



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

## 2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

**Deadline for Nominations: March 3, 2015**

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

### SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Neighborhood Partnering Program

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: City of Austin, Texas

Jurisdiction population(s): 890,491

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: September Year: 2009

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Marc Ott

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: City of Austin, TX

Name: Sara Hartley

Title: Chief of Staff Jurisdiction: City of Austin, TX

Name: Justin Golbabai

Title: Neighborhood      Jurisdiction: City of Austin, TX  
Partnering  
Program Manager

## **SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact**

Name of contact: Justin Golbabai

Title: Neighborhood      Jurisdiction: City of Austin, TX  
Partnering  
Program Manager

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E-mail: Justin.Golbabai@austintexas.gov



# City of Austin

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## Public Works Department

P.O. Box 1088, Austin, Texas 78767-1088 - Administrative Offices:  
One Texas Center, 505 Barton Springs Road, Suite 1300, 78704  
Telephone (512) 974-7065; Fax (512) 974-7084

### **Neighborhood Partnering Community Partnership Award Narrative**

Prior to 2009, the City of Austin did not have a funding mechanism to address small but meaningful neighborhood level improvement requests that individually could not rise to the top during the city's capital budget process. Under the leadership of City Manager Marc Ott, staff saw these neighborhood requests as an opportunity, developing the framework to support and enhance neighborhood improvement projects while better leveraging public resources. The resulting Neighborhood Partnering Program (NPP) has since developed into an innovative model for collaborative partnerships and an embodiment of ICMA's core beliefs of representative democracy and ensuring diversity in local government and in the organization.

The mission of the Neighborhood Partnering Program is "Empowering Neighborhoods, Building Community." Likened to the local government version of Kickstarter, NPP provides a platform for neighborhood and community organizations to affect public improvements by sharing in the costs of those efforts with the City of Austin government. Through the program, assistance is given to neighborhood groups in developing, resourcing, and executing small- to medium-sized improvement projects in the City's right of way or on City-owned property. All projects must be initiated by a neighborhood or community group, the groups must demonstrate via petition that 60 percent of the impacted stakeholders approve of the project, and all proposed projects must be on City property or Right-of-Way. Cost sharing can be achieved through cash contributions, in-kind contributions, or donated labor (sweat-equity). City staff complements this contribution by providing assistance on multiple levels depending on the project: from the conceptual application process, to helping formulate project cost estimates, to engineering design, to taking items through permitting,



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and finally even utilizing City crews and contracts for project implementation. Applications to the program are evaluated on the program's five core values: Community participation, cost sharing, quality of life enhancement, incorporation of City initiatives, and geographic equity.

The Neighborhood Partnering Program operates with two full-time City staff (a program manager and a project coordinator), and has recently incorporated a rotating AmeriCorps VISTA member to the team. The total annual operating cost of the Neighborhood Partnering Program is approximately \$200,000. In addition to these operating costs, the below chart details the City's awarded cost sharing breakdowns by application cycle:

	FYs 2010-2013	Fall 2013	Spring 2014	Fall 2014	Total
Number of Projects Approved	10	7	7	6	30
<b>Total Project Value (Estimated)</b>	<b>\$483,380</b>	<b>\$532,169</b>	<b>\$430,182</b>	<b>\$513,929</b>	<b>\$1,959,660</b>
<b>City Funding (Estimated)</b>	<b>\$304,927</b>	<b>\$350,106</b>	<b>\$284,857</b>	<b>\$332,551</b>	<b>\$1,272,441</b>
<b>Community Cost Share (Estimated)</b>	<b>\$178,453</b>	<b>\$182,063</b>	<b>\$145,325</b>	<b>\$181,378</b>	<b>\$687,219</b>
Cash	\$53,109	\$77,163	\$41,869	\$41,213	\$213,354
In-Kind Professional Services & Materials	\$26,519	\$19,540	\$14,420	\$61,893	\$122,372
Volunteer Hours (Value)	\$98,825	\$85,360	\$89,036	\$78,272	\$351,493
Volunteer Hours (Number Pledged)	4,547	3,782	3,805	3,345	15,479
Community Cost Share Average	37%	34%	34%	35%	35%

Between 2009 and 2012, the Neighborhood Partnering Program learned many lessons developing the program. The program was successfully able to work with the legal department to develop a project agreement, liability waivers, and purchase an insurance policy to allow volunteers



