

“Government Lite”

The Town of Fort Myers Beach, Florida is pleased to submit the Town’s philosophy of governance as an example of creative problem-solving in the public sector. We call our philosophy of governance, “Government Lite”. We believe that our methodology has caused us to incubate a new government life form. The goal is to have local control while attempting to keep that local control simple, thin and rather elegant. As the need for new services grow or expands, the Town attempts to find other groups or agencies private or public that take on those responsibilities rather than the thin elegant local government structure. If you refuse to allow your government to grow, then protection of a growing bureaucracy or turf is never an issue. Instead your government is looking to incubate, create and spin-off, all of which are very private sector, entrepreneurial and corporate culture goals. Similarly your government is turned outward always in a service delivery mode rather than inward looking to create and extend bureaucracy and process. We believe that this philosophy launches the public sector in the same directions as the private sector. Government is pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities to effectively deal with community issues and problems. The ability to effectively accomplish this for our residents is comparable to the private corporation announcing profits to its stockholders. Dollars that the government returns directly, in community services and capital projects, to the community are the profits. Government has to attempt to minimize overhead so that those government dollars are directly providing services. Many government structures confuse this necessary element of “government lite”. Those governments turn inward and spent all their revenue on internal gyrations that produce no services. On the surface, they may be cutting back and holding the line on taxes, but the resident is getting nothing but internal administrative tail chasing for their money.

As we try to explain “government lite”, the following questions will be addressed to wit; **{1}What problem(s) does your innovative program address?**

“Government Lite” attempts to address the vary basic problem that people try to articulate when asked about local government. People want local control over local issues yet they are reluctant to form a new city or town because of the fear of bloating bureaucracy and corresponding tax increases. Further people express feelings of alienation from government—that decisions are being made about their lives and they are not a part of the process.

The Town of Fort Myers Beach was formed on December 31, 1995, with the philosophy of ‘government lite’. The citizens wanted local control over issues, but wanted a very limited government with few employees and a very limited budget. The Charter of the new town was very restrictive and limited financing and bonding options. All of these preliminary restrictions were developed to prevent this new government from growing. From the very beginning, most citizens and the media loudly verbalized that such a philosophy was an idealistic pipedream at the most and election rhetoric at the least. They opined that the budget process would show that it couldn’t be done and that the new Town would go bankrupt immediately and also lose it’s way and philosophy immediately. Our local daily newspaper editorialized that they would be watching us and basically watching us fail. Perhaps, absent a well formed philosophy of ‘government lite’, that would have happened. Instead, we created a form of governance that does work and does some truly amazing things for our Town. Upon the Town’s first anniversary, that same local newspaper editorialized profuse congratulations at our unexpected success.

The Town has a seasonal peak population of 35,000 with a year round population of 7,588. The Town is a barrier island and is approximately 7 miles long. The Town totally encompasses the island and extends from bridge to bridge, which means that we only have two ways out of town. We have a median household income of \$39,031 (1990). We have a mix of residential and business/tourist uses on a very congested and narrow island. We have a number of serious problems to deal with that have been lingering in the community for years. We have severe evacuation problems in the event of hurricane. Our main and only arterial is designated as a constrained roadway. Due to limitations imposed by reason of location on a barrier island, this roadway will always remain a two lane roadway and will not be widened. Despite this fact, we must continue to explore ways

of dealing with gridlock traffic during season. This problem has been explored and studied for years by the County. We must also deal with severe parking problems due to our County public beaches and 30 plus public beach accesses. We have antiquated zoning and limited dollars to solve problems that have county wide implications. We are attempting to redevelop our Downtown, save significant historical and archaeological property and deal with the pull and tug of escalating property values, redevelopment pressures and the desire to preserve open space and ecologically significant land. We are attempting to develop stringent but fair regulations on personal watercraft, parasail, noise, towing, signs, building heights, commercial zoning and accessory apartments. All of the fore-mentioned within the first year of

existence. The various problems that we face are described only to offer evidence of the complexities we are voluntarily facing. So that one could not argue that “government lite only works where nothing much is going on.

{2} Who are the current and potential beneficiaries of your program?

The beneficiaries include all of our tourists, business owners, seasonal population and our permanent resident population.

{3} Describe the innovation. Please emphasize its creative and novel elements.

“Government Lite” is an attempt to allow for hands-on participation in almost all phases of local government coupled with a philosophy of a simple, thin, and rather elegant government structure. The government does not grow and government funds are targeted for delivery of services and capital projects. The Town relies on; 1] a volunteer Local Planning Agency that is using teams of volunteers to assist in the state mandated comprehensive planning process 2] An unpaid Town Council that relies on voice-mail, E-mail, the Internet and regularly held meetings to stay in close contact with residents 3] A pool of volunteers that tackle a variety of government functions from remodeling of Town Hall to submitting grant applications 4] A paid staff of three employees 5] Volunteers to answer phones at Town Hall on a scheduled basis and volunteers who copy and distribute agendas for Council meetings and for the Local Planning Agency meetings.

