



Case Study: Clean Cities Strategy

Building pride in public spaces

Introduction:

Blacktown City Council's Clean Cities Strategy 2015 - 2020 is about more than just litter; it aims to create clean, well-maintained public spaces that foster community pride, build a sense of public ownership and deter anti-social behaviour such as vandalism.

The strategy is unique as it has evolved over 10 years, informed by extensive pilot programs, community engagement initiatives, surveys and behavioural theory.

It is a flexible, adaptive strategy that spans many departments, taking a whole-of-council, and whole-of-community approach to cleanliness.

2005: Identifying the issue

Cleanliness has long been a priority for Council, however the 'clean cities' approach was first raised as an interdepartmental issue during a councillor's forum.

The forum questioned why incidences of litter and graffiti still exist where regular council maintenance takes place?

In answering this question, they found that because many council departments contribute to maintaining a space, responsibility for the overall cleanliness of Blacktown's public places did not fall to any particular department or person but to many.

In many cases cleanliness was just a small part of a department's duties, and with limited time and resources available.

The division of responsibility between different departments also made reporting incidences of

litter or vandalism more complicated both internally and for residents.

Cleanliness was also found to strongly reflect the habits of the local community. This included how much people litter and the likelihood that residents would report incidences of vandalism or graffiti so they could be promptly addressed.

To ensure clean public spaces, they needed to develop a strategy to address the following questions:

- How do we ensure there are no gaps in our cleansing and maintenance services?
- How do we encourage residents to report litter and vandalism promptly so council officers can move to rectify the situation?
- How do we prevent litter and other anti-social behaviour in the first place?



2005 – 2014: Finding an answer

It became evident that a holistic approach to cleanliness was needed; one that considered planning and design, maintenance, cleansing, economic development, safer communities, community engagement, media and marketing and policy development.

In 2005 all departments that contribute to cleanliness were brought together to discuss the issue; forming the first Clean Cities cross functional team.

Regular meetings were held to maintain strong lines of communication between departments. This ensured officers were more aware of other departments' needs, the challenges they face, and potential service gaps.

Participating departments include:

- Community development;
- Civil and park maintenance;
- Recreation planning and design;
- Building construction and maintenance;
- Asset planning and support;
- Environment;
- Corporate strategy and economic development;
- Community law enforcement and waste;
- Strategic planning;
- Access and project management; and
- Communications and marketing.

These meetings continue and are a key part of the 2015 – 2020 strategy.

The second part of the problem – getting the community on board – was more complex.



To encourage community members to change their litter behaviour and report incidences of vandalism, we used the [Broken Windows Theory](#) to inform its strategy.

Broken Windows Theory suggests that clean, attractive public spaces are more likely to engender community pride and respect, and therefore deter vandalism, littering and other anti-social behaviour. Well-maintained spaces have also been shown to create a greater sense of community safety.

The importance of cleanliness to the Blacktown City community was reaffirmed by a series of community surveys which indicated cleanliness as a key driver of community satisfaction with Council.

Combining theory and resident feedback, Blacktown developed a series of pilot programs. The first, in 2005, focused building community and business engagement in the Mount Druitt and Blacktown CBDs, while the second, in 2007, expanded to other locations in the local government area (LGA).

These pilots did not receive dedicated funding, but drew on the existing resources of participating council departments.



Several of these pilots are now on-going programs including:

- [Business Pride Project](#): aims to develop and build partnerships between Council, business traders and local Chambers of Commerce to promote pro-social behaviour and improve the amenity in the shopping precincts.
- [Picitup Litter Campaign](#): an initiative that encourages residents to carry a free environmentally friendly bag while on their daily or weekend walks around the City, and pick up any rubbish they may spot during that time.



2015 and beyond: Our Clean Cities Strategy

From its beginnings in 2005, the concept of ‘clean’ has evolved into a comprehensive strategy for the promotion of public amenity and respect for public spaces.

Community belonging and ownership are central to the Clean Cities Strategy which goes beyond cleansing and servicing of public places and focuses on community building.

The Clean Cities cross functional team still manages the strategy however a dedicated Clean Cities Project Officer was brought on in 2015 to coordinate the strategy’s implementation and reporting.

Objectives of the strategy include:

- Provide clean public places in Blacktown City
- Contribute to a reduction in anti-social public behaviour (littering, graffiti and vandalism)
- Facilitate commitment and understanding for maintaining clean public spaces from all stakeholders
- Ensure our internal communication and procedures are effective in the management of clean public places

- Develop a sense of community ownership and pride of public places
- Improve community perception and awareness of our prevention programs in public places.
- Build and maintain staff pride in Blacktown City

The current version of the Strategy has two main components:

1. The Clean Cities Action Plan

The Our Clean Cities Action Plan outlines Blacktown City’s cleansing and community engagement programs for the next five years, including:

- Working with local area police commands to address graffiti and vandalism;
- Improving BIN infrastructure to provide consistency and flexibility across the City;
- Extending the Business Pride Program to new shopping precincts; and
- Actively promoting Our Clean Cities initiatives within the community.

Responsibility for each of these actions is attributed to a member of the Clean Cities team who provides quarterly updates to the Clean Cities Project Officer. They then report to management.



2. A Clean Cities Assessment Tool (CCAT)

Central to the Strategy is the [Clean Communities Assessment Tool \(CCAT\)](#) which is used to provide a holistic assessment of public places including: litter, infrastructure, community sense of place and safety.

This tool was used to establish an initial baseline for the strategy's development, but also helps Blacktown monitor, evaluate and report on the action plan over time.

What Blacktown has learned

While the Clean Cities Strategy is still relatively new, extensive pilot programs have given Blacktown valuable insight into what is needed for the strategy to be successful.

A dedicated officer

One of the key learnings from previous pilots was that building and maintaining relationships with business partners, community groups and other stakeholders was a worthwhile yet time consuming activity. A dedicated position was needed to maintain these relationships to an appropriate level.

Keep it flexible

Keeping the strategy's action points flexible allows the team to easily identify and address new issues as they emerge, or tailor the program to meet new funding opportunities.

It is also a good way to make the most of council resources by pooling funds for projects that serve multiple outcomes.

Think long term

Another lesson from previous iterations of the strategy and from behavioural theory more generally, is that behavioural change is a complex, long-term process.

Blacktown City has seen positive outcomes in regards to litter reduction and increased feelings of community pride, safety and satisfaction however this has built slowly over many years.

Genuine change takes time, and councils wanting to improve the cleanliness of their LGA will need to commit to an on-going strategy to achieve lasting results.

Communication is key

This strategy, and its corresponding pilot programs have achieved increased cleanliness outcomes for Blacktown City, however the role this strategy played in opening lines of communication between council departments has been equally valuable.

The Clean Cities cross functional team has created a greater understanding of how each department contributes to keeping Blacktown City clean, and the day to day challenges they face.



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