



2005 All-America City Award Application

Community Information

Community name and state:

Willmar, Minnesota

Your community is applying as a:

Neighborhood Town City County Region

If applying as a region, name participating communities: N/A

If applying as a neighborhood, name city: N/A

Has your community applied before? Yes No If Yes, which years: 1982

Has your community been a Finalist before? Yes No If Yes, which years: 1982

Has your community been an All-America City before? Yes No If Yes, which years: _____

Contact Information

All-America City Award contact (primary contact person available throughout entire competition and for follow-up):

Name: Michael Schmit

Title: City Administrator

Organization: City of Willmar

Address: 333 SW 6th Street; Box 755

City, State, ZIP: Willmar, MN 56201

Phone (business/day): (320) 214-5160

Fax (business/day): (320) 235-4917

Phone (home/evening): (320) 235-6886

Fax (home/evening): N/A

E-mail Address: mschmit@ci.willmar.mn.us

List the 3 individuals who most actively participated in filling out this All-America City Award application (add additional lines if needed):

(Provide name and title; organization; phone; e-mail address)

Michael Schmit, City Administrator, (320) 214-5160, mschmit@ci.willmar.mn.us

Bruce Peterson, Director of Planning and Development Services, (320) 235-8311, bpeterson@ci.willmar.mn.us

Joy Baker, Co-Owner, RedStar Creative, (320) 796-0388, joyb@redstarcreative.com

The community applying will receive one complimentary membership (or a membership renewal if an AAC application was submitted last year) to the National Civic League for one year. To whom should this membership be directed?

Name: Michael Schmit, City Administrator

Address: 333 SW 6th Street; Box 755

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Fax: (320) 235-4917

Email: mschmit@ci.willmar.mn.us

If we are designated an All-America City, we agree to follow NCL's rules (available on the Web site) regarding use of the All-America City Award logo, a registered trademark of the National Civic League.

Signature: _____ Date: February 22, 2005

Name: Michael Schmit Title: City Administrator

Community Statistics

Note: Use the most up-to-date statistics possible for your neighborhood, town, city, county, or region (*source suggestions:* U.S. Census Bureau, State Department of Economic Security, State Department of Finance, Department of Public Health, and local school statistics)

POPULATION (in year 2000 or most recent): 18,351

Source/Date: U.S. Census - 2000

POPULATION PERCENTAGE CHANGE 1990-2000 (indicate + or -): +4.7 %

Source/Date: U.S. Census - 2000

RACIAL/ETHNIC POPULATION BREAKDOWN (percentage):

White alone 88.1 %

Hispanic or Latino (of any race) 15.9 %

Black or African American alone 0.9 %

Asian alone 0.5 %

American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) alone 0.5 %

Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOP) alone 0.1 %

Some other race alone 8.5 %

Two or more races 1.4 %

Source/Date: U.S. Census - 2000

MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME: \$ 45,415

Source/Date: U.S. Census - 2000

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL: 8.4 %

Source/Date: U.S. Census - 2000

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 4.3 %

Source/Date: U.S. Census - 2000

POPULATION BREAKDOWN BY AGE GROUP (*percentages, if available*):

19 years old and under	30.5%
20-24	7.8%
25-44	26.4%
45-64	18.9%
65 and over	16.4%

Source/Date: U.S. Census - 2000

PERCENTAGE OF HOME OWNERSHIP: 63 %

Source/Date: U.S. Census - 2000

WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION -- Name the three largest employment sectors in your community and provide the percentage of total employed in each:

<u>Educational, health, and social services</u>	25.8%
<u>Manufacturing</u>	17.3%
<u>Retail trade</u>	13.0%

Source/Date: U.S. Census - 2000

★★ Please attach a state map with your community clearly marked (attach as a separate sheet).

Part I: Community Background and Community Challenge Section

Add lines as needed for your responses

1 (A). Community Background: Set the background for your community. Tell its story. Summarize your community's history, successes and struggles. Describe how your community got to where it is today and your community's current state of affairs. (700 word maximum):

After the last great glacier receded from the greater Willmar area, Native Americans flourished on the fertile plains and in the hardwood forests. Tribal conflicts would become far more complicated in the mid-1800s as settlers of Norwegian, Swedish, German and other descent immigrated to the region. Settlers brought businesses, schools, and churches in an attempt to establish settlements in strategic locations throughout the area. Military posts helped ensure safety of the frontier, and the railroads stretching from the east reached Willmar in 1869. Willmar (named for Leon Willmar, a Flemish land agent for the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad) became a hub for the Great Northern Railway. The railway company, known now as BNSF Railway, continues to define the community as a key link in a national rail system some 135 years later.

Willmar is the county seat of Kandiyohi (a Dakota word meaning abounding in buffalo fish) County, and encompasses an area of 8,570 acres in west-central Minnesota, approximately 100 miles west of the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. The City's estimated population is 19,000. Willmar has been a municipal corporation since 1901 and is governed in accordance with a Home Rule Charter adopted in 1968.

