

**Community Engagement Systems in
Three Cities:** A comparative analysis focused on
achieving effective equitable engagement

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Executive Summary

This report is an overview of the community engagement systems in Boston, Massachusetts; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington. It combines on-the-ground observations with findings based on face-to-face conversations with dozens of city staff members, paid staff members of local neighborhood organizations, elected volunteer members of local neighborhood organizations, and others connected to community engagement efforts in the three cities.

The differences in community engagement in Boston, Seattle, and Portland stand out far more than their similarities; and each city has lessons for Saint Paul's consideration in its efforts to achieve more effective and equitable community engagement. This report focuses on the current state of community engagement in these cities, and highlights the innovative efforts being implemented to complement traditional geographical-based engagement and to engage traditionally under-represented communities.

Portland's system is the most robust—with solid and increasing investment, conscious efforts to maximize both geographic and culturally-based outreach, and a philosophy and structure that favor community-level engagement over initiatives driven from City Hall.

Portland contracts with—and provides substantial city support to—seven independent District Coalitions. Up to a dozen geographically-based neighborhood associations fall under the umbrellas of each coalition. Coalition staff provide training, communications, logistical, technical, and advocacy support for residents and their neighborhood associations.

The city itself has a full-time Neighborhood Program Coordinator who works directly with the coalitions; more than a dozen other employees in a central office dedicated to community engagement; an advisory council with work groups devoted to public involvement; and staff assigned to outreach with immigrants and refugees, youth, residents with disabilities, and other traditionally under-engaged groups. Portland also directly fosters civic leadership development, especially among under-represented communities; provides small grants for grassroots neighborhood projects; and uniquely addresses the needs of East Portland, an area of the city with high concentrations of poverty and people of color.

Seattle, in contrast, is a system in flux. For nearly 30 years, Seattle had a system of 13 district councils that received some funding and direct staff support from the city's Department of Neighborhoods. However, over several years, Seattle withdrew funding, support, and access from its district councils. In 2016, the Mayor cut ties with the councils entirely. The city argued the district councils failed to provide equitable representation

of city residents; many neighborhood activists believe there are other reasons behind the decision, including political payback. In addition, they argue that the city's failure to provide adequate funding, support, and influence made it all but impossible for the councils' volunteer members to achieve that goal.

Seattle has no replacement system in the wings, but is experimenting with project-based engagement tactics outside the traditional council system. These include a civic development training program similar to Portland's; an expanding team of part-time liaisons selected for their multi-lingual and multi-cultural skills; and a pilot program in participatory budgeting.

Boston takes a more laissez-faire approach that has yielded a patchwork of results. The city has never organized a deliberate city-wide system of community engagement, nor does it provide direct financial support to any neighborhood organizations. The result is an uneven system that relies almost entirely on the commitment of dedicated, savvy, civic-minded, but often aging and over-stretched volunteers. Active organizations tend to operate on minimal budgets, a decision they believe gives them integrity and independence, but also hampers their ability to bring in new volunteers or effectively reach under-represented sectors of their communities.

In an effort to bring consistency to engagement efforts around land use decisions, City Hall employs 19 neighborhood liaisons who work out of the Mayor's cabinet-level Office of Neighborhood Services. Each liaison is responsible for a designated geographic area of the city; some also serve culturally-defined populations, such as specific immigrant groups or the city's LGBTB community. Staff continuity is a challenge, however, as burnout and turnover is common. Recently, City Hall instituted additional procedural steps for certain land use issues, intended to provide a minimal opportunity for residents to give input. But many residents see these steps as a way of undermining traditional neighborhood practices.

The City of Boston does fund a network of neighborhood Main Street associations, which play specific roles in developing and maintaining vibrant neighborhood business districts. And philanthropic support has created an intentional coalition of residents, social-service agencies, faith communities, businesses and others to address seven well-defined areas of need in part of the City.

Although the differences between the three cities are stark, common themes emerged. The successes—and failures—of community engagement efforts can be attributed to the following ten factors.

Effective, equitable community engagement:

1. Is well-resourced with consistently reliable funding.
2. Includes intentional cooperation and communication among neighborhood organizations and city departments.
3. Combines geographic engagement with culturally-based outreach that crosses geographic lines to reach traditionally under-represented populations.
4. Combines project-based engagement from city departments with grassroots, resident-based engagement supported by independent neighborhood organizations.
5. Seeks partnerships among city staff, neighborhood organizations and institutions, residents and businesses, foundations, and others.
6. Supports long-term community building in neighborhoods, not simply reaction to one-time projects driven by city departments.
7. Is deliberate, intentional, legitimate, and visibly credible, not just a required box on a checklist.
8. Looks for opportunities to innovate.
9. Makes expectations and realities clear to all involved, early in the process.
10. Honors the commitment, expertise, and sincerity of resident volunteers.

Introduction

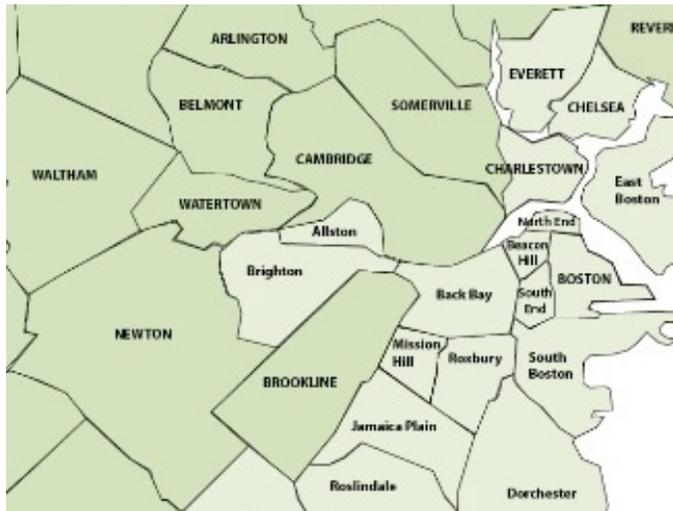
This report is intended as an overview of the community engagement systems in Boston, Massachusetts; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington. It combines on-the-ground observations with findings based on face-to-face conversations with dozens of city staff members, paid staff members of local neighborhood organizations, elected volunteer members of local neighborhood organizations, and others connected to community engagement efforts in the three cities.

This report focuses on the current state of community engagement in these cities; how the cities got to where they are today; the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of the approaches the cities are taking; and some of the innovative efforts being used in cities to complement traditional geographical-based engagement or engage traditionally under-represented communities. It is our hope as authors that those involved directly in community engagement in Saint Paul can learn from the successes and failures in other cities as we strive to make our District Council system as vital and representative as possible.

Boston, Massachusetts

General Overview

The City of Boston proper has 23 officially-designated neighborhoods, including some of the oldest urban neighborhoods in the country. But much of the area commonly thought of as Boston—including communities such as Brookline, Cambridge, and Newton (shaded darker on the map below)—actually comprises distinct municipalities with separate processes.



City of Boston neighborhoods and surrounding municipalities

Like its cobblestone-laden historic districts, Boston's community engagement practices have developed in an uneven patchwork over time. They are fragmented, with occasional but obvious gaps. The process has ebbed and flowed as various approaches were created (or arose) to meet the needs and goals of residents, nonprofits, and City Hall.

Some neighborhoods are served by neighborhood *councils* that were created by the city decades ago, but now operate independently. The geographic areas of these councils often contain multiple, smaller, hyper-local neighborhood *associations*. The majority of these associations are very small; however, a few are extremely well-funded and organized. In practice, they can be even more robust than the neighborhood council. On the other hand, there are areas of the city that are completely unrepresented by a formal neighborhood group altogether.

Much of the community engagement driven by the city itself is around land use—specifically zoning and development. City Hall carries out direct

project-based engagement through city staff designated as neighborhood *liaisons*, who are appointed by the mayor.

Mixed into this patchwork are active collaborations of social service organizations, foundations, faith communities, and business associations—some of which receive city financial support. Even institutions, especially the area’s most prominent colleges and universities, sometimes serve community engagement and organizing needs throughout the city.

This complex, layered, neighborhood-driven system has achieved countless examples of positive, citizen-led change in Boston’s individual neighborhoods. But it has not achieved equitable opportunities for engagement across the City, nor does it strive to. Recently, however, the mayor has spearheaded deliberate efforts to establish a more widespread, minimum level of community engagement, at least on a narrow range of issues. But given the city’s long history of a detached approach, change will be slow and hard-earned.

Current Community Engagement Practices

Office of Neighborhood Services

The city-led community engagement work extends from the Office of Neighborhood Services (ONS), a cabinet-level department under the Mayor.

The most prominent roles in the department are performed by the 19 full-time staff members who serve as neighborhood liaisons (formerly known as neighborhood coordinators). Each of the city’s 23 officially-designated neighborhoods is assigned a liaison. In addition to their geographic neighborhood assignments, some liaisons also serve cultural communities, including specific immigrant groups and Boston’s LGBTB community.

Neighborhood liaisons perform a wide range of activities. They describe themselves as the Mayor’s “eyes and ears” in the neighborhood, as “providing direct access” to the Mayor’s office, or as “providing pathways into City Hall that have never been there before.” The Mayor tells city staffers that if a neighborhood liaison calls, “think of it as if I am calling.”

Neighborhood liaisons have weekly phone calls and monthly one-on-one meetings with the Mayor, and the positions often serve as stepping stones to other city jobs. Although liaisons enjoy a high degree of autonomy and access, burnout and turnover is high in these positions. A primary reason appears to be the large range of duties assigned to these positions. Attending a couple dozen night meetings a month, plus community festivals, is routine. As one liaison described it: “I don’t have a life. I’m on call all the time. We are paid to work 9-5 here, but my day starts at 5 p.m.”

Additionally, the liaisons typically interact with neighborhood organizations that are run by volunteers with day jobs, which brings its own set of challenges. “We’re dealing entirely with volunteers,” one liaison remarked. “I try to be very respectful of their time, and meet them when it’s convenient for them. We have kitchen-table meet-ups if we need to. I hold their time and commitment to our city and their neighborhood sacred.” The liaisons also say they consciously avoid interfering in neighborhood council governance or elections. On city issues, one liaison said, “I try to have a dialogue rather than a top-down agenda.”

Liaisons are the point people for any city activity in their assigned neighborhoods, including:

- **Land use applications:** Liaisons manage the entire process for applications of zoning relief that require Zoning Board of Appeals approval. (These are similar to variances in Saint Paul.) The liaison ensures that the application is complete, identifies any impacted parties, conducts an “abutter’s meeting,” and coordinates the public review process at a neighborhood council or association, if one exists for the area. The liaison makes a recommendation on behalf of the Mayor and delivers this recommendation in person at the hearing.
- **Engagement aspects of projects from city departments:** When other departments have projects located in a liaison’s neighborhood, such as road reconstruction, the liaison will assist with the community engagement aspects of the project.
- **Emergency response services:** Liaisons are on call 24 hours a day, and must respond immediately to emergencies in their neighborhoods, such as house fires. Liaisons coordinate communications with other city agencies and departments to ensure that victims are safe and stabilized.
- **Dispute resolution:** Liaisons are also called upon to mitigate disputes between neighbors or small groups of residents including noise complaints, house parties and similar conflict issues.

The heavy list of responsibilities and high turnover makes continuity and systemic engagement a difficult task for most neighborhood liaisons to achieve. Though they can provide a reliable, direct connection to City Hall, their role is clearly one of communication, reporting, and crisis management rather than sustained equitable engagement.

The Office of Neighborhood Services' annual budget of about \$2.7 million supports a variety of activities beyond direct engagement through the neighborhood liaisons, including:

- **A 24-hour call center:** The 311 service provides information to residents on non-emergency city services. The center manages a 24-hour hotline and online request system for services such as pothole repair, street cleaning, missed trash pick-ups, and streetlight outages.
- **City Hall To Go:** This recent initiative is designed to improve the experience of interacting with City Hall. Using a “food-truck inspired mobile truck,” City staffers provide services to residents in neighborhoods on a daily rotating schedule. Services include parking permits, dog licenses, and a notary.
- **Neighborhood Hub:** To expand the City Hall To Go initiative, ONS also offers information and services in community recreation centers during winter months. In addition to providing neighborhood access for City services, this initiative also seeks to increase use of these centers.

Neighborhood Organizations

In the mid-1980s, Mayor Raymond Flynn officially created 10 neighborhood councils to serve as “advisory bodies” to the city. All still exist, but their core characteristics have changed significantly over the past three decades.

Initially, the Mayor appointed members to these councils and the city provided staff to support them. Today, nearly all have become independent organizations, some with 501(c)(3) non-profit status, which determine their own memberships and elect their own boards. They do collaborate—often closely—with the city’s assigned neighborhood liaisons. But the city does not provide any form of staffing, technical assistance, or importantly, financial support. Instead, most neighborhood organizations, both councils and self-styled associations, are volunteer led.

