

**Practice Name:****Date Created:** 26-May-09**Author:****Last Updated:****Abstract:****GENERAL INFORMATION**

Name of Practice	The Urban Alliance - an organization wide research partnership with the University of Calgary
Date	26-June-08
Name of Municipality	<a href="#">City of Calgary</a>
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**THE ISSUE****Abstract:**

What is the practice you developed or are developing (brief abstract)?

Please briefly describe the final practice developed. (e.g. if you developed a new Council agenda, list the agenda

items, or if a new communications plan was created, provide a summary of the plan's goals, objectives and highlights.)

**CONCEPT:**

The Urban Alliance is a research partnership between The City of Calgary and the University of Calgary (U of C).

Together we believe we are making a significant research and development impact on matters that directly affect Calgary and Calgarians, and that such activity can form a solid foundation upon which to educate Calgary's population. The Urban Alliance research scope is as broad as the City's responsibilities and as deep as the University's considerable expertise.

Today, as the City of Calgary faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities created by rapid growth, the need for knowledge has never been greater. Urban Alliance was created to better coordinate a seamless transfer of leading research between the City of Calgary and the university – for the benefit of all our communities.

Urban Alliance will integrate research activities in nine key areas to benefit the citizens of Calgary.

**PROCESS:**

By aligning more research projects at the U of C with priority areas identified by the City, researchers will be able to develop innovative solutions to real-world problems. Urban Alliance marks a transformational change in the way the City develops, by providing a framework for leading-edge researchers and front-line city practitioners to work together. It will be an organic relationship that evolves in response to the changing needs of the City.

Its focus is to deliver sustainable quality of life to Calgary and Alberta through nine broad themes: Social Fabric & Security, Living Spaces, Natural Environment, Consumption Cycle, Mobility, Physical Infrastructure, Management & Industry, Workplace/Workforce and Governance.

Collectively, the Alliance, its members and joint enabling team seek to:

- Foster the long-term alliance

**Need:**

Please describe (just a couple of sentences or bullet points) why you needed to create this practice (policy or process).

What issue made it necessary? (e.g. “We needed a comprehensive plan to deal with...”, or “We needed an annual forecasting tool because...”)

**WHY DO THIS:**

The City of Calgary faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities created by rapid growth, the need for knowledge has never been greater. Urban Alliance was created to better coordinate a seamless transfer of leading research between the City of Calgary and the university – for the benefit of all our communities.

It’s purpose is to address the partners' needs to:

- develop excellent solutions to complex cross functional problems facing Calgary
- facilitate a 180 degree change in thinking
- foster world class research and innovation
- create a more sustainable urban form
- develop highly qualified personnel & address demographic changes
- establish flexible, cross discipline approaches
- energize University & City staff through innovation
- facilitate continuity of corporate memory, wisdom and experience
- help realize Calgary’s long term priorities and the imagineCALGARY vision
- nurture a long term partnership between the City & University
- foster both leading edge innovative thinking and pro-active implementation.

The complementary strengths of Calgary’s two public institutions provide a powerful combination where Calgary’s brightest innovators work with Calgary’s most practical, down to earth urban practitioners. Together, we have the capacity to both invent and implement solutions.

**CREATING YOUR PRACTICE****Research:**

How did you obtain information to help design your practice (including consultation with stakeholders, formal and informal research)?

Please include any research documentation you can share,

or give us a source reference (e.g. Web site, literature, “We reviewed the bylaws from other municipalities in the area...”).

**Process:**

How did you go about designing your practice? For instance, did you create a team, hire a consultant, borrow something ready-made from another jurisdiction?

Describe briefly who did the design work and what process they followed.

The University and the City has worked together on a variety of independent research projects for many years. In 2004-05, representatives from both entities explored the concept of a more intentional relationship and a possible alliance. They concluded that by working together (in urban research, education and municipal innovation) a significant favorable impact could be made on a broad range of matters affecting Calgary and its citizens. This activity could also strengthen both the City and the University.

On January 6th, 2006 senior management from the University of Calgary and the City of Calgary formed an interim Alliance committee and a project called Getting to Yes for the purposes of designing and finalizing the administrative elements of a proposed Alliance.

Through a series of five Alliance committee meetings, supported by a small full-time working team, the group as whole designed and established the concept, operating framework, vision, purpose, research themes, governance structure, operating principles, intellectual property preferences, escalation policy and a draft memorandum of understanding.

