



BUSINESS LEADERS' GUIDE

2012 ALL-AMERICA CITY

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The 2012 All-America City Awards will go to the 10 communities that develop the most comprehensive, realistic, and sustainable plans for improving grade-level reading by increasing school readiness, reducing school absenteeism, and addressing summer learning loss. All cities applying for the award will join a network that provides priority access to leading education experts, administration officials, technical assistance, and foundations looking to invest in these efforts.

Business leaders have key roles to play:

- **Join the coalition:** The award requires evidence that community leaders from all sectors, including business leaders, are mobilizing to improve third-grade reading. Check with your mayor's office to become part of the cross-sector team created to develop a detailed plan for your locality.
- **Rally business and civic support:** Make the business case for early education as a key investment in the community's future. Stress the value of the award for economic development efforts. Encourage other businesses to become involved in the coalition. Align your firm's volunteer work and philanthropic support with the grade-level reading goals of improving school readiness, attendance, and summer learning.

Take the lead! Any community stakeholder can lead the coalition, as long as there is buy-in from the local government. Confer with other leaders and, if necessary, step forward.

Why take this on now:

Better-educated citizens make for better cities: Compelling research shows the return on investment when children receive a firm foundation in the early years. They are less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to find jobs that contribute to the local economy. In Hartford, Connecticut, a strong emphasis on early childhood education has led to steady increases in test scores: The 2010 third-grade reading scores increased at double the rate of districts statewide.

Early education is an issue everyone can rally around: People understand the issue intuitively and want to get involved. In Jacksonville, Florida, then-Mayor John Peyton launched a book club in 2004 that eventually drew 65,000 children and gave out nearly 1 million books. The club brought national attention to Jacksonville's efforts.

Winning has its benefits: Past award winners tout the All-America City Award to bond rating companies and to businesses considering relocation. They cite it in applications for federal grants and philanthropic support and use it to rally civic support for new initiatives. In Dubuque, Iowa, the award “helped us land a BIG project in the midst of a major economic recession,” says Assistant City Manager Cynthia Steinhauser.

Simply applying for the award has benefits, as well: Communities that submit letters of intent will become members of the GLR Network supported by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, the National Civic League, the National League of Cities, and the United Way Worldwide. Network members will receive priority access to:

- **Experts** in each of the three community solutions areas
- **Funders** with an interest in supporting local campaigns
- **Policymakers** at the state and federal levels through Campaign convenings, webinars, and calls
- **Models** of programs and practices with proven impact
- **Peers** in other cities facing similar challenges
- **Media** products that can be localized to help you spread the word
- **Opportunities** to publicize and promote their work; and
- **Systems** for common data collection and analysis

Talking Points

- The centerpiece of our effort is a bold and aggressive plan to ensure that all of our children in {CITY} are reading on grade-level by the time they finish third grade.
- We know that if children don’t read well by that point, they are less likely to catch up, less likely to graduate from high school, and less likely to find a good job.
- If we want to close our achievement gaps, reduce our high school dropout rate, and break the cycle of poverty in our community, we need to focus on our youngest readers.
- We have a long way to go to get there—in {CITY} and across the country. Right now, only 33 percent of our kids nationally meet that standard. Among poor kids, only 17 percent hit that mark. In {CITY} XX percent {refer to NAEP TUDA or state test data}.
- In {CITY} we’re developing [or expanding on] a XX-year, community-wide plan to help us get there.

KEY DATES

Oct 14, 2011: Letter of intent due confirming community mobilization to develop a plan and to secure data.

March 12, 2012: Application due detailing plans for addressing the core grade-level reading issues.

June 30–July 2, 2012: Finalists present plans at a Denver conference. Winners announced.

- Clearly, we must hold schools accountable for helping all children achieve. This means providing effective teaching in every classroom every day. But schools cannot succeed alone. We need to enlist health providers, social workers, community nonprofits, faith-based groups, business and civic leaders, and local foundations to help. [MENTION ANY ONGOING EFFORTS]
- The process of learning, and specifically learning to read, begins long before children reach the schoolhouse door. We need to make sure children are born healthy, that parents and child care providers have the latest information on child development, that every child has access to a good preschool program, and that we align what we're teaching in preschool with the early grades.
- Once kids get to school, we need to make sure that they get great teaching, that they attend regularly, and that they keep learning through the summer.
- We've zeroed in on three challenges that contribute to the problem and that everyone in our community can make a difference in overcoming: They are 1) school readiness—too many young children show up for school not ready to learn; 2) school attendance—too many children in grades K-3 miss too many days of school; and 3) summer learning—too many children in the early grades lose ground over the summer months.
- The 2012 All-America City Awards will go to the 10 cities that develop the most comprehensive, realistic, and sustainable plans for addressing these three issues and increasing grade-level reading proficiency by the end of the third grade.
- Simply applying for this award will put us in an elite group of communities that are part of the Grade-Level Reading Network. {CITY} will have better access to education experts who can walk us through the best policies and practices. We'll have a chance to work with other cities engaged in the same important work. And we'll have better exposure to local and national foundations that are looking to invest in this work.
- I'm really excited about this campaign, and it's definitely time for us to focus on these important issues. I'm asking you to join me in bringing together our community for this award.

Read more about the awards and the GLR Network in these [online resources](#).

Watch the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading video [here](#).

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