

ALL-AMERICA CITY AWARDS CRITERIA

Participation of the public, private and nonprofit sectors and key constituencies to the maximum extent possible;
Recognition and involvement of diverse segments and perspectives (ethnic, racial, socio-economic, age, etc.) in community decision-making;
Creative use and leveraging of community resources;
Significant and specific community achievements;
Projects that address the community's most important needs;
Cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries; and
Clear demonstration of project results and impacts (dollars raised or lives impacted).

PART I: TELL YOUR COMMUNITY'S STORY

Tell us your story. Utilizing the awards criteria describe how your community addresses its pressing challenges and plans for its future. How are the neighborhoods, government, businesses, and nonprofits organizations engaged in these efforts. What is your community's vision? Include real examples of how your community has demonstrated its strengths and faced its challenges. How does it embrace diversity and demonstrate inclusiveness?

PART II: DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY'S CHALLENGES

What are your community's two most pressing challenges?

PART III: DESCRIBE THREE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROJECTS

Describe your three best collaborative community projects that have resulted in a significant local impact within the past five years. Ideally, the first two projects should be drawn directly from the two community challenges stated above. The third project should benefit youth and children. Include examples of how these projects promote collaboration, inclusiveness, innovation, and impact.

PROJECT ONE (Challenge #1)

Provide a description of the first project and its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years.

PROJECT TWO (Challenge #2)

Provide a description of the second project and its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years.

PROJECT THREE (Benefit Youth and Children)

Provide a description of a project and its qualitative and quantitative impacts on youth in the past five years. This project may address issues such as literacy, community service, health, recreation, or other youth-related issues. Projects addressing underserved youth are particularly valued in this program.

City of Phoenix – All-America City Essays

Part 1: Tell Your Community's Story Phoenix Rising

Phoenix is in the midst of an exciting transformation reverberating through nearly every corner of the community. These dramatic changes involve creating competitive educational opportunities to diversify the economy, preserving recreational space and environmental corridors, embracing the area's evolving diversity and molding spaces where young people learn together.

While changes are taking place on many fronts, their purpose is a single one: to increase and foster the highest quality of life for residents and visitors.

The progress catalyzes through extensive partnerships between neighbors, community groups, nonprofits, universities, businesses and various governments. And the results are clear:

Major brick and mortar projects downtown are adding much-needed vibrancy, while creating educational and research opportunities where few existed.

Massive mountain and desert areas are preserved to protect the environment and provide recreational open space. New and renovated traditional parks give children in all neighborhoods a nearby, safe place to play.

Teen centers established at all city libraries welcome young people, with amenities and an atmosphere not expected from a library.

These diverse images of Phoenix tell a story of a city in transition, often linked to the metaphor of the mythical Phoenix bird rising. From roots as a relatively small town a few decades ago, Phoenix has grown to 1.5 million residents. It's the fifth-largest city by population in the country.

The transformation has triggered major challenges, outlined in the following projects. A committee of 50 people - 30 community members from a variety of organizations and 20 city staff members - teamed to brainstorm and craft the essays. The collaboration is an example of the community's vision for partnering with stakeholders on every issue.

Vision - Change through Collaboration

Understanding Phoenix's vision is impossible without examining the sheer trajectory of the city's growth. U.S. Census figures reveal Phoenix's population tripled in the last 50 years and grew by half a million in the last 20 years. The

city's boundaries encompass more than 500 square miles. That staggering growth creates challenges with quality of life issues, such as education, public safety, the economy and open space.

Phoenix chooses inclusion and collaboration to guide change. Community involvement and partnerships are the standard for all pivotal projects and policy issues.

A few major examples:

2006 Citizens Bond Program – More than 700 residents crafted an \$878 million dollar package for large capital improvement projects. Voters approved them by wide margins. The volunteers still actively guide the work. Projects include improvements for public safety, education, parks and open space, libraries, youth and seniors.

Phoenix Parks and Preserve Initiative (PPPI) – A coalition of interest groups and thousands of residents are involved in PPPI. The initiative created a dedicated tax for parks and preserves. Residents organize the effort and help decide how to spend the money.

