



## Virginia Beach GrowSmart Program Wins National Innovation Award

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Virginia Beach GrowSmart – a city program that improves early childhood education, attracts new jobs to the city and improves the lives of hundreds of local families – has won a national award for innovation.

Yesterday, the national Alliance for Innovation honored GrowSmart with an Outstanding Achievement in Innovation Award. GrowSmart is one of 11 local government programs that were recognized at an awards banquet in Atlanta at the Transforming Local Governments Conference. GrowSmart was chosen by a committee of city and county managers from among more than 70 applications.

GrowSmart won praise for two specific innovations

- Partnering with local child care centers – small businesses often owned by women and minorities – to provide business counseling and mentoring.
- Becoming part of the city's Economic Development staff – an explicit recognition that outstanding child care and education helps to create a skilled and educated workforce for the future.

In announcing the award, the alliance said, "The selection committee looks for those local governments that have shown their dedication to stretching and improving the boundaries of day-to-day government operations and practices, implementing creative business processes, and those who have improved the civic health of their community."

Studies show that every \$1 spent on early childhood education returns \$7 to \$10 in community benefits. Another study found that quality early education provides Virginians with \$2 billion in benefits over 17 years, including reduced needs for special education, child welfare and grade retention, fewer juvenile and adult crimes, higher earnings by parents and increased tax collections.

"Quality education for our youngest citizens makes good business sense," said Warren Harris, Virginia Beach's director of economic development. "Businesses go where the quality of life is high. That includes outstanding schools *and* preschools. That's why GrowSmart is such an important investment in Virginia Beach."

[The Alliance for Innovation](#) is an international network of progressive governments and partners committed to transforming local government by accelerating the development and dissemination of innovations, in partnership with the [International City/County Management Association](#) and [Arizona State University](#). For more information on GrowSmart, contact program coordinator Karen Kehoe at (757) 385-0144 or [kkehoe@vbgov.com](mailto:kkehoe@vbgov.com).