Whereas the economy of the surrounding area is reliant on agriculture and related business and industries, the City of Willmar serves as a regional center for retail trade, medical care, education, and small industries. This diversity of the City's economic base has provided steady growth and stability over the years. Jennie-O Turkey Store, a homegrown industry headquartered in Willmar, is acknowledged internationally as the world's largest turkey processing company. Rice Memorial Hospital and its partnerships with Affiliated Community Medical and Family Practice Medical Centers, Willmar Public Schools and Ridgewater College, and traditional governmental institutions all drive the local economic engine. As a relatively remote "regional center," Willmar compensates for location by aggressively pursuing ground links to state and interstate transportation systems and by encouraging public/private partnerships to develop a community strategic technology plan. A new four-lane highway connection to Interstate 94 is underway, and the technology plan is firmly in place.

Diversity comes in many shapes and forms. As the City has continued to grow and prosper economically in its role as a regional center, cultural diversity issues have both blessed and complicated the development. The Latino community has been a significant presence in Willmar for more than 20 years. However, where once agricultural migrant populations were drawn to the Willmar area for the annual beet harvests, now, many have chosen Willmar as their permanent home. Approximately 20 percent of the Willmar population now identifies itself as Latino. Willmar now has the largest Latino population of any Minnesota city, except for Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Early efforts to acknowledge and assimilate Latinos and a new culture into the general population were coordinated by the religious community and, although well intentioned, they were generally ineffective. Time passed and although there were never any major racial incidents, the Latino population was showing a steady increase in problems with school attendance and dropout rates, language barriers, law enforcement relationships, and a lack of Latino representation in local community leadership

positions. The end of the century found Willmar at a crossroad. Were these bicultural tensions and issues to be viewed as problems or community-wide challenges?

A major community-wide visioning process was launched in 1999, spearheaded by City and County officials, Willmar Public Schools, and Willmar Area Chamber of Commerce. Comprehensive surveys and community-wide strategic planning sessions attended by more than 250 concerned citizens resulted in an action plan designed to reach to the very core of the issues preventing the Latino population from being recognized as part of the community. Cultural diversity has evolved into cultural competency. Partnerships between the responsible authorities have provided funding and programs for cultural liaisons charged with the responsibility of breaking down competency barriers. School attendance and graduation rates are on the rise and language barriers are being identified and eliminated. Training programs are designed and implemented recognizing that integrating Latino members into local community leadership positions decreases the “insider/outsider” perspective, builds cultural bridges within the community, provides positive role models for young Latinos, and helps reduce overall tension in the community.

1 (B). Community Celebration: Why should your community be selected as an All-America City? Describe what makes your community a great place to live, work, and play. *(300 word maximum)*

Despite inadequate connections to major metropolitan areas, Willmar continues to grow and serve as the premier greater Minnesota regional center. The community has banded together in an effort to maximize our multicultural and economic strengths. The community focuses on public and private partnerships to develop efficiencies in service delivery, and enjoys the lowest tax burden and property tax rate of similar sized communities in Minnesota.

School districts, local government, and the business community have partnered to meet cultural competency issues head-on. Business leaders and local elected officials understand the underlying economic benefits Latinos bring to the community. Residents express appreciation for the multiculturalism, and educators note the benefits of exposure to cultural and language differences that provide our children and families with a more realistic view of the world.

Recent approvals of local option sales taxes have resulted in a new public library and plans for a new and expanded industrial park (under the auspices of the City/County Economic Development Commission) are under way. Public/private partnerships have built a new YMCA, a baseball stadium, a civic center addition, and an aquatic center. The municipally owned Rice Memorial Hospital is in the final stages of a \$52 million expansion and renovation program, and enjoys business partnerships with Family Practice and Affiliated Community Medical Centers. The City and School have recently combined their Community Education and Parks/Recreation programs to better meet the needs of area residents. The City’s 37 parks and more than 20 miles of hiking/biking trails round out our well-designed citywide recreational opportunities. The City has averaged in excess of \$30 million of new construction over the past ten years, and its bond rating has been upgraded twice in the last three years from A3 to A1. Willmar heads into the 21st Century full of energy and optimism.

1 (C). Community Challenges: Based upon your community's current status, describe your community's two most pressing challenges.

Challenge #1: *(200 words maximum)*

Willmar is a rural city that experienced a significant population growth in the late 1980s to early 1990s. This growth was primarily due to the expansion of Jennie-O Turkey Store, the leading producer of turkeys in the U.S. headquartered in Willmar. With the expansion of Jennie-O's processing facilities came an immediate and critical need for employees to fill these general labor positions. Jennie-O began an intensive recruitment effort, targeting the southern and western states where unemployment rates were high. Suddenly, there was an influx of Spanish-speaking families who were beginning to call Willmar home.

