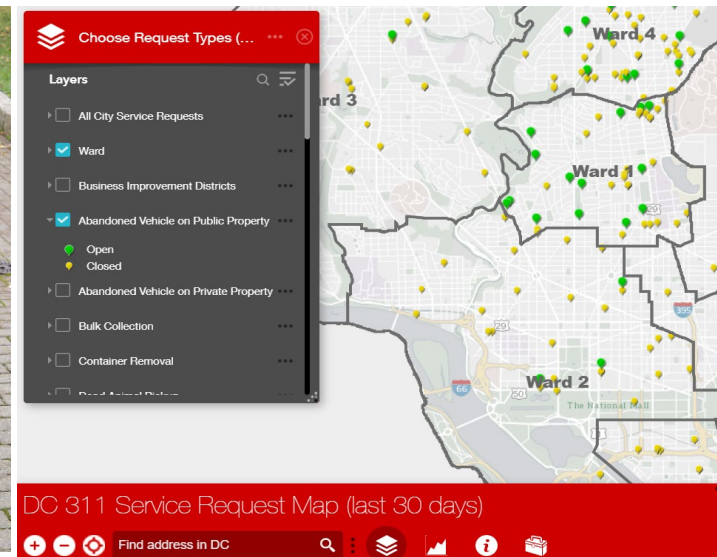


Improving Community Engagement & Constituent Services:

Study conducted for the City of Denver
Office of Human Rights and Community
Partnerships

Revised with corrections October 9, 2023



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

AUTHORS.....	I
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	VII
LIST OF ACRONYMS	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1
Study Goal and Vision.....	1
Acknowledgements	1
Research team.....	1
Scope of Work	3
Summary Approach	5
Summary Findings	8
Study Limitations	10
Recommendations Overview	11
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	17
Increasing importance of urban governance.....	17
Authentic public participation	17
Civic engagement and official neighborhood organizations.....	18
Constituent Services	19
Information transparency and accountability	20
Literature Summary.....	20
METHODS AND APPROACH.....	21
Interviews.....	21
RNO Evaluation Methods: Survey, Meetings, Interviews, Landscape, Data Analysis	24

Case Studies of 13 US Cities	31
Evaluation of City’s Community Engagement: Interviews, Survey, Nonprofit Listening Session	32
Constituent Services	35
STUDY CONTEXT: IMPETUS FOR EACH COMPONENT	36
Dissatisfaction and discord in the RNO system	36
Lack of standards and transparency in public engagement	39
Complaints about poor constituent services; interactions with community engagement.....	39
FINDINGS PART ONE: RNO EVALUATION	41
The State of Denver’s RNO System	41
Effectiveness in providing notice and two-way Notifications with the City.....	43
Other needs of RNOs	50
FINDINGS FOR PART TWO: IMPROVING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	51
State of Community Engagement in Denver	51
Current efforts to improve community engagement.....	54
2.3 Effective grant programs and partnerships: problems, opportunities, and needs.....	57
FINDINGS FOR PART THREE: STATE OF CONSTITUENT SERVICES DELIVERY	60
Constituent Services and Technology Services	61
Constituent services and community engagement.....	62
Constituent Services Systems	66
Satisfaction with constituent services.....	69

Other issues identified with the Digital Technologies Constituent Services.....	73
Summary of perspectives on the spectrum of city-resident interactions: from customer service to community engagement	75
Existing efforts related to the study’s three topics.....	75
LEARNING FROM OTHER CITIES: 13 CASE STUDIES	77
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	87
Reason for the study	87
Improvements needed in the RNO system.....	87
Community engagement strengths and weaknesses	87
Constituent Services	88
Lessons from other cities on community engagement and constituent service	88
RECOMMENDATIONS	89
#1. Notifications: Allow all residents and businesses to opt-in to, or search notifications currently restricted to RNOs.....	91
#2. Create a two-tier system of neighborhood organizations.	92
#3. Create an Office of Community Engagement (OCE) in the Agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships (HRCP) to create a coordinated engagement system and elevate HRCP’s related work.	95
#4. Create a network of 22 Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs) (two per council district) to support RNOs and DNCOs, utilizing existing knowledge, training, and staffing from 311 and other agencies.	96
#5. Increase the Technology Services Department’s budget for additional staff, especially with Salesforce expertise, and to create SLA dashboards.	99
#6. Provide new grants and partnership opportunities for nonprofits to increase their capacity and extend the City’s reach beyond its agencies.....	101

#7. Create a Civic Education and Training program building on existing initiatives in Denver Marketing and Media Services, City Council, and other agencies.	102
#8. Increase department budgets to fund additional engagement specialists embedded alongside subject matter experts and project managers.	103
Summary of Budget Implications for 8 Recommendations.....	104
CONCLUSION.....	105
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	107
APPENDICES	
Appendix A. Scope of Work	A.1
Appendix B. Interview Scripts	B.1
Appendix C. Interview Codes	C.1
Appendix D. Report from Listening Session	D.1
Appendix E. Updating the RNO Ordinance.....	E.1
Appendix F. Detail for 13 Case Studies.....	F.1
BOSTON, MA	F.2
Community Engagement Office	F.2
Supports for Neighborhood Organizations	F.2
Boston 311.....	F.2
Political Representatives by neighborhood	F.3
Budget.....	F.4
BOULDER, CO	F.5
Communication & Engagement Department	F.5
Neighborhood Associations	F.6
Constituent Services.....	F.7
CHARLOTTE, NC.....	F.8

Community Engagement Office/Division.....	F.8
Supports for Neighborhood Organizations.....	F.8
Civic Training.....	F.9
Resident Services:	F.9
Powers and Interaction with other Departments:.....	F.9
GOLDEN, CO.....	F.11
Neighborhood Associations	F.11
Community Engagement and Communications Department.....	F.11
Funding.....	F.12
311 services	F.12
LOS ANGELES, CA	F.13
Neighborhood Councils.....	F.13
Funding.....	F.13
Constituent Services	F.14
Office of Community Engagement.....	F.14
Civic Academies/ Resident Government Training.....	F.15
MINNEAPOLIS, MN.....	F.16
Neighborhood Organizations.....	F.16
Neighborhood and Community Relations	F.16
Training Departments	F.18
Civic Academies / Training Opportunities	F.18
Constituent Services (e.g. 311)	F.19
NEW YORK CITY, NY.....	F.20
Community Boards	F.20
Support for Community Boards:	F.20
Powers and Interaction with Other Departments:	F.21

Resident Services	F.22
Civics Academies:	F.23
OAKLAND, CA	F.25
Neighborhood Councils	F.25
Office or Department of Community Engagement	F.25
Constituent Services.....	F.27
PHILADELPHIA, PA.....	F.28
Office of Community Engagement.....	F.28
Registered Community Organizations.....	F.28
Constituent Services.....	F.30
PITTSBURGH, PA	F.31
Neighborhood Organizations	F.31
Ordinance.....	F.31
Office of Neighborhood Services.....	F.32
SEATTLE, WA	F.34
Neighborhood District Councils	F.34
Department of Neighborhoods	F.34
Constituent Services.....	F.36
ST. PAUL, MN.....	F.38
Neighborhood Organizations	F.38
Civic Training Opportunities / Youth Engagement	F.39
Constituent Services (e.g. 311)	F.40
WASHINGTON D.C.	F.41
Community Associations:	F.41
Constituent Services.....	F.42
Resident Services	F.43

Mayor’s Office of Community Affairs	F.44
Civic Academies/ Resident Government Training.....	F.44
CASE STUDY REFERENCES	F.45

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1. Scope of Work: 9 tasks and 9 sub-tasks	4
Table 2. Estimated Budget for Eight Recommendations	14
Table 3. 8 major recommendations compared to 8 tasks by recommended order of implementation.....	16
Table 4. Summary of Interview Types	22
Table 5. Demographics represented in interviews and listening session	23
Table 6. RNO Electronic Survey responses by geographies (zip codes, council districts, and statistical arewas)	26
Table 7. Other home neighborhoods identified by survey respondents.	27
Table 8. Demographics of Listening Session Participants compared to Denver	33
Table 9. Demographic comparison of RNOs that responded or didn't respond to the survey, by Census Block Group	47
Table 10. HRCP Offices, Budget, and Personnel from 2015 to 2023.....	55
Table 11. Summary of Problems and Recommendations for Small Grant Programs to Nonprofits.....	58
Table 12. Technology Services Divisions, Budget, and Staffing 2017 to 2023	62
Table 13. General Fund Expenditures by Department 2017 to 2023 (in millions).....	62
Table 14. Survey respondents' satisfaction with customer service	71
Table 15. Identified engagement efforts during the study	76
Table 16. Comparison Cities Studied for Community Engagement Offices, Neighborhood Organizations, Constituent Services, and Civic Education	78
Table 17. Comparison of city case studies by grants and other funding, paid liaisons, and civic education training	81

Table 18. Case study systems of 311 and online services	85
Table 19. City Council members' thoughts on supports for RNOs	98
Table 20. Study survey response to: Should the City provide more organizational and/or funding support for neighborhood groups or organizations?	101

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Depiction of a Coordinated Engagement and Constituent Services Ecosystem based on the 8 Recommendations 15

Figure 2. Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of Engagement with citizens..... 18

Figure 3. Demographics of Survey Responses 24

Figure 4. 115 RNOs examined in the Landscape Analysis..... 28

Figure 5. RNO Density by Block Group and Council District 30

Figure 6. Flyer for listening session (provided in English and Spanish).. 32

Figure 7. Groups represented by listening session participants. 33

Figure 8. 2020 Survey responses to “What role does your RNO serve?” 37

Figure 9. 2020 Survey responses to “How does your RNO communicate information received from the city?” 37

Figure 10. Photo of 2018 RNO meeting hosted by CHUN RNO, reported by the Denverite..... 38

Figure 11. Top Priorities of RNOs in Fall 2022 Survey..... 44

Figure 12. RNO Meeting Frequency for 86 RNOs with available meeting information 46

Figure 13. RNO Meetings we were able to attend Fall 2022 47

Figure 14. 50 RNOs identified by RNO survey respondents..... 48

Figure 15. 190 RNOs as of July 2022..... 48

Figure 16. Results for public participation question on 2022 NRC survey 51

Figure 17. Response to survey question on the effectiveness of City’s community engagement 52

Figure 18. HRCP’s Office of Storytelling website, “I am Denver” 55

Figure 19. Denver resident pathways for constituent service 64

Figure 20. Differentiation between Customer/Constituent Services and Community/Public Engagement..... 65

Figure 21. Impressions of Denver Customer Service 2014 to 2022, NRC 69

Figure 22. Example of trying to find information on a street closure 74

Figure 23. Matrix of 8 Recommendations by Topic Area to 9 Major Tasks 90

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CASR: Department of Climate Adaptation Sustainability and Resiliency

DPL: Denver Public Library

CPD: Community Planning and Development

DDPHE: Denver Department of Public Health & Environment

DNCO: Denver Neighborhood & Community Organizations

DOTI: Department of Transportation & Infrastructure

HOST: Department of Housing Opportunity & Stability

HRCP: Human Rights and Community Partnerships

INC: Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (nonprofit organization representing RNOs citywide)

NEST: Neighborhood Equity and Stabilization

NST: Neighborhood Support Teams

OCE: Office of Community Engagement

RNO: Registered Neighborhood organization

TS: Department of Technology Services

INTRODUCTION

This study was funded and sponsored by the Agency of Human Rights and Community Partnerships and the Mayor's Office within the City of Denver. It was conducted from July 2022 through August 2023 using an extensive set of methods to fully understand the existing systems and explore the best possible set of recommendations given the resources and time frame for the study. **Throughout, equity was an overarching guide and goal for the study's approach and recommendations.**

Study Goal and Vision

The goal and vision for the study were outlined in the scope of work as follows.

Study Goal:

"provide recommendations that can be used for action toward improving community engagement by the City and County of Denver".

Study Vision:

"identify opportunities for programming and building structural improvements into community engagement practices. The final report will offer recommendations that encompasses the work of all the city agencies in their effort to increase the community's knowledge of city government, and to develop community partnerships in policy making and programming."

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the time and effort of the City staff in the Mayor's Office, HRCP, and the City Council. Tracy Winchester, the Deputy Chief of Staff to the Mayor, Derek Okubo, Executive Director of HRCP, and Councilman Paul Kashmann, District 6, provided crucial support, input, connections, and feedback.

Research team

Core research team

The study was conducted by a core team of researchers in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Colorado Denver led by the principal investigator Dr. Carrie Makarewicz. Additional team members included three doctoral students in the Geography, Planning & Design program, six graduate students in the Master of Urban and Regional Planning program. Additionally, a Professional Research Assistant with a Master's in Public Health provided research on components of the final study. Some of the students' hours were funded by the CU Denver Community Collaborative Research Center and the Principal Investigator.

Coordination with Graduate Planning Engagement Course

In addition to the paid graduate student researchers on the team, the project benefitted from research conducted by four additional graduate students in the MURP program who were enrolled in a Planning Engagement course in Fall 2022. One of the research assistants on the core team was also a student in this course. Through the study, we hired an additional doctoral student to co-teach the course so that the course could work with the study team to co-design data collection activities that served as two meaningful and relevant assignments for the course.

For the first assignment, each student assisted with the "RNO Landscape Analysis" in which the 10 graduate students each researched 10 RNOs through online searches and, when available, attendance at their meetings. This group of students, along with the research team, were able to study 115 of the 190 RNOs.

The second assignment was the co-design and facilitation of a community listening session at the Carla Madison Recreation Center with members of small nonprofits who serve diverse and often

marginalized communities and populations, such as nonprofits in NEST neighborhoods, and those who serve people experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities, people who identify as LGBTQ+, residents of public and affordable housing, including affordable housing for Native Americans, people who are recent immigrants and refugees.

Research Team

Principal Investigator

The principal investigator, Dr. Carrie Makarewicz, is an associate professor of urban and regional planning where she is Chair of the Department. She has been at CU Denver for 10 years. She received a PhD in City and Regional Planning from the University of California, Berkeley in 2013, a Master's in Urban Planning and Public Affairs from the University of Illinois-Chicago in 2001, and a Bachelor of Business Administration, with a concentration in Computer Information Systems from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in 1994. She has extensive work experience in the private, nonprofit, and public sectors, in addition to her academic career. From 1994 to 1999 she was a change management consultant for Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) where she specialized in developing training and implementation approaches for enterprise-wide Business Management and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Systems, such as PeopleSoft and Siebel Systems. In Chicago she worked for the City of Chicago's budget and planning departments, and for two planning-related nonprofits, the Metropolitan Planning Council, and the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT). She was a planner and research analyst at CNT for six years where she led the development of the Housing & Transportation Affordability Index, a tool to measure, communicate, and advocate for lower combined housing and transportation costs as a strategy to reduce the costs of living while promoting more equitable, sustainable, and integrated communities. She also managed the center's partnership in the Center for Transit Oriented Development, a national organization to protect and promote affordable housing and a range of services and other uses near the nation's fixed rail transit stations. In Denver, she has

worked with nonprofits, neighborhood organizations, and government agencies on issues related to affordable housing, public transportation, sustainable development, flood recovery, manufactured housing parks, equity in arts and music organizations, and school closures.

Graduate Research Assistants

The 15 current and recent graduate students hired for the project have varied backgrounds with grassroots organizations, local and national organizations, and private firms. The additional five students who contributed research for the project through two major course assignments have similar rich backgrounds that provided significant amounts of data for the project.

Project Budget

The contract was for \$52,500 broken out as follows.

Expense	Amount
University materials, supplies, space, equipment	18%
Faculty time paid to university to cover teaching	25%
Listening Session on 11/11 (food, translation, participate compensation)	3%
Additional instructor for planning engagement course	12%
Graduate Student hours	39%
Total funded by city contract	100%
Additional faculty and graduate research assistant hours were funded or donated by the PI and the Community Collaborative Research Center (CCRC), a new research center on the CU Denver campus to support community engaged research, www.ccrccolorado.org .	150%

Scope of Work

The Scope of Work was broken into the following three parts, which each had three to four tasks each, see Table 1.

Part One. Evaluate the system of **Registered Neighborhood**

Organizations (RNOs), including their effectiveness, the ordinance that stipulates their eligibility and requirements, and the training needs of RNOs, including their leaders, and all residents to run successful community-engaged neighborhood organizations, and to better understand the laws, policies, processes, and operations of local government.

Part Two. Using an equity lens, study the **community engagement, forming, and granting activities of city agencies**, especially residents in underserved communities, and make recommendations for informing residents of City activities, engaging residents in the formation of city policy, and formulating grant programs that support nonprofits involved in community engagement work.

Part Three. Study the delivery of **constituent services programs and technologies**, including 311 and pocketgov, the City's website, other communications vehicles, and the system of communication between the HRCP Boards and Communications and the Mayor's Office.

The following table lists the full scope of work with detailed tasks. Note the tasks were modified to reduce redundancies across the three parts and to ensure equity was centered in all tasks. The full and original scope of work is in Appendix A.

Table 1. Scope of Work: 9 tasks and 9 sub-tasks

ALL RECOMMENDATIONS THAT THE CONTRACTOR PROVIDES MUST BE VIEWED THROUGH AN EQUITY LENS WITH AN EMPHASIS ON HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES		
One. Evaluate Registered Neighborhood Organizations (RNOs)	Two. Study Community Engagement, Informing, and Granting	Three. The Delivery of Constituent Services
1.1 Provide a full assessment of the RNO program including but not limited to – their effectiveness in: a) Providing notice as primary function. b) acting as a two-way conduit of information sharing with City. b) Engaging their constituents with information to share with City. c) Understanding of and knowledge toward navigating the operations of the different City agencies & departments. 1.2 Review RNO ordinance and propose an approach/ scope for how to update the ordinance and/or recommendations for updating the language. a) Confirm the intent and purpose of RNOs and review current definition b) Update the eligibility requirements for RNOs to ensure they reflect current practices and trends in communications, community engagement, public participation, and inclusivity. c) Create or make recommendations for RNO rules enforcement and due process to address conflicts/complaints. 1.3 Recommendations of an ongoing education initiative to give residents – especially RNO officers –an understanding of city structure and operations.	2.1 Provide a full assessment and recommendations of how to best <i>inform</i> residents of what is going on in city government. a) Determine whether there are technological tools that would allow the city to expand how notices are distributed beyond the current RNO system. b) Recommend [other] resources to identify and increase the volume of information pushed out to communities. (was 3.5) 2.2 Conduct a full assessment with recommendations of how best to <i>engage</i> residents, especially underserved communities, in the formation of city policy. Include recommendations on a city-wide framework and guidance for effective engagement and outreach. (was 3.1) 2.3 Recommendations of effective grant programs and partnerships where funds are provided to non-profit organizations engaged in community building work.	1) Recommend how to reframe 311 funds for customer service, community navigators, and translation services. 2) Recommend processes to identify, improve, and track the timelines for responses to constituent requests. 3) Define expectations on a process by which the Mayor's Office can regularly report to the HRCP commissions regarding how their input was considered and used in decision-making & policy.

Some items were moved from Part Three and combined with tasks in Part Two due to overlapping questions, research methods, and stated outcomes.

Summary Approach

The initial phase of this work required an in-depth understanding of the current processes, and other existing conditions, in each of the three study areas. Thus, we conducted extensive background research through multiple sources.

Study principles

- Develop a thorough understanding of what the City, RNOs, and nonprofits ***are doing***, before recommending what they ***should or could be doing***.
- Seek **multiple perspectives**, inside and outside of City Administration & Council, with an emphasis on **equity**.
- Provide **anonymity and confidentiality** to allow for open and honest responses.
- **Triangulate** multiple sources of data to validate findings, to the extent possible given project budget, time, and other resources.

Study timeframe

The contract was executed on July 1, 2023. The original timeline specified the RNO portion was to be completed by August 31, and the Community Engagement and Constituent Services components were to be finished by December 31. The PI began the work in early July 2022, and brought students onto the project in mid-August at the start of the fall semester. The team designed some of the strategic data gathering activities, including interviews of each city council member, key informant interviews at the City of Denver, the nonprofit listening session, the RNO landscape analysis, RNO meeting attendance, RNO/resident survey, HRCF meeting attendance, and case study selection to be complete by early November in order to complete the study by December 31st.

The initial rush resulted in a somewhat poorly designed and planned survey, although we gathered over 2000 comments, in addition to closed-ended responses, and fewer groups at the listening session than

we desired. To make up for the initial activities that resulted in rich data, but not enough, we extended the study to do more outreach through interviews, meeting attendance, and other activities.

One of the most time-consuming activities was setting up, conducting, transcribing, and coding the interviews. When individuals could not attend the listening session, I asked if they would be open to an interview instead and several agreed. From there, the PI and team members continued to reach out to people and to attend their meetings to learn more about each task.

Likewise, once we started the city agency interviews it became apparent, we could not limit it to the largest agencies who provide constituent services and engagement with the public, e.g., Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, Community Planning and Development, Parks and Recreation, and Technology Services. Further, there was no comprehensive list of people in the city who do marketing, communications, public information dissemination, and engagement. Using an internal HR titles list, the city contact identified potentially 185 people. Thus, we started on the list and then searched for the right individuals across as many agencies that seemed relevant, or that other people recommended.

Study methods

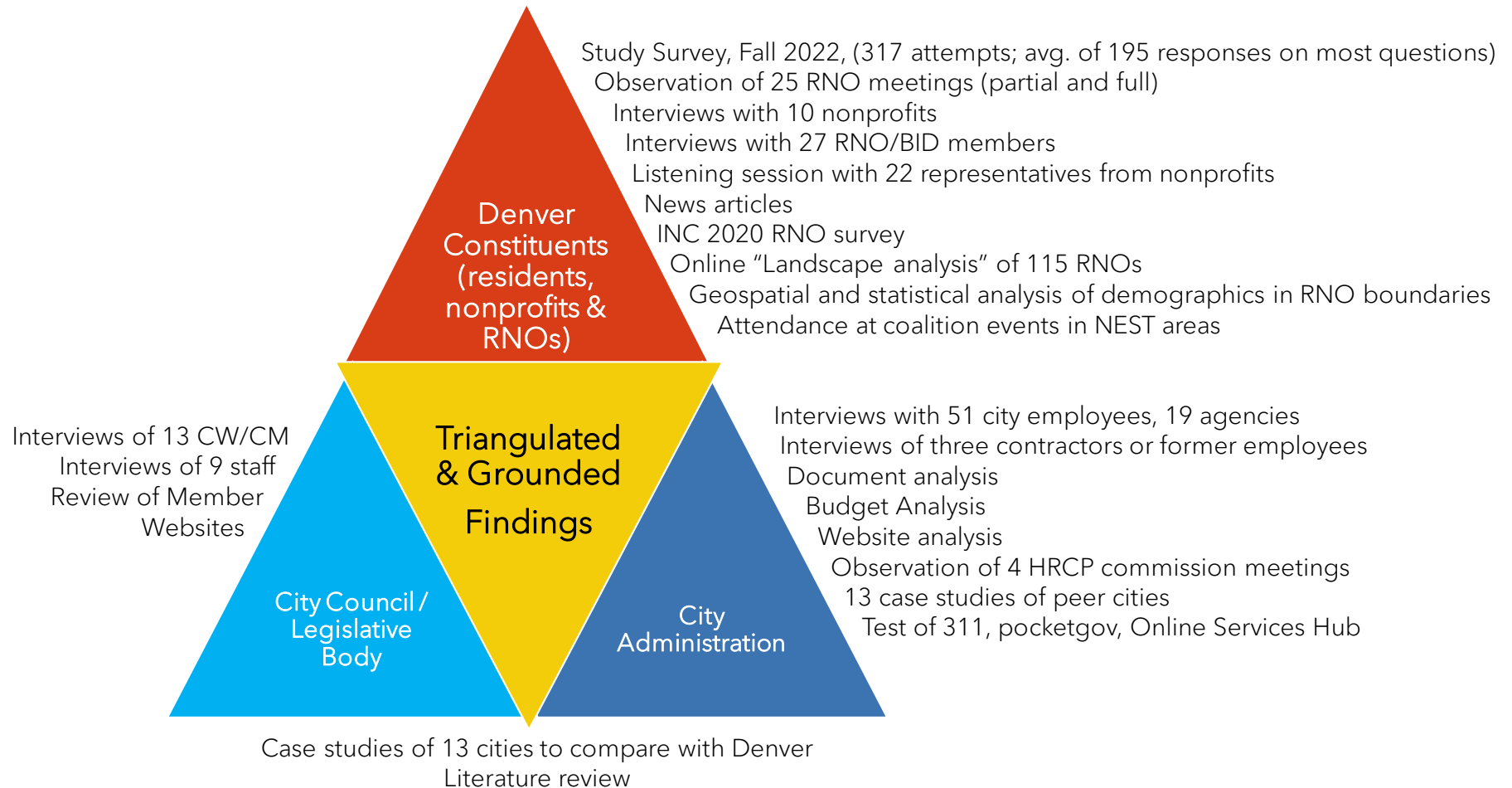
As noted, we used several different methods, from an online survey to a small listening session with nonprofits, to meeting observation, and 120 formal and informal interviews and conversations with 144 individuals.

- A two hour listening session with 22 representatives of nonprofits representing diverse communities and often marginalized and minoritized populations, including people of color (Black, African American, Asian Pacific Islander and Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latino, multi-racial), people who identify as LGBTQ+, people experiencing homelessness, people and businesses in NEST neighborhoods, artists, displaced peoples, Native Americans,

residents of public housing, people with disabilities, and people recovering from substance misuse.

- 144 formal and informal semi-structured interviews and conversations with all council members, community members, RNO members, nonprofit employees and leaders, and city staff.
- a citywide survey of RNOs (317 initial responses; 195 on average for other closed ended questions),
- GIS and statistical analysis of RNOs in comparison to the census,
- a RNO Landscape Analysis of the characteristics of 115 RNOs via the internet and meeting attendance
- attendance at 25 RNO meetings (from 10 minutes to full meeting),
- attendance at other community meetings, including GES Climate Summit, INC constituent meeting, YIMBY Denver, Ulibarri Park Naming, GES Climate Fiesta, and others.
- attendance at four HRCP commission meetings via Zoom, and
- case studies of 13 other cities, including 13 interviews.

Figure 1. Triangulation of Study Methods



Summary Findings

When we started this study, several of the tasks seem disparate, ranging from recommended response times and metrics for constituent services (which is a nearly endless list of services, ranging from stop sign requests, to missing trash cans, illegally parked semi-trucks, and hundreds of other items), to defining a process and expectations for the Mayor's Office to report to HRCP Commissions on how they're input was used, to identification of technologies and methods to push out greater volumes of information to all residents, to recommendations for training residents on how city government works, to designing an enforcement process for RNO rules and regulations, among other tasks.

As we interviewed people within the city and across neighborhoods, we began to see connections across the tasks, with the main connection being city-resident interactions and urban governance. These interactions can be through resident requests for services, public engagement processes on a long-term planning, resident participation on boards, commissions, and task forces, and online surveys about resident satisfaction. The sum of these touchpoints involves thousands of residents and city staff. They can also promote -- or erode -- mutual respect, trust, and understanding between residents and government.

Good systems of urban governance can help ensure these interactions are positive and productive. If monitored, evaluated, tracked, and continuously improved, resident-government interactions can lead to better input into decision making processes, and therefore, better outcomes. Under the umbrella of urban governance, we identified several broad findings across the tasks that helped to inform our recommendations. More detailed findings are in the "Findings and Recommendations" section of this report.

Six Major Themes

1. Consistency in problem identification and solutions

First, there was a remarkable level of consistency in problem identification and potential solutions across the various groups we interviewed in relation to community engagement, constituent services, and the RNO system. For instance, people who are internal and external to the City, alike, identified the City silos within and across agencies as a major problem for all types of city-resident interactions. Similarly, individuals from nonprofits, RNOs, and city agencies identified very similar lists of resources that would improve public engagement. Numerous individuals recognized the same issues with the existing RNO system, including City staff, City Council members, and long-time leaders of active RNOs. Nonprofits noted similar problems in partnering with or receiving grants from the City.

2. Passion and hope for improvements in the three study areas

Second, most interviewees were both passionate and hopeful about the outcomes from this study. They look forward to its outcomes and hope the recommendations will support the City's ability to provide better constituent services and to foster more meaningful, productive, and representative engagement processes that lead to mutually desired outcomes.

3. Actions to improve all three areas are underway

Third, because of the first two, it is not surprising that people within and outside the City are already taking many corrective actions toward some of the problems we were asked to study. These activities are in various stages, from early discussion, to planning, and implementation. Some of these actions include hiring additional engagement staff in large city agencies, developing department community engagement guides, developing methods to expand representation and diversity within RNOs, and creating civic engagement videos and workshops.

4. Changes require resources: human, capital, and operational

Fourth, the changes desired and needed across the urban governance spectrum will take more resources, both financial and human, and will need to come from the City, and possibly other sources, such as foundations. Most acknowledge the City currently lacks adequate staff and funding to deliver the high-quality customer services and engagement activities that most of the city staff, city council, nonprofit staff, and individual residents know are needed. Technology Services is understaffed and underfunded, project managers in large agencies are trying to juggle complex projects along with engagement, and delays in the provision of city services will not be reduced until large departments, especially the Department of Transportation & Infrastructure, are fully staffed.

5. There is no single solution: the City needs a comprehensive and multi-pronged urban governance strategy

Fifth, no single solution will resolve or improve the issues we were asked to study. Simply doing any one of these activities; creating an Office of Community Engagement, hiring more navigators, delisting certain RNOs, or purchasing new engagement tools or software, will not solve the many issues and needs we identified. We make eight recommendations that will have the greatest impact if implemented jointly or in phases.

6. Customer Service and community engagement are not the same, but they are related

Sixth, it is important to keep in mind that customer or constituent service and public engagement are different, though they are related. Improving ways for residents to obtain information or to contact the City about service needs is not the same as engaging residents in policymaking, planning, and other decision processes. At the same time, if one is not done well, it can affect the other. If residents are dissatisfied with city services, they may be less likely to engage. Likewise, if a resident engages in a terrific engagement process to

improve a city program or facility, but they do not see the result of their input, they may be less likely to engage in the future or to trust the City.

Study Limitations

Study scope

The scope of work was substantial. Each of the three components required multiple methods and time to understand the current state of each issue: RNO practices and effectiveness, community engagement practices, and improvements to city services. Within the City and City Council, we needed to identify the people and agencies involved, relevant reports and policies, current roles, responsibilities and procedures, related ordinances, software applications and their uses and users, budget constraints, etc. Further, there are 31 city agencies, including multiple offices and divisions within them, and 11,000 city employees.

Within the city of Denver, there were many more units of analysis and variations, including 78 statistical areas, 11 geographic council districts, and 190 RNOs, not to mention hundreds of nonprofits, 715,000 residents, and so on.

Study Resources

Given the expansiveness of the three topics, and the numerous perspectives on them, we do not claim to have captured every possible voice we needed to hear and wish we could have heard even more. Since it was impossible to survey or interview every possible person across the relevant units of analysis listed above, we purposefully sampled from as many of the entities or geographies as possible to ensure we were holistic in our investigation and had sufficient variation in our sample.

Through this mixed-methods approach and the large number of team members reaching out to various groups, we feel confident that we achieved sufficient saturation to make our recommendations, if not to fully solve each problem. In qualitative research, the researcher looks for difference until they start to hear too much repetition. As they go through the data gathering process, when answers begin to repeat and

there are few differences and little to no new information among the responses, the researcher believes they have gathered sufficient data to summarize a range of perspectives. This does not mean they have heard from multiple people for each perspective, or that they have identified all the potential differences. Instead, given the time and other resources, they have identified a sufficient level of both difference and repetition to provide validity and reliability, i.e., *‘does it make sense, and can I trust the information?’*.

Thus, the goal was not to reach out to everyone, but to gather enough information from different groups to inform a set of recommendations that will start the City, its residents, and nonprofits on a path forward toward better community engagement practices with informed resident participation and active and successful nonprofits that can partner with the City and residents to address resident needs and improve urban governance.

Implementing the recommendations

Going forward, additional people should be involved in the review, refinement, and implementation of our recommendations, should they be acted upon.

Due to the importance of finishing this report for the 2024 budget, we have not included all the background data that went into this report. We will provide an additional technical appendix for certain items, upon request.

Recommendations Overview

Based on our findings, we developed a set of eight major recommendations. Although the study delineated three parts with nine separate tasks, many of the issues we were asked to study shared the same root problems. Thus, several of the tasks can be solved by the same recommendations, and therefore, we do not offer a 1:1 relationship between each task and recommendation. We do, however, describe how each recommendation addresses the relevant tasks in the “Findings and Recommendations by Task” section. Further, several recommendations are contingent on the others and would not be effective or possible without the other recommendations.

For tasks in which the scope of work requested a framework for decision making and implementation, we propose alternative structures to consider, and methods for selecting and defining the final structure, procedures, timeline, and stakeholders based on the City’s staffing, budgets, timing, other resources, and input from multiple groups. Interdisciplinary planning and implementation teams should engage a set of city residents and organizations who represent a diverse range of characteristics, including racial and economic demographics, services or focuses, organizational size and budget, and geographic area, and among other characteristics. These teams should also include multiple city agencies, including middle managers, project managers, and staff who primarily work within the community, and members of city council, including council members, council aides, and central office staff. These interdisciplinary teams should also engage members of boards or commissions, especially the 10 HRCF Commissions. Since commission members, nonprofit staff, and residents would be doing this on top of their other work and responsibilities, they should be paid for their involvement in this important work.

As the main purpose of this study is community engagement, the overarching objective for the following collection of recommendations is to design and implement a more cohesive constituent services and community engagement system and network. An *engagement system and network*, facilitated by a new Office of Community Engagement,

would improve internal communication within and across city agencies, connect the engagement efforts of the City with those of the City Council, and ultimately expand the City’s external outreach to more residents, community groups, nonprofits, and businesses.

The following page provides an overview of the 8 major recommendations.

#1. Notifications for all.

Allow all residents and businesses to opt-in to receive or search notifications currently restricted to RNOs. They should be searchable by geography, type, and date. There was strong support for this recommendation from 11 of 13 City Council members and nearly all the City staff, though some had concerns about the technology necessary to send or allow an opt-in service. One member felt residents already had the ability to get this information; they could file a CORA, search the city’s website, or join or become an RNO. The other thought it wasn’t necessary to send all city residents each proposed zoning change. On the latter, with an opt-in process, the City wouldn’t be emailing all residents the notifications. Those who wanted them could request them without having to find a functioning RNO who would send them or would they have to pay an RNO member fee.

Already, Technology Services (TS) and Community Planning & Development (CPD) are working on a small-scale version for some planning notifications that would be searchable on the City’s website. This recommendation will be most effective with Recommendations Two, Three, and Four, creating a two-tier RNO system, creating an Office of Community Engagement, and creating Neighborhood Support Teams.

#2. Create a two-tier system of neighborhood organizations.

RNOs will be accountable to the original intent and DNCOs can organize for other purposes.

Many Denver residents and council members believe in and support the RNO system. At the same time, some of these same supporters recognize its current failures, challenges, and limits. There is also a spectrum of the reasons people participate in RNOs. For some, it is the community building aspect. Others are committed to providing two-way communications between the City and residents, and ensuring residents have a voice in City decisions. The different groups would benefit from alternative ways to manage and participate in neighborhood activities. We recommend a two-tier system with the first tier serving the original intent of the 1979 ordinance that established RNOs, and the second tier would operate as optional Denver Neighborhood [or Community] Organizations (DNOs or DCOs). We hereinafter refer to them as DNCOs recognizing some groups are neighborhood based while others represent communities of people of geographies that are not tied to a specific neighborhood.

Along with the two tiers, the RNOs need more support to carry out the required functions, including training, material support, and technical assistance provided by paid City staff. To provide these supports, we recommend the expansion of the existing Office of Neighborhood Engagement within HRCP and the creation of a system of Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs) that mostly relies on existing 311 staff working in conjunction with engagement specialists across the agencies and within HRCP (see Recommendations 3 and 4).

#3. Create an Office of Community Engagement (OCE) in HRCP to coordinate an engagement system and elevate HRCP's related work.

Through our interviews We heard strong support from City Council and city staff. From Council, 11 of the 13 members were in favor, and among the 51 City staff, 43 staff from 15 different agencies were in favor, five were maybe or unsure, and only three were opposed, although others in their two agencies were in favor.

The opposition or hesitancy to an OCE fell into three areas: 1) costs of a new office are not necessary; the needed coordination and assistance

with things like flyers could be handled through existing channels and public facing entities, e.g., libraries; 2) agencies will not give up their engagement activities or “fiefdoms” so this office would not be able to foster collaboration; and 3) agencies know best what they need to do for engagement. Thus, we have attempted to address these critiques in our recommendation.

This office would coordinate, support, guide, and help to improve engagement activities across the city agencies and city council. It would also support the newly restructured RNOs and, to a lesser extent, the DCNOs. It should not be a top-down directive office, a punitive monitoring agency, or replace engagement activities other agencies and council districts do for their projects and programs. Instead, it should be a supportive resource for engagement and constructive feedback. It could perform engagement audits to encourage continuous improvement.

The OCE should also work to promote and elevate the other important work of other offices within HRCP. To achieve these aims, the OCE must have adequate budget and staff to promote a learning and sharing network of engagement professionals across the city agencies, and to partner on engagement activities with nonprofits and individuals throughout Denver. Its location in HRCP provides direct access to, and coordination with other relevant offices, including the Office of Nonprofit Engagement, the Division of Disability Rights, Office of Language Services, Office of Financial Empowerment, Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs, Office of Storytelling, and Office on Aging. It can also tap into the expertise of the members of the 10 HRCP Commissions, which have been underutilized, especially for reaching out to the groups they represent.

This office can also help to define the process for interactions between the Mayor's Office and the 10 commissions, including how often the mayor interacts with the commissions, and how the mayor reports use of their input. There should be an effort to expand this agency and these commissions' involvement in other equity issues in the City. For

instance, HRCF could be a Referral Agency for developments that require an equity analysis during Planning Board review.

#4. Create a network of 22 Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs) for RNOs, DNCOs, and non-profits using existing knowledge, training, and staff from 311 and other agencies.

The 22 Neighborhood Support Teams is to allow for two teams for each of the 11 geographic council districts. We propose staffing them with existing city staff from 311. The new staff in the proposed Office of Community Engagement would manage and coordinate the teams and the teams would coordinate with engagement specialists in the other city agencies and with the City Council Aides. To provide the supports nonprofits, RNOs, city council members, and others we surveyed or interviewed requested, there need to be semi-dedicated staff at the City whom these individuals or groups can contact with their questions and requests for logistical and other assistance.

Because budget or cost was another issue raised by interviewees, the NST positions are not intended to be full-time jobs unless the work demands it. Their purpose is to become experts in a subset of the city's neighborhoods in order to provide support to neighborhood groups in their focus areas, including RNOs, DNCOs, small nonprofits, and others, for meetings, events, outreach, questions about city projects in their neighborhoods, civic training, etc. The 311 agents are already knowledgeable about the city agencies and processes and have access to the Salesforce Knowledge base and other resources to help answer questions. Some agents have also tabled at public events for major city projects, such as the 16th street mall. Several of the other cities in our case study research had staff dedicated to neighborhoods, such as Neighborhood Empowerment Advocates in Los Angeles, Neighborhood Specialists in Minneapolis, Community Coordinators in Seattle, and Community Engagement Representatives in Washington, D.C.

#5. Increase Technology Service's budget to hire Salesforce experts, improve the website, and create Service Level Agreement dashboards.

There was widespread agreement in our interviews that TS was understaffed and underfunded. This is hurting the continued use, rollout, training, and monitoring of the Salesforce software products, both Service Cloud and Marketing Cloud. Expanded staff could achieve a true Enterprise Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, allowing for coordination, efficiency, and effective outreach and case management. Additional staff can also work with each agency to establish and regularly report on SLAs for all primary constituent services, and to solve the "ticket closed" issue.

#6. Provide new grants and partnership opportunities to increase nonprofit capacity and extend the City's reach beyond its agencies.

Grants should be targeted to nonprofits that are able to do community outreach, training, and engagement with the City, including eligible RNOs, if given adequate support, both financial and technical. The grants could be jointly administered by the Office of Community Engagement and the Office of Nonprofit Engagement, both within HRCF, and coordinated with the grants in DEDO's NEST division. DHS, DDPHE, and Children's Affairs also partner with nonprofits and have important experience to share with these agencies.

#7. Create a Civic Education and Training program building on existing initiatives in Denver Marketing and Media Services, City Council, and other agencies.

When interviewees were asked if RNOs and residents could benefit from training -- whether small online videos or in-person courses, and about how city government works, or ways to run effective meetings -- the answer was generally a resounding "yes!". RNOs, nonprofits, city staff, and City Council members, aides, and staff, agreed training would be extremely useful. To that end, there are many efforts underway in City Council and the City agencies. INC has also provided some RNO

training and workshops for many years. Several of the 13 case studies also provide training which could provide useful examples for content and delivery mechanisms.

#8. Increase department budgets to fund additional engagement specialists to work with subject matter experts and project managers.

Many of the city staff we interviewed who are tasked with being their agency's marketing specialist, web author, and communications lead would greatly welcome engagement specialists. Managing communications while trying to do engagement is beyond their capacity. Likewise, project managers working to implement complex city projects and plans also need engagement assistance if they are to do it well. These additional staff should coordinate with other agencies through the proposed Office of Community Engagement but reside in their home departments.

Budget Implications for 8 recommendations

Our recommendations require an estimated \$2,460,000 to implement them. Agencies affected by these recommendations should verify our estimates. Table 2 lists and tallies the cost for each recommendation with a budget need.

Table 2. Estimated Budget for Eight Recommendations

Recommendation	Estimate
#1. Notifications for all: <i>Requires TS staff time.</i>	(see #5)
#2. Create a two-tier system of neighborhood organizations and update the RNO ordinance: <i>Costs for a task force to rewrite the code, define the two tiers, identify the equipment needed, and implement the new registration process.</i>	\$35,000
#3. Create an Office of Community Engagement: <i>New office should have three staff, plus one-time capital costs for meeting and event equipment purchases (for NSTs to loan to RNOs, DCNOs, etc.), and ongoing meeting support costs, e.g., language services, Zoom, childcare, email lists, etc.</i>	\$600,000
#4. Create a network of 22 Neighborhood Support Teams: <i>Staffed by 311 agents who select to split time between the citywide call center and supporting one or more NST areas.</i>	N/A*
#5. Increase TS budget for additional Salesforce experts: <i>Covers about 5 new experts, plus training, recruiting, etc.</i>	\$750,000
#6. Provide new grants and partnership opportunities for nonprofits: <i>Covers 1 additional FTE and \$200,000 for new mini grants program in the pilot year.</i>	\$325,000
#7. Create Civic Education and Training programs for residents and RNOS: <i>Cost for a consultant to support internal experts to continue, expand, and coordinate civic and RNO training.</i>	\$250,000
#8. Increase department budgets for additional engagement staff <i>Covers 3-4 additional engagement specialists for the largest agencies.</i>	\$500,000
Total	\$2,460,000

* Absorbed within 311 budget for proposed staff once vacancies are filled.

Figure 1. Depiction of a Coordinated Engagement and Constituent Services Ecosystem based on the 8 Recommendations

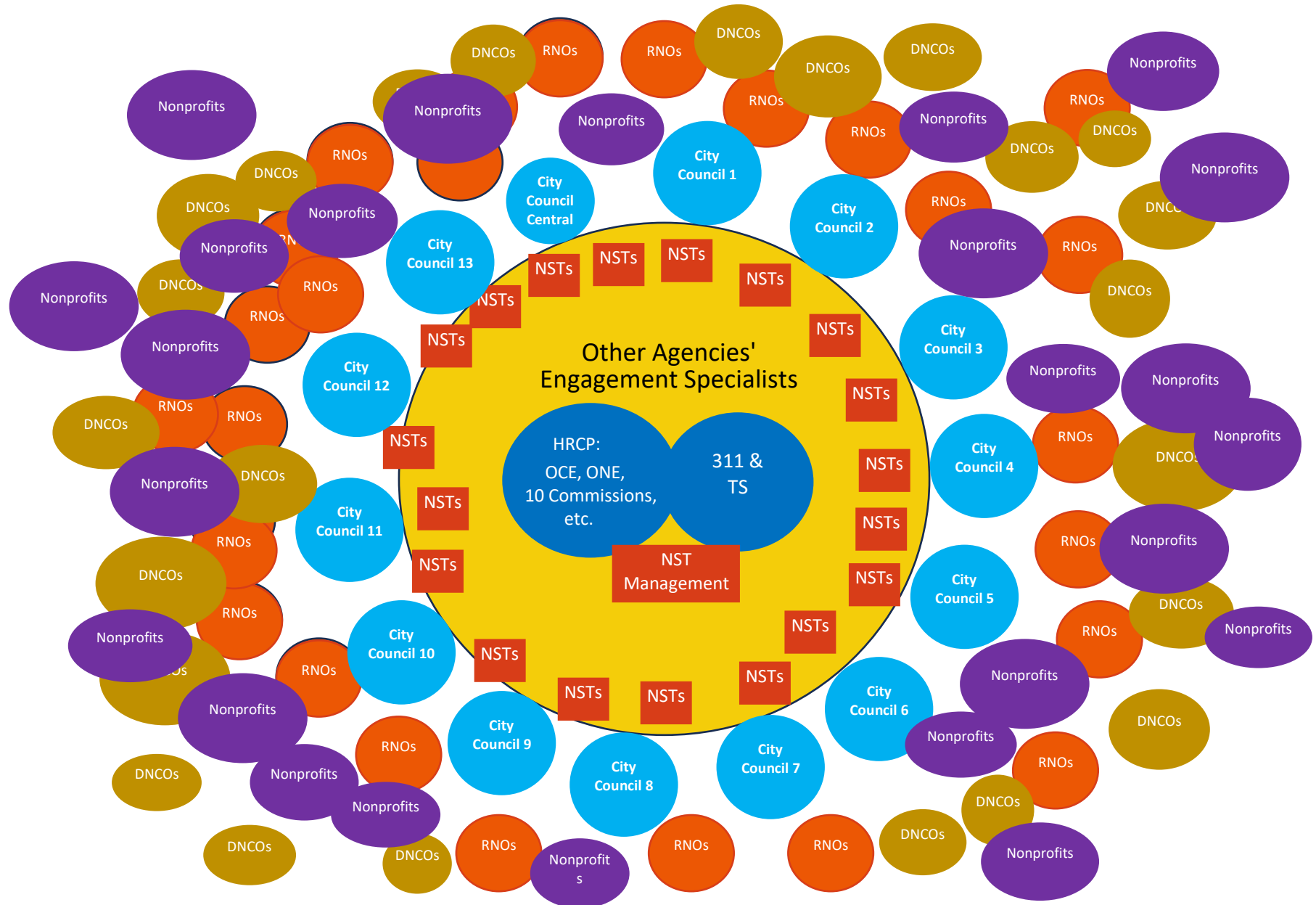


Table 3. 8 major recommendations compared to 8 tasks by recommended order of implementation.

	EQUITY IS EMBEDDED IN EACH RECOMMENDATION							
	RNO System			Community Engagement				Constituent Services
	#4. Create Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs) with paid staff and equipment	#2. Create a two-tier RNO/DNCO system with accountability and supports	#1. All residents and businesses can receive or search notifications	#7. Create Civic Education & Training Programs with Denver 8, TS, Storytelling, and City Council	#6. Create new grant programs for nonprofits and eligible RNOs	#3. Create HRCP Office of Community Engagement to coordinate and support engagement and elevate HRCP's relate work	#8. Increase department budgets for additional engagement staff	#5. Increase TS budget for 311, Salesforce staff, websites, and reporting
1.2 Approach to RNO Ordinance & effectiveness	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
1.3 Civic Education for RNOs, residents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.1 Tools, practices to inform residents & increase info.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.2 Best practices to engage residents, esp. underserved	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.3 Grant programs and partnerships	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
3.1 311 reframe with navigators and translation services	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
3.2 Response times for constituent services						✓		✓
3.3 Mayor's Office reporting process to HRCP Commissions						✓		

LITERATURE REVIEW

The three parts of the study fall within several bodies of literature encompassing different aspects of public administration, public policy, and city planning, all of which include public participation in local government. A unifying umbrella across these fields is urban governance.

With Denver's dramatic growth over the last two decades – by more than 156,000 since the year 2000, it's to be expected that the City would be struggling with many of these governance issues. The city has changed from this growth, in numerous ways, and change and adaptation is often difficult for incumbent residents. New residents also bring new ideas and expectations, which can clash with existing ways of doing things. The following provides a summary of the research related to the study's three main topic areas: registered neighborhood organizations, community engagement, and constituent services.

Increasing importance of urban governance

Urban governance has emerged as a critical field of study in the face of rapid urbanization and the increasing complexity of urban environments. Recognizing the importance of including residents in decision-making, public participation and public engagement are major movements within the re-shaping of modern urban policies and programs (da Cruz et al., 2019; Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010).

Public participation is viewed as a means to enhance transparency, accountability, and legitimacy in urban governance, while also fostering community empowerment and social cohesion (Gough & Reece, 2017; *How Public Engagement Produces More Accountable and Effective Government*, n.d.). Public participation can take several forms, including public meetings, focus groups and surveys, cultural asset mapping, e-participation, and more (Iroz-Elardo et al., 2021; *Storytelling as Authentic Engagement*, n.d.).

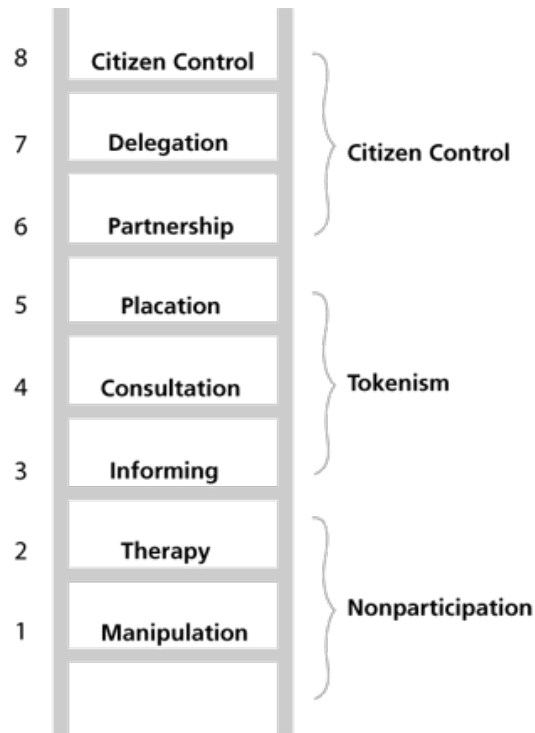
Likewise, urban governance also needs equitable and efficient constituent services that are responsive to residents' expectations and requests. Beginning with communication from residents, followed by responsive action from city government, residents' respect and trust for government can be maintained and thus be positioned to more enthusiastic engagement in other municipal infrastructure development processes, including parks, bike lanes, libraries, composting, electrification, and other new city services (Bone, 2013). In other cases, when trust for local government is not fostered through effective, efficient, and reliable responsive action to constituent service requests, residents may be less likely to participate in future municipal engagement processes (Brown & Higgins, 2021).

Authentic public participation

Throughout the decades, since Sherry Arnstein wrote her famous 1969 article, "*Ladder of Citizen Participation*" (Arnstein, 1969) (Figure 1), residents and governments alike have sought to better define how they are actually engaging residents. Are they on the lowest non-participation rungs of manipulation and therapy, the middle rungs of tokenism, that are mostly about informing, consulting, and placating, or the highest rungs in which citizens have degrees of power through partnership, delegated power, and citizen control?

Since then, others have recognized that public participation needs to vary, depending on the project. While manipulation, therapy, and placation are never good practices, in some cases the government only needs to inform and consult, since partnership, and beyond, is not possible for every administrative decision. Further, residents who have garnered power through wealth, knowledge, social networks, and other systems of structural biases, will coopt the system if they have too much control in policies intended to produce equitable outcomes for historically disadvantaged communities.

Figure 2. Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Engagement with citizens



Arnstein's Ladder (1969)
Degrees of Citizen Participation

What is public engagement?

At a minimum: It's public input on administrative decisions through a process that allows resident input to have some impact or influence on a decision (Creighton, 2000).

Ideally: Government seeks and facilitates involvement of those potentially affected, involves them in the design of their participation,

ensures participation is accessible (in multiple ways), provides necessary information and guidance for meaningful participation, and communicates how their input affected the decision (IAP2, 2000).

Why should the public be engaged?

Policies and regulations of local government are intended to have impact on individuals' lives, yet the outcome of these impacts can often be negative, neutral, or positive (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). These policies and regulations are best informed through a process of democratic participation and inclusion, for which a ready pool of residents who can contribute their expertise and insights to address more complex issues is essential (Tang et al., 2014). This approach not only minimizes future unrest as cities evolve and transform, but also allows for healthy protest, deliberation, and dialogue which equally fosters positive economic, social, and health outcomes (Safaei, 2006). Encouraging citizen engagement enhances their knowledge of existing problems and potential solutions which in turn promotes adaptive climate change (Carvalho et al., 2017). This problem solving can lead to improved policies, plans, and projects that are informed by diverse perspectives, in turn supporting the amplification of social justice which aims to rectify unjust burdens and imbalances. Integral to these diverse perspectives is the inclusion and active participation of oppressed communities (Andrain & Smith, 2006).

Civic engagement and official neighborhood organizations

One specific form of public participation that has gained more mainstream attention (Cusumano, 2020) is the involvement of official neighborhood organizations. In Denver and other cities, they are often named Registered Neighborhood Organizations (RNOs), or the like, to recognize their official status in public processes of their respective city. RNOs are community-based organizations that serve as intermediaries between residents and local government authorities. These organizations are typically established and recognized by municipal

governments to represent the interests of specific neighborhoods or communities, but they can also be self-formed, yet follow the structure and activities set forth by the government through an ordinance or other means.

