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CITY OF PALMDALE

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City of Palmdale's Transit Village Initiative Recognized as 2015 Harvard Ash Center Bright Idea in Government

PALMDALE –The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, recognized today the City of Palmdale's Transit Village Initiative as part of the 2015 Bright Ideas program.

This year's cohort includes 124 programs from all levels of government—school districts; county, city, state, and federal agencies; as well as public-private partnerships—that are at the forefront in innovative government action.

Palmdale's Transit Village Initiative was originally implemented in January 2013, in order to revitalize an aging neighborhood challenged by crime and safety concerns, low socio-economic demographics and the absence of consistent resident investment. The collaborative connected traditional resources with engagement opportunities to promote a sustainable neighborhood model.

“The Transit Village area has long been viewed as a ‘problem’ area by the community as a result of higher crime statistics, elevated school transiency rates, lower socio economics and an aging infrastructure, exacerbated by transient residency, absent property owners and cultural separation within the

neighborhood,” said Director of Neighborhood Services Mike Miller.” “We designated the area as one of our Focus Neighborhood’s in March 2000, and used traditional resources such as housing grants, targeted law enforcement, code enforcement and parking enforcement to raise the bar. However, it became clear to us that those efforts, while good in and of themselves, lacked a sustainable model for success.”

Beginning in early 2013, Palmdale began to reviewing past efforts with an eye to improving the sustainability of the initiative. Partnering with representatives from Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, City of Palmdale staff from Housing, Public Safety, Maintenance, Code Enforcement, Parking and Community Programs identified several key hinderances to success, including a lack of sustainable efforts, fiscal challenges, “disconnect” with residents, cultural barriers, lack of trust of authority and government and a need for direct engagement with residents and property owners.

In an effort to engage the community and gather their input, more than 100 sheriff’s deputies, City staff and community volunteers conducted a neighborhood survey in January, 2013 to address public safety concerns, with a supplemental section on City programming. In all, 541 surveys were completed.

“As a result of the survey and subsequent analysis, Palmdale implemented a neighborhood based strategy to not only address the critical issues, but also engage residents to insure investment and long-term sustainability,” Miller explained.

Among the initiatives enacted from the survey results are:

- Increased visibility of resources such as law enforcement, City of Palmdale staff and community partners.
- Remodeled mission to customer service driven enforcement (code enforcement, parking, administrative citation)
- Developed targeted law enforcement tactics (burglary suppression, narcotics enforcement, etc.)
- Engaged community stakeholders via a Neighborhood Advisory Committee (faith community, property owners, residents, service providers)
- Enhanced neighborhood opportunities for engagement and education (Neighborhood Houses, The Art Branch, Gabriel's House, Community Garden, Neighborhood Watch, YouthBuild)
- Contracted with non-profit community partners to develop housing programs thus elevating the housing infrastructure (Michael's Organization, AV YouthBuild, Paving the Way Foundation, New Beginnings)
- Facilitated neighborhood events to encourage neighborhood unity (Block Party/Resource Fair, open houses, volunteer service days, park picnics and concerts)
- Established neighborhood based abatement team employing local youth (Advancing Communities Together)

“The Bright Ideas program demonstrates that often seemingly intractable problems can be creatively and capably tackled by small groups of dedicated, civic-minded individuals,” said Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in Government Program at the Ash Center. “As exemplified by this year’s Bright Ideas, making government work better doesn’t always require massive reforms and huge budgets. Indeed, we are seeing that, in many ways, an emphasis on efficiency and adaptability can have further-reaching effects than large-scale reforms.”

This is the fourth cohort recognized through the Bright Ideas program, an initiative of the broader Innovations in American Government Awards program. For consideration as a Bright Idea, programs must currently be in operation or in the process of launching and have sufficient operational resources and must be administered by one or more governmental entities; nonprofit, private sector, and union initiatives are eligible if operating in partnership with a governmental organization. Bright Ideas are showcased on the Ash Center’s [Government Innovators Network](#), an online platform for practitioners and policymakers to share innovative public policy solutions.

