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## Award-Winning Innovations in 2011: Exploring the Boundaries of Transformation

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Four years into the “Great Recession,” it is no surprise that citizens across the United States are weary of bad economic news and a dreary forecast for recovery. That sentiment is particularly resonant among local governments, which felt the precipitous drop in sales and income tax revenue early. Property taxes fell more slowly, but lower revenues will be a continuing drag for many years forward as housing prices slowly rebound. Four out of five cities made personnel cuts in 2010, two out of three cities cut jobs in 2011, and it is estimated that local government has lost over 500,000 jobs since peak levels in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

In the *ICMA State of the Profession 2009* survey, most managers indicated that they were taking short-term steps—for example, making across-the-board cuts, imposing furloughs, and eliminating vacant positions—rather than significantly changing their organizations, rethinking their approaches to service delivery, or revising their long-term strategic plans.<sup>2</sup> The same pattern was in evidence last year as local governments generally pursued cuts rather than creative solutions to cope with the fiscal crisis. But there were important exceptions.

In 2011, the Alliance for Innovation, a national non-profit that promotes the adoption of new approaches in local government, hosted its third BIG IDEAS event in Fort Collins, Colorado, and opened the meeting with

### SELECTED FINDINGS



The Fairfax County, Virginia, public-private partnership office converted a potentially polarizing project into an ecosystem restoration project that enlisted volunteer groups who work and care for the natural environment.

Belleville, Illinois’s Buy Belleville First campaign uses an informational approach and a discount program both to educate Belleville’s citizens about the importance of sales tax revenue to the city’s budget and to increase patronage and revenues for local businesses.

Lethbridge, Alberta, implemented a “deconstruction” program involving the selective dismantlement and harvesting of building components for reuse, recycling, and waste management, and saved 10,448 tons of construction waste in the first six deconstruction projects.

a panel presenting discussion papers on the future of local government. One paper advocated a fundamental reassessment of what local government does and how it delivers its core services. Saying that “the ‘vending machine’ is broken”—that government can no longer

be the sole provider of services to passive citizens—it proposed a shift to focus on core mission, linking a changed workforce to new technology, shared services, nongovernmental solutions, and authentic civic engagement as ways to start adaptively building a new model.<sup>3</sup> A second paper did not necessarily disagree with that assessment but saw little evidence that the proposed shifts being advocated would emerge. As evidence from previous recessions and cutback periods has shown, “even the shock of the Great Recession is unlikely to change the pattern of gradual rather than dramatic change.”<sup>4</sup> A third paper argued that the primary challenge is changing the internal workings of local government so that elected officials and professional staff will work together to address highly complex problems in a shifting external environment.<sup>5</sup>

These views of the future provide a backdrop for examining the award-winning programs of 2011. Despite the decline in resources and successive rounds of cuts, local government officials and citizens across North America keep coming up with new ideas. Some of these ideas are direct responses to fiscal pressures, and some reflect a recognition of the new realities and new ways of doing the work of local government that the first BIG IDEAS paper suggested. Others, however, are creative new approaches intended to make government more effective in addressing community problems, more efficient in delivering services, and better able to ensure that the workforce of today and tomorrow will be ready to serve. By highlighting some of the most noteworthy approaches, this article encourages other governments to consider them, modify them, and make them work in their own communities.

For the past four years we have reviewed hundreds of award-winning programs to ascertain: *What leading-edge ideas are being implemented in local governments across the continent?* The 21 cases presented in 2012 represent a wide range of North American

communities, from cities as small as 4,500 in population to cities exceeding 8 million. The featured innovations fall into five broad categories: new connections to leverage results, citizens as volunteers, organization and finance, sustainability, and solving uncommon local problems. The article then examines key features of the highlighted cases and reviews lessons learned from them.

## New Connections to Leverage Results

*Local governments are finding ways to involve a wider range of players in delivering service, planning for the future, and saving tax dollars.*

## Comprehensive Citizen Engagement

*Windsor Heights, Iowa (pop. 4,860)*<sup>6</sup>

ICMA Strategic Leadership and Governance Award

Starting in 2000, Windsor Heights made a commitment to undertake activities that inform, educate, and involve citizens through a variety of media and creative ways. The Takin’ It to the Streets program, in which the city council holds meetings literally on a neighborhood street and serves refreshments afterward, not only promotes citizen involvement but also encourages neighbors to get to know each other. The Community Coffee Club, in which the city administrator and a council member invite citizens to join them for coffee once a month at a local coffee shop, enables local officials to meet with citizens and keep all parties current on community events. The city reports that these sustained efforts to connect with citizens *where they are* have resulted in increased interaction between citizens and local officials at both formal and informal meetings, greater citizen access to and confidence in their local government, and broadened perspectives among citizens of their community’s future.

