

Leverage and the Idea of Multiple Benefits

The Tangible Benefit of Collaborative Thinking and Doing

LEVERAGE AND MULTIPLE BENEFITS.

A thought that underlies all city strategies, plans and actions is to leverage available resources to create multiple benefits for single actions. Every action should produce more than one benefit to the city; as should every dollar spent and every regulation enacted.

Obvious examples are;

- Stormwater ponds: They prevent flooding, improve water quality, offer a visual amenity, anchor a walking path and increase the real estate value of adjacent properties.
- Schools: They primarily serve as the setting for educating children, but they also offer playgrounds after hours, venues for adult education, health care and libraries.
- Development standards: They prevent bad things from happening and also incentivize good things to happen.
- Service clubs: They serve the needs of their members and also support community and charitable activities and demonstrate community contributions to employers considering relocation to the city.

Leveraging, as a term, has taken on a bad reputation by the abuses in the financial world. However, the concept is valid for community use since the idea is to use a limited amount of a resource to expand the amount of that resource or to gain an advantageous and valuable new resource.

Leveraging stormwater funds to achieve the primary purpose, and also to create a visual city amenity is a positive use of leveraged funds.

Multiple benefits is a closely related idea. For any one action, at least two benefits should be produced. If you have the option to get two benefits from one expense, why would you not take that deal?

Not every expense creates multiple benefits, at face value. Therefore, creative thought has to be applied to identify the potential multiplicity of benefits. Sometimes a small additional expense can produce huge extra benefits; sometimes just the search for extra benefits is enough.

The availability of multiple benefits can also help set priorities when resources are limited. If one unit of effort or expense produces one unit of benefit while the same effort directed differently produces three units of benefit, the choice is clear.

“Give me a place to stand and with a lever I will move the whole world.”

[Archimedes of Syracuse](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Archimedes) (c. 287 BC – c. 212 BC)
<https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Archimedes>

THE REALIZATION OF MULTIPLE BENEFITS.

The idea of reaping multiple benefits from a single investment is critical in all economic times, but especially in the aftermath of the Great Recession. A municipal application of the idea is to find partners who contribute monies and effort in exchange for a specific benefit. Once you get the idea; any other way of thinking and doing seems silly and wasteful.

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Develop a single facility or program that serves multiple needs; such that each contributor gets what they need from the single facility or program while others get different benefits from the same improvement. Get something done that the individual partners could not accomplish on their own.

EXAMPLES.

Five people contribute a dollar towards a five dollar “coffee” machine. One person gets a cup of coffee, another a cup of tea, another hot water for oatmeal in the morning, another soup in the afternoon and the fifth person likes hot chocolate. Each gets some different benefit from the five dollar machine, but each person only paid a dollar.

In a city, as another example, the streets department may need to fix a street and needs a drainage pond; the drainage department has flooding in the vicinity and also needs a pond. The environmental services department is preserving a wetland near the flooded area and needs to intercept stormwater for water quality purposes using the pond while the parks department is constructing a playfield in conjunction with a school next to the street that is being fixed.

Each has money in their respective budgets for their specific improvement project. What if there was a master plan for these multiple projects in this one small area that accommodated all the needed projects at once; combining the monies and the design talent while reducing construction disruption and costs to each individual partner?

Everyone gets what they need, the cost to each partner is less than it otherwise would be and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. That’s multiple benefits thinking at its best.

Spending one dollar in cost for one dollar in benefit must stop. Every dollar spent must produce multiple dollars of benefit. The “poster child” project is the park that is also a stormwater area, a trail head, a school yard and an environmental resource protection area with proper design, budgeting and management.

Firehouses, community buildings and libraries can be co-located. The costs are reduced and the benefits are increased. Opportunities for co-locations, shared programming and joint projects abound; each usually found in a silo. Dollars from many public departments and businesses can contribute to a multiple benefit project once the silo-mentality is confronted with common sense and community spirit. “Multiple benefits” thinking is a basic principle of sound municipal operations.

MULTIPLIERS.

The economic multiplier has been accepted as an important phenomenon by business and industry for years. One dollar spent creates a multiplied effect in the local economy that exceeds and justifies the expense.

The same thought process applies to the expenditure of public monies on public facilities and programs. Like the economic multiplier, the urban open space multiplier effect cannot be dismissed or foregone.

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MORE EXAMPLES.

Multiple benefits in the environmental arena are easy to identify. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's report *"Assessing the Multiple Benefits of Clean Energy: A Resource for States"* (revised September 2011) addresses the energy gap and helps state energy, environmental, and economic policy makers identify and quantify the energy, environmental — specifically greenhouse gas, air, and health — and economic benefits of clean energy."

"This groundbreaking document is the first to organize and present a comprehensive review of these benefits, together with an analytical framework that states can use to assess those benefits during the development and implementation of clean energy policies and programs." Every dollar spent reducing energy consumption produces air quality, greenhouse gas, health and economic benefits."

Capturing the Multiple Benefits of Energy Efficiency: A Handbook for Policy Makers and Evaluators by the International Energy Agency deals with multiple benefits associated with energy policy. "It is the product of an IEA study which seeks to broaden the discussion of energy efficiency policy as part of wider economic and socioeconomic strategy. The IEA Energy Efficiency Unit began this work in 2012 with a preliminary scoping study investigating the range of impacts delivered by energy efficiency, and publishing an IEA Insights paper, 'Spreading the Net' (IEA, 2012), which provides a preliminary assessment of this topic and these benefits.

"The IEA identified at least fifteen distinct benefits, from health and well-being to improved industrial productivity."

The Idea of "Multiple Benefits"

The idea is that a single action can produce "multiple benefits." One dollar of expense, if thoughtfully expended, can produce two or more dollars of benefit. Consider:

- "Killing two birds with one stone." [Apologizes to birders.]
- Taking one action and getting more than one beneficial outcome.
- Using one asset to produce more than one product.
- Monetizing by-products to produce second-effort products that would otherwise be a cost of production.

Much like mixed-use development, multi-modal transportation systems, diverse housing stocks and biological diversity, multiple benefits are founded in the concept of diversity and derived from a core system or asset, like open space.

Source: wck | planning, inc.

CONCLUSION.

The examples and explanation presented above seem redundant and generally too much. However, the idea is so important that it cannot be understated.

Leveraging resources, usually limited resources, to produce multiple benefits is a way of thinking and doing that can permeate an organization once recognized as the obvious way to do business and build the city. Even if monies were unlimited, searching for multiple benefits from a single action has got to become a best practice.