

**2015 All-America City Award Application**

***Spotlight on Engaging and Supporting***

***Vulnerable Boys and Young Men***

**Deadlines:**

**September 2014-February 2015: Monthly conference calls**

**November 25, 2014: Submit Letter of Intent to Apply** (Save $100 on your application fee when you submit a Letter of Intent to Apply by November 25, 2014!)

**March 10, 2015: Submit Application**

**April 2015: Finalists Announced.** Finalist community delegations will be invited to Denver to present.

**June 11-14, 2015: Peer-Learning Workshops & Awards Presentation/Competition** in Denver, Colorado.

**Application Guidelines**:

**The All-America City Award (spotlight on Engaging and**

**Supporting Vulnerable Boys and Young Men)**

The National Civic League invites you to apply for America’s oldest and most recognized community award, now in its 66th year.

The All-America City Award recognizes ten communities annually for outstanding civic impact and action planning. Winning applicants demonstrate innovation, inclusiveness, civic engagement, and cross sector collaboration by describing successful efforts to address pressing local challenges. For this year, 2015, NCL is pleased to announce a spotlight on vulnerable boys and young men. Applicants are asked to feature in their application a program in which they are engaging and supporting vulnerable boys and men with the goal of success in school and in life. Key issues you may consider are early childhood education, healthy communities, access to housing and jobs, racial healing, male achievement, empowerment, income inequality, among others. NCL takes a broad and inclusive view of vulnerable boys and young men as those that have been historically underserved and at-risk including African American, Latino, Native American, Asian Pacific Islander, economically challenged, disabled, LGBTQI, religious and other underserved identities. We hope to also hear about how you are engaging and support vulnerable girls and young women and projects that support all genders. NCL values gender equality and views this spotlight as an important way to highlight the targeted successful approaches for vulnerable boys and men. NCL recognizes these initiatives are an essential part of the work it takes to create healthy and prosperous communities for all residents. This spotlight builds on NCL’s more than 20 years of work on diversity, inclusiveness, racial equity, and youth leadership in communities across the country.

A youth member of one finalist community is also recognized with the AAC Youth Award. Nominations for this award will be requested after finalists are announced.

**Community Information**

**Community name and state: City of Tallahassee, Florida**

**Your community is applying as a:**

\_\_\_ Neighborhood \_\_\_\_ Village \_\_\_ Town \_\_\_ Tribe \_**X**\_\_ City \_\_\_ County \_\_\_ Region

**If applying as a region, name participating communities: n/a**

**If applying as a neighborhood, name city: n/a**

**Has your community applied before?** **Yes** If Yes, which years: **1971, 1994,** **1999**

**Has your community been a Finalist before?** **Yes** If Yes, which years: **1999**

**Has your community been an All-America City before?** **Yes** If Yes, which years: **1999**

**Contact Information**

**All-America City Award contact (primary contact person available throughout competition & follow-up):**

Name: **Anita Favors Thompson** Title (if any): **City Manager**

Organization/Government/Other: **City of Tallahassee, Florida**

Address: **300 S. Adams Street** City, State, Zip: **Tallahassee, FL 32301**

Phone (business/day): **(850) 891-8576** Mobile Phone: **(850) 545-2602**

E-mail Address(es): **Anita.Favors.Thompson@talgov.com**

**The applying community will receive a complimentary membership (or membership renewal if an AAC application was submitted last year) to the National Civic League for one year. To whom should this membership be directed?**

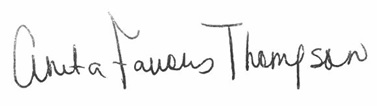
Name **Anita Favors Thompson**

Address **300 S. Adams Street**

City, State & Zip Code **Tallahassee, FL 32301**

Phone Number **(850) 891-8576** Fax **850-891-8669**

Email **Anita.Favors.Thompson@talgov.com**

**We agree to follow NCL’s rules regarding use of the All‑America City Award logo, a registered trademark of the National Civic League. We allow NCL and the All-America City Award to share this application and the information enclosed in it with the NCL and AAC networks to promote the work of our community. If we are named an All-America City, we agree to conduct a post-AAC conference call or regional forum for the AAC network that features our projects. In a pay-it-forward spirit, if named a finalist or All-America City, we agree to support AAC through an NCL membership for a minimum of the next three years. See membership details** [**here**](http://www.allamericacityaward.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/membershipform-7-9-14.doc)**.**

Signature: Date: **March 10, 2015**

Name: **Anita Favors Thompson** Title: **City Manager**

**Community Statistics and Map**

Note: Use the most up-to-date statistics possible for your neighborhood, town, city, county, or region (source suggestions: U.S. Census Bureau, State Department of Economic Security, State Department of Finance, Department of Public Health, and local school statistics).

Population (2014 Estimate): **185,784**

Source/Date: University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR), October 2014

Population Percentage Change 2000-2010: **+20.4%**

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010 decennial data

Racial/Ethnic Population Breakdown (2013):

White **57.0%**

Hispanic or Latino (of any race) **6.5%**

Black or African American **35.3%**

Asian **3.8%**

American Indian and Alaska Native **0.3%**

Mixed Race (Two or More Races) **2.3%**

Other **1.3%**

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey, December 2014

Median Family Income (2013): **$61,333**

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey, December 2014

Percentage of Families Below Poverty Level (2013): **15.2%**

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey, December 2014

Unemployment Rate (2014): **5.7%**

Source/Date: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Labor Market Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), January 2015

Population Breakdown By Age Group (2013):

19 years old and under **25.2%**

20-24 **22.1%**

25-44 **26.2%**

45-64 **18.1%**

65 and over **8.4%**

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey, December 2014

Percentage of Home Ownership (2013): **41.2%**

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey, December 2014

Workforce Distribution (2013 Leon County):

State Government **25.2%**

Trade, Transportation & Utilities **13.5%**

Education & Health Services **13.1%**

Source/Date: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Labor Market Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), October 2014

**MAP** -- Please attach a state map (8.5” x 11”) with your community clearly marked.

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**ALL-AMERICA CITY AWARDS CRITERIA**

1. **Civic Engagement and Collaboration**: comprehensive citizen/resident engagement in decision-making and action planning, cross-sector collaboration (business, local government, nonprofits, military, etc.) and regional collaboration.
2. **Inclusiveness and Diversity**: recognition and involvement of diverse segments and perspectives (ethnic, racial, socio-economic, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, people with disabilities, and others) in community decision-making.
3. **Innovation**: creative use and leveraging of community resources.
4. **Impact:** ***demonstrable*** significant and measurable achievements in the past 5 years (for example: dollars raised, jobs created or lives impacted), particularly in projects that address the community’s greatest challenges.