## Arlington Urban Design Center

*Arlington, Texas (pop. 365,438)*

2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

With the opening of new sports facilities and its selection as the site for the Super Bowl in 2011, Arlington was undergoing a significant amount of development activity. To capitalize on this surge of reinvestment, the city’s Community Development and Planning Department collaborated with the University of Texas’s School of Urban and Planning Affairs to create a unique studio staffed with six graduate students studying architecture, landscaping, and urban planning. The Arlington Urban Design Center (AUDC) was

### Alliance for Innovation and ICMA Awards for Best Practices

More than 220 submissions and 50 award winners were reviewed for this article. These included Innovation Case Studies and top-ranking award submissions from the Alliance for Innovation, recipients of ICMA honors, winners of the National Civic League’s All-America City Award, and recipients of the Innovation in American Government Award from the Ash Center at Harvard University.

established in July 2009 to create public awareness about the importance of sustainable urban design and its impact on quality of life, the environment, and economic investment. Directed by city employees, the AUDC strives to provide high-quality urban design solutions at no cost to its clients. To date, 22 projects have been completed, including the construction of affordable housing, streetscape and signage improvements, and commercial facelifts. The AUDC is located inside city hall near the main public entrance, which sends a clear message that the city highly values design and wants to make the service accessible to all citizens.

### **Water Regional Utility Partnership**

*Round Rock, Texas (pop. 99,887)*

2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

After completing a utility study in 2005 that analyzed the costs of accessing various sources of water—from lakes to the north and west to aquifers to the east—with and without partners, Round Rock concluded that going solo was much more expensive than working with partners, and it initiated a partnership with two other cities, Leander and Cedar Park. Located just north of Austin, the three cities had each secured rights from the Lower Colorado River Authority to access water in nearby Lake Travis. Leander and Cedar Park were already accessing water from Lake Travis through separate treatment and distribution systems.

One goal of Round Rock's regional utility partnership was to finance and build the infrastructure necessary to secure long-term water supplies for three of the fastest-growing cities in Texas. Together they created the Brushy Creek Regional Utility Authority, which secured below-market financing from the Texas Water Development Board. The design and construction of a 106-million-gallon-per-day water treatment and distribution system, to be constructed in four phases, is projected to cost an estimated \$327 million. Just as important was the goal to achieve significant savings in design and construction costs by building one regional system instead of three stand-alone municipal systems. To this end, the project is expected to save approximately 33% of current costs, or up to \$100 million.

### **Fairfax County Restoration Project**

*Fairfax County, Virginia (pop. 1,081,726)*

2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

When the Virginia Department of Transportation MegaProjects began land clearing for the High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes project on the Capital Beltway

(I-495), local environmental and civic organizations became concerned. Preconstruction work required the removal of many native plants as well as old-growth quality forest around the existing highway, which would result in damage to and loss of wildlife habitats. Citizens approached the Office of Public Private Partnerships with the idea of replicating an environmental restoration initiative that had been undertaken in New York. The result was the Fairfax County Restoration Project (FCRP), whose purpose is to restore ecosystem functions in Fairfax County through collaboration with public, private, and volunteer organizations. It strengthens efforts already under way in each sector by identifying opportunities to share volunteers, education initiatives, and resources, and it includes a collaborative website and events calendar.

As construction of the HOT lanes began, FCRP member organizations rescued seedlings and plant material at two construction sites and cultivated them for future planting. Current efforts focus on reaching out to homeowners affected by the construction and educating them on sustainable practices for land use and landscaping. To this end, the FCRP holds educational forums and workshops for citizens, homeowners associations, and civic associations on the benefits of using native plantings and water runoff management. It has also helped to develop a community garden laboratory and a living classroom for teaching students about the environment.

