

CASE STUDIES

Proof in Practice

How the City of Mississauga embedded continuous improvement into everyday work.

Navigating Change Without Losing Performance.

CONTEXT

When the City of Mississauga launched its Lean Program in 2010, the goal was straightforward: improve productivity and value without additional resources. Over time, this initiative evolved into something bigger, a culture shift in how Canada's sixth-largest city approached change. Municipal operations, from permit approvals to waste collection, face constant transformation pressures: new technologies, budget constraints, shifting citizen expectations. Mississauga's challenge was to deliver better, faster, and more transparent services while maintaining stability and staff morale.

THE CHALLENGE

Like many growing cities, Mississauga experienced three recurring issues:

- Siloed improvement efforts: Departments launched projects independently with little coordination.
- Change fatigue: Continuous modernization initiatives left staff weary and uncertain.
- Focus drift: As priorities multiplied, attention shifted from long-term outcomes to short-term firefighting.

The City needed a way to make change routine — not disruptive — while preserving high performance across essential services.

“Our goal wasn't to add another project. It was to make improvement how we work.”

— City Manager, Mississauga

APPROACH

1. Lean as a Mindset, Not a Project

Mississauga introduced the Lean Continuous Improvement Program as an internal capability-building initiative rather than a one-time transformation. Staff were trained in Lean tools, process mapping, value-stream analysis, and root-cause problem-solving, but the emphasis was on practical application, not certification.

Each department had a designated Lean Champion, responsible for fostering engagement and mentoring peers.

2. Empowering Employees

Instead of top-down mandates, Mississauga encouraged front-line employees to identify inefficiencies and suggest improvements. Ideas were logged, tested, and scaled using a “Plan-Do-Check-Act” cycle. Every employee could contribute to better service delivery — making change inclusive, not imposed.

3. Transparent Measurement

A city-wide Lean Dashboard tracked key results, time savings, cost avoidance, customer satisfaction, and innovation projects completed. Progress reports were shared quarterly with Council and employees, reinforcing trust and accountability.

4. Integration with Strategy

Lean was embedded into corporate planning and budgeting. Projects had to show alignment with strategic priorities like “A City that Works for You” and “Corporate Excellence.” This alignment prevented improvement fatigue by ensuring all initiatives served a shared purpose.

RESULTS

Over a decade of sustained application, Mississauga’s Lean Program became a model for public-sector productivity.

Metric	2010 Baseline	2023 Results	Notes
Process improvements completed	25	1,950+	Across 20 departments
Total savings & cost avoidance	—	\$25 million+	Verified by Finance
Average cycle-time reduction	—	20 %–40 %	Varies by process
Staff trained in Lean	0	4,000+ employees	75 % of workforce
Staff engagement score	68 %	83 %	Internal survey, 2023

Departments reported higher efficiency without layoffs or service cuts. The city maintained consistent service levels during periods of structural change, such as digitization and post-pandemic recovery.

“Lean gave us a language for improvement that everyone could speak.”

— Director of Corporate Performance, City of Mississauga

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Build change into everyday work.

When improvement becomes habitual, transitions feel natural.

2. Empower the many, not the few.

Productivity thrives when front-line ideas are valued.

3. Show results, visibly and often.

Transparent dashboards keep staff engaged and leadership accountable.

4. Align change with purpose.

Connection to strategy prevents fatigue and keeps focus.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

- Train staff in simple improvement tools and encourage experimentation.
- Use dashboards to share real results, not just reports.
- Celebrate small wins, they build resilience and readiness for larger change.
- Ensure every improvement links back to strategy.
- Treat transformation as an ongoing skill, not an event.

REFERENCES

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Share your thoughts, your examples

We are always looking forward to learn as a community.

solutions@productivitycouncil.ca