In the City of Denver, a RNO is defined as a “voluntary group of individual residents and owners of real property, including businesses, within a certain prescribed area of the city, and/or a coalition of such groups formed for the purpose of collectively addressing issues and interests common to and widely perceived throughout the area” (DENVER, CO., ORDINANCES Sec. 12-91. – Legislative intent, Ord. No. 634-00, § 3, 8-14-00; Ord. No. 53-05, § 1, 1-31-05).

Studies have examined the ways in which RNOs (or similar organizations) facilitate resident engagement and advocacy, acting as platforms for residents to share their voices, provide input on local policies, and collaborate with their local government. RNOs have been identified to increase resident participation in local government, improve communications between relevant neighborhood and local government stakeholders, and increase accountability of local officials (Li et al., 2019). Best practice of RNOs encompass:

1. building relationships amongst active stakeholders;
2. respecting cultural differences;
3. communicating through a variety of methods; and,
4. connecting and teaching active members within the organization (Nikrin, 2004).

Yet, research relevant to community organizations and RNOs also highlights challenges and limitations associated with public participation and the role of RNOs. These include issues of inclusivity and representativeness, as certain groups may be excluded or face barriers to participation, including the exclusion of unhoused folks without a permanent address as well as low-income and renter tenants that do not hold long-term housing (Koester, 2016). External organizations, such as nonprofit foundations, have also been identified to catalyze the development of a “neighborhood policy regime” through funding

mechanisms that may determine priorities, goals, and agendas within RNOs (Martin, 2004). Finally, researchers have also pointed the hyper-individualistic priorities set out by RNOs that often supersede the needs and goals of the larger region (Jun, 2013). This sense of individualism and self-sufficiency amongst neighborhood organizations has led to inequity in engagement and outcomes of public participation in some cases (Reiter et al., 2017).

Constituent Services

Constituent services mechanisms provide opportunity for public participation in the minutia of city operations. These constituent services are a form of response and action to the complaints or comments made by individual residents regarding their local urban environment within the city. The services that local government is required to respond to include, but are not limited to: trash collection, park maintenance, pot-hole repair, urban forestry, graffiti removal, among many others (Nam & Pardo, 2014).

As part of the process of delivery of constituent services, residents must be offered the opportunity to communicate their comments towards their local landscape. The pathways for communication from resident to city government are made possible through a variety of pathways including, but not limited to: 311 hotlines, online or app-based communication platforms that allow residents to leave complaints/comments, in-person communication at city halls or other local government physical spaces, as well as resident volunteers on stakeholder committees or task forces where residents can provide direct feedback and opinion to specific projects (Nam & Pardo, 2014; Scott, 2005).

Local residents can also engage through more formal organization structures including volunteering on boards and commissions where residents provide their opinions and feedback to specific departments and purposes, including design review boards related to housing, parks and recreation boards, and many more (Hawkins & Wang, 2012). In

Denver, there are 130 Boards and Commissions. Some are large, well-funded, and established with specific funding, such as the Library Commission. The members of many boards and commissions are mayoral appointees. Research suggests the effectiveness and function of these boards depends on several factors including the mayor's leadership style, the composition of the boards and commissions, the political environment of the city, and how well they are managed. Strong mayor systems of government can also affect how well they function. They should receive clear expectations, regular updates from the mayor and their staff, and requests for input on a regular basis, and appreciation for their service. The two-way communications between voluntary board and commission members and the mayor help to ensure the City is aware of community concerns and that budget and policy priorities are aligned with resident needs.

Information transparency and accountability

In developing best practices for public participation and engagement, monitoring and evaluation of existing policies and priorities are essential (Ammons et al., 2001; Gough & Reece, 2017). It is crucial for local government to maintain and foster trust amongst its constituents, particularly through respectful response to criticisms made by residents (Clark & Veal, 2011; Evans et al., 2018).

The practice of monitoring and evaluation through the auditing of engagement processes is well documented as a critical component to robust engagement (Katsonis, 2019). An audit is a quality improvement process which goes beyond financial issues and incorporates environmental, social, and health related issues. An audit measures performance against pre-determined standards or criteria. Audits are often performed by a third-party organization, providing clarity and mitigating bias. Once the audit is performed and reviewed by the respective department focusing on engagement, the goals and objectives for continued progress and change are made clear allowing for superior accountability (*The Audit Process*, n.d.).

Literature Summary

Overall, research on public engagement, its processes, mechanisms, and tools provide valuable insights into the complexities and potentials of urban governance, from high quality constituent services that promote a high quality of life, as well as trust, respect, and understanding of local government, to transparent and timely public notices, to authentic public engagement processes that truly involve residents in the entire process of local decision making. Understanding the dynamics of citizen engagement, the role of intermediary organizations such as RNOs, boards, and commissions, as well as vehicles and mechanisms for constituent service delivery, and methods to evaluate its performance can all inform the development of more inclusive, responsive, and effective urban governance strategies.

METHODS AND APPROACH

To make the substantive recommendations envisioned for this study, and to ensure they were grounded in the practices and needs of the City and County of Denver we first needed in-depth understanding of the current systems and processes in each of the study parts to investigate relevant frameworks for revision and improvements to them. As such, our research team conducted extensive background research on the existing RNO system, the city's current processes for community engagement, a variety of constituent services, and residents' perceptions of each. We used the following range of methods.

- **An in-person listening session** with 22 representatives from nonprofits representing often marginalized populations and communities on November 12, 2022, at the Carla Madison Rooftop conference space. Our 12 research team members staffed the event, which allowed full coverage at each focus group table.
- **Interviews and informal conversations with approximately 144 different people**, including 51 City staff members, all 13 City Council members, 6 City Council Aides, 27 RNO leaders and members, some of whom were also BIDs or nonprofits, 10 nonprofit leaders and staff, and other civically engaged residents or former city employees.
- **Systematic online inquiry of 115 of the 190 RNOs** registered with the City's Community Planning & Development (CPD) department as of July 2022. This "landscape analysis" of the RNOs helped us to identify the nature, reach, and effectiveness of the current RNO system.
- **Citywide electronic survey of RNO members and Denver residents** (yielding 317 initial responses, but an average of 190 responses on most questions) disseminated through multiple channels, but primarily the RNO email list.
- **Attendance at 25 RNO meetings**, in-person and by Zoom, for varying lengths of time. At some meetings we held a Q&A session about the study, or had longer conversations with its members,

while at other meetings we told the members about the survey but there was no further interaction. To attend some meetings, we first had to have a screening interview with the RNO leaders so they could understand how much time we needed and if it was relevant to their members. Some posted our survey to their newsletters and websites.

- **Observation of four of the 10 HRCF commission meetings.** We had planned to attend seven meetings in early 2023 but three of the commissions did not meet per the schedule on the website.
- **Case studies of 13 other cities in the U.S.** regarding their citywide supports for community engagement, nonprofit organizations, and neighborhood organizations; Boston, Boulder, Charlotte, Golden, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York, Oakland, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Seattle, St. Paul, and Washington, D.C.

Interviews

Sample. For the City Council, our intention was to interview all 13 members and we were successful in doing so. As we spoke with them and staff at the City, we realized it would be helpful to speak to some of their Aides, particularly about their use of Salesforce or other case management software. We attended a Council Aides weekly training meeting to tell them about our study and invite them to meet with us for an interview. In other cases, the Council members put us in touch with their Aide(s) after we interviewed the member.

To identify City staff for each of the three topic areas, we started with Tracy Winchester, Deputy Chief of Staff within the Mayor's Office who helped to identify key people across the 31 agencies using Human Resources lists of titles related to marketing, engagement, public relations, resident services, and engagement. We then used snowball sampling from our interviews with City Council, our initial City staff interviews, and interviews and conversations with people outside the City.

For interviews with nonprofit and RNO leaders, we reached out to nonprofits who were doing advocacy around city projects or planning, and groups who represented underrepresented, marginalized, or minoritized communities. Sometimes our outreach was through existing contacts, for others it was a cold call. We also did brief interviews with RNO members who received our survey request and wanted to know more about the study. Others missed the survey but received our email for the listening session and we offered to interview them outside the listening session if they were unable to make it.

Process. We asked nearly all interviewees a set of similar questions related to this study's three major components. Most interviews were conducted online via Zoom, but some interviews were conducted in person and by phone. With permission, 81 interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Only a small number of interviewees asked us not to record the interview, or it wasn't convenient to do so. For those 15 interviews, we typed notes during and after the interviews.

We then coded either the transcriptions or typed notes per the scope of work, as well as other themes that arose throughout the research. For the list of interview questions and codes please see Appendices B and C, respectively.

Anonymity. We guaranteed the interviewees anonymity and confidentiality, and therefore do not directly quote or attribute comments to specific people. Where we use direct quotes we are conscientious not to note their affiliation or title if it would lead to the identification of the speaker. Our goal was to solicit honest and thorough responses to our questions, and guaranteeing anonymity supported this goal.

The large set of responses to similar questions provided incredibly rich data, which allowed us to triangulate multiple perspectives and experiences.

We extensively coded the interviews and qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed the survey and other data. Through triangulation of the data

from multiple sources, summary notes, group discussions, and other means of data interpretation, we derived both overarching and detailed findings and recommendations.

Table 4. Summary of Interview Types

Interview / Conversation Type	Number of interviews	Number of participants
Semi-structured transcribed interview	81	107
Transcribed listening session tables	6	22
Semi-structured/ informal with typed notes	15	16
Informal conversations	3	3
Total	105	144*

*Four people participated in two events, e.g. listening session and follow up interview. We counted them once in Table 4 on demographics.

Demographic Analysis of Participants

Through outreach we made a concerted effort to hear from groups who often are not represented by more established RNOs and other groups. When invitees to the listening session sent us regrets, we invited them to participate in an interview. We also reached out to small nonprofits who serve NEST neighborhoods and marginalized groups.

Table 5. Demographics represented in interviews and listening session

Interactions via Interviews, Conversations, and Listening Session Vs. City of Denver Population							
	Total Participants		Listening Session		RNOs, BIDs, nonprofits		Denver
Race or Ethnicity	#	%	#	%	#	%	%
White	93	65%	8	36%	21	78%	68.8%
Black	17	12%	5	23%	1	4%	9.0%
Hispanic or Latina/o	20	14%	5	23%	5	19%	29.4%
Asian	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%	3.6%
Two or more races	4	3%	2	9%	0	0%	9.9%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	2	1%	1	5%	0	0%	0.8%
Other, unknown	6	4%	1	5%	0	0%	N/A
TOTAL	144	100%	22	100%	27	100%	N/A

RNO Evaluation Methods: Survey, Meetings, Interviews, Landscape, Data Analysis

We analyzed the RNO information from our internet search and the RNO survey quantitatively, qualitatively, and spatially.

RNO Survey

To understand the geographic and demographic representativeness of the survey respondents, we associated their zip codes, nearest intersections, and/or reported neighborhood and RNO membership with census information, RNO boundaries, Denver's 77 statistical neighborhoods, and the 11 council districts. With this information entered into a geospatial information system (GIS) we were able to produce maps and other analyses to look at differences by council district and other areas within the city.

For the survey analysis, when possible, we analyzed the responses by the respondents' age, location, race or ethnicity, education level, and longevity in Denver. This was to understand whether responses varied by the positionality of the respondents, particularly if they were more advantaged. An important, and mandated, part of this study is to view all recommendations through an equity lens.

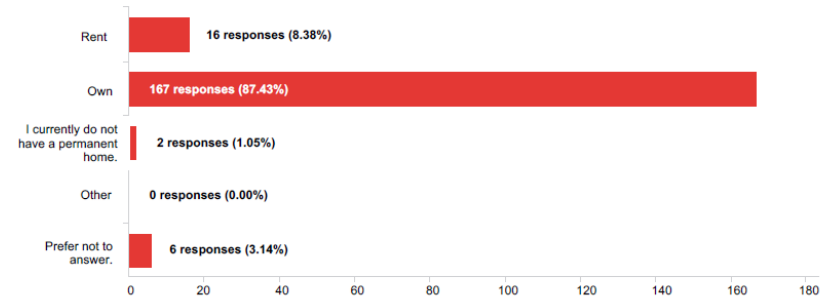
We distributed a survey to all 190 RNOs via the emails for the 380 leads listed in the RNO registry. Approximately 30 leaders responded directly to the email inviting us to talk or attend their meetings. Another 10 bounced back as undeliverable, and one had a permanent message that the RNO had ceased due to the inability to gain resident interest. The survey was open from September 21, 2023, to February 15, 2023. 317 completed the survey representing 50 RNOs, 27 zip codes, 10 of the 11 geographic Council Districts, and 59 of the 77 statistical neighborhoods. We also posted the survey links to a campus [webpage](#) we created for the study.

When we were granted additional time for the study, we created a Spanish language version and sent it to RNO contacts who were bi-

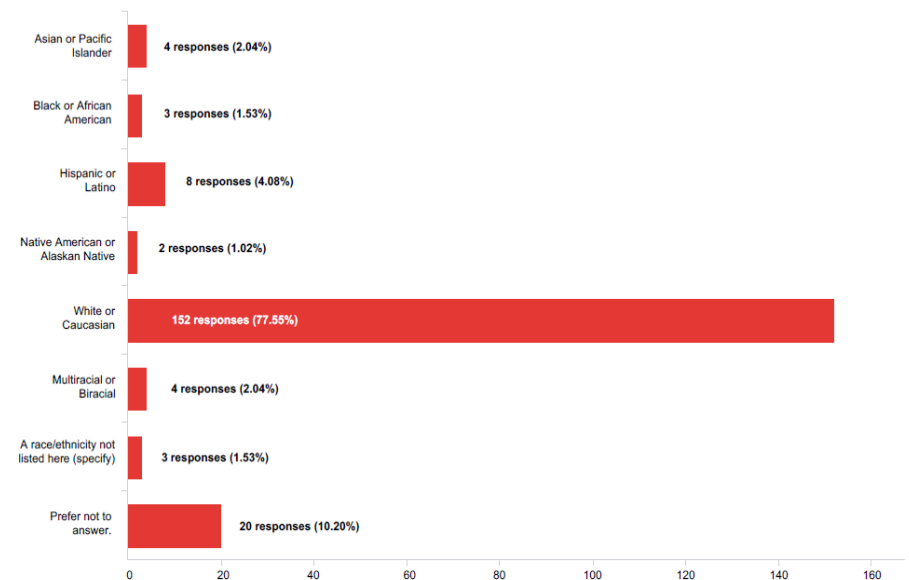
lingual and mentioned having Spanish speaking residents in their neighborhoods, and we sent it to other nonprofits. Unfortunately, we were not successful in obtaining responses to this survey.

Figure 3. Demographics of Survey Responses

Q42 - Do you rent or own your home? (191 total responses)

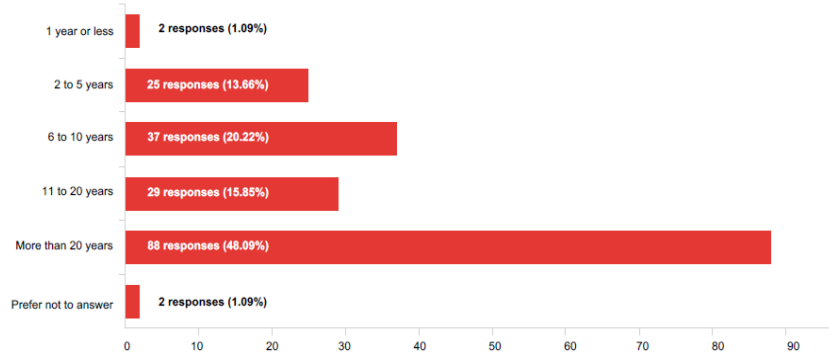


Q46 - Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply. (196 total responses)

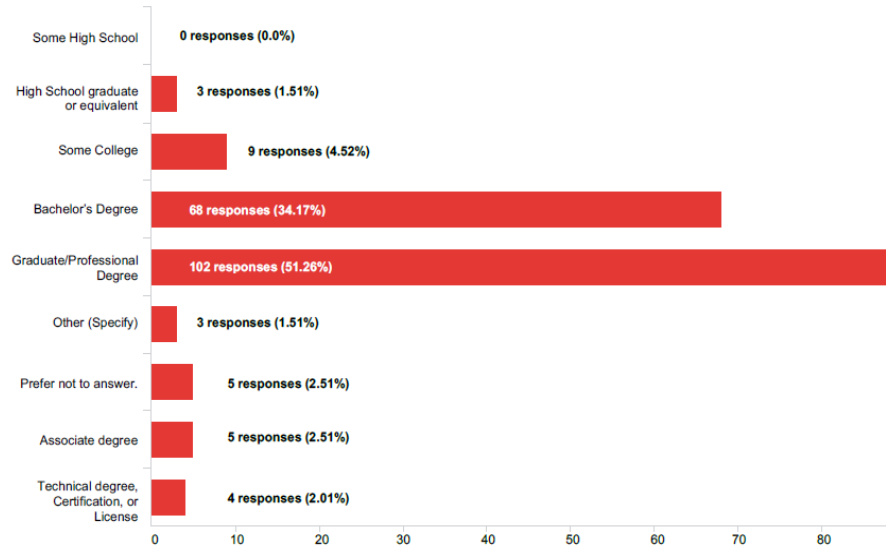


Improving Community Engagement & Constituent Services

Q44 - How long have you been a Denver resident? (183 total responses)



Q45 - What is your highest level of education? (199 total responses)



Q47 - Please select your age range. (190 total responses)

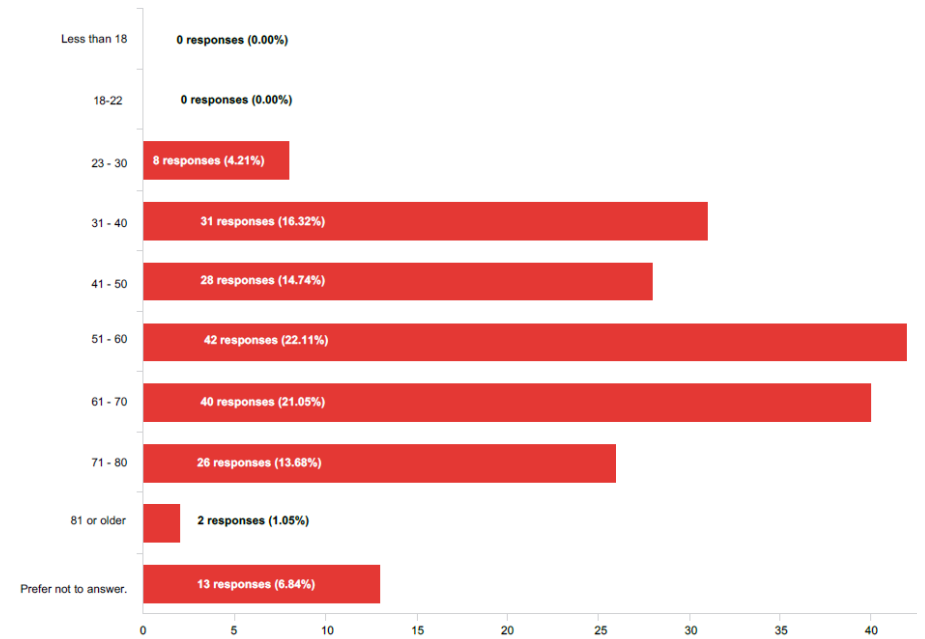


Table 6. RNO Electronic Survey responses by geographies (zip codes, council districts, and statistical areas)

317 Responses to RNO Survey by Geography			
27 Zip codes		10 of 11 Council Districts*	
Blank	32	Blank, Unsure/Don't Know	213
80202	21	District 1. CW Sandoval	22
80203	4	District 2. CM Flynn	8
80204	17	District 3. CW Torres	4
80205	8	District 4. CW Black	10
80206	39	District 5. CW Sawyer	5
80207	1	District 6. CM Kashmann	6
80209	10	District 7. CM Clark	10
80210	17	District 8. CM Herndon	3
80211	34	District 9. CW CdeBaca	14
80212	16	District 10. CM Hinds	22
80218	9	District 11. CW Gilmore	0
80219	12	TOTAL	317
80220	12		
80221	2		
80222	27		
80223	6		
80224	8		
80227	1		
80230	3		
80231	9		
80235	1		
80236	3		
80237	18		
80238	4		
80249	1		
80498	1		
81501	1		
TOTAL	317		

**59 of 77 Statistical Areas			
Blank or other name	19	Jefferson Park	2
Athmar Park	3	Lowry Field	4
Auraria	3	Mar Lee	6
Baker	5	Montclair	2
Barnum West	2	North Capitol Hill	3
Bear Valley	1	North Park Hill	1
Berkeley	5	Overland	3
Capitol Hill	5	Platt Park	5
CBD	12	Rosedale	1
Central Park	5	Ruby Hill	4
Chaffee Park	2	Skyland	1
Cheesman Park	3	Sloan Lake	11
Cherry Creek	7	South Park Hill	3
City Park	2	Southmoor Park	10
City Park West	2	Speer	2
Civic Center	3	Sunnyside	7
Clayton	2	Union Station	2
College View – South Platte	2	University	6
Congress Park	34	University Hills	22
Country Club	8	University Park	4
Five Points	2	Villa Park	4
Fort Logan	2	Virginia Village	5
Gateway – Green Valley Ranch	1	Washington Park	3
Goldsmith	3	Washington Park West	3
Hale	6	Washington Virginia Vale	1
Hampden	10	Wellshire	4
Hampden South	9	West Colfax	7
Highland	11	West Highland	17
Hilltop	2	Westwood	1
		Whittier	2
		TOTAL	317

*District 11. was not identified by name or number, but there were respondents from this district. **The 20 neighborhoods not selected by respondents included Barnum, Belcaro, Cole, Cory - Merrill, DIA, East Colfax, Elyria Swansea, Globeville, Harvey Park, Harvey Park South, Indian Creek, Kennedy, Lincoln Park, Marston, Montbello, Northeast Park Hill, Regis, Sun Valley, Valverde, Windsor.

Table 7. Other home neighborhoods identified by survey respondents.

Place Name	#	Place Name	#	Place Name	#
blank, N/A	7	Driving Park Place	1	Seven Springs Denver	1
Bible Park	1	Mayfair	1	Up Town	1
Curtis Park	1	Morgan's Historic District No. 8 RNO	1	Upper Downtown	2
Downtown	1	Rocky Mountain Lake park	1	Winston Downs	1

RNO related interviews

In our interviews with RNO leaders and members we asked questions related to the Scope of Work (SOW): Effectiveness of the RNO system; whether RNOs and residents would benefit from civic education training; and their experience with City Services.

To evaluate the RNO system we asked about the size and representativeness of their membership, including attempts to improve representation as well as the nature and frequency of meetings, dues, purpose or mission, activities, interactions with other RNOs, opinions of the RNO system, familiarity with the RNO ordinance and whether it should be updated, interactions with the City agencies and their council member(s), whether RNO officers should be paid, if they have funding needs, and other thoughts about the RNO system.

For the other two parts we asked broad questions about their participation in community engagement processes, and how the city could improve engagement, and how their RNO is involved with fielding resident requests or complaints about city services.

We conducted 11 interviews with RNO members that we transcribed and coded from audio or typed notes, plus an additional 16 conversations with other RNO members who called or emailed us about the study. These 16 conversations were by zoom, phone, and in-person and we recorded them through typed notes.

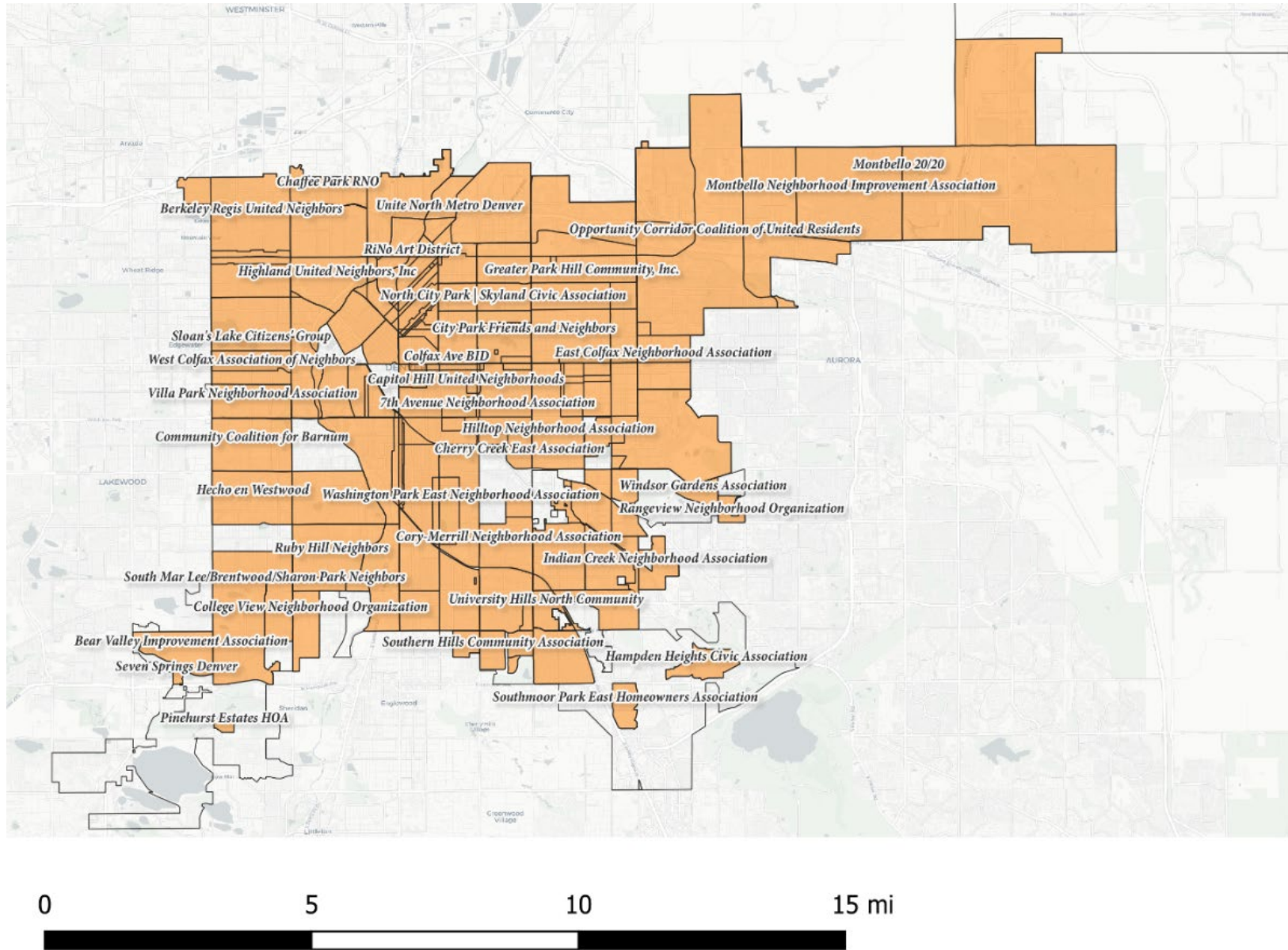
The Landscape of RNOs

Our team examined 115 RNOs to understand their structure, activity, membership, and publicly available information. While this represents just 60% of the 190 RNOs on the city's registration list as of September 2022, we believe it is representative of the most active RNOs. Of the 190 RNOs, 75 did not take the survey and emails from 10 RNOs were undeliverable.

For the Landscape analysis, research team members sought to collect the following information for their assigned RNOs via the web, and if possible, attending their meeting:

- Number of members
- Online presence, e.g., a website, Facebook group, news articles
- Date it was established
- Stated purpose
- Meeting frequency
- Activities other than meetings
- Boundary overlap with statistical areas and other RNOs
- Type of RNO, e.g., neighborhood or community association, HOA, BID
- Member representation: who is or is not represented in the RNO based on their boundaries, purpose, dues, meeting availability, online presence, interest in and ability to collect resident input, etc.

Figure 4. 115 RNOs examined in the Landscape Analysis



RNO Meeting Attendance

Our team members attended 25 RNO meetings by zoom or in person, however, we did not attend the entirety of most of the meetings. We asked to be on the agenda and listened until we were allowed to present our study and tell them about the survey. When possible, both due to permissions, and research team availability, we stayed for the entire meeting, or beyond our slot on the agenda. The following map (figure #) shows the concentration of meetings we were able to attend. Our meeting attendance was based on RNOs who responded to our emails and invited us to attend, or RNOs that had public information about their meetings posted online.

Descriptive, Statistical, and Spatial Analysis of RNOs

From the first three analyses, we compiled a comprehensive RNO database that we could use in GIS and SPSS for both spatial and statistical analysis. The database included the following variables:

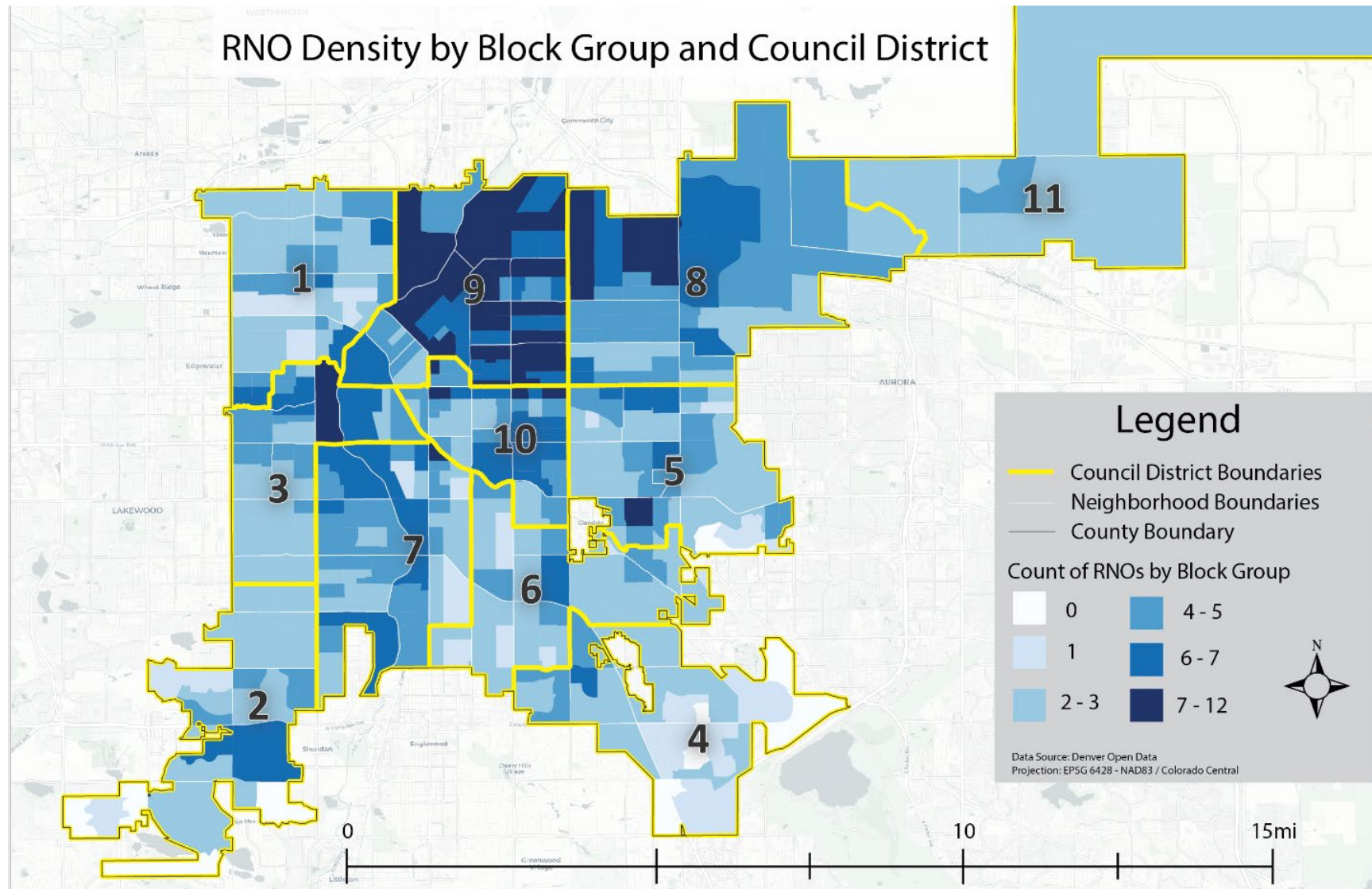
RNO Variables

- RNO Name
- North Boundary
- South Boundary
- East Boundary
- West Boundary
- Primary Contact
- RNO Website
- Number of Members
- Responded to Survey (Yes/No)
- Landscape Analysis (Yes/No)
- Meeting Attended
- RNO Meeting Frequency
- Website (YES/NO)

Census Block Group Data Summed to RNO Boundaries

- Total Population
- Median Income
- Poverty
- % Homeowner
- % Renter
- Median Home Value
- Median Rent
- % Age Under 18
- % Age 18 to 24
- % Age 25 to 34
- % Age 35 to 44
- % Age 45 to 54
- % Age 55 to 64
- % Age 65 to 74
- % Age Over 75
- % White
- % Black
- % American Indian
- % Asian
- % Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- % Other Race
- % Two or More Races
- % Not Hispanic
- % Hispanic

Figure 5. RNO Density by Block Group and Council District



Case Studies of 13 US Cities

We conducted 13 case studies of U.S. cities with public engagement offices and neighborhood organization structures. We identified the 13 cases from an initial list of cities similar in size and/or growth patterns to Denver, as well as cities suggested by members of the City Council and other interviewees. We narrowed the list to those in our region and nationally that had the public engagement functions we are studying. The final list includes the following cities:

- Boston, MA
- Boulder, CO
- Charlotte, NC
- Golden, CO
- Los Angeles, CA
- Minneapolis, MN
- New York, NY
- Oakland, CA
- Philadelphia, PA
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Seattle, WA
- St. Paul, MN
- Washington, D.C.

Note that we included St. Paul, MN even though it does not have an office focused on community engagement. We included the city because of its long-standing system of neighborhood council districts established in the 1970s. For nine of the cases, we conducted 13 interviews, including for the cities of Boulder, Minneapolis, Oakland, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Los Angeles, Oakland, St. Paul, and Washington, D.C. For the other six cities we gathered our information primarily through internet searches of each city's website, online news sources, and journal articles.

Our case study inquiries addressed the following five categories:

1. System and types of support for official or unofficial neighborhood organizations recognized by the city.
2. Constituent Services technologies, including web tools and call centers, similar to 311 and pocketgov.
3. Presence of a citywide office for Community/Resident Engagement.
4. Civic education and training for residents.
5. City-funded grant programs for community building and engagement.

Evaluation of City's Community Engagement: Interviews, Survey, Nonprofit Listening Session

Interviews, survey, and engagement meeting observation

To learn about how the City conducts public engagement, as well as the human, financial, and technology resources available to them, we asked several questions of city staff during our interviews. We also asked City Council members and their Council Aides how they engage with their communities and what they thought of the City's engagement processes.

To gather resident input on engagement, during our interviews with RNO members, other residents, and employees of nonprofits, we asked for their opinions of, experiences with, and recommendations for the City's public engagement processes. We also included several questions about community engagement in the online survey.

In addition to studying the engagement process through interviews, team members also observed planning engagement meetings conducted by CASR, CPD, and DOTI during the study period.

Facilitated Listening Session with nonprofits and grassroots leaders

To better understand both existing barriers to current engagement practices and challenges within city grant processes, our research team held a listening session with community leaders of historically underserved and/or marginalized neighborhoods and populations. Through the two-hour listening session, 22 community leaders gathered with 12 members of the research team to provide feedback and share their desires for improved community engagement and partnership practices from the City and County of Denver. The event was held on Saturday November 12, 2022, at the Carla Madison Recreation Center.

Participants were identified based on a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The team collectively identified a list of grassroots, neighborhood, and nonprofit community leaders from advocacy groups representing immigrants and refugees, People of Color, LGBTQ+, unhoused and formerly unhoused, substance use and recovery, people with disabilities, artists, older adults, and less-advantaged youth. Through the RSVP process these leaders were invited to share contacts of others whom they felt would have feedback and suggestions related to the scope of work. We invited the participants by emails written in English and Spanish with the following flyer (Figure 5).

Figure 6. Flyer for listening session (provided in English and Spanish)



The flyer is divided into two main sections. The top section has a dark green background with white text. It starts with 'You're Invited:' followed by 'Listening Session with Community Leaders' in a larger font. Below this, separated by a thin white line, is 'on The City and County of Denver's Community Engagement Practices and Social Equity'. The bottom section has a light beige background. On the left, the word 'Listening' is written vertically, with each letter accompanied by a stylized ear illustration. To the right of this, the event details are listed: 'Saturday Nov. 12TH, 11AM-1PM', 'Carla Madison Rec. Center', and '2401 E Colfax Ave'. Below the address, it says 'Lunch and compensation provided' and 'Childcare & interpretation available'. At the bottom right, it says 'RSVP requested'. In the bottom left corner, there is a QR code and the text 'RSVP using the QR code or the link in your invite email.'. In the bottom right corner, there is the University of Colorado Denver logo and the text 'Department of Urban and Regional Planning', 'COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING', and 'UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO DENVER'.

You're Invited:

Listening Session with Community Leaders

**on The City and County of Denver's
Community Engagement Practices
and Social Equity**

Listening

Saturday Nov. 12TH, 11AM-1PM
Carla Madison Rec. Center
2401 E Colfax Ave

Lunch and compensation provided
Childcare & interpretation available

RSVP requested

RSVP using the QR code or the link in your invite email.

Department of Urban and Regional Planning
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO DENVER

Our invitation process resulted in a diverse group of participants, in which only 36% of participants were White alone. We did not have Asian participants our share of Hispanic or Latina/o participants was 23%, which is below the 29.4% share citywide (see Table 7).

Table 8. Demographics of Listening Session Participants compared to Denver

Race or Ethnicity	Listening Session		City of Denver Pop.
	#	%	%
White	8	36%	68.8%
Black	5	23%	9.0%
Hispanic or Latina/o	5	23%	29.4%
Asian	0	0%	3.6%
Two or more races	2	9%	9.9%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1	5%	0.8%
Other, unknown	1	5%	N/A
TOTAL	22	100%	N/A

Figure 7. Groups represented by listening session participants.

- Persons with Disabilities
- Artists
- Youth
- Substance Use, Harm reduction
- Refugees and Immigrants
- Participatory Budgeting
- Affordable Housing, including for Native Americans
- Older Adults
- People experiencing homelessness
- LGBTQ+
- NEST neighborhoods

During the event, we facilitated small group discussions at separate tables on 1) existing barriers to socially equitable community engagement with the City, 2) recommendations for more effective and inclusive engagement practices, and 3) grant structures and programming that would enable more equitable distribution of resources to historically underserved and/or marginalized communities within the City and County of Denver.

Listening Session Process for engagement practices

Listening session attendees were divided into small groups facilitated by research assistants and graduate students in the Planning Engagement course. They were asked to share their reflection on past engagement with the City and County of Denver and how they think the City and County should or could better engage the communities they work with or represent. One to two facilitators at each small group table used question prompts around best practices for connecting and making contact with community members, modes and means of communication including language, technology, and context, as well as structures of decision-making, transparency and accountability. After the discussion of each question in the small groups, the entire group discussed the themes and ideas that arose at each table and how they compared across the tables.

Listening session process for grants and partnerships

At each table, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with grant processes, and then each table collectively designed an ideal grant process that would meet their needs. They were asked to provide ideas regarding grant eligibility, timelines and frequency, payout structure, reporting structure, grant amounts, review process, training and technical support, and performance requirements. Participants were also asked to reflect on how the City and County could or should support community-based involvement in policy creation or reform.

Listening session process for analysis and feedback

Each small group discussion was recorded and transcribed by the research team. These transcriptions were then coded using qualitative coding schemes tied to the scope of work as well as emergent themes. Each transcript was coded and then checked by a second member of the analysis team. This data was then synthesized and compiled into a preliminary report. Attendees were invited to review the draft findings in the report from December 9, 2022 to December 15, 2022 via a recorded zoom presentation and the draft document. Feedback and further clarification provided by participants was then incorporated by the research team.

Constituent Services

To study the three tasks for this component, we drew from each of our methods.

- On the survey, we asked several questions about where residents go to ask questions or request service, and how satisfactory they were. We offered the following choices: RNO, Council member, 311, pocketgov, and 911.
- During interviews with all groups (nonprofits, RNOs, residents, City Council members, Council aides, Council central staff, and City staff), we asked about constituent services, and the tools provided to residents. With the City Council and City staff we extensively explored the use of Salesforce and the “ticket closed” issue.
- Our team members also reviewed and tested 311 and the new Online Services Hub systems, which replaced pocketgov during our study.
- We also performed a content analysis of the Technology Services performance review section of the City Budget’s from 2017 to 2023.
- To inform our recommendations, we reviewed the 311 and similar systems in our 13 case study cities.

HRCP Commissions

As with the other tasks, we drew heavily on the interviews to learn more about these specific commissions, and how they operate, as well as the City’s other boards and commissions generally.

Because of the unique nature of this sub-task, our research team members also sought to attend the 11 HRCP commissions meetings in the month of January 2023. After identifying commissions with January meetings (9 of the 11), the team was able to observe 4 of the 7 meetings identified during our availability. For three of these meetings, team members logged into the Zoom conference, but no one else joined the Zoom meeting. We learned later that these meetings had been

canceled since they had just had their annual retreats, but staff had not updated the website.

The four meetings that were held and that we could attend included the American Indian Commission (January 11); Denver Latino Commission (January 18); HRCP Advisory Board Commission (January 27), and LGBTQ Commission (January 10).

We also researched best practices in journal articles and reports for best practices on city boards and commissions.

STUDY CONTEXT: IMPETUS FOR EACH COMPONENT

In this section we review several reasons this multi-pronged study was commissioned. As noted earlier, Denver is experiencing growing pains, which has put a strain on city systems and residents. Additional residents, construction, and aging systems has created more service requests, and the plans and investments to expand the systems needed to support the growth require more public engagement.

Engagement is especially important with historically underserved communities as they face gentrification and displacement pressures, and its many resulting consequences including an affordable housing shortage, school closures, changes to neighborhood culture, increased cost of living, etc. These residents and others desire more opportunities to participate in decisions regarding growth management tools and strategies, such as density, inclusionary zoning, and multi-modal transportation infrastructure.

Through our interviews, it was clear that City staff and Council members realize their plans, projects, and policies would be better informed with more representative input from the diverse range of perspectives and needs throughout Denver, but the current systems for engaging with residents and serving their needs were insufficient.

Dissatisfaction and discord in the RNO system

Prior to this study, residents, council members, city staff, and RNO leaders acknowledged the city's RNO system suffers from some of the issues identified in the literature, including lack of inclusivity and representativeness, hyper-individualistic priorities that supersede the

needs and goals of the larger region (Jun, 2013), and inequity in engagement and outcomes of public participation (Reiter et al., 2017).

Another issue with the Denver RNO system is disagreements among RNO members that lead groups of residents to leave an existing RNO and start a competing RNO within the same boundaries. Some residents and RNO leaders we spoke with found that this could be a positive occurrence, allowing residents to create and affiliate with groups that share their values and interests. Others noted that the splintering and overlapping boundaries of RNOs erodes spaces and opportunities for constructive public debate and dialog among neighbors. Separate RNOs become spaces of groupthink in which anyone with a differing viewpoint is not welcome.

The splintering of the city's oldest and largest RNO, Capitol Hill United Neighbors (CHUN), in April 2019 is one recent and well-known example of an RNO split. After a tumultuous two years in which CHUN depleted its reserves, and shifted from paid positions to a volunteer organization, long time members of CHUN stated the RNO leadership was no longer focused on issues that "actually concern the neighbors" (Lamb, 2019). The new RNO, Neighbors for Greater Capitol Hill, which covers four of the nine neighborhoods within CHUN, state their core issues are zoning, transportation (including "walking, biking, transit, and -yes – even driving...and parking issues"), historic preservation, and licensing (<https://www.neighbors4caphill.com/>, retrieved March 2023).

Later in 2019, after the CHUN split, the President of an-East Colfax RNO, Tim Roberts, sent a proposal to INC and the City of Denver, stating RNOs lacked diverse representation from their neighborhoods and the system needed to be reformed. He proposed a set of carrots and sticks as incentives for RNO's to diversify their membership. Two of the proposed incentives included a "part-time city-paid liaison" and funding for basic supplies and resources for each RNO in "good standing", (Sachs, 2019; Denverite, 2019). If their membership was not within 15 percent of the "socioeconomic diversity" of the RNO's boundary, it would lose its status and be de-listed. The *Denverite*, a local online newspaper, reported the opinions of other RNOs and noted CHUN was largely in

support of diversification but not ready to endorse it since the draft lacked sufficient details on how to hold RNOs accountable (2019).

This discord within the RNO system, is one of the many issues that prompted the District 6 Councilman, Paul Kashmann, to issue an RNO survey. The survey was sent in winter 2020 and received 158 respondents representing 123 RNOs (Lapel, 2021). Most respondents reported they were “conveyors of information to their communities” as well as “advocates for their community’s interests”, indicating they view themselves as providing two-way communication, distributing information to their residents, and then advocating their interests to the City or Council. This, however, does not mean they provide synchronous two-way communication on all issues, which is what the ordinance intends and the City staff and City Council members desire.

Figure 8. 2020 Survey responses to “What role does your RNO serve?”

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Receives information from the City regarding zoning, licensing and other such matters and passes this along to your residents.	94.84% 147
Takes official positions on zoning, licensing and other such matters where a neighborhood position is desired.	79.35% 123
Holds special meetings to inform your community about hot topics or issues impacting the area.	82.58% 128
Sponsors community building events like picnics, concerts, farmers markets, etc.	75.48% 117
Sponsors neighborhood improvement events like clean-ups, etc.	62.58% 97
Total Respondents: 155	

Source: Research Report: RNO Survey. Denver City Council Legislative Services, p.8.

While nearly all respondents to the survey selected the survey options that represent one or two-way communication with the city and their neighbors, the next set of responses show the unevenness or inconsistency in how RNOs share information, and with whom. About two-thirds share it by electronic means, email or social media, which would leave out those who do not have internet or email access. It’s not clear how many of the respondents who share information by electronic means also share it through print or in-person meetings.

Figure 9. 2020 Survey responses to “How does your RNO communicate information received from the city?”

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Share with the Board?	82.05% 128
Share with all dues paying members?	23.72% 37
Share with an email list of those who have requested information?	67.95% 106
Share on social media (Facebook, Nextdoor, etc.)	60.90% 95
Share through print newsletter.	26.28% 41
Community meetings.	58.33% 91
Don't share - lack of time and other resources	7.69% 12
Don't share - lack of interest	3.85% 6
Total Respondents: 156	

Source: Research Report: RNO Survey. Denver City Council Legislative Services, p.8.

Through other survey questions, respondents expressed frustration with the lack of resources to do the job expected of them by the City. The survey summary report stated:

“residents expressed being overwhelmed with the work of running an RNO and the job of sharing information from the City to their members and soliciting feedback on key issues feeling that they had little support from the City. The survey revealed that RNOs would like additional assistance from the City in performing their duties such as financial assistance, legal assistance, education on how the city works and effective community organizing strategies.” (Emily Lapel, Denver City Council Legislative Services, Research Report, 2021).

The picture below, Figure 9, of a CHUN RNO meeting, captured by Kevin Beaty of *The Denverite*, suggests the level of effort an RNO might put into planning and hosting a meeting like this. The meeting was to allow residents to engage with a local developer about the vacant Whole Foods building at 11th Avenue and Downing Streets in Capitol Hill. The photo of largely unhappy faces also shows the tone of many large RNO

and community engagement meetings, the kind that residents might only attend because they are upset.

Figure 10. Photo of 2018 RNO meeting hosted by CHUN RNO, reported by the Denverite.



Steven R. Ferris, with the Real Estate Garage, speaks during a Capitol Hill United Neighbors meeting on the now-vacant Whole Foods Market building. Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Oct. 9, 2018. (Kevin J. Beaty/Denverite)

Photo Source: Sachs, 2019, Denverite.

Proposals to update the RNO System

To our knowledge, there have been three recent proposals to update the RNO system.

Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation's 2020 Proposal

In January 2020, INC established a committee to: “(1) examine and review the RNO Ordinance and recommend possible improvements; and (2) recommend ways in which the inclusivity and effectiveness of Denver Registered Neighborhood Organizations can be improved” (Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation, 2020). The committee met four times and they were joined by Councilman Kashmann at the first

meeting, and Romaine Pacheco from the Mayor’s Office at the second meeting. We understand the committee sent their final report and memo to the Mayor’s Office and the City Council, but no action was taken.

Community Planning & Development RNO Ordinance Review

In the early 2020s, Community Planning & Development Department staff went through the ordinance in detail and identified things that were urgent and achievable. They categorized the changes into four categories:

1. administrative fixes around modern communications and registration, as well as presenting at public hearings;
2. efficiency fixes to address RNO eligibility, overlapping boundaries, CPD duties, and notices to RNOs;
3. policy/process gaps, including how to address complaints against RNOs, and de-listing and re-listing processes; and
4. definition updates, including language on overlapping boundaries, encouraging RNOs to work cooperatively, and RNOs as general interest organizations, rather than special interest, single-issue groups.

There was no official movement on the detailed recommendations due to the pandemic, and possibly other delays or challenges to implementing some of the recommendations.

Councilman Hinds of District 10 commissions a study for a Strategic Community Engagement Model for District 10

In 2021, District 10 Councilman, Chris Hands commissioned a study for a Strategic Community Engagement Model by the firm JPW Communications. The goal of the model was to address challenges in local government’s public participation programs, remove communication barriers between District 10 and harder to reach audiences, and provide additional resources to RNOS that would allow for stronger partnerships and collaboration between the RNOs, the

councilmember, city staff, and district community members (Research + Insights Report, 2021).

CHUN's Reformation

In Fall 2022, current CHUN leadership presented a recent history of the organization, including its “near demise in 2017” at the annual conference of the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association. In their presentation they discussed “what separated them from other RNOs”, such as being a 501c3 organization, including renters as members, being viewed as a “collaborative thought-leader among myriad stakeholders”, having a staff and board, and encouraging representation and cooperation among diverse groups. This latter difference is in direct response to one of the main critiques of RNOs: they represent a select group of residents, mostly white, wealthy, older homeowners who have more discretionary time because of these characteristics (Berkeley and Leiker, 2022).

Lack of standards and transparency in public engagement

In November 2021, as part of its regular monitoring of City transparency practices, the City and County of Denver’s Office of the Auditor reviewed public notice and public engagement practices of three selected agencies: the Department of Community Planning and Development (CPD), the Department of Transportation & Infrastructure (DOTI), and the agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships (HRCP). Through case studies within these agencies, the auditor identified deficiencies in public notice requirements and access to information about opportunities to participate in government decision making, and lack of clear “standards, expectations, and guidance” for public engagement (O’Brien, 2021). Subsequently, the auditor recommended “a citywide framework and recommendations to strengthen individual city agencies’ management practices, policies, procedures, training opportunities, and monitoring and evaluation processes” (2021).

In May 2023, the Auditor issued a follow-up report and noted which agencies implemented some or all of the recommended actions in the 2021 report: “the Department of Community Planning and Development fully implemented all four recommendations we made to it in the original audit — while the agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships fully implemented four recommendations, partially implemented three, and did not implement one other. The Department of Transportation & Infrastructure partially implemented one recommendation and did not implement two others. Finally, the Mayor’s Office and the city’s Technology Services agency partially implemented both recommendations we had made to them.” The auditor concluded, therefore, that “some risks associated” with their initial findings had not been fully addressed (O’Brien, 2023).

Both the 2021 and 2023 reports emphasized the importance of following best practices for public engagement and public notices, and the risk of not doing so. With more consistent engagement of residents in decisions that affect their lives, as well as the evaluation and monitoring of the engagement and notice activities, there would be improved decision-making, increased public trust, and improved urban outcomes.

Complaints about poor constituent services; interactions with community engagement

Throughout the study, several interviewees asked what we were using for our definition of the term “community *engagement*”. People who have studied or practiced public engagement and communications recognize the term is often used, and misused, to describe very different things. This question often arose after we described the three parts of the study. For instance, as many pointed out: **311 is not resident engagement** or public participation. Residents who call 311 are not engaging in decision making, nor are they being consulted. They may be informed of a city policy or project that has resulted in a street closure, and numerous repeat calls about a particular issue may result in longer term actions by the City to address the issue, but when residents

call 311 or report issues on pocketgov (now Online Services Hub), they are not directly participating in government decisions or policymaking. Further, when the city issues information to inform residents, without seeking feedback, that also is not engagement.

So, while resident/constituent services and public engagement are distinctly different practices, with the former consisting of responses to questions or requests to provide a service that falls within the local government's responsibility, and the latter involving requests for input on decisions that will affect residents' lives—most often in the more distant future, the two types of interactions are similar in that they involve resident-city interactions. Further, from the City's and City Council's perspectives, whether the staff member or elected official is providing a constituent service or seeking engagement on a public policy or plan, both activities require their time, effort, and ability to connect with residents, as well as their local government colleagues who are responsible for fulfilling the service or making the plan.

Through these discussions, we learned one reason for this set of tasks is the disappointment with the current 311 system and its failure to provide more comprehensive responses to constituents. As one council member noted in response to our question about creating an Office of Community Engagement: *"so you have a very different experience based on where you live and who's in office versus having a [more comprehensive] 311...the vision and the dream of what 311 could and should be.* This member and others noted 311 was supposed to have navigators and troubleshooters who could do more than direct calls, including when a recipient agency returns the ticket to 311 because it's not their issue.

