

News Release



City of Hampton

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Hampton's Youth Civic Engagement Program Wins Award

The City of Hampton's Youth Civic Engagement Program which is championed by the City in Partnership with Alternatives, Inc. has won the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award. Often referred to as the "Oscars" of government, the Innovations Award is a program of the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University, and is administered in partnership with the Council for Excellence in Government. One of six award winners, Youth Civic Engagement will receive a \$100,000 grant to support its efforts. Hampton City Council will recognize the program's accomplishments at the August 10th Council meeting.

The Hampton program turns the notion of youth as consumers of public services on its head, and instead empowers young people as leaders in their schools, neighborhoods, and city government. It engages youth as advisers within a Neighborhood Youth Advisory Board, Teen Advisory Groups for Parks and Recreation, the Superintendent's Advisory Group, and secondary school advisory teams. A special group of 24 young people also serves as the city's Youth Commission and on other appointed committees throughout the city.

The program, created in 1997, is based on three pathways of opportunities for youth to become involved in their community:

- Service – hundreds of short-term opportunities to volunteer
- Influence – over 300 youth each year serve in some type of advisory capacity providing input into adult decision-making
- Shared Leadership – youth in Hampton have the opportunity to serve as voting members on city boards and commissions, run their own grant program, and have responsibility for their own component of the Community Plan

By allowing youth to have a voice within city government and the community, the city has seen an increase in volunteerism and voting rates among the youth, with many young people returning to the city after college to pursue local careers in a place where they feel valued.

"At all of the Hampton City Schools they encourage us to be involved in the community and to really talk about how we feel and what we think; they really make us feel like our opinions matter," said 14-year-old Mindy Gross.

Jacob Berg, 2005 Hampton High School graduate, added, "I used to feel like, as a kid, I couldn't do too much for the city – that city government was for adults – but I've realized that youth can be involved and can actually have a big influence."

The City of Hampton's Youth Civic Engagement Program was one of more than 1,000 applicants for the 2005 Innovations in American Government Award. The National Selection Committee, chaired by David Gergen of the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard, included former Maryland Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, former San Diego Mayor

Susan Golding, former White House Deputy Chief of Staff Maria Echaveste and former Congressman William Clinger.

For 18 years, the Innovations in American Government Award has recognized quality and responsiveness at all levels of government, honored government efforts that are creative, effective and address significant problems, and has fostered the replication of innovative approaches to the challenges facing government. For more information on the Innovations in American Government program, visit www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu or www.excelgov.org.

For additional information on programs for Hampton's youth, visit www.hampton.gov/foryouth. To see how the city's young people are encouraging others to join their efforts, visit www.areyouinthegame.com.

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