



## City of Fort Collins Logo Case Study

### Overview

The City of Fort Collins, population of 134,000, began rolling out a new logo in February 2008. Citizens cried out and asked the City to reconsider replacing the well-known, 30 year old, organizational logo.

In order to connect with the public and educate them on the project, a swift public input process was developed. Since so much of the communication from the public was via the online newspaper blogs and emails to City leaders, the City developed both online and in person opportunities for public engagement.

At the end of the process, when a revised logo was chosen, we had achieved renewed credibility and community buy-in due to the community engagement.

### Background

Why do communities go through a brand process? In Fort Collins, it was an economic development strategy recommended by a citizen-led economic advisory group. In 2006 a national consultant was hired to develop and clearly identify Fort Collins's destination marketing brand for businesses, visitors and residents.

Research was gathered from a variety of sources: Fort Collins stakeholders completed a handwritten vision survey, we had 75 respondents. Fort Collins residents participated in an online survey and on the street interviews, there were approximately 450 respondents. Numerous state and regional tourism professionals, group tour leaders, economic development officials and local business owners were also surveyed and interviewed. Through this extensive process, the community's core identity was revealed and multiple messaging and creative packages were created. These options were analyzed by community stakeholders and leaders in the community. They eliminated choices until one tagline and one creative package, including a logo, was chosen.

It was decided unanimously that the community partners involved with the project would share messaging and the design templates. The City would use the tagline and logo. The decision to phase in a new logo was not taken lightly. It took months to research the inventory of City property with logos and identify costs and reorder schedules.

The City of Fort Collins began phasing-in a new City organization logo in February 2008. The old logo was created in 1974; its small font and multiple gradients of grey

were difficult to use in many ways. Technology staff and vendors who needed to stitch or screen the logo had trouble using the logo as it was designed. The look and feel of the City's old logo was also not reflective of the values of its changing, growing community. But the bottom line was that the logo was hard to read.

In February 2008 the local press was contacted to make them aware of the logo replacement. Once articles were published, City Council, the City Manager and City staff began hearing complaints and comments from the community. Citizens didn't fully understand the project or how staff could take away a beloved City symbol. One article in the media stated the price of the logo design was the entire cost of the brand research and report. Residents mistook this large number as the price of the logo. \$76,000 compared to the modest price of \$2,500. Others felt disenfranchised with the process and called for a logo contest among children, college students, or local graphic designers.

Due to overwhelmingly negative feedback, the City Manager halted the implementation in early March and directed the Communications staff to develop a new public input process to engage the community in finding a solution.

## **Objective**

Our main objective was to engage the community in a new public input process. We would use the feedback we received, along with professional recommendations, to decide on what to do about the logo.

## **Obstacles to the initial logo implementation**

People thought it cost too much money.

They thought the community should vote on it.

Parts of the community didn't want a change.

Some people didn't like the design and felt it didn't represent Fort Collins.

People were disappointed that someone from outside the community designed the logo.

Council members were contacted about the project and didn't know how to defend it.

City Manager was pressured to "do something" about it from Council.

Our community did not understand the connection among the logo, the brand results and marketing strategy.

One incorrect electronic newspaper article launched a month of negative response.

- Backed off the original "why", went back to the simple, obvious why you can't read it (the old logo).
- We clearly stated from the beginning, and throughout the process, how the new logo would be phased in, and how much the branding project cost, including developing the logo.
- Partnered with a local design firm to address the local component that so many felt was missing from the original process.

## **Public Involvement Process**

### **Leverage public interest, develop wide community engagement**

- If people are interested in a topic and truly feel disenfranchised, it's an opportunity to reach out to them and listen to what they're saying.

### **Use technology to your advantage**

The daily paper had record-breaking online reader comments associated with anything "logo."

Our online feedback page received 10,000 hits by the end of the process.

- Set up dedicated interactive webpage.
- People could list community attributes, pick a logo, and submit written comments anonymously.
- Facts about the project, staff presentations, and examples of how a new logo would look on City property were posted on *fcgov.com/yourvoice*.
- Photos of the old logo on property were also posted; these were compelling photos that showed the lack of readability.

### **Clearly communicate how feedback will be used**

- Stated early in process that we would collect feedback, that it would be heard and be part of the decision-making process.
- When we collected feedback cards at public events, we made it clear that we weren't counting votes; we needed help picking a logo and wanted to see what direction people thought we should go.

### **Change is uncomfortable to many people**

The logo topic was an umbrella issue, people used the line "don't change the logo" but also meant, 'don't change the rules,' 'don't change prices of things I buy,' 'don't build new things,' 'don't discontinue services I use,' etc.

- By having a new public input process in place, we had an extended period of time to rollout the idea of a change. People had more time to get used to the idea.
- We assured the public that the decision to implement a new logo was not taken lightly.
- Our messages also stated that we would implement a change slowly, in a fiscally and environmentally-responsible way.

### **Public discovered that people think differently**

People who supported the new logo couldn't believe some people wanted to keep the old logo. People who didn't want change couldn't believe other people didn't like the old logo.

- Results of the feedback and public outreach were evenly split between the three logo choices. This illustrated to the public that two-thirds of the people in the community thought differently than them.
- We could never please everyone, but with honest, regular communication, we got their buy-in and they felt listened to.

### **If a new logo is in your future**

Go to the public with a couple of final designs; final logos that the logo team could work with no matter what the outcome; and solicit community feedback.

Listen to the feedback, work with professional recommendations, and work as a team with a strong, consistent leader.

### **Tactics Outlined**

- Created webpage with the facts about the project, including research from the brand study, presentations made to City Council, and Frequently Asked Question section that would educate citizens. One thousand hits were recorded during the first month, and more than 10,000 by the end of the process.
- Hired a local design firm to assist with an alternate design to present to the community. This alternate design would be a balance between the outdated logo and the new, contemporary design that seemed to have little support in the community. The project earned more credibility by having a local firm involved for the second round of design.
- Held forums twice at the start of the process. Attendees learned more about the brand project, including exact costs and benefits, and were asked to give facilitators feedback on what qualities they thought were most important to be represented in a logo.
- Three logos were presented to the community through the City website, newspaper articles, and public feedback sites: the existing 35-year-old logo, the new design originally proposed, and the alternate design created by the local design firm.
- Solicited feedback from website visitors on *yourvoice* webpage, they could anonymously record comments and choose a preferred logo. More than 2,000 responses were collected.
- Met with community during a 3-day public outreach blitz. Twenty-four hours of outreach and 65.5 staff hours were invested. Approximately 2,800 feedback cards were collected.

### **Public Involvement Results**

- The results of the public outreach were inconclusive. While interest was high, results were evenly split between the three logos.
- People were glad to have been heard. Many people took extra time in our one-on-one interactions to discuss the decision and give us their opinion. We took notes to bring to the decision table.
- Staff from the City and Linden, our local design firm, further modified their designs to be more in line with what the public asked for.
- These designs were critiqued by the City Manager, community leaders and marketing professionals.
- The final decision was made by the City Manager and presented to the City employees, community and City Council July 1, 2008.

- The media reported on the decision. Community feedback was minimal. Since results were evenly split, we knew we could never please everyone. Two-thirds of the audience would be disappointed. Yet, after the final decision, there were very few complaints.
- People felt their feedback had been heard. Staff was surprised by the initial unrest in the community and surprised again by how important it was for the community to have direct contact with us as the process advanced.