Communities in Bloom International Challenge

Growing Great Places Together

THE PROGRAM

The International Challenge is an invitation from Communities in Bloom to municipalities from around the world.

Communities in Bloom is a volunteer and partnership-driven charitable organization that uses a multi-tiered competitive evaluation process to foster community strength, involvement and continuous improvement. This is accomplished by nurturing environmental sustainability, enhancements of green spaces, and heritage conservation, in cultural and natural environments encompassing municipal, residential, commercial, and institutional spaces. National beautification programs have flourished in Europe – including Great Britain, France and Ireland – for decades, and were the inspiration for Communities in Bloom.

The program began in 1995 with 29 Canadian communities and has grown to improve the quality of life in hundreds of participating communities in the provincial, national and international editions.

Trained volunteer judges evaluate communities and the overall contributions of municipality, businesses & institutions and residents, including volunteer efforts in regard to the environment, green spaces and natural heritage.

Since 1995, communities have recognized numerous benefits from participating in the program:

Economic benefits

- Best practices and information exchange
- Valuable information and feedback from the judges
- Marketing and promotional opportunities
- Positive benefits for the tourism, hospitality and retail industries

Social benefits

- Increased civic pride, community involvement and improved quality of life
- Mobilization of citizens, groups, businesses and municipality working together
- Participation from all ages and walks of life learning more about their community
- Information exchanges with provincial, national and international communities

Environmental stewardship through the enhancement of green spaces

- Improving air quality through tree planting
- Preservation of green spaces
- Improvements in energy and water conservation
- Awareness of environmental sustainability

Within the context of climate change and environmental concerns, all communities involved in the program can be proud of their efforts, which provide real and meaningful environmental solutions and benefit all of society.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Community Appearance reflects an overall effort by the municipality, businesses, institutions and the residents throughout the community to create great first impressions and a sense that there is continuous attention and upkeep to critical elements of a community that benefit quality of life and economic vitality Elements for evaluation are: parks and green spaces, medians, boulevards, sidewalks, streets; municipal, commercial, institutional and residential properties; ditches, road shoulders, vacant lots, signs and buildings; weed control, litter clean-up, graffiti prevention/removal and vandalism deterrent programs.

Environmental Action pertains to the impact of human activities on the environment and the subsequent efforts and achievements of the community with respect to environmental stewardship, policies, by-laws, programs and best practices for waste reduction and landfill diversion, composting sites, landfill sites, hazardous waste collections, water conservation, energy conservation, and activities under the guiding principles of sustainable development pertaining to green spaces.

Heritage Conservation includes efforts to preserve and protect both natural and cultural heritage within the community. Preservation of natural heritage pertains to policies, plans and actions concerning all elements of biodiversity including flora and fauna ecosystems and associated geological structures and formations. Cultural conservation represents the "persona" of a community and refers to the heritage that helps define the community including the legacy of tangible elements such as heritage buildings, monuments, memorials, cemeteries, artifacts, museums and intangible elements such as traditions, customs, festivals and celebrations.

Tree Management Woodlands, Canopy Management, Urban and Rural Forestry includes the efforts of the municipality, businesses, institutions, and residents with regards to written policies, by-laws, standards for tree management protection (selection, planting, and maintenance), long and short-term management plans, tree replacement policies, pollinator-friendly tree selection, tree inventory including heritage, memorial, and commemorative trees, and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programs.

Landscape includes planning, design, construction and maintenance of parks, green spaces and cemeteries suitable for the intended use and location on a year-round basis. Elements for evaluation include native and introduced materials; biodiversity, materials, and constructed elements; appropriate integration of hard surfaces and art elements, use of turf and groundcovers. Landscape design should harmonize the interests of all sectors of the community and provide safe and secure public spaces. Standards of execution and maintenance should demonstrate best practices, including quality of naturalization, use of groundcovers and wildflowers along with turf management.

Plant and Floral Displays evaluates the efforts of the municipality, businesses, institutions and residents to design, plan, execute, and maintain plant and floral displays of high-quality standards. Evaluation includes the design and arrangements of flowers and plants (annuals, perennials, bulbs, ornamental grasses, edible plants, water efficient and pollinator friendly plants) in the context of originality, distribution, location, diversity and balance, colour, and harmony. It also pertains to flowerbeds, carpet bedding, containers, baskets and window boxes

BLOOM RATINGS AND LEVELS

Bloom ratings are awarded based on the scoring of the evaluation form:

Up to 55%: 1 bloom
56% to 63%: 2 blooms
64% to 72%: 3 blooms
73% to 81%: 4 blooms
82% and up: 5 blooms

At the 5 blooms rating, there are 4 levels:

82 to 83.9%: 5 Blooms
84 to 86.9%: 5 Blooms (Bronze)
87 to 89.9%: 5 Blooms (Silver)
90% and up: 5 Blooms (Gold)

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EVALUATION SECTORS:

Municipal:

- Municipal properties, parks and green spaces, streets, streetscapes
- Properties owned and run by municipality such as museums, historical sites

Business and Institutions: Properties owned and managed by

- Business: commercial sector, shopping centres, Business Improvement Areas (BIA), industrial parks, manufacturing plants
- Institutions: schools, universities, churches, hospitals, service and community organization buildings (such as YMCA, Legion), private museums, Government and Crown Corporations buildings (such as Canada Post, provincial and federal parks, etc.)
- Tourism bureaus and Chamber of Commerce offices
- Farms: in rural communities, farms can be considered in this section

Residential:

- Citizens and citizen groups acting within their own properties

Community Involvement:

The principle of community involvement is so fundamental to the program that it is considered in each segment of the evaluation.

- Individuals, community organizations and citizen groups – all contributing to various aspects of community improvement
- Organized clubs such as horticultural societies, garden clubs, and community associations.