### **Citizens as Volunteers**

*Regular citizens can make significant contributions to their communities and cost-effectively change how local governments operate and succeed.*

### **Novi Youth Council**

*Novi, Michigan (pop. 55,224)*

2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

The Novi Youth Council brings together teens from more than five high schools to develop goals, create initiatives, and enhance the community. When first formed, the council was given a blank slate upon which to look at projects to pursue. After brainstorming, the members decided that they wanted to break out of the "typical" youth council model of being a social venue for teens and instead make an impact on the community. They chose to focus on

- Promoting drug prevention within schools
- Bridging the gap between teens and seniors
- Providing education on teen depression and suicide.

With an annual budget of only \$500, this 19-member council is significantly improving various health and wellness aspects of community life through such innovative programs as “Addicted to Movies . . . not Drugs,” “Project Sticker Shock,” “It’s OUR Novi,” and an intergenerational “prom.” In so doing, it is having a profound impact on citizen engagement and community spirit, thereby serving as a model program for local governments of all sizes.

### **West Vancouver Community Centre**

*West Vancouver, British Columbia (pop. 44,058)*  
2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

In 2009, the city of West Vancouver took a bold step regarding its newly constructed \$40 million, 83,000-square-foot community center, which includes community programming space and an adjoining 40,000-square-foot aquatic center with a combined operating budget of \$6.7 million. Rather than run it as a municipal operation, the city entered into a joint operating agreement with a newly formed nonprofit. The West Vancouver Community Centre Services Society, a membership organization governed by a board of directors who reside in the community, is responsible for the operation and budgeting oversight of all services and programs that take place in the facility. Focused on sustainability, accessibility, collaboration, and multidimensional integration, the buildings and the community governance model is designed to take West Vancouver’s blend of community services to the year 2050 and beyond, with the community at the helm.

### **Caring for the Kenai**

*Kenai, Alaska (pop. 7,100)*  
All-America City Award

In 2008, the Kenai River in South-Central Alaska was designated as a Category 5 river—an impaired water body in accordance with the federal Clean Water Act. Caring for the Kenai (CFK) is an ongoing environmental awareness contest that brings together the entire community of Alaska’s Kenai Peninsula and offers over \$25,000 in cash awards to area schools and local students. CFK poses the question, “What can I do, invent, create or improve to better care for the environment of the Kenai Peninsula or improve the area’s preparedness for natural disaster?” Over 500 students research, experiment, and conduct interviews to learn about an environmental issue they wish to solve. Working with community and business leaders, government agencies, and policy makers, CFK students generate new and inventive ideas to address environmental challenges, learn about the practical application of their

ideas, and gain real-world experience implementing their projects. Parents learn about CFK when students discuss and work on their projects at home. Local media assist in getting the message out to the public. Industry, government, educators, regulators, and private citizens collaborate to promote both educational and environmental innovations. CFK is one of three community-based environmental programs recognized in the Kenai All-America City Award.

### **NYC Service**

*New York City, New York (pop. 8,175,133)*  
Ash Center Top 25 Innovations in American Government

NYC Service is Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s program to leverage citizen service as a core strategy to respond to local needs. Launched in April 2009, the program introduces “impact volunteerism”: targeting local needs, using best practices, and measuring impact. This is accomplished through identifying volunteer opportunities for local nonprofit organizations and sharing those opportunities with the public. Using a sophisticated website, NYC Service has identified community building, neighbors in need, education, health, emergency preparedness, and the environment as priority areas in which New Yorkers can volunteer their time. In all, the mayor reports that the program’s three primary goals have been met: channeling volunteers to address the city’s greatest needs, making New York the easiest place in which to volunteer, and promoting service as a core part of what it means to be a citizen.

### **Organization and Finance**

*Focusing internally on planning, organizational development, and leadership training and externally on citizen involvement can improve the bottom line and produce excellent results.*

### **Challenges, Solutions, and Innovations Alliance (CSI Alliance)**

*Sarasota County, Florida (pop. 379,448)*  
2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

Difficult economic times have created a “new normal” for local governments. While most government leaders recognize the need for honest discussions with employees, understanding how best to engage employees on emotionally laden topics is another matter. In confronting today’s challenges, Sarasota County Government (SCG) is philosophically committed to the Networked Talent Model, in which all levels of an

informed and engaged workforce participate in generating solutions and making decisions to achieve a common goal. Over the years, county employees have taken advantage of opportunities to learn together through such tools as award and recognition programs, team assessments, and broadbanding, which have supported positive cultural change. The success of these past efforts set the stage in January 2009 for SCG to take its employee engagement practices to the next level. Through the Challenges, Solutions, and Innovations Alliance (CSI Alliance), SCG actively engages a large, cross-functional group of employees in thinking creatively to meet enterprise-wide challenges with no- to low-cost solutions. Employee workgroup successes to date include transparency in the payroll and benefit system, revisions to the downtown parking plan, and other time- and money-saving solutions.