Not only did this council member want more consistent service quality across the city, but that was also independent of whether a council member's office provided the navigation absent in 311, they wanted navigators in 311 who could do both customer service and community engagement. With additional interviews it became clear that council members are frustrated having to spend so much time solving residents' service requests related to city operations, which are largely out of their

control, leaving them little time for resident engagement around policy, laws, and programs.

Additionally, if a resident is unhappy with city services, and holds both the Council and Administrative agencies responsible, it's difficult for Council offices and City staff to engage with unhappy or dissatisfied residents on policy and plan making. Engagement is further hindered if the resident has been displaced or harmed by prior actions or inactions by the City and County of Denver.

At the same time, council members value their interactions with residents. They want to help provide resolution for their requests, when possible. It also helps them to learn about the nature of residents' services requests since repeated poor customer service on certain issues can help council members to understand the need for new or revamped policies or laws, or changes to the budget priorities and expenditures.

Thus, city council members do not wish to be removed entirely from hearing about and responding to resident concerns, even though it is not an official part of their job, per the City's Charter. They do, however, desire a more efficient and effective process for residents to have their requests resolved. Better customer services delivered by the administration would allow more residents to have their needs met in a timelier way, and without having to make multiple requests through multiple means, e.g., calling 311, filling out website forms, calling their Council member, and contacting their RNO.

It should be noted that the time trade-off between customer service and community engagement was a lesser concern for three of the council members. The different levels of concern were due in part to the differences across the districts, including density, active developments, mix of land uses, demographics, etc., and the council member's role on City Council.

FINDINGS PART ONE: RNO EVALUATION

The State of Denver's RNO System

RNO Membership as of July 2022

According to the City's list from the July 2022 registration period, there were 190 RNOs registered, about three times the number of the 78 statistical areas, and 17 times the number of council districts. Due to the unevenness of where RNOs exist across the city, there are between 13 and 22 RNOs within most District boundaries. Council District 5, with just 5 RNOs, and Council District 9, with 42 RNOs, are outliers. **The tally of RNO members reported by the leaders of the 190 RNOs is 25,249, which is 3.6% of the 711,500 residents in the City of Denver as of 2021.** The number of members per RNO ranged from 2 to 12,500. The average is 246 and the median is 50. About 22% had 20 or fewer members.

In early September 2022 when we emailed the 380 contacts on the July 2022 registration list about our upcoming survey, about 16 emails were already undeliverable. Of the remaining 364 emails that presumably reached the recipient, seven had auto responses, including for vacations, paternity leaves, and notifications that the email was infrequently checked. Another 38 responded with mostly cordial and interested responses. Some invited us to attend their meeting to talk about the survey, to talk with them by phone first, or to have our survey link added to their newsletter or posted to their social media accounts. Several were somewhat protective, noting they receive a lot of requests from the City to attend their meetings and therefore wanted more information first. Others noted they did not have meetings, or only met annually.

After the low response rate to our email, we wondered how it compared to the response rates city agencies receive when they send

notifications or ask to attend their meetings. We recognize, however, that our request to distribute and take our survey may not have carried the same weight as a notification from CPD, DOTI, or Excise and Licenses about a potential impact to their community. An email from an unknown professor at ucdenver.edu may easily be disregarded.

Later in the study, we learned through our interviews with agency staff that they often have similarly low response rates, and when they do get invited to RNO meetings it is often the same small group of people. Despite their disappointment with low numbers, both agency staff and council members noted RNOs were one way to contact engaged residents, but not a guaranteed way to reach a wide audience that was representative of the neighborhood.

The activities, function, and perceptions of RNOs

For more than 50 years, even before the adoption of the 1979 RNO ordinance, neighborhood organizations have been gathering people in their communities to discuss important issues, communicate their concerns and desires to city agencies, and build community. Many who have been involved with RNOs value them for the various activities they plan, the information they gather and distribute to their members, and the social capital they help to create. Unfortunately, others who have been involved, or feel left out and excluded, see them as problematic. They have too much power, are not representative, are poorly run, and cause conflict among neighbors.

Positive or strong attributes of RNOs / RNO System

Across all our interviews, from staff, to City Council, to RNO members and leaders we coded several positive attributes.

- Advocacy
- Activities
- Collaboration with other RNOs
- Community building
- Connects underserved areas with nonprofit support

- Engages people
- Good Neighbor Agreements
- Historic Preservation, positive
- Information interpretation, awareness, dissemination
- Innovation space
- Input to policies, foster deliberation, facilitator
- Navigate constituent services for residents
- Nonprofit, multi-purpose
- Organized communities with low-incomes and minoritized populations
- Problem solve through convening
- Residents know us; we're a neighborhood staple
- Volunteers, willing
- Want to do better, especially with diversity

The positive codes from our research matched some of the activities RNOs identified in the 2021 survey of RNOs conducted by Councilman Kashmann of District 6 via Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC), referenced earlier.

- "Our Homeless Solutions Committee advocates for Safe Outdoor Spaces and works closely with nearby neighborhoods and charitable organizations"
- "Work with the city to advocate for better mobility and transit options"
- "[We are] focused on helping to build a strong sense of community across a diverse population of ages and [ethnic] groups."
- "Works with local businesses to try to build better connections with the community and ensure the neighborhood helps patronize them"
- "We communicate out to our members (who follow us on social media) information the city wants communicated, such as: leaf drop off info, x-mas tree recycling, etc. We also communicate, through social media, neighborhood related events, such as: farmers markets, community town halls, studies that the results of will impact our residents, etc."

Negative or weak attributes of RNOs / RNO System

As noted, we also heard about negative, or weak, aspects of RNOs, and the RNO system which we coded with some of the following words and phrases.

- City burdens RNOs with communication
- City should foster cooperation [among RNOs]
- Communication limits due to digital divide
- Competition among RNOs (not conflict)
- Conflict among RNOs (beyond competition)
- Demanding, rigid, difficult to work with
- They shouldn't "shoot the messenger"
- Dues: restrictive, misused
- Groupthink, fragmentation, ideological
- Hostile, dangerous meetings
- Inaccessible for residents
- Misinformation, lies
- Need more accountability
- Need supports for meeting, communications, etc.
- Need training
- Ordinance violations: meetings, members, dues, voting
- People afraid to engage, feel unwelcome
- Promotes/reinforces inequity
- Require mediation
- System doesn't work
- Uneven performance
- Volunteers, capacity limits
- Why are the RNO requirements the neighborhood's responsibility?

Similarly, the INC survey also noted negative or weak statements that coincide with our negative and weak codes about individual RNOs and the RNO system.

- “Do not share much w/ general membership, or non - member community members. Lack of resources, and time.”
- “There is not one good way to reach everyone and this is a struggle. We are currently seeking funding for a platform that allows for integration between a web site, email, and social media, but it is expensive.”
- “I think that RNO's are asked to do quite a bit within the city but without any support or resources provided.”
- “This work is incredibly time consuming and lends itself to burnout.”
- “Sometimes a small cabal of self-interested individuals can work against the interests of an area.”
- “RNOs have different areas of interest and they don't always represent our interests (despite what one particular RNO claims).”
- “Many RNOs are undemocratic and do not allow new voices in the neighborhood to have a say. By, "new," I mean people who have been living in an area for at least 5 years or more, and are clearly committed to it. Having overlapping boundaries allows new RNOs to be formed so that democracy can happen and voices have equal say.”
- “In a perfect world, RNOs should NOT overlap... however our system is so far from perfect that the only way to combat our problems is to allow for overlap. Due to lack of oversight and inconsistency of regulation, some RNOs have evolved into non-representative special interest groups in which entrenched power suppresses any opposition.”
- “We left because we had disagreements with wealthier white communities who have no clue what we deal with on a daily basis in largely POC communities. Too much elitism in [the organization].”

Effectiveness in providing notice and two-way Notifications with the City

To judge RNO effectiveness, we used our interviews with City staff, council members, and RNOs, as well as the survey our attendance at RNO meetings, and the RNO Landscape Analysis.

On the survey, to gauge how well they engage their members in two-way communication with the City, we asked several questions about their RNO's purpose, meeting frequency, priorities, and how they engage with the City and City Council.

1.1.a Providing notice as primary function.

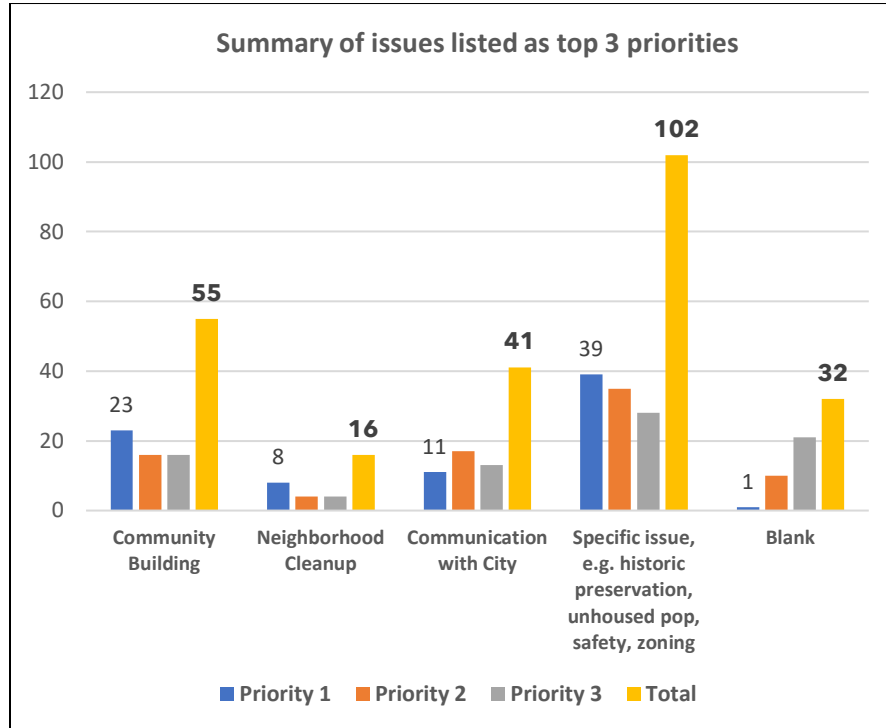
While several of the RNO in the 2021 INC and 2022 Study surveys stated that sending notices was one of their responsibilities, they also referenced other primary activities, and some did not reference this as an activity at all. At the same time, even the RNO members who valued the notifications and felt this was an important responsibility, indicated this was a major burden on them. The notices they receive can be difficult to interpret when they are not written in laymen's terms, and there are often more than a volunteer can manage to read and forward on a regular and timely basis. This probably varies by the size of the RNO boundaries and its location since some parts of the city have much more development and commercial activity than others.

Specifically, only 41 respondents listed communicating with the City as among their top three priorities, and only 11 listed it as their top priority. Instead, the top priority for the other survey respondents included:

- Neighborhood cleanup, aesthetics (8),
- Community building (23), and
- Specific issue (affordable housing, sustainability, unhoused, safety, zoning) (39).

The 102 respondents who noted a specific issue as one of their three top priorities reflects CPD's concern that there are a growing number of special-interest RNOs rather than general purpose membership organizations to address all types of neighborhood concerns.

Figure 11. Top Priorities of RNOs in Fall 2022 Survey



Note: These categories are collapsed from the full list of responses in the survey. For the full detailed responses, see Appendix E.

Another issue is *how* they forward notices to their members. To truly reach all their members, or residents within their boundary, sending emails is not enough. Posting them to a social media account, such as Facebook or NextDoor might have greater coverage, but still won't reach most residents within an RNO's boundaries. Also, given the uneven coverage of RNOs throughout the City, many areas are left

without a capable RNO who can manage to receive and forward the notices.

Overall, our assessment indicates volunteer RNOs should not be relied upon as the sole way the City notifies residents of many issues occurring in their neighborhoods.

1.1.b Do RNOs support two-way communication?

Another issue is the time and resources it takes to distribute notices to members, and then to gather feedback to deliver to the City. Respondents in our 2022 survey, the 2021 INC survey, and our interview with RNOs in underserved neighborhoods expressed frustration with the difficulty of running RNOs with few resources. For instance, in our 2022 survey, when asked **if they would like support from the city**, 78 respondents wanted the City to "Assist with communications, e.g., provide a website, email services, annual USPS mailing, pay to print and distribute flyers, etc." One respondent offered the following:

It takes a lot of volunteers and volunteer hours to have a successful RNO. The City should reach out to RNOs to ensure that they have the support they need from the city to be successful. A lot of time is spent in finding and making contact. A contact list of city agencies, etc. would be very helpful. Also, some RNOs don't have the volunteer support or funds that other RNOs do. If funding is available and an RNO needs it, that would be helpful.

Similarly, in response to the question **whether RNOs were a good method for sending information to residents**, of 113 responses only 21 respondents (19%) said Always, 51 (45%) chose Somewhat (48) or Not at All (3), and 41 offered comments, such as the following:

[Yes] People have a chance to question and provide feedback about issues concerning the city. However, problem is not many people belong to RNOs

[No] RNOs only inform their members. Not a good way to reach the community as whole.

[Somewhat] This could be a good way but they don't have the means to communicate out to everyone.

[No] The city needs to stop making RNOs gatekeepers especially without support. With the amount of info thrown at us, we'd need a full-time staff to keep up with info sharing.

[Yes, but] yes, RNOs are the best way to send information to residents, if the RNO has the means to do so and has a comprehensive mailing list or email list of its constituents. This is an area in which the city of Denver has fallen short--providing resources to assist RNOs to do effective outreach.

Many others made similar comments in the survey, noting it was a lot of work, reached few people, and was too dependent on the commitment, capacity, and knowledge of the RNO leaders.

We also observed the unequal resources of RNOs through our meetings and interviews. Some RNOs have thousands of dollars in their bank account, while others simply would be satisfied with members, let alone revenues from dues. Some RNOs with dues generate thousands of dollars a year when members make contributions of \$100 or more a year, which is much higher than their suggested dues. These RNOs typically have officers with professional degrees, annual physical mailings to hundreds of residents, active websites, places to meet, zoom accounts, and residents who can participate in English.

Unclear City notifications limits City to resident communications

In our interviews with RNO leaders in NEST neighborhoods in West Denver, Globeville, and East Colfax, they provided several examples of poor notifications from the City and the work it takes to determine if and what information to pass along to their members. The following illustrates one of the examples.

And so they gave a link of like, here's how you can find what work is going on in your neighborhood. And I went on to the link and it didn't have any information that was actually useful. So then I

emailed them. And then I also called them, and it took me calling three different people before I was able to get the answer of the work that was going on. And they ended up saying, well, we use a contractor for that work, so we don't know exactly what they're doing. We just know they're coming to your neighborhood. That's also something, you know, we get these emails of, hey, we need you to notify the neighborhood ...And it's not any valuable information to actually notify people. And if that's the only way that residents on a particular street are getting notified, it's a terrible way of doing that, you know, they have no information, no real information from us [the RNO].

Lack of representation and meeting frequency limits resident to City communications

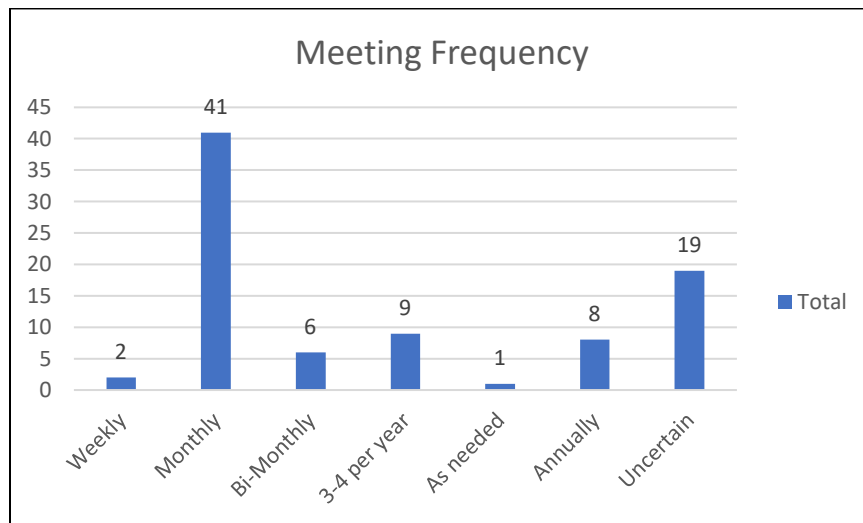
The other issue, of course, is whether the feedback they provide to the City is representative. When we asked the City Council members and agency staff if they gained useful information from RNOs, the answer was mixed, but all of them recognized that RNOs were only a starting point, and that it was only the few active RNOs in each council district that responded with requests for information or input from residents. Unfortunately, most of the current 190 RNOs do not provide information to the city agencies or council districts, and when they do there is no way to guarantee or assess how representative it is of the residents' opinions within the RNO's boundaries.

In the next section, we provide tabulations, maps, and analysis to show their limited reach and representation of residents of all backgrounds, and the infrequency of their meetings. Through our research, we confirmed that most RNOs exist to receive the required notifications from the city for their personal purposes, or for a small group of people, not to distribute it to many more people, or to provide feedback to the City. This aspect of RNOs is not monitored as there is no way to determine if they are forwarding the information they receive.

Other elements of RNO eligibility that may gauge communication effectiveness are also not monitored, such as meeting the minimum

membership of 12 persons, a number which could help to facilitate the dissemination of information to a larger group. On the official list, 10 RNOs reported less than the required minimum. Further, in our interviews with RNO members, several did not know the official rules and stated inaccurate requirements for meeting frequency, board members, and membership minimums.

Figure 12. RNO Meeting Frequency for 86 RNOs with available meeting information



In terms of resident awareness of RNOs, just 69 (40%) had websites we could identify or locate, or that were provided in the list from the City. Of the 115 we studied through multiple means, we could only identify meeting information for 86 RNOs. Of these, only 43 met weekly or monthly, and 15 met bi-monthly or quarterly. This leaves 132 with no easily available meeting information. Thus, there is no evidence that 69% of the current RNOs are holding at least the required annual meeting. Additionally, 202 of the initial 317 respondents to our survey did not list an RNO when asked if they were a member of an RNO. Some made comments that they did not know what an RNO was until they got our survey link, presumably from their council members' newsletter,

and then learned about it from the link we provided to the City's RNO website.

1.1.c Engaging their constituents with information to share with the City.

RNO Representation and Geographic Coverage

Our survey response rate shows that emails and other outreach to RNOs will not necessarily yield a high response rate. We emailed all RNOs two times, attended 25 meetings, and promoted the survey through some of the city council offices, but the response rate of 317 initial individuals is just 1% of the 25,249 reported RNO members. Further, based on the respondents who reported their demographics and reported being involved with an RNO, there is a lack of diversity and representation of various groups in Denver.

Demographics of respondents to our RNO Survey

- 87% have lived in Denver 11 or more years.
- 77% were White or Caucasian.
- 63% were 51 years or older.
- 88% were homeowners/
- 65% had 1 or 2 people in their household.
- 90% had a Bachelor's or Graduate degree.

Largely absent in these demographics are individuals or households who are: newer to Denver, people of color, younger than 51, households who rent their homes, households with children or multiple roommates, workers with lower incomes, and residents without college degrees.

In another comparison, we analyzed the census reported demographics of residents within RNO boundaries, based on Census data at the block group level. The results of this comparison showed significant statistical associations between median income, median home value, and race, with the survey response rate, and the meeting frequency of the RNO. Census block groups within the boundaries of at least one of the

mentioned RNOs had the following significant differences from RNOs not mentioned in the survey:

Table 9. Demographic comparison of RNOs that responded or didn't respond to the survey, by Census Block Group

Households and Housing	Geographic area of RNOs that responded	Geographic area of RNOs that did not respond
Median household income	\$98,908	\$84,489**
Median home value	\$581,557	\$502,726*
% White households	76%	71%*
% Black or African American	6%	10%*

*Statistically significant p-value <.05, ** p-value <.01. There were not significant differences by other races, ethnicity, tenure, poverty, or age.

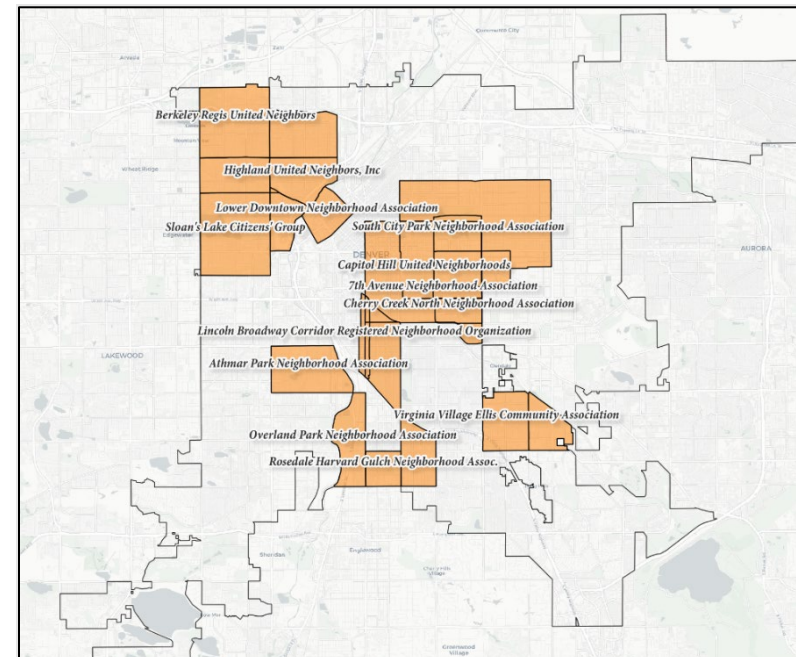
Additional spatial analysis shows the current system of RNOs, which relies upon residents to create them, leaves gaps throughout the city with few active RNOs. As the map in Figure 12 shows, the 25 RNOs who contacted us about our survey and invited our team to their meeting are concentrated in the central and northwest part of the city. We attempted to find other meetings to attend via RNO websites, but meeting information was difficult or impossible to find, as noted earlier. Also, many RNOs do not meet regularly and did not have a meeting in the timeframe of the early part of our study (September through November) when we were studying RNOs through in-person or virtual means.

RNO concentration in some areas can also hinder an RNO's ability to do outreach and communicate with residents. Some active RNO leaders and members complained that the numerous overlapping RNOs hinder RNO participation, including their own, when they were looking to join one. When a resident enters their address into the RNO portal and 8 to 10 RNOs are listed, but only some, if any, have a website, how is a resident able to find an RNO to join, unless they find their RNO another way? One RNO leader noted they had not even heard of most of the other 8 – 10 RNOs listed for their neighborhood, even though they had

lived in their neighborhood for more than 10 years and were actively engaged in neighborhood and council district activities. They found this to be frustrating and unfortunate, since their RNO is actively reaching out to diverse residents in their community, including many who speak English as a second language, or not at all. Given language barriers, the RNO leader posited it is probably hard for residents they had contacted for other outreach to remember which RNO had contacted them.

Yet, as the map in Figure 13 shows, our survey did reach a larger set of RNOs, extending further north and northeast than our meeting attendance. Still, we did not reach many of the west, southwest, far north central, northeast, and southeast portions of the city. Figure 14 shows the number overlapping RNOs making it hard to understand their boundaries, members, and relationship to council districts.

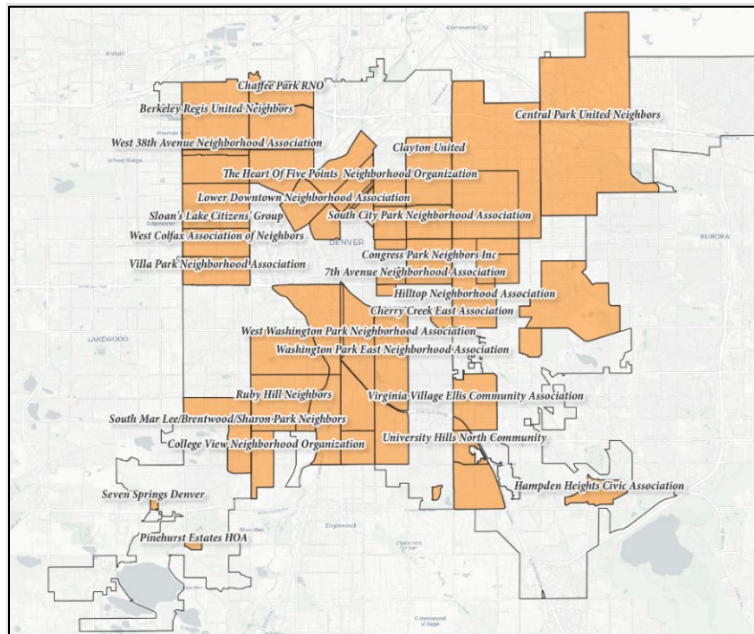
Figure 13. RNO Meetings we were able to attend Fall 2022



Note: the map does not include the Denver International Airport since there are no RNOs or residents in this area.

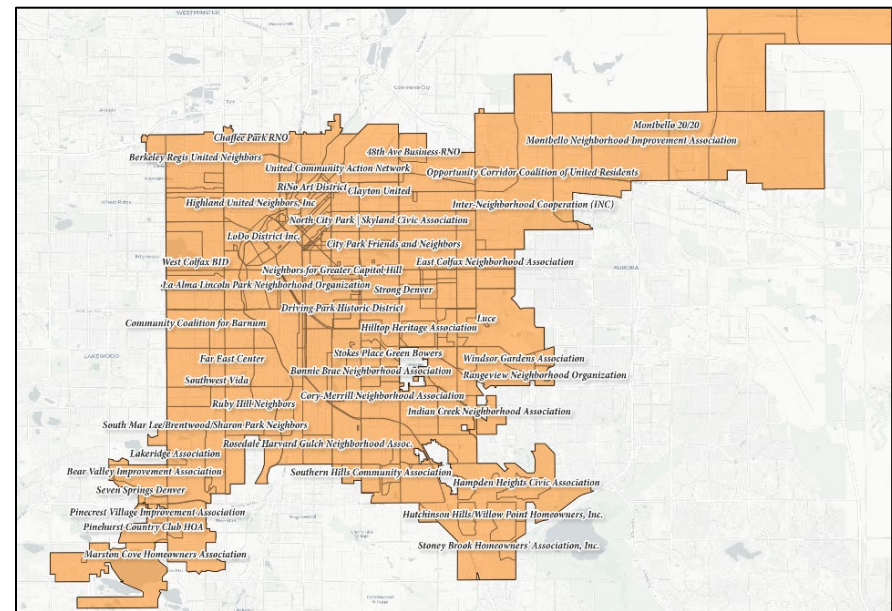
Earlier in this report (Figure 4) we showed a map of RNOs by Census data and council districts which also indicated their overlaps. This map also corresponded to Council member responses about the effectiveness of RNOs, somewhat reflected the number per Census block group within their district boundaries. Those who thought the RNO system worked relatively well, had fewer in their districts, and fewer conflicts among RNOs. Council members who thought the RNO system could and should be revamped were likely to have more RNOs in their districts, or fewer active ones which they could reach out to for two-way communication. It should be noted however, that in areas with lower residential density, Census block groups have larger geographies, since the Census devises block groups by population not by land area. Thus, the number of RNOs in a block group can be misleading. For instance, 6-7 RNOs in a larger geographic block group, such as those in District 2, may be less likely to overlap than 6-7 RNOs in a block group with less land area, such as those in Districts 9 and 10.

Figure 14. 50 RNOs identified by RNO survey respondents



This unevenness in RNOs across the city was not news to the people we interviewed, including people from RNOs, council districts, and city agencies. All the agency staff told us when they reach out to RNOs for community engagement, they recognize that contacting RNOs will not allow them to reach many residents given the small number of people who actively participate in RNOs, the inaccurate contact information for RNOs, and the level of activity for most of them. Thus, agency staff contact RNOs knowing it is required or recommended, and that they will reach some people, often those who are most engaged, but they know it will not result in representative engagement from the neighborhood or area in which they are working.

Figure 15. 190 RNOs as of July 2022



In the reverse, while City agencies have a way to reach some RNOs, some RNOs reported that they can't always reach the "City".

At the same time, City agency, council members, council staff, RNO members, and others respected some of the long standing and well-resourced RNOs that have committees for city functions, mostly around land use, zoning, and transportation. They mutually expressed the value of the ability for local government and residents to work together in these situations. City Council members also acknowledged the great community building work several RNOs do through annual picnics, block parties, etc.

Summary 1.1.c Effectiveness of RNOs at engaging their constituents with information to share with the City

In sum, given their lack of representation, both in quantity and diversity of membership, and their lack of capacity to receive, decipher, deliver, and return information, RNOs cannot be considered an effective or reliable vehicle for city agencies to rely upon for two-way information exchange, including notification of important changes to neighborhoods, or for engaging residents in community planning activities.

1.1.d. Understanding and knowledge toward navigating operations of city agencies and departments

In terms of knowledge of city processes, the data we collected through multiple methods confirmed uneven knowledge about city processes and notifications across and within RNOs as both organizations and as individual residents.

- ***There is a lack of understanding or time to decipher all the notices sent to RNOs from the various city agencies.*** While some council members felt the information in these notices was clear and straightforward, several RNO members noted the volume was overwhelming and the presentation of the information was difficult to quickly interpret, making it difficult to decide which information was relevant and meaningful to forward to their members. RNO leaders are hesitant to send too many emails to their member lists,

and some prefer to summarize the important information in periodic newsletters, condensed emails, and website post, rather than forwarding the often-confusing emails from the City. This issue also implies RNOs have active members who have time to, and interest in reading all the notices sent by the RNO leaders. It also assumes the membership is on an accurate email list. This latter point is not the case for RNOs in neighborhoods where residents are less likely to have home computers, internet service, and email addresses. Some RNO leaders are also not well-versed in establishing large email lists, such as through free listservs, or subscription contact databases, such as Mailchimp. Such RNOs are also less likely to have funding to pay for websites, contact databases, etc.

- ***RNO members complained about the way information was presented to them by city agency staff who attended their meetings.*** Some noted that agency staff tend to take up too much time delivering canned information about their agency, or the planning process, and do not allow enough time for questions and answers. These comments indicated the RNO members had a basic or high-level understanding of city processes, and want to be engaged, but it is the details of particular processes and projects that they want more time to learn, understand, and discuss. It also highlights the issue that many RNOs do not have sufficient time at their limited meetings to engage in training, longer discussions, etc., especially if they have multiple priorities. Most members are unable, or unwilling, to attend monthly, or even quarterly meetings, that last for more than two hours.
- ***Can RNOs solve their members' problems?*** Another measure of RNO understanding of city processes, is RNO member satisfaction with their RNO's ability to solve problems. The majority, 59%, of survey respondents were unsatisfied or somewhat satisfied with their RNOs for problem solving.
- ***Most of the City Council members noted that many residents in their districts did not seem to understand city processes.*** Ten of the thirteen we asked about civic education for residents agreed that it was needed. Specific items they noted included by-right zoning

versus zoning amendments; which agency handles which functions; and the different powers and roles across the administrative (city agencies), legislative (city council), and executive (mayor) branches. This, they felt, is especially compounded in a very strong mayor system, like Denver's. City Council offices do what they can to assist residents, but their powers are limited in terms of the implementation of policies and plans, e.g., bike lanes. Many residents also do not realize which services are provided by other entities, such as those provided by Denver Water, Denver Public Schools, Xcel, and the Colorado Department of Transportation.

- ***RNO also complained about the lack of training, including how to become an RNO, and even less information on how to manage an RNO, and how to find and understand information on city processes.*** As such, several noted they can only do the minimum required because it is hard to set up processes or know how to make their RNO more active and effective. Even RNOs with 501c.3 status, and the eligibility to receive City grants, i.e., via NEST or DEDO, did not have time to do everything they felt was required of them by the RNO ordinance. Despite their nonprofit status, they were often run by volunteer leaders.

Other needs of RNOs

RNOs with and without resources, would like various types of support. Those with the types of resources we listed above (financial, zoom accounts, website, active board members) don't feel they need more support financially but would like other types of support. These include:

- ways to reach out to more people in the neighborhood, not just in number, but to be more representative and inclusive,
- help with the permitting process for special events,
- help interpreting the emails sent by the city, and
- civic 101 training sessions.

As noted above, a growing number of RNOs and their members, which we identified through our interviews, public discussions at INC, and in

local media accounts, recognize they are not as inclusive as they should be, but they need more guidance and resources to improve their outreach, meeting protocols, etc.

RNOs with fewer resources would also like assistance reaching their residents/neighbors. These resources include funding and volunteers to help with printing and distribution of mailings, flyering, and yard signs. They also need help creating and maintaining a website, and creating a monthly or quarterly newsletter, either paper, electronic, or both. These RNOs also lack accessible, free/ affordable meeting spaces and good meeting supports, such as childcare, food, and translation services. Without the spaces and supports it is hard to encourage or support attendance for better representation across the various demographics in their communities, particularly people with lower incomes, people of color—who may not trust the government, people with children, and people working one or more hourly jobs with less flexibility.

RNOs would also like access to rental/loan equipment for meetings and events, such as an "Owl" camera for zoom meetings, cones and roadblock barriers for block parties, gloves and shovels for clean-up days, fold-up tables and easels to table at events or hold outdoor activities, speakers and microphones, etc.

RNOs that have received assistance from the City through grants from NEST, the CASR Rapid Assessment process, DEDO, etc., noted how useful they were, but that the resources and activities enabled by the grants were not sustainable once the grants were over. For instance, with one of the grants, an RNO was able to support a part time administrative assistant who could do outreach for the required meetings and coordinate the logistics for each meeting, such as language translation. The RNO was successful getting good attendance, including from residents who spoke languages other than English, however, now that these residents want to be involved and attend more RNO meetings, the RNO is not able to support language interpretation in real time, post multi-lingual flyers to promote meetings, or create multi-lingual handouts at meetings.

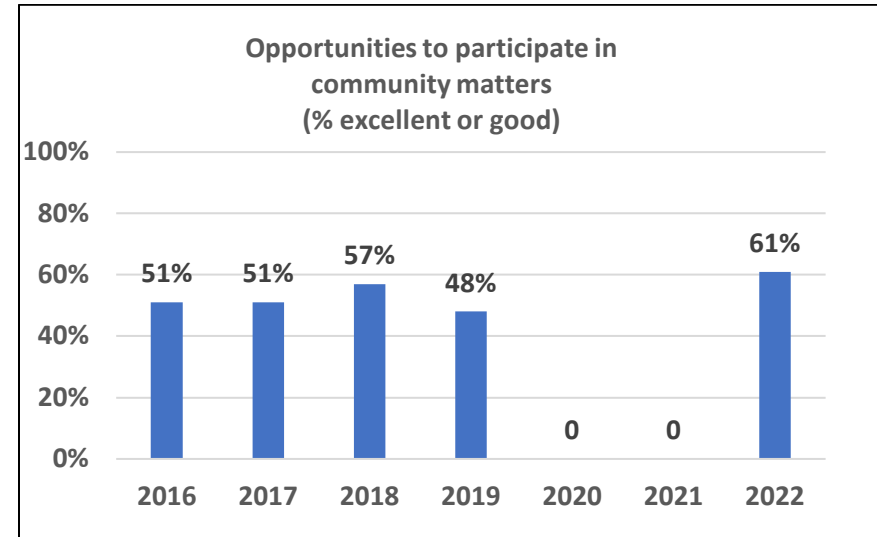
FINDINGS FOR PART TWO: IMPROVING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As with Part One, we drew from each of our main methods to study this set of tasks: interviews, the listening session, the Resident & RNO Survey, participant observation at engagement meetings, and content analysis of reports from the City and other entities.

State of Community Engagement in Denver

Each year, the National Research Center does a National Community Survey of residents of large cities regarding urban governance. In the 2022 survey, Denver improved on the “Opportunities to participate in community matters” question from a low of 48% in 2019 to 61% in 2022.

Figure 16. Results for public participation question on 2022 NRC survey



Source: National Research Center, National Community Survey for Denver, 2023.

Based on our interviews and the survey, the improvement on this question seems to be from increased efforts by several agencies to involve residents in public engagement. First, the pandemic forced agencies to offer more digital opportunities, such as online surveys and Zoom meetings, which may have reached more people than the typical in-person meetings. Some agencies have also adopted public engagement guidelines. There have also been a lot of intensive planning processes with the Neighborhood Planning Initiative program, the Denver Moves Everyone plan, the Food System Policies, and the update to Blueprint Denver.

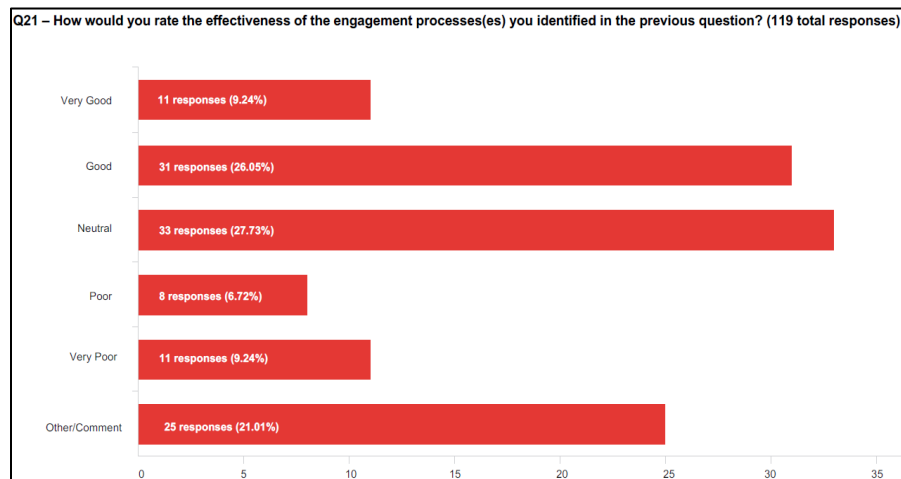
At the same time, this question does not indicate *satisfaction* with the participation. Our survey and interviews offer more insight into that aspect.

Resident & RNO Survey questions on community engagement

We started the community engagement section of the survey with a question about whether they had participated in a community engagement process. Of the 202 responses, 122 had (60%) and 80 (40%) had not. They reported participation through going to meetings, both in person and on Zoom, talking with planners, giving feedback on websites, and filling out surveys.

When asked to **rate the effectiveness of the engagement process**, the 119 people who responded to this follow up question were split into thirds: 35% said Very Good or Good, 28% were Neutral, and 16% chose Poor or Very Poor, and 18 of the 25 who chose “Other” and made a comment were disappointed or mixed about the process. Some noted the engagement process was good, but there was no follow through or implementation. Several felt like the City was “checking the box” and already had their mind made up.

Figure 17. Response to survey question on the effectiveness of City’s community engagement



Note: For the 25 detailed “Other/Comment” response, see the full survey results in this report’s Technical Appendix.

Listening Session feedback on the City’s community engagement efforts

Barriers to community engagement

Findings from this listening session, held on November 12th, 2022, include several big picture challenges as well as discrete and more manageable barriers to equitable community engagement. Big picture challenges include:

1. poor communication within and between departments that are perceived to work in silos,
2. a strong disconnect between the City administration, its policymakers (elected officials) and its residents,
3. power imbalances that tacitly direct funding and other resources to wealthier and better-connected neighborhoods, and
4. a lack of a culture of care and compassion for struggling city residents.

Specific and discrete issues that participants raised include:

1. poor community meeting organization and a lack of outreach, in particular to renters and non-English speaking community members,
2. a lack of clear accountability for follow-up action after meetings with city staff,
3. language barriers and a shortage of interpretation and translation services, and
4. perceptions of large salary inequities between community-facing employees and higher-paid leaders that participants believe result in high turnover as well as poorly informed, uncaring interactions with public-facing staff, as well as the lack of follow-up actions.

Solutions to address the barriers and challenges

Participants shared a wide range of suggestions to address these issues that included broader paradigm shifts as well as specific and targeted

changes to policy, practice, and supporting systems. The three paradigm shifts include:

1. a cultural shift to a more compassionate, care-oriented relationship with the public,
2. an opened-minded approach to problem solving with residents, and
3. intentional efforts to build relationships with community leaders and neighbors in historically marginalized communities to shift the flow of information and resources in the city.

Participants also suggested more concrete actions. **An important item with several benefits is greater efforts to educate residents about city processes and systems, including efforts that engage youth.** Other recommended actions participants felt would support a wider cultural shift to more inclusive and transparent engagement include:

1. improvements in the City's information sharing, both in-person and online,
2. development and distribution of capacity building resources for community organizations, and
3. improvements to the RNO structure, and
4. general recommendations for public engagement meetings and communications (see Appendix D for more detail).

City Council perspectives on community engagement

Most City Council members were dissatisfied with the City's processes for community engagement, although this wasn't shared by all members, or for all types of engagement. Members recognized differences among agencies or processes. They also compared some of the engagement activities they do as councilmembers for things specific to their district, or for citywide initiatives, such as the Expanding Affordable Housing ordinance.

Community engagement weaknesses identified by City Council members

- Some feel the Administration sees engagement as public relations and one way messaging, rather than a two-way conversation that would allow for meaningful feedback.
- They compared the availability of funding City agencies use to hire moderators, facilitators, and public engagement consultants to the lack of funding to pay the public to participate or to fund RNOs to help engage more community members.
- City Council offices are often asked to pass along messages to residents on an agency's behalf, and then the council member must take the "heat" or complaints if it's an unpopular program. Further, agencies don't provide the council offices with funding for message distribution, e.g., e-mail subscription services, flyering costs, or a physical mailing.
- Some complained that agencies and their consultants do not spend the time to get to know and understand each neighborhood, which puts the consultants and staff at a disadvantage in public meetings, and sometimes requires the council member to step into very tense situations.
- Information agencies send or communicate to the public often includes too much jargon.
- Council members lamented that few agency staff regularly attend RNO meetings, like the local community resource officers and city council members do, even though much of the conversation at RNO meetings is about things related to Administrative roles, e.g., traffic (DOTI) and zoning and development (CPD).
- Engagement strategies do not always match the task or activity, e.g., is the City asking for permission to do something, looking for input on future decisions, or simply informing the public that something *will be* happening. The strategies should vary so that residents aren't misled that they're being asked for input, when they are simply being told about a decision.
- New policy processes that involve public input are not always coordinated with the City Council and can, therefore, interfere with

existing engagement work a council member is doing. The Large Development Review process was one example mentioned.

In general, most of the council members noted they did not have enough money for engagement, but if they did, they could probably reach more residents and conduct a deeper level of engagement than the agencies do, who do have funding. They also noted that agency engagement can conflict with their engagement. Most recommended shifting some of the current engagement expenditures to council offices, and people who could be more embedded in community, either paid employees who act as navigators, or by providing supports for RNOs. Yet, the majority noted that RNOs needed more monitoring, evaluation, and training if they were going to receive funding.

Current efforts to improve community engagement.

Throughout our interviews, we discovered numerous efforts related to the tasks in our Scope of Work. It was also clear that HRCP and

Technology Services have offices or divisions dedicated to resident interactions and that these divisions should be further explored to understand their existing budget and staffing resources. As such, we reviewed their budgets and personnel, Full Time Equivalents (FTE), for the last eight years. We also list other engagement efforts throughout the City that should be connected and built upon with the recommendations in this report.

Engagement Offices in HRCP

Since 2015, HRCP has added several offices related to engagement (see Table 9). The Office of Strategic Partnerships started with a budget of \$22,179 and less than one half FTE (.4), and now has an annual budget of \$137,014, 1.25 staff, and a new name, Office of Nonprofit Engagement. Another office, the Office of Neighborhood Partnerships was established in 2015, but its budget, staffing, and name have been less consistent. For most of this period, it did not have staff, although its budget grew sevenfold from 2015 to 2017 (\$33,892 to \$218,184), only to drop to 25% of that (\$54,114) by 2021.

Table 10. HRCP Offices, Budget, and Personnel from 2015 to 2023

HRCP Expenditures by Activity	2015 Actuals (FTE)	2017 Actuals (FTE)	2019 Actuals (FTE)	2021 Actuals (FTE)	2023 Recommended (FTE)
Administration	\$528,169 (3)	\$786,021 (6)	\$786,021 (6)	\$709,006 (6)	\$1,100,042 (6.25)
Anti-Discrimination Office	\$100,642 (1)	\$109,843 (1)	\$109,843 (1)	\$118,316 (1)	\$137,014 (1)
Office of Strategic Partnerships	\$22,170 (.4)	\$45,788 (0.75)	\$45,788 (0.75)	\$189,089 (0.75)	\$160,782 (1.25)
Office of Nonprofit Engagement (2021--)					
Office of Community & Veteran Affairs	N/A	\$216,053 (4)	\$216,053 (4)		
Mayor's Office Community Engagement Team (2021)				\$159,221 (2)	\$484,359 (3)
Office of Financial Empowerment	N/A	\$1,410,450 (3)	\$1,410,450 (3)	\$1,193,365 (9)	\$1,507,307 (11.25)
Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs	\$112,284 (1)	\$490,711 (2)	\$490,711 (2)	\$795,243 (1)	\$1,513,887 (6)
Office of Neighborhood Partnerships	\$33,892 (1)	\$218,184 (0)			
Office of Neighborhood Engagement (2019--)			\$218,184 (0)	\$54,114 (0)	\$124,303 (1)
Office of Sign Language Services	\$146,729 (1)	\$304,272 (2)	\$304,272 (2)	\$339,256 (2)	\$450,340 (3.5)
Office of Women on Families	\$81,854 (1)	\$0 (0)	\$0 (0)	\$0 (0)	\$0 (0)
Office of Disability Rights	\$240,818 (0)	\$342,595 (6.5)	--	--	--
Division of Disability Rights (2020--)			\$498,720 (3)	\$945,494 (7)	\$1,191,844 (8)
Office of Social Equity & Innovation	N/A	\$285,203 (3)	\$285,203 (3)	\$337,755 (3)	- (0)
Office of Storytelling	N/A	\$281,258 (0)	\$281,258 (0)	\$138,285 (1)	\$406,004 (3)
Office on Aging	\$79,085 (3.5)	\$86,901 (1)	\$86,901 (1)	\$181,437 (1)	\$411,645 (3)
Expenditures by Activity Total	\$1,345,644 (11.9)	\$4,234,684 (23.7)	\$4,234,684 (22.75)	\$4,215,087(26.75)	\$6,295,683 (39.25)

Conversely, the Office of Storytelling, created in 2017 has seen its budget and staffing grow steadily, from \$281,25 in 2017 to \$406,004 recommended for 2023. The same is true for the Office Of Community & Veterans Affairs, which is now in the Mayor's Office, with nearly a half million in budget and three staff members.

Some of the efforts from these HRCP offices have helped to engage residents in various activities and policies. In particular, the offices focused on certain groups, such as older adults, people with disabilities, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and people who are immigrants and refugees, can gather input from these communities for policies and programs that affect them directly, or so that other processes have provisions that ensure the needs of diverse groups are met and there are no unintended consequences.

The Office of Storytelling and its website, "I am Denver: Sharing the stories that make our city" had a remarkable 2.1 million social media impressions in its first year. Between the people helping to contribute to the stories and those viewing them online, this effort could be leveraged to communicate other messages to residents in terms of getting involved in their city.

Figure 18 HRCP's Office of Storytelling website, "I am Denver"



Source: <https://www.denvergov.org/Community/Neighborhoods/Office-of-Storytelling>

The Office of Nonprofit Engagement was also working on a strategic plan during this study and planned to submit a request for an increased budget and more staff. It has an active advisory board of nonprofit organizations and could be an even more valuable component of a citywide engagement network if it has sufficient resources and can coordinate with other agencies that work with nonprofits to do community outreach and partnering.

Other Agencies' efforts to improve engagement.

Across the City departments and agencies there are many other engagement activities that should be continued and coordinated. Some of the methods are used by multiple agencies, include:

- YouTube channels provide online training and information videos about government operations and processes by CPD, DOTI, Auditor, and others.
- Several agencies employ navigators or liaisons, including CPD, DHS, CASR, the Municipal Defender, and others.
- A couple agencies coordinate and partner with Denver Public Schools for outreach and services, mainly the library and DHS, as well as a couple council members.
- Some agencies work with their agency's board or commission, such as the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), but there are 130 Boards and Commissions across the City and most of our interviewees said they did not work with them. Some saw potential value in being connected to them, especially the 10 Commissions in HRCP.
- The Rise Together Denver: Participatory Budgeting Process has engaged with numerous groups across the city. The use equity focus groups, and paid community connectors and are a model to continue for participatory budgeting, but perhaps for other engagement needs as well.

We also identified other activities that were isolated to a single department, as follows.

Department of Economic Development & Opportunity (DEDO)

The agency works with The Denver Foundation to provide grants to nonprofits and RNOs in NEST neighborhoods.

Office of Climate Action, Sustainability & Resiliency

- The Sustainable Neighborhoods Network, has moved from DDPHE to CASR and engages directly with neighborhood leaders and residents on meaningful programs to improve sustainability. The projects can receive support from the City in terms of staff, supplies, and small budgets, when money is available, and are constructive and meaningful ways for residents to come together with each other and the City.
- The Office did Rapid Climate Assessments in several NEST neighborhoods in which residents were paid to participate, community leaders were paid to help plan the meetings, and food and other meeting logistics were provided to encourage more representative participation.

Department of Community Planning & Development

- Implemented NPI process and engagement improvements, per auditor's report.
- The department employs high school interns as neighborhood ambassadors.
- Started intentional outreach through navigators that reached out to underrepresented and underserved groups outside the planning process.
- Adopted an engagement guide and corrected notice requirements per the Auditor.

Department of Transportation & Infrastructure

The Office of Community & Business Engagement (OCBE) created a Community Engagement Guide to guide their activities that involve planning studies and implementation of new programs and projects.

Department of Parks & Recreation

The department wrote and adopted a New Public Engagement Communication and Notification (PECAN) Guidelines document, which was approved by their board, the PRAB.

City Council efforts to improve engagement.

The City Council central office is also creating or continuing community engagement efforts.

- The new Director of Communications (a new position) is producing civic training videos with Denver 8.
- The central office produces “The Gavel” each week, a short highlights video of weekly City Council meetings.
- Studying use of Speak Up within City’s Legistar subscription, for comments on agenda items, surveys, discussion of ideas, and forum for informal votes or expressions of support for ideas and proposals.
- One council member, Councilmen Chris Hinds, is piloting Salesforce Marketing Cloud, and the Central Office is working with TS to see how it might be used for the entire council.

City Council contact management needs

Contact management is an important issue for the City Council that is related to both community engagement and constituent services. Council members maintain their own constituent lists as their constituents choose to opt-in to member newsletters or other email lists. Communicating with their constituents, however, usually requires a paid subscription service, such as MailChimp, since free versions have size limits. Several council members would prefer a better contact management system so they both have better lists and an easier time using the lists for various types of communications. This would help with engagement, such as announcements about their town halls, upcoming votes on city council, and public engagement events the City’s agencies ask them to promote to their districts. Councilman Hinds’s test of Salesforce Marketing Cloud may lead to wider adoption of the tool

and more communication with residents, not just in his district, but across the City.

A more standard contact management system across council would also eliminate the need for each new council member to start their list from scratch. The Denver City Council does not have a standard of practice or policy for council member’s information storage or for the transition between council members post transition. Each council member must start their own file system and contact management system when they begin their term. While it is logical that a prior member’s constituents may not want to be on the new member’s list, the new member could send an initial opt-in/opt-out to the prior members list. This could make it easier on the residents as well, since they wouldn’t have to search for an email listserv for the new council member.

2.3 Effective grant programs and partnerships: problems, opportunities, and needs

The bulk of our recommendations for improvements in grants and partnerships for nonprofits come from the Listening Session, but our interviews with nonprofits and RNOs that are nonprofits revealed similar issues and recommendations.

Recommendations from the listening session

During the listening session participants worked in small groups to design a small grants program that was equitable, transparent, easy to access, and manageable for small community-based nonprofits. They started by identifying challenges in several steps of the City’s current grant programs, including eligibility requirements, the application process, types and amounts of funding, and dispersal and reimbursement. They then offered several wide-ranging improvements and developments for City grants and programs, both existing and proposed.

Improvements for grants

Among the suggested improvements, there was no one-size-fits-all grant recommendation.

- **Grant Amounts:** Participants expressed interest in a range of grant sizes that had the flexibility to meet various needs for organizations with different structures and purposes.
- **Application and Reporting Requirements** As their identified grant sizes changed, so did the recommended level of reporting requirements and application effort.
- **Grant Administration and Structure:** They expressed interest in more flexible and accommodating grant structures, such as up-front dispersals of the entire amount, or dispersals in flexible installments, rather than reimbursement-based dispersals. This was clearly preferred since participants universally expressed that they do not have the organizational cash flow to wait for grant reimbursement.
- **Ongoing Technical Support:** Participants expressed interest in receiving technical support throughout the grant process.
- **Materials purchases:** The City could lessen the burden on small nonprofits by purchasing materials and supplies for them. If city

staff paid for grant-funded purchases directly, it would eliminate challenges in approvals, bookkeeping, reimbursements, and reporting.

- **Grant review and selection process:** A universal recommendation in the review process was that grant reviewers come from the applicant's communities or areas of practice, rather than reviewers they perceive as outsiders unfamiliar with the day-to-day challenges the nonprofits are working to address.

In addition to grant funds, several participants desired non-grant-funded support for their ongoing community work. The City could provide direct funding for translation, childcare services, and food provision, as well as physical materials they could borrow, like tables, projectors, translation devices, traffic cones, and other physical resources community groups could borrow for eligible community events.

The following table summarizes the problems and solutions identified by all the nonprofits we interviewed separately or through the listening session.