Improving Criminal Justice and Public Safety with Data

Many Bright Ideas programs focus on using data analytics to improve policing, criminal justice, and public safety. The state of Connecticut’s Crash Data Repository centralizes information on motor vehicle crashes to allow the public and the transportation-safety community to access state and local police

data that is timely, accurate, and uniform. In New York City, the Risk Based Inspection System allows the city's Fire Department to prioritize building inspections based on risk, as quantified through past inspection information and incidents of fire, reducing the number of injuries and death to the public and first responders. The DNA Hit Integration Program from San Diego County, California, provides prosecutors with real-time access to information on DNA hits related to their current caseload, making both prosecution and exoneration more efficient and timely. In Wisconsin State, the Wrong Way Driver Alert System gathers information on wrong-way driving and assists law enforcement with providing timely response while targeting problem areas and mitigating reoccurrence.

Reaching Underserved and Underrepresented Populations

Several Bright Ideas programs focus on expanding education and career development for populations traditionally left behind by the system, including people with special needs and economically disadvantaged children and adults. The Mentoring Program and Youth Directors Council from the city of Miami Beach, Florida, provide a safe space for at-risk youth to spend their after-school and weekend hours, offering access to study resources and SAT-prep along with career-search training and community mentors. Also in Florida, the city of Hialeah's Special Population Initiative uses community spaces to provide alternative education for individuals with disabilities, including children with

severe autism, and helps relieve families of some of the high cost of care for those with special needs. In Pierce County, Washington, the Block Play program uses libraries as a space for at-risk children to develop early-learning skills through guided block play, and trains parents to guide this play at home, focusing on developing literacy and STEM skills.

Other programs focus on community development and cultural preservation. In the state of Hawaii, the Le Fetuao Samoan Language Center engages Samoan youth in the community and teaches them to respect their culture while creating investment in their families and larger communities. Finally, the Tribal Best Practices program from the state of Oregon's Addictions and Mental Health Division Tribal Liaison helps adapt state-mandated, evidence-based practices to meet cultural and traditional standards of the Native American populations, developing best practices that address statewide goals without unnecessarily burdening these unique communities with distinct histories.

Public Participation and Civic Engagement

Among this year's Bright Ideas, there was a trend in programs focused on engaging citizens in government processes that affect their lives, seeking their input and ideas to ensure that government is meeting the needs of those it serves. Faced with a growing population of residents of Asian origin with low levels of participation in local government, the Increase Asian Residents' Civic Participation program from Lexington, Massachusetts, focuses on identifying barriers to participation and reaching out to Asian residents to encourage greater

involvement in government, including seeking candidates from those populations to run for local office. Similarly, in Portland, Oregon, the Community Engagement Liaison Initiative identifies civic-minded individuals from vulnerable and underserved neighborhoods and provides them with training in collaboration and advocacy skills, creating a link between their communities and the city government. The Citizen Survey Data for Performance program from Kansas City, Missouri, uses survey data of community feedback on city departments and their operations at their monthly KCStat meetings, where departments share their progress with the mayor and answer questions from the public who interact via livestream, social media, and in-person attendance. Finally, the state's Oregon Solutions Network fosters collaboration between State Agencies, Non Profits and business sector partners to address regional and community priorities.

Using Technology to Make Government Work for People

Many Bright Ideas use technology to increase efficiency and improve service for constituents. I-Jury: Online Juror Impaneling from Travis County, Texas, allows summonsed jurors to answer qualifying questions, screen for exemptions, and request deferrals using an online system, preventing unnecessary courtroom visits and reducing work absences and life disruptions. In Shawnee County, Kansas, residents planning visits to the Motor Vehicle office can register for a spot in line using their smartphone or computer, and receive

alerts as their turn approaches to avoid long and frustrating lobby waits. The city of Chicago, Illinois, takes the relationship between citizens and technology one step further with its Civic User Testing Group, a set of Chicago residents who test civic apps and help make software that improves the quality of life for residents through beta testing and providing feedback to developers.

Cultivating Innovation

In the spirit of the Bright Ideas program, several initiatives selected for recognition are themselves fostering innovation in government, such as the Employee Innovation Challenge of the city of Hamilton in Ohio, a contest that encourages city employees to submit ideas and work across departments to improve processes and address local challenges, increasing employee engagement. At the North Carolina Innovation Center, state employees, students, and private partners collaborate to test new technology systems before making substantial investments. And, in Washington State, the Innovation Exemption policies remove procurement rules for purchases intended to introduce new technologies and ideas to state government.

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About the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation

The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its

research, education, international programs, and government innovations awards, the Center fosters creative and effective government problem solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world's citizens. For more information, visit www.ash.harvard.edu.

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