Willmar was unprepared to handle this rapid demographic shift. Schools were ill-equipped to handle the growing number of students who were of limited English proficiency, affordable housing was limited, trailer parks became overcrowded, racial tension ensued, and gang activity seemed to erupt overnight. By 1992, Willmar had acquired a negative image of high crime and low tolerance. Today, Minnesota's statewide Latino population is estimated to be only 3 percent whereas Willmar's Latino population is approaching 20 percent. Additionally, Willmar is now experiencing a growing East African population.

Our challenge is to become a culturally competent community that welcomes and embraces its new and diverse population.

Challenge #2: *(200 words maximum)*

Change brings with it many challenges, especially economic and demographic change. To remain successful, Willmar has had to adapt to these changes.

Willmar's history is rooted in the railroad and has been sustained by an agrarian economy. The demise of the family farm and trend toward large, corporate farming operations has had a profound effect on our economy and community. Likewise, railroad consolidation, the reduction in hard-line manufacturing, and increasing demand for technology across all industrial sectors has impacted the way Willmar does business. We are no longer the small prairie town on the railroad main line with a predominantly agricultural economic base.

Our community has proven to be attractive to a number of new immigrant groups. The historical Scandinavian/European population has quickly become more diverse with the addition of large numbers of Latino and East African immigrants. Also, like many areas of the country, the overall population is aging, making it all the more important that we provide economic opportunities for our young adults.

Our second challenge is complex and multi-faceted: we must adjust to the changing economy, maintain technical competency, and provide quality employment opportunities for a changing workforce.

Part II: Community-Driven Projects

Add lines as needed for your responses

Part II requires descriptions of three collaborative community projects that have significantly affected the community.

The first two projects should be drawn directly from the two community challenges stated above.

The third project should be reflective of what your community is doing for children and youth.

PROJECT ONE (Challenge #1)

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum)

The West Central Integration Collaborative was founded in 2002 in response to a request by the Minnesota Department of Education to increase interracial contact among students. MDE identified Willmar as a racially isolated school, meaning Willmar's enrollment of 27 percent minority students greatly exceeded those of contiguous districts whose enrollments were less than 1.5 percent.

What makes the WCIC unique is its three-track goal plan to promote cultural integration not only in the school districts, but also in the areas of healthcare and economic development. In July 2003, the WCIC expanded its boundaries even further by partnering with the City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County to develop a new "Cultural Liaison" initiative for the community.

The WCIC has been able to fulfill a crucial need in our community by reaching out to the growing Latino and East African communities and letting newcomers know what Willmar has to offer.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and your first challenge, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum)

Few barriers are more fundamental to understanding and acceptance than a communication barrier. Without qualified interpreters, Willmar's new Latino and East African residents soon found themselves unable to interact with even the most basic community institutions, such as schools, hospitals, health clinics, law enforcement, and the judicial system.

In the summer of 1999, the City of Willmar began "Vision 20/20", a planning and assessment process that would help determine what our city could look like in 20 years. Members from the Latino and East African communities were asked to serve on the steering committee, as well as staff members from the Jennie-O Turkey Store. From this visioning process, a "Cultural Liaison" initiative was born. The goals of this new position would be to foster cultural understanding and acceptance by welcoming immigrants to the community, and to collaborate with education, government, and businesses to support increased diversity.

However, legislative budget cuts in 2002 left no extra dollars for the City of Willmar to fund its new Cultural Liaison position. This forced the Vision 20/20 members to "think outside the box." An initial grant of \$75,000 was obtained through the Blandin Foundation, with the requirement that when the grant expired in June 2004, future funding would need to come from the City of Willmar and

Kandiyohi County. That's when task force members came up with the idea of sharing the city's Cultural Liaison position with the WCIC.

Today, the "educational arm" of the WCIC receives 70 percent of its funding as state aid through the Minnesota Department of Education and 30 percent through Willmar's school tax levy. The new "community arm" (Cultural Liaison position) is funded by the City and the County, with \$15,000 allocated to fund the position through 2004, and an additional \$65,000 appropriated for 2005.

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum)

The West Central Integration Collaborative is a true collaborative in every sense of the word. It was born from the input of several key contributors, including the City of Willmar, the school districts of Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City, New London-Spicer, and Willmar Public Schools, the VISION 20/20 Steering Committee, Kandiyohi County, the African Coalition, the Willmar Community Education/Recreation Department, Rice Hospital, Ridgewater College, the local Ministerial Association, and others.

In addition, when the WCIC was requested to develop a Desegregation Plan for 2005-2008, invitations were extended to over 100 persons from diverse cultural communities and included parents, students, staff members, the faith community, law enforcement, healthcare providers, and government leaders. This Advisory Committee helped to develop the original goals for the WCIC, which extended well beyond the scope of the public schools to include an expansion of cultural awareness into the community.

Finally, Jennie-O Turkey Store, often criticized for its role in changing our city's demographics, has become a key partner to the WCIC. As one of the state's largest employers of minority and new immigrant people, Jennie-O Turkey Store has opened its doors to the WCIC, allowing staff to bring information to their employees, sharing its own on-staff Cultural Liaisons, and fulfilling the need to orientate new immigrants to community services. This has given minority families the opportunity to ask questions about daycare, healthcare, educational opportunities and important financial matters.

