



TLG and LMC 2016 Case Study Application
Future Ready Communities



DUE: September 4, 2015

Email to: Ryan Spillers at rspillers@transformgov.org

COVER PAGE

- 1. Case Study Title: Reinventing General Assistance Services in Evanston, IL
- 2. Case Study Category (Select only one, selection identified by highlighting your choice):

Planning for Your Future

Creating an Inclusive Community

Reinventing Local Government

Community Networks

Blinders

- 3. Jurisdiction Name: City of Evanston
- 4. Jurisdiction Population (US Census): 75,000
- 5. Would you like the application to be considered for our Rapid Fire Session? (Rapid Fire presentations are fast-paced, entertaining, interactive presentations. Each jurisdiction will have five minutes to make their presentations using 15 PPT slides set on auto-forward primarily containing photos/graphics. Participants will be seated at round tables to facilitate an energetic idea exchange. A cash bar will be available.)

YES

NO

- 6. Project Leader (Primary Contact for case study notification):
Name: Evonda Thomas-Smith
Title: Health and Human Services Director
Department: Health and Human Services
Phone Number: 847-866-2957
eMail: ethomas@cityofevanston.org
US Mail Address, including zip code: 2100 Ridge Ave Evanston IL 60201
Twitter Account: @CityofEvanston

List additional presenters contact information below:

Oscar Murillo
ICMA Local Government Management Fellow
City Manager's Office
847-448-8103
omurillo@cityofevanston.org

- 1. Presentation title and description of the innovation. *100 word maximum.*

A Wraparound Approach to General Assistance Services

2. When and how was the program, policy or initiative originally conceived in your jurisdiction? *100 word maximum.*

General assistance services in Evanston were formerly provided by the Evanston Township. In 2013, Evanston residents voted to dissolve Township functions into the City in order to streamline services and improve efficiency. On May 1, 2014, responsibility for General Assistance services was transferred to Health and Human Services Director Evonda Thomas-Smith.

Ms. Thomas-Smith performed an analysis of client needs and services provided, and implemented a new approach to providing general assistance. Positions were reclassified and additional programs and services were implemented to provide a comprehensive approach to help clients attain employment and become less reliant on general assistance services.

3. How exactly is the program or policy innovative? How has your innovation changed previous processes, products or services? *100 word maximum.*

It is uncommon for a city government to provide general assistance services, as these services are typically provided at the county- or township-level. In doing so, the City has created a more fiscally sustainable system which provides increased funding and services levels than that required by the State (at no increased costs to taxpayers). Rather than solely providing clients with monetary assistance, the City provides clients with "Job Club" services to attain employment. The City also partners with community organizations to provide GED and basic education classes, substance abuse treatment, enrollment in health insurance and social security, and work programs.

4. Explain how the program or initiative substantially stretched or improved the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations. *200 word maximum.*

The new "Evanston" approach allowed for a restructuring of staffing levels as well as the recruitment of licensed clinical workers to fill additional and reclassified positions. As a result, staff have been able to identify efficiencies and other ways of strengthening general assistance services.

Staff have been able to improve service coordination with other units of government and lines of communication with other City departments. Partnerships with community organizations have developed and expanded to allow for referral services to Eerie Medical Center for medical services, Oakton Community College for GED and basic education classes, YWCA for financial literacy workshops, West End Farmer's Market for work programs, Peer Services for substance abuse treatment, and Connections for the Homeless for housing assistance, among others. Many of these services were previously either not offered or offered at reduced service levels.

The program has developed into one that addresses the root issues that lead to poverty (i.e. general and fiscal education, health coverage, mental health, substance abuse, job search skills, self-esteem) instead of one that simply address its symptoms. This comprehensive approach will increase the chances of employable residents attaining employment and, in time, becoming self-sufficient.

5. What individuals or groups are considered the primary initiators of your program? How does the innovation engage stakeholders or demonstrate high performance teaming?

Were strategic partnerships and/or community networks developed as a result of the innovation? *200 word maximum.*

The residents of Evanston initiated the transference of general assistance services to the City. However, this approach may have also been utilized by the Township. Once residents expressed their desire to see the program changed, the Health and Human Services Department performed the analyses and implemented all of the changes.