**GETTING APPROVAL FOR YOUR PRACTICE**

**Authority:**

Whose/what approval did you need to create and implement the practice?

**AUTHORITY & APPROVALS:**

Initial approval came from the interim alliance committee in August 2006.

This was followed by approvals from

- the University's President/Vice Presidents Group
- the City's Administrative Leadership Team
- the City's LAS Committee of Council
- City Council on February 23, 2007
- A formal memorandum of understanding was officially signed by the City Manager and the President of the University on March 2, 2007.

**Reporting:**

How did you inform the decision-maker(s) about the

practice and your need for their approval?

Please note the name of any documents provided to the decision-makers that you would be willing to share.

**Consultation:**

Did you consult with stakeholders as part of your approval process?

If so, how? If possible, attach a copy of templates, surveys or other documents you used as part of your consultation.

We followed standard practices within both the University and the City, writing reports and providing presentation and feedback opportunities for each group as appropriate.

Yes, per above.

We followed standard City and University processes and used standard City and University templates.

## IMPLEMENTING YOUR PRACTICE

**Plan:**

Describe the process you went through to implement the practice. If you used an implementation plan, please note it here.

The overall Urban Alliance project was titled GETTING TO YES. A project charter\* was developed identifying and prioritizing the following: stakeholders, key result areas, deliverables, risks and exclusions. Schedules and roles of team members were assigned, executed through weekly project team meetings. Progress was tracked in detail.

This project was formally completed March 2, 2007. At this point the project team was appointed to be the Urban Alliance Enablement Team.

\*SMART Project Management methodology was used for the above. SMART PM is an innovative University of Calgary project management methodology developed by Dr. Francis Hartman. It is widely used throughout the City of Calgary.

**Policy:**

What changes to bylaws, regulations or procedures were needed to implement this practice and how did you deal with them?

Please attach a copy of the change in bylaw, policy or procedure.

**When:**

When did your municipality begin to use the practice?  
Was it implemented all at once or in stages?

Not applicable.

### LAYING THE GROUNDWORK & PILOTING

Between January 2006 and September 2006 we developed and piloted collaboration techniques and built many of the foundational research and senior leadership relationships. This period was used to develop champions who would assume their roles in the governance structure.

### FORMALIZE GOVERNANCE

March 2007: The Urban Alliance governance structure was formally activated with all players in their new roles. (Urban Alliance Executive Committee, Urban Alliance Council, Research Network, Enablement Team).

### REFINING RESEARCH STRATEGIES, PRIORITIES & PROCESSES

Throughout 2007/2008 the Urban Alliance defined and prioritized the top 8 complex problems facing Calgary. In parallel with this we executed our communications strategy and engaged a wide range of researchers and practitioners from many disciplines. In support of accelerating these relationships we built standard research agreements, data access and supporting processes and roles.

### BROADENING INVOLVEMENT

In April 2008, we held two key events to raise awareness within both organizations of internal players (Meeting of Minds Event) and external players and partners (Gaining Ground: Great Cities Conference). Over the course of this year we sponsored or presented at numerous conferences focusing on urban quality of life, from immigration to infrastructure to sustainable supply chains. We also contributed to the 2008 Community/University Expo, and were recognized as being a very special “one of a kind” initiative in North America.

Currently over 15 City business units and 16 University faculties, department or centres are participating.

#### **Who:**

Who was responsible for implementing the practice?

If someone else is responsible for ongoing management, who is it?



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The Urban Alliance is designed as a series of peered working relationships, with specific roles to play. Together they are responsible for implementing and ongoing management of the practice. Examples of these responsibilities include:

- Urban Alliance Council advises on alliance strategy,
- Executive Committee provides long term continuity and assists with barrier removal,
- Research Theme Co-Directors develop research priorities & build researcher/practitioner relationships,
- The Enablement Team provides overall project planning, management and support for the above. They also develop and execute communications strategies, legal agreements, data access processes, website, administrative processes, and help develop and move funding programs forward,
- The Research Network provides the innovative thinking and real world application.

The players that volunteered for 3 year leadership terms(not including research network) or took responsibility to make the alliance come together in various ways are(partial list):

#### UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Rose Goldstein, VP Research

Roman Cooney, VP External

Gayla Rogers, Dean, Faculty of Social Work

Elizabeth Cannon, Dean, Schulich School of Eng.

