

Government Innovators Compete for \$100k Harvard Prize: Short List of Finalists Announced During Public Service Recognition Week

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WASHINGTON, May 4 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Eighteen uniquely smart, creative, and effective government initiatives have been named finalists for the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award. A county program that saves urban neighborhoods, a state program that serves rural seniors, and a federal program that protects grizzly bears are among the wide array of government initiatives on this year's short list for seven \$100,000 prizes.

The Innovations in American Government Awards, founded in 1986, is a program of the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The award is administered in partnership with the Council for Excellence in Government in Washington.

More than 1,000 forward thinking government programs from across the country submitted applications to compete for this year's Innovation in American Government Awards. "Each of the eighteen finalists are the best and brightest, and represent government's great capacity for creating positive change and achieving results," said Gowher Rizvi, director of Harvard's Ash Institute. "Each takes a creative approach to a significant problem and demonstrates that their solution works."

Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in American Government Awards at the Ash Institute said, "When you learn about the variety of programs, the range of problems they tackle, and the creative ways they do it, it gives you a renewed confidence in the quality and commitment of our public servants. By shining a bright light on these innovators, we hope to encourage others in government to follow their amazing lead."

The prize money is awarded specifically to support winning programs in the teaching of their model to other jurisdictions. "By celebrating and disseminating this kind of creative thinking at all levels of government, the awards program helps turn innovative ideas into commonly accepted practices," said Patricia McGinnis, president of the Council for Excellence in Government.

The 18 finalists include four federal, six state, two county, and six municipal programs:

America's Army computer game from the U.S. Army -- is a virtual online experience that has revolutionized the way Americans learn about, and potentially prepare for, Army career opportunities.

Dirigo Health Reform in the State of Maine --

The comprehensive Dirigo Health Reform initiative addresses the triple threat of rising costs, inconsistent quality and increasingly unaffordable health coverage to ensure all Mainers are healthy and have coverage by

advancing a comprehensive strategy of cost-containment, quality improvement and the subsidized DirigoChoice health coverage program for small businesses and individuals.

eCityGov Alliance 2006 in the City of Mercer Island, WA -- is taking local government services to new levels of convenience for citizens and businesses. Nine cities in the Puget Sound region of Washington State are making on-line services available through the nation's first cross-boundary web portals. The result is one-stop, seamless access to building permits, recreation opportunities, property information and available commercial properties for citizens and businesses across member jurisdictions. The nine Alliance cities are Kenmore, Bothell, Woodinville, Kirkland, Bellevue, Mercer Island, Issaquah, Sammamish and Snoqualmie.

Five-Year Affordable Housing Production in the City of San Jose, CA -- has created more than 6,000 new affordable housing units in five years, providing long-term affordability for low- and moderate-income families in one of the nation's most expensive cities.

Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit in Washington, D.C.'s Metropolitan Police Department -- is the first in the nation to redefine "community policing" by coupling community outreach with traditional crime fighting in the often invisible gay and lesbian communities. Moving beyond geographic, racial, and other artificial boundaries, the unit is educating law enforcement and protecting a traditionally marginalized group.

Generations of Hope in the State of Illinois -- is a planned intergenerational community for foster and adopted children, their parents and retirees or "grandparents." The program fulfills the retirees need for purpose and provides adoptive parents with needed support.

Grass Roots Conservation Program at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -- rewards voluntary conservation of habitats for wolves, trout, grizzlies, and other wildlife in the Blackfoot Watershed through cooperative, community-based partnerships.

Green Tier in the State of Wisconsin -- is a voluntary program that replaces the traditional compliance system with a collaborative model that includes businesses, communities, trade associations, non-profits, and government agencies, allowing business facilities to achieve "superior environmental performance" that exceeds minimum regulatory standards.

Health Information Technology at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VistA) -- maintains a patient's electronic health care history that substantially improves efficiency, reduces costs and demonstrably improves clinical decision-making. Patient files are readily available, easily searchable, and proactive in that they alert providers to vital patient information.

HomeBase in the City of New York, N.Y. -- is a ground-breaking community based program helping shift the homeless services model in NYC away from a focus on shelter. By intervening before legal, medical, family, and other problems trigger a period of homelessness, HomeBase focuses resources on keeping New Yorkers housed.

Land Bank of Genesee County, Mich. - acquires abandoned urban land through foreclosure and determines the best use of the land with the community's needs in mind, rather than simply selling to the highest bidder. With self-generated revenues geared towards smart growth and affordable housing, it cleans up properties, rehabilitates homes, and redevelops downtown areas.

Mayor's Charter Schools Initiative in the City of Indianapolis, Ind. -- leverages the power of his office and his accountability as a highly visible, elected individual, to make the Mayor of Indianapolis the only U.S. Mayor authorized to create and oversee charter schools designed to meet needs not currently met by the city's school districts.

Municipal Automated Vehicle Sharing Program in the City of Philadelphia, Pa. -- makes Philadelphia the first

government in North America to reduce its fleet by partnering with a local car-sharing provider that serves residents and businesses with hourly vehicle rentals. Employees on City business can now use vehicles that are more accessible, more fuel efficient, and more cost-effective, eliminating the need for hundreds of city-owned vehicles and facilitating savings of approximately \$1.7 million annually.

New Alliance Task Force at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation -- provides historically "unbanked" immigrant communities with tools and services that allow them to avoid high-cost and/or predatory providers, gain access to mainstream bank products and to low-cost remittance services. They also become homeowners through access to mortgages, and learn about personal financial management.

Promising Practices Network in the State of Missouri -- is an on-line resource that provides reliable, high-quality information to policy makers and government agencies about what really works to improve the lives of children, youth and families. By making available the best research on how existing programs across the nation actually function, the site helps stakeholders to plan, budget, and design programs that meet their local needs.

Supportive Housing Pilots Initiative in the State of Connecticut -- invests in housing and services for families and individuals experiencing homelessness, especially those suffering from addiction or mental illness. It implements a cost-effective model that demonstrably cuts clients' dependence on medical, mental health, criminal justice and other public services.

Teaming in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts -- is a groundbreaking child welfare practice aimed at solving the problem of front line social worker isolation, and providing more effective services to families in times of crisis. The program creates teams of social workers who collaborate on a group of family cases, reducing isolation and improving communication between clients and the Social Services Department.

Urban Academies Program of the School Board of Broward County, Fla. -- tackles the costly and debilitating teacher retention problem in predominantly poor and minority hard-to-staff schools. The Academies recruit aspiring educators in these communities' high schools, provide specialized training for college students already committed to education, and work with practicing teachers, providing all three groups with the skills and confidence to carry out the program's growing success in giving children in these communities the education they deserve.

The winners of the Innovations in American Government Awards will be selected later this month following presentations they will make before the National Selection Committee at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government on May 25, 2006. The seven final winners (including one recipient of the Annie E. Casey Innovations Award in Children and Family System Reform, and another of the Fannie Mae Foundation Innovations Award in Affordable Housing) will be announced on July 10 at a dinner ceremony in Washington, D.C., during the 2006 Excellence in Government Conference.

The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government fosters excellence in government around the world in order to generate and strengthen democracy. Through its awards program, research, publications, curriculum support, and global network, the Institute champions critical milestones in creative and effective governance and democratic practice.

The Council for Excellence in Government is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to improve government performance by strengthening results-oriented management and creative leadership in the public sector, and to build understanding by focusing public discussion on government's role and responsibilities.

For more information on the Innovations in American Government program and this year's finalists, visit <http://www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu> or <http://www.excelgov.org>.

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