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to do work on City property and on Right-of-Way. Through this process, the program learned what volunteers couldn't do on City property (like use a bobcat to do ground work) and what they could do (like landscaping and mosaic tile laying). Many times, NPP had to learn how to navigate and refine the City's own processes. Sari Albornoz, Grow Local Director with the non-profit Sustainable Food Center (SFC) describes this process for two community gardens currently in construction,

*“Because the local protocol for permitting and building community gardens on City-owned land in Austin was established fairly recently and is not yet comprehensive, the process for starting these new gardens has been far from straightforward. The NPP staff has employed creativity, tenacity, partnerships with outside organizations (including SFC), and collaboration with the neighborhood groups working on each of these gardens to overcome a steady stream of obstacles. Today both community gardens are on the cusp of opening. Beyond adding two valuable amenities to Austin neighborhoods, the NPP has established new partnerships and protocols for initiating NPP community gardens that will ensure that future projects of this kind proceed more smoothly.”*

Most recently, NPP is addressing challenges related to its core value of geographic diversity by working to make the program accessible to low-income and underserved areas of the City. In its early years, upper-middle class areas of central Austin were the most frequent users of this community-initiated cost sharing program. To address this challenge on multiple levels, NPP has established several valuable partnerships, including:

- **AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA):** NPP has partnered with AmeriCorps VISTA, a federal national service program designed to fight poverty on a systemic level. When



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asked about their 2013-14 AmeriCorps VISTA experience with NPP, Will Livesley-

O'Neil and Nevena Pilipovic-Wengler wrote:

*“Our involvement soon formed one of the most rewarding parts of our time as VISTAs. The vision for NPP as a community-wide and inclusive program drove our efforts to spread the word about the program to lower-income neighborhood groups, work to build partnerships with non-profit, academic and business organizations who could support the work of project groups and develop ways that the intricacies of applying for and implementing government funding could be more accessible for all. NPP is seen as a chance not just to build a sidewalk, or community garden, or any other new public benefit, but also as a way for communities to organize themselves around a goal and build the capacity of individuals.”*

- **University of Texas-Austin Longhorn Center for Civic Engagement (LCCE):** Over the past two years, NPP has partnered with the University of Texas’ LCCE. Dr. Suchitra Gururaj, Assistant Vice President over the LCCE wrote of this partnership: “Our partnership with the NPP has supported all of our student-facing goals and, in turn, provided community residents and leaders with the resources of UT.” She continues, “Just this past academic year, in fact, students in disciplines as diverse as engineering, communications, business, and liberal arts worked with residents to undertake a variety of projects, from brochure and web design for neighborhood websites to outreach to community resource mapping.”
- **Engaging Non-Profit Partners:** NPP found great success in building win-win partnerships with a variety of non-profit organizations. For park improvements, NPP coordinates closely with the Austin Parks Foundation while for our two community gardens opening this spring, NPP worked



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closely with the Sustainable Food Center. Similarly, NPP has worked closely with the community organizing group Go Austin/Vamos Austin (GAVA) to provide application materials and workshops in English and Spanish, as well as connect Spanish-speaking residents to other City resources. “NPP functions as a connector as well as a program provider – a role that endlessly serves Austin residents in navigating the sometimes-complex City of Austin infrastructure,” wrote Alba Sereno and Carmen Llanes, Community Programs Coordinators for GAVA.

The success of NPP goes well beyond the aforementioned leveraging of public resources. Through NPP, the City of Austin has modeled an effective way to engage its citizens to transform underutilized spaces into community-driven, small but meaningful projects – from sidewalks to separated bicycle facilities, trails, community gardens, pocket parks, park improvements, mosaics and street art. Yet most importantly, the program has built positive relationships as City employees and community members work hand-in-hand problem-solving, overcoming obstacles and celebrating successes together. Meanwhile, neighbors who were not otherwise connected are brought together over a shared vision for a better community. Perhaps Sabrina Joplin, Chair of the Adelphi Acre Community Garden said it best in the midst of building her NPP project,

*“This has such a rewarding process. At our meeting last week Justin made a keen observation that none of the steering members really knew each other before this project began. It had not dawned on me how many friends we've made through this effort. It has truly brought some excitement to our neighborhoods and we look forward to watching this develop out over time.”*