Though current neighborhood councils technically have their formal roots in a mayoral initiative, many of these neighborhoods (most of which are traditionally working-class) have much longer histories of neighborhood activism. This activism often was (and often still is) in response to large transportation projects or large-scale development pressure that could (and sometimes did) substantially alter neighborhood character or function. Other active and well-organized neighborhood organizations were spurred into existence to protect or sustain what have become

historic districts. Three issues—development, transportation and preservation—continue to drive much neighborhood activism.

There is actually no consolidated list of reliably active neighborhood councils in Boston, and how many there are depends partially on how you define them. The number of active neighborhood associations is even less clear. By one count, the neighborhood of Dorchester, for example, contains not only the Codman Square neighborhood council, but more than 30 neighborhood associations, plus business associations, friends of parks organizations, and other civic groups within its borders. Some of these groups exist mainly to organize specific event(s) throughout the year, while others have ongoing meetings or programs.

The Volunteer Dilemma

The majority of Boston’s neighborhood organizations have a very minimal budget, and seem to prefer it that way. “We’ve never received money from the city or from grants,” one longtime board member of a council says. “It would be nice to get staff help, but it also means we are not beholden.” “We won’t accept donations,” says an officer of another council. “Money doesn’t influence people’s opinions because there is no money.”

Although members prize the perceived independence it provides, this lack of resources leaves neighborhood organizations dependent on the individual dedication, time, connections, and skills of volunteers. “The most active neighborhood councils rely on volunteers and their resources,” one board member said.

On one hand, this level of reliance on dedicated volunteers means organizations can develop an impressive level of localized expertise. “A lot of our members have been around a while. They’re very savvy; they’re not afraid to give it right back,” one council board member said of its work with developers. Another organization member noted that “the board is very experienced. You typically have to work your way up through our committees to get on the board.” Indeed, volunteer-led committees tend to be very knowledgeable and active components of these local organizations; one council typically attracts 30-40 residents to its monthly meeting, which typically acts as a de facto zoning committee meeting. Some able volunteers have applied their experience and knowledge to serve as official representatives to the city’s architectural and licensing commissions, which have formal regulatory authority, and to city-sponsored community advisory committees.

However, neighborhood volunteers point out the challenges of keeping up with what can be a crush of emails and notifications that must be read, researched, and shared—especially on more complicated zoning matters.

In high-demand neighborhoods, there can be a dozen land-use applications per month that the neighborhood organization must review, which is a heavy administrative burden on a volunteer. “It’s a lot of work,” one longtime council leader says. “The administrative work—no one has time to do it. I put in 20-30 hours a month. I go to the supermarket, and people have complaints. It’s hard to escape.”

The high expectations and heavy workload put on community volunteers means that those with discretionary time and individual capacities are more likely to serve. A few council representatives point out that their councils are fortunate to have professionals in key roles who have the flexibility to handle some day-to-day logistics of council business as part of what they do for a living—or even as pro bono work through their employers.

The fact that councils often are run by volunteers who have discretionary time and professional capacities related to the work—lawyers, architects, engineers, and the like—also can mean councils are not necessarily representative of their neighborhoods as a whole. One neighborhood council, for example, was described “as primarily white men over 60.”

Veteran volunteers also say it seems to be getting harder to find residents who are able—or willing—to commit to regular attendance and duties. “Younger people are not stepping forward,” one council board member says. “They engage online, but they don’t turn out.” While one council member reported some success in engaging new residents, she acknowledges that that also takes a lot of volunteer resources: “People need to understand it just doesn’t get done on its own. So we try to nurture people to play a bigger role.”

More commonly, the lack of staff—combined with a few volunteers doing too much work—makes it an uphill battle to carry out the kinds of ongoing neighborhood outreach that could effectively get more residents involved. “The council has, at times, had an outreach committee to do community building,” said one board member. “But it never got much off the ground.”

Despite these challenges, the general sentiment among neighborhood organizations is that independence in decision-making is best demonstrated by financial independence—even if it results in a lack of capacity to carry out deeper community building within neighborhoods, and results in uneven community engagement across the city.

In conversations about their work, neighborhood organization representatives rarely mention the historic and intrinsic inequities in community engagement practices among neighborhoods. “I suppose that the current system isn’t always fair,” one neighborhood council board

member said when pressed, “but it’s up to other neighborhoods to do what we do, if they want to.” The lack of a deliberate, city-wide strategy to achieve equitable community engagement over time has certainly influenced this common viewpoint.

In City Hall, Mayor Martin Walsh has started what he calls the “civic academy.” A series of citywide summits, organized by theme, are intended (in part) to make more residents more aware of volunteer opportunities. The Mayor’s office says it is also committed to strengthening its online and social media infrastructure as a means of outreach. Whatever their long-term potential, neither seems to have made an immediate impact on neighborhood councils.

Nonetheless, recent initiatives by City Hall suggest that unequal access does receive some consideration, though clearly not at the same public level as in other cities. The fact that every area of the city is assigned a neighborhood liaison, that some liaisons are required to connect with cultural constituencies as well as geographic constituencies, and that liaisons are required to oversee initiatives such as abutters meetings (see below) shows that Boston is making some attempts to provide access to residents who do not connect with their local neighborhood organization—or do not have a functioning neighborhood organization to begin with.

City Efforts: Engagement on Land Use Decisions

Zoning

The primary official role of Boston’s neighborhood councils, where they exist, is to make advisory recommendations to the city’s Zoning Board of Appeals. This is especially true of the smaller neighborhood associations, which sometimes serve no other visible role beyond weighing in on zoning matters. These recommendations can be on anything from large-scale development projects to individual property owners who need a zoning variance.

The city’s designated neighborhood liaisons consider it one of their key responsibilities to keep councils and associations informed of zoning issues in their jurisdictions, and council volunteers uniformly seem to take that responsibility seriously. Some council zoning committees meet twice a month, or more often if necessary, to meet deadlines. “We don’t let the City tell us what to do. If something is reasonable, we try to get it done,” one council officer says. “If something is unreasonable, there will be a lot of heat.”

A few neighborhood councils (including Jamaica Plain, Bay Village, Charlestown, and Roxbury) actually are named in city zoning codes as

advising the city on zoning matters. Despite this, a state court ruling in 2013 said neighborhood councils are not government bodies that have the ability to stop projects or impose modifications. Councils have a “right” to review projects, the court said, but not a “duty” to review them.

Nonetheless, many organization members feel effective in their land use work. One council officer said: “We are meant to be part of the process. They feel it is essential to listen to us on every major issue.” The result, he said, is “better projects, because developers must go through a local process and must address issues.” Usually, he said, there is a version of a development proposal that a neighborhood can get behind.

“Most of the time, we can achieve consensus on difficult decisions. Whatever the process, the goal is to build consensus on the local level. We try to do the hard work elected officials would prefer not to do.”

Despite widespread recognition of the role neighborhood organizations play in land use decisions, longtime neighborhood volunteers see encroachment of this role as the city establishes additional processes, such as Abutters Meetings and Impact Advisory Groups. Some fear these are becoming top-down alternatives to working through the long-standing, grassroots neighborhood process. From the city’s perspective, however, they are an attempt to bring uniformity and equality to community engagement throughout the city.

Abutters Meetings

Mayor Martin Walsh, elected in 2014, is visibly working to create a more consistent process for community engagement around certain issues throughout the city. One of his first changes, enacted through ONS, creates a new requirement for property owners seeking zoning relief: the Abutters Meeting. As one neighborhood council board member described it: “This is literally a sidewalk meeting for property owners within a 300-foot radius of a proposed development or zoning action.”

The city’s neighborhood liaisons are responsible for organizing and convening the meetings. The meetings usually take place on weekday evenings on the sidewalk in front of the property in question. The neighborhood liaison creates a flier describing the proposed action in easily understandable language, and the city requires the applicant or developer to hand-deliver the flier to residents within 300 or 500 feet (depending on any historic district designation). The number of attendees at this city-hosted meeting can vary widely, depending on the type of project and its location.

According to one neighborhood liaison, these meetings are “great, because they take away the excuse of having to go to City Hall to participate.”

Indeed, holding these meetings on the sidewalk can be a powerful tool. Often, people walking by will stop to hear about the project who likely would not have gone out of their way to attend a community meeting held at a central location. Since an Abutters Meeting centers only on one specific zoning application, it is brief and focused.

Neighborhood liaisons say the Abutters Meetings provide a consistent opportunity to provide input for those adjacent to (abutting) a proposed project. If there is an active neighborhood organization, they likely provided this function in the past. But because there is not complete coverage across the City, residents without a council or association did not always have the same opportunity for neighborhood input. With the Abutters Meetings, Mayor Walsh is working to ensure that all voices are heard, one liaison said. “We want to hear from the neighborhood groups about a project, too, but we have to be sure that abutters can provide input if there isn’t an association to convene a separate meeting.”

Long-standing neighborhood organizations are skeptical of the new requirement. At best, they say, it’s a parallel process—the Abutters Meeting doesn’t preclude or replace a meeting of the council or association zoning committee. Others say it actually undercuts the traditional neighborhood process, and doesn’t give the entire community a chance to weigh in. “Some people use the Abutters Meeting to avoid the community meeting. I think it’s better when everyone has to be at the same meeting,” one neighborhood volunteer says.

IG (Impact Advisory Groups)

Another recent innovation in Boston is the use of IAGs—Impact Advisory Groups. These groups, typically used for major development projects, are open only to members appointed by the Mayor and the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Like the abutters meetings, IAGs are intended to provide a uniform process for community engagement around large-scale projects. In some parts of Boston—most notably, where high-functioning neighborhood councils effectively filled this role in the past—community members are skeptical.

Specifically, neighborhood representatives are concerned that IAGs will provide a way for developers to circumvent meaningful engagement with existing neighborhood organizations. To a large degree, IAGs eliminate the ability for neighborhood organizations to negotiate directly with large developers and institutions for contributions to offset the impact of the project on the affected neighborhood.

“Neighborhoods used to negotiate their own deals and get money directly from developers,” said one neighborhood council official. “If it’s going to create an impact, how can you offset that?” Given the exceedingly high

development pressure currently present throughout Boston, developers seem willing to comply with requests for neighborhood benefits.

In some cases, the benefit negotiated by the community had nothing to do with the direct impact of the project, but provided a smaller tangible benefit, such as new uniforms for local youth sports teams or a new scoreboard for a playing field.

But in Charlestown, savvy neighborhood council members negotiated a \$1.2 million mitigation fund in the 1990s with the developers of a large construction project. Using the fund, they established a decade-long grant program under council oversight. Extensive criteria and a rigorous review process accompanied funds granted through the program. According to one longtime Charlestown community member, running the grant program “was a very fulfilling process as a Board member, because it showed you all the great work that everyone was doing. We invested in community groups and taught grant-writing skills.” According to him, the IAG process would make negotiating such a neighborhood-focused fund very unlikely today.

Similarly, the Allston Civic Association successfully negotiated construction of a new community center when a nearby university built a medical research center. “Institutions can only expand into the residential or commercial parts of neighborhood, which requires going to city for change in zoning” said an official with the Allston Civic Association. “This provides an opportunity for tradeoffs—what does the neighborhood need in return? Political pressure is our biggest weapon,” he explained. “Now, the IAGs affect that.”

City officials point out, however, that while some deserving neighborhoods accrued great benefits as a result of the traditional neighborhood negotiation process, the opportunity to leverage these benefits as the result of development is not equitable across the city. They stress that neighborhood councils and associations, if they exist, generally are invited to participate in an IAG process. If there is *not* a neighborhood council in place, however, the IAG will ensure that community benefits are negotiated, they say.

A board member from another neighborhood organization said IAGs, because they focus on an individual project, often don’t factor in the cumulative, big-picture impact of multiple projects. “That’s what neighborhood associations can do.” “We represent residents’ interests,” another neighborhood official said.

“We want to be seen as a partner with city, but we have a difficult relationship with city.”

The city-led Abutters Meetings and IAGs are two vivid examples of the efforts of City Hall to achieve more uniform community engagement opportunities, at least on certain issues, across the city in a haphazardly-created, inequitable system. Unfortunately, these efforts seem to be exacerbating the long-running tensions between the oversight of City Hall and the influence of individual neighborhoods, and their effectiveness is yet to be determined.

Alternative and Emerging Models of Community Engagement

In contrast to the volunteer-focused system that dominates in Boston's neighborhoods, some organizations are trying different models to provide more resources—including staff—to serve more neighborhood needs. These include a few well-funded neighborhood associations; Mattapan United, a foundation-driven umbrella organization that operates in a neighborhood that lacks a neighborhood council; and the city's 20 Main Street organizations, which focus on neighborhood business vitality.