**Resources Available to You**

As you fill out this application, it may be helpful to consult the following material:

1. For questions to help evaluate your civic infrastructure--***NCL’s* *Civic Index***. Ask for a free copy! [AAC@ncl.org](mailto:AAC@ncl.org)
2. National Civic League’s [Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook](http://www.ncl.org/pdfs/community%20visioning.pdf)
3. To help identify associations and their impact in your community--***New Community Tools for Improving Child Health: A Pediatrician’s Guide to Local Associations****.* (Provided by permission of co-author John McKnight) <http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/Pediatricians.pdf>
4. For an asset-based framework--***Discovering Community Power: A Guide to Mobilizing Local Assets and Your Organization’s Capacity.*** *(*Provided by permission of co-author John McKnight) <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/images/kelloggabcd.pdf>
5. Previous All-America City presentations and summaries of past projects presented in the application
   1. 2014 Presentation links: [Fort Lauderdale, Florida](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cU6IGg_3Rdk&feature=youtu.be); [Cedar Rapids, Iowa](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001CF0NT3T24-3xuJMIO10tfbVlmvkwiVT6uvn1-FoZtL9hJ-vz-KxOC00KcVTSzgveqkKVDCANFQOvZKb1PVEc_e7vXtMEEhHi41tvvlQe0bIU1odxMku8aw1SYpsk_YSxoH1patM5HU-GjaEQa4p1MpdBuly1GTtl4BcsskrIr5mU9twnsEfW4kWfqv8RDAlnBsOgdpALPAI2oJv5R2J_fE-N42yW9dqa1itgGu5Q6rGPEYSSLK65ItBuwNbGbP_L&c=WcyGUNAH4GJCKKY2Ciux5Tw2qXqDSm9f1gEro_gDVim66TBXsGEq3A==&ch=7BCiX0oxg_Oe2Tg4hT68Up-NZrA6tMy2lPj8YBbadeB7AnD0jToGPw==); [Eau Claire, Wisconsin](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001CF0NT3T24-3xuJMIO10tfbVlmvkwiVT6uvn1-FoZtL9hJ-vz-KxOC00KcVTSzgveInWHx7_IkBOdrft6gHy_WM5WTGkzQtjAF_iZiaFcX-YuXbVz4OODBdgO-AvZeeUEtIaCVFV3PjkOSptpTQdIYV_A-HjdRGbWMK0Feymv_A6gvn0Yp_bWqMys1HwnowTRF_LB2HFNsAqPeE2O33psPJhDkC3Kz5AP2Jdp3c0QqlmRtKj_Q60tCg==&c=WcyGUNAH4GJCKKY2Ciux5Tw2qXqDSm9f1gEro_gDVim66TBXsGEq3A==&ch=7BCiX0oxg_Oe2Tg4hT68Up-NZrA6tMy2lPj8YBbadeB7AnD0jToGPw==)
   2. [2014 Project Summaries](http://www.allamericacityaward.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/AAC-Project-Summaries.pdf)
6. To learn more about boys and men of color issues, programs, action plans, and resources—
   1. [A Time for Action, Executive Summary](http://boysandmenofcolor.org/mbk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/A_Time_for_Action_Executive__Summary.pdf) - Executives’ Alliance to Expand Opportunity for Boys and Men of Color
   2. [Black Male Achievement Funders](http://bmafunders.org/)
   3. [My Brother’s Keeper](http://www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper)
   4. [Racial Equity Impact Assessment Toolkit](https://www.raceforward.org/practice/tools/racial-equity-impact-assessment-toolkit) – The Center for Racial Justice Innovation
   5. [*Better Together in the South: Building Movements across Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*](https://www.raceforward.org/research/reports/better-together-bridging-lgbt-racial-justice) *–* The Center for Racial Justice Innovation

**PART I: TELL YOUR COMMUNITY’S STORY**

Section A: Tell us your community’s story. Focus on the last ten years of your community’s progress and development. Utilizing the awards criteria (above) describe how your community addresses its pressing challenges and plans for its future. How are citizens/residents involved in planning and implementation? Provide examples of cross sector collaboration among the neighborhoods, government, businesses, and nonprofit organizations engaged in these efforts. How is the community illustrating diversity and inclusiveness? What is your community’s vision? Include real examples of how your community has demonstrated its strengths, innovations, and faced its challenges. Don’t forget to tell us about the people in your community. (2,000 word maximum)

Located in the Florida Panhandle, Tallahassee is a place where college town meets cultural center, politics meets performing arts and history meets nature; a place where the vibrancy is matched only by the city’s inviting hospitality. As the Capital City of the nation’s third largest state, Tallahassee is the only incorporated municipality in Leon County.

Founded in 1824 on the site of earlier Native American and Spanish settlements, Tallahassee – an Apalachee Indian word meaning “old town” or “abandoned fields" – was chosen to serve as the center of government for the Territory of Florida because of its location half-way between the establishments of St. Augustine and Pensacola.

Today, Tallahassee has nearly 186,000 residents, a growth of 20 percent in the last ten years, with a diverse population (43% minority). It is a government town with 25% of the workforce employed by state government and more than 50% of local property off the tax rolls due primarily to state-owned land.

In addition to being a focal point for government it is also a place where higher education reigns supreme. With nearly 47% of the city’s population having a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to the national average of nearly 29%, Tallahassee is the most educated city in the state. With more than 65,000 students at Florida State University, Florida A&M University and Tallahassee Community College, 47.3% of residents are under the age of 25.

As the economic hub of a 13-county area covering north Florida and south Georgia, Tallahassee-Leon County is the region’s largest community, accounting for almost half of the population, 56% of regional employment and more than 60% of retail sales.

Tallahassee has a long history of championing environmental sustainability. A tree ordinance protects Tallahassee’s canopy roads and tree lined streets. In 1987, the city was among the first in the nation to implement a stormwater management fee to address water quality. Additionally, a citizen funded effort resulted in implementing the highest level of wastewater cleanup, preserving natural streams and aquifers, with $227 million invested during the last five years. More than 170,000 acres of public forest/park land are enjoyed by residents, with programs at area schools, community and senior centers designed to keep everyone active.

**Civic Engagement, Collaboration and Impact:**

Citizen engagement is mandated by residents and involved citizens are participants in all major community decisions. Voter turnout in 2008 was 85.5%, and the average turnout over the past ten years is 70.7%.

The Village Square is a non-partisan, public education forum focused on maintaining factual accuracy in civic and political debate by growing a civil dialogue. In its eighth year, the organization is expanding to Ft. Lauderdale, Sacramento and Kansas City. Hosting nearly 20 programs a year on topics ranging from “Speed Date Your Local Leaders” to economic equality, the philosophy is to address divisive issues where they are most easily and enjoyably healed – between neighbors. The Village Square and Leon County are also teaming up to create the ‘Club of Honest Citizens’, a quarterly effort to engage residents in timely issues.

Since 2007, the Knight Creative Communities Initiative (KCCI) has worked to retain, attract and harness talent to enhance the community. Groups of 20-35 diverse citizens are appointed annually as Catalysts to develop community service projects that improve Tallahassee. They have started an annual film festival, a sustainability group and, to alleviate food access issues, a farmer’s market; built an interactive playscape in the city’s newest park and porch swings throughout the community; and partnered on key community projects, including the Gaines Street revitalization.