Budget Process – The city recently completed the arduous task of slicing more than \$250 million, about a quarter of its general fund budget. A nationally recognized system of community involvement guided the process. More than 2,000 residents attended 14 community hearings throughout the city. Their input led to substantial changes to the proposed budget, to assure it more accurately reflected community priorities supporting youth and senior facilities and programs.

Public Transit – After a series of failed measures through the 1990s, voters endorsed critical transit initiatives. A “Committee of 2000” residents helped craft Proposition 2000 in its namesake year. One result is the \$1.4 billion, 20-mile light rail line that meanders through Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa. It opened in December 2008. Residents and business owners helped steer the routes and are doing the same with expansion plans. The multi-jurisdictional effort is transforming the region's transit vision. In its first two months of operation, light rail is carrying 30 percent more riders than projected.

Organic Neighborhood Involvement

It's not just major projects where collaboration is standard. Neighborhood involvement is central to the city's every day existence. As opposed to confronting neighbors, Phoenix encourages residents to help create a civic infrastructure.

The city works with approximately 1,000 neighborhood associations, Block Watches and other neighborhood groups.

More than 5,300 residents took advantage of a free, city tool-lending program last year and cleaned 230 properties.

More than 1,000 volunteer “Graffiti Busters” wiped out nearly 50,000 tagged sites last year. They used 9,000 gallons of paint the city provided.

The city responded to public input from this year’s budget process by setting up a Web site, phoenix.gov/volunteer, steering residents to volunteer opportunities.

Those are the numbers. Here are a few of the stories.

Resident Kent Jones organized the Amberlea Block Watch five years ago. He helped organize a “smiley crew” of teens to clean graffiti in his west Phoenix neighborhood. “We beat back graffiti by 85 percent,” Jones said. “We wanted a neighborhood where people could raise their children without having to worry.”

Greg Esser heads the Roosevelt Row Community Development Corporation and owns MADE, an art boutique providing local artists a retail opportunity. He’s cultivated a partnership between the city and businesses to renovate storefronts and redevelop historic properties, adding character and vitality downtown. Successes include Matt’s Big Breakfast, where customers line up around the corner and Bunky Boutique, featuring national and local fashions. “The downtown through a collaborative effort has fostered an environment where local, independently owned small businesses can grow and thrive,” Esser said.

The city of Phoenix nurtures the seeds of neighborhood and business involvement. Residents of all races, income levels and backgrounds participate. From billion dollar projects to neighborhood cleanups, residents help determine their futures and the future of the city, with a vision of collaborative excellence.

Diversity and Inclusiveness

Embracing diversity shines as a central guide for the collaborative vision. Rapid growth and Phoenix’s location near the Mexico border have infused a ballooning diversity. The number of Hispanic residents has more than doubled since 1990 to more than 42 percent of the city’s population. In 1970, 93 percent of residents were white. Today, it’s roughly 76 percent. Thousands of Phoenix residents arrived from other countries and speak languages other than English.

To communicate with its diverse community, a nationally recognized informational outreach program teams with local Spanish TV and radio stations, providing stories and columns for Spanish and other ethnic newspapers. The

city coordinates a live broadcast each month from City Hall. Staff members answer community calls on the city's top-ranked Spanish TV station.

Another program helps improve employees' language skills and cultural awareness. The Language Education and Diversity Sensitivity Program (LEADS) trained more than 13,000 participants in the past 10 years. LEADS was a 2005 finalist in the "Innovation in Government" category for a Kennedy School of Government award.

City staff, the Phoenix Human Relations Commission and local colleges and community groups partner on the "Healing Racism" community dialogue series. The program won the National League of Cities 2008 City Cultural Diversity Award for cities with a population of more than 400,000.

While growth and diversity bring challenges to all communities, the city of Phoenix works creatively with community partners to encourage staff, residents and stakeholders to embrace diversity and inclusion.

Phoenix Rising

Phoenix residents recognize the city and region as "on the rise." A reinvigorated downtown, renewed commitment to parks and open spaces, inclusive programs to involve residents and businesses, and diverse neighborhoods show Phoenix is evolving as a progressive 21st century city.

Neighborhood leader Bob Beletz sums up the benefits of collaboration and volunteerism: "The reward is making Phoenix a better place for my family and friends to live."

