

Please answer the questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed directly on the forms. If answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

**Project Name: Providence River Relocation Project: Creating a Place for Community and Art**  
**Address: 30 Exchange Terrace, Providence, Rhode Island**

**1. Give a brief overview of the project, including major project goals:**

On a cool October evening, the sun had slipped over the downtown Providence horizon hours earlier, but thousands of local families remained spellbound along the Providence River experiencing another WaterFire performance featuring mesmerizing fire sculpture in the river and evocative music. 900,000 people gathered in 2002 to enjoy free and innovative public art along the river enjoying the fruits of the Providence River Relocation Project that transformed an unusable site into a vital living place. We uncovered and moved a neglected urban river, created a new series of river parks, and rebuilt our community through excellent urban design and unique, spectacular art. The new park has made Providence a destination city with a vibrant downtown and a renewed sense of purpose and pride.

Before this project, Providence's downtown lacked an attractive civic place and was cutoff from its surrounding neighborhoods. In 1982 Providence approved a Capital Center Plan to address long-standing issues of elevated railroad tracks and acres of abandoned railroad yards that separated downtown from the State House. While the 1982 plan called for the relocation of the railroad tracks and the conversion of the freight yards into development parcels, the plan did not address the adjacent rivers or existing traffic problems. To the east, the Providence River flowed forgotten under roadway decking between downtown and the historic College Hill neighborhood. Cross town traffic and vehicles from nearby interstate ramps converged creating dangerous traffic patterns and risky pedestrian crossings at "suicide circle" and at "the widest bridge in the world."

Uncovering the river and addressing traffic issues was recommended in the visionary 1983 Providence Waterfront Study, authored by Williams D. Warner, Architects and Planners, and sponsored by the Providence Foundation. Adopted in 1984 by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, the plan was expanded to include the following goals:

- Connect College Hill with the downtown by uncovering and moving the river and building twelve pedestrian and vehicular bridges;
- Create a linear park along the river anchored at the ends by a 4-acre Water Place Park and 2-acre Memorial Park for use as community gathering places and for celebrating the arts;
- Create a multimodal transportation corridor accommodating vehicles, pedestrians, and boats;
- Celebrate the city's founding and its maritime heritage with historic site graphic panels along the river walk.

The \$60 million physical transformation was largely completed by 1997 and features 11 acres of riverfront parks, 1.5 miles of pedestrian river walks, new roads, bridges, and docks. But the story does not end in 1997. More riverfront is being reclaimed and the project's urban design has inspired extraordinary arts events, notably WaterFire and Convergence, as well as scores of other visual and performing arts activities. The Providence River Relocation project has created a community place—a heart for the city and a place cherished by its citizens—a place where WaterFire's flames symbolize their hopes as it illuminates the park that has renewed their city.

**2. Why does the project merit the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*? (You may wish to consider such factors as effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of the project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues, design quality.)**

The Providence River Relocation required unusual collaboration between state, city and federal agencies that normally did not work together as a team. Unique integrated design leveraged transportation money to solve traffic issues while also enhancing urban design, river navigation, pedestrian flow, historic preservation, and park design. RIDOT engineers learned about designing beautiful as well as functional pedestrian bridges. Preservation planners learned about the nuances of traffic flow and turning radii. The Providence experience was so successful that it provided a model for the 1991 federal ISTEA transportation legislation. That collaborative spirit is also the hallmark of maintenance for the new riverfront with the city, the state, and private landowners working together. Convergence and WaterFire are also entirely integrated with the park and celebrate and enhance their urban settings.

The Providence River Relocation transformed almost 20% of downtown Providence—an amazing urban accomplishment. The \$60 million in public investment in the river relocation has helped stimulate approximately \$1 billion in development along the river. Now the uncovered rivers make a strong connection between the riverbank where Roger Williams founded the city in 1636 and the nearby headwaters of Narragansett Bay. Three areas of the city are now knit together: downtown, the State House, and College Hill. The urban experience in the new parks is now enjoyed daily by residents walking to work, while others picnic, jog, or gather for lunch. Kayaks ply the rivers in the summer and fall. Art students enliven the river walk with student projects. Convergence places scores of monumental sculptures throughout the park along with a myriad of other cultural and artistic activities which build a sense of community ownership. Each year nearly a million residents and visitors from throughout the country gather at the new riverfront to enjoy WaterFire—a unique public art installation that uses the urban environment as its medium as it transforms the city.

Providence is now in the midst of a much-heralded renaissance stimulated in part by the creation of a new urban heart for the city. Providence is now a destination city with a vibrant downtown enriched by the arts and a renewed sense of purpose and pride. The project has created a new type of priceless urban capital – public optimism about what the city can accomplish in the future.

The Providence River Relocation Project is an excellent example of the success that can be achieved when a city is audacious enough to entirely re-invent itself with a commitment to urban placemaking, innovative solutions, and excellence in design, coupled with the conviction that the arts and the community must be woven into the urban fabric of the successful city.