Ajuntament de Barcelona

Best practices and models database of the Social Rights Section

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The Best Practices Database collects and encourages the use of best practices both in general management and in provision of care from the Social Rights Section of Barcelona City Council, be they the Council's own or with third sector participation or other municipalities. This project seeks to foster active participation by highlighting the professionals' experience which use them, as well as spreading the message of our organization, promoting the diffusion of information, knowledge and workable practices aimed at finding answers to social challenges more efficiently and effectively.

1. Origins of Best Practices Database

After many years of experience in the different departments of the Social Rights Section[1], the professionals have gained a knowledge and expertise that, sometimes, due to the complexity and dimension of our organization, is difficult to show and share.

We must face new social realities that guide us to innovate and improve current projects to guarantee the quality of services. In that sense, new professional approaches, promoting the active participation of professionals in the field of knowledge, prompt us to rethink new formulas which, coming from the same stakeholders (professionals and experts), are called to have an impact in the organization.

The management BBPP[2] project initiated in 2012, from a first definition of the Management Information Plan launched by the Section. A pilot scheme was done during 2013 to test the process, methodology and validation strategies. Improvements were implemented from 2014 and it's currently working on a permanent basis, with an annual evaluation process which guarantees ongoing improvement and adaptability to the needs identified.

The Database's goal is to identify, collect and encourage the use of best practices, both in general management and in provision of care from the Social Rights Section, be they the Council's own or with third sector participation or other municipalities

The aim is to foster the active participation of professionals, spreading the knowledge of our organization, promoting the exchange of evidence-based and workable practices, which help us to overcome challenges more efficiently and effectively.

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[1] It's currently the name of the Section.

[2] When the project was designed in 2012, other existing models were considered and the project was adapted to the particularities of our area. Some models are the Best Practices Database from the local governments of the Federation of Municipalities in Catalonia and Pi i Sunyer Foundation, as well as the Centre of Local Studies and International Cooperation.

The project's methodology and procedure is innovative, providing effective solutions while at the same time promoting mutual learning and knowledge exchange.

The database's main objective is to promote, encourage and share the technicians and professionals' knowledge. The specific goals are:

- Identify and encourage the use of the Section's Best Practices.
- Acknowledge and emphasize the professionals' work.
- Exchange of best practices.
- Gather common expertise and knowledge.
- Promote learning processes.
- Foster continued improvement in the solutions offered to the citizenship and in the way of working.

2. Methodology and validation procedure of best practices

2.1. Definition of best practices and quality criteria

Best practices (BP) are the group of useful, relevant and significant actions, (experiences, projects, activities, strategies, methodologies, toolkits, etc.), which have obtained good results in a specific context and which can trigger similar results in similar contexts. These BP can help guide and orientate professionals and/or technicians who want to launch or improve specific actions or projects.

The practices can regard to: projects addressed to different collectives; working methodologies tested and considered useful for the working routine; working processes started and finished successfully; service approaches considered as innovative where work sharing is emphasized, networking, etc. In any case, these practices must be launched and led by the Social Rights Section.

The BP must prove therefore its efficiency and good results, which may or may not be transferable partially or wholly and must have an element of innovation or continuous improvement. In order to be identified and selected as best practices, projects, practices and/or experiences must meet a group of quality criteria, which have been previously defined and adapted to our Section's specifications, and which guarantee, in an objective manner, the core elements of a best practice.

Access requirements:
- **Adequacy and belonging.** Section values: public services, people-based, non-discriminatory, innovative processes and continuous improvement which include quality aspects, criteria and planning and management standards.

Basic criteria:
- **Transferability**: capacity of being transferred to other similar contexts.

- **Innovation and continuous improvement**: practices that develop new solutions or introduce improved aspects.

Value added criteria:
- **Evaluation and quality**: capacity to adapt to new necessities, giving efficient solutions to the goals set.

- **Planning and process management**: based on a comprehensive diagnosis of needs and planning underpinned by a viable and sustainable management of the processes needed to reach the results concerning the reality where the impact is sought.

- **Leadership and participation**: capacity of a person, service or association to lead actions and manage them, promoting the active participation of the agents involved and group cohesion.
- **Transparency and communication**: level of information and skills oriented to the practice and available in the different organization levels –internal and external.

- **Resource optimization**: providing the means and strategies in accordance to the objectives.
- **Impact and sustainability**: solid results of a practice addressed to a specific collective on a long-term basis, including also the optimization of human and material strategies.

- **Multi-dimensional approach**: teamwork between agents of different areas creating synergy with a common objective, without eliminating their specific dimensions.

- **Integrity**: multi-dimensional solutions and/or multi-faceted in the face of complex needs.