Table 11. Summary of Problems and Recommendations for Small Grant Programs to Nonprofits

Problems or Burdens	Recommendation
Administrative burden of receiving grants. Some groups opt not to apply for City funds because of the requirements.	• Streamline grant process and minimize requirements for the application. • Provide City support liaison to help manage funds and provide other general T.A. through the life of the grant. • Continue and expand partnerships with The Denver Foundation and other nonprofits to provide T.A. to small nonprofits
Small nonprofits need cash flow over reimbursements. Some cannot manage large grants due to tax implications.	• The city should make payments directly to vendors. This could include vendors for food, childcare, meeting space rental fees, interpreters, facilitation materials, and transportation.
Need for more flexibility in how to spend funds and over what time period	• Offer mini grants that are easy to apply for and are not limited in frequency. • Allow longer periods of time to complete activities, within reason, and reduce burden to apply for extensions.

Problems or Burdens	Recommendation
Funds reserved for NEST areas overlook nonprofits and RNOs in other underserved neighborhoods.	• Identify other eligibility requirements for RNOs in low-resource neighborhoods that are not within NEST neighborhoods so these RNOs can access grants from DEDO, CASR, DHS, HRCF, and other entities.
Many small nonprofits and RNOs in less-resourced neighborhoods have limited bandwidth for grant applications and management, and awareness tasks, e.g. flyering, emails, etc.	• City could provide interpreters /bilingual community connectors with continuity with neighborhood/population/group. • City could cover printing costs, meeting space, and website development and maintenance support. • City or other group could offer and sponsor trainings on intercultural development, cultural responsiveness, building bridges between residents. • Help to identify people with different skillsets in a neighborhood who can receive additional training or be paid a stipend to support the RNO or small nonprofit in their community. • Provide paid trainings to eligible RNO leaders, such as budgeting 101, accounting; interpretation and translation, and applying for and managing grants.

FINDINGS FOR PART THREE: STATE OF CONSTITUENT SERVICES DELIVERY

Constituent services are delivered by City agencies, but City Council offices are often heavily involved in navigating the service requests for their constituents. Although by charter, constituent services are not the role of City Council, council offices take on the navigation and troubleshooting for their constituents because their constituents expect them to and because they want to be responsive to their constituents. Technology Services is the agency that helps residents and council members to find the correct city agency for the service request since they manage 911, 311, the City's website, and all the technology infrastructure, both hardware and software applications, including purchasing, development, customization, training, and cybersecurity efforts. Thus, TS was a major focus on this study because it manages Denver Marketing and Media Services (DMMS), which now houses 311, as of a 2021 department reorganization to improve resident's digital experiences (See Table 8).

Constituent Services and Technology Services

With the 2021 reorganization of TS, a new Chief Digital Officer was appointed to manage this division and improve outcomes for residents seeking information and services. This division also has a new Director of Resident Experience who reports to the Chief Digital Officer and manages the 311-call center, the website, and the software applications and technology staff that support both.

The major software application that supports DMMS is the City's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software is Salesforce. The City has two Salesforce products: Salesforce Service Cloud and Salesforce Marketing Cloud.

- **Salesforce Service Cloud** has 50 different instances that have been customized for different city purposes and agencies. "Instances" are collections of different objects, or data tables with certain fields that are relevant to the agency, division, or user. TS does not want to give screens, fields, etc., to users since it makes the interface more complicated and adds more data tables than necessary to a customized instance, which can slow it down or make it overly complicated. The application handles account and contact management, and is the main case management software for 311, Excise and License, CPD, and divisions within DOTI, HOST, and several other agencies.
- **Salesforce Marketing Cloud** is the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and receives some contact data from Service Cloud, but it is a very different and more complex system. Therefore, only a handful of agencies, and one pilot council district, have access to it. Many more would like to have it for their programs that work with businesses, nonprofits, neighborhood groups, and other constituents, but due to staffing and budget, the

TS Roadmap to deploy Service Cloud and Marketing Cloud to more departments goes through 2025. Since some of these requests were made one to two years ago, they are on a three to five year wait list.

TS Budget and Staffing Shortages

Given the multiple year wait for Marketing Cloud, semi-customized instances of Service Cloud, and other wait times for technology fixes and installations, many interviewees in different city agencies, including TS, and the independent agencies, agreed that TS was understaffed and underbudgeted. The budgets below (Tables 11 and 12) show that while TS has had an increase in staffing and budget over the last 8 years, it is not keeping up with the demands. Despite higher budget and personnel growth than most agencies, demand for their services have also grown, including:

- New agencies and more staff
- Significant population, businesses, and development growth
- Dozens of new online services and transactions
- Increases in Cybersecurity threats that require new software, hardware, processes, experts, training for all City employees, etc.
- The need for more online applications due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the desire to provide more online opportunities beyond in-person events, e.g., Zoom and online surveys/
- In several recent annual budgets, the Strategic Framework and Budget Decision Making priorities include Customer Experience, Constituent and Council Input, Interagency Coordination, and Performance Measurement, which all require software, new users, and technical support.

Table 12. Technology Services Divisions, Budget, and Staffing 2017 to 2023

Expenditures by Activity	2015 Actuals (FT E)	2017 Actuals (FTE)	2019 Actuals (FTE)	2021 Actuals (FTE)	2023 Estimated (FTE)
Denver Marketing and Media Services & 311 [& 311 added in 2021]	\$1,539,950 (11.5)	\$1,833,331 (17.49)	\$4,142,010 (32.54)	\$5,539,035 (62.64)	\$8,164,385 (76.97)
Office of the Chief Information Officer	\$2,760,350 (17)	\$1,930,328 (8)	\$1,644,136 (3)	\$2,086,674 (8.28)	\$3,925,271 (4)
Operations	\$25,555,056 (121)	\$30,108,029 (135)	\$34,350,866 (121)	\$30,609,185 (102)	\$39,406,906 (109)
Applications Development	\$19,733,669 (103)	\$25,100,866 (118)	\$31,567,302 (136)	\$27,115,508 (94)	\$31,186,483 (103.49)
Program and Project Management (2021--)	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$3,008,828 (17)	\$3,587,163 (20.75)
Data Tools and Governance (2021 --)	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$6,110,066 (21)	\$12,445,730 (35.66)
Denver 311 (moved to DM&M in 2021)	\$1,881,692 (32)	\$1,992,215 (33.1)	\$2,456,864 (39.1)	--	--
Expenditures by Activity Total	\$51,470,716 (284)	\$60,964,769 (311.59)	\$74,161,178 (330.64)	\$74,469,297 (304.92)	\$98,715,938 (350.37)

Table 13. General Fund Expenditures by Department 2017 to 2023 (in millions)

Expenditures:	2017 actual	2018 actual	2019 actual	2020 Actuals	2021 Actual	2023 Estimated	2017-23 %change
General Administration	\$50,898	\$48,556	\$91,665	\$55,994	\$43,659	\$65,768,388	29.2%
Community Planning & Development	\$29,302	\$33,312	\$33,707	\$33,191	\$29,279	\$41,730,054	42.4%
Economic Development & Opportunity	\$4,763	\$6,683	\$29,600	\$6,552	\$6,842	\$9,933,723	108.5%
Finance	\$88,794	\$89,835	\$97,325	\$95,711	\$94,522	\$108,244,796	21.9%
General Services	\$49,027	\$51,909	\$51,203	\$52,411	\$52,030	\$65,981,673	34.6%
Health - Environmental Health	\$46,201	\$47,600	\$88,089	\$46,611	\$41,537	\$70,499,183	52.6%
Housing Stability	\$1	\$0	\$0	\$16,946	\$23,807	\$35,905,642	3590400%
Independent Agencies	\$84,810	\$92,442	\$99,065	\$104,445	\$99,717	\$140,193,455	65.3%
Parks, Recreation and Cultural	\$110,483	\$120,234	\$189,435	\$113,155	\$110,536	\$151,404,423	37.0%
Public Safety	\$511,548	\$541,442	\$567,841	\$568,992	\$481,397	\$610,692,035	19.4%
Technology Services	\$60,965	\$69,452	\$74,161	\$75,080	\$74,469	\$98,715,938	61.9%
Public Works (DOTI starting 2019)	\$115,704	\$125,114	\$139,079	\$131,105	\$127,059	\$132,067,837	14.1%
Total Expenditures (in billions)	\$1,303,073	\$1,376,626	\$1,289,350	\$1,362,992	\$1,184,854	\$1,531,137	17.5%

Constituent services and community engagement

One of the themes we identified in our research is the conflation of constituent services with community engagement. Those in communications and engagement for policymaking were careful to

make sure we were not confusing the two. While some residents may talk about their interactions with the City without differentiation between services and engagement, whether it's their experience participating in a planning process, or calling 311 to report a problem on their street, on the City's end, the actions are very different.

Technology Services' Perspective on Resident Communication v. Resident Engagement

When we interviewed TS staff, they tended to use the two words, **engagement and communication, interchangeably**. They argued the digital tools they use to provide two-way information exchange with residents *are* the main method of resident communication. While this is true in terms of volumes of resident-city interactions, it does not mean their *resident communication* activities constitute *resident engagement*.

Because of the multiple ways they communicate with residents, a few of the TS staff we interviewed questioned the need for more engagement tools, engagement staff, or a separate office of community engagement. They felt if they could improve the resident experience using 311, the new Online Services hub, or navigation improvements to the City's website, the City would be improving community engagement.

Some also mentioned that 311 agents have tabled at events to provide information about City projects, e.g., the 16th street mall. This again, however, is not full engagement in the planning for a process, which involves gathering input and using it in decision making. It is simply communicating the details of a project that has already been decided.

This position of TS explains, in part, the tension between 311 as a call center, and the SOW task that asked us to:

Recommend how to reframe 311 funds for customer service, community navigators, and translation services.

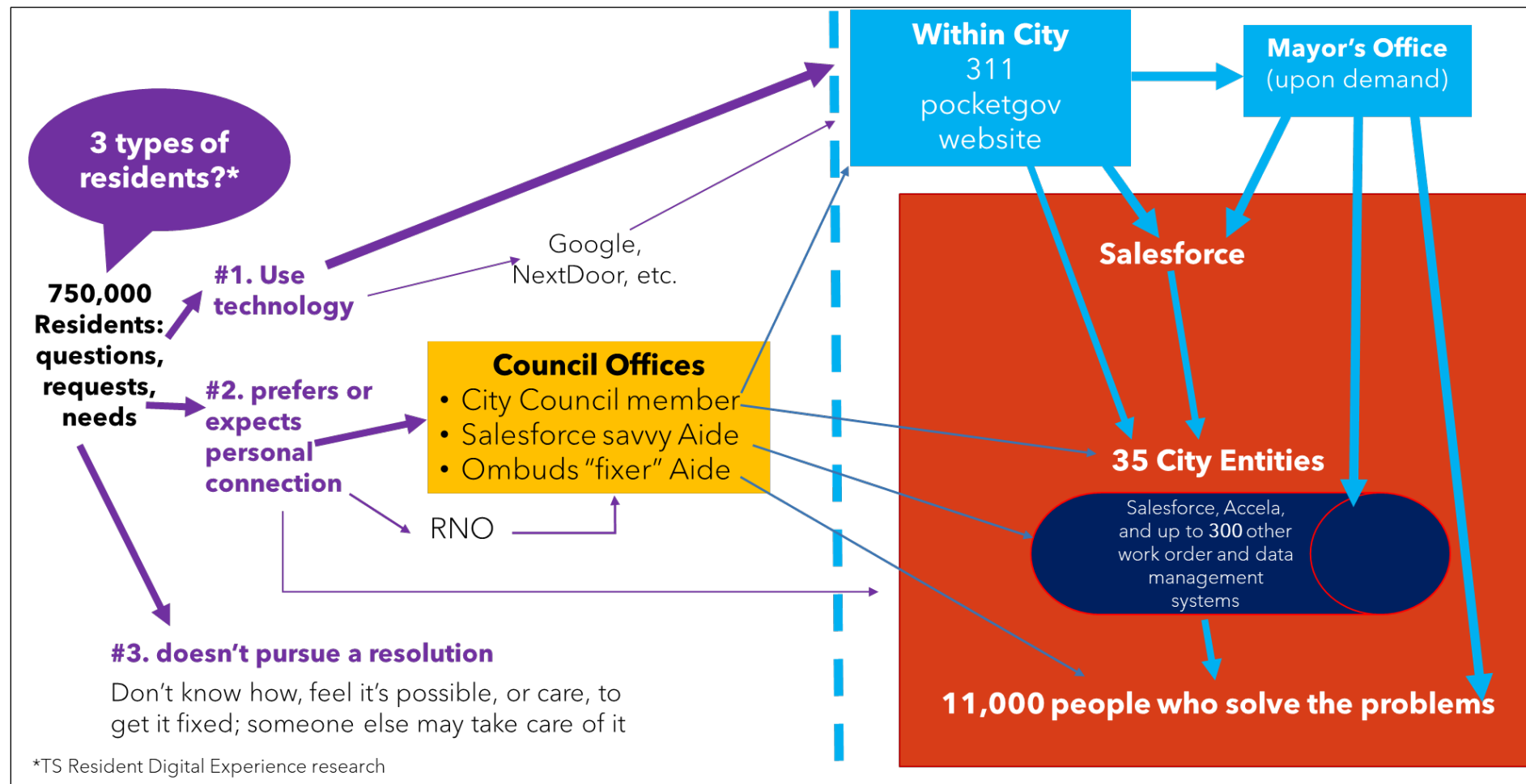
Council Members' Involvement in Resident Communication

Some council members and agency staff wanted navigators or other outreach specialists to help them reach constituents who are not as easily engaged in planning engagement processes since they may not have internet service, speak English, or have a data plan on their cell phone. A phone service (311) and other digital tools that the resident must initiate are not effective at reaching many groups.

Additionally, council members wanted these additional outreach tools and personnel so that their time was not consumed by navigating constituent services that are not fully solved through the 311 or the Online Services Hub process.

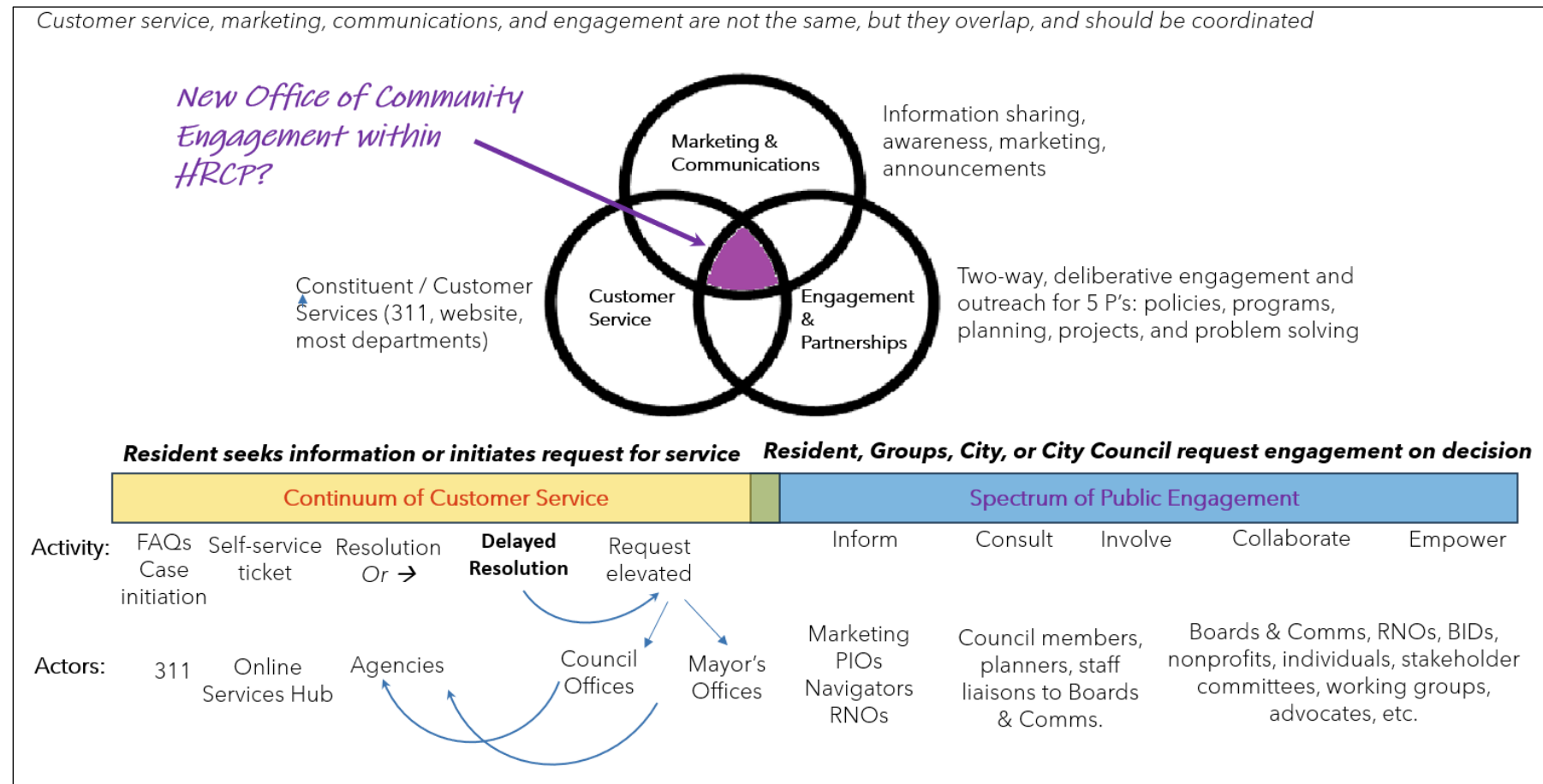
The following diagram (Figure 19) depicts the current paths residents use to make a service request. A major take-away from this diagram is that Council members are a major go-between, which cuts into their time for legislative work and can be a waste of time for residents since Council cannot directly solve most of their requests.

Figure 19. Denver resident pathways for constituent service



The following diagram (Figure 20) shows the relationship between constituent services and community engagement. The actors are the same for some steps, but the purposes and process flows are different.

Figure 20. Differentiation between Customer/Constituent Services and Community/Public Engagement



Constituent Services Systems

Across agencies there is disagreement on the use and usefulness of Salesforce. Some teams love it and see it as mission-critical, while others see it as an expensive and unnecessary system that doesn't suit their needs. The following breaks down some of the progress and achievements with Salesforce as well as the remaining issues.

Contact Management for services and engagement

Many interviewees discussed the need for a complete contact management system, so they have an easier way to contact and engage with residents, businesses, and nonprofits. Currently, agencies' lists of residents and businesses are not uniformly linked across the City. Further, in databases that are linked, there are tens of thousands of incomplete contact records and duplications.

In part, the lack of shared contacts is due to privacy laws for some agencies, such as DHS. In other cases, it's a lack of uniform use of contact databases, and few standards on how to record contact information. TS is currently leading a massive de-duplication effort to address this, but it involves more than two million records. The process to solve the issue, in addition to cleaning the database, includes new standards for collecting resident information when they request a service. At a minimum, the City will collect the contact's first and last name and a phone number or email. Combined, these three or four fields will create a unique identifier and help to reduce or eliminate future duplicate records. This more complete contact database can be used to reach out to residents about engagement processes, new city services, etc.

In addition to cleaning the more than two million contact records in the centralized system, mainly Salesforce, agencies and departments that reach out to businesses, such as divisions within DOTI, DEDO, CASR, and Excise and Licenses, have additional lists that are not stored in an Enterprise-wide database, like Salesforce. Because these agencies don't

yet have Salesforce Marketing Cloud, they have created internal lists of contacts using Microsoft Excel or Microsoft Access databases that team members share through Microsoft SharePoint. Others may be in different applications purchased before Executive Order 85, which stipulates TS must approve and purchase software applications for all agencies.

Some of these remaining agencies not fully utilizing Salesforce are eager to adopt Salesforce, while others see problems with it.

Positive aspects of Salesforce and TS Improvements

- **Satisfied Salesforce users.** Throughout our interviews, several staff within TS and other agencies were happy with many of the initiatives launched by the new management of DMMS & 311, noting the improvements to 311 and the continued management of Salesforce. For instance, request times to fix Salesforce bugs or other problems have been reduced, especially those that are mission critical. Some staff needing additional Salesforce training, particularly for specialized queries and reports, are mostly able to receive it. Salesforce users who use it regularly for case management and work orders, have received good training, and have versions of Salesforce that integrate with their other systems, think Salesforce is a terrific and invaluable system.
- **Inter-agency coordination for Salesforce and other digital communications.** TS also holds three regular meetings with their different internal customers: 1) the Salesforce Governance Team has eight members from different sized agencies and user groups and meets regularly to discuss issues and prioritize needs; 2) the website content authoring team (with 140 members) meets bi-monthly to receive website updates, training, etc., and 3) the Mayor's Office's Communications Team has a monthly virtual meeting with over 100 communications people from across the agencies and independent agencies, e.g., the Auditor, Airport, and City Council. People were generally positive about these three convenings as they help to reduce the silos across the city and are a good way to get new information.

- **Consolidation of case management systems.** TS is working to consolidate and transfer the city's case management systems into one or two databases, mainly Salesforce. Across the 50 lines of business, there are now 53, but there were many more. Customer service is affected when case management is spread across so many systems. It also adds time and cost since TS has to support and maintain these systems. The goal is to give more divisions "out of the box", i.e., lower cost, versions of Salesforce in place of some of these other database tools various users or divisions have created or purchased. Moving to standard versions of Salesforce, in place of highly customized versions has lower costs for rollout and maintenance. Out of the box versions can also receive automatic software updates and corresponding announcements. Customized versions can become out of date and lack important updates.

Room for improvement with Salesforce and other systems

- **Lack of training and/or customization for needs.** Those who have limited access to, or need for regular use, and therefore may not have had sufficient training, rate Salesforce less favorably. Some people we interviewed were not on board with getting an out-of-the-box version of Salesforce with minimal customization. This is an ongoing change management issue that needs to be worked through between the agencies who want or need new or improved Salesforce instances and TS. It's not clear that the Salesforce Governance Team has enough people involved or authority to resolve this.
- **Short staffing leads to long wait times.** Divisions that really want Salesforce for their processes, particularly outreach to constituents, are on one-to-three-year waitlists.
- **Need for more database management and other applications.** Although TS has reduced the case management systems to 53, a manager told us TS has not identified at least 300 more data management systems in their department which may be unstable, at risk of losing data, and not coordinated with other systems. The

department is undertaking its own clean up and continuing to use databases they create and share in Microsoft products over the SharePoint network because they can't buy other software applications that TS doesn't approve per E.O. 85.

- **High cost of Salesforce.** Other agencies report the high cost of buying additional licenses of Salesforce for their agency. There was disagreement about what the cost was to agencies, however: do the agencies pay or does TS pay? It depends on the purpose and timing in the budget year. If it wasn't budgeted or it's something TS hasn't planned, the agency is responsible for paying for it.
- **"Ticket Closed"**. There is no mandate that certain agencies use Salesforce or that they completely fill out the fields, except for the agencies that use it for their critical work. There are also some perverse incentives in some divisions within DOTI that measure staff on how quickly they close the Salesforce ticket created in 311. When these staff members receive the Salesforce ticket and thereby open a ticket in their work order system, they will close the Salesforce ticket to signal they have received the request and have started a process to resolve it. Unfortunately, closing the Salesforce ticket sends a message to the constituent that their ticket has been closed. The resident does not know how to interpret it, since it rarely means their request was resolved. While TS, DOTI, and other agencies have stopped this from occurring in most divisions that handle workorders, the problem remains in some divisions. It should be an easy technological and training fix to solve this issue. The message to the constituent can be changed. The interface between the two systems can be updated. The managers of staff members who close the Salesforce ticket can change the incentive.

Salesforce Lessons: the need for ongoing and comprehensive change management

The City first adopted Salesforce in 2006, but it did so with very little change management. Some agencies adopted it and continue to embrace it. Other agencies looked at it and decided it was not for them. Still others decided to opt in and have a few users on it, but the

directors aren't very aware of how their staff use it or how valuable it is for them. Another group wants to use it, but can't, due to staffing. Citywide, the software is not mandated as the enterprise system. Without that mandate, groups that are resistant to use it as the contact management or work order system, when it meets their needs, hold up the value of other groups using it. As one staff member explained:

"so to really bring everybody into this enterprise model where Salesforce is the tool that allows the city to operate... without more people it's going to be hard to bring [along] that group or some of those other groups that are not like, "we are in it with Salesforce!""

Good implementation of Enterprise Software systems, such as Salesforce requires enterprise Change Management processes.

Without change management, organizations will get the hardware and software but they will not get the most effective and efficient use from it. Change management requires an organization to identify Sponsors, Champions, Subject Matter Experts, Trainers, and Users. It also requests changes in job descriptions, business processes, and workflows that incorporate the use of the new software. In our interviews, we asked about the nature of change management that accompanied the City's implementation of Salesforce and it was clear that the City had done very little change management with the initial and ongoing role out of Salesforce. To the best of some people's recollection, the City hired external consultants for the software and hardware side but did the change management internally. Unless there are in-house dedicated experts to change management, the in-house model seldom works as effectively.

Satisfaction with constituent services

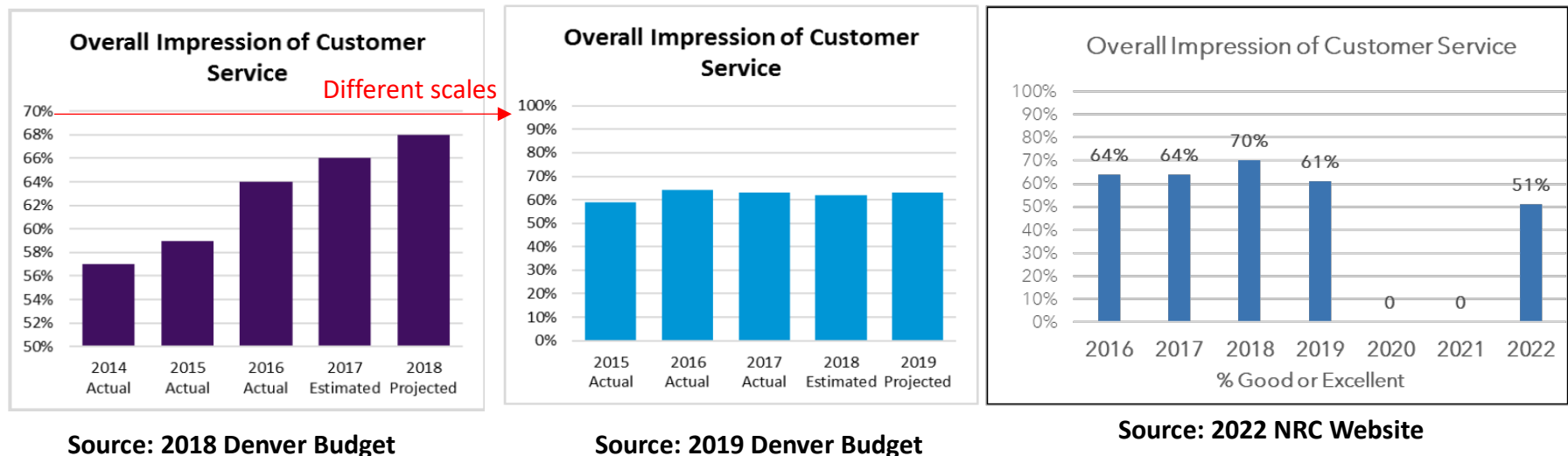
Through the research, we collected feedback on services through the Listening Session, interviews with other residents and nonprofits, and the online survey. We also researched current measures of the city's services through the performance measures tracked by TS in the City's annual budget.

National Research Center's Annual Citizen Survey

One measure of resident satisfaction with Denver's customer service over time is available from the annual Citizen Survey conducted by the

National Research Center (NRC). The charts below in Figure 19 were presented in the City of Denver's annual Budgets as part of the Department of Technology Service's annual reporting on their performance. Based on this survey in the 2018 budget, the impression of service was steadily increasing from 2014 to 2016 and estimated to continue to increase in 2018. The updated surveys with actual numbers in 2019 and 2022 show that service did increase by 2018, but that 2018 was the peak. Since then, the overall impression of customer service declined to just 51% in 2022, the lowest of the 8-year reporting period.

Figure 21. Impressions of Denver Customer Service 2014 to 2022, NRC



"Citizen attitudes about Denver's customer service and public information are determined through an annual Citizen Survey conducted by the National Research Center, Inc. The measure is the percentage of respondents who rated their interaction with our City staff or the City as "good" or "excellent." The survey is conducted in the fourth quarter of each year" (2017 Denver Mayor's Budget, p. 25). Note: the authors of this study created the 2022 chart based on the NRC website data. The City Budget did not provide a chart in 2022, only a link to the website.

Nonprofit perspectives on constituent services

In our conversations with nonprofits, as well as RNOs in neighborhoods with lower incomes, residents saw a connection between constituent services and community engagement because both were “the City” or “the Government”. As we note in the full Report Back from the listening session (Appendix F), participants expressed a general appreciation of the 311 and pocketgov services, but they believe the actual services are lacking in consistency. Specifically, participants highlighted the following difficulties, frustrations, and inequities.

- the system automation was frustrating and that it can be difficult to fit questions or issues into the structure provided. For some things, they want to speak to a live person who can understand their concerns and feel that the impersonal and generic nature of the current service leads to residents feeling that the city does not care about issues within their neighborhood.
- nonprofits and RNO leaders who connect with multi-lingual speakers, noted that pocketgov (now Online Services Hub) is only in English, so they direct their constituents or members to 311. But 311 is limited, however, due to the hours of operation, wait times, and the inability to check the status of a case number for their request. Waiting on hold for 311 can also deplete a person’s limited phone minutes if the caller has a lower cost cell phone plan.

Thus, people who do not speak English or have lower incomes have fewer options to make requests. This is a significant inequity in the delivery of constituent services.

Participants expressed similar concerns with online surveys for public participation. They did not feel surveys allow for enough nuance to get to the core of the community’s concerns. They expressed that the current structure of the surveys and 311 system, as well as the lack of follow-up from both, leave them feeling like their concerns are unheard.

Thus, whether they are registering a complaint or problem, or want to give input on a plan for their community, they are interacting with a

government that does not always provide sufficient methods for everyone to use. While online services can be helpful, sometimes they prefer or need more personal interaction and engagement that cannot be provided online through technology or by phone. This reemphasizes the point that many others made to us: ***the resident communications provided by TS are not enough and do not offer full engagement opportunities.***

Survey responses on constituent services

A few questions in the survey we issued also help to understand whether and how Denver residents, including those involved with RNOs, distinguish between different types of interactions with the City, from routine constituent service requests, such as delays in trash collection, to engagement in a longer-term public planning process, such as the Neighborhood Planning Initiative (NPI). Based on our survey results, many residents do not seem to separate their interactions with the City into separate bins, although some do understand the differences between divisions, staff members, and purposes for the interaction. In survey comments, respondents’ responses indicated they want their time respected, and they expect a follow-up response, whether it’s a time estimate for when their trash will be picked up, or a longer-term response on how their input to a public process was used. When one or both of these criteria are not met, residents are frustrated and disappointed. Several comments in the survey noted that public engagement processes felt disingenuous and that the decisions were already made. Some also felt this way about 311 and pocketgov and wondered if their requests were received. When asked if there should be an Office of Community Engagement, a few respondents were against it, stating it would be one more barrier between them and their council member or city agencies, “just like 311 and pocketgov”.

The more complex types of requests, such as changing traffic speeds, or installing a stop sign seem to be most frustrating for residents since response times are long and the processes are not transparent. We know from our interviews with 311 and DOTI staff that these types of requests take longer due to required traffic engineering studies, and

because DOTI is not fully staffed. Unfortunately, residents are not always given these reasons for long time delays. In the end, residents feel like they are being ignored, even though the City may be planning and budgeting for a study to respond to their request.

Those who do distinguish differences between different departments, or a customer service interaction versus a planning process, note some are more satisfactory than others, and point to a deficient person, department, or process, rather than all city government. Even so, when residents start to amass a list of interactions that were not satisfactory, especially across different departments, they may start to bundle them into a stack of evidence showing the City does not care about its residents, neighborhoods, RNOs, etc., or that it is incompetent and poorly managed.

Resident satisfaction with customer service systems

For a quantitative assessment, we asked residents to rank their satisfaction with the four major methods for reporting problems to the City: Denver 311, Pocketgov, Council Office, and RNO. None received a majority of satisfied respondents (see Table 10), with satisfied rates ranging from 26% for Pocketgov, to 41% for their RNO. While all methods were low RNOs and Council Members received the highest satisfaction rates at 35% and 41%, respectively. When “Somewhat Satisfied” is combined with “Satisfied”, pocketgov had the highest somewhat/satisfaction rate at 78%, followed by RNO at 77%, 311 at 74%, and Council Office at 65%.

It also should be noted that the numbers of respondents who rated their satisfaction with each option are not equal. The numbers who contacted their Council Office or RNO are much lower than the number of respondents who rated 311 and Pocketgov. Only 95 people rated their satisfaction with their RNO, whereas 152 rated their use of 311. While this is a small sample, it indicates that at least some residents are more likely to try 311 and pocketgov than to call their Council Office or RNO. This is inline with the three resident types TS developed, shown in

Figure 18. Conversely, it also shows a substantial share of respondents expect their council members to address customer service problems.

Table 14. Survey respondents’ satisfaction with customer service

Satisfaction with Service	Denver 311	Pocketgov	Council Office	RNO
Unsatisfied	40 (26%)	28 (22%)	37 (35%)	22 (23%)
Somewhat Satisfied	68 (45%)	66 (52%)	32 (30%)	34 (36%)
Satisfied	44 (29%)	33 (26%)	37 (35%)	39 (41%)
Somewhat Satisfied + Satisfied	74 (74%)*	99 (78%)	69 (65%)	73 (77%)
Total	152 (100%)	127 (100%)	106 (100%)	95 (100%)

*corrected and republished on 10/9/23.

Resident satisfaction with the RNO system to address service issues.

When asked about the different ways their RNO engages with the City, the 71 commenters loosely fell into the following three buckets:

1. residents involved in RNOs with strong leadership who also have a good relationship with their council member;
2. residents who are not happy with their RNO and may not be involved with it; and
3. residents who are engaged with an RNO but are dissatisfied with their council member and/or the City.

To explain their selected response, respondents referenced a mix of daily customer service items, such as trash collection, to longer term issues that require planning, such as bike lanes and parks planning. Small crimes were another common item referenced, which can fall into both city operations, as well as an issue that could involve public engagement to invest in longer term solutions.

#1. Members of active RNOs with strong leaders also may be engaged in other civic activities that they leverage for their RNO's ability to provide input. These respondents also tend to have a good relationship with their council member.

"City representatives often participate in meetings to brief the neighborhood on projects that impact us."

"City Council liaison sits on all of our monthly meetings and works with us. We have a member sit on the Denver RNO Board We arrange meetings with DOTI, Parks, etc with members"

"(1) Constant contact with Councilperson's office. Invitations to monthly meetings are always extended. (2) Has representation on initiatives such as Denver Moves (DOTI), Curbside Access Plan Steering Committee (DOTI), (3) Community Planning and Development: works with city staff assigned with each zoning application that applies to Cherry Creek East."

"We work closely with our city council member who offers much support and generous assistance in our work and efforts. We've been in contact with the Denver City Parks and Recreation Dept. regarding the Sustainable Neighborhoods program"

"We meet regularly with our council member, we have representatives from the city, such as DOTI, Safe Outdoor Space, Save our open space etc. speak about issues such as traffic, safety, homelessness. Our CM holds a meeting every two months for leaders of RNOs and brings in various speakers from the city, such as police, fire, parks, water etc."

"We engage with every agency as needed. We look for partnerships and grants."

"There are a variety of committees, that are sponsored and are a part of [RNO], that interact with a variety of governmental and non-governmental entities in executing the associations goals."

"RNO board members form relationships with our city council person and their office. RNO board members call specific people within departments/agencies, attend meetings, and disseminate information as it relates to happenings in our community."

"Our council person or a representative regularly attends our meetings and provides updates as well as guidance to the right agencies to help with issues. We have a member who is on the PRAB and STAR advisory board that attends meetings regularly and shares updates on the agencies. DOTI has been absent due to turnover. DPD community resources officers regularly attend and share information on petty crimes and encourage participation in their community events."

"Our [council member] always has a detailed update for us on issues in our area, we have regular reports from the local police district, and depending on what impact various projects might have on us we sometimes get reports from say DOTI, when they were working on the bike lanes"

#2. Respondents who are not happy with their RNO and may or may not be active with it.

"at this point they mostly just pass emails along"

"Invite them to their own neighborhood meetings to which the board of directors maintain control."

"I only know that my RNO exists & that it is supposed to hold monthly meetings. I've attended one meeting but have been unable to attend any others due to time or last minute cancellations, changes, no meeting invite going out, etc."

"I don't know. I have not been active and I do not think they represent the community"

"I don't think they do engage with the city departments"

#3. Respondents who are engaged with an RNO but are dissatisfied with their council member and/or the City.

"We register our views with [council member] but they go unheeded. [CM] is in the Mayor's pocket ...no regard for our RNO's [majority] vote against commercial development at [planned development]."

"We have worked with DOTI Transportaion regarding speed limit signage and stop signs and they were a complete failure, Solid Waste initiated a disfunctional policy 16 months ago with out visiting the neighborhood and a has created severe hardship and will not change the policy, we are the only neighborhood they have done this too. We have a council person who refuses to meet with us."

"They come and talk occasionally but very little productive dialogue"

"RNO engages with city agencies. However, it looks like City agencies do not always attend meetings as requested or provide information. This also includes City council members. Some do not like RNOs and refuse to respond to their emails or requests for presentations or information."

"Informational - they tell us what they aren't going to do - e.g. good luck"

"I know the RNO has engaged with DOTI Utilities and Solid Waste Management on numerous occasions, but DOTI continues to do nothing to address the safety concerns of residents and the RNO as it relates to trash, recycling and compost pickup in Congress Park."

Other issues identified with the Digital Technologies Constituent Services

Residents made several complaints about the new Online Services Hub and 311. Our team also tested both services and identified issues that could be improved.

- TS has decided not to provide a mobile app for either service, due to fees charged by the two primary providers, and other limits with apps. They instead have designed a mobile-friendly web version of the Online Services Hub. The lack of a dedicated App, i.e., from the Apple and Google Play App stores may reduce awareness and ease of use, at least for constituents who use Android and Apple phones.
- Reporting a problem online is difficult for at least two reasons: 1) exact addresses are not always possible or relevant. The constituent reporting the problem should be able to log a cross street or block/range for the problem, and 2) photos are required, but it is not always possible or safe to take a photo.
- The What's Near Me function on the Denvergov website is also largely unknown and provides little more than Google maps. It should be populated with information from the different agencies.
- The limited hours of 311 do not match with times when people need to report a non-emergency incident related to cars, noise, traffic, safety when 311 is closed and it's inappropriate to call 911.
- Other issues with 311 include lack of confirmation that the call was logged, e.g., a confirmation email or text message with a complaint number. This limits their ability to call back and reference their prior complaint. The 311 complaints do not seem to be linked to the Online Services Hub, so a resident cannot look up their status online after they initially filed it through 311.
- Council members and survey respondents noted that 311 seems like a barrier between residents and the City. Residents want to call DOTI directly if their trash isn't picked up, etc.
- Some frequently reported issues should be easier to report through a streamlined form for such issues, e.g., click on the "my trash wasn't picked up" and then enter your name and address.

- Other frequently reported issues can take too long to resolve due to lack of staff in CPD's Neighborhood Inspection Services (NIS) or disconnect between 311 and 911 traffic safety. These issues include abandoned vehicles, illegally parked cars, traffic violations, and street safety issues. NIS is in need of more staff and resources, including case management workers who can assist residents who need support to respond to tickets and fines, especially older adults who cannot maintain their homes and do not have reliable access to the internet.
- Inequity in the prioritization of complaints and responses: some residents have been told, or led to believe, that the more complaints sent to 311, the higher the likelihood of an issue being addressed. Some residents will therefore file a complaint through 311 or pocketgov as often as possible if they want an issue addressed. Well-connected residents will encourage their neighbors to join them in logging complaints. We heard varying responses from the agencies on whether this is a successful strategy and the City's method for resolving complaints. Several confirmed the squeaky wheels do get oiled, while others noted they use order of submission, unless it's a life/safety issue, to be fair and equitable.
- There doesn't appear to be cross-agency communication about common problems or which agencies are working to address them and how. This leads to redundancy in work, causes gaps in responding to issues, and limits innovation that could occur if agencies had better communication and information sharing about common issues that do not fall fully within a single agency.

When our team tested these systems, we had varying levels of satisfaction, as well as frustration. The example in Figure 22 is an example of a frustrating experience with multiple dead-ends, and ultimately no resolution.

Figure 22. Example of trying to find information on a street closure

In Spring 2022, we attempted to use the City's digital tools to discover more information about the ongoing work on the 7th Avenue Parkway, a two-way street from Speer to Colorado Blvd.

On 7th Avenue there were new "Do Not Enter" signs heading west on 7th Avenue at Williams. It was unclear if the street was one-way beyond that point, or if a driver is prohibited from heading west for a block, or more.

We tried looking on the Online Services Hub for existing projects, but nothing was noted. Also, there was no way to search for a project by location.

We then tried to "Report an Issue" by asking what is happening on 7th Avenue. None of the listed choices included roadwork. We searched on the Online Services Hub for transportation projects, but it doesn't have an interactive map, so we would have had to type in numerous addresses in an attempt to locate it. There is a Civic Center-Capital Hill NTMP which could be behind this work on 7th Avenue, but there were no details about what that project entails and the map shown just outlined the project area with no specific information.

We tried to call 311, but they do not operate on the weekends or evenings, so we logged a request for information online. When we completed the request, we did not receive an email confirmation or a case number.

Summary of perspectives on the spectrum of city-resident interactions: from customer service to community engagement

For successful urban governance in which all residents have a high quality of life, all types of City-resident interactions must work well, whether the interactions are service-related and resident-initiated or engagement-related for long term planning and policy issues. When customer service is bad, and city operations don't meet resident expectations, the poor experience may damage a resident's desire to participate in engagement activities. Further, residents may also question: *Why would a City take on future projects, if it can't manage its current infrastructure and operations?* This leads to no votes on bond issues, tax increases, and proposals for new projects.

Government officials and staff also realize the connection between constituent services, community engagement, and quality of life. Unfortunately, however, staff and council offices are often forced to delineate among the types of interactions with residents based on whose job it is to respond, whether they have the resources to respond, and how they can prioritize responses fairly and equitably, given constrained resources and high demands.

For instance, when a bike planner goes to an RNO meeting to talk about a proposed bike lane and the members only want to discuss trash collection, how is the planner supposed to respond if they know nothing about trash collection? Do they have the resources, personal network within the City, or procedures to take the questions about trash collection to the appropriate people in DOTI, and ensure that DOTI personnel will follow-up with the members who attended the RNO meeting? Further, how do they know that the few people at the meeting are representative of the neighborhood? Do they have a good way to poll or contact the rest of the neighborhood about the issue?

Largely, the answer to the questions in the above scenario is "no". These types of scenarios make the officials and staff wish they could

easily reach more residents, more often, for all sorts of input and engagement. They also want better ways to connect with their peers across the city agencies, so they provide better service and engage more residents in decision making.

Technology Services is trying to facilitate improvements for both issues, outreach to residents and communication across agencies, but there is still more work to be done. Likewise, agencies are working to hire more engagement specialists, and City Council is trying to improve its communications about council processes and resident input, and develop better contact management systems, but these efforts lack sufficient funding and staff.

Existing efforts related to the study's three topics.

As noted above, there are several other efforts related to our scope of work (see Table 14). Where possible, we have incorporated them into our recommendations.

Table 15. Identified engagement efforts during the study

<u>Part One: RNOs</u>	<u>Part Two: Community Engagement</u>	<u>Part Three: Constituent Services</u>
• District 6, CM Kashmann: RNO grants, Residents Academy • City Council: Legislative & Councilman Kashmann: Survey of RNOs in 2020 via INC • CPD: Document discussing possible updates to the RNO Ordinance • DEDO NEST: small, easy-to-use grants to nonprofits/RNOs in NEST neighborhoods • INC: proposal to update RNO ordinance, efforts to improve representation engagement and membership and civic training • Radian Inc. developed RNO Equity Toolkit for 5 RNOs with support from HRCF, ONE	• DEDO, NEST grants to RNOs and nonprofits via The Denver Foundation • City Council: producing new civic training videos with Denver 8 • City Council: Produces “The Gavel”, a short highlights video of weekly City Council meetings. • City Council: studying use of Speak Up within City’s Legistar subscription, for comments on agenda items, surveys, and idea discussion and vote forum. • CASR Sustainable Neighborhoods Network (formerly in DDPHE) • CASR Rapid climate assessments in NEST neighborhoods • CPD: NPI process and engagement improvements, some per auditor’s report • CPD: high school interns are neighborhood ambassadors. • CPD: intentional outreach through navigators • CPD: engagement guide and notice requirements per the Auditor • DOTI: Office of Community & Business Engagement (OCBE) Community Engagement Guide • HRCF: I am Denver – Office of Storytelling has millions of website visitors. • HRCF Office of Nonprofit Engagement: new strategic plan, increased budget, and staffing request, and HRCF Commission • Parks & Recreation (DPR): New Public Engagement Communication and Notification (PECAN) guidelines approved by PRAB. • Multiple Agencies: • online training and information videos about government operations and processes on YouTube by CPD, DOTI, Auditor, and others • employ navigators or liaisons, e.g., CPD, DHS(?), CASR (?), • coordinate and partner with Denver Public Schools for outreach and services • 130 Boards and Commissions: some work with agencies, including HRCF help with community outreach and advise on engaging and serving residents. • Rise Together Denver: Participatory Budgeting Process with community wide and equity focus groups, and paid community connectors.	• Denver Public Library: field workers • HRCF’s immigrant and refugee training, MyCity • TS: Salesforce Governance Group • TS: Efforts to improve Resident Experience through Online Services Hub (which replaced pocketgov and allows user accounts to track requests), and 311 improvements, • TS: Salesforce Marketing Cloud rollout, and more users on Service Cloud • TS: contact de-duplication process across the Salesforce. • TS: What’s Near Me online mapping of some city locations, but only a few types of events • Mayor’s Office of Communications: monthly meeting with 100+ city employees and council members • CPD and TS are developing a website to provide some notifications for everyone to access, not just RNOs • TS: The new website, OpenCities (Granicus), allows improved maps and they hope that Granicus will eventually allow lines and shapes to designate projects. Currently it is limited to points.

LEARNING FROM OTHER CITIES: 13 CASE STUDIES

To inform our research on best practices for RNO's, community engagement, and constituent services we conducted a review of 13 US cities (Boston, MA, Boulder, CO, Charlotte, NC, Golden, CO, Los Angeles, CA, Minneapolis, MN, New York, NY, Oakland, CA, Pittsburgh, PA, Philadelphia, PA, Seattle, WA, and Washington D.C.).

For each case, we looked in the following six categories for innovative models, engagement and support structures, grants and personnel devoted to engagement and neighborhood supports, and whether there were similar trends across cities.

City case study criteria

1. *System of neighborhood organizations (e.g., RNOs):* does the city support them; what is their structure; are there defined geography boundaries; how many are there; is there an official ordinance that designates their structure or rules; what powers do they have to give feedback on city policy, if any; are there mechanisms, if not official "power" or authority" to provide input or review of policies or development?
2. *Constituent Services phone line and interactive neighborhood web tools:* Is there a 311 system or online system for non-911/emergency questions and issues, like "see, click, fix"; is there a web portal for resident information by zip code or neighborhood; are there other web tools or phone applications for city services?
3. *Citywide office for Community/Resident Engagement:* Is there an Office of 'community engagement' or 'neighborhoods': how does this office interact with other departments that have engagement specialists or divisions?

4. *Paid Liaisons, either city staff or residents, to support neighborhood organizations and/or connect residents.* These are different than navigators since they provide ongoing support for neighborhood organizations.
5. *Education & Training for Residents:* Do the city provide resident training on local government, such as civic academies, online videos, or other types of education for residents on how their city government works?
6. *Grants for community building and engagement:* Are there grants for neighborhood organizations or other nonprofits to promote community building, resident participation in policymaking and planning, etc.?

We elected to study only cities that had adopted a formal Office of Community Engagement as well as formal or informal neighborhood groups. This eliminated cities such as Atlanta, Phoenix, and Austin, despite being peer cities. We did make an exception for St. Paul, MN, which does not have an engagement office, but does have a long-standing system of neighborhood District Councils, begun in the 1970s for Urban Renewal, and funded by the City at over \$1.2M per year.

Our consolidated findings are organized into several tables on the following pages. At a high level, across the 13 cities, five cities had all seven items (we counted 311 and the website as two) we identified as useful for comprehensive engagement and constituent services: an office of community engagement, paid neighborhood liaisons, grants for eligible neighborhood organizations, civic training, 311, and a neighborhood portal/website. The five cities include Los Angeles, Oakland, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, and New York. Five more had six of these features, including Seattle, Boston, Charlotte, Washington DC, and Philadelphia. The presence of nearly all these features across 10 of our 13 cases, and in cities of various sizes from less than 300,000 to more than 8.5 million, suggests these are becoming standard practices. Further some have had these programs for several decades. Across the 13 cases, we identified several worthy practices to inform our recommendations.

Table 16. Comparison Cities Studied for Community Engagement Offices, Neighborhood Organizations, Constituent Services, and Civic Education

City, Pop, (interviews)	Engagement Office Name & Budget	Location of Office	System of Neighborhood Organizations
Boston, MA 667,137	Cabinet of Community Engagement, and Neighborhood Services Office (\$3,096,377)	Mayor's cabinet	Neighborhood councils, but they are not uniformly distributed. City has several ways to support their needs as requested via the Neighborhood Services Division.
Boulder, CO 108,250 (2)	Department of Communication & Engagement	Individual Department	There is no formal system, but neighborhood groups exist, and the City has started a grant program to promote community building
Charlotte, NC 827, 097	Community Engagement Division of Office of Housing & Neighborhood Services (\$50,000)	In Office of Housing & Neighborhood Services	Informal groups, but supported by City staff assigned to 4 quadrants of city
Golden, CO 20,399	City of Golden Community Engagement & Communications Department (\$657,769)	Individual Department	Formal and informal neighborhood associations. Both can register and City sends them periodic information.
Los Angeles, CA 3,971,883 (2)	Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, "EmpowerLA", houses Office of Engagement (\$3,014,987)	In Dept. of Neighborhood Empowerment, but may become a department	99 Neighborhood Councils formed in 1999, each serving 40,000 people.
Minneapolis, MN 410,939 (2)	Dept of Neighborhood and Community Relations (NCR) (\$1,704,315)	Individual Department	70 autonomous nonprofit Neighborhood Associations representing 84 neighborhoods
New York, NY 8,550,405	Mayor's Community Affairs Unit (CAU) (\$5,000,000)	Mayor's Office	59 Community Boards across the 5 boroughs with up to 50 paid staff each
Oakland, CA 419,267 (1)	Office of Inclusive Community Engagement (ICE), which has a Neighborhood Services Division (NSD) (N/A)	City Administrator's office, under the mayor	45 neighborhood councils (NCs), mostly for crime prevention, Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils, NCPs, and serve one or more of the 57 Community Policing Beats.
Philadelphia, PA 1,576,000	Mayor's Office of Public Engagement (TBD)	Mayor's Office	274 Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) involved with zoning review and registered by the plan commission.
Pittsburgh, PA 295,793 (2)	Forming an Office of Neighborhood & Constituent Services (ONS) (\$982,694)	Mayor's cabinet: 3 Staff members	2018 ordinance established 38 Registered Community Organizations (RCOs). Managed by Planning Department.
Seattle, WA 684,451 (2)	Department of Neighborhoods (\$3,000,000)	Individual Department	The City defunded 13 district councils / neighborhood organizations supported by city Neighborhood Coordinators.
St. Paul, MN 307,913 (1)	(They do not have an office but allocate \$1,096,267 for District Council Community Engagement and the DC Innovation Fund).	N/A	17 autonomous nonprofit District Councils (DCs) created in 1975 to provide community engagement in the city planning process as a backlash to Urban Renewal receive City funding.
Washington, D.C. 672,228 (1)	Mayor's Office of Community Engagement and Services	Mayor's Office	26 Community Associations that are part of the "Federation of Community Associations" which started in 1910 and incorporated as a nonprofit in 1940
13 Cases (14)			

City case study highlights

The following summarizes several lessons or findings from the 13 cases.

System and requirements of Neighborhood Organizations vary widely.

Six of the cities have a single, city-wide formal neighborhood organization system, including Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles, Community Boards in New York City, District Councils in St. Paul, Community Associations in Washington DC, Registered Community Organizations in Pittsburgh, and Neighborhood Councils in Oakland. Other cities have multiple neighborhood or district organizations that are not uniform, such as the RCOs in Philadelphia or the Neighborhood Associations in Minneapolis, like the organically formed RNOs in Denver, with the exception that the neighborhood associations in Minneapolis are nonprofits. The informal organizations are typically made up of volunteers and focus on community-building activities, while the formal organizations with boards and committees are typically more structured and have a greater focus on advocacy and policymaking. All the organizations have some role in providing input to city government on issues that affect their neighborhoods.

Requirements of neighborhood organizations also vary. Both the Community Boards in New York City and the Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) in Philadelphia are required to hold regular meetings and choose leadership. The RCOs in Philadelphia have a minimum of 10 members. They also have other requirements and are allowed to provide formal input on zoning and development. Because of these official requirements, Philadelphia has produced several videos as part of RCO learning services with modules about what an RCO does, its responsibilities, what is development, how to meet with developers, etc. The City also offers a training packet that provides suggestions for running virtual meetings, choosing leadership, and understanding zoning.

Size and number of neighborhood organizations also vary.

There are just 17 formal district councils in St. Paul, but more than 274 Registered Community Organizations in Philadelphia. Denver and Philadelphia are outliers in terms of the large number of organizations. Given the number of associations, their membership or representation varies widely. The informal Neighborhood Associations in Minneapolis represent between 672 and 20,000 residents, while the District Councils in St. Paul represent between 2,000 and 10,000 residents each, and the Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles each represent 40,000 people.