Part II – Community Challenges

Communities can be defined by how they cope with challenges. In Phoenix's case, two have stood out in recent years:

The need to create a more diverse and robust economy and a lack of research and educational structure to make it happen.

The loss of open space to rapid growth, compounded by the deterioration of existing parks and recreational facilities.

Both challenges are wedded to residents' prosperity and quality of life. Failure to deal with them could lead to blight in the city's inner core and unfulfilled expectations in Phoenix's less developed areas.

Economy/Urban Higher Education

In the recent past, Phoenix's economic base was heavily reliant on real estate and tourism and, therefore, not prepared for the knowledge-based economy. A series of downtown revitalization efforts floundered and the city did not have a major research or higher education presence downtown. In 2004 all of these issues converged when the city started working with neighborhood, industry and nonprofit leaders to orchestrate a strategic downtown vision.

A new plan germinated. The city would work with universities and research institutions to establish a downtown presence, while building other needed amenities. Constructing a major university from scratch would give inner-city students improved exposure and access to higher education and nurture the workforce of tomorrow. The goal was to start a new cycle of knowledge, research and economic diversity.

Growth, Loss of Open Space, and Deterioration of Existing Parks

Phoenix's rapid growth has been a double-edged sword. Hundreds of thousands of new residents support new jobs and businesses. But the influx also crowds the same open spaces that attracted so many here in the first place. Phoenix needed a plan to protect vast swaths of open space for the city's parks and preserves system, and avoid strangling a unique natural habitat.

Also, Phoenix lagged behind other cities in traditional municipal parks per capita. Failure to revitalize aging parks would deprive residents of access to valued open space and recreation centers in their neighborhoods.

To overcome this challenge, the city turned to the community. Residents were asked to support a dedicated revenue source for expanding mountain

preserves and renovating traditional parks. The effort is critical for maintaining Phoenix's quality of life as a desirable place to live, work and play.

Project One (Challenge #1) Urban Higher Education

Life-altering drug discoveries.

Collaboration between high school students and international bioscience leaders.

A new, vibrant, urban university campus.

These are among the results of Phoenix's decision to build the future, based on cutting-edge knowledge and educational opportunities. The impact of the community's nearly half-billion dollar investment in urban education can be measured by research partnerships, student success, a downtown renaissance and a steady flow of creative ideas resulting in economic activity exceeding \$4 billion.

Major universities teamed together; a world-renowned research emerged and arrived as a key partner; and a building named after our nation's dean of broadcast journalism rose to train the reporters of tomorrow. Funding came from the city's 2006 Citizens Bond Program, organized by more than 700 residents and supported overwhelmingly by voters.

The result? Two academic campuses are blossoming in downtown Phoenix, where previously educational opportunities were limited. The Phoenix Biomedical Campus is a 28-acre research site that includes the international headquarters for the Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen). Also housed on the campus are the University of Arizona (UA) College of Medicine, Arizona State University's (ASU) Department of Biomedical Informatics, the UA College of Pharmacy, a branch of St. Joseph's Hospital & Medical Center - Barrow Neurological Institute, a division of the National Institutes of Health, Phoenix Union High School District's Bioscience High School and more.

The other growing urban education center is the new ASU Downtown Phoenix campus. It's home to the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism, College of Nursing & Health Innovation, College of Public Programs and University College - all on 18 acres with more than 750,000 square feet of academic development.

Phoenix Biomedical Campus

The story begins with the city deciding to create a biomedical campus instead of aiming to use mostly vacant land for a pro football stadium. The idea spurred a partnership between leaders in the bioscience field, the city, county, state, businesses and private foundations. The group teamed to establish a nonprofit biomedical research institute named TGen. In 2006, TGen's home, a six-story,

city-constructed building, opened as the cornerstone of the Phoenix Biomedical Campus.

TGen grew rapidly into one of the leading institutions of its kind in the world, with scientific breakthroughs on diseases like autism, diabetes, cancer and Alzheimer's. Its partnerships extend from the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community to Luxembourg.

