

Continuous Improvement Centre of Excellence Update

Recommendation:

THAT Council receive the report titled “Continuous Improvement Centre of Excellence Update” dated March 4, 2025, for information.

Report Purpose and Summary Statement:

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Council outlining the approach to continuous improvement of City services and programs through operation of a Centre of Excellence (COE).

Previous Council Action:

On October 10, 2023, in Council Workshop, Council endorsed the establishment of corporate continuous improvement activities within a Centre of Excellence as one of the objectives and key results supporting the Strategic Plan and approved the associated budget allocation for objectives and key results.

Strategic Alignment:

Governance & Corporate Excellence

Climate Impact:

Continuous Improvement efforts delivered through the Centre of Excellence help to identify corporate activities that can improve efficiency and reduce use of resources leading to potential reductions in the City’s carbon impact.

Continuous Improvement Centre of Excellence Update

To: Mayor and Council

File number: [01-0685]

BACKGROUND:

On October 10, 2023, in Council Workshop, Council endorsed the establishment of corporate continuous improvement activities within a Centre of Excellence as one of the objectives and key results supporting the Strategic Plan 2023-2026. In 2024, considerable work was undertaken to establish new service lines, policies, and templates to support the development of a Centre of Excellence focused on continuous improvement. Bhawna Sehgal, a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt certified expert in continuous improvement, was appointed as Continuous Improvement Analyst to establish the procedures and guidelines for the Centre of Excellence, and to undertake training and lead continuous improvement major projects in collaboration with departmental staff.

ANALYSIS:

Discussion:

The Continuous Improvement Centre of Excellence (COE) was established to provide a hub that focuses on the promotion, development and implementation of best practices, methodologies and tools related to process improvement and optimization. The Centre of Excellence was established to respond to Council's Strategic Plan 2023-2026 objective: *"Ensure the City is organizationally resilient, ready to adapt to a changing environment"*. Continuous improvement efforts enable the City to respond to changing conditions in the economy and with our key customer groups and community members. They enable departments to review and adjust operations in a structured and methodical way to optimize use of resources and reduce waste wherever possible.

There are currently three major elements that comprise the Continuous Improvement Centre of Excellence.

- A) **WISE Program** – a training series for staff in principles and practical skills for process reviews, operational analysis, and continuous improvement.
- a) **LIFT Program** – COE staff led projects to undertake process reviews and improvements for medium to large scale projects that drive business transformation.
- b) **Advisory Services & Resources** – staff receive requests from across City departments for support with development of standard operating procedures, reviews of processes and other aspects of continuous improvement and provide templates and support for departments to lead smaller projects.

Over time, these programs will be augmented with additional services to support staff with project and program management, change management and implementation of lean principles in key areas of City operations creating an Agile Hub for continuous improvement. This Hub within the Centre of Excellence will enable cross-fertilization of ideas and case studies of success to inspire and improve future projects. Together, these continuous improvement programs will foster skills of staff to generate a city-wide culture of agile innovation.

WISE Program

The Workflow Improvements for Sustained Excellence (WISE) program involves different training programs for staff. A key part of this training are three progressively advanced levels of training to first introduce, and then develop, staffs' skills at understanding their work through the lens of continuous improvement and then taking on small projects to improve processes and/or standardize documentation for departments using a proven, structured methodology. Training is delivered in a combination of online and in person sessions. Stickers are awarded to staff completing each level –Gold, Red, and Teal – as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. WISE logo and Course Completion Stickers

Staff have shown significant interest in these courses and display their stickers with pride on their laptops or in their workstations. All staff are eligible to take the level 1 course (Gold) online. For the more advanced courses (Red and Teal), these are done in cohorts with managers and supervisors nominating specific staff for the course based on the needs of their role. To date, over 500 staff have completed level 1 (Gold) training. Two cohorts (25 staff total) have

completed the level 2 (Red) training, and an additional level 2 cohort is currently being scheduled. Finally, one cohort is preparing to take level 3 (Teal) advanced training in Q1 & Q2 of 2025.

LIFT Program

In its first nine months of operation, the Continuous Improvement Centre of Excellence (COE) has undertaken four major process improvement projects in the following operational areas:

- a) Civic Addressing
- b) Business Planning
- c) Business Licensing
- d) Communications and Public Engagement

These projects have been extremely successful and have created a high benchmark for the Centre of Excellence in terms of the approach to workshop reviews and process improvement sessions with staff in impacted departments. The success of these early process improvement projects has led to several additional projects being initiated for 2025.

Advisory Services and Resources

As departments have become familiar with the benefits gained from adopting a continuous improvement lens to their work, the Centre of Excellence has started to receive ad-hoc requests for support and advice that are delivered by the Continuous Improvement Analyst. This aspect of the Centre of Excellence includes guidance documents, templates and resources to help departments develop their own documents to codify processes and changes to their operations within a structured template.

In future, these requests will be logged through a new Continuous Improvement Centre of Excellence collaboration site where requests can be brought forward from any staff member. This will encourage a “just do it” approach to continuous improvement innovation where staff are empowered to see areas for improvement and be supported and supervised as they make minor changes to existing process steps. This will also provide a pipeline to identify more significant projects which might qualify under the LIFT program.

Evolution of the Centre of Excellence

As the Centre of Excellence continues to gather momentum projects become self-reinforcing and each review uncovers additional areas for improvement. Resources available to staff will be expanded over time to include the Agile Hub where staff can get support with related areas such as agile-driven innovation pilots, change management, project and program management, and implementation of lean principles to reduce waste and optimize service delivery.

Strategic Alignment:

The Centre of Excellence falls within the key result to “*Deploy a continuous improvement program and conduct training with a cohort of staff*” which was achieved in 2024 and noted in the Q4 2024 Update on Strategic Plan Objectives and Key Results provided to Council in February 2025. Now that the Centre of Excellence is established, the work of continuous improvement has been fully operationalized and will continue under the Strategic Development, Communications and Public Engagement Department annual workplan.

CONCLUSION:

This report provides an update on the establishment of the Continuous Improvement Centre of Excellence as part of Council’s Strategic Plan 2023-2026. It outlines the components of the Centre of Excellence and provides data on successes to date. The Centre of Excellence embodies the City’s commitment to continuous improvement and to ensuring that process and operational reviews are undertaken in a systematic way that will reduce waste, optimize use of City staff and resources and ensure the best service to the community.

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Report Approval Details

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Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Feb 27, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Zvi Lifshiz, Director Strategic Development, Communications & Public Engagement

Carolyn Mushata, Director of Legislative Services and Corporate Officer

Scott Hartman, Chief Administrative Officer