



2025 Volunteer Community of the Year Award

The **Volunteer Community of the Year Award** recognizes municipal volunteer programs across seven categories: **Best City, Best Mid-Sized Town, Best Small Town, Most Innovative, Most Resilient, Most Sustainable, and Most Youth Engagement.**

Applicants should not select a category, as the judges will identify the best applications per award. Please see the category definitions on the following page.

Applications are due to Engage.AR@adhe.edu no later than Friday, October 24, 2025.

Population:

- Small Town: Less than 5,000
- Mid-Sized Town: 5,000-20,000
- City: 20,000 or Greater

Contact:

Municipality: _____
 Mayor: _____
 Mayor Phone: _____
 Mayor Email: _____

Nominator Information:

Name: _____
 Title: _____
 Address: _____

 Phone: _____
 Email: _____

Application:

- 50-word executive summary of your project.
- Typed, double-spaced entry with no more than five pages describing the municipally developed volunteer project.
- Clear connection between your project and at least one of the award categories listed above.
- Up to 3 support materials for your volunteer project, which may include articles, photographs, community letters. (Optional)

Things to include in your narrative:

- 50-word executive summary of project required
- What was the community issue you sought to address?
- How was the project developed?
- Which municipal staff/department spearheaded the project?
- How were residents invited to volunteer?
- Did you partner with other departments to achieve your goals?
- Is the project scalable for other Arkansas communities?
- Is it the first of its kind or an adapted project?
- How well has the project achieved its objectives?
- How does civic engagement fit into the municipality's long-term strategic goals or values?
- How did you measure the impact of the volunteer project/program/event? (Example: number of volunteers, youth engaged, neighborhoods improved, etc.)

Judging Process:

All entries will be screened by the Governor's Advisory Commission on National Service and Volunteerism. Judging criteria includes:

- Is the application complete and are the necessary items included?
- Was the project developed and led by municipal staff (nonprofit partnerships will not be considered)?
- Did the project address a significant community need?
- Did the project engage volunteers in the community?
- Did the project have a significant impact on the community?
- Does the project have longevity and/or can it be adapted by other communities?
- For specialized categories, is the project innovative, sustainable, resilient, or focused on boosting youth engagement?

Judging Process:

- Finalists will be notified in Dec. 2025.
- Awards will be distributed at the 2026 Municipal League Winter Conference.

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Key Terms and Definitions for the Volunteer Community of the Year Award

Civic Engagement is the process through which individuals or groups engage in collective actions to address public issues and improve community well-being.

Municipally Led means an effort initiated, coordinated, or formally supported by a local government entity, often involving official promotion, logistics, or resource allocation. It distinguishes municipal sponsorship from purely grassroots or nonprofit-driven efforts.

Municipally Led Civic Engagement Events are programs where municipal staff or elected officials take the lead role in planning, launching, or facilitating events that engage citizens in public life. These events often focus on issues of public concern, provide public platforms for dialogue or action, encourage participation in civic processes, and are organized, promoted, or resourced through local government channels.

Best City/Mid-Sized Town/Small Town recognizes municipalities of different sizes that exemplify excellence in mobilizing volunteer service through government-led or government-facilitated programs. These municipalities demonstrate sustained, strategic leadership in engaging residents to improve their quality of life through civic action, touching one or more of the categories for the Volunteer Community of the Year Award. Honored communities not only show clear municipal leadership in organizing, promoting, and supporting volunteer initiatives, but also integrate volunteerism into planning and services in ways that produce measurable results. Their efforts address high-priority local needs or pressing issues, achieve strong citizen participation rates, and deliver visible, lasting impact in the community.

Examples:

- Clear municipal leadership in organizing, promoting, and supporting volunteer initiatives
- Integration of volunteerism into planning and services
- Strong citizen participation rates and visible community impact

Most Innovative recognizes a municipality that demonstrates originality and creativity in designing, promoting, and delivering volunteer programs. Innovation may include new models of engagement, use of technology, or fresh approaches to solving civic problems through volunteer action.

Examples:

- Novel methods or tools developed by the city/town to increase participation
- Creative partnerships between municipal departments
- Piloting new programs or volunteer roles to meet evolving community needs

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Most Sustainable recognizes a municipality that uses volunteer service as a tool for long-term environmental, economic, or social sustainability. This award honors local governments that embed sustainability goals into their volunteer strategy.

Examples:

- Volunteer-supported city efforts in areas such as waste reduction, tree planting, water conservation, climate resilience, or infrastructure maintenance
 - Programs that have enduring value and can be sustained by the community
 - City leadership in promoting sustainable behaviors through volunteer-driven initiatives
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Most Resilient recognizes a municipality that has shown remarkable ability to adapt and recover from crises by mobilizing volunteers under municipal leadership. This includes responses to natural disasters, economic shifts, or public health challenges.

Examples:

- The municipality rapidly organized or restructured volunteer efforts to meet urgent needs
 - Continuity of community services was ensured through civic volunteerism
 - Programs supported long-term recovery and helped maintain community cohesion
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Most Youth Engagement recognizes a municipality that actively involves young people in volunteer service, promoting leadership, civic education, and a lifelong ethic of service through programs initiated or coordinated by the city.

Examples:

- Municipal programs created by or for youth (e.g., youth advisory councils, city-led school initiatives)
- Inclusion of youth voices in planning civic improvement or service projects
- High participation rates of young residents in volunteer programs facilitated by the city