The next critical step was another complex partnership to establish a downtown medical school. With significant financial support from the state and a collaborative spirit among the public, private and nonprofit sectors, the UA College of Medicine expanded from its Tucson base, partnered with ASU, and is already home to nearly 100 students. The first class of urgently needed new doctors will graduate in 2011.

Three historic buildings previously slated for demolition house the medical school's first phase. Instead of razing the buildings, the city and UA preserved and renovated them. The medical school, UA's nationally ranked College of Pharmacy and Northern Arizona University's Allied Health Programs incorporate various medical professions in an inter-disciplinary team environment - the new model for medical education.

Next came the opening of the Arizona Biomedical Collaborative building. It's a joint venture between ASU and UA, drawing on the strengths of both universities. Faculty members share research and lab space and their work attracted more than \$15 million in research grants in less than three years.

The latest Biomedical Campus addition gives inner-city students an unprecedented academic opportunity. Bioscience High School is a partnership with the Phoenix Union High School District. Of the school's 182 students, 57 percent are Hispanic. In its second year, the school's 10th graders achieved the region's highest math scores in state testing. They also were in the top 10 in reading. Principal DeeDee Falls quote in The Arizona Republic describes the school's high expectations. "Being first in the Valley does not come as a surprise," Falls said. "But it certainly makes me proud of our students and teachers who worked so hard for the last two years."

The city also is assisting with building two additional specialty high schools, focusing on nursing and public safety. They, too, are experiencing a successful start.

Community colleges are part of the collaboration, with a proposed bioscience incubator. GateWay Community College is one of 10 Maricopa Community Colleges that partner with the city, work with the three universities represented downtown, and hold formal academic affiliation with TGen, including student internships and faculty training.

The Biomedical Campus' next development phase includes a Health Sciences Education Building and a second Arizona Biomedical Collaborative research building. These will house approximately 600,000 square feet of new development at a cost of \$376 million, funded by the state.

Arizona State University

Blocks from the burgeoning biomedical campus sits another major academic investment, where \$233 million in voter-approved city bond dollars funded a new, downtown ASU campus. One local magazine writer described it this way: "As ASU and Phoenix ... build ... their way toward their respective desired destinies - A New American University and a vibrant urban center - the downtown campus is the symbiotic overlap of both pursuits. It is a time of becoming for both city and university."

The vision was to bring higher education to the doorstep of underserved, inner-city youth. To achieve it, the city acquired land downtown, provided capital funding and worked with the community, hundreds of bond committee members and downtown neighborhoods. It was the first municipal bond of its kind in the nation supporting the development of a state university. The measure passed with 80 percent of the vote.

The ASU Downtown Campus is already a center of intellectual and cultural engagement, serving nearly 9,000 students with 1,300 faculty and staff. The College of Nursing and Health Innovation established a center for geriatric nursing and a new community clinic serving primarily Latino residents of childbearing age. The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism has risen rapidly as the regional journalism education center, considered among the nation's best. Students are combining instruction in print, broadcast, and Web journalism. Their future is now.

In two years, the new campus secured \$51 million in grants. Highlights include a 12-university initiative to explore new ways of producing in-depth multimedia journalism, an endowment for a center on philanthropy and nonprofit innovation and a program to educate more geriatric nursing specialists.

ASU's College of Public Programs offers robust research and educational programs for traditional students and working adults - in social work, nonprofit leadership, local government innovation and urban planning. Students and faculty are partnering with the city to help the community. One example is ASU recreation students working under the guidance of city Parks staff. Students will learn on the job, helping with the day-to-day operation of a soon-to-be-opened park and community center adjacent to campus.

Economic Benefits

The long-term scientific and scholastic implications of the city's investment in education already are proving profound. The growth of surrounding businesses is equally noteworthy. Altogether, more than \$4 billion in investment is energizing downtown - from educational facilities to light rail, new hotels, a new convention center, and numerous private businesses.

The community's investment and partnerships for research and education eventually will create 26,000 jobs, educate 18,000 students and spur an economic impact of \$2.6 billion annually.

In the city's urban center, students, faculty and researchers of all ages are collaborating on a daily basis. They're making academic discoveries that will save lives. They're experiencing opportunities absent just a few years ago. Downtown Phoenix, the state of Arizona and the whole world are better for it.