Well-funded Neighborhood Associations

Neighborhood associations, whose histories are completely separate from the mayor's 1980s initiative, tend to be small and limited in scope. A few, however, are highly sophisticated. The Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay and the Beacon Hill Association are prominent examples of organizations in Boston that deliberately choose not to operate on a financial shoestring or exclusively on the goodwill of resident volunteers.

These associations operate in vibrant, picturesque historical districts and oversee areas that are much smaller geographically than a typical neighborhood council. But these associations have developed solid fundraising strategies—including membership dues and gala events—and therefore are better-resourced than most neighborhood councils elsewhere in Boston.

Having resources sets these two associations apart in notable ways from typical Boston neighborhood organizations. Both have offices. Both have paid staff. Both provide substantial administrative support to their boards and committees. Both have communication efforts that go far beyond email lists, a basic website, or an occasional article in a neighborhood newspaper or blog. And both are much more active in deeper community-building than organizations in other parts of the city.

Back Bay organizes nearly two dozen "friends and neighbors" groups that get residents together for topical activities such as book clubs, bridge nights, or wine-tasting. It also holds quarterly forums on a current issue of prominence. Beacon Hill organizes more than a half-dozen events a year,

including forums, lectures, a neighborhood block party, fund-raising social events, clean-up days—and a beloved, elaborate decorating tradition for the Christmas season.

Despite their relative advantages, these organizations wrestle with some of the same issues their peer organizations face—affordable housing among them. “The neighborhood is losing its middle class,” one Back Bay officer says. “There’s lots of international money coming into the neighborhood,” the officer says. “They’re buying up old brownstones, and converting them from multi-unit condos into single-family residences.”

It is the upscale status of these neighborhoods, however, that enables them to effectively leverage the wealth, skills, and resources of their residents. Both of them charge significant dues and solicit donations, with benefactor levels up to \$5000. Back Bay holds successful fundraisers (most notably Taste of Back Bay) that double its revenue. Beacon Hill owns a former police station (which it purchased for \$1) and rents out space to other nonprofits. On top of that, there are many nonfinancial assets to draw upon in these communities: “We have lots of professionals in neighborhood,” one member says. “Lots of talent.”

While this model works well for these particular neighborhoods, it is not scalable city-wide, and results in obvious inequities across the city.

Mattapan United

Mattapan is a Boston neighborhood that is 95% non-white, including large immigrant populations from the Caribbean. It has no neighborhood council. Instead, it has Mattapan United, a convening organization that serves an even broader role for carrying out long-range goals and specific projects in the neighborhood.

Mattapan United serves as a “circle around Mattapan—it keeps everything attached,” a staff member says.

Mattapan United was formed in 2011 after a community development corporation ceased operation. It connects and coordinates a coalition of residents, businesses, faith communities, elected officials, educational institutions, social service agencies, and the half-dozen or so neighborhood associations in Mattapan.

Mattapan United is a joint initiative of:

- Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), a poverty-focused, nonprofit social service agency
- Social Capital Inc., a nonprofit based in the Boston area
- “Resilient Community / Resilient Families” program of the Boston Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC)

LISC is affiliated with a New York-based funder with roots in the Ford Foundation. The Boston funders committed for a minimum of five years, and Mattapan is one of the three Boston neighborhoods in which LISC’s resiliency initiative is active.

Mattapan United has seven well-defined areas of focus: community fabric, business development, affordable housing, public safety, green spaces, jobs, and health. Action Groups oversee each of these focus areas.

Day-to-day operations run out of the offices of Action for Boston Community Development, a nonprofit. Governance is handled by a Steering Committee of 13-15 representatives of the neighborhood, local organizations, and institutions. Steering Committee members are drawn from the Community Assembly, which is open to the entire community, but is typically attended by 20 core activists, staff say. As part of its role as a neighborhood hub, Mattapan United maintains a community website, publishes a weekly email newsletter, and even live-streams the monthly Community Assembly meeting on Facebook.

Mattapan United works on a model that focuses on community assets, not community deficits, staff say. Though Mattapan typically is seen as under-resourced, the neighborhood has the highest concentration of faith communities in Boston, and a higher percentage of home ownership than the city as a whole. Like in many traditionally working-class neighborhoods, however, gentrification is a growing threat to affordable housing. The community also needs economic investment and stronger transportation connections, staff say, as more than 90 percent of residents work elsewhere in metropolitan area.

The neighborhood associations in Mattapan are among the community groups Mattapan United tries to keep in its network. Mattapan United staff or other representatives typically attend neighborhood association meetings, and some neighborhood association representatives are part of the monthly Community Assembly, though rarely part of the Steering Committee, staff say. The small associations “are very engaged in their areas of interest,” Mattapan United staff say, “but siloed.” Mattapan United also works regularly with the two Neighborhood Liaisons assigned to Mattapan: one is the geographic representative, the other is City Hall’s liaison to the Haitian community.

In short, Mattapan United is an example of an organization that is effectively engaging—and serving the interests of—its diverse and historically underrepresented community through nonprofit and foundation resources.

Boston Main Streets

The City itself supports its neighborhoods in one other, very visible way: 20 neighborhood Main Street associations funded primarily through the City’s Department of Neighborhood Development. Main Street associations focus exclusively on the vitality of neighborhood commercial

districts. Combined, the associations oversee 4,000 neighborhood businesses. Not every neighborhood business district has a Main Street association, but they are scattered throughout the city, including in some lower-income, minority and immigrant communities.

Although each association is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, they started through a competitive process launched by the City Council in 1995. Each association currently receives \$75,000 per year from the City and gets additional financial and technical support from the Boston Main Streets Foundation. It also is not uncommon for associations to receive research support from MIT and other local colleges and universities. The Boston Main Streets program is affiliated with Main Streets America, a national program through the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center.

Each Main Street faces challenges that are distinct to its neighborhood, but they all focus on the same core functions: organizing local businesses, promoting local business (including design support and other branding tactics), and ensuring that the business district has a stable economic structure. Associations research and track such data as business and property ownership, rents, property values, transportation, workforce, and the mix of chains and local businesses. "We're looking for a healthy mix," one Main Street staff member said.

If a business district lacks the desired mix, the association actively seeks to adjust it. "It means attracting what we need, including anchor businesses that attract customers from outside the neighborhood," the staff member said. "People see us as business support, which is crucial. We do provide support and link businesses to resources. But I like to call us a business and nonprofit development organization. We are a mini urban-planning organization."

By design, Main Street associations have one paid staff member and are run by volunteer boards drawn from their neighborhoods. "Our board self-recruits among institutions, business owners, nonprofits, and residents," the staff member said. Boards deliberately seek a range and balance of skills among members, including fundraising, finance, networking, and governance.

Main Street associations also have clear limits that forbid them from advocating directly on behalf of individual businesses on licensing, permitting, or zoning issues before a neighborhood council or the Zoning Board of Appeals. "Instead, we guide businesses through the process," the staff member says.

How well and how closely Main Street associations work with other community organizations—including neighborhood associations and local chambers of commerce—seems to depend on the neighborhood. In some neighborhoods, “there is a network of overlapping volunteers and institutional support,” one neighborhood council board member said. In other neighborhoods, it’s more of a cordial but arms-length relationship, with minimal if any overlap in active leadership.

Nonetheless, Main Street associations are a way that Boston invests—somewhat equitably—in neighborhoods. They are effective at engaging and advocating for local businesses because of their well-defined roles within the city’s structure and stable financial support.

Conclusion

Boston, even more so than Saint Paul, is a collection of neighborhoods. The Townies in Charlestown have a neighborhood pride rivaled only by the pride felt in every other neighborhood in Boston. In the not-too-distant past, community engagement was achieved independently and uniquely in each neighborhood—where volunteer capacity existed. However, development pressure, increasing diversity, and changing demographics are challenging the City’s traditional neighborhood-based style of engagement and activism.

The current administration in Boston’s City Hall is working to augment the historically-established patchwork system through incremental improvements and additions to required processes. However, at times these efforts seem to duplicate resources and exacerbate tense relationships between residents and city decision makers. Although there are myriad examples of inspiring community volunteerism and civic duty throughout the City of Boston, there appears to be increasing recognition that the current system of community engagement does not achieve equitable results across the City in the way that a sustained, deliberate, adequately resourced strategy might.

Seattle, Washington

General Overview

The City of Seattle was divided into 13 districts in 1988. Each geographic district has a district council, which is essentially a volunteer board comprised of representatives from community councils, nonprofit organizations, and business groups. Originally created to guide neighborhood planning processes, district councils serve to promote and support citizen participation at the neighborhood level.

In Seattle's system, city staff members called Neighborhood District Coordinators (NDCs) provided support for each district council board.

Originally, each district council received its own full-time NDC, who worked out of the city's Department of Neighborhoods and in a local neighborhood service center in each district. The city also provided each district council with funding to hold community events and conduct resident outreach.

Working on behalf of the district councils, Neighborhood District Coordinators:

- organized meetings
- connected residents with resources
- oversaw communications efforts
- advised on local issues
- kept communities apprised of city projects
- informed on grant opportunities
- supported community-building events
- nurtured new community groups
- assisted in advocacy
- managed organizational logistics

Many district councils say the NDCs were highly valued in their communities and by their organizations. As city staff, they were very knowledgeable about city processes, adept at "navigating bureaucracy," and well-connected to city experts and policy makers. Often living within the local communities they served, they cultivated local relationships and were "integral in making connections ... pushing conversations ... and meeting the needs of residents and businesses." Additionally, they coordinated the work of community councils and other community groups, aligning them on issues and allowing them to share efforts and resources.

One of the primary roles the district councils played in the city was to review and rank project proposals submitted to the Neighborhood Matching Fund. This process allocated over \$3 million annually to community-initiated projects such as park improvements, public art, community gardens, cultural festivals, and community organizing, through both larger grants (up to \$100,000 each) and "Small Sparks" funds (up to \$1,000 each). The Funds are matched by community funds, other

resources, and volunteer time. Traditionally, 60-70 percent of the projects were funded. The process was a key way to build community, allow for self-determination within neighborhoods, and empower the district councils. Volunteers say the “process was extraordinary” and that serving on the citywide project review team was one of the “best experiences of my life.”

Each district council was represented on the City Neighborhood Council, a citizen-led advisory group that met monthly. As originally sanctioned, its purpose was to provide city-wide coordination for the Neighborhood Matching Fund process, Neighborhood Budget Prioritization, and Neighborhood Planning programs. As a collection of community council representatives, each district council board provided an efficient way for city staff to reach out to a broad spectrum of the community on projects and issues.

Seattle's Recent Shift in Community Engagement

In July 2016, Mayor Ed Murray signed an Executive Order terminating the city's official ties to each of the 13 district councils, citing a “significant need for more equitable and accessible community engagement processes.” The move to disempower the district councils was seemingly grounded in a 2009 report by the City Auditor that advocated for a “renewal” of the system, and a 2013 demographic snapshot of district council attendees that showed they tend to be over-40 Caucasian homeowners.

A high-level Department of Neighborhoods staff member acknowledged that the district councils engaged committed volunteers, but said they were the same 200 or 300 people—“nothing beyond that”—doing “little outreach to renters and underserved communities.” He characterized Seattle's district councils as “advocacy groups for single family homeowners,” and expressed frustration over suspicion and mistrust of plans for city-wide growth and density he observed within the district councils. He also said it was difficult to find people to be involved in the City Neighborhood Council, and that many community councils were “exclusive” and difficult to access for outsiders.

The Executive Order did not “disband” the district councils. Instead, according to the Mayor's Office, they are allowed to “continue to participate/advocate/inform as they do now even if not formally supported by the city.” The Order redirected resources that previously supported the district councils to city departments, directed those departments to develop community involvement plans, and required the

Department of Neighborhoods to come up with a new, more equitable citywide framework and strategic plan for community engagement.

At this point, there is no new system to replace the old, and there are few action steps anyone could point to that the city is using to build a more equitable system citywide. City staff spoke generally about how the Department of Neighborhood will hold “convenings” where different groups will meet to listen to each other; think beyond geography when addressing housing, transportation and other issues; and provide tools and resources for all groups—“tools that will be for everyone.” (Seattle has been investing in some interesting project-based tactics intended to engage traditionally under-represented communities, as discussed below.)

The city’s own Frequently Asked Questions on the Executive Order asks, “How will equity be achieved?”

The given answer: “When everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to achieve their full potential, and improve their quality of life. A focus on equity in any community involvement process is essential to improve outcomes for all communities, especially under-represented and under-served communities.”