### **Buy Belleville First**

*Belleville, Illinois (pop. 44,478)*  
All-America City Award

The Buy Belleville First campaign is a twofold effort designed to educate Belleville's citizens about the importance of buying goods within their own community and to increase patronage and revenues for local businesses. The two components are an informational campaign and the "Belleville First" discount program. For the first component, community volunteers hand-delivered letters to the 17,000 households within the city's corporate limits, describing what sales tax revenues mean to the city's budget and reminding them that the more they buy in Belleville, the more sales tax comes to the city for police and fire protection, roadway repairs and construction, city services, etc. For the second component, participating merchants offer discounts to those holding a Belleville First card; the Belleville Main Street organization coordinates the program and produces the cards; and the city promotes the program to residents and visitors. Since its inception, the Buy Belleville First campaign has gained momentum and become more successful than originally anticipated.

### **"I Value" Campaign**

*Hampton, Virginia (pop. 137,436)*  
2011 Havlick Alliance for Innovation Award

In January 2010, the new city manager of Hampton faced the task of balancing the upcoming fiscal year 2011 budget while confronting an approximate \$19 million shortfall. Knowing that maximum community input was necessary to help her make the tough decisions ahead, she wanted to make community

involvement in the budget process a top priority. To accomplish this, the city took an innovative approach by pulling together a team comprising marketing, communication, and technology professionals throughout the organization. The team quickly embarked on the most extensive community involvement project the city had ever undertaken. Blending some of the best traditional citizen-outreach practices with an array of Internet-based engagement tools, including live online chats and electronic polling, the "I Value" campaign largely involved having citizens rate their city services in terms of "needs" and "wants." Beyond engaging the community on all levels, the campaign helped the city manager produce a balanced budget with little community dissent. Since the first year of the process, "I Value" has included citizen feedback on the capital budget as well as on the operating budget.

### **Changing the Public (and Internal) Perspective of Local Government**

*Montgomery, Ohio (pop. 10,251)*  
ICMA Strategic leadership and Governance Award 2011

In 2001, in order to create a better work environment for employees and a more productive system of government for residents, Montgomery instituted the High Performing Organization (HPO) business model throughout its departments. The city studied the HPO theory of three distinct phases of work and tailored the third phase, the Networked Talent Model, to fit its specific needs. This model assumes that work is holistic in nature and is done by teams of employees who demonstrate the leadership, management, and technical skills to work effectively together toward common goals. The changes improved not only the work environment but also organizational capacity, individual employee skills, and the quality of employee teamwork. Some specific results include revised hiring practices, new human resource performance tools, and the implementation of an annual organizational culture tool.

### **Sustainability**

*A wealth of new approaches is being developed to make communities more sustainable.*

### **Greening Lakewood Business Partnership**

*Lakewood, Colorado (pop. 142,980)*  
All-America City award

The Learning Source in Lakewood operates one of the largest adult literacy programs in the United States. When it learned that its utility costs for its one-story brick building were higher than those for a 50-unit,

multifamily complex, the organization sought energy-efficiency expertise from the community. This sparked the formation of the Greening Lakewood Business Partnership (GLBP). GLBP's mission is to bring energy efficiency to older, existing office and commercial buildings in Lakewood while providing job training, particularly for military veterans returning from overseas. The partnership includes the city of Lakewood, which works with the utility company, banks, and the state to help fund energy-efficient retrofits; Red Rocks Community College, which created a program for students to train in energy auditing and provides free audits to businesses under the supervision of experts in the field; the Alameda Gateway Community Association, which continues the discussion with Lakewood businesses; Veterans Green Jobs, which mobilizes the military veterans to enter the Red Rocks program; the Jefferson County Workforce Center, which coordinates funding for the students' paid internships; and the Better Business Bureau, which markets the partnership. As for the Learning Source, GLBP has helped it reduce its monthly heating bills from \$3,500 to \$200.

