



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: Neighborhood problem-solving 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: October Year: 2008

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: Ray Gosack

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

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Fort Smith Police Chief Kevin Lindsey implemented the Neighborhood Problem Solving Program in October 2008. The program, implemented in response to concerns brought about by a Fort Smith citizen at a Board of Directors meeting, provided a way for citizens, city services and police to join together to improve the quality of life in the City of Fort Smith. During this meeting, Chief Lindsey recognized the Police Department had a disconnect from neighborhoods in spite of actively participating in community oriented policing: a philosophy operating under the belief that city administration and protection services must partner with the citizens that are being policed engender positive change in a community. The following month, Chief Lindsey conducted the first problem-solving meeting with residents of the Lutheran Duval neighborhood. Chief Lindsey witnessed the success of a similar program while working as Chief of Police in Joplin, Missouri and was confident that such a program could help the residents of Fort Smith.

The program is a partnership that allows citizens to engage in their own problem-solving rather than making the Police Department a sounding board for complaints and helping residents to accept some of the responsibility by giving them a structured forum to organize and prioritize complaints. Additionally, involving other city departments (neighborhood services, streets & traffic, sanitation, etc.) in the problem solving meetings facilitates the ability for residents to share problems and for the municipal government to address issues quickly.

The Neighborhood Problem Solving Program is designed to provide a partnership between the City of Fort Smith and the local community. This partnership enhances the ability of the City of Fort Smith to address the concerns of its citizens, respond effectively, and promote a healthy and safe community through a prevention-oriented approach. By conducting regular meetings, participating neighborhoods and city officials work together to overcome service delivery

challenges by focusing on a specific problems and intervention strategies. Facilitators direct the citizens in identifying problems, which are described as:

- A group of related crime, disorder, or public safety incidents
- Something that affects a number of people in the community
- Something that is unlikely to disappear on its own without intervention or resources
- Something not only or primarily caused by deeply rooted causes such as poverty, unemployment, or homelessness.

For example, in the meeting on October 13, 2008, residents identified the following problems and priorities for intervention:

- Drugs
- Speeding
- Prostitution
- Unattended Children
- Graffiti

Residents worked side by side with law enforcement and community leaders to develop a systematic plan of action in relation to these priorities. Each neighborhood is different, but many have the same types of issues, allowing facilitators to guide residents into interventions that have proven successful in the past.

After that first meeting, requests from the community began pouring in, and due to the overwhelming response, Chief Lindsey quickly realized he would need help. Within a year of the first meeting, seven other neighborhoods had become part of the program. In response to this growth, Chief Lindsey has since trained nine additional officers to become facilitators for the program. These officers share responsibility for conducting meetings based upon the officers' availability. As of 2012, there are twenty-six organized neighborhoods participating in the Neighborhood Problem Solving meetings. The costs associated with the program have been minimal, the main expense being overtime for the off-duty officers, but well worth the expense.

It is important for residents to see on-duty staff at these meetings as it demonstrates to the community who is patrolling and working the problems each neighborhood identifies. Other costs include printing, advertising and office supplies, all under \$200. Much of the advertising is word of mouth fueled by residents' experiences in the program, local news coverage in both print and television, and follow-up meetings, which gave residents positive reinforcement for their involvement.

Follow-up meetings scheduled 4-6 weeks after the initial meeting measures how the strategies and interventions are working, assesses community satisfaction, and resolution of the issues identified. Additional assessment at the 6-month and 1-year mark after ongoing partnership within a neighborhood is also important to measure the success of the interventions. These meetings serve to report to the residents the measurable results of fewer Calls for Service (CFS) and reported crime/complaint of known issues. While it is impossible to measure a negative number in the form of crime reduction, this reduction is reflected through fewer calls, arrests, gang activity, graffiti, and speeding. Six months after the October 13, 2008 meeting, residents and community leaders met once again to assess the success of their interventions. A report was given by officers that reflected a 59% reduction in criminal activity and crime in the area, to include noticeable reductions in traffic violations, drug use/sales, prostitution, and appearance of graffiti.

Ongoing assessment through soliciting feedback from residents and city officials and staff serve to make the meetings more organized and effective. Even something as simple as making a change in the way meeting supplies are organized or reproduced can make a big impact on how successful a meeting is. Most of the feedback received has been positive and is anecdotal in the personal stories and impacts made on individuals. In the end, that is what this program is all

about: bringing together individuals to work on issues that affect the larger community, which improves the quality of life for all individuals within the City of Fort Smith.