Following the community’s lead by focusing on engagement, leadership academies for government, law enforcement and fire have educated more than 3,000 residents. Citizens are involved in every major project; guiding designs that help create unique, desirable places. Because of extensive involvement, not one citizen spoke against the $37 million FAMU Way roadway extension, which will cut through a low income neighborhood, when it came before the City Commission.

Poverty is a serious issue with 30.2% of individuals below the poverty rate compared to 16.3% for the state. Since 1997, about 90 citizens each year take the lead in distributing $80 million to more than 75 community and social service organizations through the Community Human Service Partnership (CHSP), which is funded by the city, county and United Way. Considering the needs of the community, these volunteers prioritize funding based on detailed reports from each agency and site visits. Volunteer hours (60,264 since 1997) total $1.3 million in service from citizens.

When the community was considering extending its local option sales tax, Imagine Tallahassee, a grassroots citizen initiative began a visioning effort to identify how to best use $97 million allocated for economic development. More than 1,000 residents participated. “Meetings in a Box” were distributed so interested citizens could host meetings with their book club, church group, art guild or neighborhood association. Reports showed the community was properly represented demographically and geographically in the process. Recommendations were included in a citizen referendum that was approved by 65% of voters in 2014, a 5.2% increase over the number of supporting voters for the last sales tax referendum in 2000.

**Inclusiveness, Diversity and Impact:**

As a stately southern city, Tallahassee has worked hard to defy the lack of inclusiveness and diversity sometimes seen in the South. Local government has a history of diverse boards and commissions. Elected by the community at-large, minorities have traditionally filled two of the five seats on the City Commission. In 1973, the first elected female City Commissioner served as mayor, and women have continually filled at least one seat since 1980. The first African-American to be elected to the City Commission later served as Tallahassee’s first African-American mayor in 1974.

The Palmer Munroe Teen Center opened its doors in 2010 to the community’s most vulnerable youth. At the center, teens have a space to expand their opportunities, learn about social responsibility and be gently guided through a restorative justice program, which has been effective in steering first time, non-violent juvenile offenders toward success. Together, the City of Tallahassee, Leon County, Leon County Schools and the Department of Juvenile Justice offer a unique blend of educational classes, workshops, programs and recreation. The center also serves as a safe haven for teens who often have nowhere else to go. To date, more than 1,500 teens have benefited from the center.

An effort to prevent gang involvement by young men has been undertaken by the 50 Large program within the Leon County School System. This program has mentored more than 200 young men with outstanding results, including 80 percent of participants giving up their gang involvement.

Civil rights history has not been forgotten in Tallahassee. Civil rights leaders, historians and local citizens helped create the Civil Rights Heritage Walk in 2014. The downtown sidewalk provides a thought-provoking and emotional storytelling of more than 50 activists who took part in Tallahassee’s 1960s lunch counter sit-ins and the 1956 bus boycott, the second major bus boycott in the U.S.

Tallahassee is recognized across the state for equality and consistently scores high on the national Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equality Index. In 2008, the school board adopted anti-bullying and harassment policies, which included protections for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) students. In 2010, the City Commission approved providing domestic partner benefits and workplace protections for LGBT employees, and Leon County adopted a human relations ordinance protecting citizens and also provided domestic partner benefits. In 2013, the County introduced a Domestic Partner Registry allowing LGBT and non-married heterosexual families basic rights. In January 2015, marriage equality came to Florida. When some cities and counties refused, the Mayor invited couples to get married in Tallahassee.

Many say equality can be out of reach for convicts when it comes to employment. The City of Tallahassee – with input from the community – implemented a Ban the Box initiative in 2015, removing the box inquiring about criminal convictions from city job applications. A background check now occurs later, allowing equal footing early in the process. Local businesses and the state are discussing following suit.

The low birth weight of babies in the black community has been a concern for years. In the past, agencies have focused on direct outreach to pregnant women; however, a broader perspective began taking shape in 2013. Churches, residents, non-profits and city government formed Creating Awareness of Resources and Educational Services (CARES). In addition to providing information about neonatal and early childhood care, this effort focuses on identifying the root causes that lead to high crime rates, unemployment and low rates of home ownership in a specific neighborhood and providing solutions to its residents. Activities include street cleanups, job and health fairs, community forums and plans to address aging infrastructure. A community oriented policing unit was developed and assigned to this area to build relationships and improve safety.

**Innovation and Impact:**

With a focus on education and commitment to technology, Tallahassee is known as a ‘smart city’. Tallahassee was the first city in the nation to install wireless smart meters for electric, gas and water utilities. With this technology, citizens can easily access information about their utility use. In 2012, a $7 million federal grant was used to purchase five electric buses, which save the city $90,000 annually in fuel while eliminating almost 260 tons of CO2 emissions.

Homelessness has been a challenge for decades. The continuum of care model was introduced in the early 2000s when agencies joined forces. After an extreme cold snap put the homeless shelter over capacity, area churches stepped up and now host cold night shelters. In 2013 homeless advocates, responding to a crisis at the emergency shelter, envisioned a better approach. Led by a local businessman and philanthropist, service agencies united in support of a new comprehensive emergency service center. The 36,000 square foot facility, opening in April 2015, will serve as a one-stop shop for men and women to help transition them out of homelessness permanently. The facility shows innovation in approach and design. It incorporates recommendations from homeless individuals who served on the design committee – for example, including inspirational messages on the mirrors in the women’s restrooms to build self-confidence.

Like many other cities across the nation, efforts to address community relations, particularly between minorities and law enforcement is ongoing. While major crimes have decreased 11% over the last 10 years, an increase in gun violence led to the formation of an 18-member Community Leadership Council on Gun Violence in 2014. It consists of business owners, representatives from the courts, church leaders, community advocates and law enforcement personnel. Using data to identify “hot spots” to evaluate high crime areas, the committee is focused on recommending potential solutions in 2015.

In 2013, the Tallahassee Police Department created the first adult civil citation program in the nation. It diverts from the criminal justice system individuals who commit a misdemeanor crime and have not been arrested previously. Most are under the age of 25. If the person completes the program, they avoid having an arrest record. More than 600 citations have been issued since the program’s inception.

Innovation in economic development can mean making tough decisions in difficult times. In 2008 at the height of the recession, the City Commission made a decision to invest in a major infrastructure project along Gaines Street, a connector between the two universities. Critics called it a “field of dreams” as the city began to replace aging water/sewer pipes, narrow the road to two lanes, purchase vacant lots and rebuild the corridor to support business and the arts. Local and sales tax funds of $12 million were invested in the road construction, creating jobs as unemployment was rising. That investment has generated $400 million in new investment and a 71% increase in the taxable value in the district.

Tallahassee is not a perfect city. Yet it is a city where there is a united effort to identify community problems and work together to find innovative solutions – the key ingredients for an All-America City.

