

The 2016 Innovation in Governance Awards Program

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| Contact Information: | CITY OF EAST ORANGE | | |
| Municipality: | ESSEX | | |
| Population: | 65,000 | County: | ESSEX |
| Address: | 44 CITY HALL PLAZA | | |
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Project Information

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| Initiative Title: | 9 STEP APPROACH TO VAP |
| Description: | A GUIDE TO HELP TOWNS TO RUN A VAP PROGRAM |

The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort. Innovations must have been implemented during the time period June 1, 2015 - September 30, 2016

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 Monday, October 3, 2016. Mail applications to NJLM Innovation in Government 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608 or send by email to CBradley@njslom.org

If you have any questions, please contact Ciara Bradley at the League of Municipalities
609-695-3481 ext 128 or CBradley@njslom.org

Re: The 2016 Innovation in Governance Award Program

As the Director of Property Maintenance, Dwight Saunders had one goal – to once again make East Orange one of the cleanest cities in America, a designation it held three times over three decades ago. Challenged with years of urban decay and blight, Director Saunders spearheaded the development of a Vacant and Abandoned Properties Program (VAP) that would aggressively combat this issue using codes that had been on the city's books for years, yet not enforced. In doing so, Saunders has helped to create not only a cleaner community, but a safer and more profitable one.

Under Mr. Saunders' leadership, my administration has been able to successfully work toward achieving our mission to enhance the quality of life in East Orange by providing outstanding service to our residents, visitors, community, and business partners.

Armed with a staff of Rutgers University-certified personnel who employ the latest technology to inspect and identify blighted properties, the Department of Property Maintenance is using code enforcement to hold property owners accountable and clean up the city. Once identified, property owners are forced to address the issue of blight – either by following the code or paying fines. In one year's time, the efforts of Property Maintenance have resulted in over 1027 properties being identified, more than 856 owners tracked down, and a surplus of \$604,000 in unanticipated revenue for the city since December 2014 and from June 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016 Vacant and Abandoned Division has collected \$384,000 in registration fees.

His effective 9-step VAP program is now considered a best practice in municipal code enforcement, garnering statewide attention and requests for Dir. Saunders to speak before the State Assembly Housing Committee, as well as before attendees of numerous conferences and seminars dedicated to implementing the Abandoned Properties Rehabilitation Act to enact change.

Dir. Saunders leads by example. His hands-on approach has earned him the respect of his staff and peers alike. Working collaboratively with the Quality of Life Task Force, Property Maintenance has empowered residents and businesses to take a proactive part in keeping the city clean. Seeking to encourage active participation in the beautification of East Orange, Dir. Saunders launched the "Don't Dump on EO" campaign, a citywide initiative to reinforce community pride among the young people in our community.

Most recently, working with the Mayor's Office of Training and Employment, Dir. Saunders played a vital role in executing "The Neighborhood Clean Up Initiative." This project employed a team of 12 residents to assist in cleaning up vacant and abandoned properties. The response was tremendous and contagious, eliciting scores of offers from volunteers wanting to help. The initiative, once limited to 12 weeks, will be continued using funds generated through Dir. Saunders' department.

Dir. Saunders is a dedicated and transformational leader. His work as a Director has helped to boost morale and inspire not only his staff, but the municipality as a whole. His leadership has directly improved the quality of life for over 65,000 residents and helped to advance our vision that East Orange will set the standard for urban excellence and become a destination city.

Dir. Saunders held a press conference with Sen. Menendez on "Zombie Foreclosures" June 27, 2016. The Wall Street Journal article how East Orange uses law to fine creditors if property fall into disrepair.

East Orange Record story about Code Enforcement Director want to clean up the town using 2004 Abandoned Properties Rehabilitation act (APRA). NJTV News segment East Orange works to clean up abandoned properties June 26, 2015. New Jersey Advance Media NJ.Com article August 3, 2015 featured N.J. City hopes to turn 700 abandoned homes into a bright future. June 4, 2016 East Orange Record Story on East Orange Code Enforcement Director addresses homeowner's complaint.