### **Lethbridge Deconstruction Initiative**

*Lethbridge, Alberta (pop. 87,882)*<sup>8</sup>  
2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

Buildings, like everything else, have a life cycle. For the past four years, Facility Services in Lethbridge has taken responsibility for mitigating the environmental impact that occurs when a city facility or community building has reached the end of its useful life and is destined to be removed. Unlike demolition, in which a site is cleared of its building by the most expedient means, deconstruction in this context is the selective dismantlement and harvesting of building components, specifically for reuse, recycling, and waste management. The process, which is known as "waste streaming," involves identifying and assessing various building elements prior to deconstruction so that they can be reconverted into useful building material and diverted accordingly. Hazardous materials are properly abated to render a safe and clean site, and prearranged "homes" are found for remaining usable materials before work is even started. The successful contractor is generally awarded salvage of all materials, which helps generate funds to offset deconstruction and disposal costs. In adopting deconstruction as a responsible means of building disposal, the city has, to date, successfully diverted 10,448 tons of construction and demolition waste—or the equivalent volume of 70 average 2,000-square-foot houses—from entering local landfills.

### **Oro Valley Energy Efficiency and Solar Project**

*Oro Valley, Arizona (pop. 41,011)*  
2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

The Oro Valley Energy Efficiency and Solar Project has created a long-range plan that is producing substantial savings for the town, but the real triumph of this project is the innovative mix of financing that was used to pay for it. The \$4 million project is self-funded through federal energy bonding, an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant, local utility incentives, and energy savings. Each financing source is uniquely bundled into a funding vehicle known as Energy Performance Contracting, a strategic, design-build energy plan that funds itself by virtue of its own savings and is increasingly being used in energy-related projects. In this project, the newly applied and/or installed technologies and operating procedures will generate cost reductions to ensure that 100% of project costs are recovered over the next 10 years, and these savings will be used to retire the debt service created to initiate the program. The utility company Arizona Public Service Energy Services has guaranteed both energy and operational cost reductions to mitigate the risks typically associated with the traditional approach of financing new projects.

### **Solving Uncommon Local Problems**

*Out-of-the-box thinking can yield unanticipated opportunities for communities to solve problems that are specific to them.*

### **Local Job-Generation Stimulus Programs**

*Sunnyvale, California (pop. 140,081)*  
2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

*St. Lucie County, Florida (pop. 277,789)*  
ICMA Strategic Leadership and Governance Award

As the "Great Recession" began to unfold, both Sunnyvale, California, and St. Lucie County, Florida, determined that rather than wait for the federal government to start a stimulus program, each would create its own. In Sunnyvale, the goal was to undertake \$60 million in low-interest, bond-funded capital improvement projects. Sunnyvale Works! required the city to reinvent its capital improvement project processes by finding new ways to expedite procedures, using staff to better advantage, and accelerating what it takes to get a project under construction. As a result, Sunnyvale changed the way it does business, becoming more agile, breaking down internal departmental

barriers, and adopting methods that have permitted the city to expand the original \$60 million in projects to more than \$80 million without increasing its costs.

In 2009, St. Lucie County had one of the highest unemployment rates and one of the highest foreclosure rates in the country. To help put residents back to work and boost the local economy, the county developed a comprehensive stimulus program consisting of many small “shovel-ready” projects and local-preference ordinances. Projects ranged from a \$4,000 canoe dock to a \$6.6 million road-widening project. In the end, the stimulus plan helped to create just over 500 jobs and provided work projects to a number of local businesses.

### **We Are Legal Graffiti**

*Fort Worth, Texas (pop. 727,575)*

All-America City Award

Standard-issue weapons to fight graffiti in Fort Worth produced little results, but when two high school art teachers joined with students from rival high schools, they were able to turn things around. We Are Legal (WAL) is a voluntary, student-driven, non-scholastic effort that redirects the time and talents of central-city and predominately Hispanic youth to producing well-conceived and approved art. Each youth signs a contract in which he or she pledges to no longer paint illegally. With no more than guidance from the teachers and support from a growing number of community organizations and businesses, WAL students—would-be criminals who were fined for tagging—have transformed themselves into Fort Worth’s Pop Surrealism Post Modern Urban Art Movement. They also are transforming the community by adorning walls with murals rather than graffiti. And their work is paying off. Still-active taggers respect the wall murals that the students have painted by not tagging the work. With a 33% decline in graffiti, particularly in the neighborhood from which most WAL students come, Fort Worth has become a more attractive place to live.