The shift mandates that the Department of Neighborhoods is charged with advising on engagement for all city departments and their projects, and essentially will manage all of the city’s engagement needs—identifying when and why a community meeting is necessary, what types of questions will be used to engage community, and coordinating among departments to get the engagement done. Accordingly, the city will continue to employ Neighborhood District Coordinators, but they will become citywide planning and development specialists, with specific topical areas of focus, working on outreach and capacity-building in communities impacted by city projects.

To help the city with this task, the Department of Neighborhoods has a Policy Advisor whose role is to maintain a database for city staff that tracks hot topics, current issues, and useful contacts in each community. She will also manage an internal calendar that captures outreach activities initiated by city departments throughout the city, in an effort to better coordinate them.

The subsequently approved budget also terminates the city’s relationship with the City Neighborhood Council (which was representative of the district councils) and instead created a Community Involvement Commission. Half of these members will be appointed by the Mayor and half appointed by City Council. This new Commission was created to help

“advise and guide the city departments to assess, improve, and develop authentic and thorough outreach and engagement to all residents.” The city plans to convene the Commission four times a year. The development of the Commission is still in progress.

Perhaps in response to the changes, City Council members recently received an increase in their office budgets (with an average of four and half FTE positions per Council office). Many of the Council Members have chosen to hire someone focused on community outreach and communications. Also, the mayor hosts “Find It, Fix It” walks in the communities to identify small-scale neighborhood needs.

Factors that Led to the Shift

Extensive interviewing with both city staff and district council representatives identified factors that led to the disempowerment and defunding of Seattle’s district council system.

The Councils were Under-Resourced

One primary theme that emerged was that the district councils had been severely under-resourced. Over the course of numerous years, the city repeatedly decreased the amount of funding it provided until, in 2016, each organization was allotted only \$550 per year. “It’s impossible to do formal engagement on \$550 a year,” one district council representative said. Numerous district council members stressed they had been “asking for support from the city for years” to be able to complete outreach and engagement, but such requests fell on deaf ears. Even a high-level Department of Neighborhoods manager acknowledged that the city “could give them money and they could do more outreach.” However, he admitted a lack of understanding as to exactly what they would do with funding. He cited an example of some district councils in Los Angeles that do not even use the \$40,000 a year they are allotted, stating that “when they are not using the money, that seems like a problem right there.”

The lack of funds severely limited the Councils’ ability to do their work. Significantly, many people argued that **“the lack of resources itself is what led to inequities.”** For example, one District described committed volunteer efforts to reach out to an immigrant community, but with no resources for interpretation or translation, they were not effective. In another instance, a district council spent \$900 on outreach and meeting materials related to project planning for an urban village. The funds came from one of their member organizations—a business association with the resources to provide such funds. Along with dedicated volunteers who leafleted and organized the meeting, these resources allowed the district council to effectively reach previously unengaged renters who would be

affected by the project. Other district councils without independent resources did not have the capacity to conduct such outreach.

Similarly, over the course of several years, the primary staff resource for the district councils eroded. While the city originally provided each Council with its own Neighborhood District Coordinator, many of those positions were eliminated, requiring NDCs to split their time between multiple councils and giving them less time and “less ability to engage authentically” with residents. Moreover, they were now required to work within neighborhoods they were not familiar with, which reduced their “integral value in connecting people” within the communities. District council representatives expressed frustration about changing and sharing NDCs—not knowing “who’s our person” and who they can turn to for support.

Equally as significant was the shift in NDC responsibilities that many district councils observed. Six years ago, the NDCs experienced a noticeable change in their roles—away from direct support to the neighborhoods, with more responsibilities back in their city offices. Many Council representative characterized the shift more harshly, observing that over time the NDCs “became a tool of the Mayor’s office,” are now “in the Mayor’s lap,” and serve as a “mouthpiece for the city, convincing the neighborhood to fall in line with the city.” One Council volunteer lamented the change in the NDCs’ role from “assisting and empowering the community ... to serving downtown and getting the Mayor’s message out.” There was also great inconsistency between the approaches and performance of each NDC, with some “going the extra mile” within their communities, while others were “city bureaucrats, sitting in their offices.”

Like the reduction of funds, the erosion of staff resources also appears to have exacerbated inequities. NDCs entrenched full-time in their communities had the time to develop relationships, mentor, and build capacity within underrepresented communities such as homeless youth and immigrant groups. They often effectively helped new community groups get organized and be represented. Over the past six years, this ability has been severely limited.

Finally, many District representatives named other resources they lacked. For example, as community volunteers with little staff support, they sought training on everything from leadership, outreach, websites and email lists, social media, parliamentary procedure, conflict resolution, cultural competency, and more. This lack of training again led to inequity, because those organizations with inherent member capacity were able to better perform in a variety of ways, from volunteer-created websites to more effective advocacy for their causes. They lamented the inability for district councils to access city resources, such as the Public Outreach and

Engagement Liaisons (described below), which would better allow them to conduct outreach in underrepresented groups. Staff support for their collective City Neighborhood Council was eliminated in 2012, yet could have helped mediate struggles with strong personalities and divisive issues.

All of this under-resourcing rendered the district councils ineffective, especially in engaging traditionally under-engaged communities—which is the justification given for cutting ties with them. In short, as one district council volunteer observed, the city “keeps pulling things away from us, and then says that we’re not doing enough.” A Neighborhood District Coordinator echoed the sentiment, observing that the city “failed the district councils ... they asked for help, and we didn’t provide them with the tools.” The city “under-resourced them, put the blame on them, and then cut ties with them.”

The Councils Lacked Influence

Along with the reduction of resources, by 2016 the district councils had very little influence or authority within the city, which further justified the Executive Order cutting ties with them.

Many councils recognized that they had “no power beyond grant approval” through the Neighborhood Matching Fund process. And, even that had eroded over time—both through the amount of funds available and the complexity and opacity of the process. To the extent that the City Neighborhood Council empowered district council representatives to allocate city funding, the city’s official messaging states that “these responsibilities have become less of a priority over the years.”

The district councils also had a limited role in making policy recommendations. One volunteer stated that the council still wrote letters to the Mayor and City Council, but recognized that “three or four years ago we felt like they were read, but now I don’t know if it would make a difference.” The high-level Department of Neighborhoods manager emphasized that the district councils are not official bodies or commissions within the city, and that their resolutions were not binding. So if district councils “started making policy statements,” City Council would “wave the letter around if it supported the City Council’s view, but if not, they would shred it.”

The lack of a formal role within the city created apathy among some district council volunteers, who acknowledged that it was difficult to attract people to volunteer without a “job” to do or relevant issues to address. By 2016, one district council had only a few members showing up to meetings. Another member characterized the district councils as primarily a vehicle for communication between the city and

neighborhoods, and now that technology has increased the ability to communicate, the “intermediary of communication isn’t necessary, and the importance of the district council has decreased.”

The Political Climate Played a Factor

Many district council representatives feel that the city’s justification for dissolving the city’s ties with the system was disingenuous. In response to the city’s argument that the district councils “have become groups of single family homeowners that are white and middle aged,” they brought up numerous examples of district councils whose representation more closely matched their communities—multiple councils where board representation of renters was over 50%, councils where culturally and racially based organizations had a seat at the table, councils where the board President was a person of color. They told numerous stories of efforts they made to reach out to immigrant communities in an effort to be more inclusive.

District councils also pointed to city-run engagement efforts that fell flat in engaging underrepresented groups. One example was a Housing Authority engagement effort organized by the Department of Neighborhoods, which was characterized as a “typical, white, bureaucratic” effort with traditional meeting times and locations, no childcare, and very high attrition rates of any diverse representation.

The very change being made in the engagement system also was criticized: “If you want to build a system that represents underrepresented folks, and they aren’t engaging any community members around that, what does that say?” More broadly, there was unanimous questioning around dismantling the system before anything new was established, and questioning whether equity was really the goal when no gaps have been identified or addressed.

Instead, some point to an erosion in relations between the district councils, the Mayor’s office, and the City Council as the primary reason for the Executive Order. The Director of the Department of Neighborhoods and her key staff member came from the Mayor’s Office and City Council, and there is a feeling among district councils that they are motivated to serve a mayoral agenda that was being threatened by the district councils. In fact, last summer the Mayor was supporting a Housing Authority proposal for upzoning for greater density in the city. One neighborhood association appealed the legislation—a direct affront to the Mayor’s agenda—shortly before he issued the Executive Order cutting ties with the councils. Although the Mayor has denied any connection between the two, some district council representatives feel that the Mayor abolished the system because of the challenge.

Lessons Learned from Seattle's Experience

Across the board, district councils were upset and offended by the Executive Order. Severing ties with the system was a strong statement to them that the Mayor did not value their volunteer time and efforts. They felt that the City had unnecessarily “alienated all of these involved community volunteers...so many grassroots activists.” The Neighborhood District Coordinators expressed regret as city staff at the decision and the way it was presented: “Be respectful of people, they have volunteered for years and years—be gracious about it. The system represents 30 years of people volunteering. Honor that.” Even those who felt that the district council system needed to change did not agree with the way the change was handled—by a unilateral announcement without any engagement around the decision.

There are many concerns moving forward. There is a concern that deep knowledge will be lost through the rejection and disempowerment of community volunteers who have a lot of experience with relevant issues and city decision-making. There is a concern that removing the NDCs from communities “will be a crushing blow for sourcing of information” and guidance necessary to plug into the city, especially for those who are not already or otherwise connected. There is a concern about losing the “neighborhood feel” and connections established through the neighborhood association and district council system. This is expressed even by city staff members who traditionally have worked with community.

There are also concerns around the fact that the city has no plan for an engagement system moving forward. A culturally-based community organization director observed: “We won’t know if it’s good or bad until we know what they’re going to do.” There’s much skepticism around the city’s ability to effectively take on all community engagement efforts, since the city’s traditional means of gathering public comment is “after a three-hour meeting in the middle of the day, when you have two minutes and there’s a camera in there.” There’s also much skepticism around the new Community Involvement Commission, which is “being built covertly” with Mayoral and City Council appointments, will meet only four times a year, and purportedly will “run the city’s entire engagement program.”

There are further concerns about the future of the district councils; with no support, there will be little ability to draw new voices into the fold, and only the loudest voices will remain. Some say it will be difficult to keep their organizations going with no staff support, and others are reconsidering their roles. On the other hand, some councils are optimistic

that they will feel more empowered to advocate more freely now that they are not tied to the city. One observed: “It’s up to us now—the question is not how the city is going to engage with us, it’s how we engage with the city. They’re not looking to us, so we set our own agenda and decide what we want from the city.”

District council representatives and many city staff members agree that adding resources to the previous system would have been more desirable. NDCs had hoped that the city would have built on the existing structure of volunteerism in communities. District councils had hoped the city would restore the 13 NDCs, provide support and training to them, and incorporate another layer of outreach – applying best practices for doing engagement in underserved communities. At the very least, they feel the city should have included them in a discussion to work together in creating a successful transition to a defined new system, which could involve NDCs and other groups doing outreach across the city. Many district councils acknowledge that the system needed to be better equipped to do engagement in a more inclusive way; they say they would have been willing partners in working toward equity goals.

Equity within Seattle’s Engagement System

Despite the turmoil within its district council system, Seattle has implemented some strong programs seeking to engage its communities more broadly.

PACE: People’s Academy for Community Engagement

This civic leadership development course is dedicated to teaching hands-on engagement and empowerment skills to emerging leaders in a multicultural environment. The class is offered three times a year for 25-30 participants seeking to acquire additional skills to be more effective in civic leadership.

The program’s vision is “a city government of *all* people, by *all* people, and for *all* people.” It was established specifically for people who are newly engaged in the community—it is “not for people who have been involved in the district councils for 30 years.” Originally, it was established as an effort to diversify district councils, with the goal that graduates would become involved in the district council system. Indeed, there are examples of PACE graduates who have become district council board members, and in one case, even the chairperson.

Participants build skills in two primary areas. First, there is a focus on community organizing strategies and leadership development. Participants collaborate on a community project together as part of this process.

Second, there is a focus on demystifying the experience of working with the city, giving people skills and “insider tips” on accessing government so they have avenues to engage with local government beyond the general city email address. Specifically, the program provides opportunities to:

- Identify resources and avenues to empower communities.
- Learn how to advocate effectively on behalf of community groups they work with.
- Cultivate a deeper appreciation of cultural competency and inclusive civic engagement.
- Learn from key community and civic leaders and build new relationships.

Each session is co-taught by city staff and facilitators from community organizations with expertise in the topic and in facilitating group discussion. City staff members provide valuable information and connections, and have included councilmembers, Mayor’s office staff, and representatives from the budget office. The community facilitators provide a valuable outside perspective and are compensated for their time.

City staff identified numerous reasons for the success of this program:

1. It is highly flexible. Meetings are scheduled at times that work best for people, and each course has a different type of schedule to accommodate different community needs. For example, the winter session is a five-week course meeting on Saturdays for four hours, while the fall session is a ten-week, ten-class evening program.

