



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

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: S.T.A.R (Students Together Achieving Revitalization)

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: City of San Antonio, TX

Jurisdiction population(s): 1,327,407

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: November Year: 2010

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: Sheryl Sculley

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: City of San Antonio

Name: David Ellison

Title: Interim Assistant City Manager Jurisdiction: City of San Antonio

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact:	<u>Edward Benavides</u>		
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The S.T.A.R. project is a proactive approach to revitalization of central city historic districts. It is a partnership between the University of Texas at San Antonio College of Architecture (UTSA CoA) and the City of San Antonio's Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) based on the concept of service learning for the students while working to eliminate the deterioration in local historic districts by helping homeowners with exterior repair and maintenance project. The November 2011, S.T.A.R. project completed repairs on thirteen houses in the Dignowity Hill Historic District on San Antonio's Eastside. The project also furthers an ongoing effort to engage and inform the public about the values and benefits of historic preservation.

Unfortunately, many of San Antonio's historic neighborhood and homes have been neglected for decades, which not only threatens the community's connection to its heritage but also impacts the value of properties and safety of neighborhoods. In 2009, the City Council adopted a Strategic Historic Preservation Plan (SHPP) which makes 5-15 year recommendations for economic development and revitalization. The S.T.A.R. project fulfills several of the SHPP recommendations by working to match endangered properties with the appropriate tools to help eliminate the deterioration of San Antonio's historic central city housing stock.

Through the partnership with the UTSA CoA, the first S.T.A.R. project coordinated the work of more than 250 student volunteers who performed minor exterior repairs and maintenance projects. In addition to the volunteers, the OHP also enlisted the help of various corporate sponsors, the District 2 City Council office, the Dignowity Hill Neighborhood Association, and volunteer contractors to provide supplies, food, labor, and expertise to make this program a success. In order to prepare for the event, a pilot weekend was organized for one house, which acted as a preliminary test. The pilot weekend also served as training for the graduate students from the Historic

Preservation Association (HPA), who acted as team leaders during the S.T.A.R. weekends.

The students were able to gain first-hand experience in construction techniques and building and materials technology that they will be able to apply in the classroom, as well as in their professional careers. “Service Learning” is one of the best ways to describe this experience – students giving to the community and gaining in-depth experience in return. The program offered a learning experience that they would otherwise be unable to attain in the classroom.

The S.T.A.R. project completed work including window repairs, siding repairs, porch repairs, exterior yard maintenance, and painting. Several of the houses had window repairs, where the students removed the entire wood window and learned repair techniques. The students were also involved in removing rotted siding and replacing it with new siding, as well as preparing and painting the exterior of the homes. The event left the students, homeowners, and community motivated to do more – the S.T.A.R. project is now a semi-annual event in San Antonio’s historic neighborhoods.

Problem assessment:

San Antonio’s central city neighborhoods are also the most historic neighborhoods. However, because of disinvestment and rampant growth to the suburbs, many of these neighborhoods had been affected by crime and neglect. Many of these same neighborhoods have been designated as local historic districts by City Council in an effort to recognize their value to our quality of life and sense of community and spur reinvestment.

Once houses begin to deteriorate, property owners sometimes become overwhelmed or properties become abandoned and the problems of “demolition by neglect” begin to plague the neighborhood. Demolition erodes the overall fabric of the

neighborhood and reduces the likelihood for reinvestment by removing potential assets from the neighborhood. The biggest challenges to neighborhood revitalization in San Antonio are deferred maintenance, deterioration, and resulting demolition. Each situation is different, and unfortunately, many time property owners lack the resources to make necessary repairs. The S.T.A.R. project was established as one way to address these major challenges through volunteerism and service learning.

Program implementation and Costs:

The direct cost for S.T.A.R. is less than \$750 per house, including materials, supplies and food. The value of S.T.A.R. to each homeowner ranges from \$5,000-\$15,000 per house depending on the level of work. In some cases, volunteer contractors completed more costly foundation repairs and similar work. In other cases, the work was primarily maintenance-related, such as painting. The S.T.A.R. project is funded entirely from donations by community sponsors, including money, materials, meals, professional time and expertise. The project is managed and staffed by the Office of Historic Preservation staff throughout the event. The HPA students (architecture and construction science) serve as team leaders at each house and help develop and manage the scopes of work.

Measurable Outcomes:

Through the first S.T.A.R. project, 13 homeowners received approximately \$5,000-\$15,000 in materials, labor, and time which were supplied *gratis* through generous donations. The repairs included yard maintenance, window rehabilitation, porch repairs, restoration of architectural features and exterior painting. More significant structural issues were also addressed by the volunteer professionals assisting with the project as one contractor team stabilized and leveled an entire foundation. The repairs that each homeowner received resulted in an overall facelift for the neighborhood. This

project also serves as a motivation for other homeowners to invest in their homes, spurring revitalization throughout the area.

The students gained hands-on experience in construction techniques and building and materials technology that they will be able to apply in the classroom as well as in their professional careers. Volunteer contractors, OHP staff, as well as faculty from UTSA CoA were on-site, teaching about historic preservation, building techniques, material deterioration, care and maintenance in order to execute these projects.

Lessons Learned:

S.T.A.R. is a community-based program that employs service-learning as a mechanism for neighborhood revitalization and reinvestment. This not only provides a benefit to the community, but also specifically addresses the goals adopted by the City Council to arrest the deterioration of the historic housing stock. Students were presented with real-life situations and use knowledge gained in the classroom through a hands-on application to help community members in need. They not only learn the practical application of their studies, but also experience volunteerism. The team leaders gain valuable leadership skills by learning to manage and motivate a diverse volunteer work force and to set work priorities.

Students, homeowners, and neighbors all responded positively to S.T.A.R. projects. The students took pride in the results and the homeowners were especially grateful for the assistance, as several were actively on-site during the event providing hands-on participation. The neighbors appreciated the improved appearance to the community and were inspired to make their own improvements.

Historic Preservation is cultural, economic and environmental sustainability all at once. It protects a community's heritage by ensuring that changes and new construction are consistent with the overall character of historic districts. It is a proven economic

development tool for central city revitalization and is the foundation for heritage tourism. It is environmentally sustainable as the ultimate form of recycling of existing buildings and infrastructure. The S.T.A.R. project promotes the value of historic preservation and protects and enhances the quality of life in historic San Antonio neighborhoods.

The S.T.A.R. project is an innovative, low-cost program with a huge impact. S.T.A.R. can be easily replicated in other areas of the city, with other volunteer groups and in other communities. Since the first S.T.A.R. project completed in November 2010, two more S.T.A.R. projects have completed repairs to 19 additional houses and involved more than 350 additional students. Planning for spring and fall 2012 S.T.A.R. projects is underway.