**PART II: DESCRIBE THREE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROJECTS**

Describe your three best projects that have resulted in significant local impact and action planning within the past five years. Past All-America City Award applicants have highlighted projects to increase third grade reading success for at-risk children, to increase health care for underserved populations, to create new businesses and jobs, to revitalize downtown, to engage youth in identifying and planning services and facilities, to promote cross sector collaborative centers, to increase fiscal sustainability, to develop emergency disaster plans, to recover from a natural disaster, and more. For 2015, NCL invites all applicants to include at least one project in their application that spotlights innovative approaches to engaging and supporting vulnerable boys and young men (examples include education readiness and success, health, jobs, housing, leadership, empowerment, income equality). Be sure to tell us how each of these projects promote civic engagement, collaboration, inclusiveness, innovation, and impact. See criteria above and consult NCL’s Civic Index – available at no cost to applicants. Request it at [aac@ncl.org](mailto:aac@ncl.org).

**PROJECT ONE**

Provide the project name and a description of its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years. *(2,000 word maximum)* Tell us the challenge being addressed, actions taken, and the impact/outcomes of this project on your community’s residents.

**Project Name: Distinguished Young Gentlemen of America, Inc.**

**Primary contact for the project:** Ramon Alexander, National Executive Director - External Affairs, Distinguished Young Gentlemen of America, Inc., 2334 Capital Circle NE, Tallahassee, Florida 32308, (850) 597-2977, [RamonAlexander06@yahoo.com](mailto:RamonAlexander06@yahoo.com).

Leon County is respected throughout Florida for its schools and the quality of education they provide to its students. Like many parts of the South, however, Leon County and Tallahassee are obliged to conquer the lingering racial disparities generated by 20th century segregation and inequality. The challenge is borne out by the statistics for African-American boys and young men:

* On Florida’s 10th grade standardized reading test, 45% of Leon County’s black males earned a passing grade, while 82% of white males and 69% of Hispanic males passed.[[1]](#endnote-1)
* On Florida’s 10th grade math test, 76% of Leon County’s black males earned a passing grade, while 95% of white males and 88% of Hispanic males passed.[[2]](#endnote-2)
* High school graduation rates for white and Hispanic students in Leon County are above statewide averages, but the graduation rate for African-Americans (62.8%) is less than the statewide average (64.6%).[[3]](#endnote-3)
* In Leon County, the 9-12 grade high school dropout rate is 1.8% for white males, but 3.9% for African-American males.[[4]](#endnote-4)
* In Leon County, only 20% of black high school males graduate and attend a university compared to 28% of white males, 36% of Hispanic males, and 60% of Asian males.[[5]](#endnote-5)
* While representing 21% of the youth ages 10-17 in Florida, black males and females accounted for almost half (47%) of all school-related arrests.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Recognizing this disparity, community leaders in Tallahassee have been committed to bridging the gap. In the summer of 2008, three young professional African-American men who had recently graduated from Florida A&M University (FAMU) met at one of their parents’ homes and began a zealous conversation about the state of young black men in America and, in particular, within Tallahassee and Leon County. They had become increasingly concerned about the social issues black boys and young men face as they grow into adults. The lack of positive role models and high quality mentoring, they believed, were the reasons why young African-American males were having difficulty realizing their potential.

Those three men – Donte Cager, Gallop P. Franklin, II and Ramon Alexander – were determined to do something about it. They knew that young African-American males need more than traditional program resources; they must have a strong sense of belonging and they should hone their leadership skills by serving as positive role models. By doing so, young black males can maximize their potential and make a profound impact within their community.

For the next several months, the three men met at the home frequently, sitting around a modest, wooden dining room table to develop a unique, new organization that would be named **Distinguished Young Gentlemen of America, Inc. (DYG).**

DYG is a Tallahassee-based, non-profit entity fully committed to addressing the multi-dimensional challenges that affect young African-American males in today’s culture. Standing firmly on the principles of ‘Manly Deeds, Academic Excellence, and Servant Leadership,’ DYG’s comprehensive strategies encompass an innovative, accelerated student curriculum that takes vulnerable African-American boys and young men and develops their academic and leadership skills so they can serve as influential role models for their peers.

DYG’s target population is minority 9th -12th grade males who come from socio-economically challenged and single-parent homes and who can benefit from leadership development, academic coaching, and life skill development support.

DYG’s first programming event was a comprehensive summer enrichment program for 40 local male students during the summer of 2009. To launch the program, the three founders contributed their own personal funds and obtained financial backing from a wide cross-section of the Tallahassee community: FAMU, private donors, and local businesses such as Florida Commerce Credit Union. At a cost of $24,000, the summer camp was a remarkable success and the DYG leadership was inspired to continue.

### By early 2010, the program model was expanded and enhanced to become a year-round program with services offered to DYG students on a daily basis. Metric measurements were added to the academic and leadership development programs, ensuring that every facet of the DYG model was monitored based on specific goals and objectives.

Consistent interaction and resources are needed to ensure that students are not lured down the wrong path. To achieve this, DYG provides its students with critical support in the form of weekly mentoring, tutoring, enhancement workshops and community engagement. DYG’s members are trained and prepared to deal with the generational cycles of ignorance, apathy, and a wide range of relevant issues. The students must desire to be a part of a program that has a strong, popular image with high school students.

Credible peer-to-peer engagement strategies are more effective than traditional methods that might include “out-of-touch” adults providing information that doesn’t resonate with students.  Peer-to-peer engagement with minority males is the best method for encouraging them to perform well academically and pursue higher education, dress appropriately and stop sagging their pants, and participate in positive activities throughout the community.

**Academic Excellence: Realizing the Potential in Black Boys and Young Men**

A key part of the DYG program is academic coaching. Each DYG student undergoes a series of aptitude tests and interviews to evaluate his strengths and areas for improvement. DYG then conducts mandatory academic performance assessments on a quarterly basis with the student and his parent or guardian. Program leaders also maintain regular interaction with school guidance counselors and administrators.

Students attend interactive tutoring sessions, accelerated writing camps, and standardized test taking workshops that enable them to build confidence and achieve high scores. DYG program staff has facilitated 27 interactive ACT Prep Sessions over the past two years. If a student needs additional assistance in a core academic area, additional strategies are developed to ensure the student’s success.

DYG students also receive college transition preparation. Since January 2013, DYG has facilitated 34 consultation sessions for its students.

The academic mentoring and college preparation has paid off:

* DYG students have consistently increased their average GPA. In 2014 the overall unweighted GPA was a 3.20, which is up from 3.01 the prior year, and up from 2.80 prior to that, which was before the introduction of tutoring and transportation services.
* For the past three years, DYG’s 61 graduating seniors have been awarded a total of $2,189,395 in college scholarship funds.
* For the past two years, 36 of the 40 graduating seniors in DYG achieved a college-ready ACT or SAT score as defined by Florida Department of Education standards.
* For the past three years, 59 of the 61 graduating seniors in DYG attended a 2- or 4-year college or technical training academy.
* Over the past three years, DYG graduates have gone on to pursue their higher education at institutions such as Vanderbilt University, Hampton University, Florida State University, Florida A&M University, and the United States Navy.

