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for immediate release

GROUPS AWARDED \$100K FOR CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT PROJECT
Economy League and Great Expectations to develop online Philadelphia budget simulation tool

3 April 2008, Philadelphia – At a meeting of its Board of Directors today, the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia announced it had received a grant of \$100,000 from the Lenfest Foundation to create and bring to the community a web-based city budget simulation. Great Expectations, a joint project of The Inquirer's Citizen Voices program and the Penn Project for Civic Engagement at the University of Pennsylvania will partner with the Economy League on the project.

The goal is to have thousands of people experience the simulation, and in so doing, to think about their priorities for the city not in a vacuum, but in relation to real fiscal constraints and opportunities. Actual numbers from the City Budget Office will allow citizens to wrestle with the trade-offs that Mayor Nutter and his administration face in devising the city's budget and to provide more informed input into the city budget process.

The Economy League will use its budget expertise on the content side of the project, and Great Expectations will contribute its extensive community forum experience in taking the simulation to groups across the city. The game will be housed online at EconomyLeague.org.

Steve Wray, Executive Director of the Economy League, explained the reasoning behind the project. "The budget is any city's most important policy document. Where and how the city spends its money reveals its priorities, liabilities, and obligations. In Philadelphia, however, budget documents and the budgeting process have remained the province of insiders and only the most dogged of citizens. The last mayoral election excited among Philadelphians both the desire to know how city government spends their tax dollars and the expectation of accountability for those expenditures. This game will give residents a fun way to get their opinions across."

Both the Economy League and Great Expectations were concerned with budget literacy prior to last year's election. The Economy League's IssuesPhiladelphia website has been focused primarily on budget information, analysis, and best practices. A more transparent budget process and increased public participation emerged as a key goal for the city from the Great Expectations Citizen Agenda process.

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Economy League Chair James R. Waddington, Jr. of Lockheed Martin said, “the Economy League has a long track record for both budget analysis and innovation in communicating complicated issues. This project is a perfect combination of the two.”

Chris Satullo, Director of Civic Engagement for Great Expectations and *Philadelphia Inquirer* columnist, expressed the goals behind creating the simulation. "We're hoping to do at least two things: 1) to use the appeal of an interactive game to coax citizens to think more deeply about the tradeoffs involved in governing our city, and 2) to use the online game as the centerpiece of community forums where citizens would think through these choices together through dialogue, as well as individually while sitting at a keyboard."

Harris Sokoloff, Faculty Director of Great Expectations and Director of the Penn Project for Civic Engagement, noted that, “this project will give citizens opportunities for structured engagement in the budget process – where citizens have a chance to learn about the budget, discuss different budget priorities, and then work through their ideas together to reach some common ground. This can dramatically improve both citizen understanding of the budget as well as support for a budget that addresses the priorities and concerns that emerge in the process.”

The Economy League licensed the prototype from Next 10, a Palo Alto organization that in 2005 created its "California Budget Challenge" to engage more Californians in the budget process. The Philadelphia version is expected to launch online this August and to go on the road throughout the fall and winter. The goal is for as many Philadelphians as possible to experience the simulation before the actual City Council hearings on the Fiscal Year 2010 budget in spring 2009.

About the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia

The Economy League of Greater Philadelphia is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to research and analysis of the region’s resources and challenges with the goal of promoting sound public policy and increasing the region’s prosperity. ELGP is an affiliate of the Pennsylvania Economy League, Inc., with offices in Harrisburg, Wilkes Barre, and Pittsburgh. For more information, visit www.EconomyLeague.org.

About Great Expectations

Great Expectations is a joint project of The Inquirer's Citizen Voices program and the Penn Project for Civic Engagement at the University of Pennsylvania. Learn more at www.greatexpectations07.com.

About the Lenfest Foundation

Based in West Conshohocken, the Lenfest Foundation is dedicated to supporting programs primarily in the areas of education, arts, and the environment. The Lenfest Foundation's efforts are focused mainly in southeastern and south central Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, and northern Delaware. Visit www.lenfestfoundation.org for more information.

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