



Mayor James Sanders welcomed municipal leaders from across Northeast Arkansas to Blytheville in October for the inaugural Technical Assistance for Mayors Program.

New technical assistance program helps mayors meet challenges

By Shelby Fiegel

Our country’s future lies in the strength of our rural communities. This statement is repeated over and over by various leaders across America, but many of our small town leaders are experiencing extreme adversity. Rural communities are desperate for resources, have dying populations, are losing their youth because of a lack of job availability, and their work forces lack soft skills. They have housing, water system, and general infrastructure issues. And to top it off they don’t have the funds to combat all of these issues.

That’s a lot to digest. Yet, though our rural communities face what seems like insurmountable problems, there is hope and opportunity for them to revitalize, progress, and grow. They just need a jump-start and a helping (experienced) hand.

Recognizing the need for community and economic development training and grant assistance to help build the capacity of the leaders, particularly mayors, of our small towns, University of Central Arkansas’s Division

of Outreach and Community Engagement created a program entitled Technical Assistance for Mayors Program, or TAM 360°. The technical assistance program is a free program designed to educate Arkansas mayors about the various state and federal resources that are available to support them when addressing affordable housing and non-housing community development issues in an effort to improve the overall welfare of their cities.

The goal of the program is to help rural mayors meet the wide range of challenges they face in their cities head on by providing access to resources and tools to inform their daily practices and move their cities forward.

Kristy Carter, TAM’s program administrator, engaged local non-profit organizations, institutions of higher education, community groups, and state, regional, and federal agencies in both planning and preparing curriculum for the technical assistance program. Major partners include the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Delta Regional Authority, Arkansas

Development Finance Authority, Arkansas Community Foundation, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

Participants who stay throughout the program will receive a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Grantee Training Certificate, which is recognized by the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) as a measure of competence and overall knowledge necessary to submit a successful grant application for CDBG funds.

The first Technical Assistance for Mayors training event was held Oct. 27-29 in Blytheville at Arkansas Northeastern College. Twenty-five mayors and various community leaders were in attendance representing several cities in Northeast Arkansas: Bassett, Blytheville, Dell, Etowah, Gilmore, Gosnell, Hoxie, Joiner, Leachville, Luxora, Manila, Marked Tree, Portia, Sedgwick, Turrell, Walnut Ridge, and Wilson. Program highlights included the AEDC's Community Development Division, grants administration and application training, group discussion concerning possible funding sources for future community development projects, "Funding for Affordable Housing Projects," "Effective Communication and Consensus Building," and a legislator panel.

Participants also had numerous opportunities to network with one another, make connections with state and local resources, and share community updates.

Mayor Larry Tinker of Hoxie said, "I am in my fifth year in office and have a background in facilities management in higher education. I thought going into office that I was prepared, but I wish I had experienced this

program in my first term to genuinely prepare me for my position. I think that every mayor, especially those in their first term, should learn about funding opportunities and need to be equipped with the tools they need to support their communities."

"TAM helps mayors learn about needs across the state," Blytheville Mayor James Sanders said. "It made me realize that no matter the size of your community, we all share some of the same problems. All those in attendance also learned how to work together and help one another when possible. It was a great opportunity to provide information to organizations that serve us at the state and local level and in turn they provided us with information that will benefit our communities."

Upcoming training session dates and locations include:

- Nov. 17-19, East Arkansas Community College in Forrest City
- Feb. 16-18, 2016, University of Arkansas Pine Bluff in Pine Bluff
- March 15-17, 2016, in Monticello (location TBA)

To apply for one of these sessions or to learn more, please go to uca.edu/cced/TAM, call 501-450-3139, or email kcarter@uca.edu



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Participants who complete the program receive a CDBG Grantee Training Certificate.