City officials have been quick to recognize that while other rural Minnesota cities are declining in population and struggling to boost economic development, Willmar is enjoying success and growth due in large part to its vital Latino population.

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum)

The WCIC has attained positive outcomes in all four-goal areas.

1. SCHOOL RETENTION:

- a. Twenty-three percent increase in the number of minority students graduating from 2002-2003.
- b. Eighty percent increase in the number of minority students and parents attending K-12 school conferences.
- c. SMART Club – Provides mentoring and job shadowing opportunities, college visits, peer-to-peer tutoring, and computer access.

- d. Summer Enrichment Camp partnership with Ridgewater College – Provides a four-day, on-campus college experience for minority students.
 - e. Youth Circles – Program conceived by the League of Women Voters that fosters youth leadership and encourages minority youth to plan for the future of their communities.
2. COMMUNITY OUTREACH:
- a. Youth Leadership for Vital Communities – Youth-led leadership program established through the Willmar Community Education Department and Communities of Promise. Participants developed a billboard celebrating diversity and a video titled “Do You Know Your Neighbors?”
 - b. Soccer Program – Partnership with the Willmar Soccer Association to enhance and expand the current soccer program to be more culturally responsive. The program grew from 40 students in 2003 to 125 students in 2004. More growth is expected.
3. LANGUAGE BARRIERS:
- a. Foreign Language in Elementary Schools – Currently serves 1,500 students and focuses on cultural understanding through classroom instruction, games, music, theater, food, and field trips.
 - b. Newcomers Program – Helps students who speak little or no English to transition into English Language Learner programs and mainstream classrooms.
4. COMMUNITY CULTURAL AWARENESS:
- a. Minority leadership on civic committees increased from one to seven individuals in only one year.
 - b. Received a two-year, \$291,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Health to address health disparities among minority youth.
 - c. Held first bi-annual “Celebration of Cultures,” a one-day event that attracted over 2,000 people.
 - d. Held first “Skills to Action Leadership Training” seminar by partnering with Center for Cross Cultural Health.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (This person may be contacted to verify information.)

Idalia Leuze, Director
West Central Integration Collaborative
611 SW 5th St
Willmar, MN 56201
(320) 231-8546
idalia.leuze@swsc.org

PROJECT TWO (Challenge #2)

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum)

The healthcare industry has emerged as one of the dominant sectors in Willmar's economy. Throughout the past decade, area health clinics have grown, adding doctors, nurses, and support staff. Rice Memorial Hospital underwent a \$52-plus million expansion/renovation to meet its growing role in providing regional healthcare. It was soon recognized that the education sector also needed to adapt to these industry changes, and to the cultural/demographic changes witnessed by the community.

Healthcare industry representatives approached Ridgewater College of Willmar for assistance in addressing the shortage of healthcare workers in central Minnesota and to ensure a highly skilled healthcare workforce. Thus, the Improvement Model for Workforce Development in Rural Health Care (Health Care Simulation) was created. Working with the providers, Ridgewater College designed the program to recruit people of diverse backgrounds to the healthcare field and give them the technical competency needed to support the local healthcare industry.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and your first challenge, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum)

In the year 2000, healthcare providers approached Ridgewater College seeking solutions to their workforce concerns. The industry was represented by clinics, acute and long-term care providers, as well as dementia care providers. A series of meetings led to the development of four goals:

1. Stimulate critical thinking.
2. Embrace technology to enhance patient care.
3. Provide culturally sensitive care.
4. Understand the business of healthcare as it relates to patient outcomes.

These goals (in addition to the overall objective of increasing student recruitment) formed the platform for the Health Care Simulation model.

One of the core components of this model is the Ridgewater healthcare simulation lab. This lab provides a high-tech, real-life environment for healthcare training in which skills can be learned and refined. The computerized lab is also available for doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers to maintain technical competency.

The program addresses the changing healthcare industry forces and goals by increasing education/employment opportunities for high school graduates, the minority community, and non-traditional students. It assures that the most technologically advanced training is available, resulting in a highly-skilled healthcare workforce that reflects our diverse local population.

Ridgewater College and Rice Memorial Hospital provided early financial support for the project. Two Minnesota Job Skills Partnership Grants were obtained based on the program's ability to relate healthcare education directly to industry needs. A local visioning process sponsored by the Blandin Foundation provided grant money that was matched by the Otto Bremer Foundation and Ridgewater College Foundation, leading directly to the acquisition of simulation technology. The program is

sustained by student tuition, workforce development (user) fees, and funding from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System.