### **Public Service Areas in Philadelphia**

*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (pop. 1,526,006)*

2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

In 2010, Philadelphia established the Public Service Areas Model for Sustainable Change in High Crime Neighborhoods as a pilot program to bring a citizen-centric, coordinated approach to improving public safety in challenged neighborhoods. The process began by canvassing residents to learn what they thought could be done to make their

neighborhoods safer, and then by having a coordinated team of public and nonprofit agencies deliver the resources necessary to turn those ideas into concrete action. During the first phase of the program, crimes were reduced by 17%. Since the program began, 85 parcels in the pilot area have been cleaned, dangerous buildings have been destroyed, programs for schoolchildren have been established, new recreation programs are in place, and nonprofits are delivering health programs for seniors and job training programs for residents. The residents, many of whom had lost all faith in the “system,” are now engaged, which most believe is the key to the program’s success.

### **Foreclosure Prevention Partnership Program**

*Las Vegas, Nevada (pop. 583,756)*

2011 TLG Innovation Study, Alliance

Ninety percent of Nevada’s foreclosures are located in the southern part of the state, which includes unincorporated Clark County and the cities of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, and Henderson. Southern Nevada experienced 71,000 foreclosures from January 2008 to June 2010, representing more than 11% of its housing stock. Las Vegas continues to lead the nation in foreclosures, with 1 in every 80 homes receiving a foreclosure filing in June 2010.

Funds provided for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program through the Housing and Economic Recovery Act (HERA) and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) assist local governments only in reducing the number of already foreclosed properties, but neither HERA nor ARRA provides foreclosure intervention and prevention services. Thus, the city of Las Vegas created the Foreclosure Prevention Partnership Program (FPPP) to bring together government agencies, housing counseling agencies, lenders, and nonprofit organizations to combat the foreclosure crisis. The program uses a dual approach: educational forums and Freehomeaid.org, a foreclosure prevention counseling services website. (The website was originally named StopNVForeclosures.org but was changed when FPPP learned that many of its potential clients were being lured to unscrupulous sites when searching the Internet for foreclosure help. That change alone increased traffic on the website by twofold.) At no cost to the homeowner, the forums and the website provide educational materials, tools to prevent foreclosure, and an online system designed to streamline the foreclosure case submission process.

## Powered Paragliders in Palm Bay

*Palm Bay, Florida (pop. 103,190)*

2011 Muehlenbeck Award for Innovation, Alliance

In 2009, the Palm Bay police department created a first of its kind for its Search Operations Aerial Response (SOAR) unit: an ultralight classified aircraft called a Powered Paraglider (PPG). The PPG, which consists of a small, two-cycle motor worn on the back of a pilot and a parachute-type “wing” capable of lifting the pilot and motor into the air, provides a low-cost option for a police agency that is unable to purchase or maintain more conventional forms of aviation. The PPG was never intended to replace commonly used forms of police aviation, such as airplanes or helicopters; rather, it supplements these aircraft by providing an aerial platform that is portable (weighing about 60 pounds), easily deployable from any open field, inexpensive to operate (as little as \$5 per hour), and able to remain airborne for up to four hours (with a three- to five-gallon fuel capacity) as long as wind and weather conditions are favorable.

In addition, the PPG is legally permitted to operate below the 1,000-foot minimum altitude for general aviation. Flying between 20 and 30 mph (depending on wind direction), the glider can cover up to 70 miles. The “low and slow” principle allows it to have both maneuverability and an unobstructed view of objects on the ground. An officer operating a PPG can cover a larger area more thoroughly and in a shorter amount of time than can multiple officers in patrol cars or on foot. Using radio contact with the officers on the ground, the pilot can direct them to specific locations to further investigate any sightings made from the air.

## Lessons Learned

The cases described here are not the only ones that have been recognized by the Alliance for Innovation, ICMA, the Ash Center, and All-America City Program, but they do exemplify new approaches that have been crafted to solve enduring or perplexing local problems. In previous years we have noted that innovative organizations share certain characteristics, such as inclusive leadership within the staff or with elected officials, convergence of motivation to make something happen, willingness to be creative and take risks, internal and external collaboration, and a strong connection to engagement with citizens. These elements are present in the organizations featured here, but there are also programmatic characteristics that link these 21 award-winning efforts.