2. Meetings are scheduled at community centers and local organizations that are convenient for participants, not at City Hall.

3. It follows an interactive adult learning model, where in-person participation (as opposed to speakerphone or web-based instruction) is emphasized.

4. A significant discretionary budget and dedicated staff time are committed to the program. Food and child care are provided. The staff member coordinates the program and does targeted recruiting in historically underserved communities.

PACE session topics include:

- Approaches to Leadership
- Accessing Government
- Community Organizing
- Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement
- Meeting Facilitation
- Public Speaking
- Conflict Resolution
- Sustaining Involvement
- City Budget 101

5. Tuition is low—\$100—and 75% of participants receive need-based tuition assistance (although a minimum contribution of \$25 is required).

6. Organizations are encouraged to sponsor participants. For example, Real Change, a group of people experiencing homelessness who sell newspapers, has sent people to PACE. Other city agencies, including the Youth Commission, send their participants through PACE, providing committed participants.

Moving forward, Seattle is considering a “Popup PACE”—a mobile arm of the program. The intent would be to bring one-time, four-hour workshops to dense low-income communities around the city where residents face barriers to getting to other meeting locations.

POEL: Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons

Seattle’s Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons perform part-time outreach to underrepresented communities in Seattle’s neighborhoods. The city currently contracts with 62 POELs, who were selected because they are connected to their respective cultures, are bi-cultural and bi-lingual, and have experience organizing and facilitating community meetings. They serve over 40 immigrant and refugee groups, African Americans, Native Americans, the homeless, LGBTQ, people living with disabilities, seniors, and youth.

Based on the trusted advocate model, these “bridge builders” assist City departments in their outreach and engagement needs, ensuring that the City provides information to all community members, forges connections, fosters relationships, and receives rich, diverse, and meaningful civic participation. Their work is conducted in a culturally-specific manner, allowing participants some comfort and familiarity while navigating the City's processes.

Last year, POELs worked on 60 projects calling for interpretation and translation. POELs meet with individuals, organizations, small businesses, and others based on the needs of the community and each City department's outreach goals. They share information, connect groups with services, respond when issues arise, and provide technical assistance. They serve on commissions and committees to participate on behalf of the

The main tasks of a POEL are to provide:

- Quality translations
- Fair and equitable facilitation (in native language) to culturally specific community groups
- Simultaneous interpretation.
- Constituent support at City-hosted events
- Feedback and expertise on cultural concerns and barriers
- Accurate records and reports of participant feedback and concerns
- Planning and execution of community workshops and events that parallel larger City-hosted meetings

communities they represent, and provide input on behalf of residents who cannot attend traditional meetings.

For example, the city recently planned to improve a park frequented largely by Native American and homeless individuals. The Parks Department held a 5 p.m. meeting and expected interested constituents to participate, but the meeting was “mobbed by Amazon folks who just wanted the park cleaned up.” So, POELs for the homeless and Native communities were sent in to reach constituents where they were, and prepared a report outlining the input they received, allowing for a final project that reflected the needs of multiple segments of the population.

Along with supporting more traditional engagement, POELs participate in a community clinic model, going into a community to hear from residents about their issues while providing a suite of city resources and services at the same time. For example, city staff and POELs have gone to ESL teaching centers and cultural festivals to gather input on city projects, while also providing information on the programs, resources, and opportunities the city has to offer: free preschool options, subsidized bus passes, free legal services, utility discount programs, free summer camps, affordable housing options, and so on. These clinics and resource fairs are organized by Department of Neighborhoods staff, who bring relevant POELs, and provide a meal for the group. The idea is that “you give us feedback and then we give back to you.” POELs are empowered to come back to a team of staff at the city to deal with the issues identified during the outreach.

All the outreach and engagement work of the POELs is coordinated through the City’s Department of Neighborhoods. City departments need to pay the Department of Neighborhoods to receive POEL services, and the POELs are paid \$50/hour. The Mayor issued an executive order to departments about POEL use, and departmental projects need Department of Neighborhoods approval before they can proceed, to ensure that POELs have been utilized adequately. In fact, there are four Department of Neighborhoods staff people who attend city meetings specifically to confirm that the POELs sharing input from the community are listened to.

The POELs participate in a Community Liaisons Institute, a training opportunity that supports their work. And, they receive an orientation on issues before addressing them so they can do facilitation that is meaningful. Although they are independent contractors, the city covers their insurance, and provides them training on how to run a small business, prepare invoicing, pay taxes, and so on. The program is growing; city staff project that, within a year, they will have 130 POELs. Also, POELs are shifting toward more proactive work, collaborating with departments more

directly and working with Department of Neighborhoods staff to identify priority projects.

Neighborhood Matching Fund

The Neighborhood Matching Fund, with its Community Partnership Fund (with grants up to \$100,000) and Small Sparks program (with grants up to \$1,000) has been an effective way for the city to dedicate resources to traditionally underrepresented groups. Since 1988, the Fund has awarded more than \$49 million to more than 5,000 groups and generated an additional \$72 million in community matches. The city employs five project managers, a program supervisor, and a contracts administrator to run the program.

As mentioned above, authority for funding decisions was removed from the district councils' purview. Instead, city staff will evaluate and rate projects based on their ability to build community partnership and their readiness. In the past, applicants with larger projects (over \$25,000) were required to be geographically based; as part of the shift in the program, nongeographic communities (including youth, seniors, refugee, immigrants, race, culture, and LGBTQ groups) also will be eligible to submit for larger projects. Another change to the program increases the Small Sparks grants to \$5,000 and increases the frequency of application deadlines—there are now three opportunities per year to apply.

A project of the Vietnamese Friendship Association is an example of a successful project of the Fund. It received a large grant to undergo a large-scale community research project identifying needs in the Vietnamese community. The grant paid to train and compensate youth for community organizing work, funded a project coordinator, supplied venues and food, and so on. After significant engagement in the community, seven priorities emerged, creating the foundation for a community action plan. One of the top concerns identified was of parents whose children are losing their native language and culture, with a simultaneous need to address the education gap their students face. To meet this need, the Association created a dual-language preschool—a community-driven solution based on authentic community relations.

Participatory Budgeting

In 2016, Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods engaged in a pilot Participatory Budgeting process, empowering community members to directly decide how to spend \$700,000 from the city's general fund. For the pilot year, they chose to focus on youth, with a project called *Youth Voice, Youth Choice*.

The goals of the project were to:

- Fund projects that **create equity** in the city, addressing the deepest needs and ensuring that city resources go where they will have the greatest impact
- Forge a more **inclusive democracy**, aiming to engage those who are typically excluded from decision-making and building bridges among diverse communities
- Build **youth skills** and knowledge to create new leaders
- Give youth a **meaningful and lasting voice** in city government

The process started with city staff engaging in an intensive idea-collection phase, asking youth for ideas for public projects they would like to see in their communities, then collecting input through online surveys, social media, idea assemblies in different neighborhoods, and mobile seminars in spaces where youth already were gathering or meeting. This outreach was done in collaboration with schools and youth service providers. Project ideas were eligible if they benefitted the public, were one-time expenditures that could be completed within the year, and cost between \$25,000 and \$300,000.

The city's extensive outreach process produced two things. First, 534 ideas were collected. Second, 70 geographically and racially diverse youth volunteered—and 20 were ultimately selected—to serve as budget delegates and work through the process. With guidance from Department of Neighborhoods staff, this group of delegates collaborated with city

The seven winning *Youth Voice, Youth Choice* projects were:

- **Safe Routes to Schools** - \$45,500
Improve crosswalks in areas near schools.
- **Park Bathroom Upgrades** - \$205,000
Create a map of public bathrooms and improve bathrooms in parks in most need of repair.
- **Wi-Fi Hotspot Checkout** - \$165,000
Expand Seattle Public Library's system to include more Wi-Fi hotspots.
- **Homeless Children and Youth Liaison Services** - \$70,400
Expand school liaison services connecting youth experiencing homelessness to resources.
- **Youth Homeless Shelter Improvements** - \$42,000
Physical improvements for a youth homeless shelter, such as installing lockers, washer and dryers, and new paint.
- **Job Readiness Workshops for Homeless Youth** - \$43,600
Expand existing services for youth experiencing homelessness focused on job readiness.
- **Houses for People Experiencing Homelessness** - \$128,500
Youth collaborate with carpenters to build 10 tiny homes for people experiencing homelessness.

departments to determine eligibility, cluster similar ideas together, sort ideas by jurisdiction, and prioritize ideas based on feasibility. The group arrived at 19 final proposals, which were presented on a ballot. City staff walked around schools with mobile ballots, reached youth through social media, and met youth where they were in the community. In the end, over 3,000 youth ages 11-25 voted for their favorite projects.

The city received a lot of positive feedback on the program from youth and youth service providers. However, city staff reflected that the program demanded too much of the volunteers, who participated in weekly meetings for 10 weeks, without financial compensation, and with a lot of responsibility to manage. City staff suggested chunking out the work, so some delegates would work on vetting the projects, while others had other roles in the process. The project also put a lot of pressure on city departments participating in the preparation of cost estimates and the vetting of projects.

Nonetheless, the city is now embarking upon a broader participatory budgeting program, *Your Voice, Your Choice*, which is not limited to youth. In 2017, the program is focused on allotting \$2 million of the city's budget on parks and streets projects. The program's framework is geographic, to ensure equitable distribution of funds. With a dedicated staff person and a sustained funding source, they anticipate offering the program every year.

Conclusion

Seattle is making strides in effectively engaging its residents—especially members of traditionally underrepresented groups—through its People's Academy for Community Engagement, Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons, neighborhood matching fund, and participatory budgeting pilot. These programs might well be emulated in other cities.

The story of Seattle's recent system changes, however, is a cautionary tale with at least three morals: cities should be intentional and transparent in implementing well-planned systems change, they should honor the commitment and draw on the expertise of resident volunteers, and they should insure that engagement efforts are well-resourced to avoid exacerbating inequities.

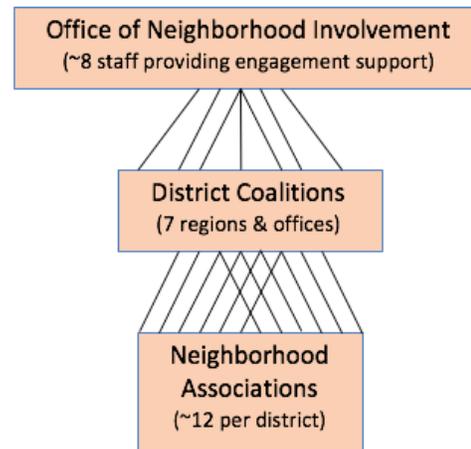
Portland, Oregon

General Overview

Portland has a long-standing commitment to meaningful community engagement. One of the primary elements of Portland's system is its seven District Coalitions, supported by the City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement.

A typical Coalition is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with full-time staff members who provide support for about 12 volunteer-led neighborhood associations. Each neighborhood association has a volunteer-run board and committees, and has a representative on the Coalition's board.

The primary focus of Coalition work is building capacity for civic engagement throughout the city. This is achieved largely by Coalition staff providing a variety of resources to support the grassroots advocacy work of the volunteers who lead the neighborhood associations. A single Coalition may have as many as six full-time staff members, many of whom serve as liaisons to neighborhood associations while fulfilling other roles. Some primary functions coalitions provide:



- **Forging connections:** connecting residents with relevant city staff, and establishing partnerships between neighborhood associations, community groups, and residents.
- **Training community members:** educating residents about city processes and how to work effectively with city decision makers; providing meeting facilitation skills; advising on grant writing; and teaching effective organizing and communications.
- **Advising on neighborhood issues:** helping residents advocate for themselves on specific projects, especially land use, transportation and parks projects; sharing information on current city issues; clarifying questions on process.
- **Creating communications and events:** producing monthly newspapers or newsletters that report widely on neighborhood association projects; hosting community-building events.

- **Providing technical support to neighborhood associations:** facilitating meetings; assisting with external communications and branding; providing fiscal agency; managing elections; orienting new board members; informing and educating about bylaws and financial policies; providing equipment and video production; and resolving internal grievances and organizational issues.

While the neighborhood associations enjoy a lot of support from the Coalition offices, they are largely independent, are empowered to advocate on local issues, and have standing to pass resolutions providing input directly to the city. The level of participation of Coalition staff within neighborhood association work varies greatly: Some organizations need more guidance, especially when there are newer board members or chairs, while others are very independent. Coalitions do not interfere in the democratic process of the neighborhood associations; they will consult and facilitate discussions but will not dictate decisions. Coalitions and neighborhood associations can also bring in a third-party facilitation/mediation group through a city contract when needed.

