

Project Grey Power

A strategic approach to address the skills shortages in the Overstrand Municipal area

Date: 24 May 2010

Executive Summary

Project Grey Power was introduced by the Overstrand Municipal Manager, Adv Werner Zybrands at the Mayoral Committee Meeting in August 2008 with the primary objective to address the skills shortages in the Overstrand Municipal area. At the meeting, several resolutions were approved by the Committee to give substance to this initiative.

Since then the awareness of the Project Grey Power initiative has also spread to other areas in the Western Cape. Enquiries have also been received from other interest groups with similar objectives as the Grey Power initiative of the Overstrand Municipality.

The one element that distinguishes the Overstrand initiative from most other similar initiatives is that the Overstrand initiative is multi-cultural. It is believed that people from all our communities will benefit from it, not only the initial financial gain for students and post graduates in the short term, but that this Grey Power initiative will eventually also contribute in the longer term to the upliftment of the people in all our communities.

Currently the Overstrand Municipality has more than 70 students and post graduates registered on our database. These students are representative from all the cultural groups within our community. There are also more than 70 "Grey Power" mentors registered on our database who are mostly sufficiently qualified and experienced to provide mentorship and guidance to students and post graduates, seeking opportunities to broaden their life skills and technical competencies in a real life working environment.

Background

It is well known that the Overstrand Municipality in many respects experiences skills shortages in many areas of service delivery. These are especially prevalent in the technical, financial, I.T. and legal/administrative fields.

There may be various reasons for this situation including:

- the general skills shortage throughout South Africa;
- the “poaching” by larger and financially stronger institutions e.g. metropolitan municipalities and ESKOM due to a better salary structure;
- the cost of living in a coastal municipality as house prices are often beyond the means of municipal employees;
- the relatively low salary structure of Overstrand due to the TASK process not yet finalized (It can, however, be safely assumed that Overstrand qualifies for a higher grading than the present one);
- the absence or shortage of social infrastructures e.g. primary and especially secondary schools, medical facilities, government institutions and sport & recreational facilities; and
- Many suitably qualified graduates are either disinterested in becoming municipal employees or lack relevant experience.

Strategy to address the Skills Shortage Problem in the Overstrand Region

The Overstrand Municipal area is blessed with numerous residents who have a wealth of knowledge and excellent qualifications. Some of them are already playing leading roles in a large variety of community activities and, as a rule, are doing so on a voluntary basis with little or no pecuniary reward. These residents have a lot of so called ‘grey power’ - a reference to not only their grey hair but also their grey matter.

An advertising campaign was launched during the 1st quarter of 2009 in all the local newspapers to invite students to register on the municipal database. Responses to date have indicated there are a fair number of students from the Overstrand area who are currently studying at Universities and Technikons or similar educational institutions. Many of these students have difficulty in finding work due to their lack of practical experience. Others would also welcome an opportunity to earn some pocket money to alleviate the financial burden imposed by their studies.

Presentations were also done to all the Ward Committees to ensure an awareness of this initiative in all our local communities.

It is possible that a working relationship could be created between local ‘grey power’ and students by matching experienced people with young people who need mentorship and guidance while gaining practical work experience.

Specific Benefits

The following benefits can be accrued from this initiative:

1. The Municipality obtains the services of skilled and experienced residents to supplement shortages at an affordable price.
2. Students gain practical experience and are mentored into a real life workplace.
3. A pool of young potential employees is established who may become interested in a Municipal career as they have now become exposed thereto. It may also be financially attractive in the sense that they could still live with their parents which could reduce the cost of living for both parent and child. Even if such a mentored student cannot (or does not want to) be employed by the Municipality, he/she at least has a CV with some practical experience.

Additional Considerations

There are three matters that should also be considered;

1. The first being to find alternative sources of funding to compensate students. The amount paid per day or per week should really only be to cover travel and other out of pocket expenses with a limited degree of personal financial gain.
2. Liaising with educational institutions to send their students to Overstrand for compulsory practical work. Special research projects could also be initiated e.g. socio-economic surveys and field work. In some cases they could provide assistance to communities e.g. a part time law clinic, a social support initiative, or as field workers for the recently instituted action to assist people to obtain a legal title to the properties they inhabit.
3. The 'grey power' service providers should not detrimentally affect other full time professional people within the local economy. This will be achieved by limiting the hours of work; limiting the remuneration per hour and also the obligation to act as mentors for students.

Resolutions approved at the Mayoral Committee held in August 2008.

Seven resolutions were approved:

1. That the service provision/mentorship scheme as set out in the report **be adopted;**
2. That 'grey power' service providers and local students be invited to register on the Municipality's database;
3. That each directorate fund its own appointed 'grey power' service providers at rates to be determined between the relevant director and the Municipal Manager;
4. That the support of potential sponsors to remunerate the students be solicited and failing which, the relevant directorate also remunerate the students;
5. That quarterly progress reports be submitted to the Executive Mayor;
6. That the support and co-operation of educational institutions be solicited, and
7. That the recruitment and selection of students conform to Section 5 of the Employment Equity Act, 1998 (Act 55 of 1998).