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum)

Addressing the ever-changing healthcare needs of an increasingly diverse population requires the efforts of many committed individuals and groups. As previously noted, the Model for Workforce Improvement in Rural Health Care was initiated by Ridgewater College as the result of contact by local healthcare providers. Foremost among these providers was Rice Memorial Hospital. However, it became apparent early in the program development process that the needs reached beyond the hospital. Input was sought from the two major clinics in Willmar — Family Practice Medical Center and Affiliated Community Medical Centers. Their responses were immediate and enthusiastic, as was that received from Bethesda Homes, a major long-term care provider with two large campuses in Willmar. These entities are credited with laying the foundation upon which the model was developed.

Program implementation has required a larger cast of participants. More partnerships were formed to achieve the stated goals. Today, Willmar Public Schools participates in career day activities that expose interested students to healthcare professions. The West Central Integration Collaborative assists in outreach efforts to minority students and employees. Ridgewater College Nursing Department staff pursues on-going program funding and manages program operations, in addition to providing classroom and simulation center training. Patient care staff from the hospital and medical centers also take advantage of the training and simulation opportunities offered at Ridgewater College. Recently, Minneapolis Children's Hospital became a partner in the program, providing local health practitioners with training in advanced neo-natal care prior to transport by ground or air ambulance to Minneapolis Children's.

All program partners participate in review and evaluation exercises to ensure that the goals of the program are being met.

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum)

The most important result of this process has been the bridge built between the education sector (Willmar Public Schools, Ridgewater College) and the healthcare sector (hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities). This direct linkage has greatly benefited all parties by reinforcing the education-to-workforce connection.

Recently, the program has contributed to another significant outcome, which reflects the sum and substance of local healthcare initiatives. Due to our community's demonstrated ability to address rural healthcare issues, Willmar has been designated as a site for an Area Health Education Center in conjunction with the University of Minnesota.

A significant outgrowth of the workforce improvement model was the nursing simulation center at Ridgewater College. The center provides an environment for healthcare learning and training that realistically simulates clinical settings. It enables educators to design clinical situations and use simulators with authentic patient responses, providing instant user feedback.

Quantitative outcomes from the program are impressive. Ridgewater College has increased the number of its registered nursing program graduates by 70 percent. Registered and practical nursing graduate numbers are projected to increase by 50 per year. Gains are reflected in program diversity statistics, as well. Approximately 20 English Language Learner trainees from diverse backgrounds are now placed in the healthcare industry on an annual basis. Fifty income-disadvantaged individuals have been recruited since the inception of the program. Thirty-four of those individuals completed their training. The nursing programs boast a 100 percent placement rate for graduates, with most being able to find employment within the immediate area. Over the three years that this program has been in existence, 881 physicians and nurses have received professional development training, including the use of simulation. To recruit new students, seven career fairs have been held with “Sim Man” attracting over 700 participants.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (This person may be contacted to verify information.)

Lynn Johnson, Director of Nursing
Ridgewater College
2101 15th Avenue NW
Willmar, MN 56201
(320) 231-6034
lynn.johnson@ridgewater.edu

PROJECT THREE

As a commitment to America's Promise, the National Civic League has issued the Youth Initiative Challenge. We ask that at least one project from each All-America City applicant document ways in which the lives of children and youth have been tangibly improved.

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum)

The Willmar Public Schools' Child Guide Program is an innovative, early-prevention program, originally created by the community to address juvenile crime and race relation issues. Based on the premise that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," the program is designed to connect at-risk students with resources — including people and activities — that will help them grow up to be healthy, caring, and responsible.

Willmar has found the most needy children are often from families who are simply disconnected from the community's support system. It may be due to immature or lackluster parenting, or unfamiliarity with the system. Whatever the case, a six-year-old boy will not sign up for Boy Scouts on his own. A ten-year-old girl will not seek out a mentor without guidance. This is where a Child Guide can make all the difference.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and the challenge it is addressing, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum)

In 1996, a group of concerned citizens and school leaders gathered at the district office to discuss the effects of a rapidly changing school enrollment. The growing number of Latino students now accounted for over 20 percent of the total school population, and the number of children from lower socioeconomic groups was also dramatically increasing. Racial tensions were on the rise, gang activity was increasing, and the dropout rate among Latino students was alarmingly high.

The group reviewed recent research by the Search Institute, an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities. The Search Institute defined "40 Developmental Assets" that, when present in young people's lives, will make them more likely to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. Some of these assets include a high level of support from a loving family, service to others, adult role models, and positive self esteem.

It was determined that the key to a child's success is to increase the number of Developmental Assets in his/her life by connecting him/her with programs, activities, resources, and community service projects. A secondary goal would be to also help students and parents become more familiar with how to access the resources that are available to them.

The big challenge, as always, was how to fund the initiative. A group appealed to the Minnesota State Legislature, requested project start-up funding, and received it. Additional support came from throughout the community. In the years that followed, the program has been funded by the United Way of Kandiyohi County, and is now 100 percent funded by PACT-4 Families Collaborative, a four-county family service collaborative.

Currently there are six Child Guides in the Willmar school district — one operating in each of the K-8 schools.

