



2021 Awards of Excellence Winners

Community Development

Fairfax County, Virginia, "Lee District Community Center"

The Lee District Community Center is a powerful example of the significant impact housing authorities can play in the development of community infrastructure – beyond housing – to build communities of opportunity which allow residents to excel physically, intellectually, educationally, and financially.

For years, Fairfax County has worked closely with residents along the western side of the Historic Richmond Highway Corridor to identify and meet the evolving needs of the community. This engagement has led to the identification of a variety of needs including youth programming, recreation, childcare, technology education, and skills development to help residents better compete for jobs in the rapidly evolving marketplace in along the Corridor. Such programs are among those offered at Fairfax County Community Centers that provide safe, structured environments for participants to learn, play and engage with the community around them.

The Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority (FCRHA) is strongly invested in providing the means for the development of community infrastructure that can better enhance the ability of all residents to achieve their fullest potential. When the Mount Vernon Athletic Club, a 45-year-old private health and racquet club, was placed for sale in late 2019, the FCRHA recognized this opportunity to fulfill its mission in providing a 50,000 square-foot facility to serve the needs of the surrounding community.

In partnership with the County, the FCRHA developed a multi-phase plan for acquiring the property and making initial renovations to deliver the Lee District Community Center (to be renamed at a future date with input from the community), which could begin to serve the recreation and youth programming needs of the community under the property's current zoning. A second phase of development will be undertaken at a later date that will address a change in zoning as well as provide additional enhancements to the facility to accommodate a more robust assortment of programming options to complete the vision for the center to serve as a cornerstone of opportunity along the Richmond Highway Corridor.

In May 2020, after a record-setting due diligence process, the FCRHA successfully purchased the Mount Vernon Athletic Club and commenced work on needed improvements to mechanical, electrical, and plumbing system upgrades; safety improvements (fire alarm system upgrades and security enhancements); basic accessibility improvements (restrooms and corridors); and community use updates (transitioning some of the existing tennis courts to multi-use recreational surfaces to accommodate a variety of programming options). After navigating numerous challenges which have impacted the construction industry due to COVID-19, the FCRHA is preparing to deliver the phase one facility to Fairfax County for operation in October 2021. The facility will be operated by the Fairfax County Department of Neighborhood and Community Service

Economic Development

Nassau County, New York, "Boost Nassau Restaurant Recovery Grant Program"

In the Spring of 2020, by order of New York State, thousands of full-service restaurants were forced to shut down all but takeout and delivery service for months as the Coronavirus ravaged the state and the country. By early Fall

2020, restaurants were allowed to reopen, but indoor capacity was limited to stop the spread of the virus. And though allowed to expand outdoors, this forced additional costs on restaurants for outdoor seating, partitions, personal protective equipment, heat lamps, and other items. Nassau County estimated that approximately 82,000 people on Long Island that work in the restaurant and hospitality industry lost their jobs due to the economic impact of the Coronavirus.

The Office of Community Development (NCOCD) invested millions in Community Development Block Grant dollars during the past decade to help local downtown business districts to revitalize. Much of the funding was used for pedestrian-friendly projects such as streetscape improvements and also for commercial façade improvements and parking upgrades. Many local communities also made changes to their local zoning requirements to allow for more dense housing near downtown. This led to a revival in several local downtowns as nearby residents and tourists flocked downtown to take advantage of the vitality and to sample the new and diverse offerings of local restaurants. The impact of the Coronavirus with its forced shutdowns and limited seating capacities threatened to dismantle the hard-won improvements.

This led the NCOCD to propose to utilize a portion of its CDBG-CV funding - \$2.2 million - to assist the restaurants through a grant program. Initially it was thought the funding could help to defray the costs of heat lamps and equipment purchases that would allow restaurants to offer outside seating. But it soon became clear that many eateries could not offer this option and as the Fall season led to colder weather it also led to outside dining being less attractive as well. Thus, the program was rolled out in November 2020 as the Boost Nassau Restaurant Recovery Grant Program (RRGP), a full grant program for sit down restaurants impacted by the pandemic. The grant size - either \$5,000 or \$10,000 - was based solely on the number of full-time equivalent employees.

Homeless Coordination/Assistance

Cook County, Illinois, "Cook County Legal Aide for Housing and Debt"

The Cook County Legal Aid for Housing and Debt (CCLAHD) program is an innovative public/private partnership that was formally launched in November 2020 in recognition that growing numbers of people in Cook County were facing potential eviction, foreclosure, or debt collection lawsuits as a result of the pandemic and associated economic dislocation. The County partnered with the Circuit Court of Cook County, The Chicago Bar Foundation (CBF), the City of Chicago, and a number of other nonprofit and public partners to launch this program utilizing CARES Act funding from the federal government as the core funding source to get started. With substantial in-kind contributions from the County, the Circuit Court, the CBF, and other program partners, the program launched and already has served more than 15,000 County residents in need and was recognized as a national model at a recent White House summit. [Website](#)

