

The 2014 Innovation in Governance Awards Program

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Municipality:	Highland Park	
Population:	14,000	County: Middlesex
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Project Information

Initiative Title:	Park Partners Community Grant Program
Description:	grants for citizen-run programs for community

The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort.

Project Specific Details: (Please explain your innovation. Include up to 3 supplemental attachments if needed.)

- How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?
- How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?
- Are there any measured savings or program improvements?
- Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent
- How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?

Please Attach a Supplemental Sheet(s) Noting the Details of Your Initiative.
(Supplemental Attachments NOT to exceed 3 pages)

Application Deadline: Applications must be received no later than Wednesday, October 1, 2014. Mail applications to NJLM Innovation in Government 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608 or send by email to MDarcy@njslom.org

If you have any questions, please contact Michael Darcy at the League of Municipalities
609-695-3481 ext 116 or MDarcy@njslom.org

HIGHLAND PARK'S PARK PARTNERS COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAM

Highland Park has always prided itself on having an active volunteer spirit; we are a community whose residents feel a strong civic responsibility. Our Borough-sponsored commissions and committees are involved in many aspects of life in Highland Park, spreading their important messages and planning programs and activities for the benefit of our residents.

To further involve our residents in civic life, and to encourage their involvement in how some of their tax dollars are spent, the Borough launched a special grant program, sort of a "give back" program, to encourage volunteerism. **Park Partners** was created in 2013 as an annual Community Development Grant program. This program empowers our civic-minded residents to participate in the continual development of the community, by either submitting a grant application or participating in the town-wide vote for the winning grant applications.

Park Partners awards up to five grants to individuals or organizations within Highland Park to create and execute a program to benefit the community. Residents must complete a grant application. The grants are divided into five categories that represent important values for Highland Park: Environment, Arts, Culture & Diversity, Safety, and Universal Access or Health & Wellness. Each recipient can receive up to \$2000 to complete the project, and the projects must be completed within one year of receiving the grant.

Park Partners participants fill out an application describing their program, the need for the program, and how it will be implemented. Each program is evaluated by the Borough to determine the feasibility and legality of the project, and participants are made aware of policies and procedures required to complete their project. Those that are accepted create an exhibit for presentation to the

community. At a "science-fair" type event, residents listen to the applicants discuss their program, and are able to vote for one program in each category.

In its first year the Borough received 16 applications in the five categories. The voting event, held last November, attracted an overwhelming amount of residents. More than 250 people came out to vote for the programs they felt would be best for Highland Park.

The Borough presented the winning grants for the following programs: Emergency Radios for elderly and disabled in the community (Safety), a Summer Series Outdoor Movies (Arts & Culture), CuttingOutHunger food pantry program (Universal Access or Health & Wellness), Re:ThinkHP diversity project (Culture & Diversity), and a River Road walking trail (Environment).

After experiencing several natural disasters in the past several years, resident and Commission for Universal Access member Tara Canavera saw a need to communicate with the elderly and disabled who may not have easy access to information. She used the Park Partners grant to purchase almost 60 Emergency Radios for these individuals so they could receive up-to-date information about an emergency in the community.

Resident Brian Onsen received a Park Partners grant to improve the variety and quality of movies for the Summer Series Outdoor Movies. The movies, which are shown on Saturday afternoons from May through September in our Municipal parking lot, have been a big hit with residents, and thanks to the grant Brian was able to purchase licenses for a wider variety of films.

Highland Park students Jamie and Kate Atschinow brought the idea of using coupons to a new level. They began an organization called CuttingOutHunger, which collects coupons and uses them to purchase food and supplies for the Highland Park Food Pantry. Since June 2013 the girls have donated

more than \$1000 worth of items to the Food Pantry. This grant enabled them to purchase additional and more expensive items that are needed at the Food Pantry.

Oscar Lee, a 2014 Highland Park High School graduate, created Re:ThinkHP, an exploration of race and culture to encourage people to understand and accept each other. In April 2014 Re:Think HP hosted three panel discussions about diversity, criminal justice and educational inequality, and pop culture and housing discrimination. The successful panels were held at the Highland Park High School and featured journalists, professors and activists.

Many residents of Highland Park appreciate and enjoy the environment, and resident Allan Williams, in conjunction with Sustainable Highland Park and the Environmental Commission, is developing a new River Road walking trail to do just that. The trail leads from the Environmental Center to the Raritan River, and is a beautiful path for walking, bird watching, and more. The Park Partners grant provided the funds to build the path, and Sustainable HP will maintain it in the future.