Project Two (Challenge #2) Phoenix Parks and Land Preservation

As the nation's fastest growing large city, Phoenix has gained more than half a million residents in 20 years. Plentiful jobs, an active, outdoor lifestyle, affordable homes and sunny weather drew waves of new residents.

Within the vast city limits lies 30,000 acres of some of the most beautiful Sonoran Desert mountain parks and preserves in the southwest. Virtually no neighborhood is untouched by desert vistas and traditional parks.

Phoenix's preserves welcome approximately five million visits annually. The busiest hiking area, with a picturesque trek to the top of a signature peak, attracts more than 1.2 million hikers each year. Traditional parks built over time also meet residents' recreational needs.

"The city's preserves and parks played a real role in deciding to call Phoenix home," said Phoenix resident Allysa Adams. "The preserves are now a place where my children learn about the desert and what makes it unique. My friends and I use them to run, hike and stay active."

In the past, the city's system of neighborhood parks and desert mountain preserves was strong. They satisfied residents' needs and provided neighborhood centers for youth.

Disappearing Desert / Deteriorating Parks

As Phoenix grew, the displacement of natural desert was so prevalent that The Arizona Republic published a series of stories called "An Acre an Hour." The title represented the loss of desert land, as homes displaced cacti and wildlife. Growth threatened the quality of life that drew so many here in the first place.

Compounding the problem, the building boom on the city's fringes created demand for new parks outstripping the city's ability to provide them. An aging park system remained in older neighborhoods and many newer neighborhoods lacked sufficient recreational spaces. Phoenix lags in city parks per capita, with only 1.3 traditional city parks per 10,000 residents, according to the Trust for Public Land. That's 70th place among the country's 75 largest cities.

Reversing the problem called for an innovative solution. The city mobilized a broad coalition of residents, nonprofits, user groups, elected officials, and state and federal agencies. Their multi-pronged effort envisioned an audacious goal: seek community support and funding streams - to preserve desert land for recreational use, develop park spaces and improve existing parks and facilities.

The partnership secured a new funding system to address city park needs and continue preserving open spaces. Last year voters renewed and expanded their commitment to the program, which has preserved thousands of desert acres, funded new traditional parks and renovated older ones. This triumph will keep alive the active, outdoor lifestyle defining life in this desert city.

Renewed Commitment

The solution hinged on public support. First in 1999, voters passed the Phoenix Parks and Preserve Initiative (PPPI), dedicating one penny for every \$10 in retail spending.

Last May residents reaffirmed their commitment by passing a 30-year extension of the parks and preserves tax, with more than 80 percent voter approval. Residents helped craft the initiative, which directs 60 percent of the funding to parks and 40 percent to desert preserve land. For the first time, the city can use a percentage for park rangers and maintenance - a crucial distinction during recent years of deep budget cuts.

PPPI has raised nearly \$200 million to build regional parks and recreation centers, make accessibility renovations to older parks and, in the last few years, help fund the purchase of nearly 2,400 acres of Sonoran Desert preserve land. The program is expected to generate nearly \$2 billion over 30 years. The city can finance bonds for purchasing large swaths of land before development fragments the landscape.

Almost 3,000 residents boosted the initiative. They gave money, volunteered and distributed literature at trailheads and on hikes. Firefighters, police officers, the Phoenix Zoo and neighborhood associations all supported the grass roots effort.

Community-wide Effort and Impact

Voter passage was only the beginning for the 2008 effort. The volunteer Parks and Recreation Board conducted eight evening meetings throughout the city to gather input. Nearly 4,000 people took an online city survey gauging funding priorities. The input helped forge a five-year development plan for the Parks and Recreation Board.

The Parks and Preserve Initiative, along with voter-approved bonds, has funded projects touching nearly every Phoenix neighborhood. In 10 years, Initiative funds paid for 61 playgrounds, 47 lighting projects and 34 sports-related projects. Altogether, 176 parks reaching children, senior citizens, people with special needs and families have received improvements. New playgrounds and shade structures, improved security lighting, better playing fields and new

restrooms give residents new reasons to consider their local parks for recreation and community.

