

International Downtown Achievement Awards Submission

Applicant: Portland Downtown, 549 Congress Street, Portland, ME 04101

Category: Downtown Leadership and Management



PORTLAND DOWNTOWN'S DOWNTOWN CADET PROGRAM:

Increasing BID Safety Perceptions through a Collaborative Community Policing Model

INTRODUCTION

Portland Downtown is a 501C(4) non-profit business improvement district (BID) in Maine's largest and most diverse city. The BID's mission is to maintain a clean and safe downtown while building and promoting a vibrant business, residential and tourism destination. Portland Downtown was established in 1992 through an act of the Maine State Legislature, and operates in agreement with the City of Portland to provide supplemental services for the Downtown above and beyond basic services provided by the City. Supplemental services provided by Portland Downtown include maintaining cleanliness and safety in the district, an area that is accessible by nearly 14 miles of sidewalk, and includes several public parks, ample green space, City Hall, and two City-owned and -operated parking garages that house public restroom facilities. To provide supplemental services, which focus on clean and safe initiatives, Portland Downtown contracts with the City of Portland's Public Services Department for additional staff dedicated to maintaining cleanliness and facilities in the downtown district, and with the City's Police Department for additional foot patrol officers and cadets during the busy summer months.

Portland has evolved since the BID was first established to become one of the leading cities in New England, and is indisputably the economic engine of Maine. The downtown in particular has built its reputation as an important visitor destination, and a popular place to live, play and work. Portland now receives national accolades for its successes, and regularly makes top ten lists for its scenic beauty, restaurants, active arts culture, and quality of life. Working mostly behind the scenes, Portland Downtown has been committed to maintaining a clean and safe environment for residents, workers and visitors. It has consistently produced popular city events, developed a successful website, distributed printed visitor brochures and maps, and worked hard with other partners to create value for its property owner constituents.

APPROACH

Like most thriving major cities, Portland struggles with common issues, including panhandling, vagrancy, loitering and substance abuse, by-products of homelessness that have been identified as top concerns among downtown businesses fearing these images will negatively affect Portland's tourism industry. As part of providing supplemental services for public safety in the district, Portland Downtown manages the Downtown Cadet Program. This program provides for additional security in public areas that see an influx of traffic in the summer months due to an increase in tourism and transient populations that come to Portland because of the pleasant summer climate and abundant amenities in the scenic coastal community.

At this point, Portland Downtown's collaboration with the Police Department, as well as regular communication with and fundraising for area homeless service providers, serves to assure downtown businesses that the BID is providing for downtown safety and perceptions of safety for visitors. The Downtown Cadet Program has been funded in partnership by Portland Downtown and the City of Portland Police Department to better provide this additional level of safety for downtown businesses, employees, residents and visitors, and exemplifies a collaborative approach to downtown leadership and management that improves the effectiveness of program delivery.



IMPLEMENTATION

Portland is generally a safe city and sees crime reductions annually, but Portland Downtown must remain vigilant as perception translates to reality for many. This requires continuous work to create a comfortable experience for visitors, employees and residents. Additionally, the influx of tourist and transient populations downtown equates to many newcomers who do not necessarily understand the City's regulations, resulting in conflicts that are easily resolved through outreach and education rather than police intervention. Portland Downtown manages safety concerns through a close working relationship with the police and fire departments, human service agencies, and city staff, and hires full-time cadets from May through September.

With perception being the key concern for business owners downtown, the Downtown Cadet Program bridges the gap between enforcing ordinances and providing public relations for both business owners and tourists. In addition, Portland Downtown provides funding to a local mobile outreach team to coordinate with the cadets on issues stemming from homelessness. The Police Department collects and tracks daily stats from each cadet team by area of patrol, so that they may interpret the data for hotspots and apply its community policing and outreach efforts strategically. Cadets meet with their police lieutenant supervisor at the police station at the start of each shift, are informed of assignments for the day, and check e-mail for communication from Portland Downtown and area businesses.

OUTCOMES

The Downtown Cadet Program has evolved since Portland Downtown has assumed management of the program from the Police Department, from a more crime-focused police department internship to a community policing model that encompasses ordinance enforcement, community education, and tourism. Cadets, under Portland Downtown's umbrella of service provision, help Portland Downtown achieve its mission of insuring a safe downtown. They are preparing for careers in law enforcement or the military and are seeking hands-on experience in the community. As part of their duties, they make contact with business owners, identify persons in need, and can enforce local municipal ordinances. Due to the popularity of the program, Portland Downtown increased the cadet program to four cadets in 2015, up from two cadets in previous years. During the 2015 season, the cadets:

- Made nearly 4,000 safety checks;
- Gave over 1,000 warnings pertaining to violations of local municipal ordinances; and
- Made contact with over 1,000 local businesses.

The Downtown Cadet Program is a long-standing program that has adapted with the changing face of law enforcement. In addition to patrolling the downtown area, cadets' duties include talking to business owners and connecting with local homeless outreach teams to resolve issues of loitering and panhandling. Their positions certainly still focus on ordinance issues, but have risen to the challenge of addressing quality of life issues that a tourist or business owner sees, focusing as well on making perceptions of Portland a clean and safe destination to live, work and play. The program provides an innovative solution to community outreach with an eye to law enforcement that others could replicate or modify according to local need.