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COVER PAGE

Innovation Study Title Innovations in Leadership Development: Leader’s Challenge

Category Building a skilled Workforce of the Future

Jurisdiction Name Arlington County
City/County Manager Barbara Donnellan
Population 210, 280

Submit Innovation Study for an Alliance Innovation Award Yes [x] No []
*Alliance member jurisdictions only. Learn more about the award program at
transformgov.org/en/about/innovation_awards*

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**2012 Transforming Local Government Conference
Kansas City, KS
Innovation Study Application**

COVER SHEET

Agency:

Arlington County Government, Arlington, VA
HR-Training and OD – **Leader’s Challenge Program**

Contact Information –

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Category: **Building a Skilled Workforce of the Future**

Please consider the Leader’s Challenge Program for an Alliance Innovation Award

SYNOPOSIS

Submit a 1 to 4 page maximum synopsis describing the innovation study including:

1. Intent of the idea/program/project/service and length of time it has been enacted.

The Leaders Challenge program in Arlington County Government was created in 2008 to address succession planning concerns at senior levels of the organization. The organization is comprised of 3550 employees, and 13 Departments. Leader's Challenge is targeted to each department's "high potential" managers and individual contributors.

The primary intent of the Leader's Challenge Program is to increase the number of leader's ready to compete for promotional positions as we anticipate 30% retirements in our leadership in the next 1-3 years. A second intent is to develop leaders who can work effectively in cross functional teams on complex problems that require cross-departmental solutions and cooperation. In the program we create these teams and use the action learning technique to drive this development and to develop innovative solutions to complex County issues. The teams are sponsored by senior leaders of the organization which has a secondary effect of exposing the participants and their talents to the leadership of our organization and vice versa.

Our overriding intention is to fast forward the development of our high potential staff at all levels of the organization providing them the opportunity grow and develop as leaders in Arlington County. We have run this program 3 times in the last 3 years.

2. Anticipated and actual outcomes.

For the participants we anticipated the following outcomes as a result of participating in the Leader's Challenge Program:

Participants Anticipated Outcomes	Participants Actual Outcomes
Increased effectiveness as a leader by learning to apply skills to solve complex problems	Participant's worked in teams and produced new recommendations and actions to solve complex problems. For example, more effective civic engagement practices and new strategies to facilitate a more diverse applicant pool of leaders were identified.
Improved self awareness as a leader through feedback, continuous assessment, and learning	Improved awareness of strengths and direction as a leader as a result of the individual coaching, assessments and peer feedback.

Enhanced collaborative network of peers.	This was achieved as a result of interaction with the participants, trainers, coaches, and the larger County learning community. There are notable inter-departmental stream-lined business operations as a result of the relationship- building.
Readiness to compete for higher level leadership positions.	Within one year of participating in the first cohort, 45 % of the participants had been promoted.

For the organization we anticipated and achieved the following outcomes:

Organizations Anticipated Outcomes	Organizations Actual Outcomes
More staff developed to compete effectively for leadership positions.	After each cohort a number of participants have successfully competed for promotions in the more senior -levels of the organization.
Innovative solutions to complex problems as a result of the action learning process.	Innovative solutions to complex- renewed interest to work on intractable problems
Leaders able to work well on high level teams on complex problems and build effective working relationships.	More people who can work effectively in teams on complex problems

Structure/ Logistics

Leader’s Challenge is a feedback intensive, six-month (2-3 days a month) cohort based leadership development program.

There are four main capability building components:

- Classroom-Based Instruction – “Self as Leader. “Team development.” and “Change Management”
- Participation in an Action Learning Project, as established by the County Managers Office and Executive Leadership Team.
- Individual Executive Coaching
- Commitment to healthy work-life balance practices.

3. Costs and/or savings, if any:

The cost (\$37,000.00) of running the program covers the external coaches and trainers that we hire to deliver the coaching and classroom-based training components of the program. There are no costs attached to the coordination of the program and some of the action learning costs or training rooms all of which are internal resources managed by the program’s coordinator. There is no charge to participants or their departments. Human Resource Department training and development budget covers the cost.

4. Innovative characteristics

Combining the classroom based development with individual coaching is often the norm in leadership development programs today. However, the action learning teams, comprised of individuals working outside of their normal domains, is innovative and has proven effective in driving new solutions to critical problems. And, it hones participants' listening, communication and problem-solving skills—making them even more effective leaders.