Not only were these programs worthy of the grants, but the Borough was proud that two of the winning programs were sponsored by students at our local high school and middle school, pointing to the fact that our current and future leaders are concerned about our community and assuring a future of active residents as well.

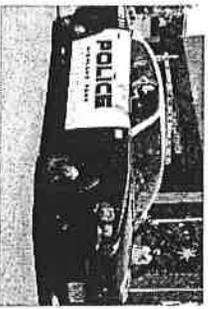
The Park Partners program is continuing in 2014, with presentation of proposals and voting scheduled for December 2014. Park Partners is now in Highland Park's annual budget for the future. The program has been a welcome addition to our ongoing goal to advance and develop Highland Park, and can be easily implemented in communities throughout New Jersey. The programs are created and executed by the volunteers, with the Borough offering advice, assistance with permits and legal questions, as well as financial support.

PARK PARTNERS



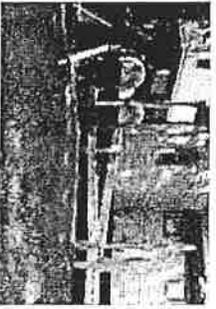
ARTS

CULTURE & DIVERSITY



SAFETY

ENVIRONMENT

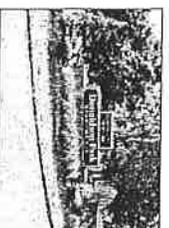


UNIVERSAL ACCESS OR HEALTH & WELLNESS

Park Partners



Sponsored By: Borough of Highland Park



Do you have a great idea to help enrich or beautify our community?

Make your idea a reality!

The Borough of Highland Park is sponsoring up to FIVE community service programs. Programs should enhance our community, benefit our residents, and encourage volunteer participation.

This opportunity is open to all residents and organizations in Highland Park. One grant, valued at up to \$2000, may be awarded in each of the following categories:

Environment

Arts

Culture and Diversity

Safety

Universal Access or Health &

Wellness

Rules and Procedures

Step 1: Complete Application

All participants must fill out an application form for Borough approval. Applications due no later than **November 14, 2014**. Application may be brought to the Borough Clerk, or mailed to: Park Partners, cc: Borough Clerk, 211 South Fifth Avenue, Highland Park, NJ 08904

Step 2: Create a Presentation

Once the application is accepted, participants must create a presentation display for the proposed program. Residents will view presentations and vote through ballot to determine the winner of each category (one vote per person). Showcase and voting scheduled for **December 7, 2014**.

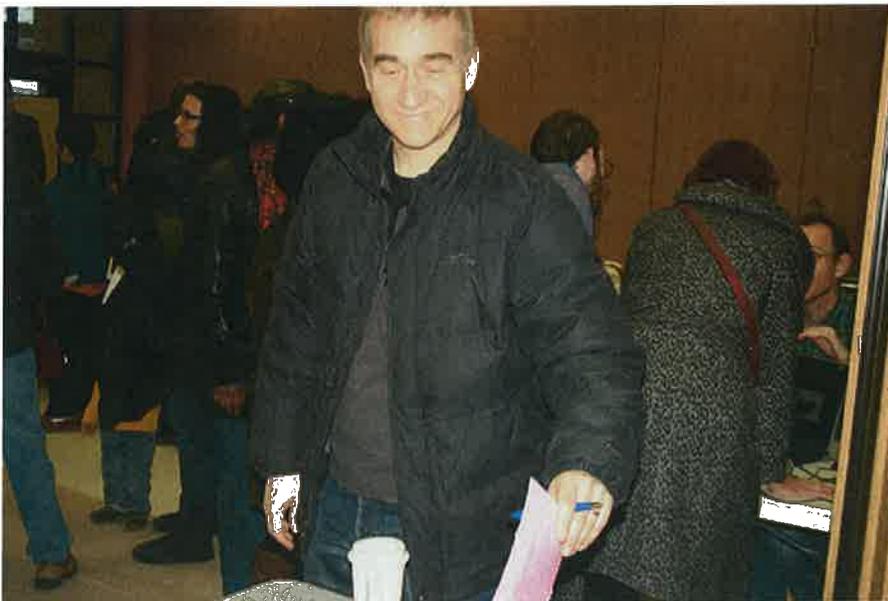
Step 3: Implement Project

Winners in each category will receive up to \$2000 to complete their program. Grant recipients are responsible for implementation, with support from the Borough. Program must be started and completed within one year of grant approval.

PARK PARTNERS COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAM
HIGHLAND PARK, NJ



Program Display at 2013 Vote



More than 200 residents came to the voting session.