

# Case Study: The City of Yuma, Arizona

## Renovating the Community with Creative Thinking Systems

### The Challenge: Innovate or Abate



City of YUMA

The nation has been challenged by the *Innovate America Initiative* that says, America's task is "...Over the next quarter century, we must optimize our entire society for innovation." Yuma, AZ decided to answer this challenge.

Yuma, AZ is growing faster than almost anywhere else in the country. In fact, Yuma is the third fastest growing area in the United States. Along with the rewards of a growing society there are many complex issues that develop. Traffic congestion, inadequate housing market, insufficient public safety systems (police - fire - etc.) are just a few.

Yuma found itself as at a crossroads. Community leaders were faced with a choice. Deal with the impact of their booming growth in the traditional way amid mounting frustrations OR apply new thinking systems to the situation and design a new way to exploit their opportunities.

To the community leaders the need to reinvent the city was becoming obvious, but the necessity to renovate thinking was very provocative.

### The Solution:

#### Renovate the Community with Creative Thinking

Mark Watson, City Administrator, painted a vision to create an entire community of master thinkers. In order to effectively meet this challenge, everyone needed to be involved - city staff, governing boards, business leaders, educators, military personnel, charitable and religious leaders, members of the press and citizens.

A team of city employees led by, Watson, selected the Master Thinkers™ accreditation program developed by cognitive systems expert, Vickie Mann of Retention Mastery Systems, Inc. (Innova Training & Consulting, Inc. government sector specialist) to renovate thinking skills.

This customized value-based decision making program is designed to build the capacity for thinking and innovation first at an individual level. Individuals then apply these thinking skills to community issues as needed. The key to success is to have adequate community members with Master Thinker status to support the size and complexities of the population.

Master Thinkers accreditation is earned after completion of in-depth training, including a series of thinking systems developed by **Dr. Edward de Bono**, the world authority on creative and conceptual thinking skills.

The Yuma City Council rose to the challenge with a commitment to develop 500 Master Thinkers in five years. Since January 2006, eighty-nine (89) city employees and community leaders have achieved the Master Thinkers accreditation. Exposure to these Master Thinkers has created a swell of requests from around the community to participate in the Master Thinkers accreditation.

The City of Yuma, AZ is ranked #1 on *Inc. Magazine's* 2006 list of Hottest Large Cities

#### Yuma, Arizona

Once a small farming community, this border town is one of the nation's fastest-growing areas, with a burgeoning Latino population and a steady stream of Californians in search of a lower cost of living. Surging trade with Mexico has sparked strong growth in services and transportation.

Overall Rank 1

1-Year Job Growth 8.3%

5-Year Job Growth 32.0%

Index Score 100.0

Information provided by Inc.Com

*"Yuma is working hard to reinvent itself. In the past much of our focus had been on analyzing statistics and researching the best ideas that have already been tried in other communities. We have realized that while these are important bases to cover - they are not enough. We want the type of results that require us to break out of traditional patterns and go where no one else has thought to go. It is rewarding to be on our way - and reaping the results of our efforts."*

Mark Watson / City Administrator

Go to: [www.innovateamerica.org](http://www.innovateamerica.org) for more information on The National Innovation Initiative Final Report

## The Value: Build a Community of Master Thinkers

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Yuma is the first city in the world to undertake such a comprehensive plan to build the capacity for community-wide innovation. The city is also first to realize that in order to make innovative thinking happen on a day-to-day basis, large numbers of people within their community must be equipped with proven, systematic creative thinking skills that can be applied on demand.

Each Master Thinker goes out into the community sharing with and influencing family members, friends, business associates, board members, church members, and fellow citizens. Here are some specific ways in which Yuma is benefiting:

Decision making is no longer stalled by argument and debate

- \$22,000,000 saved on a transportation related amendment
- A 9 year disagreement was resolved in less than an hour with all sides satisfied
- Assisted members of the local women's softball league in redesigning their league in a way that dissolved the explosive argument threatened the existence of the group

This aggressive approach to build the capacity for innovation fast, wide and deep within the community is yielding early results that are delivering exceptional value.

So much so, that upon a visit to Yuma, AZ in May of 2006 Dr. Edward de Bono addressed the community as, "Yuma, the City that Thinks!" Yuma is proving that argument and debate are not enough for the challenges of today. There is room for new thinking systems and the investment is well worth it.

*"There is no way to adequately describe the success we are having. But I think a very good indicator is that people are asking for the training and willing to invest their own dollars to get it. That says a lot!"*

—Greg Hyland, Strategic Communications Manager

## The Future: A thriving community that meets the challenge of change through innovation

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In Yuma the vision of raising the quality of thinking and innovation through a community of Master Thinkers is already being realized. The capacity of the community to think and innovate is being optimized.

Yuma, AZ along with the rest of our nation will continue to change and evolve. Communities that meet the challenge of change and embrace innovation will thrive in the coming years. Imagine what the impact will be for American society when community after community begins to operate at this level.

*"I am thankful that we, Yuma, AZ have made the investment to go wide and deep within our community to teach these thinking skills. It is assuring to know that no matter what comes our way we've got the tools to design our way forward. That feels great!"*—Mark Watson, City Administrator

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**"You cannot argue and judge a way forward,  
you need to design a way forward."**

— Dr. Edward de Bono