5. Obstacles and results achieved.

There is a considerable time commitment from the participants during the program. They are frequently working beyond normal working hours in order to fulfill the requirements of the program, work on their Leader's Challenge project, and continue to deliver the high quality products in their regular positions

What are the results achieved by overcoming obstacles?

Because the time commitment was great, the teams learned to delegate the work to be done according to the strengths and interests of the participants in the group.

6. Any new issues/problems, or unintended consequences (things you didn't expect) realized as a result of the identified effort

In our first offering, we had not anticipated the varying level of presentation capacity by the participants. Given the professional level of the group, it was assumed the skill level would be high. However, there were some weak final presentation performances. As a result, the program added a "Powerful Presentation" module, with practice opportunities prior to the final presentation. As a result, the subsequent Cohorts have greatly enhanced their presentation skills (feedback from members of the Executive Leadership Team.)

In addition to the synopsis and cover sheet, provide the following information:

1. Innovation/Creativity

a. How did the program improve the organization?

- The participants have developed cross-departmental networks which benefit the organization.
- The Project sponsors (senior managers) had the opportunity to work with up and coming leaders in the organization and vice versa.
- The results, innovative thinking and actions that resulted from the action learning teams' recommendations have challenged the status quo of the organization. For example, there are new efforts in to increase diversity in leadership, telecommuting, civic engagement, and public outreach.
- The organization has a roster of developed leaders ready to assume positions of greater leadership.

b. Were new technologies used? If yes, what methods and/or applications were implemented?

The action learning technique was followed in order to gain clarity in each issue addressed. Teams had to “sit with” a problem longer than they are used to and use inquiry mechanisms that may not be the natural order of business. Once mastered, however, it became a valued, thoughtful approach that gets continuous use.

c. Was a consultant used?

- a. If yes, describe their involvement; and**
- b. Identify the consultant and/or firm, including contact information**

The program was conceived, designed and managed internally. Consultants served in the capacity of individual coaches, leadership trainers and action learning facilitator.

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2. Outcomes Achieved

- a. What customer/community needs and expectations were identified and fulfilled?

In the three years of the program offering, the following issues have been tackled using an action learning approach. Findings were shared at an end -of -program briefing with the County Manager and her Executive Leadership Team (The final three projects were completed at the end of June 2011, so too early to report results):

Issues Addressed

- Greater **Telecommuting** capacity and utilization by employees.
- Improved **storm water management practices**.
- Dynamic **strategic plan** for the Libraries.
- Consolidation of **records management** in the Department of Human Services (DHS).

- **Volunteer Management** plan for the new County-wide arts facility.
 - More effective **civic engagement** process.
 - Increased presence of the Community's **diverse** population in all levels of management.
 - More effective **outreach** to citizens by the Library staff.
- b. Has service delivery been enhanced?
- Telecommuting capacity has doubled, with excellent customer service and employee engagement reported.
 - Improved storm water management in one particular residential area, and improved relationships with residents.
 - Vision and practices for the Library in tune with the rapid change of technology
 - Consolidation of records by 30% in DHS with more in the planning phase.
- c. Did the initiative improve access to your government?
Yes. Strategies included smart uses of social media, streamlined records and round the clock services to residents.
- d. Has the health of the community improved as a result? The following are three examples of how the health of the community has improved:
- a. The Libraries group has heightened a productive two-way exchange of input/information.
 - b. Storm water management and relationships with the residents in one troubled area have improved.
 - c. DHS Customers receive more efficient service, with streamlined forms and records.

3. Applicable Results and Real World Practicality

- a. What practical applications will be shared?
- Action learning teams: as a developmental tool for leaders and driving new results for complex issues.
 - "Self as leader" principles and practices : for renewing commitment, valuing strengths and work-life balance
- b. How applicable is the program to other local governments?
This program is highly transferable and easy to implement in other organizations, especially if they are in the process of succession planning looking for innovative ways to grow and develop future leaders and have dedicated resources.
- c. What results/outcomes will you share?

- We would share project outcomes, with special attention to the Civic engagement and diversity strategies.
- We would engage the entire group in the action learning process with a demonstration of the model
- Finally, audience members will practice a “Self as Leader” exercise from the program.

d. Include any applicable performance measures, if any.

45 % Promotions since participating in the Leader’s Challenge 1

87 % Team recommendations implemented

4. Innovation Study Presentation

Describe your innovation study presentation.

- Action Learning Demo
- Experiential leadership exercises.
- Practical tools for implementation to include hand-outs and reference literature.

All innovation study applications, whether selected or not, will be shared with the Alliance’s membership as well as national publications such as GFOA, ICMA, etc.