The spin-off phenomena that was described has also worked well. The Town has a pool group (The Build a Pool Foundation), which is taking responsibility for operation and maintenance of a new community pool to be built in the Town. The Town will not add any employees or costs to its budget in this regard. Instead this new group made up of individuals particularly interested in and concerned about a community pool will direct the future of this project. Similarly, the Town has won a \$1 Million dollar grant to purchase a historical and archaeological site which would have been developed into a small subdivision absent the Town’s formation. This site will be operated by the Town’s Historical Society as a Learning Center. Again the Town will not add employees or operating function. The Town is currently working on implementation of a redevelopment plan for the Downtown and has won a Florida MainStreet Grant in a joint-venture with the Chamber of Commerce. The employee dedicated to the MainStreet project will work for the Chamber until a Downtown Redevelopment Authority is formed.

The initial downside of these spin-offs is that each will duplicate some internal functions such as budget, personnel, purchasing etc., but the trade-off in preventing bureaucratic bloat is significant. There are an abundance of positives such as; a] the more spin-offs that you do allow more people in the community to be involved ; b] every spin-off created enlarges the Town’s networking capability and allows for the dispersal of information and the ability to rapidly “rally the troops so to speak”; c] each spin-off stays focused on its particular mission with the Town government moving among the spin-offs disseminating information and offering coordination as a type of big picture cheerleader; d] Town staff also continues to explore shared efficiencies among the spin-offs and the Town government and looks to create new spin-offs as new projects are discussed by the community.

{4} What are the most significant achievements of the program? (Cite the best verifiable evidence.)

The first year of “Government Lite” has accomplished more than anyone anticipated. The Town’s first budget reduced the millage rate that was paid by the residents prior to the Town’s creation. In other words the citizens of Fort Myers Beach saved money by becoming a Town and as an added bonus took local control of their issues and future. The Town applied for two significant grants in its first year and received both of them. The first grant was secured to purchase one of the most significant historical and archaeological sites in Florida, and the second grant assists Downtown redevelopment. Neither would have inured to the island in the absence of incorporation. The Town was also able to capture state revenues that would have flowed to the County with no guarantee that they would be spent on the island. The bottom line is that the residents directly saved real dollars from their own pockets and at the same time captured over \$two million dollars that will be spent on local projects by their locally elected Council. In a very real private sector sense, the residents of Fort Myers Beach made significant dollars by incorporating and utilizing the governance philosophy of “government lite’.

This is particularly important to combat the public’s feelings of alienation referenced at the beginning of this monograph. People believe that even if their government saves money or makes money that those dollars will just be absorbed by government bloat , covered up within a huge bureaucracy that is formed or wasted on the proverbial million dollar

screwdriver. Our government will not grow or bloat. Simplicity is used in budget materials so that every expenditure and revenue is clearly detailed and explained. The budget document is concise and clear.

The real crowning achievement of ‘government lite’ has been the revived spirit of enthusiasm, trust and support being shown by most residents towards each other and their elected leaders. In an area with a long history of deep-set differences of opinion and perspective and after a long and bitter fight over whether to incorporate or not incorporate where the subsequently elected council was split between those that voted in favor of incorporation and those that voted against, these expressions of optimism and good will that were all documented in the various newspapers servings our area are the most remarkable sign of success.

{5} How replicable is the program? What obstacles might others encounter?

Before Estero Island became a Town, we had a tremendous problem finding our identity. The Island was split in its vision of itself. We weren’t sure if we were a tourist destination or a family neighborhood. We weren’t sure whether we were withering or growing. If it can work here, in an area that has had trouble defining its identity for so long, “government lite” can be reproduced in almost any area. It will most likely be met with a healthy dose of skepticism that can be overcome only by a real effort on the part of the participants to listen and learn from each other.

{6} List all current funding sources, with dollar and percentage contributions for each. If applicable, include separate subtotals for public and private funds and sources. Provide details of any unusual financial features not described elsewhere.

Ad Valorem Taxes (property taxes)	\$1,105,000	35.0%
State Revenue Sharing (includes state cigarette, sales and gas tax)	465,100	14.8%
County Gas Tax	452,600	14.5%
Franchise Fees and Interest Income	85,000	2.7%
Grant Revenues	1,040,000	33.0%
Total	\$3,147,700	

It is significant to note that these are all moneys that will now be spent within the corporate limits of the Town. In the past, the residents of Estero Island because of their ownership of valuable beach property felt that the County treated the area as a ‘cash cow’, collecting substantial property taxes yet spending and returning very little back to the community. This is a common complaint on the federal, state and local level. Utilizing “government lite”, the Town’s administrative costs are budgeted at \$283,950, less than 10% of the total budget. The rest of the dollars in this budget are being used to provide and deliver services for the Town. “Government Lite” does not allow a government structure to turn inward and spend its time on administrative function. By structure and by budget direction, governance is directed outward toward problem-solving and service delivery.

1997 APPLITATION: PROGRAM DATA SHEET

Leave this box blank. It will be completed by Innovations staff.