Location and budgets of Offices of Community Engagement

Twelve of the 13 case studies, St. Paul was the exception, have an office or department focused on engagement, but they vary in size, location, and activities. Across the 12 cities, six engagement offices are in the Mayor's Office (Boston, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C.), five are separate departments within the General Fund (Boulder, Golden, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Seattle), and one is a division within another department, Charlotte's is within the Office of Housing & Neighborhood Services.

Budgets for the offices of community engagement that we were able to locate range in size from the lowest in Charlotte at \$50,000, to approximately \$3M in Seattle, Boston, and Los Angeles, and \$5M in New York. It should be noted that some of these agencies include the cost of 311 and may or may not include the grants they provide to neighborhood associations or all staff who serve in neighborhood liaison roles. (See Table 11).

Paid City Staff as Neighborhood Liaisons

Remarkably, all but Golden have at least one staff member serving as a dedicated neighborhood liaison, while most have several liaisons, also termed Neighborhood Empowerment Advocates (Los Angeles), Neighborhood Service Coordinators (Oakland), Neighborhood Specialists (Minneapolis), Community Engagement Representatives (Washington, DC), and Community Connectors (Seattle) (see Table 12).

Grants and funding for neighborhood organizations

In terms of funding, while all cities, except Golden, have grants or funding available to eligible neighborhood organizations, most do not automatically provide funding. Less than half, St. Paul, Minneapolis, New York, Oakland, and Los Angeles have funding dedicated to their formal neighborhood organizations, or councils.

While they do not automatically provide funding in most cities, there is a wide variety of grants available to neighborhood organizations. Some grants are focused on specific types of projects, such as the Love Your Block Mini-Grants in Boston or the Public Service Grants in Pittsburgh. Other grants are more general, such as the Neighborhood Matching Grants in Charlotte or the Neighborhood Council Fund in Oakland. The amount of funding available also varies widely, from the \$500 mini-grants in Boston to the \$1.4 million budget in St. Paul to support each of the 17 District Councils. Despite the grant and funding differences, there are some similarities. For example, many grants require neighborhood organizations to identify goals and report outcomes. Additionally, many grants are focused on supporting projects that benefit the community, rather than just a specific group of residents.

Civic training and education

Civic training or education, either in person or online, is not available uniformly across the cases, but eight of the cases offer it online or in person, across various topics. Two of these eight cities, New York and Washington, D.C. provide training through the individual councils (New York), or through the Federation of Community Associations (Washington, DC.)

Lessons from case study interviews

The 13 interviews we conducted helped us to better understand the cases, beyond what we could locate and read on their website. Depending on the case, the interviewee described the nature of their community engagement office, including how it came about, explained how their neighborhood liaisons or grants worked, if they had them,

and pointed us to additional information or people to interview. This information is captured in our tables and more detailed case descriptions in Appendix F.

In addition to that information, there were other lessons from five of the studies that are worth sharing.

- **311 awareness and use in Minneapolis:** the city successfully used radio coverage of how to use 311 to raise resident awareness and increase its use.
- **Lack of dedicated staff for neighborhood groups in Pittsburgh:** The relatively new system of RCOs has had some difficulties. Because they are run by the Planning Department, managing the 38 new RCOs has reduced planning staff time for planning.
- **City-designation of RCOs in Pittsburgh has led to neighborhood divisions.** RCO status has led to divisions between community groups that were serving different needs within an area. It has also driven wedges between those with RCO status and those without it. The City's establishment of these groups also disrupted the organic nature of community organizations that formed and worked together in different parts of the city. Some feel that developers have also exploited the new model.
- **In Seattle, there were several lessons, both positive and negative, after the mayor discontinued the neighborhood councils.** On the positive side, the new city personnel, Community Engagement Coordinators, who work as interdepartmental positions allow for better engagement practices across departments. On the other hand, they don't have sufficient capacity and resources. The paid resident liaisons are also a good model for helping to reach underserved communities who may not trust, or be comfortable interacting with, the government. Former City personnel who were involved in the city during the discontinuation of the neighborhood organizations caution that getting rid of an existing neighborhood system can create significant distrust or animosity toward the City. Improving and reforming the existing system, with clear equity goals, may be a better approach.

- **In St. Paul, project funding for neighborhood groups demonstrates their capacity.** Neighborhood councils have received project specific funds from CDBG and other sources, including funding from Economic Development and Parks and Recreation, demonstrating that formal, funded, neighborhood organizations can have the capacity to work with City departments and agencies on projects. That said, there is “engagement fatigue” in some neighborhoods.
- **In St. Paul, the relatively limited number of councils and lack of monitoring can foster insular organizations resistant to change.** Because of the lower number of District Councils, just 17, there can be a lack of transparency that creates barriers to entry. The interviewee suggested some have an insular culture and are often resistant to change, including accepting suggestions from the City

on how to improve. It’s their job to make recommendations to the City, not the other way around. Thus, some within the City felt they should leverage the City funding to require better performance from District Councils. As noted in the following table, although a District Council must identify goals and report outcomes, to receive funding, some note there is little accountability or incentive to meet goals or increase equity and representation.

- **Washington, DC’s Federation of Community Associations is a positive example of an Association of Associations.** Further exploration of this model could offer lessons for Denver’s Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation group, INC., such as their funding model and services offered, including training.

Table 17. Comparison of city case studies by grants and other funding, paid liaisons, and civic education training

City	Community grants/ funding for neighborhood organizations	Neighborhood Liaisons as City Personnel or Paid Residents	Civic Education and Training for Residents
Boston, MA	Love Your Block Mini-Grants funded through external dollars, the Make Boston Shine Trust	20 staff liaisons, each covering 1-4 neighborhoods, or other population groups. They attend community meetings, assist residents with city services, share information directly with neighborhoods and help the City respond to emergencies. Also represents neighborhood with development, e.g., zoning hearings. They provide a forum for groups and individuals to express concerns, request services, and extend opinions. The goal is to encourage, facilitate, and maximize resident input and participation in all aspects of government. They use a “Mobile City Hall to Go” truck that takes services directly to residents. They add and rotate selected services to the truck.	They have block party kits to make it easier for residents to plan community events, but they don’t offer other training.
Boulder, CO	Neighborhood Connection Grant supports programming or funding to bring their community together by sharing experiences in your community and around the city. Neighborhood Connection Grant Program website.	Boulder has a Neighborhood Liaison in its Neighborhood Services division. They also have eight Community Connectors-in-Residence to “elevate underrepresented voices and build trust between community members and city government.” They co-design engagement opportunities and provide two-way communication. They are paid a stipend.	We could not identify civic training, but they have instructions on their website to “learn how to participate in a City Council meeting. They also offer a block party tool kit.

City	Community grants/ funding for neighborhood organizations	Neighborhood Liaisons as City Personnel or Paid Residents	Civic Education and Training for Residents
Charlotte, NC	Neighborhood Matching Grants for eligible neighborhood-based organizations	"Community Engagement Service Teams" are assigned to four areas and work directly with citizens, neighborhood and business associations, civic groups, and other community organizations to assist communities with project implementation and area revitalization. They provide Advocacy, Coordination, Information, and Problem Solving	Charlotte provides a free Civic Leadership Academy. They also have a repository of on-demand training videos, such as "Queen City Crash Course: Tools for Neighborhood Leadership". OCE also provides training on digital communication for neighborhood groups
Golden, CO	<i>No neighborhood grants</i>	N/A	Offers a Public Works Citizen's Academy.
Los Angeles, CA	Each receives \$32,000/year for proceedings and activities and are part of local city government.	Several staff members, including Director of Awareness & Engagement, and 14 Neighborhood Empowerment Advocates. The NEAs staff Awareness & Engagement division, Civic Leadership Division, the Policy & Governance Division. They also have 3 project assistants, and a management analyst. The Department of Neighborhoods has paid Neighborhood Empowerment Advocates. The elected Neighborhood Council members who are volunteer board members.	EmpowerLA.org has videos on councils, and training resources to find meeting times, elections, and file complaints.
Minneapolis, MN	New funding model, but interviewees noted funding was insufficient. Base level of funding for each neighborhood organization and additional funding based on equity and historical underrepresentation, based on racial equity analysis by the University of Minnesota CURA: Areas of Concentrated Poverty (50%), Gentrification (20%), Cost Burdened Households (30%).	An NCR Neighborhood Specialist services each Neighborhood Association.	Community Connections learning lab series consists of eight free, in-person 90-minute labs for residents and staff - can result in a "Community Connector Certificate". They also have a Community Connections conference annually with 1000 people and 150 booths/vendors. Additionally, the city contracts w non-profit, Nexus Community Partners, to provide an annual 7-month program to identify and train people from underrepresented communities to join boards and commissions, the Boards & Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI).

City	Community grants/ funding for neighborhood organizations	Neighborhood Liaisons as City Personnel or Paid Residents	Civic Education and Training for Residents
			They also have a 5-week City Academy for residents on operations and functions of city government.
New York, NY	Community needs for funding are included in yearly "community district needs statements" prepared by each of the 59 community boards to allocate funding.	Each of the 59 Community Boards has paid District Managers who establish an office, hire staff, and implement mandatory procedures to improve delivery of City services. Some may provide additional services beyond the mandated ones. RFEI (expression of interest) for Neighborhood Support Teams are solicited each year. Borough CBs, CBOs, Council Members, or BIDs may apply. They can propose actions to address local issues that require city services as part of the solution and must be addressed by multiple agencies to be addressed effectively and comprehensively. The NSTs must use existing city resources to address their issues	Training varies by Community Board. Many have videos. There are also training videos and training workshops led by the Department of City Planning (DCP). The DCP also provides direct support to all CBs for Community District Needs process. The Civic Engagement Commission also runs the participatory budgeting process.
Oakland, CA	Each NC receives \$1,111/year from City's Neighborhood Council Fund **[need the source of this fund]**	The Neighborhood Services Division has 10 staff including 7 Neighborhood Services Coordinators and 2 Police Services Technicians, and 1 Office Assistant. Each Neighborhood Council is assigned an NSC. Each NSC has 5-8 police beats (7 NSCs, 47 PBs, 45 NCs). The NSCs work with NCs to identify leaders and NC participants in Neighborhood Watch. The NSCs are constantly doing outreach to connect with residents	They had a "Civic Academy" has been inactive since Covid.
Philadelphia, PA	None identified.	Residents can do training to become connectors to their community through the Mayor's Office of Public Engagement.	The Philadelphia Citizens Planning Institute is a six-week course held twice a year. Additionally, the RCO website has 14 documents with various types of instructions and training, including "RCO virtual meeting notice examples", "RCO training packet", and "Meeting summary template". The 72-page training packet provides templates, links to city resources, meeting guides, and other instructions. They also offer several videos on RCOs available on PHL GovTV via YouTube. They range from 5 to 12 minutes.
Pittsburgh, PA	Public Service Grants scored by Youth/high school students	The new Office of Neighborhood Services will have online engagement specialists, infrastructure engagement specialists,	They have a civic training and are in the process of revamping it in 2023.

City	Community grants/ funding for neighborhood organizations	Neighborhood Liaisons as City Personnel or Paid Residents	Civic Education and Training for Residents
		and community liaisons. 3 lead it: 1 for constituent services; 1 for neighborhood services manager; and 1 as a community liaison.	
Seattle, WA	Neighborhood matching funds started in 1998 via a Small Sparks Fund (up to \$5,000 in matching funds) and Community Partnership Fund (up to \$50,000). Goal to give communities opportunity to take part in city building and creative placemaking, increase their awareness of the workings of the city, and have a sense of ownership.	4 Community Coordinators are housed in Dept. of Neighborhoods. Community Liaisons are "paid members" of a certain community, to be communicators between the City and that community. The two-way communication is to : educate community about city projects, and educate the city about community needs and complaints	People's Academy for Community Engagement (PACE)
St. Paul, MN	To receive funding, a DC must identify goals and report outcomes, but some note little accountability or incentive to meet goals or increase equity and representation despite receiving \$6,000 to promote equity from Innovation Fund. Also receive base funds based on population, poverty, non-English speaking, and employment, from CDBG and General Fund (Economic Development and Parks & Recreation). DC budget in 2019 was \$1.4M in 2019 and \$1,1M in 2023.	The City has a Community Liaison position that serves District Councils through project management and technical assistance for the community engagement program.	
Washington DC	FCA is funded by member dues, not government funding. CA's can apply for community grants, but the Federation cannot. CAs can also sue the city and developers, which can generate revenue/funding.	They have 2 community engagement reps per ward for a total of 16 representatives across the eight wards	The Community Associations Institute supports the Federation of Community Associations, but this is not led by the City. They have a monthly newsletter and have 18 in-person education programs. They also have a guide, and the Federation holds meetings on topics of interest that are sort of like training, or at least information sharing

Digital Technologies for Constituent Services

Among the 13 cities, nine have 311 call centers. Several brand their 311 systems with the city's name, e.g., "CharMeck 311" in Charlotte, Mecklenberg County, "MyLA311" in Los Angeles, "BOS:311" in Boston, and "Oak311" in Oakland. Further, Boston and Minneapolis, and likely others, provide multiple languages on their phone line and website. Most of the cities bundle and brand their 311 with the online portion and provide look-up services for their ticket. Several have maps showing all open and closed tickets. This provides greater transparency and may reduce call volumes since residents can see that the issue was already reported.

All cities, but Golden, had a community or neighborhood website with various types of information, from getting engaged, to finding current events in your neighborhood, to learning about your neighborhood organization or council, and other city services. Some of these websites also show representation of the neighborhood group. For instance, Minneapolis's "Blueprint for Equitable Engagement" uses Tableau to update dashboards including one that tracks diversity on the neighborhood association boards.

Table 18. Case study systems of 311 and online services

City	Online and phone systems to report or request services	Community and neighborhood engagement, services, and information websites
Boston	311 via phone, web, tweet, or mobile app: BOS:311 (U/I improvements and 11 languages.) Boston.gov website shows all 311 calls received that year, plus case status.	Events page filters by event type, department, title, date, and neighborhood. "My Neighborhood Representation Map" provides city council members, Neighborhood Liaisons, Community Liaisons, and City Councilors At-Large
Boulder	Online system to look up services information FAQs, Knowledge Base, and report option via "Inquire Boulder" with user Sign In	Be Heard Boulder is an online engagement platform available 24/7 for input on featured projects. They also have "Boulder for Me" for residents to locate services they may be eligible to receive.
Charlotte	"CharMeck 311 "	Robust community engagement website with neighborhood resources, online trainings (recorded and live webinars), and grants.
Golden	No	N/A
Los Angeles	" MyLA311 " includes a way to log reports and to view other open 311 requests.	"Know your Community" website has a robust neighborhood data lookup feature
Minneapolis	311 Service Center - online, by phone, and in-person. Provides English, Hmong, Spanish, and Somali	"Blueprint for Equitable Engagement" document and accompanying website, which uses tableau for a reporting dashboard on the Blueprint, e.g., diversity on NA boards. Each Neighborhood Associations is also given a website.
New York	NY311 is a comprehensive site that integrates phone and online services. Residents can report problems, lookup service requests, make payments, etc. Lists 16 most popular complaints or search topics, e.g., apartment maintenance, and SNAP assistance, as well as the 19 topical areas they cover, from Benefits, to Trash, to Culture and Recreation	NYCCityMap has numerous layers: capital projects, city life, city programs, culture, water quality, transportation, youth services, etc. Also, each community board has a website.

City	Online and phone systems to report or request services	Community and neighborhood engagement, services, and information websites
Oakland	Oak311 , phone, App, and website in English, Spanish, and Cantonese with instructional videos. The website is sorted by links to common complaints and Urgent Infrastructure Issues. Links to common issues with mapping tool improve usability and accuracy.	No interactive map of neighborhood information, but residents can search for Police Beat, associated Neighborhood Service Coordinators, and list of meeting dates for Neighborhood Councils (NC), which are mostly Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils (NCPCs). Districts list updates and current events for NCs in the District.
Philadelphia	Philly311 is robust and interactive, can track requests. 311 offers a knowledge base to search for information about city services.	Residents can be trained to support safety issues in their community through the engagement platform.
Pittsburgh	311 Response Center is moving to new ONS to be more proactive than reactive. The myBurgh App that has a Knowledge Base, Request for Service, and Contact options.	"Engage PGH" is their engagement website and used across departments to engage residents.
Seattle	"Find It, Fix It" Service Request Mobile App, online, and by phone	Department of Neighborhoods website has videos to describe each program.
St. Paul	Online and Phone, but not 311. They use ZenDesk because they noted Salesforce is too expensive for local governments.	They use Engagement HQ web tool for public engagement, which requires residents to log in. Their map gallery page has tiles for each type of resident service, which links to maps about these services, such as parks, road closures, speed limits, student housing, garbage, and recycling, etc.
Washington DC	311 is available by phone or via the website. Residents can request, check status, and see a map of 311 requests in the last 30 days and filter by open or closed and type of request.	Resident resource center webpage

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Reason for the study

The study was prompted by many coalescing factors over the last several years, including Independent Auditor's reports on transparency, engagement, and notifications; requests from city council members to improve engagement and to provide better support for, and reform of, the RNO system; low and declining resident satisfaction with the constituent service platforms, i.e., 311 and pocketgov and the desire for it to be more than a phone line and ticket-logging system; resident complaints that there is a disconnect between community input into the planning process and when and how projects occur in their neighborhoods, and other related concerns about each of the three topics for this study.

Improvements needed in the RNO system.

Related to the system of RNOs, while there is no doubt dozens of RNOs provide positive benefits and assistance to their neighborhoods and neighbors, such as holding community building events, helping residents navigate city services, working with city staff and council members to solve problems and gather community input, and passing along notifications from the City to their members, the system is suffering.

The system is inequitable, lacks capacity, is not monitored, and is therefore open to misuse and conflict. As a result, it is not meeting the intent of the original 1979 ordinance.

At least half of the RNOs, based on the 2020 and 2022 surveys, as well as our interviews, conversations, and the listening session, note they do not have the capacity and resources to do everything expected or needed of them. Another large set of RNOs exist in name only, and there are likely more of these than of the highly productive set of about 65 RNOs. The RNOs in the "in name-only" group, rarely meet, do not

pass along city notifications, and are not interested in fulfilling the original purpose and intent of the City's RNO ordinance: two-way communication between residents and the City. Yet, they must be listed on the website, and tracked by the City, causing confusion for residents, and unnecessary work for City staff. Others in this group may meet, but they may exclude some residents, and create conflict with overlapping RNOs. RNOs in this and other groups of RNOs may have formed to express the view of their often-small group of members, claiming they represent the voices of the residents in the boundaries they have drawn for their self-designated RNO.

Denver RNOs: A broken system worth saving

Still, our survey of residents and participants in RNOs shows there is great interest in some form of structured neighborhood organization system, even among those who are very dissatisfied with the RNOs in their neighborhood, or the RNO system overall. Further, other cities and decades of research show that a system of neighborhood organizations can help to improve urban governance, which benefits residents and the local government. A city cannot adequately and effectively reach out to all residents and foster two-way communication without some form of intermediary. Preferably, the intermediary is resident led, even if it receives support, but not control, from the local government.

Community engagement strengths and weaknesses

Multiple departments have worked to improve their outreach for planning processes using online surveys, meetings in the community, Zoom, and navigators. Some have also recently adopted engagement guidelines. This may explain the uptick in the national survey regarding opportunities to give input.

At the same time, of the 191 respondents to the RNO/Resident survey who said they had participated in a community engagement system, only 35% rated it as Good or Very Good. Those who logged comments

noted several complaints similar to complaints we heard in interviews and at the Listening Session, with the main two being 1) the lack of follow-through on how the input was used, and 2) asking for input as a “box-ticking” exercise when the City has already determined what it is going to do.

The City would benefit from following the steps outlined in best practices for public participation, such as the Core Values from the International Association of Public Participation (<https://www.iap2.org/page/corevalues>).

Constituent Services

Several improvements are needed for a high functioning constituent services system. More users need access to the Salesforce case management system, and they need regular access to good training and the use of the system should be tied to their job descriptions. Uneven use of the system has an impact on how well or quickly the problems are resolved. The TS roadmap should also be revisited to estimate the number of salesforce and other IT staff required to greatly reduce the timeframe to rollout Marketing Cloud, as well as more instances of Salesforce CRM to the departments and staff who want it.

The digital tools currently available to residents are inadequate, hard to find, and distrusted by many, especially those who are vulnerable or who have fewer resources. There are inequities between users who need to use 311 instead of the Online Services Hub, including language barriers, the ability to track a ticket/case number, and hours available (311 does not operate on evenings and weekends). Wait times are also increasing for 311 holds, as are resolution times for most case types. The integrated online and phone 311 systems in several of the case cities, including the case open and closed maps, should be investigated for the cost and ease to offer similar systems in Denver.

Lessons from other cities on community engagement and constituent service

The case studies offer various approaches to resident/neighborhood organizations or council, offices of community engagement, neighborhood liaisons, grant programs, and digital tools for constituent services. While no one case offered the perfect set of solutions for Denver, the lessons highlighted in our interviews, and the research we did of their websites and other materials provide strategies or programs that can be combined, modified, or avoided to improve the systems in Denver.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To respond to the nine major tasks, while using an equity lens and an emphasis on historically underserved communities, we developed eight recommendations that collectively respond to the tasks. If implemented fully they will improve urban governance and improve equity in engagement, resident services, and neighborhood empowerment.

The goal of the recommendations is to create an ecosystem of engagement that better connects the city agencies internally with each other and to groups and people outside the city. City staff desire to provide “One Voice” when interacting with residents, not to “tow the party line” but to show they are working together to provide the best possible services for residents.

The “one voice” or ecosystem concept can also help residents, businesses, staff, and council agree to the goals and values identified in plans so that everyone better understands how projects and investments are helping to achieve the agreed upon goals and values, especially equity.

Finally, the recommendations aim to demonstrate that the City does want community input and is willing to support the groups willing to communicate and work with residents and the City, especially those serving underserved communities, even when there are disagreements.

The following, Figure 22, shows how our eight recommendations line up with the nine major tasks. In the figure we note how most tasks require more than one recommendation.

Figure 23. Matrix of 8 Recommendations by Topic Area to 9 Major Tasks

	EQUITY IS EMBEDDED IN EACH RECOMMENDATION							
	RNO System			Community Engagement				Constituent Services
	#4. Create Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs) with paid staff and equipment	#2. Create a two-tier RNO/DNCO system with accountability and supports	#1. All residents and businesses can receive or search notifications	#7. Create Civic Education & Training Programs with Denver 8, TS, Storytelling, and City Council	#6. Create new grant programs for nonprofits and eligible RNOs	#3. Create HRCP Office of Community Engagement to coordinate and support engagement and elevate HRCP's relate work	#8. Increase department budgets for additional engagement staff	#5. Increase TS budget for 311, Salesforce staff, websites, and reporting
1.2 Approach to RNO Ordinance & effectiveness	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
1.3 Civic Education for RNOs, residents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.1 Tools, practices to inform residents & increase info.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.2 Best practices to engage residents, esp. underserved	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.3 Grant programs and partnerships	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
3.1 311 reframe with navigators and translation services	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
3.2 Response times for constituent services						✓		✓
3.3 Mayor's Office reporting process to HRCP Commissions						✓		

#1. Notifications: Allow all residents and businesses to opt-in to, or search notifications currently restricted to RNOs.

Overview

First and foremost, allow all residents and businesses to access the notifications that are currently restricted to RNOs. We heard *near* unanimous support for this recommendation from members of city council, city staff, RNO leaders, and civic activists, with only a few people expressing hesitation or being totally against it. The notifications should be searchable on a website by type, geography and date.

Justification

Already Technology Services (TS) and Community Planning & Development (CPD) are working on a version for some of their notifications in which the notifications would be in a searchable map.

There are not enough RNOs who can adequately manage and distribute the number of notifications sent to them. Further, the share of residents who belong to RNOs (3.6%) does not give fair access to all residents of Denver, which raises equity issues, among other problems.

We did not find the three hesitations to be insurmountable or significant enough to prevent this change. First, people questioned why people in other neighborhoods should be notified about something happening in another neighborhood. We believe there are many reasons for allowing anyone to access information about any neighborhood in a city. A resident could have a child who attends school in another neighborhood, they could own property in other neighborhoods, they may be a caregiver for someone in another neighborhood, and so on. Further, the RNO system has been so distorted by RNOs that cover areas that are much larger than a neighborhood, or that are RNOs in name only, mainly to get the notifications, that many unintended recipients of neighborhood

organizations already receive this information. Second, people were concerned that those receiving or searching for the notifications on a City website might not be able to interpret them correctly. Similar to the above response, RNO leaders have already stated in the two RNO surveys that they were not always able to interpret them. We find this is a problem with the wording and the sender, not the receiver.

A third hesitation was the City's website capabilities. This does not have to be a complex website, at least to start. The City agencies that send these notifications by email to RNOs already have the notifications in electronic format and queried by geography so they know which RNOs should receive them. This digital information could be posted to a website and stored in an archive. The notifications would be stored in a database by date, sender, type, and geographic point(s). Creating this website, as well as an opt-in email alert by geography. Each agency's web authors could update their appropriate website page with notifications. Additional web authors could be trained if this would require more time than the current web authors have.

Key elements

Create a centralized webpage on the City's website that acts as a hub for notifications. Notifications would be available or filtered in up to three ways:

1. By topic area with hyperlinks to the appropriate agency's website.
2. By geography via an interactive map. The inquirer could enter their address and a radius (e.g., increments of .25 mile buffers).
3. By date

Residents could also sign up for email alerts by topic and geography.

City agencies would post their notifications to this website infrastructure rather than send them to RNOs. NST's could help to field questions and to send out relevant notifications to the RNOs in their areas.

Budget implications

TS time to create the website and train existing, or new web authors.
Ongoing agency staff time to post updates.

The additional staff time in TS can be covered by the additional budget we proposed for TS to increase their staff in Recommendation #8.

#2. Create a two-tier system of neighborhood organizations.

It's clear from the existing landscape of RNOs that there are many reasons individuals, or groups of people, form RNOs. Further, for most RNOs, the main priority is not the main purpose or intent of the RNO Ordinance. Many register just to receive the notifications, another substantial group are formed to focus on a single issue, and others prioritize community building over communicating with the City. But a core group of RNOs are working to communicate and work with the City on behalf of their members. Within this group there is a range of capacity and resources, and varying levels of agreement with the City's adopted plans, their neighbors, and other RNOs.

Because of these multiple types of groups that are called RNOs but operate very differently and for different purposes, we determined it was necessary to off them different designations, rather than eliminate all or some of them. Also, the implementation of Recommendation #1, Notifications for All, may result in fewer individuals or groups seeking RNO designation.

Overview

The two tiers allow for current RNOs that wish to maintain their two-way communication role with the City to do so, and in return, they will be eligible to receive more types of support, such as a basic City website page, logistics support for meetings, such as access to meeting rooms and digital equipment or Zoom access, training on city processes and leading an RNO, and a neighborhood liaison through the Neighborhood Support Teams (NST) (see Recommendation 4).

In exchange, RNOs that receive support to stay within the reformed RNO system would be held to greater levels of accountability through monitoring and evaluation of their resident outreach, member representativeness, frequency and notification of their meetings, and activities to collect resident input, among other things.

Other existing RNOs or community organizations that want to continue their community building and social activities with their neighbors, or focus on a single issue, but do not want to be held accountable for resident engagement and communications, would have the option to become a Denver Neighborhood and Community Organizations (DNCO). This designation allows them to be visible and recognized by their community, neighbors, and the City, and could also make them eligible for certain supports such as free or low-cost equipment loans or rentals for block parties, e.g., tables, speakers, and street cones. They would not be required to have a board, membership minimum, or meetings.

Justification

The literature, our research, and evidence from other cities, shows high functioning neighborhood organizations are an important component of good urban governance and democratic processes for policymaking. To ensure they are highly functioning, as well as representative, there needs to be accountability through monitoring and evaluation, as well as capacity building through the provision of adequate resources, knowledge, and support.

If the City continues to leave RNOs to act on their own as volunteer organizations with little to no support, the system will remain uneven with power imbalances, information voids, and a lack of diverse voices in City decision making.

While the current system is not meeting the original intent for the purposes of the City or residents, there are many active and positive neighborhood groups that have used the RNO system to organize their neighbors for community building, networking, and socializing. These groups should not be disbanded, but they could shift designation to

remove the two-way communication responsibilities, and other burdens they're not equipped or interested in handling.

Key elements

Several steps need to occur for this transition.

- First, the Office of Community Engagement in HRCF needs to be formally created. In the 2023 budget, the Office of Neighborhood Engagement, which has been in the budget since 2019, had a \$124,303 budget with 1 FTE. The budget and staffing needs to be increased (see Recommendation #3).
- Second, the RNO ordinance needs to be rewritten to identify these two groups, add more accountability to RNOs, and move the registration and monitoring activity from Community Planning and Development to the expended Office of Community (or Neighborhood) Engagement within HRCF. Ideally, the ordinance rewrite will be led by a task force to identify the requirements and accountability mechanisms for the RNOs, and a process for organizations to re-register as the new RNO type, to shift to DNCO status, or to delist themselves. (see below, Ordinance for more details).
- Third, the equipment, space, and technical support needs for RNOs should be identified and budgeted.

RNO Ordinance update

Given the expectations for RNOs as the vehicle for two-way communication between neighborhoods and the city, we found the ordinance as written is vague and outdated and does not allow for accountability or encourage RNOs to meet the aims of the original intent and purposes for RNOs. We have drafted a proposed update that we included as Appendix E.

In brief, some of the elements we recommend updating include:

- Add city council districts to the flow of information specified in the ordinance.

- Add details about how the City can support RNOs, including training, community grants, meeting space, equipment, translation, and other capacity building services and resources.
- Add a new structured system of Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs), which will be comprised of staff from city agencies, and in coordination with Council Aides, who have expertise in engagement and outreach. [We have not included this in the draft ordinance revision, but we are recommending approximately 22 NSTs, two per council district. The NSTs will have staff members who are already employed by the city in 311 or as engagement specialists elsewhere in the City. They will be coordinated by an NST director who is housed in Human Rights and Community Partnerships].
- *Change the responsible department from City Planning and Development to Human Rights and Community Partnerships (HRCF).* While HRCF was not the resounding agency to house a Department of Community Engagement, many felt it could be appropriate. It could elevate HRCF and their other community outreach functions, and community engagement activities could have synergies with those functions, such as the Office of Nonprofit Engagement, and the HRCF Commissions. While several agency staff said the Mayor's Office could be a good location since the Mayor has the power to convene and agencies respond to mayoral directives others felt the office was inherently too politicized and that the office could be cut with changes in political sentiments.
- Strengthen the RNO eligibility requirements to set a target for membership that is representative by race and/or ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status; have an active web presence (such as on social media or materials sent to the City provided website); and to hold regular meetings (no less than quarterly) that are open and promoted through many communication vehicles. With the new system of city-staffed NSTs, RNOs will have support to meet these requirements.
- Set up a 2-tier system of groups. The top tier is RNOs, which will have stricter eligibility requirements, as well as access to NST resources, and the second tier would be Denver Neighborhood or

Community Organizations (DNCOs) (or other name). The DNCOs are for groups or organizations who wish to be recognized by the city as a neighborhood or community group but do not have the capacity or desire to meet the eligibility criteria. RNOs will be considered the vehicle for resident communication and training, while DNCOs will be recognized as other groups who may want to be contacted for certain things, and at times, eligible for grants, the ability to borrow equipment for events, such as street closure barriers, and access to meeting space.

- Specify that BIDs cannot be RNOs, although they may be members of RNOs. BIDs are special taxing districts and are recognized as a City Commission. They are not interested in reaching out to all residents in a neighborhood, e.g., for parks, or other things that often concern residents versus businesses. While businesses also need representation, communication with the city, and affiliation with each other, we do not feel the RNO system is a vehicle for them, except as members of an existing RNO.
- RNOs should have a method of recording attendance at their meetings for reporting purposes.
- Future RNOs will be required to justify boundaries that span more than two NST areas (which are roughly half the area of a city council district), or to overlap with other RNOs. As council districts are redrawn every 10 years the RNOs may also adjust their boundaries to align with their primary NST, but they are not required to do so. Overlapping RNOs will be discouraged since RNOs are intended to promote cooperation and dialog among residents within geographic neighborhoods. Currently, many RNOs are started by groups of people who only want to meet with people who share their views. While residents should have the right to self-organize, if this is their interest, they should become DNCOs, not RNOs.
- We opted not to do statistical areas because they don't change while neighborhoods do change as development occurs.
- RNOs must maintain a website independently, or by providing content to the NST for a City-provided web page with basic information about their RNO. The update process for the City

website will need to be worked out during the pilot, e.g., should it be two or three times per year? What information should be included, e.g., boundaries, officers, priorities, established date, typical meeting times and locations?

- NSTs can assist RNOs with email addresses, collecting demographic information of their members, writing by-laws, and creating other structures to manage the RNO. NSTs can also assist the RNO with an annual budget and requests for financial or in-kind assistance from the NSTs or OCE within HRCP.
- RNOs should be allowed to register more often than twice a year, perhaps quarterly. Perhaps 311 can assist with the form processing for RNO and DNCO registration.
- Notification should be changed from restriction to RNOs to any city resident, property owner, or business in Denver who wishes to opt into the different notifications currently restricted to RNOs. RNOs can still opt-in to these alerts. NSTs should also summarize the notices, with the help of the agency that generates it, and post the relevant notices to their NST website. The required notification list can be removed from the RNO ordinance, unless it's for reference to the types of notices an RNO can opt-in to receive.

Budget implications

A task force to rewrite the ordinance, design the support structure for the new RNOs, and engage the RNO leaders and members, as well as other residents in the process. The task force will need an engagement budget for food, childcare, language translation, facilitation, member recruitment, and communications about the reform effort.

We recommend a budget of **\$35,000** to support the task force.

Ongoing costs for the new OCE, NSTs, equipment, etc., are covered in other recommendations.

#3. Create an Office of Community Engagement (OCE) in the Agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships (HRCP) to create a coordinated engagement system and elevate HRCP's related work.

Overview

We recommend that the current Office of Neighborhood Engagement in HRCP should be expanded with additional budget, staffing, and official recognition through a City Council ordinance and an Executive Order. The City, City Council, and external partners may determine if it should remain an Office of *Neighborhood* Engagement or *Community* Engagement. We lean toward the latter, Office of *Community* Engagement, since people would like to engage with the City for purposes beyond their neighborhood, such as citywide parks, bike networks, climate initiatives, affordable housing policies, etc.

But this should not be a centralizing agency. It is essential for the City's internal engagement *system* and external engagement *network* that engagement professionals, guidelines, and tools are embedded in each city agency or department. This allows engagement that is contextual to an agency's programs, projects, and services and will not delay an agencies' engagement activities, which could occur if all individual agencies had to go through an OCE for their engagement activities. Several of our interviewees expressed this concern and stressed that the office should be coordinating, not centralizing. Further, many agencies already use effective engagement techniques, and have partnerships with community groups that help to reach historically underserved community groups, they would not want to be directed by an agency that may not understand the nuances and depth of their engagement needs.

But while it should not replace activities within agencies, it could supplement their activities, in addition to coordinating and helping to improve and guide them. This agency should share the knowledge of

agencies with good practices and connections throughout Denver, and beyond, with agencies that have less developed engagement frameworks and networks. Throughout our interviews, numerous City staff recounted they had greater success when they were able to actively partner with other departments on longer term large projects that required extensive community involvement. Several noted the Food Systems Policies and Population Health study as one example with multi-agency coordination.

Finally, it's important that 311 representatives, who field thousands of calls from residents and businesses, are connected to this agency. We learned some agents have helped to staff communication and outreach tables at events for big city programs or projects, such as the 16th street mall redevelopment. Having some 311 agents transition to additional outreach and engagement activity would help "311 live up to its mission" and build on the existing work responsibilities of at least some 311 agents.

The City Council's Council Aides and the Council's Central staff also need connections to this agency given their direct engagement with the residents in their districts.

Justification

It was clear from our interviews with city staff and several interviews with people outside the City, that this office should not be in the Mayor's Office. In addition to the rich network of engagement offices already in HRCP, placing it outside the Mayor's office will reduce its politicization and the possibility that it could be eliminated by a future administration.

While HRCP is an agency, and therefore not in the City Charter as a Department, which means it too can be eliminated, it has proven longevity since its origins in the late 1960s. While it does not have the power of the Mayor's Office to direct departments, which some interviewees thought was important, **the new OCE's authority could be increased through an Executive Order on Community Engagement**

along with a corresponding Ordinance from City Council. Also, if it's implemented successfully, there will be high demand for its continued existence, both internally and externally, making it difficult for a future mayor to eliminate.

Key Elements

- Create or expand the Office of Community/Neighborhood Engagement within HRCP
- Hire at least 3 people to staff this office: a manager/director, a manager/coordinator of the Neighborhood Support Teams (NST) and coordination of the agency engagement staff, and an administrative assistant.
- Connect this office to 311 and cross-train 311 agents to work as NST members who can support RNOs, DNCOs, and engagement specialists in the City's other agencies.
- Work with the City Council Central Office and the City Council Aides to coordinate engagement and communication with residents.
- Establish a Mayoral Executive Order on Community Engagement that specifies this office and how it will coordinate with engagement staff in each agency.
- City Council should adopt an Ordinance on an Office of Community Engagement and how this office will interact with City Council and other City agencies.

Budget Implications

The Office needs at least three full-time people, and additional staff time from other agencies, namely 311. The three staff should include:

1. Office director or manager
2. Engagement coordinator to manage the 22 NSTs and coordinate with the District Council offices and the engagement specialists in each agency.
3. Administrative Assistant

Additional 311 agents may need to be hired to provide adequate 311 phone coverage while some agents support the 22 NSTs. This agency is already understaffed, due to vacancies, but the number of necessary FTEs are already in the budget, to our understanding.

The office will also need to purchase initial meeting equipment or technology for RNOs that are eligible and request it. It should also have annual operating funds to pay for language services, childcare, Zoom licenses, room rentals, and other items to support meetings and communications of the reformed RNOs.

This agency's new Administrative Assistant should be trained as a web author in order to create one website page per RNO and keep it updated two to three times per year with officer names, a map of the boundaries, meeting times, and description of their activities.

We recommend a budget of **\$600,000** to cover personnel and capitol costs, both one time and ongoing, e.g., Zoom licenses and other meeting costs.

#4. Create a network of 22 Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs) (two per council district) to support RNOs and DNCOs, utilizing existing knowledge, training, and staffing from 311 and other agencies.

Overview

NSTs would be staffed by both existing staff across the City as well as new staff hired to fill vacancies in 311, and possibly the planned for hires to fill engagement staff or navigators positions across the agencies. The role of the NSTs is to be a resource, advocate, and liaison for RNOs, other groups, and nonprofits who are engaged in engagement, community building, and two-way communications between the City and residents.

Several of the other cities we studied had similar geographically tied liaisons or supports for their neighborhood organizations. NSTs can help RNOs and other groups with the range of needs for meetings, such as community spaces, Zoom licenses, cameras and microphones, translators, flyers, etc. They can also provide support for city grant applications, help to navigate city services, and provide or direct people to civic training. Further, they can help to answer questions about current projects, plans, and programs in the neighborhoods they support. Last, they can connect residents to the Civic Education and RNO Training options that will be created through Recommendation #7.

Justification

The employment of dedicated neighborhood liaisons that are city staff was a key lesson from several of our peer city case studies. Currently, neighborhoods with access are relying upon their Council offices to connect them to the City but the Council offices cannot fulfill this need since they are stretched thin, especially in some districts, and because they are outside the Administrative body. In other cases, if RNOs and other groups cannot get adequate support from their Council members or the City, they are left without support and therefore without answers or solutions to the issues in their neighborhood.

We also heard about the need for this role through many of our other data collection activities, as well as the 2020 survey of RNOs conducted by Councilman Kashmann and INC. A recurrent mantra we heard in our interviews, within and outside the City, and in comments from the two RNO surveys (the 2021 survey by Councilman Kashmann and INC, and this study's survey), was: **the City created RNOs, gave them all these responsibilities, and then "left them hanging" with no training, resources, or guidance.** Therefore, the 13 council members largely supported recommendations to provide more support to RNOs as long as the different types of support were tracked and prioritized for RNOs that most need it because they lack their own resources. Table 19 outlines the pros and cons raised for each type of support.

NSTs can help to overcome the power imbalances among RNOs

The other issue we frequently heard about and has been an issue for years within the RNO system and that is the issue of RNOs and **power**. While some will maintain that RNOs have no power since the ordinance doesn't grant them any authorities and the City and Council members listen equally to all residents who provide input whether they are members of a "powerful" and well-known large RNO, or a small and weaker RNO, or are an individual without an affiliation, the truth is that some groups amass power in the decision-making process through different bases of power, even if they don't possess official power from legal authority.

Since the 1950s, scholars have identified at least seven types of power. They are conceived in terms of the power of a leader and followers, in this case the RNO is the leader, and the follower(s) is/are the City Council member(s) or City agencies who make decisions that affect their neighborhoods.

Types of Power

1. **Reward power**- followers perceive the leader can bestow or increase rewards to them (e.g., votes)
2. **Coercive power** – followers perceive the leader can punish them (e.g., withhold votes, turn other residents against them, create problems for the district office)
3. **Legitimate power** – followers perceive the leader has a right to influence compliance or influence others (e.g., RNOs should have the right to prevent a zoning change or project in their neighborhood).
4. **Referent power** – followers perceive the leader is likable and the followers wish to identify with them (e.g., council member may find the RNO is highly effective, well-liked by residents, and therefore should support the RNO in order to maintain favor with other residents).
5. **Expert power** – followers perceive the leader has relevant knowledge and expertise (e.g., RNO member, council members,

city agency staff, and others may defer to the RNO because of their perceived level of expertise on an issue). (French and Raven, 1959, identified types 1 through 5).

6. **Information power** – followers perceive that they leader knows or has access to important information (e.g., residents may join an RNO or become an RNO because they believe the notifications from the City will increase their power to give input on decisions) (Raven and Kurglanski, 1975).
7. **Connection power** – followers perceive the leader has important “connections” with influential people inside or outside the organization (Hersey, Blanchard, and Natenmeyer, 1979).

Thus, from these definitions of different types of acquired power, one can see how certain RNOs have developed reputations for possessing more power than others. Those with connections to lawyers, council members, or their friends, and directors of city agencies, or with knowledge of how the zoning process works, or who have gained a reputation of being a “good RNO” that’s active and doing important work for the community may be able to leverage reward or coercive power to amplify their voice in City processes.

The idea of providing more support to RNOs in less resourced neighborhoods, with fewer connections, less expertise, and lower access to important information and influential people, is to increase their power.

Table 19. City Council members’ thoughts on supports for RNOs

Topics	Pros	Cons
Grants for RNOs	Yes, but monitor it and only provide those that meet certain eligibility requirements.	Budget impact and potential for misuse of funds.
Training for RNOs and residents	Yes, they would be more effective and have a better understanding of how to engage their residents and interact with the City	People may not take advantage of it unless it is convenient.
Resources/ Supports for RNOs	Yes, but like the grants, underserved neighborhoods should receive priority. Helping RNOs will help Council members.	
Boundaries	Continue to allow organic nature of RNOs, but discourage intentional competition, and encourage RNOs with overlapping boundaries to work together.	Do not allow overlap; it causes discord, confusion, and could waste resources if overlapping RNOs both receive support.
Two-tier system	Yes, this would solve a lot of problems with RNOs “in name only” without eliminating other neighborhood organizations that are not fulfilling the intent of RNOs but are still doing desired community building work.	Need a process for groups to determine if they will be an RNO or DCNO.

NSTs can help to share information across City agency silos and deliver it to residents

A best practice from our case studies, Seattle and Oakland in particular, is to have community engagement staff from across the city meet on a regular basis to compare notes and share resources. A similar effort, led by Grace Ramirez, had been underway in Denver. We heard positive feedback about the shared communication Grace was doing during several of our interviews. Staff reported this coordinated effort helped them share ideas and learn about work other departments were doing which opened up opportunities for partnering while also helping to

eliminate duplication. The proposed Neighborhood Services Division could help reignite and facilitate this effort.

It is important for the proposed Neighborhood Services Team to work with the city's communications team to share information with the community through existing tools such as Denver 8 and social media. Boston, for example, has an Office of Community Engagement that coordinates closely with their press office on community/neighborhood outreach and promotion.

Minneapolis holds a Community Connections Conference connecting residents of Minneapolis, community groups, neighborhoods and local government. This free conference draws over 1,000 people, 150 booths/vendors, local non-profits, neighborhood groups and more. It's held at the convention center every year and provides an opportunity to do training, connect people and organizations to resources, and share information.

Key elements

- Utilize new and existing 311 staff to fill the NST roles. This allows those staff members who are interested to diversify their work and the City avoids the need to hire new staff.
- Determine how many NST areas to create. We recommend 22 to allow for 2 per Council District, but there may need to be more or less depending on the nuances of each District's population demographics, boundaries, development activity, etc.
- Define equipment and knowledge each NST will need to support their neighborhood groups, including RNOs, DCNOs, and small nonprofits.
- Determine how they will work with the engagement staff in other City Agencies as well as HRCP.
- Develop training for NST members.
- Devise a communications strategy to introduce the new NST system to Denver residents.

Budget Implications

Cost for 22 311 agents to divide time between their 311 phone line responsibilities and NST responsibilities.

Time from engagement staff in each agency to participate in NSTs. We envision them rotating so they can get to know different neighborhoods within the city. This would be built in to their existing work.

The budget for this one may be absorbed by TS's existing budget to fill 311 vacancies.

#5. Increase the Technology Services Department's budget for additional staff, especially with Salesforce expertise, and to create SLA dashboards.

Overview

For TS to serve the agencies to the level that is needed, they need more staff trained in Salesforce, including the Service Cloud and Marketing Cloud. The City cannot improve resident services or consistent community outreach and resident communications without greater use of the existing Salesforce systems, and increased deployment of Salesforce products to more divisions, teams, and staff, including City Council Districts.

Justification

There was widespread agreement in our interviews that TS was understaffed and underfunded. This is hurting the continued rollout and enforcement of Salesforce product use, both the Service Cloud and the Marketing Cloud applications. An increase of TS staff could also help to enforce and improve Salesforce use, availability, upgrades, rollout, and training, which could help to improve 311, work order case management, website functionality, and engagement and communication with residents and businesses.

This staffing increase should also require each department to establish Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for their numerous constituent services, and to report on their performance against them. For services that are too unpredictable, departments should report an expected range in resolution times. This effort should also require changes to current incentives in some divisions to “close [Salesforce] tickets” when they open work order tickets in other applications, such as Acela. . Though some reported “we solved that issue”, we learned from others that it still happens because there are 25 divisions in DOTI alone, and the issue hasn’t been universally addressed in DOTI, or in other agencies.

Currently, there is limited internal and externally reported data on 311 response and closure times, overall, or by individual request. This causes frustration among residents and causes extra work for 311 agents, city council members and council aides, and agencies who are responsible for resolving the requests. Several of the cities in our case studies have online dashboards and maps for their 311 services showing the number of active and closed tickets by type and specific location. These real time maps and dashboards show the public that the City is committed to working on these tickets and to monitoring its own performance. It also helps to reduce call volume by reducing the number of repeat calls on the same issue. This data should also be broken down by geography and case type to ensure there are no disparities in service by income, race or ethnicity, or location in the city.

Key elements

- Hire approximately six more Salesforce experts
- New hires should help to speed the rollout of the TS Roadmap for Salesforce Service Cloud and Marketing Cloud deployment
- Additional staff should also work with agencies to establish SLAs for their numerous constituent services. TS should establish external dashboards for the public to view performance on these SLAs.

- New staff can also work to have a better online tool that shows open and closed tickets.

Budget Implications

We estimate an additional 5 to 6 staff who are expert in Salesforce may cost up to **\$750,000**. This includes benefits and recruitment and allows the City to be somewhat competitive with the market.

TS may have a better idea of the number of staff needed to meet these goals, and the salary ranges necessary to recruit and retain these staff members.

#6. Provide new grants and partnership opportunities for nonprofits to increase their capacity and extend the City's reach beyond its agencies.

Overview

The City cannot possibly be in every neighborhood and connect to and understand each neighborhood and the different resident needs.

Nonprofits that work with and in the communities that are able to do community outreach and provide necessary services, as well as work with the City to engage residents are crucial to a functioning city that meets the needs of all its residents.

Currently, the grants from the City to nonprofits are difficult for many nonprofits to access and use. A new set of grant opportunities, along with technical assistance, could be jointly administered by the Office of Community Engagement and the Office of Nonprofit Engagement, both within HRCP, and coordinated with the grants the NEST Office in DEDO provides to small nonprofits. DHS, DDPHE, and Children's Affairs also partner with nonprofits and have important experience to share.

Justification

The nonprofits who participated in our Listening Session in November provided numerous recommendations for how to structure grant programs, from changing eligibility requirements to streamlining the application process, changing how the funds are disbursed, and reducing the final reporting burden. These suggestions are included in the earlier section as well as Appendix D in the full Report Back from the Listening Session.

Further, about half of the respondents to the RNO survey we conducted also additional funding would allow them to be more effective.

Table 20. Study survey response to: Should the City provide more organizational and/or funding support for neighborhood groups or organizations?

Choice	# of Responses	% of Responses
No	51	26%
Yes	95	48%
I don't know	50	26%
Total	196	100%

Some people who said no were more fiscally conservative and mentioned it would be a waste of their tax dollars. They may not be aware of the value of, or need to support engagement in neighborhoods with more diversity, fewer resources, and without HOAs, which facilitates easier mass communications to the membership. Some in this group of comments noted they already pay HOA fees and didn't know why their RNO would need more money.

Key elements

- Increase funding pool for small nonprofits
- Change various aspects of the grant process per recommendations in Appendix D.
- Coordinate grants across the ONE, new OCE, and DEDO
- Seek advisement from the ONE board and county agencies that administer funds to nonprofits, i.e. DHS and DDPHE.

Budget Implications

We recommend \$325,000 to start. This would cover an additional FTE in ONE at \$125,000 (including benefits), and create a new pool of grant money that is not federal, e.g. from CDBG. The grant pool could be \$200,000 to start, allowing for 20 grants at \$10,000 each in the pilot year.

#7. Create a Civic Education and Training program building on existing initiatives in Denver Marketing and Media Services, City Council, and other agencies.

Overview

The program should draw on the expertise, and existing initiatives, of Technology Services Division of MMM & 311 (Digital Experiences), Denver Channel 8, the City Council Central Office Director of Communications, The Office of Storytelling, HRCF's Office of Immigrant and Refugee services, and other agencies that are producing educational content about how the City works. The team assembled, whether in-house, or through a consultant, should also review training in other cities, both those in our set of cases and others we did not study.

Justification

Creating Civic Training / Education was another idea that received widespread support from within and outside the City government. The City expects a lot from RNOs and to do it well, the officers and members need more guidance. Even high-functioning RNOs noted their need for more training and guidance. The City would also benefit from all residents having a better understanding of how their government works.

Thus, there should be at least two sets of training programs. One set should be training for RNOs. This can be designed by the new Office of Community Engagement (OCE) and Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs), along with the City Council and outside groups, such as INC. Training for RNOs should include tactical things like creating and managing an email list, updating information for their City provided webpage, running a board election, writing by-laws, navigating city information, holding meetings, conducting outreach and recruitment, and requesting presentations from city agencies, etc., as well as

substantive information on how city processes work. The second area would benefit RNO leaders and members, as well as all city residents, and could include topics related to long-range planning, large development review, different types of zoning changes, the license approval process for liquor and marijuana stores, the policy development process, administrative versus legislative approvals, the budget process, and the capital improvement plan, among other things.

Key elements

It should coordinate with the new Office of Community Engagement (OCE) and Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs) to produce materials for RNOs, such as managing an email list, creating a website, running a board election, writing by-laws, navigating city information, holding meetings, conducting outreach and recruitment, requesting presentations from city agencies, etc.

To reach a wide audience, training should be offered for free and in multiple formats available at different times. Virtual training can be synchronous (like a webinar in which participants and instructors are online together), and asynchronous, which allows participants to take the training by themselves whenever it is convenient. In person Civic Academies should also be offered for those who prefer hands-on learning, as well as networking and socializing with other residents. Several of the case study cities offer various types of online and in-person civic training for all residents, as well as, specific training for RNOs/RCOs.

The City should also work with groups in the community who have led successful engagement activities, such as Warm Cookies of the Revolution, and training sessions for RNOs, such as INC.

Budget Implications

We estimate **\$250,000** to hire a consultant to work with the internal City and City Council staff already producing content.

#8. Increase department budgets to fund additional engagement specialists embedded alongside subject matter experts and project managers.

Overview

The new Office of Community Engagement (OCE) should not be a centralized top-down agency that handles all engagement. The OCE should be a coordinating and guiding office, with the ability to supplement and improve engagement, when necessary, but not direct it or provide it for the other agencies. It was also clear that several agencies needed more engagement staff in-house and some already had plans to hire them. These engagement staff would support the agencies' engagement needs and work with the new OCE and engagement staff in other agencies and departments.

Justification

It was clear from our research with City of Denver staff, and staff in some of the case study cities, as well as in other research on public participation, that participation and engagement should not be left to a single centralized agency, which creates the possibility for disjointed or generic engagement. It also creates the image that only the community engagement agency is responsible for engagement when engagement should be part of each agency. At the same time, while everyone should be committed to it, engagement within agencies and departments should not be left entirely to the project managers who are coordinating complex infrastructure and planning projects that involve multiple City departments, contractors, utility companies, inspectors, planners, engineers, lawyers, designers, and finance specialists in addition to residents and other interest groups. The project managers, planners, and other city staff should be trained and aware of best practices for community engagement, but not left alone to try to manage both the project and the engagement. They often need the additional support of an engagement specialist to ensure effective community engagement

processes. Project managers often need the additional support of an engagement specialist to ensure effective community engagement processes and adequate time and resources to do it well. Like project implementation, engagement processes can be unpredictable and take more time and resources than expected.