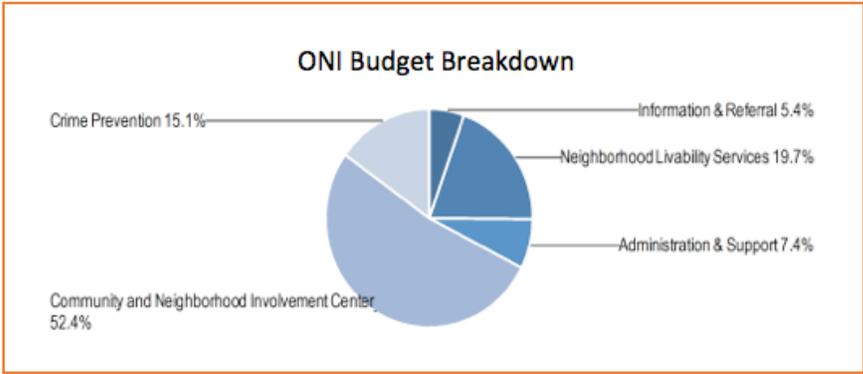
The level of issue-based activity at the Coalition level also varies: some have only one committee (usually related to land use), while others have 10 functional committees. At a typical Coalition board meeting, each neighborhood association representative reports on the primary issues it is addressing. Opportunities for collaboration are identified. The Coalition and its committees will take on identified issues that cross neighborhood association boundaries or are beyond the capacity of an individual Association to address. For example, one Coalition coordinated a group of neighborhood association chairs on an issue related to propane storage at a harbor, helped acquire the necessary information from various parties, and hosted strategy sessions. Coalition committees also may be a source of important volunteer support, taking on Coalition-wide communications work, event planning, and so on.

Coalition boards may take advocacy positions on major issues, but they tend to function under unanimous consent, meaning every neighborhood association representative must agree before a resolution can be sent directly from the Coalition. At times, the Coalition will take on an issue for a particular neighborhood, to give the recommendation more force. For example, in a trail-building project, the Coalition advocated for a better facility than the city was proposing, and even than the neighborhood was promoting, and succeeded.

Coalitions also collaborate on cross-Coalition work. The chairs and executive directors meet regularly to share best practices and collaborate on issues. When they recognized that the county was poorly managing

outreach to homeless residents, the Coalitions united and persuaded the city to put together a budget package for outreach. That led to creating a new position for outreach to the city’s homeless population. Other examples of collaboration include co-hosting candidate forums and engaging in crime prevention work.

The City’s Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI), which has 12 full-time staff members, promotes a culture of civic engagement by “connecting and supporting all Portlanders working together and with government to build inclusive, safe, and livable neighborhoods and communities.”



ONI includes crime prevention, information and referral services, and neighborhood livability (liquor licensing, graffiti abatement, marijuana policy, etc.) along with the arm that supports community engagement: the Community and Neighborhood Involvement Center. A full-time Neighborhood Program Coordinator within the Community and Neighborhood Involvement Center supports the seven district coalitions.

The Program Coordinator views the Coalitions and neighborhood associations as his clients, and provides a range of support. The Program Coordinator also staffs the ONI Advisory Committee, which advises the agency on budget, policy, and strategy issues. The Committee consists of ONI management and staff, Coalition staff and board representatives, neighborhood representatives, diversity and civic leadership participants, community partners, and general community members.

The city invites the Coalitions to push back on city decision-making and policy, and appears to treasure the independent nature of the Coalition system. The Neighborhood Program Coordinator said: “We survive because of the decentralized model, built on a foundation of community pride and involvement. They would not be successful if they were city-run programs.”

Accountability

Each Coalition has a five-year contract with the city that sets out the functions the city expects them to fulfill, but not how to execute those functions. The city also requires annual work plans from each Coalition. As primary clients of the Coalitions, the neighborhood associations also set expectations for the Coalitions and hold them accountable.

ONI's Neighborhood Program Coordinator meets regularly with Coalition board chairs and executive directors, and receives more formal quarterly reports from each Coalition. ONI staff hear all the Coalition problems, collaborate on issues, and stay in close touch with each Coalition. Through the nature of this support work, the city observes compliance with the contract requirements. "The best way to ensure accountability is personal involvement by ONI staff," the Neighborhood Program Coordinator says.

The city also collects quantitative measures (attendance at meetings, number of communications sent out, volunteer hours committed, etc.). However, there is a general acknowledgement that this measure of activity is not meaningful, and that community engagement work is very relational and difficult to evaluate. Individual Coalitions are developing their own metrics, focusing more on outcomes than activities. These often take narrative form, addressing what actions were taken to draw people to an event, how underserved communities were involved, what types of communications were sent, whether board members feel satisfied, etc. Coalition staff say it is important to take a long-term view and that concrete successes—like empowering a resident to get a crosswalk installed—take a lot of time but have significant community impacts.

The city also has a lengthy document that sets forth standards for neighborhood associations, District Coalitions, and the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (universally called the "ONI standards"). It lists the roles and requirements of these entities, and provides a grievance and appeal process for procedural violations of an organization's bylaws or the ONI standards. An individual or organization can file a grievance, which will start at the neighborhood level, with a committee appointed to evaluate it. Appeals go to the Coalition, then to ONI. There's a general appreciation that Coalition staff do not work for the city or for the neighborhood association boards. They can play the role of a neutral third-party overseeing adherence to the ONI standards and assisting with neighborhood association issues.

A common theme heard among Coalition staff is that there is a high level of motivation to do good work. The Coalition jobs pay well, and "there is a joy in the doing the work—autonomy, respect, and the ability to bust

through the bureaucracy. The city wants me to be responsive to what the community wants, and I get to decide what that means.”

Portland’s Focus on Community Engagement

The City of Portland recently adopted a new Comprehensive Plan, which includes a robust section on Community Engagement. The Office of Neighborhood Involvement, the main department charged with engagement, has three primary goals: increasing the number and diversity of people who are involved and volunteer in their communities; building neighborhood capacity to build skills and partnerships; and increasing community impact on public decisions. Its Community and Neighborhood Involvement Center has **12 full-time employees** who work at the city level to advance these goals.

The City allocates over \$2 million directly to the seven District Coalition offices. With substantial budgets, each Coalition also successfully retains a number of long-term quality staff; some Coalitions have up to six staff members, and many executive directors have been with their organizations at least 10 years. While some Coalitions engage in outside fundraising (through mechanisms such as watershed project grants, advertisements in their newspapers, and selling pedestrian-safety focused yard signs), the funds they receive from the City largely support their annual budgets.

Public Involvement Best Practices staff

Portland employs a full-time staff member titled the Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator. Her role is to provide strategic advice and consulting to departments in the “conceptualization, development, evaluation, and improvement of public involvement processes, policies, and practices.” Her role is built upon the principles of participatory democracy and self-determination, that “those most impacted by something should be at the table shaping decisions about it.” In her words, she “helps each department work through decision making at all decision-making points.”

One of her primary responsibilities is to shape citywide policy around community engagement and best practice development. For example, she has developed specific engagement tools for departments to use. Because her program is committed to the inclusion of communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities in public policy conversations and processes, she currently is working on a 20-page racial equity assessment tool for departments to use to assess their projects.

She also provides department-specific community-engagement consultation and training. She helps establish advisory councils, assists in planning outreach for engagement events, brings in good facilitators, imparts good facilitation skills, and consults on the city's racial equity standards. She encourages "bringing residents into big decisions early" and promotes co-decision-making between city staff and residents, saying, "Those who consume the services should be part of it."

The Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator also supports the city's District planner liaisons, who are assigned to the District Coalitions. A similar District liaison program for transportation agency staff recently was adopted as well.

The coordinator consistently pushes city staff members to ask: "What value do you think the community can bring to your work?" Each city department also has a

community engagement coordinator, and the public involvement coordinator provides support to them. They have traditionally had emergent requests – for example, identifying reactively that they need to involve the Native community in a particular project – and she helps them understand that building deep and sustainable relationships with communities will save city staff time and pay off in the long run. She encourages them to proactively and systematically engage community organizations, not just when there is an immediate need to do outreach.

Her performance measures are based on her activities – how many policy changes she's helped effect, how many documents she has co-produced, how many department consultations she's done. Her real goal is shifting the city's culture towards prioritizing deep engagement, but that is more difficult to measure without surveying changes in perception over time. That evaluation will take more resources than the city currently has available.

The Public Involvement Best Practices Coordinator encourages staff to recognize the value of engagement through different frames:

- **It is the right thing to do morally:** There is value in sharing power, there are vulnerable people that need to be reached, and community ownership leads to sustainability.
- **It is economical:** Resources are wasted when bridges have been burned and need to be rebuilt – staff resources as well as expenses for project delays.
- **It is required legally:** National, state and local policy and civil rights law require equity, and meaningful engagement is required to avoid disparate impacts and outcomes.
- **And, it feels good when people like you!**

Public Involvement Advisory Council (PIAC)

In 2008, the City Council created the Public Involvement Advisory Council (PIAC), Portland's first standing, formal committee that addresses how the City conducts public involvement. PIAC is an example of government and community working on shared goals, because its membership is half City staff (representing 14 departments) and half community members (representing 18 diverse community organizations). Membership is appointed by and reports to City Council. The advisory council is charged with creating recommendations to improve the quality and consistency of the City's public involvement. The Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator staffs PIAC.

PIAC allows City staff to connect with each other, and with representatives of the community, on engagement issues: identifying best practices, promoting training programs, evaluating engagement efforts, developing long-term strategies for the city and each department. To avoid burnout of community leaders, PIAC holds only six meetings a year. When the full group meets, it is action- and outcome-oriented. The group will conduct working sessions advising a department on a project, citywide policy, or best practice.

PIAC's work groups do a lot of the actual work. For example, there is a work group conducting a citywide review of notification requirements, determining who is required to be notified of city action under city and state code, and what types of notifications are required. The work group also completed a community survey on how current notification systems are working. Their goal is to create a report to the City Council setting out the purpose for notification, the current notification system, problems with the current system, and recommendations for change.

Another work group project addresses digital engagement. There's a recognition that a town-hall-style meeting is not equitable, and the group is seeking to maximize public engagement by evaluating what the city current does to engage, what has worked well, and what products could be used to better bring communities of color into the conversation. They currently are undergoing a pilot project with a product called Bang the Table.

Perhaps most significantly, PIAC created the city's Public Involvement Principles (see Attachment A), which were adopted by City Council, and now works to ensure that they are implemented. The Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator uses these Principles as a framework for her work, and the city's auditor ensures that particular projects are done according to the principles.

Equity within Portland's Coalition System

Beyond the efforts of PIAC and the work of the Public Involvement Best Practices Program Coordinator, Portland's system has other built-in mechanisms to engage more diverse, typically underrepresented groups.

First, the Coalition structure allows resource-sharing among neighborhoods. Some neighborhood associations have high levels of volunteer capacity, with educated, engaged, influential members. These groups need little from the Coalition. Other neighborhood associations need much more organizing and informational support. Because Coalitions have a diverse mix of neighborhood associations—sometimes with the wealthiest and poorest neighborhoods within the same Coalition boundaries—the Coalition can consciously triage support based on inequities between organizations and allocate more resources and staff time to the communities that need it the most.

Second, the heavily resourced Coalitions have the capacity to provide training to neighborhood associations' volunteers on issues of equitable community engagement. Recognizing that the formal neighborhood association structure may not be welcoming to traditionally underrepresented populations, Coalition staff have developed training programs for volunteers on how to be more inclusive and welcoming, by addressing racial discrimination issues, by promoting alternative meeting structures and mentorship programs, and so on.

Some Coalitions have committees that address these issues as well. For example, one has an Equity and Inclusion Committee that is working on rewriting the organization's mission statement, bylaws and action plans to include an equity lens. The executive director said: "Our mission is engaging neighbors to improve livability in southwest Portland. If our work is defined only by a part of our community, and not representative of the whole, then we are not meeting our mission. We are also losing out on the trust and involvement of many people within our community."

Third, and more importantly, other community organizations that serve residents in a District may also have seats on the Coalition board. Recognizing that geographically-based neighborhood associations are not the only – or often most effective – way that people organize, almost every Coalition board has active representatives of cultural groups, business associations, and other community organizations. This is an important, formalized way to give non-geographically based groups a seat at the table and Coalition support. This has led to concrete outcomes for culturally-based groups. For example, neighborhood associations are allowed to host

two free events in city parks each year; one Coalition successfully advocated for other groups to enjoy the same benefits.

Coalition work with non-geographic communities extends beyond board representation. There is a general acknowledgment that the Coalition is charged with reaching the entire community, so must be open to sharing its resources and support with organizations beyond the neighborhood associations. The staff of many Coalitions are making focused efforts to identify other community groups and organizations within their communities and empower them to greater advocacy. Their fiscal agency service is one way this can be accomplished, but there are other, more creative projects in the works. For example, one Coalition has partnered with immigrant groups to provide support, while another is engaged in a renters' pilot project, working with groups on advocacy around renting.