**Manly Deeds: Paying it Forward by Serving as Peer-to-Peer, Positive Role Models**

Just as important as the academic tutoring and mentoring are the ‘manly deeds’ that instill in DYG’s students a sense of community engagement and civic responsibility. Since January 2013, DYG students have facilitated or participated in 31 community engagement service projects that facilitate peer-to-peer engagement.

In December 2011, for example, the DYG students held a press conference to launch a “Stop Saggin & Start Swaggin” campaign to educate their peers about the negative culture of sagging pants. “We are going to put sagging pants out of style in Tallahassee,” said DYG Tallahassee Chapter Member Jordan Thompson**,** a junior at Lawton Chiles High School. At the press conference, other DYG students presented a ‘Top Ten Reasons NOT to Sag Your Pants’ list, which included gems such as: “Our ancestors worked too hard to stand up for us to trip and fall down,” and “Display your mind, not your behind.”

DYG leadership views students’ participation in community events as an essential part of establishing the bonds between the students and the community. DYG carefully tracks the events attended, as well as the level of participation from DYG members. Some examples include:

* In November 2013, DYG members were invited to partner with Delta Sigma Theta on the Youth Empowerment Summit, which focused on topics like social media and juvenile justice. **Forty of fifty students attended, for a participation rate of 80%.**
* In July 2014, DYG members collaborated with the City of Tallahassee in a “Summer Splash” youth event to promote positive youth engagement and offer an alternative to gangs during the summer break. **Forty-one of fifty students attended, for a participation rate of 82%.**
* The DYG students also produce an **award-winning step show**. For the past two years, DYG’s step show has earned both the Capital City Teen Step Show Competition and the Southern Region National High School Step Show Competitions. DYG performs the show regularly throughout the community, establishing the students as positive, disciplined role models.

While the community engagement events provide a way for DYG students to inspire their peers, there are many other, more subtle ways that members apply the skills they’ve learned. “I’m taking what I learned from DYG and paying it forward, said Jamesio Brown, a Godby High School graduate who was in the DYG program for two years. “My little brother is in middle school, and I’m pushing him to learn good habits like educating himself and reading every day. At FSU I have been elected President of my fraternity’s pledge class, and I’m using DYG’s principles to lead these 35 men and women.”

**Creating Servant Leaders**

Leadership development is an essential component of the DYG curriculum. Its students have participated in 17 comprehensive leadership development workshops over the past two years, and the program requires its members to put those lessons to practice. DYG students have spoken out on violence against youth at the Florida House of Representatives, and they have served as ‘health ambassadors,’ promoting health and wellness programs to parents and other adults.

DYG students have been elected or appointed to serve in a number of leadership roles. Several have been elected presidents of their high school classes, and others have served as Student Government Association high school presidents and as Chair of the Council of SGA Presidents. DYG students have even served as a student representative on the Leon County School Board and as Chair of the Tallahassee Youth Leadership Health Council.

**Support from the Community**

Since DYG’s founding, a large portion of the Tallahassee community has banded together to help it serve Tallahassee’s minority boys and young men. Organizations such as Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and the Tallahassee Chapter of the Links, Inc., an international women’s service group, have ‘adopted’ DYG as one of their ongoing projects. In addition, the Tallahassee Police Department has provided funding for DYG’s mentoring services and security for some of its events.

In 2012 the City of Tallahassee leased for $1 per year a 6,000 ft2 facility for DYG’s academic, leadership development, and support services. Numerous community stakeholders pitched in to prepare the building. Honeywell donated two brand new AC units and installed them, at a total in-kind contribution of $14,500. FAMU and the City each donated 15 computers, while a private computer firm installed the network. Other organizations donated furniture and TVs, while individual citizens and local businesses made monetary donations.

**Conclusion**

DYG’s program is innovative because of its multiplier effect. About 375 students have participated in DYG since its inception, and they in turn have mentored nearly 2,000 youth. Thousands more have been influenced through peer-to-peer interactions with DYG students – during community engagements, DYG step shows, or other displays of their leadership. Nothing inspires an African-American boy more than for him to see a distinguished, confident young black man applying his skills and living up to his potential. DYG’s mission is to develop the young leaders who will provide that inspiration to their peers.

The DYG approach that was developed in Tallahassee has been so successful that its leadership team was able to expand its reach to neighboring counties. A DYG program chapter was established in Gadsden County in 2013 and another in Jefferson County the following year. DYG leadership is currently replicating the model in cities such as Chicago, Atlanta, and Washington.

**PROJECT TWO**

Provide the project name and a description of its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years. *(2,000 word maximum)* Tell us the challenge being addressed, actions taken, and the impact/outcomes of this project on your community’s residents.

**Project Name: Cascades Park**

**Primary contact for the project:** Wayne Tedder, Director of PLACE (Planning, Land Management and Community Enhancement), Blueprint 2000 Intergovernmental Agency**,** 2727 Apalachee Parkway, Tallahassee, FL 32301, (850) 219-1060, [Wayne.Tedder@talgov.com](mailto:Wayne.Tedder@talgov.com)

For decades, the community struggled with how to address two major issues that beleaguered Tallahassee. First was the need to resolve the perilous and destructive flooding of Franklin Boulevard, the surrounding neighborhoods and Leon High School. It was not uncommon for vehicles in the school’s student parking lot to be carried away during a heavy downpour. Even more tragic, flooding in this area was so severe that over the years, several residents drowned. The second issue dealt with the demise of the once magnificent site upon which Florida’s capital city was founded. As a result of contamination and neglect, this historical piece of property became a toxic wasteland. It was nothing more than an eyesore and source of conflict between the neighborhoods, environmentalists and developers. Fast forward to 2014, the solution to both of these problems was achieved through a sophisticated engineering solution, guided by the collective vision of the Tallahassee community.

In March 2014, residents gathered together to celebrate the unveiling of **Cascades Park**, a $30 million, 24-acre world-class park in the heart of downtown Tallahassee. Designed as a state-of-the-art stormwater management facility that is cleverly disguised as a world-class park, the construction of Cascades Park not only alleviated flooding issues, but also resulted in the restoration of one of Tallahassee’s most beautiful and historic locales. The combination of historical preservation, green space, culture and arts has made it an enormously popular attraction, bringing residents from every corner of the community and visitors from all over. It is the embodiment of collaborative engagement across all sectors. Citizens’ working groups, neighborhoods, community organizations, and local businesses – as well as City, County, State & Federal governments – have been vital to the creation and success of Cascades Park.

**“The Cascades” and its Role in Florida History**

After Spain ceded the Florida territory to the United States in 1821, two commissioners, one from Pensacola and one from St. Augustine, set out to select a new government meeting place located between the two cities. Upon discovery of a scenic cascading waterfall, they selected a nearby hill as the future capital city. The beautiful 30-foot waterfall, which would become known as “the Cascades,” unfortunately would be lost to industrial abuse over the course of the next century.