Affordable Housing

Los Angeles County, California, "Studio 6 Motel Conversion: A Creative Approach to Permanent Housing"

Los Angeles County is experiencing a chronic shortage of affordable housing that has resulted in a record number of homeless individuals and families. In response, the State of California implemented a hotel/motel conversion program to address homelessness called Project Homekey. Los Angeles County used its Project Homekey award of \$11,750,000 to purchase a motel in the City of Commerce consisting of 78 studio units. The Los Angeles County Development Authority (LACDA) committed Federally-funded Project-Based Vouchers to convert the units to Permanent Supportive Housing for homeless families, making the units affordable while partnering with the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services (DHS) and Exodus Recovery to provide ongoing supportive services. Additionally, the project hired a property management team from Alcott Center for Mental Health, adding an additional layer of support for the tenants. Since acquiring the site in December 2020, 50 homeless individuals have moved in and every effort is made to achieve 100% lease-up in a timely manner.

Planning/Policy/Program Management

Westchester County, New York, "Census 2020"

The Census is an extremely important, yet completely overlooked, tool for municipalities to receive funding and representation. Traditionally, local government did not advocate in that realm as it was a Federal program, yet the impact to municipalities is profound.

Planning at WC began by educating the municipalities on that impact and pursuing grants to pay for a multipronged program which included: 1. Creating a County level Complete Count Committee that assisted with identifying local or cultural issues. The County Committee developed 5 subcommittees to handle key portions of census outreach: Field Operations; Communications, Marketing and Technology; Seniors, Veterans and People with Disabilities; Youth and Education; and Not for Profits/CBOs/Faith-Based. 2. Facilitated outreach and Education. There were many efforts to help the municipalities and local stakeholders and the general public understand the importance of getting an accurate count through self-responses. This was done through municipal and non-profit presentations and utilizing non-profits to increase outreach. A marketing plan was developed to target identify Hard to Count populations that were likely to need encouragement and support. 3. The County shared Census self-response data with various groups on a regular basis with reports twice a week (Tuesdays and Fridays) and then daily by late summer to all the municipalities and to the Complete Count Committee list serve. A weekly report was generated for the State Delegation and Board of Legislators starting in the summer. A daily report was generated for the County Executive's office. The reports shared the municipal self-response rates, but also included overall summaries of achievements and examples of marketing or promotional efforts done by the various municipalities to help others with ideas on what might work locally. All parties stayed engaged by this process. and 4. The Department created a "how to" plan based on the successes and issues of 2020 for the 2030 team.

The result was that the County's self-response increased over both the 2010 and 2000 rates – despite having identify 24,000 more housing units and have some of the hardest to count Census Tracts in the entire state. 34 of 43 municipalities exceeded their 2010 rates.

Innovation

Henrico County, Virginia, "Restoring Henrico's Historic Black Cemeteries"

The Restoring Henrico's Historic Black Cemeteries program was created in 2019 to address decades of neglect and vandalism at Woodland Cemetery, in eastern Henrico County, VA. Woodland Cemetery was established in 1916 for the interment of Black residents during a time of strict segregation. With an estimated 30,000 graves across its 29 acres, Woodland Cemetery is the final resting place for such prominent individuals as tennis champion and civil rights activist Arthur Ashe Jr. and the Rev. John Jasper, founder of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in Richmond, as well as numerous doctors, dentists, bankers, and a spy for the Union during the Civil War, as well as thousands of other African Americans who contributed towards Richmond's growth and opportunity to practice racial equality. Over the years, Woodland, like many other Black cemeteries across Virginia fell into substantial disrepair, uncared for and unacknowledged as little or no funding was provided for even the most rudimentary maintenance. The cemetery became overwhelmed and damaged by extensive vegetative growth, obscuring, uprooting, and damaging headstones, and becoming a magnet for illegal dumping and ongoing vandalism.

A local nonprofit organization, Evergreen Restoration Foundation, with \$25,000 in assistance from Henrico County, purchased the Cemetery in 2020 with plans to restore the grounds as a place of reverence and honor for those buried there. However, the restoration needs vastly outweigh the Foundation's ability to respond. The Henrico County Department of Community Revitalization has stepped in to assist by recruiting and coordinating volunteer

efforts among community groups and support from County agencies to facilitate regular and systemic restoration and maintenance of the full 29 acres, through establishment of the Cemetery restoration program. In particular, the Department of Community revitalization recruits and coordinates the work of multiple County departments, including the Department of Community Corrections that provides crews every Saturday with persons needing to fulfill community services hours. Weekly activities of this and other groups includes cutting weeds, clearing vines, removing decades of vegetative overgrowth, removal of trash and debris, as well as uncovering and restoring headstones.

Individuals participating in this effort, not only provide a community service, but also earn an awareness and a holistic understanding of the impact of Richmond's and the nation's historic disparate treatment of its African American citizens.

Since its start in 2019, the program has made significant progress in restoration and preserving a part of Virginia's overlooked history, while most importantly honoring the contributions of people from everyday citizens to national figures.