PPPI funds and other funding sources have allowed the city to replace recreation facilities in aging, lower-income neighborhoods. At Hayden Park, a renovated recreation center and new playground and basketball court are examples of the positive impact. The city also used PPPI funds to renovate a park adjacent to Phoenix's federally subsidized Hope VI housing development. Hundreds of young people now enjoy these safe places to play after school.

A System of Volunteer Leadership

Volunteer community leaders help guide all Phoenix parks and preserve development. City Council appoints the volunteer Parks and Recreation Board. The city charter grants the Board policy authority over most park business - one of a few systems like that nationwide. Board meetings can attract hundreds, providing the public a chance to participate in making policy.

The city also has invigorated its relationship with the nonprofit Phoenix Parks and Conservation Foundation. For 30 years the Foundation has served as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit partner for the city. It recently hired its first executive director, expanded its member and stakeholder database to 3,500 Phoenix residents and held its first major fundraiser - a golf tournament that generated more than \$25,000 for youth programs.

Additionally, 60 volunteers guided the Parks and Recreation piece of the 2006 Citizens Bond Program. The effort brought more than \$120 million for parks and open space.

Parks Boosting Economic Development

Phoenix park projects also function as critical economic development tools. The Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area, which opened in November 2005, occupies more than 500 acres in the Salt River bed just south of downtown. For years the riverbed was a dry dumping ground. Today, a lush and varied riparian habitat attracts hundreds of bird species.

Rio Salado is the centerpiece of a communitywide economic redevelopment effort called "Beyond the Banks." It has generated \$500 million in private sector investment. A citizens' advisory committee guided the plan, encouraging private/public partnerships and new residential and commercial development in the project area.

Partnerships between the city, federal government, state and county fashioned Rio Salado. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided two-thirds of the funding. The Maricopa County Flood Control District and Arizona Water

Protection Fund also contributed. Phoenix voters approved \$16 million in bond funds for the project.

Desert Views and Open Spaces

A final collaboration to preserve desert views teamed the city with ASU faculty and students. The goal is to maximize access as residential development surrounds preserve land. The city engaged ASU to draft an edge treatment plan guiding residential and commercial developers along the preserve boundary to incorporate public access.

Phoenix parks and preserves see input from dozens of groups, attract hundreds of volunteer leaders, receive support from hundreds of thousands of residents and welcome millions of visitors.

Striving to overcome major challenges, the community is fighting to preserve Phoenix's valued lifestyle. Inclusive plans will improve access and upgrade facilities. And they'll ensure that residents benefit, while helping mold the city's treasured natural resources.

Project Three (Youth and Children) Library Spaces – Phoenix’s Focus on Teens

A decade ago, everyone would have laughed if you’d suggested a “teens-only” space in a public library, where adults aren’t allowed and teens write the rules.

But today, walk into any of Phoenix’s libraries and stand in awe: a diverse group of teens studying, listening to music, exploring the Internet and watching movies. It means a place where teens feel comfortable in their own skin and explore their individuality and creativity in a safe environment.

It means a recent post to myspace.com: “I think you guys are awesome. I love to read and I love the programs you guys have for us teens. You guys rock!!!!!”

Overcoming the “Shhh..” Effect – Teen Central Success

A few years ago, the Phoenix Public Library resembled most libraries, tolerating but not exactly welcoming teenagers. They were likely to be noisy and rowdy, and unlikely to fit into the subdued atmosphere librarians prized as much as their books.

That all changed when Phoenix took another look at its teenagers, listened to them and found that when the library actually welcomed teens, they were happy to come.

Phoenix Public Library’s first teen space, Teen Central, opened in 2001 at the Central Library downtown. It followed more than a year of work between the library staff, architect Will Bruder and teenagers who helped design the space and its contents. Teen Central is big on funky furniture, huge on computers and anything digital, insistent on vibrant colors and home to the building’s only vending machine. With funding and guidance from a variety of community groups, led by the Friends of the Phoenix Public Library and the Phoenix Public Library Foundation, the center opened to fanfare - the first of its kind in the nation designed by the young people who would be using it.

“We didn’t know what it should be, we just knew there was a void,” remembers Phoenix City Librarian Toni Garvey. “We had little to guide us. Los Angeles had a special area for teens, but it was created by their staff. Our center was created by the teens.”