**Contamination and Flooding Spur the Community to Action**

From 1895 until the mid-1950s, Tallahassee operated a manufactured gas plant (MGP) which converted coal into gas. Not knowing the long-term effects, a city landfill was established on the southern edge of the site and an incinerator was placed on the eastern side. Soil contamination from years of dumping coal tar, trash and other waste turned the Cascades and the surrounding area into a hazardous site located just steps from Florida’s Capitol.

In 1989, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted a study of the site and recommended cleanup with the Superfund Alternative Approach. In response, the City of Tallahassee partnered with the EPA and the State of Florida in removing the contaminated soil.

With the passage of the sales tax in 2000, the City of Tallahassee and Leon County created the Blueprint 2000 Intergovernmental Agency to manage and plan the construction of Cascades Park and other community projects. With Blueprint taking the lead, the cleanup gained momentum. The assessment and remediation were completed at a cost of approximately $12 million, with most of the 95,000 tons of contaminants removed by 2006. The cleanup was a massive environmental accomplishment that exceeded EPA regulation and earned the U.S. EPA’s “Excellence in Site Reuse” award. Though the contaminants were no longer an issue, recurrent flooding needed to be addressed. In July 2010, construction began on integrated stormwater facilities that were environmentally appealing. Innovative planning and engineering methods were used to ‘disguise’ this stormwater management and water quality improvement system into a park. The stormwater system now treats 73% of the runoff from the surrounding 860-acre basin.

As reported by the *Tallahassee Democrat*:

*The park was designed mainly as a stormwater project … and in that regard, it has succeeded magnificently. Its biggest test came Dec. 23, when Tallahassee was hit with more than 7 inches of rain. Water filled the park, covered 10 rows of seats in the amphitheater and came within two inches of covering the stage. But within an hour of the storm ending, the water level had dropped nearly two feet, leaving barely any scouring or debris.*

**Improving the Quality of Life, on Several Levels**

While Cascades Park is largely a water quality and flood mitigation project, it also improves the overall quality of life for community residents.

This mixed-use facility **encourages active lifestyles** combining walkability, recreation space and open green space. For kids, the park features an interactive splash fountain and play area. The park frequently features talent shows, concerts, and a number of activities ranging from ballet to fencing at the Capital City Amphitheater, a 3,500-seat outdoor venue that functions as the centerpiece of the park.

Cascades Park also serves as an outdoor classroom providing educational opportunities related to **Tallahassee’s rich history**. Along the trails, various interpretive signs detail the story of Tallahassee from its discovery. Cascades Park features a Korean War Monument and the Smokey Hollow Commemoration, a historical tribute with 13 panels. Florida’s prime meridian marker is the center point in Meridian Plaza, which is a space for receptions, gatherings, and other events while educating the park’s patrons on the historic importance of the location. All of these features increase community self-knowledge, enhance the park experience and communicate a rich sense-of-place.

The park embodies Tallahassee’s commitment to **environmental sustainability**. The landscaping underscores the importance of native plants and includes over 1,000 square feet of Florida wildflowers. Additionally, the multi-use trail provides safe linkages for bicycle and pedestrian commuters. The park’s location in a dense urban setting also promotes redevelopment in the City center rather than on the fringes.

Even “the Cascades” that was lost to industrial abuse has returned through a reimagined waterfall that harkens back to the original inspiration for Tallahassee’s location. Of course, the best testament to the success of Cascades comes directly from Tallahassee’s residents. As reported by the *Tallahassee Democrat*:

*A year ago, Michelle Hayes and her fiancé, Christopher Salvant, were searching for a park location for their wedding. They considered Oven Park and Maclay Gardens. Then they took a walk around under-construction Cascades Park.*

*And the decision was made for them. On Aug. 9, 2014, the couple exchanged vows on the stage of the Cascades Park amphitheater. They became the first couple to marry at Cascades Park.*

*“We both said at the same time, ‘This is it!” Michelle Salvant said. “There was a feel about it. A peace about it. It was in the middle of the city. It was a perfect blend of everything we could want in a park.”*

*Next Saturday, Cascades Park celebrates its one-year anniversary — and the Salvants’ delight is shared by thousands.*

**Collaboration was the Key to Success**

Collaboration has been greater on Cascades Park than any other development project in Tallahassee’s history. According to Wayne Tedder, Director of PLACE:

*Cascades Park, unlike many infrastructure projects, included just about every possible community issue all bundled up into this single project.  We have dealt with contamination issues, storm water treatment, flooding, historical preservation, neighborhood protection, transportation improvements, economic development, community redevelopment, and intergovernmental coordination with local, State and Federal agencies.  Because so many of our citizens and community groups were excited about this new park, they had countless ideas on how to make it better. Several of those ideas were incorporated into the park, even as construction was taking place. In the end, the community worked together to transform a 24-acre wasteland into a world-class park enjoyed by thousands of residents and visitors.*

Funding for the massive project came from the citizen-supported penny sales tax – primarily administered by Blueprint 2000 – and a multitude of public and private sources. Local and state governmental agencies provided approximately $5.1 million. Private donors – ranging from health care organizations to law firms to banking institutions to individual citizens – provided another $1.2 million.

Many volunteer, citizen-led groups have contributed to the park’s development and operation:

* In 2011 Tallahassee’s **Knight Creative Communities Institute** launched a volunteer-driven project, called *Cultivate Cascades*, which identified citizens’ needs for the park and led to the planning, community fundraising, and construction of the Discovery children’s play area. The one-of-a-kind playscape, sponsored by over 40 public/private partners, includes a farm water pump, a steephead slide, log jump, and beach sand area.
* Originally located in the area occupied by the northern portion of the park, Smokey Hollow was one of Tallahassee’s most prominent African American communities. Through eminent domain it was forcibly dismantled in the late 1960s.

Many in Tallahassee felt that the design of Cascades Park should memorialize Smokey Hollow. **A working group of former Smokey Hollow residents, historians, and other interested people** met frequently for over two years to collect oral histories and artifacts relating to everyday life in the community and to design the Smokey Hollow Commemoration. Included are three spirit houses representing the ‘shotgun house’ style originally found in Smokey Hollow, as well as interpretive panels that describe the neighborhood’s rich history and the people who lived there.

The Commemoration not only educates about local African American history, it also mends broken trust between the Smokey Hollow residents and their government. It has recently been awarded the 2014 People’s Choice Award by the Florida Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

* The **Historic Monument Committee** developed the text and images for the 13 panels which tell the story of Tallahassee from its discovery to modern day.
* The **Cascades Park Working Group** discusses all operational issues for the park as well as sound and traffic impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods.
* The **Cascades Park STAGE Committee** is a focus group comprised of local neighborhood representatives and entertainment professionals that participate in the promotion of national music acts for the park’s Capital City Amphitheater.

In addition to the civic engagement, the construction of the park has also helped the local economy. Over 300 construction industry jobs were generated for its development, and the City hired extra employees to handle Cascades Park operations. Cascades Park also stimulated surrounding areas of downtown. For example, the Cascades Park project accelerated the revitalization of nearby Gaines Street, attracting $400 million in private sector investment.

