

## Outstanding Manager of the Year Award



**REGINA V. K. WILLIAMS**

*ICMA's Outstanding Manager of the Year Award recognizes a local government administrator who has initiated and implemented creative, innovative projects and programs in the management of his or her community, regardless of his or her cumulative tenure. This inaugural award goes to Regina V. K. Williams, city manager of Norfolk, Virginia.*

When Regina Williams became the manager of Norfolk, Virginia, in January 1999, she became the first woman and first African-American to hold the position. With her appointment, the city got a tenured, dedicated public servant known for a leadership style that encourages public outreach, consensus building, and accountability. Ms. Williams made it her top priority to create a government that is effective, accessible, and user friendly for the city's residents, busi-

nesses, and visitors. She has succeeded despite the demands of tight finances, uncertain revenue projections (particularly in the aftermath of September 11), and increased resident demands for services.

Ms. Williams has initiated a number of programs and strategies to foster a strong, diverse, and participatory government. She implemented a staffing and organizational review (SOR) process to better align city services to community priorities. Sixteen of the city's departments participated in the SOR, assessing how city employees do their work, identifying the methods that are most efficient and effective in delivering services, and changing their organizational structure and procedures accordingly. The SOR process has markedly improved service delivery in several areas. In the waste management division, for example, the SOR revealed that adding eight positions would improve on-time waste collection and save the city \$50,000 (due partly to less need for overtime). The change has resulted in a 53 percent drop in worker's compensation costs and a 200 percent increase in yard-waste collection. In addition, vehicles are expected to last longer and need fewer repairs because drivers have more time to attend to their maintenance. Perhaps most important, waste collection is on time, which has improved customer satisfaction.

Ms. Williams also has made a number of changes to make city government more responsive to its citizenry. In 1999, she created the Citizen Call Center to accept and track reports about property maintenance and similar issues. Determined to get administrators out of the office and into the neighborhoods, Ms. Williams made every assistant manager and depart-

ment head an ambassador to a neighborhood at risk of deterioration. The 22 neighborhood ambassadors report regularly on the health, vitality, and trends in their neighborhoods, helping the city address problems and build bridges to the public.

Ms. Williams also is guiding Norfolk in a strategic housing initiative to meet each neighborhood's specific needs, from rehabilitating individual homes to developing neighborhood design policies.

In an effort to bring academic professionals closer to city government, Ms. Williams initiated the Teacher Excel program, whereby teachers join city departments during the summer to gain technological expertise they can take back to their classrooms. She also implemented an internship program for high school seniors to help them gain experience in government and an understanding of the services the city provides.

Ms. Williams is active on the national, state, and local level, furthering the aims of local government and the profession. She serves on the Old Dominion University Business Advisory Council and the Norfolk State University Foundation. She was appointed by Governor Warner to serve on his transition team and is currently serving on the Secure Virginia Panel, which was convened to advise the governor on homeland security and emergency preparedness.

A personable and principled consensus builder, Ms. Williams brings together the best minds and inspires them to craft a vision and strategies for reaching this vision. She leads by quiet example and embodies wisdom, good humor, and a humble devotion to service. ♣