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum)

The Child Guide Program was conceived when Public School officials brainstormed with representatives from the Southwest/West Central Area Service Cooperative. The topic for discussion was the rising number of juvenile offenses that were occurring in the Willmar area, and what could be done to lower those numbers. The group pulled in representatives from the courts, corrections, social services, schools, churches, city, and county governments for additional input and feedback. It was at this time they began to focus on the research from the Search Institute and its “40 Developmental Assets.”

Today, the Child Guide Program continues to depend on this collaborative framework for its implementation and success. Referrals come from teachers, support professionals, parents, outside agencies, community organizations and even other children.

Once a child is referred to a Child Guide, the true collaboration begins. With a few phone calls, the child suddenly finds him or herself connected to a world of opportunities they may never have known existed: adult mentors, community service projects, book clubs, homework clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Club Amigos, bowling leagues, dance clubs, sporting events, music lessons, art activities and more.

The key piece to the Child Guide puzzle is communication among various groups, including parents, students, community organizations, financial agents, and public transit providers. What began as a group effort remains a group effort, and it’s this same free and open collaboration that makes the Willmar Child Guide Program a true success.

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum)

When it was created, Willmar’s Child Guide Program was the first program of its kind in the entire nation. Today, it serves as a model for other communities.

In 2004, Willmar was designated a “Community of Promise” by the America’s Promise organization. The Child Guide Program is just one example of how we are fulfilling our five promises to meet our community's youth needs.

There are currently 2,755 students in grades K-8 at the Willmar Public Schools who might be identified as “at-risk.” Some of these at-risk indicators include poverty, limited English proficiency, acculturation struggles, family changes, or low self-esteem. On average, there have been approximately 540 students each year in grades K-8 that have been referred to a Child Guide and deemed at-risk. A Child Guide is serving one out of every five students in our elementary and junior high schools.

The “Child Guide Developmental Asset Tool” measures the increase in Developmental Assets for students in the Child Guide Program. Of the 90 programs to which these students were referred, each provided 5 to 15 developmental assets.

Another measurement tool “Child Guide Connection Questionnaire” documented the increased knowledge of programs, activities, and resources available to the youth and parents served. The results showed that, on average, 84 percent of all parents surveyed felt they were better equipped and more independently resourceful in getting their children involved with school/community programs. Eighty-nine percent of all students felt the same.

Most importantly, there is a new sense of trust that has developed within the Latino and East African communities. The Child Guide Program not only opened doors for students, it has also opened the lines of communication. And in Willmar, we’ve learned that better communication is the key to better understanding.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (This person may be contacted to verify information.)

Nathan Cox, Director
Child Guide Prevention Program
611 SW 5th St
Willmar, MN 56201
(320) 231-8500
coxn@willmar.k12.mn.us

Part III Civic Infrastructure

Describe your community. Using the four major sections of the National Civic League’s *The Civic Index, Second Edition* (see www.ncl.org for more information), examine your community’s civic infrastructure and civic capacity and describe how your community lives each of the answers to each of the following questions. Please include real examples of how your community has demonstrated its strengths and faced its challenges. The roman numerals correspond to parts of *The Civic Index, Second Edition*. Also see the application instructions for this section.

Add lines as needed for your responses

I. What is our community vision for its future? (300 word maximum)

A “community of hope and promise” is our vision for Willmar. Every resident and visitor should feel a sense of inclusiveness and welcome. It is important that the community focus on its people. By engaging our residents, we can continue building our growing, prosperous, culturally-competent community.

As we learn to embrace our new immigrant population and our cultural differences, we must seize the opportunity to share our cultural histories. It will not serve the community if our diversity is divisive. We need to take advantage of the benefits of our diversity, and use the vibrancy and skills of our immigrants to forge a stronger, tighter community.

Willmar enjoys a healthy, broad-based economy. We must continue to promote economic and housing development to meet the needs of our growing population. Our status as a regional center is taken seriously. We understand that we have an economic responsibility that extends far beyond our community borders.

An important part of fostering a sense of community is making all manner of services available to our residents. Quality education, healthcare, government, social and personal services are available right here. We need to ensure that these services remain accessible to all of our people.

Willmar offers an excellent quality of life today. We must work hard to preserve and enhance it. In addition to the strong economy and available services, we must maintain our community’s neighborhoods, churches, parks, and natural amenities.

Just as Willmar’s Comprehensive Plan serves as a guide for physical and economic development, the Blandin 20/20 Community Investment Partnership visioning process has served to provide for personal, cultural, and community development. We seek to instill a sense of belonging in our community— one that leads to hope and promise for our future.

II. How are we fulfilling the new roles for community governance?

II. (a). What is the extent and nature of community member participation in community improvement efforts? (300 word maximum)

The nature of Willmar is one of banding together to address community issues. Our ability to solve problems as a group is a positive community attribute. The success of our group efforts is predicated on the recognition by our citizens of their civic responsibilities. Community activism and leadership is seen as a privilege and responsibility.