The doors opened and librarians held their breath: could diverse teens in Phoenix coalesce to study and relax or would racial or neighborhood cliques cause problems? Everyone recalls the day with excitement. Teen Central was

filled with a variety of kids, including some wearing gang colors, but everyone was getting along and the space officially was considered “neutral territory.”

The explanation is heard simply again and again from teens who flock to the center – hundreds each day: “We can’t believe you really listened to us.”

Recent Years – Teen Spaces Citywide – By Teens, for Teens

Fast forward to 2009 and the results are comprehensive: “We don’t design a new library or renovate an old one without a teen space,” said Garvey. “And that model is being copied around the country.” In the last five years, nine of these spaces opened in Phoenix libraries, with another to grace a new branch in a few months.

Hope Canaday is a 14-year-old who loves her visits: “Teen Central is a really fantastic area. My friends use it all the time. The librarians have showed me how to use the databases and fueled my love of reading.”

All 15 Phoenix libraries have their own Teen Councils to design and name the spaces and advise library staff. Employees are dedicated to the concept. Training teaches staff to work specifically with teens, treating them with fairness and honesty.

The councils plan fun and educational programs and organize fundraising events - learning the democratic process and developing leadership skills. The councils, spread throughout the city, communicate with one another through a blog called “Blaze.”

Communication also comes from the biannual teen magazine, “Create!” It’s written and produced entirely by teens. In addition, special teen programs are scheduled regularly in all the city’s libraries, from “how to find a job” to practice sessions for college entrance exams to live performances by local bands.

Results – Teen Reading and Teens as Resources

One noticeable outcome of the teen spaces is a boost in the Teen Reading program that teens help design. Last summer 12,500 teens participated, up 17 percent from the previous year, and almost 4,000 teens finished, a 45 percent jump. Teens are reading more, too. System wide more than 639,000 teens checked out books, CDs and DVDs last year - up 42 percent in three years.

Teen volunteers are the other dramatic result. They have become a major resource for the libraries. More than 300 teens are regular volunteers, which not only helps the library, but also gives teens job skills and references for scholarships and college.

For the last three years, teen volunteers have sponsored a Naturalization Ceremony for new American citizens, including essays on “Why I’m Proud to be an American.” Working with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, this inspiring ceremony is owned by the teens. They present an honor guard, organize music and artwork, put together gift bags for the new citizens and provide a children’s reading corner.

Kyia Lively, 14, has been involved in the ceremony for three years. “I like experiencing everyone’s happiness,” she said, noting it makes her see “how great being an American is.”

The teen reading program has devoted business partners, like Wendy’s and KVIB-FM Latino Vibe, a bilingual local radio station. The sponsorships include remote visits with radio shows airing from library branches.

Phoenix’s teen space concept also spurred an innovation for the library’s youngest visitors. In 2004, Central Library opened First Five Years/Los Primeros Cinco Años, where parents, infants and toddlers learn together, preparing children for reading success.

The Future

The teen space success has led both teens and library staff to think in a whole new realm: what else can help teens and bring more of them into the libraries?

A concept called College Depot to help teens plan for higher education opens in June. Teens are designing the space in Central Library.

The Depot will offer free college prep services, including workshops on college readiness, financial aid, and scholarships and preparation for ACT and SAT tests. One-on-one assistance will be available from College Depot advisors and admissions counselors from multiple colleges, including the new ASU campus a few blocks away.

The collaborative effort excited sponsors for the new program, including: the Arizona Diamondbacks Foundation and Arizona Cardinals Charities; Wells Fargo, JP Morgan and Chase; Arizona’s major utility companies, Arizona Public Service, the Salt River Project and major local foundations.

Another teen program in the planning stage is “Digital Studio” to help teens pick up 21st century learning skills. Teens are part of a community advisory board working on the concept. It envisions a studio to create videos, game design and Web-based programs.

The Phoenix focus on teens has opened libraries and provided opportunities many of the teens likely never would have envisioned. Here's what one young man said in an article on how libraries and librarians can help teens: "Kids can walk around trouble if they have somewhere to walk and someone to walk with."

In Phoenix, they walk into the public library.