6. If a private consultant was used please describe their involvement, identify the consultant and/or firm and provide contact information. *100 word maximum.*

N/A

7. To what extent do you believe your program or policy initiative is potentially replicable within other jurisdictions and why? To your knowledge, have any other jurisdictions or organizations established programs or implemented policies modeled specifically on this project? Please provide verification of the replication. *200 word maximum.*

This program may be replicated by any jurisdiction. Evanston, however, was fortunate in that the City already possessed the necessary infrastructure and capacities to provide the additional services. While residents supported the change, there were also concerns about general assistance services being reduced or eliminated. Once these doubts disappeared, implementation became much easier.

To our knowledge, no other city has established a similar program or policy.

8. What were the costs? What were the savings? *100 word maximum.*

Program costs for general assistance in its final year under the Township (FY 2012-2013) were \$1,289,872. This amount constituted a net deficit of \$220,993.

Program costs for general assistance in its first year under the City (FY 2015-2016) were budgeted at \$1,370,369. This amount constituted a net surplus of \$4,184. To date, general assistance services are projected to be come in budget for the year.

Program savings were achieved primarily in costs related to personnel, rent and utilities, information technology, and medical services and medication.

9. Please describe the most significant obstacle(s) encountered thus far by your program. How have they been dealt with? Which ones remain? *200 word maximum.*

The biggest obstacle facing this program was to shift the perception that the City could not provide the same level of service as the Township. Some residents believed that by being transferred to the City, these services would be reduced or eliminated. Those residents were quite vocal about their concerns and believed that the transference would come at the expense of those in the community who most need assistance.

A transparent process with regular updates on program statistics helped to alleviate some of these concerns. With time, these concerns began to dissipate and have not been much of an issue since. Constant communication with resident and clients helped to make the transition a smooth and effective one.

10. What outcomes did this program or policy have? What baseline data did you collect? How did you measure the change based on the intervention, and why do you believe in the credibility of this assessment? *200 word maximum.*

The program has resulted in general assistance clients receiving wraparound services that have increased their likelihood of attaining employment and coming off of general assistance benefits. Clients have been referred to other services such as mental health, substance abuse, counseling, and workforce training, among others.

Over 90 general assistance clients have been enrolled in Get Covered Illinois, allowing for other eligible general assistance clients to receive assistance.

Baseline data was collected on-site through a 100-question health survey administered by staff during mandatory meetings. Programs and services have been tailored to meet these needs (e.g. implementation of smoking cessation programs once it was established that 62% of clients are smokers). Subsequent health surveys have been periodically administered and show increased efficiency when compared to Township service levels.

11. Has the program received any press or other media coverage to date? If yes, please list the sources and briefly describe relevant coverage. *100 word maximum.*

We have written content for an article in Governing Magazine but it has not yet been published. The City received local press coverage (local and university newspapers) for its Township dissolution, and to a lesser extent for its new general assistance program. Much of the coverage was related to the dissolution itself, as it was the first time an Illinois township had dissolved since 1932.

12. Please provide web links where the innovation can be seen/tested (in the case of something that is web-based) *100 word maximum.*

<http://www.cityofevanston.org/health/general-assistance/>

13. Please provide any key references and their contact information who can be interviewed/called to discuss the innovation and its impact. *100 word maximum.*

Evonda Thomas Smith, Health and Human Services Director
847-866-2957, ethomas@cityofevanston.org

Indira Perkins, Administrative Supervisor
847-448-8183, iperkins@cityofevanston.org

14. You've been to a lot of conferences. TLG should be a unique experience for everyone. Describe how your case study presentation will be different than other conference presentations. *200 word maximum.*
- How will you make the session creative and unique?
 - How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational?
 - Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction.

This presentation will cover an innovative program that has not been replicated elsewhere, but could easily be done so by virtually any municipality.

We will provide a brief, but in-depth, analysis of what we have done, the problems we faced, how we addressed them, and how it can be replicated to achieve similar results.

The session will occur through an interactive Powerpoint presentation with corresponding handouts for municipalities to tailor all or part of the program to their respective communities. The presentation will culminate with a question and answer session.

15. Anything else you would like to add? *200 word maximum.*

We feel that there are no other programs like this because it is not a requirement for municipalities to do so. If we can convince municipalities to change the way they view State-mandated services, such as general assistance, then we can work together to create a more effective means of addressing poverty in our communities.

With time, we would like to expand our program to include a food pantry, career closet (business clothing), collection of toiletries, and increased partnerships with community organizations to provide adult dentistry and additional rental payment assistance (\$200 now).