These investments are perhaps best exemplified through the restoration of Tallahassee’s historic electric building. By partnering with a local restaurateur, the City has found a creative solution to what would have been a cost prohibited restoration project. “The Edison” Restaurant and Bar will open in the park this summer, breathing new life into the century old building and preserving a piece of Tallahassee’s history.

**Conclusion**

Cascades Park was designed and constructed to achieve multiple goals. The pollution was cleaned up, stormwater management and water treatment systems were installed, and its ‘disguise’ as a beautiful park has brought us together. Public reaction has been exceptionally positive.

Cascades Park now serves as a host for educational and networking opportunities that encourage citizens to become more closely linked with their community. The overall atmosphere communicates a sense of civic trust, and community interaction. Residents strolling through the park, walking their dogs or riding their bikes may run into any number of other citizens who are enjoying the sun, reading the historical panels, or attending festivals. Strangers smile at each other as they pass on the multi-use trail. Fencing classes, musicians, and toddler T-ball games are common sights as people return again and again to participate in something new.

“The Cascades” discovered in 1823 must have been a sight to behold. That original waterfall has been lost to industrial abuse, but our community has worked hard to undo the mistakes of the past and replace them with something that is truly special. Nearly two hundred years later, the very site that led to Tallahassee’s founding is now the central place that brings our community together.

**PROJECT THREE**

Provide the project name and a description of its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years. *(2,000 word maximum)* Tell us the challenge being addressed, actions taken, and the impact/outcomes of this project on your community’s residents.

**Project Name: Neighborhood REACH**

**Primary contact for the project:** Sandra A. Manning, Utility Marketing Administrator, Utility Services, City of Tallahassee, 408 N. Adams St., Tallahassee, FL 32301, (850) 879-0853, [Sandra.Manning@talgov.com](mailto:Sandra.Manning@talgov.com).

The City of Tallahassee owns and operates the electric, gas, water and sewer utilities. The Neighborhood REACH program is the first of its kind in the nation. A collaborative, holistic initiative, REACH brings together a variety of City and community services focused on improving the quality of life within Tallahassee’s traditionally low-income and older neighborhoods.

REACH was launched in 2010 at a time when the utilities were dealing with higher utility bills, due to high fuel prices, and was also assessing conservation programs to defer the need to build additional electric generating capacity. At that time, the South side and poorer sections of Tallahassee perceived there was a disparity of services provided by the City. These residents expressed increasing frustration, complaining they received higher utility bills compared to more affluent areas. Though their higher energy usage related to older construction and less efficient appliances, many believed they were being deliberately overcharged. Some even speculated that the City was taking advantage of the elderly and less fortunate to help pay for discretionary items, such as holiday light decorations downtown.

All wanted the City to offer new cost-saving programs. However, the undercurrent of distrust of local government presented a massive challenge when considering how best to implement a new program such as REACH. To establish connections early on, and for the program to truly be a community wide effort, it was essential to engage local advocates. Meetings were held with ministers and community leaders to discuss ideas and develop plans for reaching the most people possible in each neighborhood. Local churches distributed educational materials, placed information in their newsletters and notified other support agencies about the REACH program offerings.

The name Neighborhood REACH was chosen to emphasize the value and good will inherent in this community effort. At the core is a team of energetic professionals working in partnership with local businesses and service agencies. The team went door to door to provide residents with free home energy assessments, education and installation of energy- and water-saving products to help lower their utility costs. Tips were tailored for each resident with the help of the City’s Smart Meters, which show customers how energy is being used in the home. In addition, the Gas Utility provided rebates to help eligible customers switch to natural gas appliances, which cost less to operate. The primary goal is to provide residents with greater knowledge and resources to help them better manage their home energy usage.

Over time, REACH has evolved into a **comprehensive program for community-wide delivery of services**. While at the home, the team refers residents to other area services as needed. Some homes were in such bad shape that REACH measures would have had little to no effect. For example, weather-stripping and caulking provides nominal help when there is a hole in the roof or numerous broken windows. In this case, the REACH team would help connect the resident to social service agencies and the federally-funded Emergency Home Repair Program (EHRP), offering repairs to roofs, windows, doors, floors, plumbing and other services to qualified customers. Elder Care Services, the Tallahassee Urban League, Bethel Community Development Corporation, and the Tallahassee Housing Authority provided critical services as key community partners.

At the urging of community partners and leaders, the work didn’t stop with energy efficiency and help from local service agencies. It extended to holistically involve all aspects of the neighborhood. The Tallahassee Fire Department secured grant funding to install smoke detectors and distribute fire extinguishers in REACH homes at no cost to residents. Working closely with residents, other work took place to repair sidewalks, broken street lights, clean drainage ditches, clear overgrown vacant lots, repaint faded crosswalk signs, replace faded street signs, pick up litter, landscape parks and provide other services. This, combined with neighborhood litter cleanups, created an inter-generational spirit of togetherness.

Gaining access to homes and building support for the program required a collective effort. To rebuild trust and overcome potential obstacles, it was necessary to begin at a grassroots level and engage the community through churches, neighborhood associations and direct personal contact. REACH Field Manager Delmas Barber, a native of Tallahassee and former Human Relations Council chair, holds back tears as he recalls a poignant story:

“It was the coldest day of the year in December. I knocked on a door. A faint voice answered, ‘Who is it? What do you want?’ I said, ‘We’ve come to your home to stop this cold air from coming in from around the doors and windows, to make your home warmer and safe.’ The door flung open. She said, ‘I prayed to God last night, saying ‘Lord, I’m so cold, I don’t know what I’m going to do. Help me.’ And the next morning, you knocked on my door. You see, God answered my prayers overnight.’ Then we hugged each other tightly and we both cried.”

Through word of mouth, the momentum continued to build and created a spirit of caring that transcended the program. Well-respected community leaders served as ambassadors who advocated and championed the program, often speaking at local neighborhood association meetings and other gatherings. Staff went door to door, making personal connections and expanding on the outreach of church leaders.

New local partnerships developed and bridged the gap between citizens and government. This paved the way for creating more effective communication with the community and served as a model for other City programs. This one community effort to address utility costs created excitement about the potential for improved quality of life. With lower monthly utility costs, families have greater disposable income to meet their basic needs in the wake of cost-of-living increases and an increasingly volatile economy. REACH also helps stimulate jobs for local contractors providing the upgrades to the homes. While vendors were approved as contractors to provide certain home repair services as part of the REACH project, the business owners quickly saw that the needs exceed the budget. Accordingly they volunteered their assistance with work such as fixing leaks in ductwork, fixing leaking water heaters, and other home repairs beyond the limitations of the grant.

Neighborhood REACH contributes directly to the City’s sustainability initiative. Community sustainability is the point where a thriving economy, a healthy environment, and a strong quality of life meet. REACH is a perfect example of the community working together on all three pillars of sustainability.  Lower electric bills mean reduced electric consumption, which when combined with the City’s use of clean-burning fuel to generate electricity, means fewer emissions.