2.2. Assessment tool

To guarantee a rigorous assessment of the practices accessing the Database, an objective assessment tool has been designed where each one of the eleven quality criteria is scored from 1 to 10.

For the global scoring, the basic criteria have a greater impact than the added value criteria and the first criterion doesn't count, as it's an access requirement. The qualitative assessments are collected. The practices which access the Database must register a final score greater than 4.

2.3. Commission of best practices assessment

When the Database project was designed, an internal assessment committee was created, with diverse and complementary views. This committee is composed by ten technicians from different disciplines with experience and knowledge about different working methodologies attached to the areas of the Section, which guarantee the multi-dimensional assessment of every practice.

An external person, who comes from the academic field, supports the project's methodology.

The Commission members' specific role is "knowledge facilitator". They provide assessment and technical evaluation, searching for the feedback and learning of the practices presented in the Database and based on the eleven quality criteria. The assessment seeks to improve the practice and not control the results.

2.4. Internal assessment and acknowledgement procedure

The BP process of assessment and acknowledgement consists of several coordinated actions set by the Technician in charge from the Department of Planning and Process, who coordinates the Database and the Commission. These are the following:

- Practice assessment from the Commission members, based on the quality criteria.

- Feedback. The professionals receive feedback, which is oriented to the improvement and not to control over the results. Suggestions are made to improve the practice, along with proposals, which can be presented to other forums, congresses, exchanges, etc.

- Encourage best practices to be consulted both internally and externally on the different technological platforms.

- Acknowledgement of all the best practices in the Annual meeting. The goal is to value and acknowledge the team's work. In the ceremony, a diploma is given to the best practice and a public speech about the singularity of the most important quality criteria is offered.

3. Results

3.1. Database consolidation and best practices quality
The Database looks for the quality of best practices rather than quantity. There are 29 best practices; five targeted to internal management (methodologies and technical tools) and 24 oriented to citizenship, with a great variety of topics, all them addressed by the Section. These projects have a strong social impact and the majority of them are consolidated and have been working more than four years, readapting themselves throughout using processes of continuous improvement.

Some of them are well developed and advanced, in a phase of expansion and projection beyond the City council; others are still emerging and adapting, but are expected to be consolidated. Around 55% achieve between 10 and 11 quality criteria; only 17% get less than 8 criteria. These are practices of a great quality, which produce good results. The majority can be partially or totally transferred, since they are adaptable.

The majority of the citizenship-oriented practices are used by other collaborators –as well as the City Council– which complement each other and work as a team with other municipalities, the third sector, community networks of different regions, groups, etc. These external agents are very satisfied with the best practices results.

3.2. Effectiveness of the assessment Commission
The Commission's goal is to develop a new knowledge facilitator role, which can assess technically each best practice, taking as a reference the quality criteria previously defined. The projects presented are specially assessed: teams are advised about which aspects need to improve from a management perspective and also internal areas are informed, as is the case of the training department, about those needs identified which can increase the efficiency of the projects assessed.

This role has been introduced since the start of the project, going through different stages: 2012 creation, 2013 redefinition, and from 2014 consolidation. To strengthen this role, the sense of belonging and group cohesion has been worked on, in order to design a common line and a consensus in the assessment.

The assessment Commission holds monthly meetings; there are 10 annual meetings, which last an average of 2.5 hours, with 95% of participants present. The evaluation of each practice takes two or three hours on average.

4. Conclusions, reflections, learning
Having a Best Practices Database in the Area is very valuable, since it serves to collect systematic and solid experiences using technical quality criteria, easy to locate and well classified by topics addressed by the Area. It must be highlighted that the Database is being recognized progressively in the Area, as well as its importance in knowledge transfer, from different perspectives:

- Recognition of professional expertise. The project is a motivational instrument, which seeks to strengthen the feeling of belonging in the organization and emphasize the professionals' work.

- Learning process. Participating in the BP project is an opportunity for self-improvement for all the professionals, from the assessment process to technical feedback.

- Having an impact on promoting the quality of cooperative culture: systematization, fairness, coherence and rigorous assessment reinforce the criteria and provide information about the aspects to take into account, focusing also on what the organization considers valuable with regards to project management.

- Each of the practices are approaches which can be transferred, either wholly, to apply in specific situations, or partially, using a particular methodology. This transferability fosters organization learning in a cooperation framework, where the professionals can learn from each other.

- Encouraging the use of and making visible the best practices, sharing them with other municipalities outside Barcelona, presenting them to professional forums, as well as creating a section in the Social Rights Area web, promotes collaboration networks and the joining of talent within the organization (inside and outside).

Finally it must be pointed out that the Best Practices Database contributes directly to updating the record of the organization, showing what is done: expert knowledge as the driving force for innovation.