

REPORT

Parks and Recreation

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: March 27, 2023

From: Dean Gibson, Director of Parks and Recreation
File: 2245975

Item #: 2023-191

Subject: Scholarship Training Employment Program (S.T.E.P.)

RECOMMENDATION

THAT this report be received for information

PURPOSE

To inform Council on a new recruitment initiative for aquatic services that reduces barriers for potential aquatic employee candidates.

SUMMARY

Lifeguard and Swim Instructor shortages continue to plague BC and Canada since the beginning of the pandemic. New Westminister requires up to 175 skilled aquatic staff prior to January 2024 to provide adequate service delivery in preparation for the opening of the təməsewtx^w Aquatic and Community Centre (TACC). The Scholarship Training Employment Program (S.T.E.P.) introduces an innovative approach to address present day challenges in the recruitment of aquatics staff.

BACKGROUND

The closure of the Canada Games Pool in 2021 created a work shortage for the City's existing aquatic staff. The City maintained a staffing pool of approximately 40 aquatic staff throughout the 2022 and 2023 Outdoor Pool operating seasons. Staff who required annual work, out of necessity, found employment in neighbouring communities or other industries. The aquatic services team brainstormed and explored potential solutions to the current recruitment challenges facing the industry: i) lack of a skilled workforce ii) lack

of upper level instructional courses iii) costly enrollment fees for required courses and, iv) existing workforce availability, to name a few. The aquatic services team developed the S.T.E.P. plan to mitigate these issues and create a path moving forward to continuously train and recruit new staff.

ANALYSIS

The financial and time commitment for the traditional demographic of new aquatic services employees (16+yrs) is significant and for many, represents a barrier to even considering this as a viable form of employment. In the Metro Vancouver region, the cost per participant to become a fully trained Lifeguard and Swim Instructor is upwards to \$1,200 and requires the completion of 5 courses that run over 120 hours of program time. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the historical patterns for aquatics staff training which has resulted in a significant void of both newly trained and re-certified staff. Furthermore, the financial burden associated with the cost of training greatly reduces the number of potential candidates for employment with the City when taking into account the competitive labour market for aquatics staff both locally and across North America.

The City requires up to 175 trained and skilled aquatic employees to operate the tēmōsew̱txʷ Aquatic and Community Centre (TACC).

S.T.E.P. is a program piloted by the Aquatic Services team. In exchange for free training, candidates will enter into a service agreement with the City for four operational seasons within a 2 year period. Candidates apply to S.T.E.P. job postings online. Candidates are screened based on their core skills, swimming ability (skills screening), and their availability/willingness to work. Priority will be given to New Westminster residents as well as those who might otherwise experience financial barriers to registration for the required courses.

The S.T.E.P. program aims to enable the City of New Westminster to:

- Secure candidates who are available, willing and able to work
- Ensure candidates have the core skills required to do the job (skills screening)
- Train and develop the new team members from day 1 of training in cohorts during course delivery
- Maintain the new employees for at least 4 operational seasons
- Reduce the amount of staff turnover in the first few years of employment

DISCUSSION

The aquatic services management team and Human Resources team consulted with the City's legal department with the creation of the candidate service agreement. CUPE 387 supports creation and implementation of the 2023 pilot program for S.T.E.P. A marketing campaign to promote the new employment training opportunity was launched on March 9, 2023. A contractor has been procured to run the upper level aquatic programs for the City starting this spring and summer. Further savings to the City may be achieved over time with the hiring of internal upper level aquatic instructors.

NEXT STEPS

The initial intake for S.T.E.P. was March 9 to 23, 2023. A list of remaining key milestones is listed below:

- Shortlisting and interviews of applicants – late March 2023
- Skills screening – Early April 2023
- Police information check and contract submission – Mid April 2023
- Training – April - June , 2023
- Employee hire-on packages, paperwork and submission of availability – early June, 2023

If the program proves successful, the aquatic services team will continue with scheduling a summer application intake and a mini session for fall. Staff will schedule a winter (January - April 2024) session when they have access to the təməsewtxw Aquatic and Community Centre for training purposes. With increased pool capacity, candidate numbers may increase come winter.

S.T.E.P. will be monitored for costs to the City, success of maintaining staff and reduction of employee turnover. If the program proves successful, Recreation Managers will work with Human Resources and Union representatives to consider expanding the program to other positions in Recreation Services which requires skilled and trained labourers (i.e. Pool Service Worker, Building Service Worker, Parks and Recreation Maintenance Worker etc.). Following that, consideration by the Senior Management Team (SMT) may be given to implementing the program within other City departments.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The estimated cost to offer the S.T.E.P Pilot program is approximately a thousand dollars per candidate, or \$75K, and will be prioritized within the Parks and Recreation department existing 2023 education and training budget. If the program proves successful, operating budget enhancements may be proposed for the following budget years.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Staff from Parks and Recreation, Human Resources and Finance departments contributed to this report.

CONCLUSION

The current post-pandemic environment in Aquatic Services is such that aquatic supervisors are challenged to find a pool of skilled auxiliary workers to offer aquatic programs and services. For some potential candidates, the cost of the certification courses provides a barrier. Part time jobs with increased compensation levels are prevalent in today's employment market. The loss of potential candidates to other industries and employment fields because of increased wages and reduced barriers is

affecting the Recreation Department's ability to secure a skilled labour force. The Aquatic Services team created the pilot S.T.E.P. to conditionally hire future aquatic employees that exhibit a desire, need and similar core values as the City of New Westminster Recreation Services team and provide the required training in exchange for a term of employment service. Tangible and non-tangible results of the program will be documented and analyzed over the course of 2023 and 2024. Efforts will be made over the course of the next few years to decrease hard costs to the City by training existing and hiring new upper level aquatic instructors thus reducing the contract costs of providing these courses.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
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