Having department-specific engagement specialists also allows each department to create their own context specific guidelines for engagement processes that are tailored to the type of work they do. As noted above in Recommendation 3, to create a new OCE, the department engagement specialists should coordinate with other specialists across the city through the new OCE and NSTs. City staff we interviewed often cited this as the number one reason for creating an OCE: to coordinate and share information on projects, engagement strategies, community contacts, etc. Several referenced the benefits of a prior effort from the Mayor's Office when Grace Ramirez convened monthly meetings with all the engagements specialists. While it was short lived, and there were no resources provided with these monthly coordination meetings, the meetings in themselves were valuable ways to connect with peers, keep track of overlapping projects by geography, population, or issue area, and share best practices.

Shortage of engagement specialists

We also learned that many of the larger agencies that interface with the public do not have enough engagement staff. Several are just starting to hire them after years of not having anyone in their department or agency dedicated to engagement. Most agencies have one or two people who are doing both marketing and communications as well as resident outreach. These staff members are trying to keep their agency website up to date, use social media, table at community events, send physical mailings, and use other tools to communicate. But with just one or two people and multiple responsibilities, in-person outreach and engagement activities are very limited, if not entirely infeasible. To aid their work, many of the interviewees would welcome not only the coordination with their peers in engagement and

marketing/communications across the city, but also additional engagement staff.

Key elements

- Agencies need to have their own engagement specialists to support their projects. The OCE will not supplant agency engagement efforts.
- The agencies' engagement staff should work with the OCE to obtain guidance, as needed, and to connect with engagement staff in other agencies.

Budget Implications

We estimate \$500,000 to support approximately three more engagement specialists not already included in the agency budgets. The largest agencies with the most engagement activities should be prioritized, including DOTI, CPD, and Parks and Recreation.

Summary of Budget Implications for 8 Recommendations

The total of these eight recommendations is \$2,460,000. Agencies affected by these recommendations should verify these estimates. The following table lists and tallies the cost for each recommendation with a budget need.

Recommendation	Estimate
#1. Notifications for all	Covered in 5
#2. Create a two-tier system of neighborhood organizations and update the RNO ordinance	\$35,000
#3. Create an Office of Community Engagement	\$600,000
#4. Create a network of 22 Neighborhood Support Teams	N/A*
#5. Increase TS budget for additional Salesforce experts	\$750,000
#6. Provide new grants and partnership opportunities for nonprofits	\$325,000
#7. Create Civic Education and Training programs for residents and RNOS	\$250,000
#8. Increase department budgets for additional engagement staff	\$500,000
Total	\$2,460,000

* Covered by existing vacancies in TS for more 311 staff.

CONCLUSION

This report summarizes a substantial amount of data collected through various methods over a nine-month period and summarized over four months. Our findings largely echo what many had said prior to the study, but we hope they go beyond and logically lead to the recommendations we proposed. A benefit of this study is the compilation of a range of voices and perspectives from the full continuum of constituent services and resident communications, to the more involved forms of community engagement, empowerment, and partnership.

We also used multiple methods and interviewed at length people who are on the ground, or online, and working for and with the City or throughout the city. Through triangulation of these sources and stakeholders we have confirmed the problems, and provided additional nuance, detail, and evidence of the need for change.

As we noted at the beginning of the study.

- Interviewees were often in agreement about the problems, and many offered similar solutions, even across very different groups of stakeholders.
- People within and outside the City are optimistic and hopeful for change; they recognize the importance of good engagement and good governance. While some residents no longer want to go to formal meetings as regularly, e.g., to INC or other formal meetings of community groups or City agencies, many others still want human face-to-face interaction with City staff, City Council members, and their neighbors.
- Good urban governance, both constituent services and community engagement, requires expertise, budget, technology, time, and coordination. The City to date has not put enough resources into each of these categories, which has led to declining resident

satisfaction with constituent services and lack of representation in community engagement.

- Many other cities have recognized the importance of convening and supporting engagement across their city through community engagement offices, as well as training, grants, dedicated neighborhood liaisons, and more robust websites dedicated to providing easy lookup features for residents as well as ways to collect input. Denver is behind on this.
- The RNO system has been corrupted and many are unable to fully participate in it. Others do not care to participate, given the state of some RNOs and neighborhood disputes. The City also does not have a centralized or full suite of Civic Training, and next to no training for RNOs, outside the training provided by INC, which is intermittently offered and only some utilize it.
- While the City has increased the number of navigators it employs in different agencies, they are not dedicated to neighborhoods. They also have specific functions, pending the agency that employs them.
- Through our extensive interviews and case studies, we have found that there is a desire for information from the City, but it's less about volume and more about ensuring the information is shared in a consistent and systematic manner. A number of recommendations from this report will help the city get information out to the community. Giving residents the ability to opt-in to receiving emails from the City on a list of topics they choose is an important start. Technology Services is working with departments to increase the utilization of the Salesforce Marketing Cloud, which could automate the dissemination of information from City staff to residents who have indicated an interest in their area of work. Improvements to 311 and the website should also help.
- The City is making changes and investments in improving constituent services and community engagement, but more is needed, and without concerted coordination these investments will be less effective. There are also gaps and redundancies.
- The proposed increase in City Council office budgets, along with the proposal for NSTs, will hopefully increase the Council offices'

capacity through both increased resources and decreased demand for Council members to be their constituents' "fixers".

- The Office of Nonprofit Engagement in HRCP provides another avenue for sharing information with the community. They are working to double the number of nonprofits the City partners with to do work the City doesn't have the staff capacity to perform, but may have grant money, or other funding available, to contract for services. This office would share information with nonprofits like the way Human Services, Office of Children's Affairs, and DPHE works through their community partners to reach constituents.

In short, there are many activities already in motion, but several large changes need to occur in the areas we identified to address the deficiencies in the three areas of this study: RNO Effectiveness, Community Engagement, and Constituent Services. Finally, as noted throughout the study, they must be done in tandem, as a complete resident communication and engagement ecosystem and with equity at the forefront.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Scope of Work

Vendor: Regents of the University of Colorado

Purpose: for a study on Community Engagement Practices and a study on the feasibility of an Office on Neighborhood Safety.

Mission: Conduct two separate studies and provide recommendations that can be used for action toward improving community engagement and neighborhood safety by the City and County of Denver.

Vision: The first study will identify opportunity for programming and building structural improvements into community engagement practices. The final report will offer recommendations that encompasses the work of all the city agencies in their effort to increase the community's knowledge of city government, and to develop community partnerships in policy making and programming.

The research from the second study will offer recommendations on the feasibility and ideal structure of an Office of Neighborhood Safety.

The requested studies will provide the City and County of Denver with valuable information to change and enhance existing engagement strategies and add new effective strategies to move the city's community engagement and approaches to safety to optimal levels of effectiveness.

Community Engagement Study Project Description:

The consultant will conduct a study on Registered Neighborhood Organizations and Community Engagement practices and submit recommendations for improvement to the Mayor and City Council in the following manner:

Part One: Evaluate Registered Neighborhood Organizations June 1 – August 31)

- 1) Provide a full assessment of the Registered Neighborhood Organization program including but not limited to – their effectiveness in:
 - a) Providing notice as primary function.
 - b) acting as a two-way conduit of information sharing with city government.
 - c) engaging their constituents with information to share with city government.
 - d) understanding of and knowledge toward navigating the operations of the different city agencies and departments.
- 2) Review RNO ordinance and propose an approach/scope for how to update the ordinance and/or recommendations for updating the language.
 - a) Confirm the intent and purpose of RNOs and review current definition
 - b) Update the eligibility requirements for RNOs to ensure they reflect current practices and trends in communications, community engagement, public participation, and inclusivity.
 - c) Create or make recommendations for RNO rules enforcement and due process to

address conflicts/complaints.

- 3) Recommendations of an ongoing education initiative to give residents – especially RNO officers – to provide an understanding of city structure and operations.

Part Two: Study Community Engagement, Informing, and Granting June 1 - December 31

- 1) Provide a full assessment and recommendations of how to best inform residents of what is going on in city government.
 - a) Determine whether there are technological tools that would allow the city to expand how notices are distributed beyond the current RNO system.
- 2) Conduct a full assessment with recommendations of how best to engage residents, especially underserved communities, in the formation of city policy.
- 3) Recommendations of effective grant programs and partnerships where funds are provided to non-profit organizations

engaged in community building work.

- 4) All recommendations that the contractor provides must be viewed through an equity lens with an emphasis on historically underserved communities

Part Three: Study The Delivery of Constituent Services June 1 - December 31

- 1) Study and provide recommendations on a city-wide framework and guidance for effective engagement and outreach.
- 2) Recommend how to reframe 311 funds for customer service, community navigators, and translation services.
- 3) Define expectations on a process by which the Mayor's Office can regularly report to the HRCP commissions regarding how their input was considered and used in decision- making & policy.
- 4) Recommend processes to identify, improve, and track the timeline that is used to respond to constituent requests.
- 5) Recommend resources to identify and increase the volume of information pushed out to communities.

Appendix B. Interview Scripts

City Staff

Can you tell me a bit about your work?

How many projects are you working on at once

How do you reach out to communities?

Do you interact with other departments at the City?

How would you characterize the resources you have for doing engagement, e.g. team members, budget, supplies, equipment, room rentals, software technology

Does poor engagement, or lack thereof by other city departments or agencies affect your work with community members, i.e., they have a bad impression of the government?

Would a centralized Office of Community Engagement be something that might improve your resources or the City's ability to engage with residents?

How might such an office be designed? Would it be a place for resources to each department, or would it replace the engagement each department has? What would be helpful?

What cons might there be to having a centralized office, depending on how it's designed.

What interactions do you have with the City Council offices?

What are your biggest challenges with your job?

What things would help you?

Have you interacted at all with RNOs?

What are your biggest successes, and why?

Do you have any interaction with the website /IT team or 311?

Could better mass messaging from the city, an improved website, and/or additional 311 services support your job?

Anything else you would like to add?

Council Members

Interviewee:

Time & Location:

Attendees:

Contract SOW / MISSION AND VISION

Vision: The first study will identify opportunity for programming and building structural improvements into community engagement practices. The final report will offer recommendations that encompasses the work of all the city agencies in their effort to increase the community's knowledge of city government, and to develop community partnerships in policy making and programming

Part I. Evaluate RNOs (Review effectiveness, ordinance, education for them)

To register with the city, neighborhood organizations must meet a set of eligibility requirements laid out in the Denver Revised Municipal Code, Chapter 12, Article III. RNOs receive notification of proposed zoning amendments, landmark designation applications, planning board and board of adjustment hearings, liquor and cabaret licenses and other activities occurring in the neighborhood as stipulated in the ordinance.

What was the impetus for this study?

What do you think needs to change about the ordinance? How well do you think various aspects of the ordinance are enforced and monitored?

What works well with the RNOs?

How many RNOs are in your district?

How often do you meet with RNOs?

How do you think the other council members engage with their RNOs?

What would be your ideal structure? Should there be a different format and structure; something totally different than RNOs?

Many have suggested that RNO leaders should be paid so that more people can participate in leadership, beyond those who have time to do so, given their work, income, household demands, etc.

When RNOs testify at City Council public hearings, do they seem relatively informed by their membership? Are there often competing RNOs over the same issue?

Has there been a study done on the coverage of RNOs – where are there too many overlapping and where are there none?

Their communication strategies: should the city facilitate websites, email lists, costs to print flyers and mailers?

Part II. Study Community Engagement, Informing, Granting
Fully engaging residents: what technological tools have been explored?

Are notices the full issue, or are there other things?

How would you imagine underserved communities could better participate in policymaking?

For the effective grant programs and partnerships, for NPOs engaged in community building work: is this a new grant structure with new city funding, or an expansion or change to current funding from DEDO, the commissions, etc.?

Part III. Study the Delivery of Constituent Services

Where would we find a complete list of constituent services this section is to address?

For reframing how “311 funds” for customer service, navigators and translation services: what do you envision?

Process for Mayor’s office to report to HRCP commissions using their input: what is their current process? Is there an issue in which the commissions do not feel their input is being used?

A process to “identify, improve, and track the timeline used to respond to constituent services” could potentially be an entirely separate contract. What is the scope you are envisioning?

Recommend resources to identify and increase the volume of information pushed out to communities. This too is very broad. Many communities already suffer from information overload. At the same time, I understand there is a lack of transparency and clear information in other ways, especially if one can’t

navigate the website or doesn’t have data skills or a computer to download the data sets available.

RNO Members

Contract SOW / MISSION AND VISION

Mission: provide recommendations that can be used for action toward improving community engagement by the City and County of Denver.

Vision: The study will identify opportunities for programming and building structural improvements into community engagement practices. The final report will offer recommendations that encompasses the work of all the city agencies in their effort to increase the community's knowledge of city government, and to develop community partnerships in policy making and programming

Part I. Evaluate RNOs (Review effectiveness, ordinance, education for them)

ORDINANCE: To register with the city, neighborhood organizations must meet a set of eligibility requirements laid out in the Denver Revised Municipal Code, Chapter 12, Article III. RNOs receive notification of proposed zoning amendments, landmark designation applications, planning board and board of adjustment hearings, liquor and cabaret licenses and other activities occurring in the neighborhood as stipulated in the ordinance. [much more on the website]

When was your RNO established?

How many members does your RNO have?

How do you know how many members you have? Do you charge and require membership dues, or are they optional?

Do you feel the membership is representative of the neighborhood demographics, or reflective in other ways, e.g., by issues you address?

What is the main purpose of your RNO and has that purpose evolved over time?

Is neighborhood safety a focus for your RNO?

How often does your RNO meet?

Does your RNO hold events, like block parties [if not answered in purpose question]?

There are conversations in the City about the representation of residents in RNOs. Has this RNO considered how they might involve members of the community who aren't currently involved, but would bring additional perspectives?

- Follow-up Prompt: do you have a sense of why some members aren't involved? For instance, is it time to attend meetings, digital access, feeling welcomed, knowing about the meetings, caring about the topics being addressed?*
- Additional prompt: what have you done to involve others and address some of the barriers?*

Do you interact at all with RNOs that overlap with your boundaries? In what ways?

- Prompt: do you have joint meetings, or discussions between the board members?*

Do you think the RNO system works well?

- Why or why not?

Are you very familiar with the RNO ordinance?

Prompt: Do you think it needs to be updated or changed?

If the ordinance were to change, but the City still wanted to be able to exchange information with residents through neighborhood organizations, can you envision a different structure?

Do you think various aspects of the ordinance need to be enforced and monitored, such as number of members, meetings, dues, etc. ?

Do you engage with your council member and the district office?

Some have suggested that RNO leaders should be paid so that more people can participate in leadership, beyond those who have time to do so, given their work, income, household demands, etc. What do you think about this proposal?

- Prompt: How could it be implemented fairly?
- How much would someone need to be paid?

If not payments to leaders, should there be other ways RNOs receive funding and supports from the city, such as grants for communications, e.g., websites, flyer printing and distribution, newsletters by mail?

Do you have any other thoughts or comments about possible changes to the RNO system?

Part II. Study Community Engagement, Informing, Granting

Has your RNO been involved in City community engagement processes? In what ways?

Part III. Study the Delivery of Constituent Services

Another part of our study is examining the constituent services the City provides and offering recommendations for how this system could be improved. Does your RNO ever receive complaints and direct members to specific resources?

- Are there any issues that your RNO tries to solve directly?

Appendix C. Interview Codes

311

311 & City Council
311 & equity, digital divide
311 & Mayor's Office
311 agencies don't communicate big changes, policies, or events
311 agency utilities and supports it
311 already has resident information, portal
311 bad software
311 call center is just the messenger
311 callers need more patience, grace
311 CC salesforce cases inaccurate sometimes
311 city response
311 does public engagement, tabling, info booths
311 doesn't allow self service, but pocketgov does
311 dropdown has auto department routing
311 enhancements
311 failed promises
311 fragmentation
311 is not engagement
311 issues they can't resolve
311 Knowledge database
311 Laura's role, improvements, plans
311 move to OCE
311 needs internal and external reporting, accountability, volume, statistics
311 negative
311 notifications integration
311 offers Spanish (pocketgov doesn't)
311 ombuds/fixer vs improving business processes
311 pocketgov connections
311 positive
311 potential, but it's not there
311 Resident experience, TS services
311 Resolution, SLAs
311 RNOs refer residents
311 Salesforce connections

311 Salesforce users enter bad comments, incomplete final info
311 should be advocates, fixers
311 should not be used for prioritization
311 staffing
311 to department
311 top 3 agencies
311 training - salesforce app, customer service, knowledge

BIDS

BIDS (Boards & Comms) compete with maintenance districts
BIDS need reform: powerful, competitive, uneven
BIDS as RNOs

Boards and Commissions

Boards & Comms 10 HCRP
Boards & Comms agency hesitation
Boards & Comms agency use
Boards & Comms agency uses topic-specific workgroups instead
Boards & Comms appointment process, recruitment
Boards & Comms audit of HRCP's
Boards & Comms City employee seats
Boards & Comms compensation, budget
Boards & Comms conflict, mixed messages
Boards & Comms effectiveness depends on staff liaison
Boards & Comms good engagement
Boards & Comms how to be relevant
Boards & Comms HRCP ebbs/flows with federal politics
Boards & Comms HRCP recommendations to mayor
Boards & Comms in/effective, member dependent
Boards & Comms longer terms
Boards & Comms Mayor control, tokenized
Boards & Comms OCE potential
Boards & Comms policymaking vs. advisory
Boards & Comms political/biased appointments; broken process
Boards & Comms representation
Boards & Comms requires collaboration
Boards & Comms standardize
Boards & Comms too many
Boards & Comms training

Boards & Comms uneven, underutilized, unknown
Boards & Comms volunteers, under-resourced
Boards & Comms website needs help
Boards & Comms work well for agencies, like DHS, Children's,
PRAB

City

City - varying technological capacities
City budget process
City budgets tied to directives, inflexible
City capacity for outreach - not nearly enough
City committees, work groups, task forces
City coordination meetings
City culture of engagement, equity, holistic approaches
City DEDO
City define constituent services differently; whether it's their
responsibility
City differences
City don't coordinate/exchange info
City email newsletters
City engagement coordination not at high level
City engagement guides
City engagement is small part of 1 FTE
City engagement staff
City engagement w/ community and RNOs is too fast and
demanding
City engagement, in/effective
City guard/have separate, contact lists
City have varied engagement requirements, e.g. permits vs. planning
City identify positive community programs
City manually prioritize 311 cases for urgency, fairness/FIFO
City missed opportunities for joint engagement
City need evaluation and strategy
City need intentional outreach; go where people already are
City NEST partnerships, collaboration
City Office of Children's Affairs
City operations staff don't know rest of agencies
City outreach to CC
City payments for Salesforce

City report to strong mayor
City skewed performance measures
City staff have community connections and trust
City tailor services to community assessments
City threatened by new offices, agencies
City training
City unsatisfied with TS
City use of Channel 8
City use of indicators and indexes
City use SharePoint work arounds; can't purchase new tech
City videos
City want to improve engagement, but how
City website and software budgets
City websites tied to goals
City with boots on the ground
City with existing community partners
City CPD leading the way on engagement Best Practices
City CPD's successful school engagement, classes, internships
City DOTI customer service initiatives
City DOTI customer service vs programmed work
City DOTI exceptions/unexpected issues hard to estimate
City DOTI has 25 divisions and 300 data sources
City DOTI's Community Advisory Groups (CAGs) by region
City HOST
City HRCP
City HRCP is mayor-driven, catch-all
City HRCP people don't understand its role, function, age
City Office of Financial Empowerment
City Office of Nonprofit Engagement, don't know it, or want to use it
City Office of Social Equity & Inclusion
City Office of Storytelling
City Office of Strategic Partnership, Nonprofit Engagement
City OSEI development process
City other agencies' engagement does/n't affect us
City Tech Services (TS) understaffed and insufficient budget
City time devoted to RNO renewals and registration
City top-down engagement, unfair metrics, decisions
City an App is not equitable; mobile-enabled website instead
City appointees & politics
City auditor on engagement, transparency

City bad example of project engagement
City budget is political
City bureaucracy vs customer service
City Cabinet in the Community
City CASR built off years of work and plans
City CASR meetings vs CPD and NPI
City CC Constituent services list
City CC Granicus, Legistar, SpeakUp, Engagement HQ
City CC interaction - create collaborative space, non politicized
City CC liaisons need peer coordination and support
City CC nonprofits social impact grants
City centralization vs decentralization debate is constant
City Channel 8 hard to track viewers; too small
City Channel 8 nobody watches
City Channel 8 videos get few/many views
City code doesn't match culture, nhoo differences
City comms people meet weekly cross-agencies, but planners don't
City communication silos within & between agencies
City communications on services is lacking
City complex projects complicate engagement
City conflicting stories
City consultants have uneven engagement quality
City could send more direct info to residents
City cross-agency collaboration is hard; each has too much information to share, work to do
City dedicated employees
City Denver Children's Cabinet
City digital ad buys/advertisement vs. free social media
City digital ADA
City directives from (non-mayoral) agencies not followed
City directors unaware of staff Salesforce use
City doesn't research enough before implementation (Google model)
City DPS connections
City engagement intentional without project or policy is hard
City engagement some agencies won't cooperate
City engagement in-person is crucial
City engagement SME - engagement disconnect
City engagement some agencies do engagement together
City engagement vs. marketing/PIOs
City entitled residents vs. government isn't going to serve me

City example of good engagement process and outcome
City Executive Order 18 on new technology
City existing civic training
City existing marketing and communications tools
City for equity, engagement needs deep & varied expertise
City Grace Ramirez
City grants are hard for nonprofits or informal community groups
City grants via intermediaries
City innovates
City internal research, studies, plans
City jargon
City major changes coming with new administration
City mayoral agencies patronize residents, RNOs
City Mayor's marketing & comms office
City messages to residents lost in competing priorities and limited time and attention
City nature of current ongoing crises require new engagement and problem solving
City navigators because residents don't trust government
City navigators not coordinated, monitored, trained, or measured
City needs foundation support for nonprofits
City needs peer teams cross agency
City needs competent nonprofits for CDBG, other funds
City needs customer service process for hard cases
City needs to focus on more self-service for call reduction
City neighborhood Services, not enough
City NEST & CC vs other agencies
City NEST & equity
City NEST current & future role
City no arbiter over RNO issues
City no strategic initiative/directive to clean up technology; agencies on their own
City nonprofits don't know how to contact
City notifications archive, website
City notifications sometimes aren't asking for permission
City notifications, anyone should receive'
City Office of Digital Experience
City open cities website analytics
City opt-in email lists for project updates
City outreach as customer service

City outreach in multiple languages
City outreach through partners, consulates, immigrant groups, etc.
City participatory budgeting
City payments via 3rd party
City Peak Academy assistance
City planners required to make recommendations based on inclusivity and transparency
City plans are hard for engagement and trust building; not binding, no action
City process improvement
City project managers are good engagers, but it's too much to juggle
City project managers, aren't good at engagement
City public meetings with disadvantaged not authentic, don't listen
City purpose of engagement (PR)
City resident awareness limited to law enforcement, social media
City resident expectations vs. 311
City resident opposition/sentiment about government
City residents unaware of RNOs, 311, pocketgov, etc.
City reverse 911 self sign-up
City RNO outreach is hard, not helpful: too many are not legit, same people
City RNO website look-up, needs help improvement
City short staffed
City should convene middle managers to share resources
City should support nonprofit sector
City social media accounts, methods
City software has limitations
City some agencies are not customer centric
City some agencies lack Microsoft, Salesforce
City staff pulled to squeakiest wheel
City statistical neighborhoods should be areas
City technology improvements needed
City troubleshoot for CC
City TS customer service goals not met
City TS does not control what agencies do
City TS goal is to create two-way communication with residents
City TS helps other agencies be more productive
City TS new roadmap for salesforce CRM & Marketing Cloud
City TS pulled to lots of unexpected, unbudgeted, needs
City TS reorganization

City TS tries to improve process, before automating or taking on projects
City TS's roadmap is long and slow to complete projects
City types of engagement & comms staff
City update, coordinate materials and information for navigators
City website What's Near Me portal
City weekly communications meeting
City work spawned DPS Community Hubs

City Council

CC "the gavel" produced by Channel 8
CC Agency conflict/frustration
CC Agency joint engagement
CC Agency joint policy development
CC Aides are unsung heroes, great for engagement
CC Aides training & tasks
CC Budget, for engagement
CC Budget, overall
CC Central Communications, new initiatives
CC Central Office
CC constituent services is not their role
CC contact wrong agencies with questions
CC could create an additional engagement ordinance
CC differences among districts
CC engagement is a priority
CC fixers for squeaky wheels and those in need
CC laws on schedule, meeting agendas
CC legislative explainer videos
CC no authority over agencies
CC official/unofficial roles
CC open comment mtg
CC ordinances that already require engagement
CC policy outreach
CC policy research
CC poor engagement
CC resident outreach
CC residents don't understand its purpose and functions
CC strong mayor/conflict
CC support RNO system

CC training for them
CC website

City Engagement

City engagement needs strategy, beyond project coordination
City engagement budget
City engagement improves programs
City engagement needs a plan for using resident engagement data; feedback loop
City engagement needs different with changing city
City engagement needs to be contextual
City engagement plan, stalled
City engagement requires passionate staff
City engagement should embed it, like Federal policy requirements
City engagement silos
City engagement staff burnout
City engagement staff want to connect & share information
City engagement standards, checklists, vs. department level
City engagement takes time, hard to measure in short term; aim for long term
City engagement tools

City Website

City website
City website capabilities and vendors
City website content authors training
City website equity and accessibility (ADA)
City website map challenges
City website resident portal sign-up and Salesforce integration
City website staffing
City website topic areas
City website use data: what people want or do
City websites don't take comments, plan input

Engagement, general

Engagement as customer service
Engagement deep neighborhood outreach
Engagement definition, continuum, not politicking

Engagement for policymaking
Engagement hard to reach people (seniors, renters, working parents)
Engagement independence, trust
Engagement methods that do work
Engagement neighborhood limits; sidewalk, internet, transit
Engagement residents don't need civics training, they need good government
Engagement role of media
Engagement same unpaid people, and very real fatigue
Engagement townhalls, meetings, etc. are old fashioned and don't work for most
Engagement trends
Engagement turnout
Engagement vs Info Sharing
Engagement what does it mean; should be outcome, not process
Engagement Neighborhood identity
Engagement Nonprofits, engagement role, "not government"
Engagement Civic training
Engagement People don't care

Office of Community Engagement

OCE don't let agencies pass the buck
OCE agency wants one
OCE basic outreach doesn't require much training; need more of it
OCE better notification & turnout
OCE budget vs agency budgets- augment, or reduce
OCE connect people to resources
OCE convene residents, CC, CPD to solve problems, create policy
OCE coordinate with ARMS (Agency Relationship Management) in TS
OCE coordinate, not dictate, communications, marketing, etc.
OCE different from ONS
OCE do what Grace did; create a network, tip sharing, etc.
OCE doesn't negate RNOs
OCE embedded connectors, not per project
OCE enable dialog, not presentations and mayoral PR messaging
OCE engagement event ideas
OCE fill gap from bowling alone; faith-based decline

OCE for convening, troubleshooting, best practices, good surveys, tools, etc.
OCE grants to nonprofits
OCE have CC oversee it
OCE host civic training
OCE in HRCP
OCE information, education, awareness
OCE leadership development
OCE liaisons, NDCC model
OCE Library reference team potential
OCE location & function
OCE master calendar of events and outreach
OCE Mayor's Authority is needed
OCE metrics defined by mayoral executive order
OCE models and BPs for engagement
OCE must ensure two-way, and feedback/closed loop on use of data and input
OCE needs a high level view
OCE needs administration and Council support
OCE needs different "swimlane" from TS
OCE needs good budget
OCE needs independence
OCE needs multiple modes of communication
OCE needs to translate plans to action to spur engagement
OCE neutral, not political, inform, not persuade
OCE No, another shield b/w residents and City/Council
OCE not in Mayor's office
OCE opponents, bad idea
OCE or City fund for liaisons, connector
OCE other cities
OCE outreach in disadvantaged communities is very difficult; need experts, money, passion, connections
OCE potential to support RNOs
OCE prior attempts
OCE purpose and activities
OCE redundancy with agencies
OCE regional outreach; address difference
OCE relationship building, trust in government, admit mistakes, failures
OCE report to independent commission to avoid politics

OCE research before implementation
OCE residents need time and incentives to participate
OCE Salesforce should be used
OCE set communication expectations for residents
OCE should have it's own space, visually important, and to network internally and externally
OCE should have professional expertise, survey science, etc.
OCE should invite critics to the engagement table
OCE some centralization is helpful, bureaucracy and queues aren't
OCE structure & design
OCE supplement small offices/agencies
OCE support RNOs w/ staff because RNOs can't access City systems and security
OCE tie engagement to fun activities
OCE to manage communications, data sharing agreement, engagement database, data collected
OCE training
OCE training and T.A. for nonprofits
OCE training for agency staff
OCE use Special Events for outreach
OCE vs Agency engagement
OCE vs independent P3
OCE why, we already do it well
OCE work with schools and health clinics, avoid neighborhood power

RNOs

RNO Access to: meeting space, virtual, mobility, language, knowledge, etc.
RNO Activities: current, past
RNO advocacy
RNO Agencies
RNO agency claims about interactions
RNO agency notification demands/requests
RNO allow workers in neighborhood to join
RNO answers questions on DPS, RTD, etc.
RNO autonomy
RNO BID co-benefits to both groups
RNO boundaries
RNO boundaries, council districts and preferences

RNO boundary overlap ok, reaches different people in same area
RNO budget for high school intern
RNO budget, payment
RNO burden on
RNO businesses
RNO caught in major city growth issues
RNO CC Interactions (small grants, meetings, newsletters)
RNO changes with gentrification
RNO city blows us off
RNO city doesn't realize neighborhood differences
RNO City engagement should be qualitative, not just quantitative
RNO city planning issues
RNO City should foster cooperation
RNO City website feasibility
RNO collaboration among
RNO committees and boards
RNO communication limits/ digital divide
RNO communication methods
RNO communication, two-way
RNO community building
RNO competition (not conflict)
RNO conflict
RNO connects Low-Income Communities to nonprofit support
RNO coopting language for misrepresentation
RNO COVID
RNO current vs future residents
RNO demanding, rigid, difficult to work with
RNO developers/ment
RNO disadvantage
RNO distrust City/government
RNO doesn't take positions
RNO don't shoot the messenger
RNO dues, use, guidance, restrictive
RNO engages people
RNO equity based grants or stipends by issue, demographics, etc.
RNO equity built into design
RNO expectations, guidance, infographic
RNO finding info on
RNO generational differences in discretionary time, methods of civic engagement

RNO Good Neighbor Agreements
RNO government agencies don't work together (City, DPS, etc.)
RNO grants / compensation
RNO grants vs supports and training
RNO group think & fragmentation
RNO historic preservation
RNO hostile dangerous meetings
RNO ideologies: city and CC can't support one over another
RNO INC
RNO incomplete notifications
RNO info interpretation, awareness, education
RNO innovation space
RNO input to policies, deliberation, facilitator
RNO landmark designation partner
RNO leadership and competency
RNO legitimacy
RNO liability
RNO lift regulations; let us thrive
RNO longevity, renewal
RNO map
RNO meetings
RNO membership, #, DEI
RNO misinformation, lies
RNO monitoring
RNO navigate constituent services for residents
RNO neighborhood defenders
RNO neighborhood different opinions
RNO NIMBY vs YIMBY
RNO nonprofit, multi-purpose
RNO notification process, logistics, not a listserv
RNO notification, courtesy and required
RNO notifications are valuable
RNO notifications, too few/much
RNO OCE for recruitment and diversity
RNO Ordinance
RNO ordinance discourages overlap, but doesn't prevent
RNO ordinance leaves out business, renters, nonprofits
RNO ordinance update history, politics
RNO ordinance update, low priority, sticky wicket, 3rd rail
RNO ordinance violation

RNO ordinance, prevent exclusion, but let them be, fewer requirements
RNO ordinance, vague enforcement wording
RNO organized in low-income and minority neighborhoods
RNO original intent vs current
RNO other cities
RNO people afraid to engage
RNO pilot funding process
RNO police attend meetings
RNO politics
RNO positive
RNO power
RNO power soft through organizing, etc.
RNO power through influence, but no authority or legal process
RNO power through media
RNO problem solve, convene
RNO project-based vs. general convener
RNO promotes/reinforces inequity
RNO purpose
RNO reform process
RNO registration and renewal process
RNO renters
RNO representation
RNO require mediation, facilitation, ground rules
RNO residents know us; neighborhood staple
RNO resource inequities
RNO rezoning template is deceiving- not binding or advisory
RNO s/b agency partners, not watchdogs
RNO safety concerns, activities
RNO should not have approval authority
RNO size
RNO staffed
RNO staffing
RNO starting point for engagement, but not enough
RNO statistical areas
RNO status provides information for nonprofits, BIDs
RNO structure, requirements, accountability
RNO supports, general
RNO supports: childcare, food, email, website, translation, laptop (camera, mic), camera, microphone, OWL, zoom, etc.

RNO supra regional districts for two-way info sharing
RNO surveys & other tools needed
RNO system doesn't work
RNO testimony
RNO tiers
RNO time
RNO train/support leaders as ambassadors
RNO training
RNO trust
RNO types, businesses
RNO uneven performance
RNO volunteers, capacity limits
RNO volunteers, willing
RNO votes
RNO want to do better
RNO why CPD?
RNO why is it the neighborhood's responsibility?

Salesforce

Salesforce & competing systems
Salesforce Accela issues
Salesforce agencies stop using it
Salesforce agency doesn't need it
Salesforce agency use, but contacts can't be shared
Salesforce architect staff
Salesforce CASR use
Salesforce CC Use
Salesforce consultant
Salesforce contact de/duplication project phases
Salesforce core case management users
Salesforce costs versus use, lack of profit motive
Salesforce CRM is Service Cloud
Salesforce CSR and/or CRM for work orders
Salesforce custom instances don't get updates
Salesforce custom vs out of box
Salesforce decisions tied to city goals, values, resident priorities, equity, politics
Salesforce department use
Salesforce DOTI use

Salesforce expensive for city agencies
Salesforce for CC Agency communications
Salesforce good, but users untrained
Salesforce governance team
Salesforce has 50 applications
Salesforce heavy use for enforcement
Salesforce helps agencies interact with each other
Salesforce HOST use
Salesforce HRCP snow angels use
Salesforce integration with processes
Salesforce lack of clarity on who pays for licenses
Salesforce likes using it
Salesforce mandate use
Salesforce marketing cloud
Salesforce marketing cloud for insights to residents
Salesforce marketing cloud for internal emails
Salesforce marketing cloud user group
Salesforce misunderstanding
Salesforce multiple vendors causes problems
Salesforce new build wait time is too long; delays in custom build
Salesforce new users need customer service comment-box training
Salesforce not designed for health-related cases
Salesforce not everyone can get a license
Salesforce number of agency-customers
Salesforce original implementation; history
Salesforce products vs applications
Salesforce queue for internal fixes (ServiceNow)
Salesforce resident communication
Salesforce residents and businesses do/don't want contact info shared
Salesforce rollout, change management
Salesforce software integration reduces licenses and double entry
Salesforce test environment issues
Salesforce ticket closed
Salesforce time to use it
Salesforce train and test-use first, then customize
Salesforce train the trainer model
Salesforce training (live and via free Trailheads)
Salesforce training: not enough trainers or training; needs user group
Salesforce TS complaints

Salesforce use not monitored or tracked
Salesforce use to build resident trust via good service
Salesforce use to coordinate response; track contacts
Salesforce used internally for contracts, etc., but no standards
Salesforce website integration

Appendix D. Report from Listening Session

Listening Session with Community Leaders on Equitable and Effective Community Engagement on Saturday November 12, 2022

Compiled by faculty and students in the University of Colorado
Denver Master of Urban Regional Planning Program

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This report is funded by a contract from the City of Denver's agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships to the University of Colorado Denver's Department of Urban and Regional Planning. The purpose of the contract is to study the City and County of Denver's community engagement practices, including the structure of Registered Neighborhood Organizations, the community engagement practices of city agencies, and the quality of constituent services. Within each area are several sub-tasks, including three that are the focus of this report: 1) Conduct a full assessment with recommendations of how best to engage residents, especially underserved communities, in the formation of

city policy; 2) Recommend effective grant programs and partnerships where funds are provided to non-profit organizations engaged in community building work; and 3) ensure all recommendations are viewed through an equity lens with an emphasis on historically underserved communities.



University of Colorado **Denver**

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Overview	1
Methods	2
Findings	4
Objective 1. Conduct a full assessment with recommendations of how best to engage residents, especially underserved communities, in the formation of city policy	4
1.1 Barriers to community engagement in underserved communities around policy and planning	4

1.2 Suggested engagement practices from participants.....	6
Objective 2. Recommendations of effective grant programs and partnerships where funds are provided to non-profit organizations engaged in community building work.	10
2.1 Current challenges to effective grant programs	10
2.2 Improvements to grant structures	11
2.3 Suggested community organizing resources	14
Summary	15

Overview

This section of the report addresses two components of the contracted scope of work as well as the equity lens and focus of all components, namely:

- Objective 1. Conduct a full assessment with recommendations of how best to engage residents, especially underserved communities, in the formation of city policy.
- Objective 2. Provide recommendations of effective grant programs and partnerships where funds are provided to non-profit organizations engaged in community building work.
- Objective 3. All recommendations that the contractor provides must be viewed through an equity lens with an emphasis on historically underserved communities.

To better understand both existing barriers to current engagement practices and challenges within city grant processes, our research team held a listening session with community leaders of historically underserved and/or marginalized neighborhoods and populations that are focused on these specific issues.

We invited dozens of community leaders from neighborhood organizations and other nonprofits representing various geographies and issue areas to a two-hour compensated listening session. During the event, we facilitated small group discussions on 1) existing barriers to socially equitable community engagement with the City, 2) recommendations for more effective and inclusive engagement practices, and 3) grant structures and programming that would enable more equitable distribution of resources to historically underserved and/or marginalized communities within the City and County of Denver.

Findings from this listening session, held on November 12th, 2022, include several big picture challenges as well as discrete and more manageable barriers to equitable community engagement. Big picture

challenges include 1) poor communication within and between departments that are perceived to work in silos, 2) a strong disconnect between the City administration, its policymakers (elected officials) and its residents, 3) power imbalances that tacitly direct funding and other resources to wealthier and better-connected neighborhoods, and 3) a lack of a culture of care and compassion for struggling city residents. Specific and discrete issues that participants raised include 1) poor community meeting organization and a lack of outreach, in particular to renters and non-English speaking community members, 2) a lack of clear accountability for follow-up action after meetings with city staff, 3) language barriers and a shortage of interpretation and translation services, and 3) perceptions of large salary inequities between community-facing employees and higher-paid leaders that participants believe result in high turnover as well as poorly informed, uncaring interactions with public-facing staff, as well as the lack of follow-up actions.

Participants shared a wide range of suggestions to address these issues that included broader paradigm shifts as well as specific and targeted changes to policy, practice, and supporting systems. The three paradigm shifts include 1) a cultural shift to a more compassionate, care-oriented relationship with the public, 2) an opened-minded approach to problem solving *with* residents, and 3) intentional efforts to build relationships with community leaders and neighbors in historically marginalized communities to shift the flow of information and resources in the city.

Participants also suggested more concrete actions. An important item with several benefits is greater efforts to educate residents about city processes and systems, including efforts that engage youth. Other recommended actions participants felt would support a wider cultural shift to more inclusive and transparent engagement include, 1) improvements in the City's information sharing, both in-person and online, 2) development and distribution of capacity building resources for community organizations, and 3) improvements to the RNO structure, as well as other general recommendations for public

engagement meetings and communications we cover more fully in the rest of this report.

Regarding grant processes and programs, participants worked in small groups to design a small grants program that was equitable, transparent, easy to access, and manageable for small community-based nonprofits. They started by identifying challenges in several steps of the City's current grant programs, including eligibility requirements, the application process, types and amounts of funding, and dispersal and reimbursement. They then offered several wide-ranging improvements and developments for City grants and programs, both existing and proposed.

Across the suggested improvements, there was no one-size-fits-all grant recommendation. Participants expressed interest in a range of grant sizes that had the flexibility to meet various needs for organizations with different structures and purposes. As their identified grant sizes changed, so too did the recommended level of reporting requirements and application effort. Correspondingly, they also expressed interest in more flexible and accommodating grant structures, such as up-front dispersals of the entire amount, or dispersals in flexible installments, rather than reimbursement-based dispersals. This was clearly preferred since participants universally expressed that they do not have the organizational cash flow to wait for grant reimbursement. Participants also expressed interest in receiving technical support throughout the grant process. Another area to lessen the burden on them is in the purchasing of materials and supplies. Participants recommended city staff pay for grant-funded purchases directly, thereby eliminating challenges in approvals, bookkeeping, reimbursements, and reporting. Another universal recommendation in the review process was that grant reviewers come from their communities or areas of practice, rather than reviewers they perceive as outsiders unfamiliar with the day-to-day challenges they are working to address.

In addition to grant funds, several participants desired non-grant-funded support for their ongoing community work. The City could provide direct funding for translation, childcare services, and food

provision, as well as physical materials they could borrow, like tables, projectors, translation devices, traffic cones, and other physical resources community groups could borrow for eligible community events.

Methods

During a two-hour listening session, two dozen community leaders gathered to provide feedback and share their desires for improved community engagement practices from the City and County of Denver. The event was held on Saturday, November 12th, 2022, at the Carla Madison Recreation Center. We chose a City-owned property to reduce costs and to highlight the City's support of this study and listening session. This location was ideal for its central location, and its accessibility by multiple modes of transportation; it has a free parking lot, is serviced by public transit, and surrounded by pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. The new Carla Madison Center also provided a welcoming, respectful, and celebratory environment for the participants. This was important to recognize them for their time that day and all the community work they do.

We identified the invited participants through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling with emphasis on inviting grassroots community leaders from Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Immigrant, People of Color, and unhoused, formerly unhoused, or homelessness advocacy groups in Denver. Through the RSVP process, leaders were invited to share contact information of others they felt should be invited to share their input. Unfortunately, the date we selected, due to the timing of this study and availability of venues, overlapped with the Veteran's Day weekend and some invited participants had conflicting events and were unable to attend. At the same time, the smaller number of attendees allowed for rich dialog during the report back sessions, allowing those who wanted to share with the larger group the ability to do so.

For each question, listening session attendees were in small groups by table and their discussions were facilitated by research assistants and graduate students from the University of Colorado Denver. In the small groups, they were asked to reflect on past engagement with the City and County of Denver and how they think the City and County should or could better engage the communities they work with or represent. Facilitators probed each small group around 1) best practices for contacting and connecting with community members, 2) modes and means of communication including language, technology, and context, as well as 3) structures of decision-making, transparency, and accountability. After each the small group discussion, the entire group reconvened to discuss some of the themes and ideas that arose and how they compared across the small groups.

Participants were then asked to reflect on grant processes with their small groups and collectively design a grant process that would meet their needs. They were asked to provide ideas regarding grant eligibility, timelines and frequency, payout structure, reporting structure, grant amounts, review process, training and technical support, and performance requirements. Participants were also asked to reflect on how the City and County could or should support community-based involvement in policy creation or reform.

Each small group discussion was recorded and transcribed by the research team. After the event, graduate students and the two course instructors coded the transcriptions using qualitative coding schemes tied to the scope of work as well as emergent themes from the discussions. Each transcript was coded and then checked by a second member of the research team. These data were then synthesized and compiled into a preliminary report. Between December 9th, 2022, to December 15th, 2022, attendees were invited to review the draft findings via a recorded Zoom presentation and a copy of the draft document. Feedback and further clarification provided by participants was then incorporated into the report by the research team.

Findings

Objective 1. Conduct a full assessment with recommendations of how best to engage residents, especially underserved communities, in the formation of city policy.

The following section provides an overview of participants' perceptions and insights regarding existing barriers to effective and equitable community engagement with the City and County of Denver, as well as actions that participants felt would begin to remedy these challenges and enable more socially equitable engagement practices.

1.1 Barriers to community engagement in underserved communities around policy and planning

Community leaders reflected on existing challenges to effective and equitable community engagement. In general, resident feedback identified several critical, **big-picture** barriers that include:

- Siloed departments
- Disconnects between the City and communities
- Power imbalances and lack of care

More **specific** challenges included:

- Lack of follow-up actions and engagement activities that feel like “box-ticking” rather than authentic requests for input to decision making.
- Language barriers and lack of translation and interpretation services.
- Inequitable salaries for community-facing city employees, e.g., navigators, connectors, liaisons, and outreach specialists, leading to high staff turnover.
- Poor scheduling logistics for community meetings, i.e., red tape.
- Inadequate outreach and a lack of two-way communication, including poor community contact methods- automation over human interaction & online surveys.

Challenges within the City

Theme: Siloed departments & high staff turnover

Participants feel that contacting the City is often a frustrating process because some departments seem to be unaware of what projects other departments are working on. Residents must often explain the same issue several times before they are understood or directed to the appropriate contact. Participants expressed that the city needs to do a better job communicating and networking within and between departments to enable better communication to residents, as well as better coordination among overlapping projects in the same area.

Participants perceive this siloing to be exacerbated by high turnover, especially in public-facing roles. Many did not trust that the City is able to retain people who care about the community. Residents find themselves “starting over” when a new city staff member becomes involved in their project, leading to frustration and burnout among residents.

Theme: Disconnect among the City, City Council, and communities

Some participants stated that they feel they are outsiders in a perceived struggle between City Council and the Mayor's Office. They believe their efforts can only go so far with the City because the department heads, who answer to the Mayor, have the final say. These participants also expressed frustration over their perception that decisions made within departments get diluted by the time they make it to the neighborhood level.

Participants stated that they would like to see changes in the way City Council views their role around policy and would like to see a more concerted effort to generate equitable policies and positive change from the council district level. In their view, the council should take direction from city engagement efforts to help design and direct policy-making processes.

Theme: Power imbalance & lack of care

Participants felt that residents of underserved communities often experience a lack of equity in how funds are distributed, or how city project priorities are decided. They felt that individuals and communities with greater means and resources were consistently prioritized above those with less, further exacerbating the challenges created by existing power dynamics.

In addition, participants noted a perceived lack of care from city staff. They believe that those who are in positions of authority often do not visit constituent communities. The participants felt that when authority figures do visit these communities, it has largely been for press opportunities rather than for reasons intended to benefit the community.

Theme: Lack of follow-up actions & engagement activities that feel like “box-ticking”

Participants expressed frustration over receiving frequent requests to participate in meetings and provide feedback to the city and its agencies, with little done in response to address the issues raised. Their frustration is exacerbated by their perception of the city failing to demonstrate progress on the issues faced by their communities despite repeated visits. Thus, participants feel they are putting in the effort to engage with the City but see no resulting benefit to their neighborhoods from this process. They stated that this has resulted in their collective feelings of burnout and engagement fatigue and cynicism about the engagement process. In other words, engagement activities are so city staff can “tick the box” on their project checklist, rather than authentic engagement that seeks and values input and partnership in the policy making process.

Theme: Language barriers & lack of interpretation services

Participants discussed how community members who speak another language besides English have a difficult time participating in city meetings, especially when there are no interpretation services available.

Because the provision of these services is not consistent from one event to the next, they stated that residents would rather not attend, thereby avoiding the very real possibility that they will not be able to understand or participate in the discussion.

Theme: Inequitable salaries for community-facing city employees

Participants pointed out the vast difference in salaries between those at the top of city departments and those on the front lines of community engagement serving as the point of contact. They view this pay discrepancy as a reason for the high turnover in city staff, which has led to a lower quality of service provided by the city. Since their expectations are not being met by city departments, they also do not see a justification for the high salaries of department heads.

Theme: Poor community meeting logistics & inadequate outreach

Participants feel that meetings are often scheduled without community input and therefore meetings are held when members of the public cannot attend because it conflicts with their work schedules. Another logistical barrier discussed was a lack of childcare at city meetings. Participants reflected that once meetings are scheduled, little outreach is done visibly by the city to bring a more diverse group of community members.

Challenges with Registered Neighborhood Organizations

Theme: Representation

Some participants described a noticeable disconnect between who lives in their neighborhood and who represents them in their Registered Neighborhood Organizations (RNOs). Many participants perceived those most active in the RNOs to be largely either retired older white residents, stay-at-home parents, and/or those who have enough financial flexibility and/or spare time to attend and participate in meetings.

Participants were frustrated, and even angered, by this scenario. They expressed that in areas where gentrification is occurring, and the incumbent residents have lower incomes and/or are people of color, new neighbors are often tone deaf to the needs of long-term residents. Participants believe that this dynamic frequently drowns out the voices of underserved neighbors and contributes to burnout within the Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) community.

Theme: Power imbalance between RNOs

Participants expressed frustration that RNOs in communities with a large and active membership tend to be well-funded have a significant advantage over those with less resources and fewer people who have time to participate in an RNO. They feel that better-funded RNOs can afford to have grant writing staff or send physical mailings for memberships dues.

Participants also expressed concern that RNOs in wealthy neighborhoods have better connections to city leaders through external relationships, resulting in an unfair advantage for those groups.

Specific logistical barriers

Theme: Poor scheduling logistics for community meetings, i.e., red tape

While participants understood the need for the implementation of systems to help the city operate efficiently to meet community needs, they feel these current structures enable delays that make communicating with their representatives and engaging with city services difficult. These systems were mostly related to small grant programs to NEST neighborhoods, special event permits, and requests for meeting support.

They provided several examples of simple actions that required multiple attempts by community members to complete the request or complaint, despite their relative ease for the city to complete the request. On a larger scale, participants reflected that the “strong mayor” system makes it difficult for City Council offices to hold

departments accountable, and in turn, for constituents to find support from their elected representatives in order to address issues.

Theme: Inadequate outreach and a lack of two-way communication, including poor community contact methods- automation over human interaction & online surveys

Participants expressed general appreciation of the city’s 311 and pocketgov services, but they believe the actual services are lacking in consistency. Participants feel that the system automation is frustrating and that it can be difficult to fit questions or issues into the structure provided. They want to speak to a live person who can understand their concerns and feel that the impersonal and generic nature of the current service leads to residents feeling that the city does not care about issues within their neighborhood.

Participants expressed similar concerns with online surveys, feeling that they often do not have enough nuance to get to the core of the community’s concerns. They expressed that the current structure of the surveys and 311 system, as well as the lack of follow-up from both, leave them feeling like their concerns are unheard.

1.2 Suggested engagement practices from participants

Participants were generous in sharing knowledge and stories, and although each perspective was unique, there were clear commonalities in suggested practices for best engaging residents. These suggested practices can be categorized by two main themes – big picture ideas and paradigm shifts – and specific suggestions within each theme. Each of the themes discussed below details actions to be taken within the City, and actions through the RNO system. Common threads through all suggestions were language justice, strengthening and balancing online and in-person engagement and tools, and providing enabling supports for community organizations.

Big Picture Ideas and Paradigm Shifts

Recommendation: Increase access to information for all residents

A big picture idea participants discussed was an update to how the city engages with the public online and in person. They feel there is potential to make it easier for anyone to access information, not just those who understand who to contact when they have a problem and that this would relieve some of the information sharing and updating burden placed on RNOs and community organizations. Specifically, they recommended an improved system for the public to access information that is updated frequently and is efficient to use. When trying to solve an issue, participants see the value in both speaking to a knowledgeable person over the phone and searching for resources online. More detailed ideas are listed below under “specific suggestions” below.

Recommendation: Prioritize authentic and full-circle community engagement processes

Participants stressed how much the overall attitude of those they interact with impacts the City’s effectiveness in connecting with the public. To address general culture and behavior, they would like to see city employees 1) lead with open hearts, open minds, compassion, empathy, and transparency, 2) focus on building relationships and establishing trust, 3) listen to youth, as this is also their city, 4) recognize community work, and 5) prioritize follow-through. Identifying ways to shift power imbalances was another topic of discussion. Participants would like to see the City intentionally address and create space for those with less power and who are underserved.

Recommendation: Initiate civic education activities and materials for residents

Finally, participants suggested that the City initiate efforts to build public awareness about how the City and County of Denver government works, and how residents can get involved and interact with their representatives. They feel that this education should include in-person, virtual, and recorded learning sessions that are free and located in

central places where people of all abilities and backgrounds, and all language speakers, feel welcome.

Detailed suggestions for communications and engagement

The specific suggestions for improving engagement within the City administration are organized into three categories: sharing information, capacity building, and behavior and attitude. Participants' ideas were grounded in their personal experiences with the City, as well as feedback from their communities. These suggestions expand on the big picture ideas and paradigm shifts above.

Theme: Improve how information is shared, online and in-person

1. Online Information

- Create an online hub that organizations can embed on their websites and share with people who are looking for regularly updated information on immediate opportunities, policies, procedures, deadlines, and processes.
- Identify the most heavily trafficked resources, pages, and amenities on the City’s website, and link these to a single community page that organizations can embed in their websites to make information easy to find and share.
- At city-owned public facilities, such as libraries, recreation centers, the DMV, share easy ways to get City information by posting QR codes or a list of other resources for those who do not have internet access.
- Provide accessible, short, and engaging videos for various types of information, including grant programs, plan approval and implementation processes, planning a special event, etc.
- Use plain language summaries on all website pages and downloadable resources

2. In-person resources and meetings

- Set standards for communication of meetings for all districts so that all neighborhoods receive the same quality notifications and delivery of content.
- Build in more time for community input in coalition, stakeholder, and commission meetings to allow for deeper discussion, input, suggestions, and feedback.
- Establish free neighborhood information kiosks or educational hubs in places like public libraries or schools, where residents can access current city information and news, and bypass paywall or internet barriers and have staff support in navigating this information.
- During election seasons, develop a standard practice of neighborhood forums congregating candidates for in-person questions as well as opportunities to discuss all proposed ballot initiatives.
- At meetings, give a clear timeline and agenda that is legible and provided in multiple languages to make it easier for newcomers to enter the space and how and when they can participate during the meeting.
- Use plain language summaries on handouts and announcements about meetings.

