

## The 2015 Innovation in Governance Awards Program

### Contact Information:

**Municipality:** Trenton

**Population:** 84,349

**County:** Mercer

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**City:** Trenton

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### Project Information

**Initiative Title:** Coordinated Entry & Assessment Services (CEAS) Center

**Description:** A coordinated system to provide services and permanent housing to homeless individuals

The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort.

**Project Specific Details:** *(Please explain your innovation. Include up to 3 supplemental attachments if needed.)*

- How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?
- How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?
- Are there any measured savings or program improvements?
- Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent
- How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?

**Please Attach a Supplemental Sheet(s) Noting the Details of Your Initiative.**  
*(Supplemental Attachments NOT to exceed 3 pages)*

**Application Deadline:** Applications must be received no later than Thursday, October 1, 2015. Mail applications to NJLM Innovation in Government 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608 or send by email to [JMoran@njslom.org](mailto:JMoran@njslom.org)

*If you have any questions, please contact Jon Moran at the League of Municipalities  
609-695-3481 ext 121 or [JMoran@njslom.org](mailto:JMoran@njslom.org)*

## 2015 Innovation in Governance Awards Program

Municipality: Trenton

Initiative Title: Coordinated Entry & Assessment Services Center (CEAS) Center

Description: A community collaborative coordination system that provide supportive services and permanent housing to homeless individuals

(The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort.)

Project Specific Details: (please explain your innovation. Include up to 3 supplemental attachments if needed.)

- **How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?**  
In 2014, Mercer County officials and the Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness proposed to the City of Trenton to develop a city-funded and operated service to address the diverse and challenging needs of homeless individuals. Newly elected Mayor Eric E. Jackson endorsed this plan and the City of Trenton's Department of Health and Human Services efforts to address issues of homelessness for individuals.

In April 2015, the Coordinated Entry & Assessment Services (CEAS) Center was opened with a grand opening in a beautiful former family transitional housing building located in the heart of the city of Trenton. Mayor Jackson and Mercer County Executive Brian Hughes welcomed more than 100 dignitaries, community providers and residents to this opening. The goal of the CEAS Center is to provide permanent housing and supportive services to chronically homeless individuals. The Center helps the chronically homeless navigate housing options and support services at one location. In addition, a mobile outreach initiative was launch to span all four wards of the city to outreach to those "hard to reach" individuals and those reluctant or unable to enter emergency shelter. The mobile outreach van is also used to transport the homeless to various appointments. This new initiative added another dimension to the homeless delivery system in Trenton/Mercer by creating a significant system change that focuses on the national Housing First approach to house homeless individuals as quickly as possible.

According to the 2013, Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness data over 1523 singles entered emergency shelter in Trenton; 520 (34%) of these persons had

long histories of homelessness and/or mental health and substance abuse issues. The Trenton/Mercer community did not have a comprehensive system to deal with homeless individuals. Homeless individuals often cycled between the Emergency Shelter, Soup Kitchen and the Day Drop-In Center. The Drop-in Center provided a place to congregate during the day but provided little access to services and after years of operation abruptly closed in the fall of 2014.

In 2009, the City of Trenton and the County of Mercer developed a comprehensive system to address family homelessness with a Single Point of Entry through the Mercer County Board of Social Services. A specialized unit at the Board was developed to assess the services of homeless families, provide case management and within 30 days, rapidly re-housing homeless families. According to the national Point-In-Time Count of the Homeless, there has been a 74% decline in family homelessness in Mercer County since 2007.

Local officials and community stake holders recognized that working together could lead to the path outlined by the Opening Doors –Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness for all homeless families and individuals. The Trenton/Mercer community realized that although it has much success developing a system for homeless families the same was not true for homeless individuals and therefore the CEAS Center was birthed.

- **How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?**  
The City of Trenton has enjoyed a strong partnership with its community stakeholders. A unique partnership was started with the County of Mercer, the Mercer County Board of Social Services and the City of Trenton to identify the homeless needs through data research and analysis that lead to the development of strategies to combat these issues which included aligning government funding to implement a system change. The community has benefited from a more comprehensive system that collaborates with various housing providers, non-profit social services agencies, faith-based organizations and federal, state and local governments. This partnership extends to everything from numerous monthly planning meetings to actual weekly case conferencing at the CEAS Center. The overall system has developed strategies that include SOAR (a best practice model that trains caseworkers to build the case for disability with medical evidence for a Social Security application), Health Care collaboration with the Trenton Health Team and prioritizing our most vulnerable homeless populations such as the disabled, veterans and seniors. Although it has taken several years for the community to embrace a significant system change, today many recognize the benefits of shared data, funding alignment and quite simply not trying to do it alone. The CEAS Center provides office space to the various community partners to promote a one stop approach for the homeless to receive supportive services and case management at one location. This allows the system to harnesses the expertise and experience of those in

their perspective fields to build capacity and provide a transparent cohesive process.

- **Are there any measured savings or program improvements?**  
According to the 2013 Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness Report to the Community, Housing First saves medical costs. The study indicates that for those with Emergency Room or In-Patient usage prior to enrollment, there has been a decrease of 50% in the average annual cost. Pre-Housing First emergency room costs were \$15,215 compared to Post-Housing First of \$7,590. The gross emergency room and inpatients cost decreased by 65% from \$867,267 to \$303,533.
  
- **Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent**  
This initiative is permanent until every homeless person is housed.
  
- **How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?**  
The success of the family homeless system change stands out as model throughout the country. County officials have share this success at several national conferences and the Executive Director of the Mercer County Board of Social Services was selected by the White House as a Champion of Change. We believe that the Trenton/Mercer singles homeless system will have equal success and can be replicated in other communicates across the state by:
  - Convening the Cities, Counties and Board of Social Services to identify commonalities, gaps and funding streams
  - Build community consensus on moving from what had been primarily as a sheltering model to a Housing First and Rapid Re-housing model
  - Engage communities HUD Continuum of Cares in the planning process
  - Invest in Data Collection, Research and Analyst
  - Develop uniformed screening and assessment tools
  - Identify homeless priorities and make a firm commitment at all levels to reach stated goals and objectives
  - Build partnerships with all sectors that touch the homeless in some capacity
  - Have patience