



2012 Annual Awards Program

Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

Deadline for Nominations: March 16, 2012

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- ☒ Community Health and Safety
- ☐ Community Partnership
- ☐ Community Sustainability
- ☐ Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: City of Good Neighbors program

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: City of Fort Smith, Arkansas

Jurisdiction population(s): 83,000

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented by or before January 31, 2011, to be eligible. The start date should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: May Year: 2007

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, October 2012. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Ray Gosack

Title: City Administrator Jurisdiction: City of Fort Smith, AR

Name: Jeff Dingman

Title: Deputy City Admin Jurisdiction: City of Fort Smith, AR

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact:	<u>Ray Gosack</u>		
Title:	<u>City Administrator</u>	Jurisdiction:	<u>City of Fort Smith, AR</u>
Street address:	<u>623 Garrison Ave</u>		
City:	<u>Fort Smith</u>	State/Province:	<u>Arkansas</u>
Zip/Postal Code:	<u>72901</u>	Country:	<u>USA</u>
Telephone:	<u>479.784.2201</u>	Fax:	<u>479.784.2430</u>
E-mail:	<u>rgosack@fortsmithar.gov</u>		

In 2002, the City of Fort Smith adopted a Comprehensive Plan, which set goals, policies, and land planning principles for guiding the future of Fort Smith. One of the main goals of this plan is to protect neighborhoods by implementing a property maintenance code, which is a requirement for property owners and tenants to maintain their structures and properties for the health and safety of the community. The purpose of the property maintenance code, implemented city wide in 2007, is to protect the health, safety and welfare of the community. Structures not adequately maintained create many negative and harmful problems for neighborhoods, including the decline of property values and threats to public health and safety.

City administration, elected officials, and staff worked with landlords and neighborhood association leaders across the city to develop a plan that focused on compliance of the housing code. Elected officials stressed that the goal of the program was to help residents meet compliance with the support of city involvement and not writing citations for code violations. Many residents lack the physical or financial ability to make the necessary repairs to their homes. **The City of Good Neighbors** is a program created by the City of Fort Smith to help citizens comply with the Property Maintenance Code. Instead of citing homeowners with regulation violations and fines, the goal of this program is to assist citizens with financial or physical hardships in achieving code compliance for their residences. This service is made possible through the help of volunteers and resources provided through local business donations and funds from Community Development Block Grants.

In 2005, Fort Smith hosted the first Good Neighbors Day, which brought community leaders, local businesses and volunteers together to assist citizens with repairs and maintenance issues. Since then, the program has expanded to include not only an annual Good Neighbors Day hosted each April, but also an ongoing need-based assistance program to help citizens complete

projects that will repair and bring their property up to code in a week- long event hosted each summer.

Former Mayor, Ray Baker introduced a partnership with World Changers organization in 2010. World Changers, an organization established in 1990, is operated through a network of Southern Baptist and other evangelical churches. Each year, World Changers participates in over 90 community projects in 30 states. This partnership has allowed for expansion of the Good Neighbors Program in Fort Smith by bringing in a team of over 300 youth and young adult volunteers who donate their labor for the benefit of close to 40 homeowners in the City of Fort Smith since its inception. The planning and community development staff works several weeks a year preparing for this week-long event, which provides repairs and services to owner-occupied homes such as roof repairs, siding, painting, graffiti removal, and yard cleanup.

The Good Neighbors Program is funded by utilizing Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) contingency funds in the amount of approximately \$30,000 each year. The homeowners receiving CDBG assistance are selected based on income qualifications and project criteria determined with the help of World Changers, Arkansas Institute of Architects and the program planning committee. CDBG funds are used solely to pay for materials and related expenses for the repair of the qualifying homes each project year. Local business donations from Lowe's, Yeager's and Pittsburgh Paints also helped with material costs. The labor donated by World Changers in 2010 alone was estimated at \$68,000. Of course, the labor, provided by generous volunteers, is free. The Good Neighbors volunteers provide a valuable service to this program, which allows more community members to receive assistance. As part of their service World Changers provides accommodation and meals for the volunteers through the generosity of partnership church organizations in the local community.

Mr. Charles Story's home was just one of the many homes repaired with this program. Due to health and income limitations, Mr. Story was unable to maintain his property and it had fallen into disrepair. In June of 2010, Good Neighbors, collaborating with World Changers volunteers, came to his assistance. Exterior repairs, new vinyl siding, windows, and heating and air conditioning systems were made possible through grants and donations. Members of the First Christian Church volunteered their time in July to give the interior of the home a makeover as well. Volunteers painted the interior walls, ceilings and kitchen cabinets with paint donated by Pittsburgh Paints. This is just one of many success stories the Good Neighbors Program has had a hand in creating through their focused commitment to community improvement.

Since its inception in 2005, the growth of this program has been rapid. Many families within the City of Fort Smith are in need of help. With the financial climate of the nation deteriorating in the past year and a half, coupled with the closing of local plants and layoffs in Fort Smith, this number continues to rise. With the rapid growth of this program, detailed and early planning is essential for success. Involving key people such as architects, contractors, and building materials suppliers early in the project planning, allows the relatively small budget to be maximized for the benefit of program recipients.

Over the past several years, planning and implementation of this program has changed to accommodate the increased reach of this community program. Committees formed to discuss project planning, scheduling, cleanup, and privacy and security concerns. Identifying qualifying properties and citizens is aided by the City Neighborhood Services Division property inspectors, referrals from local church organizations, and community Neighborhood Problem Solving meetings hosted by the Fort Smith Police Department. Administrators do not only work behind the scene coordinating the efforts, many people on the Board are also directly involved in the

hands-on activities with individual projects and are not afraid to get in and get their hands dirty helping a neighbor in need.

Additionally, the Good Neighbors program was featured in the local newspaper, *The Southwest Times Record*, in July of 2011, which provided attention for both families in need of this service and for people who would like to volunteer their time to be a Good Neighbor and help someone in need.