The City has embraced the expansion of Coalition services, and provides additional funding—\$6,500 for each Coalition office—to encourage collaboration between neighborhood groups and non-geographic communities. A recent example of this initiative is one Coalition's work with the Native American Youth and Family Center on a community dialogue among Native elders, youth, and neighborhood leaders.

Portland's Direct Support of Underrepresented Communities

Although the District Coalition system has some mechanisms to achieve broader community engagement, the City has significantly enhanced its District Coalition system in other ways to meaningfully engage its residents more equitably.

The Diversity and Civic Leadership Program

Along with providing funding to the District Coalitions, Portland contracts directly with six organizations through its Diversity and Civic Leadership (DCL) program. This capacity-building program for community-based organizations was established in 2006 and aims to “enhance community involvement of under-engaged people, with a focus on communities of color, immigrants and refugees, in efforts to improve community livability and public safety, organizational capacity and self-empowerment at the community level.” In fiscal year 2014-15, each DCL organization received \$98,657.

A current Coalition director reported that this program stems from an identified need to supplement the work of the geographically-based Coalitions. “The DCL program is an acknowledgment that the system wasn’t reaching deeply enough into the community.” He observed that Coalitions are charged with reaching the entire community, so need to be open and supportive of other mechanisms besides the geographically-based neighborhood associations. The Neighborhood Program Coordinator said: “The idea is to let people organize, and support them to do engagement work with the people that they naturally want to organize with.”

Portland’s DCL organizations:

- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization
- Latino Network
- Native American Youth Family Center
- Center for Intercultural Organizing
- Urban League of Portland (focused on the African American community)
- The Momentum Alliance (focused on youth)

The city dedicates a staff person to coordinating the program; she manages the contracts between the organizations and the city, and works directly with the organizations. The DCL organizations receive leadership training, organizational support, and assistance in advocating for their interests. The DCLs themselves manage the leadership training provided to their members and broader community, so its content and presentation are self-determined and culturally appropriate.

There is no formal understanding as to how the DCL groups connect with city government. But, there is a definite focus on learning about city government and providing access to city buildings and local government leaders. The result is “hundreds of community leaders learning how city government works.” The members of the DCLs, and participants in their training programs, often go on to serve on city boards and commissions. Indeed, the city staff person who staffs the Public Involvement Advisory Council recruits directly from each of the DCL organizations. The Neighborhood Program Coordinator reported: “This is about giving access to people and serving them, not them serving city government.”

The DCL partners do have a scope of work, where expectations are expressed primarily in terms of programming, number of community members engaged, and networking with government officials. The DCL partner accomplishments include: campaigns addressing community-identified needs and issues; partnerships with city departments and other community organizations; trainings and workshops; participation on boards, commissions and advisory committees; community gatherings for constituent engagement; communications and outreach; and research and reports.

The Neighborhood Program Coordinator recognized that, while numbers are reported, narrative surveying where participants can describe how the program affected their lives is a better way to evaluate the program's success.

One Coalition director noted that the DCL program has helped develop new, deep connections that have strengthened her work with traditionally underrepresented communities. On the other hand, a coalition board chair urges that, although DCLs are a good start toward involving underrepresented voices, they should be integrated more formally into the Coalition structure to better take advantage of untapped potential for collaboration. She suggests that the DCLs be recognized as an additional Coalition, which would give them a seat at the table within the city, and at directors and chairs meetings, for example.

City staff recommended that this type of program happen incrementally, starting with a pilot. Portland's program started with \$70,000 for a Diversity and Civic Leadership Academy that supported underrepresented

Portland's DCL program helps community organizations develop:

- **Communication structures** to encourage dialog between community members and public agencies on community building, livability and policy issues.
- **Leadership skills** to be more effective advocates responding to City public involvement initiatives and advancing policies to achieve economic and social equity.
- Leadership opportunities to **increase representation** on City advisory committees, boards and commissions, neighborhood associations, and other public involvement opportunities.
- **Collaborations and partnerships** between underrepresented community organizations, neighborhood groups, and business associations, where there may be opportunities to work on common community and neighborhood livability issues.
- **Culturally appropriate models** for how these communities can safely and successfully interact in City processes in meaningful ways that add value to both their communities and the City.

community groups, along with additional resources to the District Coalitions: \$45,000 for cross-cultural organizing and \$30,000 for language interpretation and translation, child care, and ADA accommodations to make meetings and activities more accessible. When a larger budget was dedicated, organizations were invited to submit proposals to become DCLs, and four were funded originally. Since then, the city issued additional RFPs to reach the current six funded organizations.

The East Portland Action Plan

The East Portland Action Plan is actually a project with a committee and staff, to which the City allocates over \$300,000 per year in addition to its regular funding of the East Portland District Coalition. East Portland was annexed as part of the city in the 1980s, and is home to a quarter of Portland's population, a significant number of them living in poverty, and a large percentage of people of color.

The committee works to implement the East Portland Action Plan, which was developed by the community with city support to provide "leadership and guidance to public agencies and other entities on how to strategically address community-identified issues and allocate resources to improve livability for neighborhoods" in East Portland. It was initiated because of an identified need for increased infrastructure and other city services in this lower socioeconomic, traditionally underrepresented community.

The group only addresses strategies and actions that are specifically listed in the Action Plan, so they have a clarity of purpose and goals distinct from the District Coalition. There are 268 listed actions, which fall within categories such as Housing and Development Policy, Transportation, Public Infrastructure and Utilities, Natural Areas and Environment, Economic Development and Workforce Training, and Public Safety.

There is a full-time staff member who advocates for the implementation of the plan and staffs the committee. Membership is open to anyone who attends twice and agrees to attend regularly, but anyone who comes to a meeting can contribute. There currently are 85 residents on the roster as members, and usually 55-70 residents attend a meeting. There are 12 subcommittees, which function like work groups. At each committee meeting, each subcommittee gives a three-minute report on its work. At the end of every meeting, an orientation is provided to any interested resident about the Action Plan and committee process.

The committee operates on complete consensus. Last year, there were 27 resolutions that achieved consensus. In almost eight years, only three issues did not receive full consensus. At each committee meeting, interpretation, translation, child care, and healthful food are provided. The city also has provided coaching on facilitation skills and leadership training.

Largely due to the resources committed and cultural shift achieved, the East Portland Action Plan has enjoyed success in recruiting and retaining a very diverse and representative membership. Moreover, many of its committee members now serve on several city Budget Advisory Committees, influencing how and where Portland’s money is spent. Members meet with elected officials from the city and county to advance their strategic planning items, and provide an annual report to the City Council on their work.

The project has enjoyed successes in advocating for city funding of projects that align with the Plan, including graffiti abatement, new lighting and hundreds of trees on a multi-use path, storefront improvement program for businesses, pedestrian and traffic safety projects, and the development of public spaces.

The Small Grants Programs

Portland has a Neighborhood Small Grants Program that District Coalitions administer. The city invests about \$100,000 per year into the program. The program funds neighborhood-initiated projects – everything from murals to political advocacy training to yurts constructed for emergency response.

A Coalition director identified the small grants program as the “single most effective program” it has. The Neighborhood Program Coordinator lauded this investment as financially small but “hugely incentivizing at increasing engagement and encouraging partnering with other groups.” Similarly, a Coalition staff person said the program “invigorates community by getting people directly involved in projects” in their neighborhoods, and that one grant can “leverage 20,000 volunteer hours.”

The goals of Portland’s Neighborhood Small Grants program:

- Increase the number and diversity of people who are involved and engaged in their communities and neighborhoods
- Strengthen neighborhood and community capacity to build community leadership, identity, skills, relationships and partnerships
- Increase community and neighborhood impact on public decisions and community life

The City provided a template to the Coalitions for the grant management process, but the Coalitions themselves decide how to solicit applications and select projects. To determine the grant amount available to each Coalition, the City applies a funding formula based on the total number of households living in poverty and the number of neighborhood associations a Coalition supports. One Coalition reports that it awards

between 13-17 grants a year of up to \$4,000 each; another awards eight grants a year of between \$200-\$2,000 each. Coalitions often dedicate staff specifically to manage the small grants program. Coalition staff members offer workshops for community members, with information and advice about the small grants program. Some Coalitions choose to provide micro-grants, with a simple process for grants of \$500 or less. The Coalitions often ask for qualitative reporting from grantees to get a full picture of the impact of the grant.

A Coalition staff member said the small grant program can successfully fill the gap for other community organizations – often culturally based or otherwise underrepresented – that are not formal neighborhood associations (which often receive small financial allotments). Indeed, 35 percent of the funds are supposed to be distributed to under-engaged organizations – a goal that has been met or exceeded each year.

One Coalition volunteer described a recruiting committee the Coalition established, consisting mostly of people of color, to foster grant applications from traditionally underrepresented groups. She said the funds can “spread further into the community” through outreach done by the Coalitions. Another Coalition staff person said the grant program “helps with making resources accessible to the broader community,” noting that the Coalition office specifically provides support to community and cultural

groups (beyond geographically based neighborhood associations) to apply for grants. That Coalition’s grant review criteria support underrepresented groups, and the committee deciding the grant awards consists of representatives from culturally specific organization and other diverse community members, along with neighborhood association delegates.

Examples of small grants awarded in Portland to benefit or recognize traditionally underrepresented groups:

- Native American beading classes
- Improving tech equity in schools through family training
- Multilingual neighborhood notice boards
- Neighborhood soccer program for Somali immigrants
- Cultural enrichment and reading classes for adults with special needs
- Health fair event for the Latino community
- Tile mural project to connect new immigrant communities

Additional City Staff and Resources

Portland has adopted citywide racial equity goals and strategies. One of its key goals is to “strengthen outreach, public engagement, and access to city services for communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities, and support or change existing services using racial equity best practices.”

In line with this commitment, each city department has a Racial Equity Program Manager and a Racial Equity Plan.

The Office of Neighborhood Involvement has full-time city staff members supporting various programs including:

- **New Portlanders Program.** The staff member heading up this program is charged with integrating immigrants and refugees into city life. He ensures that quality city services are provided to immigrant and refugee communities, works with city staff members to connect them to cultural community groups, advocates for immigrants' interests (for example, by empowering Somali women to advocate for women-only swim time at city pools), and networks with immigrant leaders to identify their community's needs. One widely acclaimed project involved building relationships with Parks department staff, getting them to commit to provide mobile playgrounds in parks in the summer, and instituting a summer hiring program of immigrant and refugee youth to lead the program. He also staffs a newly formed New Portlanders commission charged with advising the city on "policies and practices to integrate immigrant and refugee communities' voices and needs into the provision of city services, city decision-making and civic engagement" and to "seek constructive relationships with each member of Council."
- **Disability Program.** Originally charged with advocating for the disability community (for example, by ensuring that building planning and community festivals were accessible), this staff person now focuses more on civic engagement with the disability community. She staffs a Commission on Disability, which guides the city "in ensuring that it is a more universally accessible city for all" by broadening outreach and inclusion of people with disabilities, representing a wide spectrum of disabilities in city decision-making, and facilitating increased collaboration between people with disabilities, city departments, and the City Council. The city also runs a Disability Leadership Academy, an intensive leadership course offering training and practical experience for people with disabilities who want to effect public policy and create social change within communities. Participants advance skills in project planning, event organizing, navigating political systems, and building community through training sessions and a community engagement project, where they collaborate on a policy impact or systems change project that the group designs and implements.
- **Youth Commission.** This advisory body has up to 42 members, meets twice a month, and has three subcommittees that meet

weekly: youth anti-violence, sustainability (transit equity), and education (chronic absenteeism). The Mayor recently called on the commission to help decide how to spend youth gang violence prevention funds. It is youth led; they recruit their own membership and strive for equitable representation of young people who care about the community and want to make change. As part of its goal of youth development, the commission's work begins each year with a three-day retreat focused on topics like social justice, power and privilege, and city policy. The staff member supports the commission, writes grants to fund their projects, provides consulting and training on getting youth on nonprofit boards, and is working on a manual for the city on how to engage youth more effectively.

Community Engagement Liaisons are city-trained civic activists, fluent in English, who assist city public involvement programs with interpretation and facilitation services. This program is grounded in the principle that everyone should have access to information on decisions that impact the community, plus the opportunity to engage in the City's public involvement efforts.

Community Engagement Liaisons are offered to City staff at City department cost. City staff are encouraged to avail themselves of these liaisons if public participation includes engaging minority-language-speaking neighbors. Many communities are represented in the liaison program. Examples include a Nepali-speaking Bhutanese elder, Karen-speaking activist, Arabic-speaking male and female community elders, and so on. Portland has 10 "safe harbor" languages that have more than 1,000 speakers in the city; efforts are made to make all city business accessible to individuals who speak these languages.