A major local focus is economic development. Several community groups, both governmental and private, are involved in efforts to grow jobs and tax base. These groups include the joint City/County Economic Development Commission, Willmar Area Development Corporation, Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce, and Mainstreet Willmar. Coordination of efforts and unity of purpose is achieved by memberships that overlap from one organization to another.

Many civic and service clubs (Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Sertoma, Knights of Columbus, Jaycees, Shriners) have taken the lead in providing services to area youth and the elderly. They support community projects at the grass-roots level.

In addition to participation in the above activities, the citizens of Willmar have numerous opportunities to be involved in local government. At any given time, there are hundreds of citizens serving on boards, commissions, and task forces. Being in an active, growing community, citizen interest is high because the results of their efforts are quickly evident.

Citizen participation in community betterment reached a new level, with the effort put into the Blandin Community Investment Partnership Vision 20/20 program. Four core initiatives are being pursued in the areas of cultural competency, economic sustainability, lifelong learning, and recreation/culture.

The recent changes undergone by the community brought with them some perception and image challenges. Government and business leaders responded to this opportunity by creating the Community Marketing Coalition. Working with local media, the community is addressing negative perceptions to market a consistent, positive image of the area.

II. (b). What role does government play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum)

Willmar has a history of dynamic, progressive governance with much opportunity for civic engagement. Local politics are non-partisan, and public discourse and dialogue are encouraged throughout the decision-making process. Direct access to the City Council is afforded by the standing committee structure. "Public Forum" time is scheduled for every Council meeting, giving citizens a chance to air their concerns. City Council meetings, along with other community events/meetings, are televised on the local access cable station.

Citizen input is regularly sought. Public forums are held for specific projects. Attempts have been made to solicit public opinion using questionnaires and surveys. In addition to providing information, the City of Willmar web site serves as an electronic conduit for community contacts and

two-way communication. Meaningful dialogue and open discussion between government and its citizens is crucial to the development of public policy that is representative of the community. We know this and practice it.

Community improvement is the primary rationale behind the operations of two very active local government organizations. The Willmar Planning Commission is the lead agency for community planning and physical development. Economic development is the mission of the joint City/County Economic Development Commission. Volunteer members of the community are the backbone of each group.

Twice in recent years, Willmar voters have gone to the polls and approved a local-option sales tax for community projects, such as the library expansion, airport and industrial park development, civic center improvements, and trail system extension. Government provides this tool to accomplish projects that could not typically be funded through normal budgeting.

The City owns and manages the municipal hospital, utilities, and airport. Governmental partnerships include the City/County law enforcement center/jail and regional treatment center re-use, as well as the City/School performing arts center.

II. (c). What role does the non-profit sector play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum)

The non-profit sector plays an important role in advancing community goals. Willmar's numerous non-profits address a variety of issues pertinent to the vitality and livability of the community. The Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and the Willmar Area Development Corporation assist the joint Economic Development Commission in dealing with business and trade matters. Heartland Community Action Agency administers a number of state and federal programs such as housing assistance, home ownership education, energy assistance, and Head Start. Heartland works with the Willmar Housing and Redevelopment Authority on affordable housing issues. Affordable housing is also the focus of Habitat for Humanity and the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership. These groups have been very effective in meeting the housing needs of many low- to moderate-income households.

Grants and technical assistance from the Southwest Minnesota Foundation have been made available for a number of economic development and social improvement efforts. The United Way serves as the umbrella agency dispensing personal and corporate donations to many service agencies and organizations. Our YMCA provides family-based recreation and personal development opportunities. We are fortunate to have both the Willmar Public Schools Foundation and Ridgewater College Foundation providing educational funding outside the scope of traditional public finance. The City of Willmar contributes \$25,000 annually to the Willmar Area Community Foundation for grants that address youth, the elderly, and diversity.

Our faith community is broad and all-encompassing. Together with the many service organizations, these groups provide leadership and support for community-enrichment activities.

Members and employees of the non-profits typically serve in a number of capacities within the community improvement structure. This serves to increase dialogue between groups and ensure coordination of volunteers and funding. Members of all groups serve the community with gifts of time and expertise.

II. (d). What role does business play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum)

The Willmar business community has a strong influence on decision-making and outcomes. Never a group to shy away from a tough issue, businesspeople are looked upon as change agents and promoters of new ideas. The primary voice for business is the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce. Chamber committees offer the membership the opportunity to bring the business perspective to social, governmental, and economic issues. The Willmar Area Development Corporation is a private economic development group created by businesspeople who believe that development can best be accomplished as a partnership between public and private entities. This group shares many members and has a close working relationship with the Chamber of Commerce.

Representing the business community on the governmental side is the joint City/County Economic Development Commission. With its board consisting primarily of businesspeople, the Commission is another example of business giving back to the community. Another organization with a heavy reliance upon business is Mainstreet Willmar. Although mainly a downtown advocacy group, Mainstreet enjoys broad support from the entire business community, which recognizes its value in the greater economic picture.