Darrel Danyluk, Research Services Office

Doug Walker, Associate VP, Research

Loraine Fowlow, Acting Dean,

Environmental Design

Ed McCauley, Chair, Biological Sciences

Anil Mehrotra, Director, Centre of

Enviro. Engineering

Chan Wirasinghe, Professor, Civil

Engineering

Tom Brown, Department Head, Civil

Engineering

Peter Sherer, Professor, Haskayne School of Business

Patrick Hettiaratchi, Professor, Civil

Engineering

**RESOURCES REQUIRED****Budget:**

How much did it cost you to design and implement your practice (i.e. We saved/spent \$XX per year)?

The Alliance was developed through in-kind resourcing from both the City and the University. No additional funds were requested or required.

What are your ongoing operational and capital costs, if any?

The Government of Alberta, through Municipal Affairs, provided \$300,000 in funding to seed some pilot research projects as well as general alliance implementation costs (website, communications collateral, meeting costs, materials, training, conference and presentations etc.) At this point approximately half of these funds have been committed or expended.

**Staff:**

What human resources did you need to design, implement and manage your practice? (e.g. "It took X staff member (s) X months on this" or "This is part of normal staff duties.")

The Urban Alliance used a unique combination of volunteer resources from within both organizations. Volunteers included University Deans, Department Heads, Researchers, City General Managers, Directors, Practitioners as well as Senior Professional specialists including: lawyers, intellectual property specialists, communications strategists etc.

These resources were frugally used and coordinated through the Enablement Team.

**Infrastructure:**

What "capital costs" (such as information technology, other equipment or building assets) did you need to design, implement, manage, and/or evaluate your practice?

The organizations jointly contributed and shared existing information, technology and building assets, and meeting rooms.

**EVALUATING YOUR PRACTICE****Formal:**

If you did a formal evaluation (e.g. user satisfaction survey, analysis of annual expenditures or number of rate payers served) for your practice, please describe the evaluation tool and the process used.

Tell us who was involved.

Yes, we have done an evaluation.

1) Interim Urban Alliance Committee,  
September 2006

There is a very nice picture on our website of a big thumbs up from the committee. I think this picture says it all.

2) The Urban Alliance Council meets 4 times a year.

- Progress is reported at each meeting.
- Issues are identified.
- Annual reports are distributed.
- Urban Alliance Council direction is collected and acted on.

3) The Urban Alliance Executive Committee meets 2 times a year.

- Progress is reported at each meeting.
- Annual reports are distributed.
- Issues are identified.
- Urban Alliance Executive direction is collected and acted on.

### **Informal:**

If you did an informal evaluation, describe what you did (such as discussing the practice with people in the office or on the street, or letters/comments received).

The Urban Alliance also monitors the development and quality of relationships, which is what building an alliance is all about. Good working relationships are essential. The Co-directors and enablement team report on the development of these relationships at the Urban Alliance Council Meetings and meet independently as required to assist in positive outcomes.

### **Performance measures:**

Please list the performance measures for this practice (i.e. reduced number of complaints, money saved, or change in equipment life expectancy.)

Please list the process you used for measuring performance, (i.e. We do annual surveys on...) examples include:

- collecting data
- establishing a baseline
- applying the measures
- results
- follow up

We measure performance both numerically and qualitatively.

By design however - the research relationship is not intended to be forced, urgent or bureaucratic. We encourage them to develop spontaneously, be fun and address an important problem. In a nutshell - allowing the above for us is a win.

Examples of more formal performance measures include:

- Number of peered research/innovation relationships that develop.
- Number of grad students engaged on urban issues.
- Number of graduates taking positions at City or industry partners.
- Triple bottom line impact of research and innovation.
- Continuity of Urban Alliance.
- ..... Urban Alliance Council: meet 4 times per year
- ..... Urban Alliance Executive: meet 2 times per year
- ..... Research Theme Co-Directors for 3 year terms
- ..... Enablement Team Capacity

The Urban Alliance is in its first (March 2007-2010) of eight three year cycles. Improvements and changes are an ongoing part of this development phase.

Organizationally the Urban Alliance is flexible, responsive and a good will relationship. It meets our expectations, and many ways well exceeds what we had envisioned as being possible.

