

2017 Transforming Local Government Conference

Case Study Application



Due August 12, 2016

Email to: Ryan Spillers rspillers@transformgov.org

Application Information

Case Study Title Growing our Future: Connecting Students with Trees
Jurisdiction Name City of Virginia Beach
Jurisdiction Population 452,745

Rapid Fire Session?

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

Project Leader (primary contact for application correspondence)

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List additional presenters' contact information below:

Meghan Raftery
Elementary Social Studies Coordinator
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Virginia Beach City Public Schools
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1. Presentation title and description of the innovation. 100 word maximum

Trees for Clean Water - Growing our Future: Connecting Students with Trees. This program was developed to engage and educate Virginia Beach elementary school students about the importance of trees in their community to improve water quality and to increase tree canopy by planting trees and preserving trees. In partnership with the Virginia Beach Schools, an Earth Resources curriculum was developed to be utilized by faculty to teach the many benefits of trees. So far over 600 students have been educated and 146 trees have been planted at 21 schools.

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

The City of Virginia Beach's Parks and Recreation Department was awarded a grant offered by the Virginia Department of Forestry specifically designed to provide funds for educating citizens about the importance of trees as it relates to water quality and tree planting activities. The goal of the program is to plant trees that restore and improve the waters of the Chesapeake Bay for the benefit of current and future citizens. We introduced the curriculum in the fall of 2014.

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

The program is innovative because it encourages students to work through issues, evaluate the facts and present solutions. The curriculum was developed for fourth grade teachers as an activity that facilitates investigation and problem solving. The problem was to think of strategies to help the city and their community increase tree canopy from 36% to 45% by 2034. This partnership has encouraged students to be active members of their community, increased their awareness and ability to improve their environment. This engagement has reached beyond the schools and to the parents and family members, and to the community at large.

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

It has stretched the boundaries by providing a framework for real-life learning. Reading or being instructed on how to become involved in solving community or civic challenges is very different from becoming actively involved in investigating the problem, the alternatives, solutions and predicting the outcomes. These students have collectively written books, read their book to kindergartners, created, directed and produced an infomercial, grown trees from seeds, measured tree caliper, calculated individual tree canopy benefits using a tree benefit calculator, identified and inventoried trees on their school grounds, planted trees and actively participated in how to solve this urban challenge in their community. This program has brought students and teachers from inside the classroom to outside to explore the natural world and environment and observe the green infrastructure with new eyes. They are touching the environment not just reading it about it. This has made an impact on them understanding their role and their responsibility for improving the world around them.

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

Teachers are the primary initiators, while the Parks and Recreation staff are the facilitators and educators of both student and teacher alike. One teacher described this as discovering nature on her campus with her students for the first time, and she has continued to use these activities to enhance the learning objectives for her students. This has inspired them to present the benefits of trees at a Sustainable Environment Fair, and compete in a school sponsored Shark Tank contest to promote their 'Tree Tag' idea, which is a tag that identifies the tree species and benefits provided for every tree. Customers would use a pin to stick the tag in the ground at the base of each tree with the tree species name and calculated tree benefits. Additionally, the Virginia Beach Beautification Commission, an active group who made beautifying the City their business, donated \$5,600.00 towards tree planting and also received \$1,000 from the Council of Garden Clubs of Virginia Beach, bringing their fund raising efforts to \$6,600. Eighty-six trees ranging in diversity and size were contractually planted at 16 schools as a result of this collaboration.

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

NA

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 initiative is very easily replicated and relevant to adapt for different age groups. We built on Virginia's Standard of Learning relevant to the environment. This curriculum enhancement tool is adaptable in a school setting and can be defined as real-life learning that engages students to investigate the problem, evaluate alternatives and solve problems in their community. They learn to think outside of the box of the classroom and are encouraged to take active roles in the process. The program has guidelines but they are not static and can be developed by educators and students to fit the age group, dynamic of the team, or the learning objective. The common goal is to increase awareness about the significance of trees to the environment, and the well-being, economy and health of any community.

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

The total cost for Fiscal Year 2015 - 2016 was \$16,105.00 in tree planting, of which \$11,100.00 was funded by donations and Trees for Clean Water grant money. While you factor in those savings, you must also calculate the future benefits of 147 trees that were planted and at maturity would average approximately \$175.00 a year in benefits, multiplied out that would be a total of \$24,725.00 according to the National Tree Benefit Calculator.

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

In the fall of 2014 when we began this program, it was a challenge to convince the teachers that the enhancement activity they were offered to use would truly enhance the Earth Resources Unit and not hinder them in covering all objectives of that unit for 4th Graders. Their primary focus is in the Standard of Learning objectives to ready students for the SOL test that ties directly into funding and resources for schools based on SOL average scores. Additional activities make teachers cringe and run the other way, and this is understandable. However, the teachers that have reached out to Parks and Recreation and embraced this learning enhancement tool have really promoted the program as relevant and facilitated greater understanding of their relationships and impact to their environment and their watersheds.

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 outcomes are tangible and intangible. There were 146 trees planted on school property that will increase tree canopy, and improve water quality in all Virginia Beach watersheds. The baseline Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) for all school properties was evaluated in 2012 utilizing Lidar technology and GIS Mapping data. The next UTC study will likely be conducted in the next several years and through analysis, the specific canopy increase at the participating schools will be accurately assessed. The trees are monitored every year by the Parks and Recreation staff for health and the grant requires that any dead or diseased trees be replaced. The educational outcome is tangible and intangible, in that some of the teachers used the program but did not seek support, nor did they report out on how they utilized the enhancement tool, or its effectiveness. So, while we say that we have impacted a greater understanding of the environment to over 600 students, it is conceivable that that is multiplied exponentially through students sharing this knowledge and understanding with parents, family, friends, at fairs, and through other media.

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

The program has received coverage in the SouthsideDaily.com, titled 'Beach schoolchildren to see more trees this spring with planting program' which highlighted the fundraising work that Virginia Beach Beautification Commission was sponsoring.

12. 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

NA

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

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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.

The presentation would be less about presenting information as it would be sharing and collaborating on how the program and tools can be used by other localities. It would be fantastic to arrange a Skype interaction with a classroom who have taken this program to another level and have a quick Q & A with the students and teachers, making this presentation truly unique. Ideally, our session would be outside in the environment! It's about kids learning about making change in their environment so why not have them present the program at the TLG.

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

This program was created as an opportunity to increase tree canopy in Virginia Beach Watersheds while educating young citizens about the importance of trees in their environment. However, it has evolved and improved every year to increase awareness about how we can actively shape our environment to be better for the future through engagement and real-life learning. This has been an innovative addition to our adopted Urban Forest Management Plan.