

2026 All-America City Award

America at 250: Strengthening Civic Health and Building Trust

As the nation marks 250 years since its founding, we reflect on the ongoing journey to fulfill the promise of a government by, for, and of the people. The 2026 All-America City Award will recognize communities that are bringing these founding ideals to life by ensuring that the power to shape the future resides with the people. The award will spotlight communities across the country that are creatively engaging residents in collective efforts to create thriving and welcoming places where trust and belonging are abundant.

Across the country, Americans of all backgrounds and political perspectives are expressing growing frustration with a system that feels unresponsive, untrustworthy, and ineffective. Civic trust is declining, polarization is deepening, and many people feel disconnected from the decisions that shape their lives. Fortunately, democracy has never been static—it is a living system that can be renewed and reshaped through collective effort.

The 2026 award will honor communities that are reinventing how they come together to make decisions and solve problems. These communities are engaging residents, businesses, and public institutions in civic dialogue, collaboration, and community-building efforts that not only strengthen civic health and rebuild trust but also address pressing challenges and lay the foundation for a better future.



Some projects adhering to this year's theme include:

- Collaborative efforts to address any combination of local challenges.
- Community-building programs like block party months and neighborhood mini-grants.
- Storytelling, visual media, and arts-based projects that creatively surface community hopes and visions for the future.
- Participatory budgeting initiatives that empower residents to directly decide how public funds are allocated.
- Citizens' assemblies that bring together diverse groups of residents to deliberate and make recommendations on policy issues.
- Innovative public meeting formats, including mobile town halls and hybrid forums that broaden participation and foster dialogue across differences.
- Leadership development programs that build pathways to sustained civic participation.
- The use of civic technology to connect residents with local government.
- Deliberative forums that build consensus and address contentious issues.
- Public education campaigns that increase understanding of how local decisions are made and how residents can influence them.
- Shared service projects or cultural exchanges that build belonging and trust.
- The creation and use of civic spaces to create welcoming communities.
- Trust audits, transparency programs, and the use of trusted messenger networks.

Important Dates:

July 2025-May 2026: AAC Webinar Series

January 5, 2026: Letters of Intent Due

February 26, 2026: Applications Due

March 2026: Finalists Announced

March-June 2026: Competition Preparation

June 26-28, 2026: AAC Competition & Event in Denver, CO



Learn More: NationalCivicLeague.org/America-City-Award/