with a private operator willing to make an investment to expand his own presence governed by the laws of a Green Acres site, the residents of Westfield and neighboring communities benefitted from the end product with minimal taxpayer expenditure.