3. Other actions beyond meetings and online information

- Develop a system to track city staff follow-through and other meeting results, including how feedback is being incorporated into policy and programs.
- Create a prioritization structure to bring certain city departments together in prolonged emergency situations. For example, fast track the resolution of emergencies over concerns about traffic signal timing.
- Improve communication by partnering with community organizations to spread the word regarding opportunities and city programs, but this should be a funded partnership rather than the current unfunded burden to share City information

with residents. Some participants also suggested using billboards.

Theme: Capacity building

- Hire more public-facing community connectors to support communication between residents and the city. This can increase the knowledge of community groups, and thus their power to convene and participate in city processes.
- Engage people with lived experiences to advise city program, planning, and policy development, and compensate them.
- Hold neighborhood-scale conferences with panels, breakout sessions, and exhibitions where community members and elected officials can exchange ideas and share their passions.
- Sponsor coalition meetings between groups working on similar issues.
- Fund or provide technical assistance for community organizations to update their websites to be more useful to the public.

Theme: Behavior, attitude, and respect for community input

- Make cultural competency a hiring requirement.
- To demonstrate that they are seen and valued, provide gift cards or other resources when engaging with underserved communities and provide support for immediate needs.

Recommendations to support more equitable RNOs

- Have an official from the Mayor's Office or other city department attend one monthly RNO meeting per quarter to share updates, answer questions, and explain policies that need community feedback. Translate these updates into the languages spoken in each neighborhood.
- Help RNOs connect with resources such as childcare, translators, and space to hold meetings.
- Ensure RNO membership is free and that dues are optional

- Establish or strengthen partnerships between RNOs and service providers such as food banks and healthcare providers.
- Give structure and assistance to RNOs interested in facilitating funding resources such as emergency assistance or reparations funds.
- Prioritize outreach to areas that generally have less neighborhood participation, for example areas with higher shares of renters or refugees.
- Facilitate sharing best practices and history of RNOs between groups.
- Grant permission to RNOs to experiment with and operate short-term pilot programs.

Objective 2. Recommendations of effective grant programs and partnerships where funds are provided to non-profit organizations engaged in community building work.

2.1 Current challenges to effective grant programs

The basic challenges shared by participants regarding the grant process within the City and County of Denver can be split into three categories: Challenges within the application process, funding and allocation issues (amounts, timing, eligibility of organizations and uses, matching requirements, etc.), and struggles with awareness of, and access to, the process.

Theme: Challenges in the application process

Participants reported many obstacles in the application process for those seeking grants from the City and County of Denver. Many participants stated that the City is overly bureaucratic and difficult to interact with, and that grant paperwork and data management can also be problematic. Many reported that data collection for the application process can be overly burdensome for smaller community organizations that have difficulty aggregating large amounts of data. These kinds of requirements may prevent many organizations, particularly grassroots and resident-based groups, from applying for grants. Participants also reported frequent mismatch between funding sought and funding granted. If a large grant is sought and the resulting amount is small, or vice versa, organizations are left struggling to match funds or alter plans to fit grant structures. This can lead to frustration and lost time for organizations.

Some attendees expressed frustration with poor communication throughout the grant application process. Some noted that they had not been notified when denied various city grants and felt frustration regarding the lack of clarity on where they were in the process. Several shared sentiments that as Latinx applicants, they feel unfairly treated by the application process and that they are not trusted by the grant reviewers.

Many participants find that tracking spending is cumbersome and anxiety-inducing once a grant is awarded and worry they may be penalized for mistakes. According to participants, training and support in the grant application process is also hard to find, particularly for first time applicants with no history of past applications. Participants reported that these issues result in inefficient grant use and inhibit their ability to respond to community needs with flexibility. They also noted it is cumbersome and challenging to secure no-cost extensions when projects face delays.

Participants also noted deficiencies with the city's grant announcements and information sessions. When the City has conducted listening sessions on specific grants, they frequently do not provide information on how to apply for the grant. Participants suggested if a grant has complicated qualifications, it should both be made clearer in the application and explained during the listening sessions.

Theme: Challenges in funding and allocation

There were several problems discussed with funding availability and allocation of individual grants.

- Participants feel there is mismanagement of available funds that results in a mismatch between funding sought and funding granted, with some funds going unused. Participants also expressed frustration over the time and effort given toward large grant applications, only to receive a much smaller amount than requested. This result is especially frustrating when they learn that the City had awarded less funding than the total amount available.
- Attendees with experience applying for City and County grants feel that preference is given to applicants working exclusively within Denver. Participants from organizations working locally on issues that span the region, particularly those working with the unhoused or low-income populations with higher rates of mobility due to housing instability, stressed this point. They feel that the current preferences for funding allocations result in pushing them to seek grants from organizations focused on the larger Denver Metro

region, which then requires them to expand their geographic focus and taxes their organizational resources.

- Many participants expressed that the overly prescriptive requirements for how grant funds can be used is inefficient and does not allow for flexibility critical to their organizations. For example, an organization may apply for funding to provide clothing for their clients, only to find the need for hygiene products to be more pressing. Despite the necessity of both products, the unexpected shift may call their grant into question. Relatedly, participants stressed the need for more flexibility in the types of available grants. For example, arts organizations may be forced to fit their arts missions to environmental causes because of the lack of appropriate grant types.
- Participants have also observed that grant review panels tasked with administration and tracking often do not have direct connections with the greater community that they serve. Generally, participants felt that grant applications should be reviewed and partially advised or monitored by those who have more direct ties to, and experience in the community.
- As noted above, the deadlines for expending funds are too inflexible and do not recognize the reality of project delays when working in underserved communities.

Theme: Awareness, access, and eligibility issues

Even before the application process and funds issues, a major hurdle is general awareness of grant opportunities and meaningful access to and eligibility for these opportunities. Many said that the city is overly bureaucratic and that fruitful interactions with city staff have been rare.

Regarding eligibility, they suggested changes to several criteria. First, a history of successful past grant applications should not be an overly important qualification for receiving future grants. Those who need funding the most may be new to the grant application process and be further outside the world of nonprofits than other frequent grantees. Additionally, participants shared perceptions that interest in funding a

particular topic or community often seems dependent upon the discretion of city staff. This can further disadvantage a new group seeking funds for an emergent issue in a community that the city staff members have not yet identified.

Another specific issue was that many grants require the applicant to be able to sustain their work over long periods of time and prove that they are financially stable. These types of sustainability and existing funds requirements are difficult for financially limited small organizations to balance with their current costs for service provision and administrative overhead. Participants argued that a different standard should be used for community-based groups and longtime neighborhood activists who intend to continue their involvement in deeper ways than non-profit applicants who may disappear if not awarded funds in any given grant cycle. Grassroots and resident-driven organizations are often financially limited, may barely be covering their overhead expenses, and/or be constrained by volunteer labor. Instead of judging these groups on past financial performance, participants suggested that long-standing advocates with a track record of success be rewarded for their work and tenure. She believed that this longstanding commitment and presence in the community should count as proof of organizational sustainability. Further, they feel that larger organizations, without direct ties to the community, are less equipped to appropriately allocate funds within the community because of their lack of direct experience. In contrast, a small organizations' direct experience with the population it serves should be more highly valued, even if the organization does not have deep financial resources. Attendees also felt that grant funding allocations were fickle and dependent on personal connections, which are sometimes more likely in the large and more established organizations.

2.2 Improvements to grant structures

The following section outlines positive examples the City should study and build upon, including specific recommendations regarding grant scope, size, application processes, eligibility requirements, reporting structures, frequency and timelines, and technical support.

Existing strengths of current grants

Participants identified strengths within current grant processes as well as positive case studies from other organizations and granting institutions they feel the City should study and emulate. These broadly included ways to provide simplified payment structures, more robust technical support, and more flexibility once a grant has been awarded.

Simplified payment structures in certain grant processes

As good examples of clear and simple reporting requirements, participants named existing grant processes with the city or City Council through which vendors are paid directly by the city on behalf of grant recipients, as well as NEST and Community Connector grants from the Participatory Budgeting Program.

Technical support case studies

Participants named the Denver Foundation, the Colorado Resource Center, and the Chinook foundation as positive examples of granting organizations with strong technical support. They felt that technical support from library staff currently available at the Central Branch Library was a positive example and could be expanded to other libraries across the city.

Flexibility in Community Connector grants and outside programs

Participants named the Metro Denver Homelessness Initiative “flex fund” as a positive example of flexibility in fund allocation. They also felt that the Community Connector grants, distributed through the City’s Participatory Budgeting Program, have a good degree of flexibility.

Areas for improvement

Grant scope

Throughout the discussion of existing grant structures and processes, participants brought up several recurring issues. Many voiced the desire to see the grant process develop as a partnership between community

organizations and the city, with goals of prioritizing historically under-resourced communities with earmarked funds and funding general operating costs for community-based nonprofits. There was also support for opportunities for groups to bundle several projects into one application, reducing the time involved for each nonprofit seeking support for their community programs.

Many participants suggested a tiered system of prioritization that would weigh programs and projects with an equity-serving orientation more heavily. Relatedly, they felt that it would be helpful if the city could tailor grants to certain vulnerable communities by acknowledging unique aspects of these communities within the grant applications. Participants also want the list of 10 NEST priority neighborhoods to be expanded and feel that all vulnerable communities should be given additional assistance since the rotating NEST neighborhoods exclude many areas with similar characteristics, needs, and vulnerabilities.

Participants also expressed interest in grants that enable greater experimentation and temporary solutions to neighborhood problems. For example, using less expensive and less permanent materials for things like traffic calming, park improvements, and other interventions in public spaces would enable residents to see more immediate impacts from their resident engagement efforts, and provide opportunities to test ideas before the City introduces and installs permanent solutions.

Grant size and frequency

There was no one-size-fits-all grant proposed by participants, however ideas emerged for several different grant typologies based on different needs.

1. *Small grants of \$200 to \$1000 with flexible terms:* Participants expressed interest in quick turn-around grants with a rolling application process that would fund community events or more emergent needs.
4. *Medium grants between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year:* Participants shared that many of their program needs could not be addressed

for less than \$10,000, but that grants over \$25,000 per year required additional and more complex tax reporting and accounting that prevents them from reasonable management time expertise. These could be available annually on a rolling basis to best accommodate all-volunteer nonprofit grassroots groups.

5. *Larger grants of \$50,000 to \$200,000 per year:* For organizations that need to pay one or more employees a comfortable living wage, grants in this range can support part-time or full-time personnel and other costs like healthcare, office space, and liability insurance. Participants feel that technical support with tax reporting should be included with grants of this size. These could be available with longer-term timeframes or annually renewable terms for 3-5 years. Participants expressed that having stable funding for longer time frames enables groups greater stability and continuity in their work, and deeper community building capacity.

Improved application process

Several participants shared that the grant process feels daunting, and that grassroots groups and historically marginalized community leaders need more encouraging processes to address equity barriers. To this end, participants suggested several interventions that would improve the grant application process:

- Grant information should be posted in everyday community spaces like libraries, recreation centers, and post offices, rather than just online.
- The city should provide technical support for grant applications, either from staff or a contracted third party.
- Application processes should provide an alternative to internet file uploads and increase accessibility across the digital divide through hard copy application options and technical assistance.
- Grant applications should include fewer questions. Applications should focus on communicating the work being done, why it is necessary, and what barriers exist that would be addressed through a grant. Too many questions can cause confusion and force the

applicant to parse their ideas across several responses, which may result in a less convincing and coherent proposal.

- Organizational requirements should be lessened, specifically grants should be open to grassroots organizations that are not formal 501(c)(3) organizations.
- Application processes should be more transparent and straightforward and clearly delineate processes and expectations regarding payment before application. Also, the application and award materials should provide more clarity on what happens to grant-purchased materials after a grant is complete.
- The city should communicate clearly whether or not an application is funded as soon as it is determined. Organizations who are not successfully funded should receive feedback on their application so that they can improve in subsequent rounds.

Technical assistance

Participants also recommended the City establish technical assistance and capacity building programs to support grant-related skill-building for grassroots community organizations. This includes but is not limited to:

- Help identifying applicable grants
- Support with developing compelling narratives that tell an organization's story (writing support and help finding statistics and compelling data)
- Support with submitting online applications
- Support with tax reporting for grants over a certain threshold
- Training on record keeping and understanding the rules and regulations of grant processes

Participants expressed interest in this assistance coming from either other grassroots organizations that have had grant success, a third-party contractor, or dedicated staff within the city. Some of this content could be communicated through short, informative videos with key overview

information, in addition to frequent in-person training sessions, and on-call appointments.

Increased eligibility

Attendees universally voiced support for grants that do not require official non-profit status as an eligibility requirement. Many shared that they felt that this was one of many barriers that steered grant funds towards already established organizations with more financial resources rather than to community groups and grassroots efforts led by neighbors.

To address this, participants suggested a potential nomination-based eligibility model. The nomination process would help to recognize individuals and organizations committed to place and already doing important work to be respected for their history in the community. Under this model, community leaders would be nominated and could undergo either an interview process or a simplified and streamlined grant application process. Participants feel this would better support the long-term work of neighborhood organizers who stay engaged with their neighbors through good and bad grant cycles.

Improved fund allocation

Participants feel that when funds are requested for events, only a general invoice should be required to allow groups to receive city funds with limited paperwork and a realistic timeframe. They expressed that they feel scrutiny when receiving funds and have been micromanaged in the reporting process. They also recommended that initial funding allocations be provided up front, with the remaining funds dispersed over the lifespan of the grant. Participants from organizations with tight budgets do not feel that reimbursement works best for them and expressed the desire for a fiscal agent to help 501(c)(3) organizations distribute funds and manage tax requirements.

Improved reporting structure

Participants agreed that there needs to be accountability with reporting outcomes but believe that current requirements are overly burdensome for many organizations lacking the capacity to handle such an extensive reporting process.

Participants outlined several suggestions for the ideal grant reporting structure. They want streamlined reporting timelines to avoid excess work for staff, simplified spreadsheets, and less stringent requirements for receipts. Many expressed fears of being accused of criminal misuse of funds if mistakes were made in reporting. They suggested having available city staff to assist them with the process and provide greater clarity and direction. Another suggestion was to have staff assist with proper reporting and money and tax management.

To accommodate their recommendation for flexible funds that allow for innovation and experimentation with community problem solving, they suggested a two-step process in which recipients start with a small grant to fund new ideas and are eligible for additional funds if they can show progress is being made. However, they feel that requiring them to calculate statistics for success and ongoing support dehumanized the impact of their work and the experience of communities. They would prefer to report measures of success through tangible examples and in lay terms, enhancing relatability for communities and other organizations. This is something the Chinook fund allows. Additionally, they expressed the need for both online and paper reporting, as some organizations do not have the capacity for online reporting.

2.3 Suggested community organizing resources

Participants also expressed interest in non-grant-based support for grassroots organizations that would enable organizations to function more effectively as outreach partners. These resources included personnel contracted through the city including:

- Grant writers
- Translators

- Childcare providers
- Food vendors
- Facilitators and facilitation coaches
- Flyer printing and distribution services for neighborhood events and meetings
- Website assistance for organizations

Participants also named material resources that they would like to have accessible for community groups. These could be a special collection available at libraries, materials available for check out at recreation centers, or in neighborhoods that do not have these public facilities, the equipment could be available through a city brokered partnership with a local public school. These materials included:

- Folding tables
- Translation devices
- Projectors and other technological support
- Canopies for outdoor events
- Traffic cones and street barricades

Other general support for community groups that participants named included help reserving and identifying available meeting spaces.

Summary

Throughout the two-hour listening session, the 24 community leaders working and living within the City and County of Denver provided considerable insight that can be used to improve City engagement processes and facilitate more equitable city-community partnerships and nonprofit community development and organizing work.

The big picture takeaways for community engagement included 1) the need for improved communication within and between city departments, 2) improving the perceived disconnect between the City administration, City policymakers (City Council), and residents, 3) addressing the current power structures that are perceived to skew available funds and resources towards wealthier neighborhoods, and 4)

developing a culture of care and compassion for vulnerable communities and residents.

Toward better grant making and partnerships, community leaders graciously shared tangible suggestions and improvements that could be made to current policy structures and granting practices, voicing the need for greater education related to city processes and structures and a desire to develop better cooperative practices between their organizations and the City. Their feedback detailed current barriers and challenges, as well as existing strengths to build upon, and other areas for improvement.

Collectively, participants provided numerous examples of opportunities to create improved relations between the City and County of Denver and their organizations as well as other constituents. Their input is detailed throughout the full report to provide clear, actionable suggestions for city processes that could better facilitate equitable community engagement and policies.

Appendix E. Updating the RNO Ordinance

RTICLE III. - REGISTERED NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

ARTICLE III. - NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS: REGISTERED, UNREGISTERED, AND CITY SUPPORT

Sec. 12-91. - Legislative intent.

It is the intent of the council to increase access to the various agencies and departments of the city for neighborhood organizations; to improve the flow of information between these groups, and agencies of the city, and the city council districts; and to enable such organizations to present their positions before certain decisions that affect their neighborhoods are made by agencies and departments of the city; and to provide support to eligible organizations through training, community grants, meeting space, equipment, translation, and other capacity building services and resources. For these reasons, the council hereby intends to extend official recognition to neighborhood organizations and/or coalitions of neighborhood organizations registered with the city; to notify such organizations in advance of occasions when decisions are to be reached on certain matters affecting their neighborhoods; to afford representatives of such organizations the opportunity to present the positions of the organizations at such times; and to create a structured system of Neighborhood Support Offices comprised of staff from city agencies with expertise in engagement and outreach to support neighborhood community organizations with necessary services and resources and to facilitate communication between neighborhood organizations, the agencies and departments of the city, and the council districts. The Neighborhood Support Offices will support The council encourages neighborhood organizations to work cooperatively with any adjacent or overlapping neighborhood organizations to determine positions on issues affecting the neighborhood and to conduct business in an organized, representative

and fair manner, which is designed to obtain informed participation from as many neighborhood citizens as possible. Registered neighborhood organizations ~~are also encouraged~~ must work to cultivate neighborhood membership and participation that reflects the ethnic and socio-economic composition of the neighborhood they represent. Human Rights and Community Partnerships will register and monitor RNO eligibility requirements. Each RNO will be required to have membership representative in race and/or ethnicity, age, and socio-economic status of its boundaries, a website, and hold regular (no less than quarterly) and open meetings that are promoted throughout the organization's boundaries. RNOs will have support for remote meetings through their designated Neighborhood Support Office. ~~Registration of organizations with overlapping boundaries is allowed but the formation of numerous overlapping neighborhood organizations is strongly discouraged.~~ The council allows any current neighborhood organization that does not wish to fulfill the aforementioned requirements to become a Community Group (CG). CGs are allowed to register with the city to be recognized as a community organization within Denver, but they will not be held to eligibility requirements or eligible for all NSO support without a formal application. CGs allow for groups that are representative of identifies, issues, or other purposes to have recognition by the city without being held to neighborhood geographies or the responsibilities of RNOs.

Sec. 12-92. - Definitions.

"Registered Neighborhood Organization," as used in this article, shall mean a voluntary group of individual residents and owners of real property, including businesses, within a certain prescribed area of the city, and/or a coalition of such groups formed for the purpose of collectively addressing a specific issue or general issues and interests common to and widely perceived throughout the area and communicating those issues to the agencies and departments of the city. It does not include Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

“Neighborhood Support Offices,” as used in this article, shall mean a city funded and operated entity that manages eligibility and monitoring, provides supports to registered neighborhood organizations, and facilitates communication between neighborhood organizations and the agencies and departments of the city. Neighborhood Support Offices shall be defined by council district boundaries split into at least two pieces. They shall have a physical location and shall be run by the Office of Human Rights and Community Partnerships with employees from other city agencies also helping to run each Neighborhood Support Organization.

“Community Groups (CGs),” as used in this article, shall mean a voluntary group of residents that do not meet the eligibility criteria to be a city recognized Registered Neighborhood Organization, but still wish to receive notifications they can choose from the city. They can also opt in to be listed on the Neighborhood Groups website each year.

Sec. 12-93. - Eligibility and boundaries.

(a) *Eligibility standards.* To be eligible to register as provided in this article, neighborhood organizations shall meet the following standards:

(1) They shall be formed by residents and owners of real property within a certain prescribed area. Coalitions of neighborhood organizations are limited to those organizations with registered boundaries contained within the City and County of Denver. ~~The RNO will provide a list of current members names and addresses to verify that all members reside, or own property or businesses within the organization’s boundaries. Merchant associations or business organizations, such as business improvement districts will not be eligible for registered neighborhood organization status, but businesses are permitted to join a registered neighborhood organization;~~

(2) They shall hold meetings at which all members may vote, ~~not less than once in each calendar year~~ **not less than two times in each**

calendar year (but quarterly is preferred), including one annual meeting. A list of those attending the annual meeting shall be kept, and at least twelve (12) members must be in attendance at said annual meeting. A roll call of all attendees must be reported from the annual meeting to the RNO’s primary Neighborhood Support Office (if they fall under more than one NSO);

(3) All meetings, including the annual meeting required hereunder, shall be open to the public;

(4) Notice of all meetings shall be posted in advance of such meeting **on the RNO’s website (which may be provided by the City NSO or on the RNO’s website that is also linked to the NSO website), and in the identified public space by the RNO’s NSO (e.g., the branch library, recreation center, etc.). The RNO may also post the notification to other public places, and readily obtained publications such as newsletters, within their boundaries, as permitted and prescribed by law. A record of said notice shall be maintained by the neighborhood organization and submitted with registration renewal;**

(5) Membership shall be open to any owner of real property or resident **whose lives in (as a renter or homeowner), or operates a business partially or wholly within their boundaries. RNOs shall not require membership dues or infer greater rights or responsibilities on due paying members, or limit participation of non-dues paying members;**

(6) Neighborhood organizations shall have established boundaries, which may include one (1) or more neighborhoods within the city; provided that the boundaries of a neighborhood organization may not encompass the entire city, and provided further, that the boundaries of a coalition of neighborhood organizations may not encompass the boundaries of another neighborhood organization without prior notice to such organization. **It is preferred that the RNO boundaries fall within no more than two NSOs, and a majority within one NSO. Legacy RNOs prior to this [2023] update will be allowed to maintain their boundaries. New RNOs will be required to identify the**

reasons for drawing their boundaries to encompass more than two NSO areas. Reasons may be to encompass a neighborhood street corridor that spans more than two council districts, a natural or man-made feature, such as a river or park, or other reason that aligns with their intended purpose as a neighborhood serving organization that facilitates communication between residents, the city agencies and departments, and the council districts;

(7) Registered neighborhood organizations must maintain a website either independently, or through providing content to the NSO for their City-provided web page off the NSO website for the NSO district. The web page should be updated at least twice per year with RNO leaders' names, emails, and phone numbers, and the date, time, and location of the annual meeting. Other meetings should be added as feasible and per section XXX of this ordinance for public notification;

(8) The membership of the RNO must be representative in race, ethnicity, age, and socio-economic status of its boundaries; or it must prove that it is working with its primary NSO to identify and close representation gaps in its membership;

(b) *Overlapping boundaries.* The boundaries of adjacent neighborhood organizations may overlap, and such overlapping shall not render any neighborhood organization ineligible hereunder. However, such overlapping is strongly discouraged. The objective of this ordinance is to promote cooperation and dialog among residents within neighborhoods. Overlapping RNOs dilutes resources, complicates messaging, and can foster discord among residents, rather than cooperation and communication. Further, the requirements of subsection (a)(6) of this section shall be met prior to registration of such overlapping neighborhood organizations.

(c) *Registered neighborhood organization compliance.* As the coordinating agency of the NSO support structure, HRCP will assume a regulatory role to ensure registered neighborhood organizations meet the eligibility requirements. HRCP will manage the NSOs.

Sec. 12-94. - Registration.

(a) Any neighborhood organization and/or coalition of neighborhood organizations may register by filing with Human Rights and Community Partnerships ~~community planning and development~~ the following information:

(1) Official name;

(2) Current boundaries, utilizing public rights-of-way to describe such boundaries;

(3) The names, mailing addresses and telephone numbers of its current officers;

(4) The name, mailing address, telephone number, ~~fax number~~ and email address (if available) of a current member whom the city or a member of the public may contact [the city will work with the RNO to create an email address from a free or low-cost provider, should the members not have one];

(5) The number and names of persons the organization represents, number of paid members, if any, and number of active participants, which should be based on attendance at last meeting, members who subscribe to the email newsletters, or some other record that can verify active member participation;

(6) Demographic information of the persons the organization represents;

(7) Whether the organization publishes a newsletter and, if so, how frequently, number of copies and method of distribution;

(8) Methods used to communicate with members and the neighborhood;

(9) A copy of the organization's articles of incorporation and/or bylaws if any. New copies need not be provided with each annual registration if no changes have been made; *(NSOs may assist new RNOs with bylaws creation or existing RNOs with creating them)*

(10) The time and place of the meetings; and

(11) The schedule for electing officers.

(12) The annual budget and whether they request financial or in-kind assistance from the NSO

- (b) A neighborhood organization may register with ~~community planning and development~~ *Human Rights and Community Partnerships* on a rolling basis throughout the year. Their registration will be processed within 30-60 days of the request. This registration must be renewed ~~in writing~~ *annually based on the RNOs initial registration date*. This annual renewal may be accomplished either through the completion of the registration form *on the city's website* or, if there have been no changes in the information required, through a *renewal form, either online or as a paper letter delivered (by mail or in-person), or via a phone call to 311* requesting continued registration for the coming year. *311 will transfer the registrations to HRCP.*

Sec. 12-95. - Duties of ~~community planning and development~~ *Human Rights and Community Partnerships*.

~~Community planning and development~~ *Human Rights and Community Partnerships* shall have the following duties in connection with all registered neighborhood organizations:

(1) To maintain a current map of the boundaries and a current list of the official names, boundaries, officers and contact persons of all registered neighborhood organizations;

(2) To maintain and update in a timely manner the map and list of registered neighborhood organizations on the city's official website, DenverGov.org;

(3) To notify registered *neighborhood organizations of their annual renewal date through the NSOs and an automated database system.*

(4) To maintain a file of sample current forms used by agencies of the city to notify the neighborhood organizations as required in section 12-96.

(5) To receive, review, and take appropriate action when a formal complaint is filed against an RNO.

(6) To evaluate RNOs representativeness of the area they serve and to support them in their efforts to improve representation

(7) To provide an NSO management function that oversees and coordinates the system of NSO managers across the city for the 22 sub-council district area *(or other number TBD)*

Sec. 12-96. - Notification. *[We recommend all notifications can be received by city residents through an opt-in process for Denver residents, property owners, and businesses. NSOs will also help to publicize and interpret a subset of them to the RNOs in their District territory. People who opt-in can choose to get alerts, which will direct them to a new post on the website, or to receive the full text by email]*

(a) ~~Registered~~ *If desired*, neighborhood organizations will ~~shall~~ be notified of certain matters affecting areas within, or within two hundred (200) feet of, their boundaries. They shall be notified by ~~mail, or, if the organization and the agency agree, by fax or e-mail~~ *or if the neighborhood organization requests and can show the need for paper mail*, by mail. Such notification shall be made within ten (10) working days after receipt by the responsible city agency of the proposed action.

Notification shall include, where applicable, the location and general description of the proposed action; and the process to be followed, including the date, time and place of any public hearing and/or public meeting relating thereto, if such has been scheduled. The failure of an organization for whatever reason to receive a notification required hereunder shall not invalidate any action taken by the city. **These same notifications can be requested by all Denver residents, property owners, and businesses. The notifications will also be automatically posted to the relevant agency websites and, as possible, summarized on the relevant NSO webpages as soon as they are released via email or mailed to the residents, businesses, property owners, RNOs, and DNG, that have requested them.**

(b) ~~(d)~~ The responsible agencies of the city, upon receiving an application or plan relating to any of the matters listed in this section, shall inform the **NSO whose boundaries encompass or lie within two hundred (200) feet from the location for which application is made. The NSO will post on its website a weekly announcement of all relevant notifications within 200 feet of its boundary.** ~~of the registered neighborhood organization or organizations whose boundaries encompass or lie within two hundred (200) feet from the location for which application is made, and of the officers or contact person thereof.~~

(c) The following agencies of the city shall be responsible for the following notification:

Zoning and Development Review Services

- Zoning Map Amendment
- Residential Care Uses
- Power, Gas and Similar Facilities
- Home Occupations
- Nursing Homes in Certain Residential Districts

- Clinic or Office, Dental or Medical & Laboratory, Dental or Medical in a R-4 Zone District
- Neighborhood Services Uses Over 5,000 square feet in R-4-X Zone (technically this is listed under the responsibility of “District Zoning and Development Review Services”)
- R-X Zone District Plan
- Comprehensive Sign Plan
- Planned Building Group
- Preliminary Subdivision Plat

City Council

Zoning Language Amendment

Board of Adjustment—Zoning

Hearings Before the Board of Adjustment—Zoning

Asset Management

Sale of city owned land

Public Works, Design Engineering

Street or Alley Vacation

Public Works, Traffic and Transportation Division/Design Engineering Services

Streets: Reconstruction/Widening/Change in Direction/Change to or from one-way to two-way

Excise and Licenses

- New Application, and/or Major Modification to Premises and/or Transfer of Malt, Vinous or Spirituous Liquor License
- New Application, and/or Major Modification to Premises and/or Transfer of a Cabaret License
- New Application of Underage Patrons License
- New Application or Changes in Applications for Tastings of Malt, Vinous or Spiritous Liquor
- Class 15 and 16 Amusement License Application
- New License Applications for Rooms for Recreation, Amusement or Social Activities
- Restrictions on New Lodging Licenses
- New application, and/or major modification to premises and/or transfer of retail marijuana store, retail marijuana cultivation facility, retail marijuana products manufacturer, or retail marijuana testing facility; or any action for which a public hearing is required by state or city retail marijuana licensing laws.

Landmark Commission

Landmark Designation Applications

Planning Board

Hearings before the Planning Board

Board of Appeals-Building and Construction Services

Abatement of Unsafe Buildings, Structures or Utilities: "Repair or Wreck" Hearings

Parks and Recreation

- Park Land Use: Proposals to Change/Amend
- Park Traffic Patterns: Proposals to Change/Amend

Nuisance Abatement Coordinator

Properties Identified and Being Processed through Nuisance Abatement Procedures

Environmental Health

Noise Variance Requests

In the event that the Code provisions corresponding to the notification requirements listed above should be amended so that the requirements are changed or eliminated or the responsible agency changed, the Code provisions shall supersede the requirements of this list.

~~(c) The council shall send, each week, to each registered neighborhood organization, one (1) copy of the meeting schedule of the council for the succeeding two (2) weeks.~~

~~(d) The responsible agencies of the city, upon receiving an application or plan relating to any of the matters listed in this section, shall inform the applicant of the registered neighborhood organization or organizations whose boundaries encompass or lie within two hundred (200) feet from the location for which application is made, and of the officers or contact person thereof.~~

Sec. 12-97. - Public hearings.

(a) At any public hearing on matters listed in section 12-96, except malt, vinous or spirituous liquor license applications, testimony shall be accepted from members of each registered neighborhood organization whose area is affected by the proposed action. A person authorized by a registered neighborhood organization and/or coalitions of neighborhood organizations to present the position taken by the organization, shall begin such testimony with a verbal or written statement that shall include:

- (1) The name of the organization and/or the names of the organizations which comprise the coalition;
- (2) The boundaries of the organization;
- (3) The number of people, households, institutions and businesses represented by the organization and the basis for determining membership;
- (4) The time and date of the meeting when the organization decided on its position;
- (5) The nature of the meeting, whether the same was a meeting of the board, of a membership subcommittee, or the general membership;

(6) The number of members present;

(7) A description of the process for reaching the decision, including if and how neighborhood citizens were informed and if and how they were invited to participate; and

(8) The votes cast for and against the proposed position.

(b) If the person testifying on behalf of an organization does not disclose the information listed above, the person presiding at the public hearing may require the person testifying to provide the information.

Sec. 12-98. - De-listing and re-listing.

Any registered neighborhood organization which does not meet, or ceases to meet, the eligibility standards of section 12-93(a), the requirements of section 12-94(a) or which does not re-register as required by section 12-94(b) shall be no longer considered a registered neighborhood organization and shall cease to be listed. Upon demonstrating that it has corrected the deficiency that caused its de-listing, a neighborhood organization shall, at that time, be re-listed as a registered neighborhood organization. **HRCPC shall be responsible for regulating RNOs and de-listing and re-listing them.**

Appendix F. Detail for 13 Case Studies

BOSTON, MA

Community Engagement Office

Boston's newly formed Community Engagement Cabinet that is a cabinet-level department with an intent to improve delivery of services and create more resident participation in government. The Cabinet includes the Office of Neighborhood Services, the Office of Civic Organizing, SPARK Boston, and Boston 311. The goal is to coordinate all community services and engagement under one office, including the 24-hour 311 service. In terms of accountability for engagement, the Chief of Community Engagement works to eliminate silos between residents and the city. Additionally, the OCO is intended to both support and hold other departments accountable for resident engagement. The organization chart below shows the divisions and responsibilities within the Cabinet.

The Office of Civic Organizing (OCO), established in 2022, works to form collaborative partnerships and programs that encourage proactive community engagement, awareness, and service in the neighborhoods. SPARK Boston, a program within the OCO works to empower 20–35-year-olds to play a greater role in planning for the city's future.

Of note the OCO does not do work for the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA), as that entity is not part of the City (though the current mayor is in the process of trying to revamp the organization). BPDA has its own team of community engagement managers.

Supports for Neighborhood Organizations

The Office of Neighborhood Services has staff and Neighborhood Liaisons that attend community meetings, assist residents with city services, share info directly with neighborhoods, and helps the city

respond to emergencies. They also encourage and facilitate resident input and participation. There are liaisons for each neighborhood as well as specific communities.

Some neighborhoods have neighborhood councils and neighborhood associations, but these are uneven in terms of existence and how well-funded and organized they are.

Boston 311

311 service is available through phone, web, tweet, or a free BOS:311

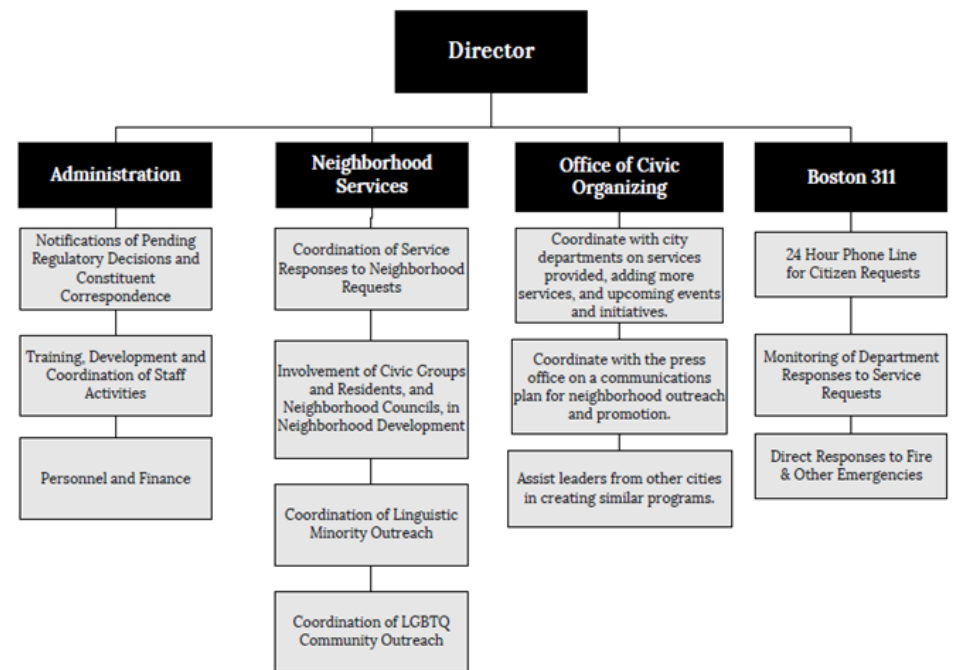


Figure 1: Boston's Community Engagement Cabinet (Available from: https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2022/10/V2%2005-%2023%20A%20Community-Engagement-Cabinet_0.pdf)

app for your phone. It was recently upgraded with U/I improvements

and 11 total languages. Additionally, the Boston.gov website shows all of the 311 calls received in a year along with the case status.

DOWNLOAD THE APP

The Boston 311 app helps residents and visitors improve City neighborhoods. You can report non-emergency issues, like potholes and graffiti.

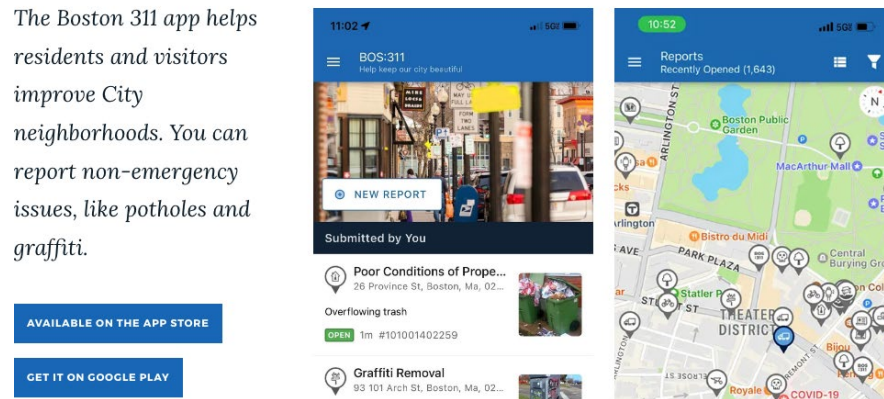


Figure 2: <https://www.boston.gov/departments/boston-311>

Political Representatives by neighborhood

The My Neighborhood Lookup Tool is an ArcGIS tool map of Boston that allows residents to click on a neighborhood and see a list of their City Councilors, Neighborhood Liaisons, Community Liaisons, and City Councilors At-Large. This includes a link to each person's website that includes their contact details. They also host a general webpage for each neighborhood that includes links to sign up for newsletters, find representatives, and other city resources.

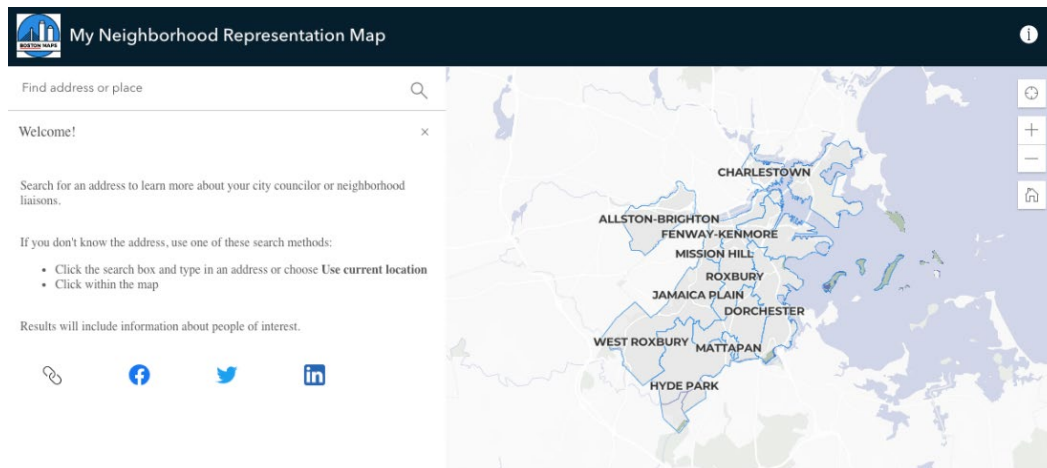


Figure 3: Boston's My Neighborhood Representation Map (Available from <https://www.boston.gov/departments/city-council/who-my-boston-city-councilor>)

Budget

Boston's FY23 Operating Budget is \$3.99 billion, 5.7% more than FY22.

Cabinet	Dept	Program	Expense Category	FY20 Actual Expense	FY21 Actual Expense	FY22 Appropriation	FY23 Adopted
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	ONS Administration	Personnel Services	516,408	640,264	777,674	934,963
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	ONS Administration	Contractual Services	155,281	59,937	46,100	46,100
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	ONS Administration	Supplies & Materials	4,840	2,969	6,731	7,189
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	ONS Administration	Current Charges & Obligations	8,440	20,028	7,664	2,430
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Neighborhood Serv	Personnel Services	1,296,455	1,293,366	1,427,094	1,599,393
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Neighborhood Serv	Contractual Services	-1,525	-825	110,200	10,200
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Neighborhood Serv	Supplies & Materials	3,914	1,047	3,800	3,800
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Office of Civic Organizing	Personnel Services	67,435	87,221	105,387	74,950
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Office of Civic Organizing	Contractual Services	9,486	20,856	1,090	1,090
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Office of Civic Organizing	Supplies & Materials	401	556	500	500
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Office of Civic Organizing	Equipment	#Missing	3,270	#Missing	#Missing
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Boston 311	Personnel Services	1,279,725	1,465,349	1,632,308	1,967,746
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Boston 311	Contractual Services	349,669	426,363	7,000	7,000
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Boston 311	Supplies & Materials	453	142	2,700	2,700
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Boston 311	Current Charges & Obligations	#Missing	#Missing	776	776
Community Engagement	Neighborhood Services	Boston 311	Equipment	1,546	#Missing	#Missing	#Missing

Available from <https://www.boston.gov/departments/budget/fy23-operating-budget#explore-spending>

BOULDER, CO

Communication & Engagement Department

The Communication and Engagement Department of the City of Boulder is responsible for providing effective communication and engagement with residents, staff and council, working to increase the understanding of and support for city programs, policies and projects. The Department operates using an Engagement Strategic Framework, adopted in 2017. The Engagement Strategic Framework are guidelines and steps to improve and implement best practices for the culture of engagement with Boulder residents. The Framework supports resident participation in council meetings as well as participation in board or commission meetings. Through the Framework, opportunity for volunteering with the city is also prioritized. As part of this volunteering, online trainings on a variety of civic topics and themes, including housing, homelessness solutions, and stormwater plans, are provided. The City of Boulder has one dedicated staff member in the role of neighborhood liaison who is the contact person between residents seeking out engagement opportunities.

Communication & Engagement	Block Party Permits	Brand Guidelines	Community Connectors Program
About	Community Connectors-in-Residence	HOA Information	Manufactured Home Community Resources
Upcoming Events	Media Relations	Neighborhood Block Party Trailer	Neighborhood Connection Grants
Projects	Neighborhood Services	Podcasts	Productive Atmospheres
Services & Programs	Public Participation	Sign Up for City E-newsletters	Stay Informed
	Watch Boulder 8 TV		

Figure 1: Boulder Communication & Engagement Department website (Available from: <https://bouldercolorado.gov/government/departments/communication-engagement/services-programs#main-content>)

Funding

The City of Boulder provides limited funding for residents through the Neighborhood Connection Grant. These grants are provided to increase opportunities for neighbors to meet and get to know one another, provide community-building resources to under-resourced neighborhoods, and enhance community resilience, healing and joy through personal connections. These grants are provided at a maximum \$3,000 and are by yearly application. Grant categories exist within the parent grant, catering to topics including connecting with nature, music and culture, community healing, and neighborhood block party.

Neighborhood Connection Grants



Neighborhood Connection Grants are designed to increase opportunities for neighbors to get to know each other in fun, relaxing and positive ways, creating pathways for communication, collaboration and resilience.

Figure 2: Boulder Neighborhood Connection Grants website (Available from: <https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/neighborhood-services#section-9545>)

Neighborhood Associations

Boulder does not operate through programs or mechanisms of neighborhood associations, but instead does have several Homeowners Associations. Both the [Martin Acres](#) neighborhood and the [University Hill](#) neighborhood have very active community associations, members and strong agendas, however these are incorporated neighborhoods to the City of Boulder. These associations are active on social media websites including Facebook and Next Door. The only entities that have to register are HOAs, and those are registered with the state, not the city.

The Boulder Neighborhood Services website provides information on how to connect to with other community members. They have how-tos for connecting with neighbors, hosting a block party and staying

connected while also offering resources for block parties and manufactured home community resources, HOAs.

As part of civic training, the City offers the Community Connectors Program as well as the Productive Atmospheres program, both of which are intended to support productive and inclusive civic conversations amongst all residents, including those underrepresented voices.

How to Build Community in Your Neighborhood

- 1 Connect with your neighbors**
Say hello in-person and online. Using listservs, emails, texting, and Nextdoor all are great ways to get in contact.
- 2 Host a neighborhood block party**
Block Party Permitting, Trailer and other resources: Information on when/how to get a Block Party Permit, how to reserve the Block Party Trailer, and a tool kit for great block party ideas and resources.
- 3 Stay connected to the city**
 - If you have questions, ideas or feedback for city staff, reach out to the City of Boulder's Neighborhood Liaison: Edgar Chavarria by email at chavarriae@bouldercolorado.gov or by phone at 303-441-1895.
 - Participate in online engagement opportunities about issues that are important to you. Find these through the calendar at bouldercolorado.gov/calendar and beheardboulder.org/.
 - Report an issue (such as public safety, code regulations, roads and transportation, etc.) by using the [city's online tool](#).
- 4 Apply for a Neighborhood Connection Grant**
Apply for programming or funding to bring your community together by sharing experiences in your community and around the city. Information about this program can be found on the [Neighborhood Connection Grant Program website](#).

Figure 3: Boulder Neighborhood Services website (Available from: <https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/neighborhood-services#section-9545>)

Constituent Services

The City of Boulder has a Report and Issues website which is not monitored 24/7 but does provide the City direct tips from local residents on a variety of urban and civic issues. The Report an Issue Website provides a slew of topics and issues that the City of Boulder can address on behalf of their citizens, including but not limited to: public safety, community, utilities, codes and regulations, roads and transportation, and more. Public safety tabs include opportunity to report a crime, crisis intervention, bias motivated crimes, bicycle or pedestrian problems, stormwater/spill issues, storm drain problems, mosquitos, debris/trash/roadkill issues. There are also opportunities to report human rights violations, graffiti, issues of homelessness, and unsanctioned camping. Code & Regulations reporting includes violations of building/rental code, right of way code, police code enforcement, aircraft noise and more.

Roads and Transportation issues includes maintenance problems, signal outage, snow and ice, public tree, pothole, street light, traffic sign issues and more. Finally, utilities reporting of water service, drinking water, sanitary sewer, creek debris. Otherwise, the City of Boulder relies on 911 for emergencies, and 303.441.3333 for non-emergency dispatch.

Public Safety

Report a Crime	Crisis Intervention	Bias Motivated Crimes	Bicycle or Pedestrian Close Call
Report a Spill or Stormwater Issue	Storm Drain Problems	Mosquitoes	Debris, Trash and Road Kill

Community

Human Rights Ordinance	Graffiti	Homelessness Engagement and Referral	Report Unsanctioned Camping
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Code & Regulations

Building and Rental Code Concerns	Right-of-Way Code Violations	Police Code Enforcement Unit	Aircraft Noise
Smoking in Public Places	Marijuana Odor Complaints	Wood Burning Restrictions	Sight Obstructions
Weed Control and Tall Vegetation	Composting and Recycling	Illegal Use of a Dumpster	Bear Resistant Container Required
University Hill Outdoor Furniture Restriction	Outdoor Lighting Code		

Roads & Transportation

Transportation and Road Maintenance	Traffic Signal Outage	Snow and Ice	Public Tree Issues
Potholes	Street Lights	Traffic Signs and Markings	Street Sweeping
Multi-use Path Maintenance	Alley Maintenance	Overgrown Sidewalk Obstructions	Sidewalk Repair and Maintenance

Figure 4: Boulder Report an Issue website (Available from: <https://bouldercolorado.gov/report-issue>)

CHARLOTTE, NC

Community Engagement Office/Division

Charlotte has a Community Engagement Division which supports neighborhoods to organize and implement initiatives that are a priority to their unique communities.

Supports for Neighborhood Organizations

The City of Charlotte's Community Engagement Division offers a Board Support program to assist neighborhood advocates in connecting with community resources and partners to achieve their goals. Community Engagement Service Area Teams of 2 persons each are also assigned to four areas to work with citizens, neighborhood and business associations, civic groups, and other community organizations to assist with both city and grassroots project implementation as well as city-funded area revitalization.

The Neighborhood Matching Grants Program is another initiative offered by the Office of Community Engagement that awards funds to eligible neighborhood-based organizations for projects that improve the quality of life in Charlotte's neighborhoods.

Community Engagement Service Area Teams

Community Engagement Service Area Teams are assigned to four areas and work directly with citizens, neighborhood and business associations, civic groups, and other community organizations to assist communities with project implementation and area revitalization. This allows us to develop meaningful relationships in the community and understand the unique characteristics and needs of each community served. Teams provide support to communities and coordinate resources to address a wide range of issues by:

- **Advocacy.** As advocates for Charlotte communities, Community Engagement Service Area Teams seek to maintain a balance between meeting the needs of both the city and individual neighborhoods.
- **Coordination.** To improve the quality of life in Charlotte neighborhoods, Teams engage in a significant amount of coordination efforts to align City resources, projects, and initiatives with community needs.
- **Information.** Teams provide information about available programs and services directly to individual citizens and neighborhood groups and help facilitate connections where possible.
- **Problem Solving.** Teams work with neighborhood and community groups to empower them to develop and implement solutions that create positive change.

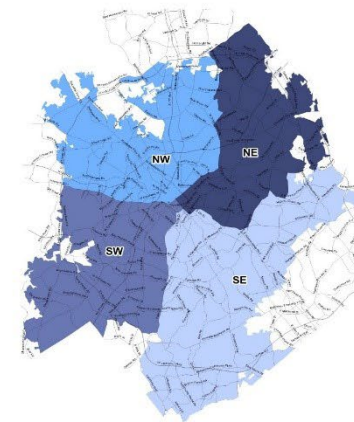


Figure 1: <https://www.charlottenc.gov/Streets-and-Neighborhoods/Get-Involved/Community-Engagement>

Civic Training

The City of Charlotte provides training and information to residents interested in community leadership, such as the free Civic Leadership Academy course. Along with in-person training sessions the Office of Community Engagement has a repository of "on-demand" training videos that can be accessed via their website. An example of one of the training videos can be seen in figure 1 below. The "Queen City Crash Course" video gives an overview of how the City of Charlotte's governmental structure works and how citizens can interact with the city.

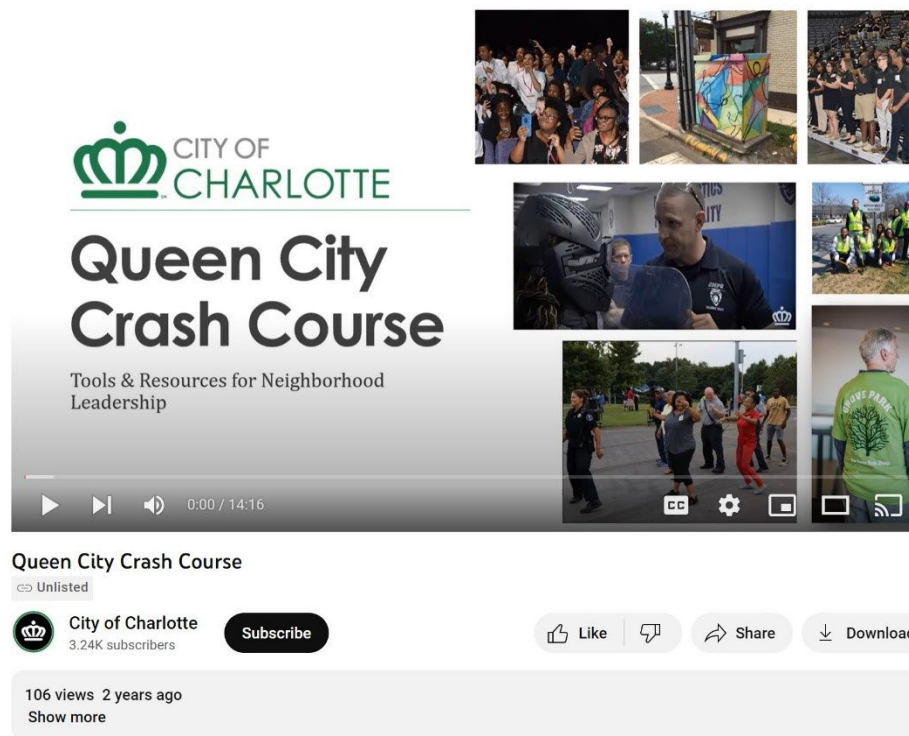


Figure 2: <https://www.charlottenc.gov/Streets-and-Neighborhoods/Get-Involved/Attend-the-Civic-Leadership-Academy>

Resident Services:

Residents can report non-emergency issues, request services, and obtain information about city services through the 311 system, known as "CharMeck 311." The Office of Community Engagement also provides training on digital communication for neighborhood groups to build capacity and strengthen the community.