## Complex Partnerships

Enduring partnerships nearly always represent an equation in which the sum exceeds the value of the

individual parts. Arlington, Texas’s AUDC program brought together university design students with residents and businesses to make the community a more desirable and attractive place. The city placed the program’s front door on the first floor of city hall to promote its interest in great, affordable design for the city center. The Fairfax County, Virginia, Office of Public Private Partnerships was able to convert a potentially polarizing project into an ecosystem restoration initiative that enlisted volunteer groups who work and care for the natural environment. In a state often known for rugged individualism, Round Rock, Texas, looked beyond the simplicity of building its own utility and instead partnered with Leander and Cedar Park to combine the water rights of all three jurisdictions into a single system, saving nearly \$100 million for the local governments and ratepayers. Lakewood, Colorado, used the community’s energy-efficiency expertise not only to retrofit the Learning Source literacy building but also to create the Greening Lakewood Business Partnership, which is bringing energy efficiency to existing offices and commercial buildings while providing job training for veterans and energy education for students.

## Borderless Internal and External Collaboration

Collaboration is defined as “the work and activity of a number of persons who individually contribute to the efficiency of the whole” and also “the state of having shared interests or efforts.”<sup>9</sup> Both definitions apply to a number of the cases cited. The West Vancouver Community Centre in British Columbia was bold in blurring the boundaries between the public and private sectors when it entered into an agreement with a nonprofit organization to operate a brand-new \$40 million community center. Sarasota County, Florida, and Montgomery, Ohio, each undertook extensive cross-team training to allow employees to come up with unexpected solutions to lingering problems that the regular work groups had not successfully tackled. Budget woes led Hampton, Virginia’s new city manager to enlist the city staff and community to help pare expenses and raise revenues in ways that enhance the city rather than diminish it. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, developed cross-department teams made up of public safety, code compliance, recreation, and other staff to join with residents in beautifying the neighborhood, decreasing crime, and connecting with nonprofits to increase access to services.

## Authentic Engagement

No longer does including residents in public sector deliberations simply mean holding public hearings or



posting notices in the local newspaper. Today local governments across the country and around the world are discovering the power, creativity, and commitment of their residents. Windsor Heights, Iowa, made a game-changing commitment to be accessible to residents, holding council meetings in neighborhoods and hosting coffee clubs in local cafés. Three cities sought to involve youth in efforts to solve local problems: Kenai, Alaska, created an environmental awareness contest to invent better ways to care for the environment; Novi, Michigan, established a nontraditional teen council; and Fort Worth, Texas, engaged art teachers and taggers to transform polarizing graffiti into community murals. Other communities addressed their citizens' needs in separate but equally important ways through education and action: Las Vegas, Nevada, recognized that foreclosures were being addressed only after the fact and set up prevention programs to help homeowners avoid losing their homes; New York City built a user-friendly website where thousands of volunteer opportunities are cataloged and easily accessed; and Belleville, Illinois, helped its citizens understand how their shopping patterns affect city services.

### Using Ingenuity to Get Remarkable Results

It has been said that innovation without measuring results is simply play. In this competitive and financially challenging environment, local governments cannot afford to be investing in programs that do not achieve

their potential. Oro Valley, Arizona, put that notion to work when it translated energy savings into a \$4 million energy bond structured so that the debt service is repaid through the savings earned from new technology and new operating procedures. Sunnyvale, California, and St. Lucie County, Florida, took existing resources and created their own local "stimulus" programs, completing future-year capital projects early and creating local construction jobs within their communities. Lethbridge, Alberta, made destruction constructive by implementing a "waste streaming" process and saving 10,448 tons (9,478 metric tonnes) of construction waste in the first six deconstruction projects. Palm Bay, Florida, decided to "fly slow and low" with new technology that expands its traditional police aviation capability by allowing officers to investigate larger areas more thoroughly and in a less time-consuming manner.

### Conclusion

In the continuing hard times of 2012, local governments are using innovation not only to fill gaps and save money, but also to build partnerships, engage citizens, and solve perplexing problems. The governments featured in this article are exploring the boundaries of transformation in local government. Doing so is hard and successes may be rare, but the cases provided here can give other governments ideas and inspiration to emulate and build upon.

### Notes

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