Conclusion

Portland's well-funded system supporting both geographically-based organizations and non-geographic community groups does an exceptional job of facilitating civic engagement in the City.

Conclusion

Faced with the challenge of effectively and equitably engaging their residents, each of these three cities has taken drastically different approaches.

Boston's heavy reliance upon volunteers yields uneven and inequitable engagement and results. Recent efforts to augment its patchwork of volunteer-run organizations with city initiatives have had narrow and limited success to date, especially where they lack intentional cooperation and communication with existing community-based organizations.

The slow defunding and disempowering of Seattle's district council system left it functioning similarly to Boston's; a reliance upon available volunteer energy has rendered it ineffective in achieving broad-based equity. The city's decision to ultimately break ties with the remaining geographically based organizations failed to honor the commitment, expertise, and sincerity of their volunteers. While Seattle is instituting some innovative programs in an attempt to engage more residents more consistently, many residents are skeptical of the city's ability to take on the task alone, and are frustrated by the lack of a plan for a new system.

In contrast, Portland's well-resourced system is grounded in a commitment to authentic community engagement. Faced with a geographically based system that admittedly was unable to fully engage underrepresented communities, Portland created programs to complement the work of its district coalitions. These programs directly support culturally based organizations and directly empower people of color, immigrants, youth, and members of other traditionally underrepresented groups.

The structure of Portland's system allows for robust resident volunteer support through the district coalitions, and develops highly functioning coalitions through substantial city investment—in both staffing and funding. This investment allows for effective partnerships among resident volunteers, coalitions, and city departments, and supports long-term community building in neighborhoods.

All three cities have programs and practices that might be implemented effectively elsewhere—either at a local organization or on city-wide level. Some key ideas that the City of Saint Paul and its district councils might consider include:

- **Abutters Meetings:** Boston tries to generate engagement on location-specific issues by literally bringing the meeting to the location, instead of requiring residents to attend a meeting at a

centralized meeting space. Like pop-up meetings in Saint Paul, the concept has the potential to engage residents who do not respond to traditional outreach, and to gather feedback from frequent users, neighbors, and others who are most directly affected by projects.

- **Coordinated issues database:** Seattle uses this tactic to track issues, organizations, and primary concerns of each neighborhood at a city-wide level, and shares this knowledge among city staff.
- **Diversity and Civic Leadership Program:** This is Portland's primary method of supplementing its geographically-based neighborhood coalitions with culturally-specific outreach. The city contracts with six independent, community-based organizations to enhance involvement of under-engaged residents, including immigrants and refugees, more-established communities of color, and youth. Portland also has a hybrid program—the East Portland Action Plan. This program focuses on empowering a specific low-income, minority neighborhood, but operates separately from the neighborhood coalition system.
- **Impact Advisory Groups:** Boston creates these groups for large development projects. They are seen as a way to gather and channel input from residents and other interested parties, and to negotiate conditions that minimize or offset the projects' impacts on neighborhoods. Because membership on IAGs is appointed, who is included and who is excluded can determine their effectiveness and perceived legitimacy. Saint Paul already employs a version of the approach through its community advisory committees and, to some degree, citizen-led boards and commissions.
- **New Resident / Disability / Youth Program staff:** Portland designates specific city staff who are charged with integrating immigrants, residents with disabilities, and youth fully into city decision-making.
- **Participatory Budgeting:** Seattle is experimenting with a program giving residents a direct say in how to allocate \$2 million in city funds. Based on an early pilot project, the goals and outreach differ significantly from how Saint Paul traditionally handles its Capital Investment Board process.
- **People's Academy for Community Engagement:** Seattle created this course for emerging leaders, especially from traditionally underrepresented groups. The course provides on-the-ground training in community organizing and advocacy, leadership development, and the workings of city government. It maximizes participation and effectiveness by being community-based, providing flexible scheduling for training sessions (which include

food and child care), and using both city staff and outside facilitators as instructors.

- **Public Involvement Principles:** In 2010, Portland adopted seven principles to constructively engage community members, allocate engagement resources, and increase understanding of and support for public policies and programs. The principles were created by the Public Involvement Advisory Council—a panel of residents and city staff. The PIAC continues to meet six times a year to evaluate and report on engagement practices, and how well they live up to the principles. The PIAC is outcome—not policy—driven. It makes specific recommendations and follows through on strategies, best practices, and training needs. Portland also has city staff dedicated specifically to propagating best practices for public involvement among city departments. Seattle is in the initial phases of replicating this approach through its Community Involvement Commission.
- **Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons:** Seattle hires individual contractors who have multilingual and multicultural skills to serve as “bridge builders” to underrepresented communities and to connect hard-to-reach residents to city information and resources. These liaisons tend to be hired by a specific city department for a specific project—primarily to facilitate meetings and provide translation and interpreter services. However, some have begun doing more in-depth organizing within their communities, hinting at the potential of this type of approach. Portland has a similar program of Community Engagement Liaisons.
- **Small Grants Programs:** Portland and Seattle infuse city funds directly into communities to support resident-initiated projects. On the surface, the funds make possible projects that otherwise would fly under the radar, or not be accomplished at all. But community members say the real impact is how the grants engage a more diverse mix of residents, and strengthen community capacity, leadership, and relationships. Portland’s Small Grants Program and Seattle’s Neighborhood Matching Fund have similarities to stewardship grant programs run in Saint Paul by the Capitol Region Watershed District and Mississippi Watershed Management Organization.

City of Portland Public Involvement Principles

Adopted by the City of Portland, Oregon on August 4, 2010



Preamble

Portland City government works best when community members and government work as partners. Effective public involvement is essential to achieve and sustain this partnership and the civic health of our city. This:

- ❖ Ensures better City decisions that more effectively respond to the needs and priorities of the community.
- ❖ Engages community members and community resources as part of the solution.
- ❖ Engages the broader diversity of the community—especially people who have not been engaged in the past.
- ❖ Increases public understanding of and support for public policies and programs.
- ❖ Increases the legitimacy and accountability of government actions.

The following principles represent a road map to guide government officials and staff in establishing consistent, effective and high quality public involvement across Portland's City government.

These principles are intended to set out what the public can expect from city government, while retaining flexibility in the way individual city bureaus carry out their work.

City of Portland Public Involvement Principles

❖ **Partnership**

Community members have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Participants can influence decision-making and receive feedback on how their input was used. The public has the opportunity to recommend projects and issues for government consideration.

❖ **Early Involvement**

Public involvement is an early and integral part of issue and opportunity identification, concept development, design, and implementation of city policies, programs, and projects.

❖ **Building Relationships and Community Capacity**

Public involvement processes invest in and develop long-term, collaborative working relationships and learning opportunities with community partners and stakeholders.

❖ **Inclusiveness and Equity**

Public dialogue and decision-making processes identify, reach out to, and encourage participation of the community in its full diversity. Processes respect a range of values and interests and the knowledge of those involved. Historically excluded individuals and groups are included authentically in processes, activities, and decision and policy making. Impacts, including costs and benefits, are identified and distributed fairly.

❖ **Good Quality Process Design and Implementation**

Public involvement processes and techniques are well-designed to appropriately fit the scope, character, and impact of a policy or project. Processes adapt to changing needs and issues as they move forward.

❖ **Transparency**

Public decision-making processes are accessible, open, honest, and understandable. Members of the public receive the information they need, and with enough lead time, to participate effectively.

❖ **Accountability**

City leaders and staff are accountable for ensuring meaningful public involvement in the work of city government.

City of Portland
Public Involvement Principles, Indicators and Outcomes

<p style="text-align: center;">Principles</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Public agencies that achieve excellence in public involvement follow the principles below.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Indicators</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Public involvement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Outcomes</p> <p style="text-align: center;">High quality public involvement processes often produce the following outcomes and benefits.</p>
<p>Partnership</p> <p>Community members have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Participants can influence decision-making and receive feedback on how their input was used. The public has the opportunity to recommend projects and issues for government consideration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members are kept informed of issues and processes. • Community members know how to be involved and decide the degree of their involvement. • Community members are advised how their input will affect the decision, and are followed up with contact from the lead agency throughout the decision-making process. (feedback loop) • Process constraints are clarified and understood by community members. • The decision making process and decision makers and their power are explained and understood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A better project or policy will result from community participation. • Government will have a better understanding of the community and its concerns. • The policy or project will have greater community acceptance.

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<p>Early Involvement</p> <p>Public involvement is an early and integral part of issue and opportunity identification, concept development, design, and implementation of city policies, programs, and projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members help set priorities and shape policies, programs, and projects. • Key stakeholders are involved as early as possible. • Key stakeholders help define the problem, issues, and project parameters. • Community members help define the process for outreach and decision making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better project scoping, more predictable processes, and more realistic and defensible assessments of process time and resource needs. • Early and broad community support for the project or policy. • Identification of potential problem areas before they become an issue.

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<p>Building Relationships and Community Capacity</p> <p>Public involvement processes invest in and develop long-term, collaborative working relationships and learning opportunities with community partners and stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members feel heard and feel that their input is valued and used by city staff. • Community members trust the process and city staff. • City staff have consistent and reliable connections with stakeholders and community groups that facilitate effective two-way communications. • City staff engage in ongoing monitoring of relationships. • City staff continually assess which communities and populations are missing key information, or are not involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes leave neighborhoods and communities stronger, better informed, increase their capacity to participate in the future, and develop new leaders.

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<p>Inclusiveness and Equity</p> <p>Public dialogue and decision-making processes identify, reach out to, and encourage participation of the community in its full diversity. Processes respect a range of values and interests and the knowledge of those involved. Historically excluded individuals and groups are included authentically in processes, activities, and decision and policy making. Impacts, including costs and benefits, are identified and distributed fairly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong effort is made to accommodate diverse needs, backgrounds values and challenges. • Participation in the process reflects the diversity of the community affected by the outcome. • Culturally appropriate and effective strategies and techniques are used to involve diverse constituencies. • City staff follow-up with under-engaged groups to see how the process worked for their community members. • An assessment is made to identify communities impacted by a project or policy. The active participation of these communities is made a high priority. • The demographics, values, and desires of and impacts on affected communities are identified early on, influence the process design, and are reaffirmed throughout the process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City policies, projects, and programs respond to the full range of needs and priorities in the community. • Trust and respect for government increases among community members. • City staff and members of more traditionally-engaged communities understand the value of including under-engaged communities. • Equity is increased by actively involving communities that historically have been excluded from decision making processes. • Members of under-engaged communities increase their participation in civic life. • New policies do not further reinforce the disadvantaged position of historically disadvantaged people or groups.

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<p>Good Quality Process Design and Implementation</p> <p>Public involvement processes and techniques are well-designed to appropriately fit the scope, character, and impact of a policy or project. Processes adapt to changing needs and issues as they move forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The public is allowed an opportunity to give meaningful input regarding what the community needs from government. • Process facilitators have the skills, experience, and resources needed to be effective. • Careful planning of project timelines take into account the length of time community media, neighborhoods and organizations require for effective public involvement. • Information is sent out in a timely manner so people and organizations can respond. • Input is sought from participants periodically on how the process is working for them. • Community partners have input into whether processes should change and how they should be modified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People understand the purpose of the project and why it's being done. • Conflict is reduced as are challenges to the process. • Communication is more efficient and effective. • Outcomes are more sustainable. • Public confidence and trust built through good processes can carry on to future processes.

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<p>Transparency</p> <p>Public decision-making processes are accessible, open, honest, and understandable. Members of the public receive the information they need, and with enough lead time, to participate effectively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities are clearly identified, understood and accepted. • All meetings are open to the public and held in venues that are accessible and welcoming to community members. • Relevant documents and materials are readily available to the public. • Materials are available prior to the meeting so people are informed and ready to participate fully. • Materials that are lengthy or complex are made available with additional lead time to ensure community members can review and understand the materials, clarify with bureau staff, and check back with the communities they represent as needed. • Adequate time and resources are given for translation of materials and interpretation services and accommodations at meetings and forums as necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members have a better understanding of the project or policy and are better able to participate effectively. • Government understanding of community opinions and needs is enhanced.

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<p>Accountability</p> <p>City leaders and staff are accountable for ensuring meaningful public involvement in the work of city government.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources are applied appropriately to public engagement activities. • Community members’ time and resources are respected and used effectively. • Public involvement processes are evaluated on a regular basis to foster ongoing learning and improvement. • Evaluation methods are tailored to different audiences to ensure meaningful feedback from all parties involved in a process, including community members, stakeholder groups, staff and management. • Best practices are identified and shared. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved strategies and tools for outreach and decision-making. • Increased sense of trust in government from community members.