



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Request for City participation in tourism hospitality excellence program - "We've been Expecting You"

Date:	May 18, 2011
To:	Economic Development Committee
From:	General Manager, Economic Development and Culture
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:/2011/Cluster A/EDC/ECON DEV/June 2/ed1106-018

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek City Council participation in the implementation of "Welcome to Toronto... We've Been Expecting You" (WBEY) – a new hospitality excellence and customer service initiative targetting front-line workers, residents and visitors to Toronto. The program is intended to engage residents and help visitors feel welcomed and well-treated while in Toronto – ultimately motivating return trips, and increasing the economic impact of tourism on the city.

City Council previously approved funding for the initiative as an outcome from the "Premier Ranked Tourist Destination" project (2008). The program it approved has now been developed and is being rolled out to the public. It has three streams of activity: training for front-line workers, welcoming signage promoting the program and telling visitors where they can find information, and a resident engagement platform for Torontonians to share their passion and knowledge about the city.

The private sector and tourism industry has started to embrace the program and is providing the majority of funding. But its success depends upon the City joining the industry in actively participating in WBEY and advocating for people demonstrating community pride and helpfulness when encountering visitors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Economic Development and Culture recommends that:

1. City Council support Toronto's tourism sector by joining the industry in welcoming visitors through the "We've been Expecting You" Hospitality Excellence Program (WBEY),
2. City Council distribute this report to all City Divisions, Agencies, Boards and Commissions and request that they consider how they might participate in and support the program within the framework of their approved Budgets and consult with the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture in this regard as appropriate. Forms of participation might include:
 - a. Integrating WBEY content and principles into customer service expectations and training for front-line staff likely to encounter visitors while performing their duties
 - b. Adding formal WBEY training sessions to the City's training calendar
 - c. Displaying WBEY bumper stickers on City operated vehicles likely to be seen by the travelling public
 - d. Displaying WBEY signage, posters, decals, etc. at facilities and counters likely to be seen by people visiting Toronto
3. City Council Members consider distributing information about WBEY to their constituents and Ward businesses and becoming advocates for the program,
4. City Council request that the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture report back to the Economic Development Committee on a regular basis about the performance metrics, targets and results from the WBEY program.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

City Council at its meeting on May 26 and 27, 2008, adopted clause ED13.3 which endorsed the "Premier Ranked Tourist Destination Project Summary and Recommendations" as a guide for strengthening Toronto's tourism sector, and directed the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture to continue to provide support to the tourism sector and to use the PRTD recommendations and implementation

strategy as a guide to setting work program and budget priorities.
(<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/ed/bgrd/backgroundfile-12804.pdf>)

As is further set out below, the key recommendations included introducing a hospitality excellence program to engage residents and promote a city-wide culture of outstanding customer service, improving Toronto's value proposition for tourists.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The PRTD Project was an industry-led and City of Toronto managed initiative designed to determine Toronto's strengths and weaknesses as a tourist destination and recommend how it could become more successful. Overall, the PRTD identified 99 opportunities to strengthen tourism in Toronto. A "Toronto Destination Development Leadership Committee" was formed to prioritize the actions and drive an implementation strategy. This group was chaired by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Tourism and included senior representation from Tourism Toronto, the Greater Toronto Hotel Association, Toronto Board of Trade, Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Ontario Restaurant, Hotel and Motel Association, Attractions Ontario, the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, and the City of Toronto Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Division.

The Leadership Committee determined that the top priority gap that needed a new initiative was in the area of hospitality. Although Toronto received satisfactory ratings from visitors as a welcoming destination offering good customer service, the Committee felt that Toronto had the potential to be excellent. Aspiring to excellence would ensure that visitors felt welcomed and appreciated wherever they went in the city. They would encounter friendly and well-informed people willing to take the time to assist them. Achieving this goal would better ensure that visitors felt comfortable exploring the city, would do more activities and spend more money, would be eager to come back again, and would recommend Toronto to their friends.

The City of Toronto, Tourism Toronto and the provincial Ministry of Tourism agreed to co-fund the development of a hospitality excellence program. The Committee requested the City to lead the initiative since it felt that "The City" was best positioned to lay out the welcome mat. It is the only organization that has the mandate to represent the municipality and its residents and business community as a whole.

The program was named "We've been Expecting You" (WBEY), reflecting the core objective of getting prepared to host our visitors. A \$600,000 budget to develop and launch the program was put in place over 2009/10. City Council approved a \$100,000 increase to the Economic Development and Culture Division's Base Operating Budget for these purposes in 2009, and the Ministry of Tourism and Tourism Toronto each provided the City with \$200,000 in contributions.