### Changes:

(a) Based on the evaluation (formal or informal), describe any changes you have made, or would like to make, to your practice as a result. (e.g. "After implementing this practice, we decided that it would be better if...")

-or-

(b) Has your practice met your expectations and if so, how?

## LESSONS LEARNED / BENEFITS RECEIVED

### Benefits:

What are the benefits of this practice to your municipality? (eg. Preparation of Council agenda packages now requires less time, etc.)

The Purpose & Benefits of the Urban Alliance are the capacity to:

- tackle complex problems facing Calgary
- develop highly qualified personnel
- implement excellent solutions
- enable flexible, cross discipline approaches
- energize relationships between University & City staff
- enable realization of Calgary's long term priorities and the imagineCALGARY vision
- foster world class research and innovation
- build a long term partnership between the City & University
- build continuity of corporate memory, wisdom and experience
- Peer researcher depth with practitioner breadth of experience
- Facilitate a 180 degree change in thinking
- Stay future focused: taking steps beyond 3 year plans
- Bridge research and innovation to implementation
- Deliver long term quality of life and wealth generation

### **Key Lessons:**

What key lessons have you/your municipality learned through the process of:

- designing;
- obtaining approval;
- implementing; and
- evaluating your practice?

Include any problems, surprises, and unanticipated benefits. (e.g. "We realized that we needed to spend more time...")

Building relationships takes time and these must be built one by one through repeated interaction with each other. We have had great success in the interaction of the Urban Alliance Co-directors, who have developed sound first-name-basis relationships well outside their disciplines. The result is significantly broader thinking and strategic insight into problems. Working together across disciplines is important and it's where the best innovations are. I believe this will prove to be a very powerful advantage for Calgary from a number of perspectives.

Another lesson is that we thought Urban Alliance is a no brainer. Despite this, we were surprised to find that extreme caution prevails even for no brainers. The lesson here is: people come on board in their own time and for their own reasons. There are early adopters and late enthusiasts. We are now seeing some of the latter happen (this is good to see, and we are glad we didn't pressure them to do so sooner).

Another lesson is to go slow, which we were advised to do at the outset: walk before you run. By not setting expectations too high, we maintained support and developed increasing rather than decreasing enthusiasm.

### **Advice to Municipal Peers:**

What advice would you give to another municipality that is considering adopting your practice? Is there anything you might have done differently?

- 1) Start with your strongest existing relationships.
- 2) Ensure you have champions with the vision, passion and longevity to carry it out.
- 3) Create a small, strong and freewheeling enablement team with a passion to continually knit it all together.
- 4) Stay focused on the long term there are a lot of bumps between you and success - don't give up early.
- 5) Avoid bureaucracy focus on relationships.

## **PRACTICE UPDATES**

### **New Information:**

There may be some new information to add since this practice was first posted. This is especially true if:

- a new process has been implemented in your

municipality;

- there are new practice evaluation results; or
- there has been a change affecting organizational direction. For example, explain how new economic conditions or a new vision/strategy affect the practice.

Please indicate those changes here. Don't forget to list any new documents that may be useful to your peers. Then go to "Other Information" to attach the new documents.

## OTHER INFORMATION

### Suggestions:

Please list relevant information sources that others might use or you would be willing to share (courses, Web sites, literature, experts).

Please see our website  
[www.urban-alliance.ca](http://www.urban-alliance.ca)

It outlines our structure, players, themes, projects, events etc.

### Documents & Attachments:

Please attach (using the "Browse" button below) any documents you would be willing to share with others interested in your practice (e.g. a bylaw, a policy, approval documents, templates).

\* Note: If you do not have an electronic copy of a document, please send Municipal Excellence a paper copy for scanning to:

Alberta Municipal Affairs  
 Municipal Excellence Network  
 17th Floor, Commerce Place  
 10155-102 Street  
 Edmonton, AB  
 T5J 4L4

### Nominations:

Do you have any suggestions of other individuals or municipalities with municipal practices that we should add to the Municipal Excellence network? Please list their practice, municipality, and contact information.

Or, e-mail [menet@gov.ab.ca](mailto:menet@gov.ab.ca) and let us know about a municipal colleague that has a really good way of doing things.

## COMMENTS

Have we missed something; anything you'd like to add to the areas we have touched on, or an area we have not mentioned?