Since 2010, the REACH program has served over 6,000 homes, resulting in approximately 6,300 Megawatt hours in annual savings for participating residents. Through REACH, residents have received more than 1,800 ceiling insulation grants, 1,000 HVAC repair grants, 190 hot water leak repair grants and 250 duct leak repair grants totaling nearly $760,000 in financial assistance. These results, combined with the City’s other demand side management programs, are reducing consumption significantly enough to help defer the need to build a new electric generating plant in the near future.

The first neighborhood served by REACH was the low-income Bond community, where just over half the residents were homeowners at the time. The entire Bond community was invited to a family learning extravaganza with presentations by community agency advocates, City officials, and REACH professionals. Residents had an opportunity to visit with vendors and the REACH team to learn about utilities and other essential community services.

The Bond kickoff event drew hundreds and resulted in over 500 homes receiving REACH services. In this community, energy consumption tended to be higher in winter than in summer months. Bond residents appeared to tolerate a hot summer more than a cold winter. As such, space heaters and heat strips contributed to high winter electric loads. In the two winter periods prior to the launch of the REACH program, the Bond community used 8-15 percent *more* energy per household than the citywide average. In the winter following REACH, the Bond community used 7 percent LESS energy per household than the citywide average. As a result of REACH, household savings average $18 - $25/month in winter for Bond residents.

In 2011, Tallahassee was recognized as the Most Livable City in America by the U.S. Conference of Mayors for its work in the REACH program, and in 2012 REACH won the Energy Innovator Award and helped win the national Scattergood Award from the American Public Power Association. This program has also garnered recognition from the National League of Cities as well as in publications throughout the country. REACH has bridged the gap between the City and its citizenry, as well as formed permanent bonds between those citizens and local service agencies.

Community feedback, media attention and staff testimonials have been remarkable and word of the program has grown. Hundreds have attended the kick-off events over the years and have inspired others to participate. Here’s a sampling of the comments regularly received by participating residents:

* *“They were actually trying to help save me money, not just doing a job. They spent time in my home finding areas that were wasting power and showing me how to save money.”* ***-- Keri Duesin***
* *“The workers are very friendly and have a connection with God in loving their neighbor. …I’m very grateful to the City for this kind of help. It’s the kind of help that can save lives.”* ***-- Rev. Bernyce Clausell***
* *“I thank them very much for what they are doing and what they are trying to do, not just for the people on the South side but for everybody at this time.”* ***-- Mae Bell Carr***
* *“Project REACH not only helped clean up and beautify our neighborhoods, but it also instilled a commitment to keeping the neighborhood clean. When we called for volunteers to help with a community cleanup, many of the people who were helped by Neighborhood REACH turned out to take part in our cleanup efforts.”* ***-- Rev. Eddie Lee Franklin, Friendship Primitive Baptist Church***
* *“Whole Child and other providers had a short survey for local families to assess their needs. Through our work with Neighborhood REACH, our survey was hand-delivered to families in need and we could then follow up to provide assistance to ensure children were getting all of the services they need. Linking our agency to the people in need through REACH was essential.”* ***-- Courtney Atkins, Whole Child Leon***

The REACH program has brought a great sense of pride, ownership and stewardship to neighbors and neighborhoods. These urban areas, as defined by census data analyses, have faced disproportionate hardships from the recent economic downtown and longstanding socio-economic difficulties when compared to more affluent regions of Tallahassee. The program was expanded to other areas of the city by popular demand.

REACH professionals have been able to make personal connections, promote programs, build relationships and find problematic living conditions warranting immediate attention. Teams have even found many residents who did not have the ability to ask for help and were living in uninhabitable conditions that required extensive assistance and interagency support. This has resulted in newly established liaisons and cooperative ventures.

Here are a few tips shared with other cities who have expressed interest in starting similar programs:

* Cultivate “ambassadors” with credibility to create “buy-in” from the beginning.
* Develop a customized outreach plan based on demographics, culture and values.
* Involve elected officials, churches, social service providers and civic organizations.
* Door-to-door contact works best and provides feedback.
* Use experienced contractors and workers reflective of the community.
* Be ready to address other community issues and needs that arise.
* Ensure extensive and positive media coverage by supplying materials, such as pre-recorded video segments.

While other communities may offer energy-saving programs, REACH stands out as a model for its unique, holistic, neighborhood-centric approach. At the heart of REACH is community involvement. This program will have lasting effects for years to come, not only in energy and money saved, but in understanding the value of working together as a community and passing down the benefit of conservation throughout generations.

*End of Application. Thank you for submitting your All-America City Award Application!*

***Submit the application:***

***1) by email (***[***aac@ncl.org***](mailto:aac@ncl.org)***) or fax (888-314-6053)by Tuesday, March 10, 2015, 11:59 p.m. PST; and,***

***2) mail one hard copy with $200(\*You only pay $100 application fee if you submit a Letter of Intent to Apply by November 25) application fee to:***

***National Civic League, 6000 East Evans Ave., Suite 3-012, Denver, Colorado 80222. NEW NCL ADDRESS!***

Need additional guidance? Email [aac@ncl.org](mailto:aac@ncl.org) or go to [**www.allamericacityaward.com**](http://www.allamericacityaward.com)

for announcements of upcoming conference calls for prospective applicants, links to the 2014 event program featuring the projects of 2014 participating communities, videos of the previous jury presentations, and more or call NCL at 303-571-4343.

**Timeline:**

September 2014-February 2015 – Monthly conference calls with NCL staff and AAC community leaders to learn more about the benefits of AAC, application tips for success, and to share best practices.

November 25, 2014 -- Letter of Intent to Apply Due. \*Save $100 of the application fee if you submit a Letter of Intent to Apply by November 21, 2014.

March 10, 2015, Tuesday -- Application Due

Early April 2015 -- Finalists Announced

Finalist community-wide delegations will be invited to Denver to present.

April-June 2015 – Finalist communities assemble your cross-sector community delegation to present your story at the June 2015 awards event and peer-learning conference. Raise the funds to send your delegation to the June event in Denver. *Finalist community delegations will be asked to present their story to a national jury of civic, local government, business, philanthropy, and community experts. All applicants are invited to participate in the June workshops and networking opportunities!*

June 11-14, 2015, Peer-Learning Workshops & Awards Competition/Presentation in Denver, Colorado

July 2015-Feb 2016, All-America Cities tell their community’s story through a series of AAC/NCL coordinated conference calls and regional forums to the AAC network.

1. 2011 Data for 10th graders on the District Reading Demographic of the FCAT 2.0. Florida Department of Education. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. 2011 Data for 10th graders on the Math section of the FCAT. Florida Department of Education. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. 2012-2013 Florida Department of Education. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. 2012-2013 Florida Department of Education. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Florida Department of Education. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Florida Department of Juvenile Justice [↑](#endnote-ref-6)