The program has been developed in close association with Tourism Toronto and an industry advisory committee, and in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. To be successful, it needs to involve not only the hotels and major attractions that we

generally consider to be in the "tourism industry" – but also front-line workers in stores and restaurants, taxi drivers, public transit, car rental agencies, festivals, all of the various places our visitors are likely to find themselves. Average citizens also have an important role to play in making visitors feel welcome, and in becoming more active hosts to the seven million people a year who come to Toronto primarily to visit friends and relatives.

Reaching such a broad range of audiences required a program with three streams:

- a. A customer-service training program that incorporates Toronto-specific content and offers practical tools to front-line workers in a flexible setting. The first eight training workshops are taking place in May and June 2011 and will equip about 160 front line workers to practice WBEY principles and 80 "trainers" to deliver WBEY workshops in their own organizations. An on-line toolkit has been developed as an ongoing resource for workers and residents (www.toronto.ca/wbey), and web based self-learning modules will be launched in Fall 2011 to reach individuals and small businesses. A second series of training workshops also will be scheduled in the Fall
- b. A signage and collateral initiative that welcomes visitors and encourages businesses, organizations and front-line workers to proudly display their commitment to the program. Thousands of items already have been distributed to the industry. Bumper stickers on taxi cabs and window decals and posters in businesses are starting to be displayed, and will become more visible in the coming months as will street banners, transit shelter ads, and a mobile information and ambassador service which travels throughout the city during the summer months. Tourism Toronto is already widely using the WBEY message on signage and welcoming messages to conference delegates.
- c. An online resident engagement initiative – xoTO.ca – that provides a platform for Torontonians to share their passion and enthusiasm for the city. xoTO.ca will be launched in June. People already are following xoTO on its recently opened twitter and facebook pages.

WBEY currently is moving out its developmental phase and into the public domain. Its success depends on City Council embracing the program along-side the industry and demonstrating its leadership in program development and delivery.

COMMENTS

The WBEY program is largely funded by the private sector, and is scalable and adaptable for businesses and organizations large and small. All touch points across the city can benefit from the shift in attitude and behaviour that a focus on hospitality excellence and love for our community provides. To date, industry enthusiasm and appreciation for the program has been strong. Volunteers have donated many hours of their time to help shape its details and tactics. All 240 spaces in the initial series of training workshops were quickly filled.

Visitors also come into contact with public sector workers as they use our parks, the TTC, parking lots, taxis, libraries, recreation facilities and walk along the street. As with restaurants, taxis, and traditional tourist attractions, it is important that the City and its Agencies, Boards and Commissions also embrace and participate in the program.

Much can be done without additional funding. An endorsement from the highest levels of the City of Toronto, as well as the participation from key Divisions, Agencies, Boards and Commissions, would go a long way to encouraging an attitudinal shift in residents and the city's front line. Possible forms of participation include:

- Integrating WBEY content and principles into existing customer service training modules for front line staff,
- Adding WBEY workshops to the staff training calendar,
- Encouraging staff to share our city with visitors and to use WBEY resources to become better prepared to do so (e.g. those available at www.toronto.ca/wbey and www.xoto.ca)
- Displaying WBEY bumper stickers on City operated vehicles
- Displaying WBEY signage, posters, decals, etc. at facilities and counters likely to be seen by people visiting Toronto
- Becoming advocates for the program – welcome and assist the visitors we encounter ourselves and encourage others to do so as well
- Becoming enthusiastic Toronto hosts – use the xoTo platforms to learn what others know and love about our city and share our own perspectives; show our city off to visiting friends and relatives.

Toronto's tourism industry has asked the City to lead a culture shift to elevate the level of welcoming our community accords visitors. The We've been Expecting You program provides the necessary tools. Success will make visiting Toronto a more pleasurable experience for the over 20 million people a year who travel to our city. They will get to know us better, spend more money, come back more often and recommend us to their friends. Success also will enable our local residents to deepen their knowledge and enjoyment of the city, take pride in the community and be better prepared to share their knowledge and passion with visitors. Success will generate more revenue for local businesses and attractions.

Success requires City Council to join the industry in participating in the We've Been Expecting You Program and advocating for people demonstrating community pride and helpfulness when encountering visitors. The 2015 Pan Am Games and 2014 World Pride events that have chosen our city make it especially timely for the City to “prepare” to welcome the world by instilling the highest level of customer service excellence across all touch points in the City of Toronto.

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