For information and instructions on completing the data sheet, please go to page 3. APPLICATION NUMBER _____

A

Program Name: **“Government Lite”**

1. Type of Jurisdiction sponsoring the program (select one):

- a. _____ U.S. Federal Government
- b. _____ U.S. Territorial Government
- c. _____ State
- d. _____ County
- e. xxxx _____ Town
- f. _____ School District
- g. _____ Tribal Government
- h. _____ Special or Regional Authority
- i. _____ Government Corporation
- j. _____ Multi-jurisdiction Partnership (explain): _____

2. Name of jurisdiction (selected above) sponsoring/administering the program:

The Town of Fort Myers Beach, Florida

3. Population of Jurisdiction: **7500 year round and 40,000+ in season**

4. Name of Government Unit sponsoring/administering the program:

The Town of Fort Myers Beach, Florida

5. Contact Information: Mrs.
 Name: Marsha Segal-George
 Title: Town Manager
 Department/Division:
 Address (no P.O. boxes): 2523 Estero Boulevard
 City: Fort Myers Beach State: Florida Zip Code: 33932
 Telephone: (941)765 -0202 Fax (941)765- 0909

6. Start Date (m/d/yr): December 31, 1995

7. Funding Source (specify percentages):

Ad Valorem Taxes (property taxes)	\$1,105,000	35.0%
State Revenue Sharing (includes state cigarette, sales and gas tax)	465,100	14.8%
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Total	\$3,147,700	100.0%

- a. 0% Federal
- b. 47.8 State
- c. 49.5% Local
- d. 2.7% Other Public
- e. 0% Private & Other

8. How and where did you learn about the Innovations Program? Please specify name(s) and/or source(s):
- a. Professional/Trade Publication _____
 - b. Newspaper/Magazine _____
 - c. Television/Radio/Film/Video _____
 - d. Professional Conference _____
 - e. Colleague _____
 - f. Received Application in the Mail _xxxxx_ _____
 - g. Departmental/Agency Circulation _____
 - h. Internet (specify location and application used) _____

9. Has this program previously applied for an Innovations Award? No Yes
 If _____ yes, _____ list _____ year(s) _____ and _____ status _____ of _____ prior _____ applications: _____

10. Policy Function (Please select the ONE policy category that best represents the public purpose that the program aims to serve. We use this information to classify the program for evaluation.)

I. MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE

- a. Administration & Management
- b. Arts & Culture
- c. Budgeting & Public Finance
- d. Elections, Civil Liberties & Civic Affairs
- e. Intergovernmental & Public Relations
- f. Telecommunications, Technology & Use of Technology
- g. Human Resources & Employee Relations
- h. Public Safety (Fire & Transport)
- i. U.S. Defense Services (Civil & Military)

IV. PROTECTIVE SERVICES

- a. Courts & Administration
- b. Corrections, Probation & Sentencing
- c. Emergency Services & Preparedness
- d. Juvenile Justice (Corrections, Prevention & Sentencing)
- e. Public Prosecution & Representation
- f. Public Safety (Police & Federal Law Enforcement)

******Since we are submitting our governance philosophy as the innovation, we don't fit just one category under management and governance. Instead sections a., b., c., d., e., f., g., and h are all a part of why we believe that our governance philosophy has turned out to be an outstanding example of creative problem solving.**

II. CAPITAL & ENVIRONMENTAL

- a. Conservation & Public Lands Management
- b. Energy
- c. Pollution Control & Abatement
- d. Recycling and Solid Waste
- e. Transportation
- f. Water

III. COMMUNITY SERVICES

- a. Agricultural & Rural Development
- b. Community Development
- c. Economic, Industrial & Trade Development
- d. Housing Assistance & Development
- e. Open Space, Land Use & Recreation

V. HUMAN SERVICES

- a. Consumer & Workers' Safety
- b. Education (preK-12)
- c. Education (Adult, Continuing & Higher)
- d. Health Care (Access & Insurance)
- e. Health Care (Acute, Primary & Long Term)
- f. Health Care (Education, Prevention & Public Health)
- g. Job Training, Placement & Retention
- h. Substance Abuse Treatment/Prevention

VI. SOCIAL SERVICES

- a. Income Support
- b. Social Security (Administration & Reform)
- d. Social Services (Children's Services)
- e. Social Services (Family Services)
- f. Social Services (Elderly Services)
- g. Social Services (Disability Services)

11. Subject Area: Provide up to five additional keyword, subject, or client descriptors: Government Lite, a philosophy of governance

12. Certification and Signature: To the best of my knowledge. The information contained in this application is accurate.

Name of Agency Director (print): _____

Title (print):

Signature and Date:

APPLICATION DEADLINE: 5 P.M., JANUARY 8, 1997

“Government Lite”

The Town of Fort Myers Beach, Florida recently submitted the Town’s philosophy of governance as an application for the 1997 Innovations in American Government Awards. This award program is sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and recognizes examples of creative problem-solving in the public sector .

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