If not for the compassion and volunteer spirit of the business community, service clubs and other non-profits could not fulfill their missions. Our government or community boards and commissions would not be as effective without businesspeople serving on them. It is not just business owners who get involved. Many owners stress employee service to the community. This involvement takes many forms. Major community projects are accomplished because of the dedication of businesspeople contributing time, knowledge, and money in the name of community betterment. Most recently, this is evidenced by the role the business community played, and continues to play, in the Blandin Community Investment visioning process. Businesspeople were instrumental in charting the course to a better Willmar for our children.

III. How do we work together as a community?

III. (a). How does our community recognize and celebrate its diversity? (300 word maximum)

We remind ourselves that diversity has been recognized and celebrated in Willmar since its founding. Religious, political, and cultural diversity have always existed within our community.

Religious diversity is evidenced by the presence of over thirty places of worship in Willmar, some of which are over 125 years old. Others are fairly new, having been established to serve the needs of recent immigrants. All the churches share common ground through membership in the Willmar Ministerial Association.

Political activism and diversity provide the basis for local government. Most local elected offices are non-partisan, but that does not mean there is a lack of diverse opinion. Differences of thought and opinion contribute to our representative government. In the 2004 general election, 76 percent of registered voters in Willmar went to the polls.

One of our greatest causes for celebration is the cultural diversity of our community. Over the past 15 years, Willmar has changed from a Scandinavian/Western European population to one that now includes large numbers of Latinos and East Africans. We recognize this diversity with the bi-annual

Celebration of Cultures. This event, representing more than 40 countries, provides an opportunity for cultural education and sharing through lectures, art, cooking, and music. Willmar maintains sister city relationships with Frameries, Belgium and Viletka, Ukraine. Exchange visits are conducted with groups from both cities to examine our differences and to celebrate our similarities.

Ethnic celebrations are rooted in the Kaffe Fest, a community celebration that for years reflected Willmar's Swedish heritage. Current celebrations include Cinco de Mayo, Svenskarnas Dag, and Syttende Mai. These events emphasize Latino, Swedish, and Norwegian ethnicities.

Above all, Willmar respects personal diversity and philosophical differences as the cornerstones of a healthy community

III. (b). How does our community work with neighboring communities to address shared challenges? Is there a shared regional vision? (300 word maximum)

Willmar takes a regional perspective in dealing with community challenges. We know our community extends beyond the geographic boundary of the city. Our unofficial development motto has been "What is good for Willmar is good for the region, and what is good for the region is good for Willmar." All the cities in Kandiyohi County are represented in, and served by, the joint Economic Development Commission. The West Central Integration Collaborative addresses cultural competency for multiple cities and school districts. Willmar is looked to for support on diversity issues by smaller nearby cities just now experiencing demographic changes. The C-6 Drug Enforcement Task Force is a six-county effort to control and eliminate drug production, trafficking and use.

Willmar is the home of the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission, a four-county agency that addresses land use, economic development, and social issues on a regional basis. A City representative sits on the Board to ensure that local interests mesh with those of the region as a whole. Economic development challenges are addressed and solved through cooperation. A local telecommunications advocacy group, Kandilink, teamed up with multiple other counties in southwest Minnesota and formed the Technology and Telecommunications Consortium. Many telephone and Internet upgrades occurred due to the efforts of the consortium. Lastly, Willmar has been active in the Highway 23 Taskforce efforts to improve safety and traffic flow on this important Minnesota market route.

IV. How does our community strengthen its ability to solve problems? (300 word maximum)

Community problem-solving can only happen with an educated and committed citizenry. When confronted by social, political, or financial issues, our community takes the position that citizens need to be involved and informed to reach the best decision. Using a concept of inclusiveness, Willmar is assured of a population that acts based on a sense of ownership in the community.

A tremendous investment in youth has been made with the funding of the Community Education and Recreation Department. A new YMCA brought more recreation and citizenship-building opportunities to youth. Both entities have committed to life-long learning.

Funding special projects has been accomplished through a local option sales tax. Several years back, voters approved a 0.5 percent sales tax to finance the expansion and renovation of the Willmar Public Library. The \$4.0 million project was paid for in less than four years. In November 2004, voters again approved a 0.5 percent local option sales tax to fund \$8.0 million in projects, including industrial

park development, civic center improvements, and the expansion of our trail system. These projects will be paid for in less than seven years. All these projects have regional significance, yet it is the citizens of Willmar who decided to complete each one.

The community showed its problem-solving abilities when it began the Blandin Community Investment Partnership Vision 20/20 program. Long-range goals were determined for each of four categories: economic sustainability, recreation and culture, lifelong learning, and cultural competency. Community issues/problems are defined and approached within that context. Positive results have been obtained quickly in each.

These are all examples of a community that looks first to itself to address challenges and solve problems. The impetus for such action comes from our people, and is a reflection of the pride our citizens have for their community.

End of Application

See www.ncl.org/aac/ or the application instructions for detailed application instructions and sample applications from previous All-America City Winners.