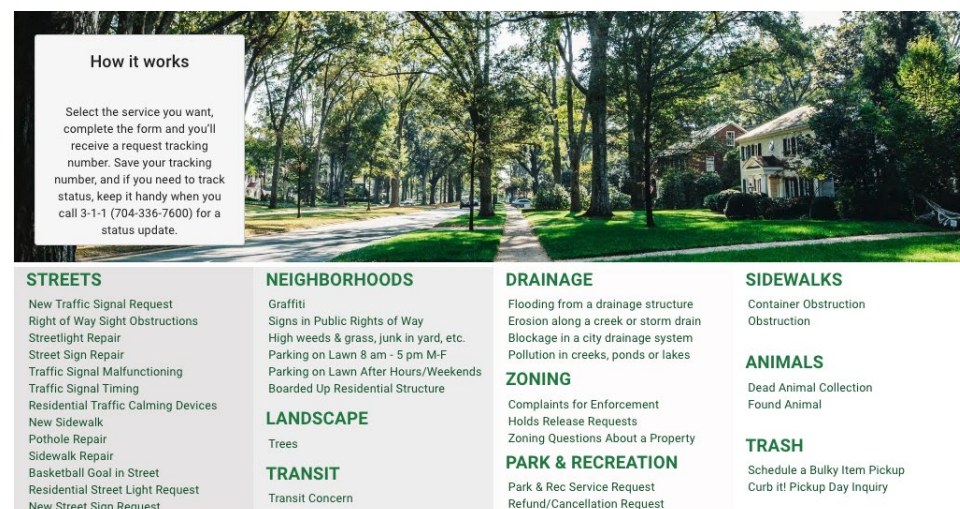


Figure 3: <https://servicerequest.charlottenc.gov/service>

Powers and Interaction with other Departments:

The Community Engagement Division coordinates with other departments with community engagement divisions or specialists to align City resources, projects, and initiatives with community needs.

Although no specific ordinance is mentioned, the division has various powers to advocate for Charlotte communities and coordinate resources to address a wide range of issues. They provide information about available programs and services to individual citizens and neighborhood groups and help facilitate connections where possible.

Overall, the City of Charlotte's Office of Community Engagement is dedicated to empowering neighborhoods and residents to create positive change and improve the quality of life in Charlotte. Their various programs, partnerships, and services provide support and resources to residents interested in community leadership and neighborhood revitalization.

GOLDEN, CO

Neighborhood Associations

The City of Golden, CO has both formal and informal neighborhood associations. There is a process to register both, and once registered the city uses that information as a contact point to periodically send updates they believe may be of interest. The associations can receive updates on City projects and land use case applications. They are also invited to events where they can share their activities and best practices. There is no ordinance establishing requirements for these associations, and their power is informal.



Figure 1: Image from: <https://www.cityofgolden.net/government/departments-divisions/planning-and-development/neighborhood-associations/>

Community Engagement and Communications Department

Golden has a Community Engagement & Communications department that coordinates internal and external communication efforts. This department will work with other city departments and city council to provide information. They additionally created a Community Engagement Planning Guide that employees of all departments are to use as a reference for community engagement projects. The guide includes detailed guidance on how to determine if a project warrants public engagement and to what extent. It uses resources from the International Association for Public Participation.

The Community Engagement Planning Guide lists tools and techniques available for Golden including a City Tool Box that includes the Golden Informer magazine, postcards, water bill inserts, social media, e-newsletter, City of Golden website, Guiding Golden website, Golden Media/Press Releases, Broader media/press releases, GCO.tv, city videographer, variable messaging boards, and the intranet. There is also a community engagement project worksheet for all departments to use to frame their approach to community involvement on a project, including fire, finance, attorney, planning, streets, public works, etc. There is a scoring sheet to determine which type of engagement is warranted and a worksheet for identifying stakeholders. There is additional discussion around engagement techniques, their pros and cons, and how to think through which ones will be effective. Standardization around engagement and scoring across departments for what type of engagement happens can create consistency around how each team is engaging with the community.

Communications & Community Engagement Strategic Framework

FRAMEWORK COMMITMENTS

- Commitment 1:** Sustain an informed public
- Commitment 2:** Seek understanding of community perspectives
- Commitment 3:** Tap into the collective intelligence of the community
- Commitment 4:** Ensure transparency in City decisions, actions, and decision-making processes
- Commitment 5:** Equip City staff to communicate, collaborate, and engage with the community effectively
- Commitment 6:** Enhance collaboration, communication, and cohesiveness within and between City departments

GOALS FOR EACH COMMITMENT:

Commitment 1: Sustain an informed public

Informing the public about City matters is a basic responsibility of government. The public should have readily accessible information about City events, processes, actions, and proceedings. When people clearly understand facts about city functions, actions, and processes, they can more confidently and effectively engage with the City.

- Goal 1.1** Provide timely, accurate, helpful, and easily accessible information to the community via methods and platforms designed to reach a wide audience.
- Goal 1.2** Facilitate increased interaction between City Council and the Golden community.
- Goal 1.3** Make it as easy as possible for residents to communicate with the City.
- Goal 1.4** Clearly inform community members about how they can interact with the City and provide easily accessible ways to be involved.

Figure 2: Image from:

https://www.cityofgolden.net/media/CommunityEngagementPlan_fillable.pdf

and is made up of two grant levels: \$500 dollars and a matching grant of up to \$2,500.

311 services

There are no 311 services noted. They do have a Public Works Citizen's Academy and they are a member government of DRCOG, which runs a Civic Academy for the region. Grants noted include the 2023 Thriving Community Support Program which has a focus on improving quality of life, supporting non-profits to address physical, health, educational, or livability needs along with support for cultural programs and activities.

Funding

There is limited funding available for community work and community organizations. The i-Golden Neighborhood Grants program is one of the only grants available to community and community organization. This grant funding scheme is part of City Council's Year of the Neighborhood

LOS ANGELES, CA

Neighborhood Councils

Los Angeles has what are called Neighborhood Councils. The Neighborhood Council system was established in 1999 as a way of ensuring that the City government remains responsive to the different needs and lifestyles of Los Angeles' rich variety of communities. There are currently 99 Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles, each serving about 40,000 people.

The City of Los Angeles defines these as: "Neighborhood Councils are the closest form of government to the people. They are advisory bodies, who advocate for their communities with City Hall on important issues like development, homelessness, and emergency preparedness. Neighborhood Councils are part of the Los Angeles City government, and have annual budgets funded by taxpayer dollars. Neighborhood Council board members are City officials who are elected by the members of their local communities, but they donate their time as volunteers."

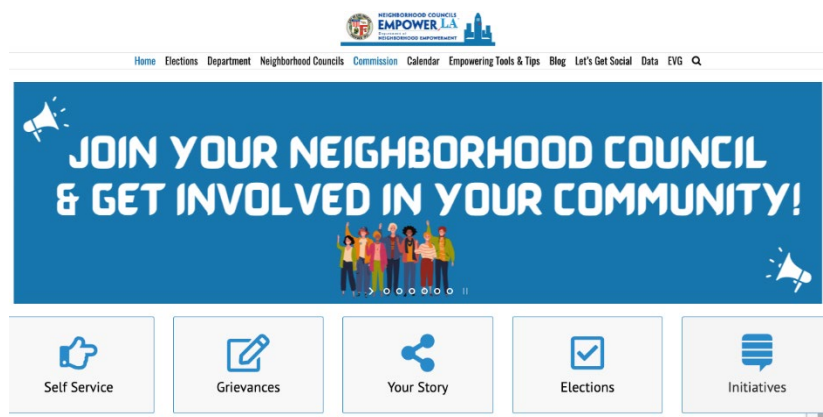


Figure 1: Image from: <https://empowerla.org/>

Neighborhood council members represent about 20,000 people in their jurisdictions. They are not appointed; they are elected but are still advisory. This aspect is what makes LA's system unique. LA's system of Neighborhood Councils is the largest in the country. It is an expectation of neighborhood councils that they not have people of the same type on their boards, in order to promote diversity and representation. Additionally, they are required in their budgets to perform outreach.

Funding

Empower LA, which is also called the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, is the overarching department which helps to connect neighborhood councils to the city government. They hold workshops and training for councils as well as city staff, and support in teaching members how to be good advocates for their neighborhoods. EmpowerLA.org is a fantastic resource- on this website a resident can file complaints, find meeting times for their neighborhood council, upcoming elections, and watch videos about the importance of neighborhood councils.

Ordinance:

Ordinance 174006 establishes regulations to implement the plan for a citywide system of neighborhood councils. Additional ordinances addressing neighborhood councils or amending the original include Ordinance 176704 and Ordinance 174975. The establishment of a Neighborhood Council system is written into the city charter as well.

Neighborhood Councils

Neighborhood Councils play an advisory role in the Los Angeles municipal government and receive \$32,000 per year from the

government to run. They gather, vet, debate, and come to a consensus on matters that impact City life and policy and deliver their official stance on these issues in letters called “Community Impact Statements” (CIS), which are shared with City decision-makers, such as the Mayor, City Council, or City Departments such as City Planning. The Neighborhood Council may also attend meetings of these decision-making officials in person, to advocate for their board’s position on a matter. Neighborhood Councils members take action as a board, and not as individuals, so they do not take an official position without a majority vote first. Each Neighborhood Council has its own set of bylaws. Every NC must also operate their meetings following the open meeting laws of the state of California, as described in the Ralph M. Brown Act.

Having elected neighborhood council members has proved to cause some conflict and confusion with regards to who holds what powers, especially between the NC’s and city council. This is mostly due to the fact that the city charter was not written with elected neighborhood council members in mind, so it does not contain the same provisions and requirements that it does for the city council. The current version of the neighborhood council system is still operating under a somewhat conceptual basis, so moving forward, the city plans to better outline in the city charter what the powers of the Neighborhood Councils are to mitigate any confusion and improve their function.

Constituent Services

311

Los Angeles has a 311 service number MyLA311 listed on the “request city services” page. The 311 Call Center connects people to general City information and a wide variety of City services like trash pickup & graffiti removal.

Your Government Working For You

Our mission is to connect people to City services and information, quickly and easily, via a communication channel of their choice. We provide general City information to citizens, local businesses, and visitors as well as perform Service Requests intake on behalf of City Departments.

The 311 Call Center provides various options to connect to a wide variety of non-emergency City services and general City information. Some of the most popular City services can be requested by calling 311 or (213) 473-3231, visiting <https://myla311.lacity.org>, or using the MyLA311 mobile app.

Contact the MyLA311 Call Center

Dial 311 or (213) 473-3231

Mon-Fri: 7:00am-7:00pm
Weekend & Holidays:
8:00am-4:45pm

Visit the MyLA311 Website

- Create a Service Request
- Search City Services Directory

Download the MyLA311 App

- Download the Google Play Store
- Download on the Apple App Store

Using the MyLA311 App

With the MyLA311 app, City information and services are just a few taps away. Use the app to quickly and easily request the City's most popular services, including graffiti removal, pothole repair, and bulky-item pickup. Other features include access to the City Services knowledge base, map of nearby City facilities, City Social Media feeds, and more.

Figure 2: Image from:

<https://lacity.gov/myla311#:~:text=The%20311%20Call%20Center%20provides,using%20the%20MyLA311%20mobile%20app.>

Office of Community Engagement

EmpowerLA is currently housing the Office of Community Engagement within its department. They have formed an Awareness and Engagement division within EmpowerLA as well. The newly elected Los Angeles Mayor will be deciding where they want to house the Office of Community Engagement moving forward, and whether they want it to remain within EmpowerLA or move to the Office of the Mayor so she

may see that it meets her standards. There have been calls however for the city to have a dedicated Office of Engagement and there will be many decisions made around that over the next few years.

Civic Academies/ Resident Government Training

EmpowerLA holds workshops and training for councils as well as city staff, and support in teaching members how to be good advocates for their neighborhoods. Neighborhood Council board members must complete required trainings as well.

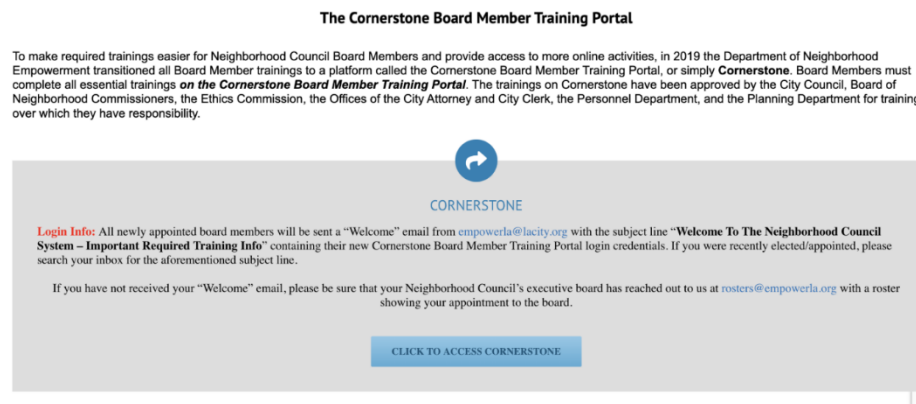


Figure 3: Image from: <https://empowerla.org/nctrainings/>

platform gives you access to a variety of data tools for a deeper dive into your community. On the platform you can find a range of useful information, from building and safety permits in your locale, to resilience indicators within your Neighborhood Council, to open 311 requests. Find out more and explore the many other data resources and ongoing initiatives tied to knowing more about your community.” It contains corresponding ArcGIS data.

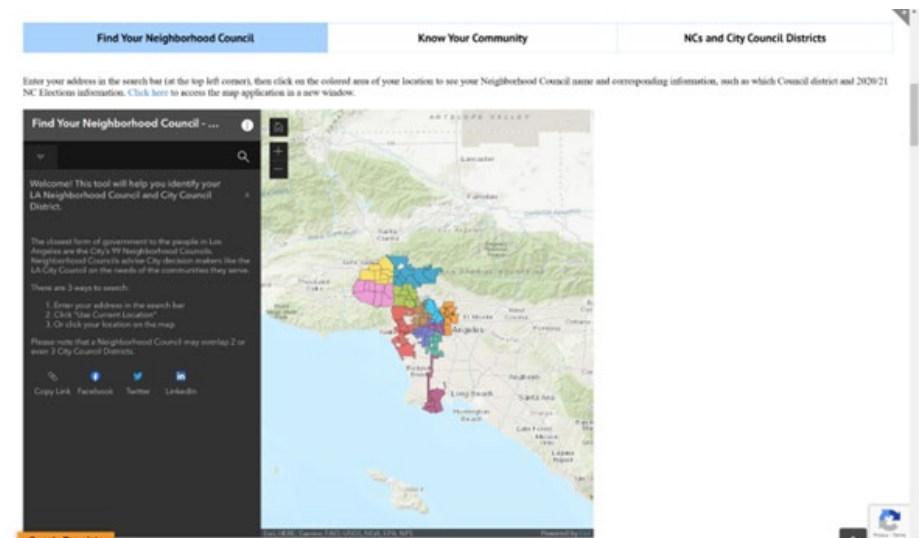


Figure 4: Image from: <https://empowerla.org/councils/>

Data Sharing With Residents

On the EmpowerLA website, there is a tab specifically for sharing data with residents in order for them to better understand the makeup of their community. From the Know Your Community page: “Developed in partnership with the Mayor’s Office, the ‘Know Your Community’

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Neighborhood Organizations

Minneapolis has 70 recognized neighborhood associations (NA's) representing 84 neighborhoods. Each NA is an autonomous nonprofit organization and has a volunteer board of directors elected by residents (and sometimes other stakeholders). Communities represented by NA's range from as few as 672 residents (Northeast Park) to more than 20,000 residents (Longfellow Community) (City of Minneapolis, 2023).

Neighborhoods 2020 (NH2020) is the community engagement process that the City of Minneapolis used to redefine the roles and expectations of neighborhood organizations that receive funding from the city. Neighborhoods 2020's goal is to make Minneapolis' network of 70 neighborhood organizations more equitable and effective (CURA, 2022). The city worked with the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) to collect both historical and current neighborhood program funding information to produce a racial equity analysis along with recommendations for new guidelines (CURA, 2020). The Minneapolis City Council approved the [Neighborhoods 2020 Program Guidelines](#) on Nov. 13, 2020 (City of Minneapolis, 2023).

The Community Connections conference draws over 1,000 people, 150 booths/vendors, local non-profits, neighborhood groups and more. It's held at the convention center every year and provides an opportunity to do training, connect people and organizations to resources, and build connections.

Neighborhood and Community Relations

Minneapolis has a Department of Neighborhood and Community Relations (NCR), which sits under the City Administrator. Their duties include supporting neighborhood organizations. Their neighborhood services team includes four Neighborhood Support Specialist (NSS) and a Neighborhood Programs Manager (Steven Gallagher, who was interviewed as part of our research). Every NA has a dedicated NSS. NCR requires Neighborhood Association's to submit an annual report. To make it less burdensome, they offer a template and provide a survey monkey link for submission.

The City has more than fifty appointed advisory boards and commissions served by about 500 residents. The City conducts a bi-annual survey of the board membership to track how representative of the community the city's board membership is. That survey was suspended in 2020 due to Covid. It is unclear if/when it will return.

NCR also provides legal, audit, and insurance resources including a panel of CPA firms to assist with annual filings, financial compilations, financial reviews and audits; nonprofit attorneys that NCR has on retainer, pooled directors and officers insurance, and general liability policies.

NCR's proposed budget for neighborhood and engagement support for 2023 is \$10.3 million with \$4.1 million of that dedicated to NA funding (City of Minneapolis, 2022). There was a big overhaul as part of the Neighborhoods 2020 (NH2020) effort. The old funding mechanism (Neighborhood Revitalization Program) was found to be inequitable and geared toward affluent homeowners.

Overview of Funding Programs and Structure

	Citywide Neighborhood	Equitable Engagement	Partnership Engagement	Collaboration & Shared Resources Fund
Purpose	Support a citywide network of neighborhood associations	Engage communities throughout the city with a focus on equity; support projects and programs	Support partnerships between CBO's and neighborhoods to increase diverse participation through project implementation.	Support neighborhood interested in consolidating or developing a shared resource model
Objective (quantifiable)	Neighborhood organizations receive a base amount of funding	Every neighborhood organization is engaging historically under/un-represented residents meaningfully and effectively on policies and programs that impact them and in decision making at the local level	Community based organizations partner with neighborhoods to engage and organize historically under/un-engaged residents around specific programs, initiatives or projects	Neighborhood organizations are provided sufficient resources needed to support their voluntary consolidation or sharing of resources
Outcome (qualifiable)	Residents have a local neighborhood association where they engage and be engaged on city and other policies that impact them.	Community-led engagement, with strong diverse participation, builds the sense of belonging and ownership in neighborhoods giving a sense of place.	Diverse participation is supported by expanding community partnering	Neighborhood organizations lead their own collaborative efforts to combine and share resources while ensuring their organizations are meeting the needs of the residents.
Time Period	3 years	3 years	18 months	Up to 3 years (temporary)
Process	Application and review panel by NCR	Application and review panel (multi-department)	Application and review panel (multi-department)	NCR Reviewed

Figure 1: Image from: <https://lms.minneapolismn.gov/Download/RCA/15342/Neighborhoods%202020%20Program%20Guidelines%20Draft.pdf>

For the new funding formula, the only thing really different than what NH2020 recommended is they don't use population as a metric. NCR felt it was working against their equity goals. For instance, an affluent neighborhood with a population of 20,000 was receiving more money than a traditionally disadvantaged neighborhood with only 10,000 people. Their formula for equity-based grants is: Areas of Concentrated Poverty (ACP_nh/ACP_total) 50%, Gentrification 20%, Cost Burden Households 30%.

Our NCR interviewee noted that they are working to do more to reach out to community-based organizations, including through a new Partnership Engagement Fund. It provides grants to community based organizations and neighborhood organizations to engage historically underrepresented residents.

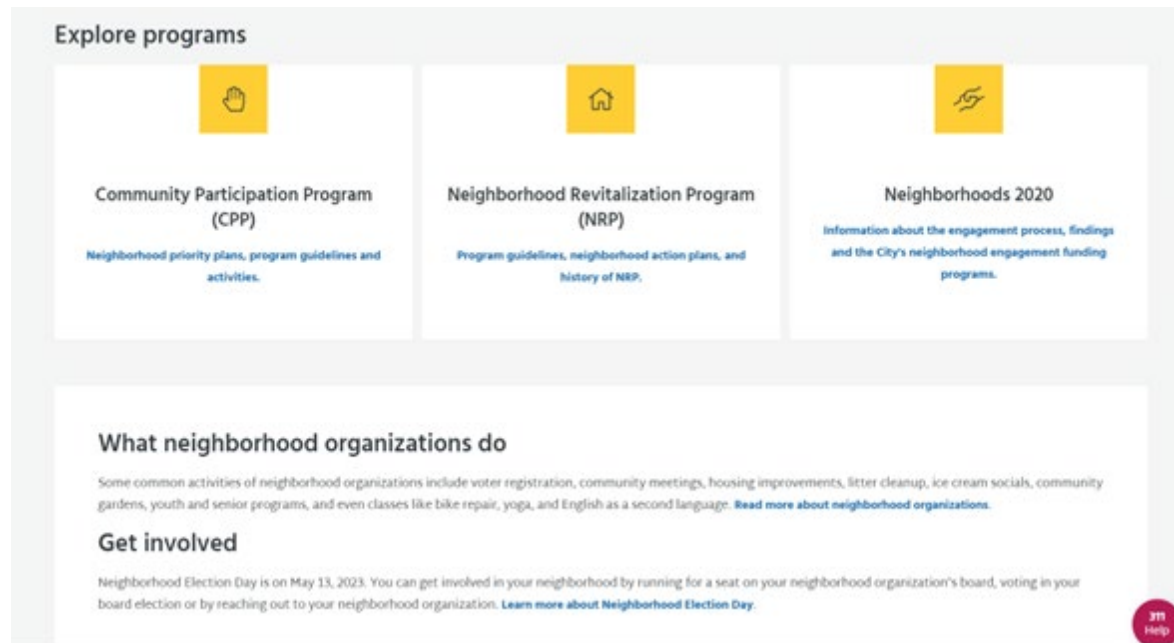


Figure 2: Image from: <https://lms.minneapolismn.gov/Download/RCAV2/15425/Combined-NH2020-Public-Comment-Revised.pdf>

Training Departments

Helping city departments improve engagement is a big priority for NCR. They work with all departments, especially Planning and Public Health. Some departments like Public Health have their own navigators, but NCR still provides training and resources. During the 2040 Comprehensive Planning effort, NCR led community dialogues and assisted the Planning Department with engagement efforts. NCR employs staff dedicated to serving specific populations: people seeking ADA and language access assistance, African Americans, American Indians, East Africans, Latinos, Seniors, Southeast Asians.

Civic Academies / Training Opportunities

City Academy: Five-week course teaching residents about operations and functions of city government.

Learning Labs - The [Community Connections](#) learning lab series consists of eight free, in-person 90-minute labs on effectively engaging multiple segments of the community in Minneapolis, including city staff. There are both afternoon and evening schedules available. Those who complete at least seven of the eight Community Connections learning labs will earn a Community Connector certificate.

Community Connections Conference is an annual free event that connects residents of Minneapolis, community groups, neighborhoods and local government. (City of Minneapolis, 2023)

Constituent Services (e.g. 311)

Minneapolis uses 311 and includes resources for ESL speakers (see below). Minneapolis' 311 language line provides City information and services in Hmong, Spanish, and Somali. They have seen continued uptake of this service thanks to unique engagement strategies such as appearances on community radio programs.

Their [online portal](#) for neighborhood organizations has lots of good information. Residents can lookup their neighborhood association by name or by entering their address. A wealth of information can be found on each neighborhood organization's entry including their latest engagement plan (required annually), their contact info, when they meet, board president, the NCR Neighborhood Specialist who serves them, a demographic profile, bylaws, and a budget showing how the funds they received from the city and how they spend them (City of Minneapolis NCR, 2023).

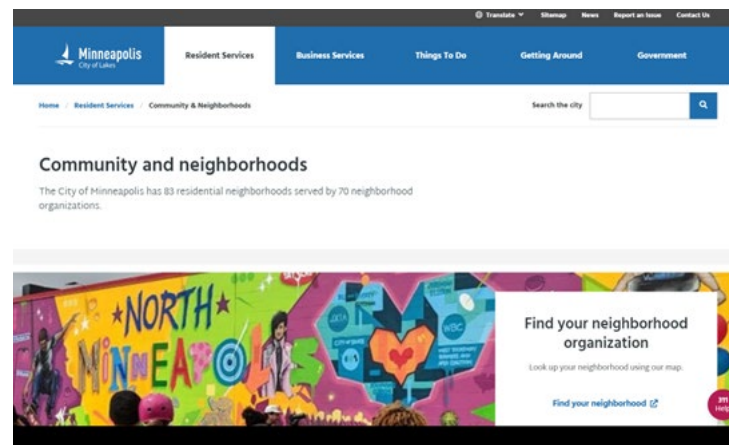


Figure 3: Image from: <https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/resident-services/neighborhoods/>

NEW YORK CITY, NY

Community Boards

New York City's 59 community boards were established by local law in 1975 to represent community districts and identify funding needs. The Community District Profiles website is a useful tool allowing users to access each district's profiles. These profiles detail the community's needs, built environment, floodplain information, community board perspectives, projects, and resources. An example of the community district profiles is shown in Figure 1 below.

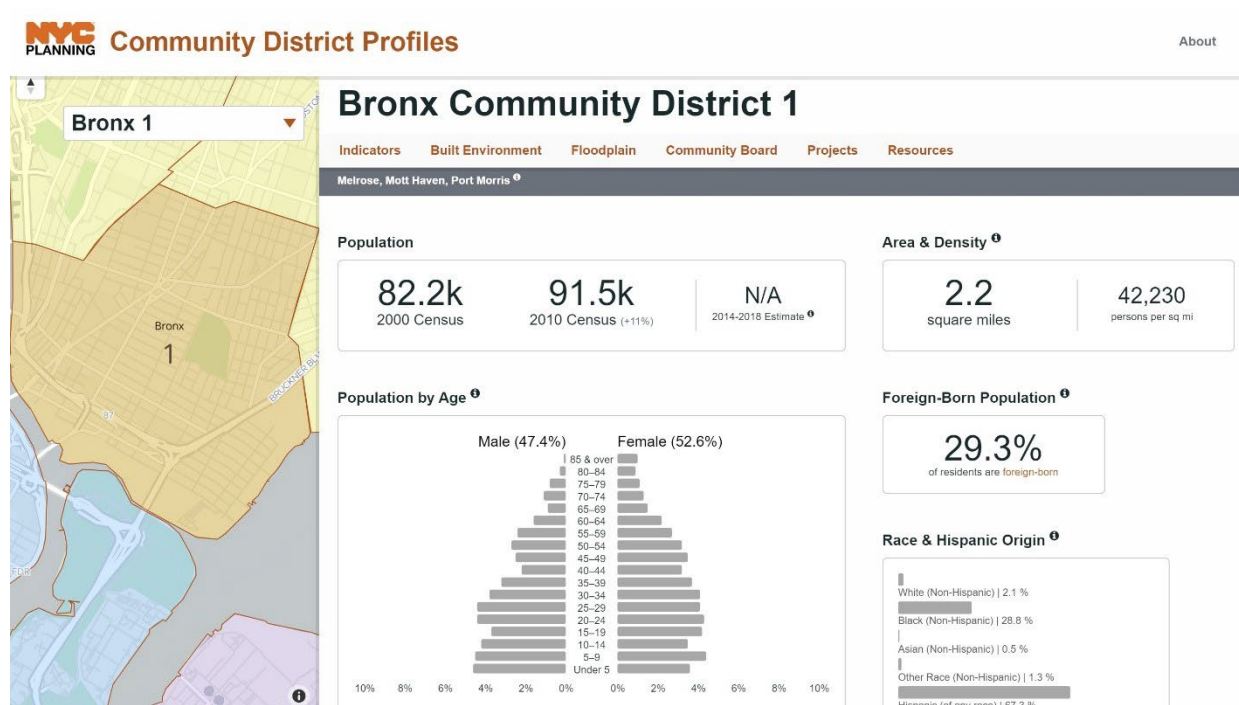


Figure 1: Community District Profile Example

Support for Community Boards:

The Department of City Planning provides various resources to support community boards, such as a budget requests reference guide, CD needs overview handout, a Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) publications page, and a survey to gather input about CD needs, and tips to

strengthen submissions. The department also hosts training sessions to help new and experienced community board members understand the CD Needs process, broaden input collection, and diversify submissions. The community boards prepare a "Community District Needs" statement each year to inform neighborhood and infrastructure planning. The Department of City Planning provides support and resources to help community boards with the process.

Most Pressing Issues Identified by Community Boards in 2021

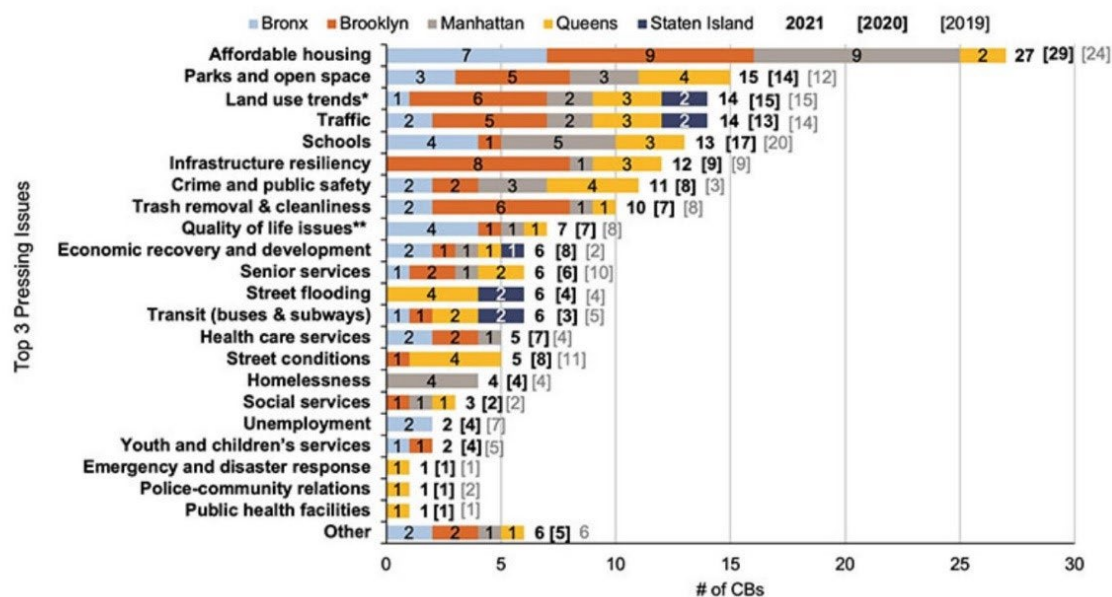


Figure 2: Image from: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/omb/publications/publications.page>

Powers and Interaction with Other Departments:

Community boards work as intermediaries between district residents and city government. Although they do not have formal powers, they can provide recommendations to city agencies and elected officials. The Department of City Planning's Office of Community Engagement encourages collaboration between city agencies and community boards to strengthen community engagement, particularly with underrepresented communities.

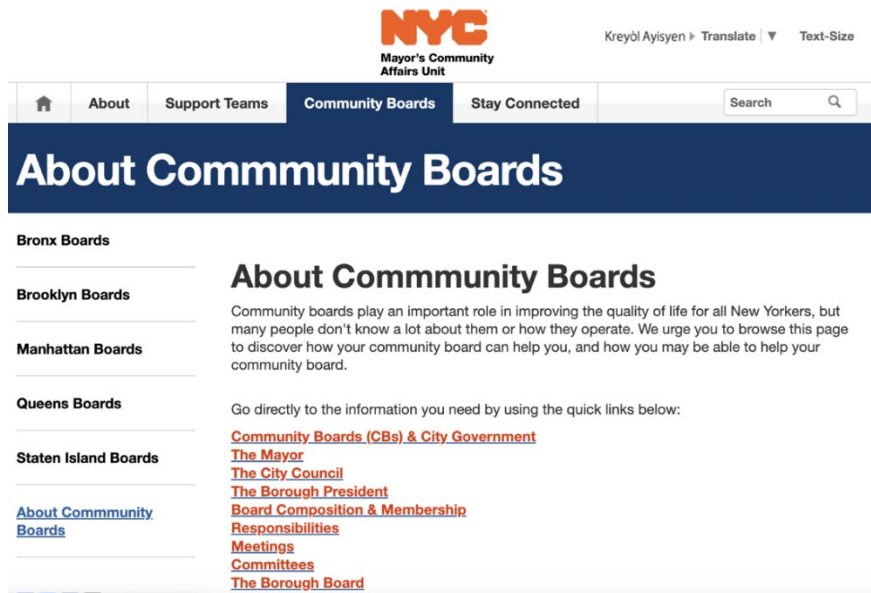


Figure 3: Image from: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/cau/community-boards/about-community-boards.page>

Resident Services

New York City offers various resident services, such as the 311 service, which provides residents with a platform to report issues and request services. While these services are not directly linked to community boards, they can assist residents in accessing services and addressing community issues.

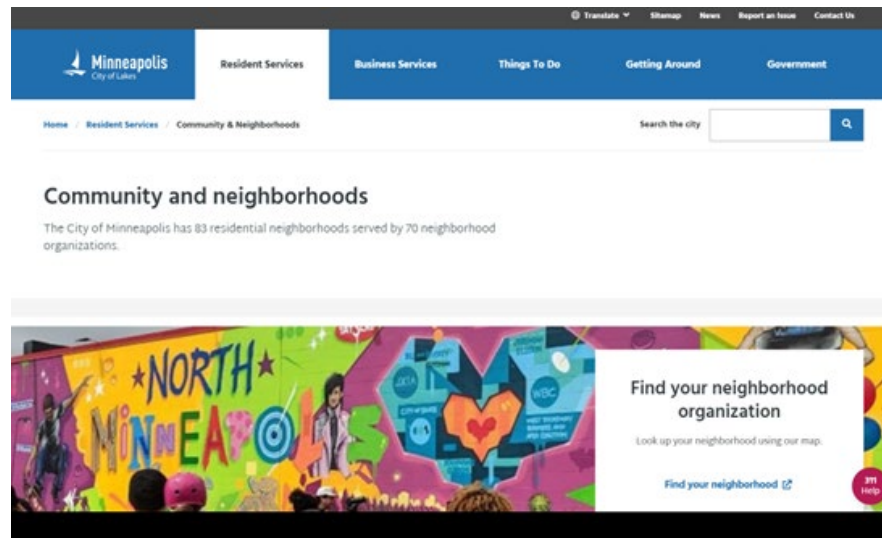


Figure 4: Image from: <https://portal.311.nyc.gov/>

Civics Academies:

New York City offers Civics Academies to train individuals and encourage them to participate in their communities. The training sessions cover the city's budget process, land use and zoning, and the role of community boards.

In conclusion, New York City's community boards play a vital role in identifying community needs, providing input to city agencies, and advocating for their districts' unique priorities. The Department of City Planning offers various resources to help community boards engage with the city and underrepresented communities. Additionally, resident services and Civics Academies provide platforms for residents to participate in their communities and make informed decisions.

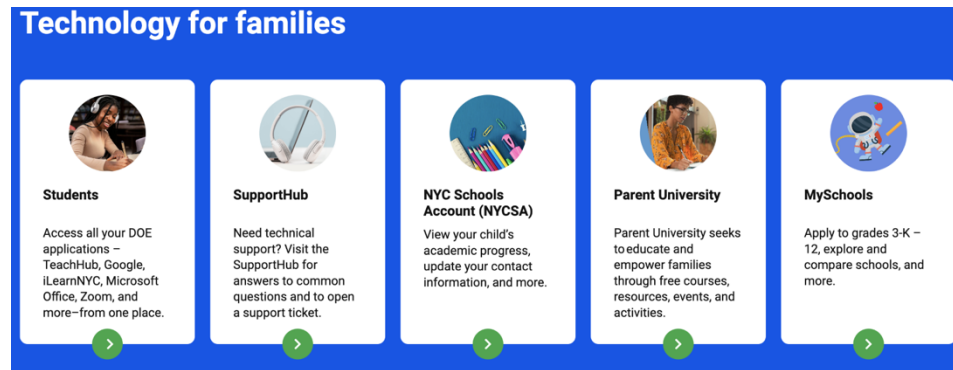


Figure 4: Image from: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learning/subjects/civics-for-all>

OAKLAND, CA

Neighborhood Councils

Yes, Neighborhood Councils (NC's). There are 45 NC's which are all incorporated within the Neighborhood Services Division and are volunteer led. There is not a grant structure, but they do receive \$1111 annually from the city's Neighborhood Council Fund (City of Oakland, 2023). These NCs are protected by resolution #79235 (City of Oakland, 2005). The goal of the NC is to help residents get to know each other, identify problems, and work together to solve those problems. Neighborhood Councils are required to have an elected board of directors. There are no other requirements. Furthermore, NCs are also part of Oakland's community policing program.

Formal staff, Neighborhood Services Coordinators (NSC's), are hired by the City to support the NCs. There are 7 NSC's, 2 Police Services Technicians, and 1 part-time Office Assistant (City of Oakland, 2023). The division is closely tied-in with the police department and has a strong public safety/crime prevention focus. Neighborhood Services Coordinators (NSCs) are assigned to each of the 57 community policing beats in Oakland. They help residents work together and in partnership with the Police and other City departments. Neighborhood Councils (NCs) serve one or more community policing beats. Each NSC has 5-8 beats they are responsible for. They act as a liaison between residents/neighborhoods, and city departments. NSCs have three main duties:

1. Work for concrete improvements in their neighborhoods
2. Help identify leaders and participants for NCs and Neighborhood Watch
3. Help NC leaders access the City of Oakland and other agencies so they will be more responsive to their neighborhood needs.

For both NCs and NSCs, there are no representation requirements. It's mostly a matter of constant outreach and continuous engagement. They noted that challenges around inclusion are an issue for most cities. The NSC's are continuously doing outreach to connect with residents.

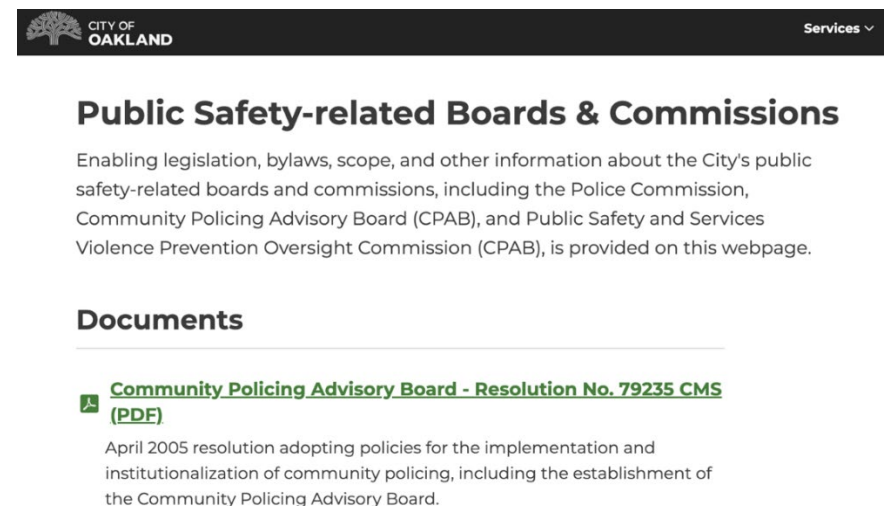


Figure 1: Image from: <https://www.oaklandca.gov/documents/public-safety-related-boards-commissions>

Office or Department of Community Engagement

Oakland recently created an Office of Inclusive Community Engagement, housed in the city administrator's office (same as the Neighborhood Services Division). That office works under the mayor. Carina Lieu, Community Engagement Officer, leads that effort. They are doing a lot of work with internal depts, doing a lot of the training around community engagement best practices within the city.

Neighborhood Services Division doesn't provide community engagement training to other departments, but they will partner with them to do outreach. Office of Inclusive Community Engagement does most of that work. There are 7 NSC's, 2 Police Services Technicians, and 1 part-time Office Assistant. It is unclear at this point how many people are employed in the Office of Inclusive Community Engagement.

Youth Commission

Oakland Youth Commission is the main initiative. Another initiative is the Deeply Rooted Youth Fellowship, which engages youth around the Oakland General Plan. The Youth Engagement Project works largely on job placement and training. They also have an initiative around fire safety education as well as a Youth Neighborhood Council comprised of youth from across the city, modeled after neighborhood councils.

Oakland Youth Commission

The Oakland Youth Commission (OYC) empowers youth to enter the public arena and tackle important issues related to youth. Formed in 1985, OYC develops young leaders in Oakland to engage with city affairs and advise City Council and the Mayor on youth priorities. We currently have 17 youth commissioners between the ages of 13-21 representing all 7 districts in Oakland.

Follow us on Instagram!

Apply now to Join the OYC Staff!

Current Openings

Interested in Learning More?

2022-2023 Commissioners

Subcommittees

OYC History

Press

Related Meetings

Oakland Youth Commission
June 5th, 2023

📅 Monday, June 05, 2023

🕒 5:00pm to 7:00pm

Oakland Youth Commission May
15th, 2023

📅 Monday, May 15, 2023

🕒 5:00pm to 7:00pm

Oakland Youth Commission May
1st, 2023

📅 Monday, May 01, 2023

🕒 5:00pm to 7:00pm

Figure 3: Image from: <https://www.oaklandca.gov/boards-commissions/youth-leadership-and-development>

Constituent Services

The 311 webpage has common requests sorted and linked to make reporting more streamlined and accurate. The City of Oakland provides opportunity to call the 311 hotline as well as a opportunity to write in via an online platform.

OAK311

Please report active infrastructure emergencies to OAK311 by dialing 311 or (510) 615-5566. Emergencies includes downed trees or tree limbs, flooding or sewer overflows, and street signal outages. Please report all non-emergency issues online at this page.

A green rectangular button with a white mouse cursor icon on the left and the text "Report Online" in white.A green rectangular button with a white telephone handset icon on the left and the text "Call 311" in white.

For urgent issues, call **311** or **(510) 615-5566**.

Figure 4: Image from: <https://www.oaklandca.gov/services/oak311>

PHILADELPHIA, PA

Office of Community Engagement

Within Philly, The Mayor's Office of Public Engagement oversees offices for the following intersectional resident constituents: Black male engagement, civic engagement and volunteer service, engagement for women, youth engagement, faith-based and interfaith affairs, and collaborates with the mayor's commission on Asian Pacific American affairs and African and Caribbean immigrant affairs.

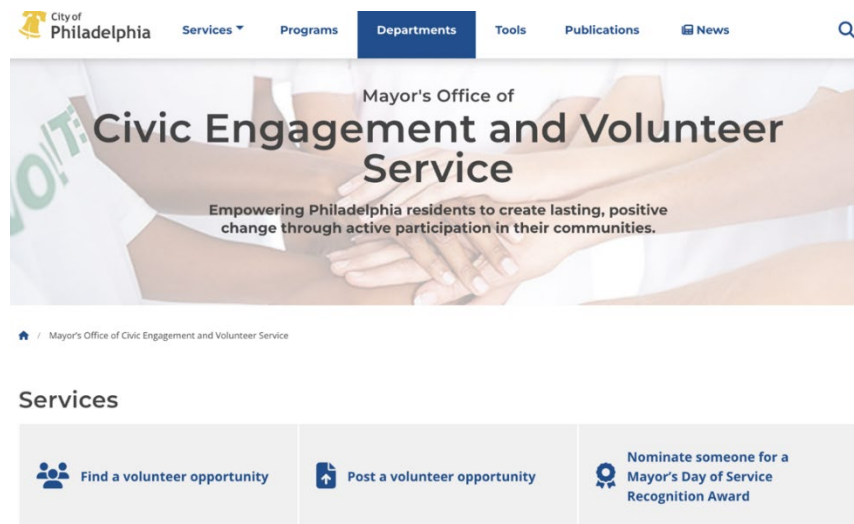


Figure 1: Philadelphia's Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service (Available from: <https://www.phila.gov/departments/mayors-office-of-civic-engagement-and-volunteer-service/>)

As a complementary program, the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service helps residents to find volunteer opportunities

that work to reduce barriers and expend capacity for participation. The aims of this program also supports data-driven decisions related to volunteer support programs, a civic engagement academy, volunteer and community resource corps. The program hosts the Civic Engagement Academy which provides online trainings and learning series to residents.



Figure 2: Philadelphia's Civic Engagement Academy (Available from: <https://www.phila.gov/programs/civic-engagement-academy/>)

Registered Community Organizations

Philadelphia formalizes its neighborhood organizations as Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) within the Philadelphia Planning Commission. These RCOs offer community members the chance to learn about developments that affect them and while also providing the opportunity to give feedback to the City of Philadelphia of their concerns and opinions for the new development. The RCO provides a mechanism to offer comments on the physical development of their community by providing members of the RCO advance notice of projects that will be reviewed by the Zoning Board of Adjustment or the Civic Design Review Committee. RCOs organize and conduct public meetings where community members can comment on planned

developments in their neighborhood. RCOs are notified by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission whenever a 1) zoning variance or special exception is requested, or 2) development requiring Civic Design Review is proposed.

To qualify as an RCO, the organization must: hold regularly scheduled open meetings, have leadership chosen by the org members at large at regularly scheduled elections, and serve a geographic area that has no more than 20,000 parcels. In some cases, groups can qualify as a RCO if they are already registered as a Neighborhood Improvement District, Special Services District, or Ward Committee. Registration to form or be enrolled as a member of an RCO happens every year in June while training and info sessions are shared online. Philly's RCO website also includes an RCO Help desk phone number and form to ask a question.

One of the major online tools that RCOs can be identified is a website where a user can input an address that may need a zoning application approved, for which the website will share how many properties need to be notified and how many RCOs exist around that property. This website allows for residents and developers to know what community group is involved with the zoning process.

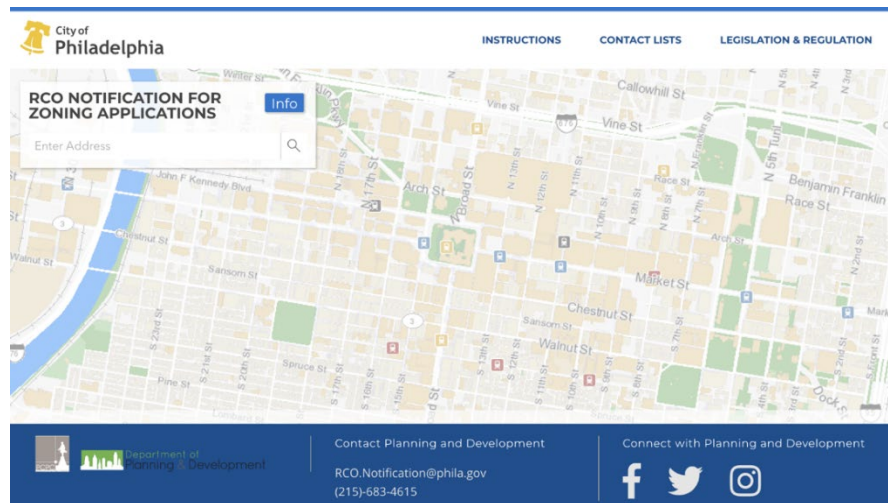


Figure 3: Philadelphia's RCO Notification website (Available from: <https://www.phila.gov/rconotification/>)

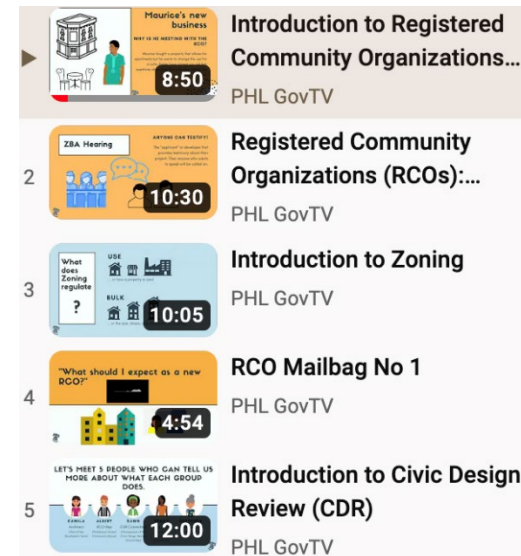
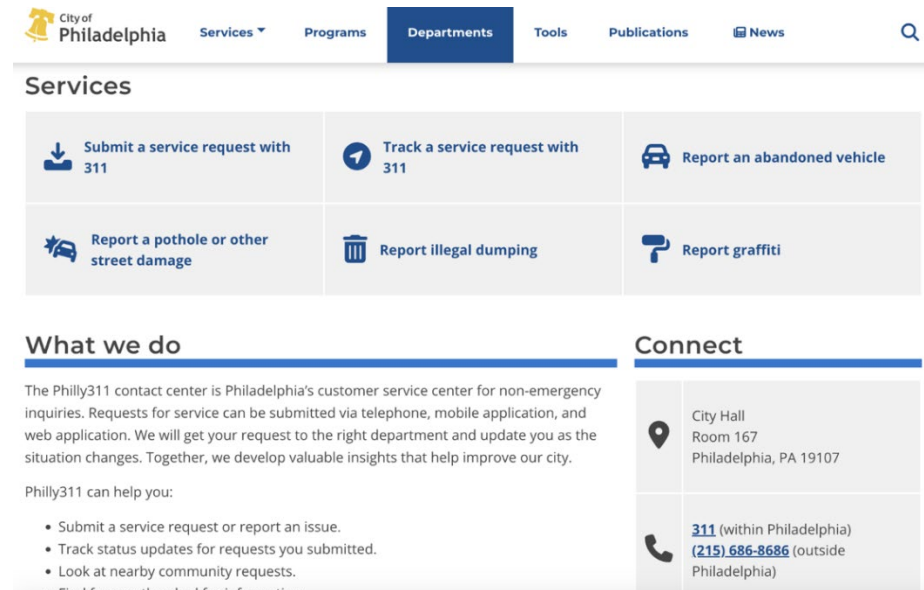


Figure 4: Philadelphia's RCO Training (Available from: <https://www.phila.gov>)



Constituent Services

Philly 311 is an interactive website with links to submit a service request, report street damage, track a service request, report illegal dumping, report an abandoned vehicle or graffiti, and more. Philly 311 Knowledge Base provides residents opportunities to find answers to common questions about City Services. Philly 311 also includes information on community engagement through a special Engagement tab, allowing residents to request a speaker for an organization, take online self-paced courses to learn about Philly311, and a tab to become a neighborhood liaison and how to be trained to support safety issues for your community through the platform. Philly 311 also includes a mobile phone app which can be accessed from Android and Apple smartphones.

Figure 5: Philadelphia's 311 services (Available from: <https://www.phila.gov/departments/philly311/>)

PITTSBURGH, PA

Neighborhood Organizations

In 2018 Pittsburgh passed an ordinance establishing registered community organizations (RCOs). The RCO ordinance was passed to increase community input in the development process and increase resident engagement. It would also allow community organizations to create their own neighborhood plans that the city would then adopt. But the ordinance has been met with criticism since it was put into effect.

Pittsburgh is a city with strong grass roots community organizations such as Hill CDC. Leaders from these organizations were worried that the RCO ordinance was inequitable because of the steep barriers to becoming an RCO. In the ordinance, an organization must have 501(c)3 status, have a website, is discouraged from overlapping boundaries with other RCOs, and needs to be signed off from the council member whose district the RCO is in. Leaders from existing community organizations criticized the ordinance as being exclusionary to groups with less resources because of these strict requirements (Shoemaker, 2018).



People
The Hill CDC is committed to the social and economic development of Hill District residents, many of whom have been historically disadvantaged. A variety of programs are offered for business owners, entrepreneurs, aspiring homeowners,



Figure 1: <https://www.hilldistrict.org/>

Ordinance

According to one of our interviewees from Pittsburgh, the RCO ordinance has created a set of unforeseen problems. Instead of the ordinance restricting the number of groups that could become RCOs, RCOs have proliferated to around 38 groups. This has overwhelmed the planning department because they must manage all the groups and attend their development meetings. Because the planning department is so busy with all the RCOs, our interviewee said that they haven't had the capacity to adopt any community developed neighborhood plans.

The RCO status has led to divisions between community groups that were serving different needs within the same area, causing tension between groups. The RCO ordinance has also weakened the power of previous community organizations. The development review process that is mandated in the RCO ordinance is weaker than Hill CDC's development review process. Our interviewee said the ordinance gave developers control of the development community review process by

giving them rights to determine a project due date instead of collaborating together to determine a work process. And on top of this, developers have been able to form RCOs that back their developments.

Interviewees from the city said that they are working with the community to rewrite the ordinance.

Office of Neighborhood Services

Pittsburgh has also started to form an Office of Neighborhood Services. According to our interviewees, the Office of Neighborhood Services has existed before, but it is getting completely restructured. The new office will have online engagement specialists, infrastructure engagement specialists, and community liaisons. They will also be revamping the city's civic education program and running a youth education program that seeks to prepare young people to serve in Pittsburgh's government. One of the interviewees we spoke with talked about how they are trying to do proactive engagement through their community engagement specialists and how they are trying to do reactive engagement through housing 311 in the Office of Neighborhood Services. Housing 311 in a community engagement office is something we haven't come across and sounds promising.

One way in which Pittsburgh's engagement seems to be working really well is through their website Engage PGH. Our interviewees said that this website was used across departments to engage residents, and it seems to be an impressive and cohesive landing page.

I'm looking for projects about **Community** in **All places** or Search for a specific project... >

Open



Last updated: 10 Mar, 2023

City Collection Equity Audit

The City of Pittsburgh is conducting an audit to identify inequity and bias in the City's collection of public art and memorials.

[Learn more →](#)



Last updated: 10 Mar, 2023

2023 Public Service Grants

The 2023 Public Service Grant application is available from March 3, 2023, to April 14, 2023.

[Learn more →](#)



Last updated: 09 Mar, 2023

Westinghouse Park Plan

A community-led process to create a vision for Westinghouse Park incorporating gathering space, recreation amenities, ecological restoration, and stormwater management.

[Learn more →](#)



Last updated: 09 Mar, 2023

Hill District Parks Master Plan

Creating a plan for the Greater Hill District Parks that



Last updated: 09 Mar, 2023

Sheraden Park Phase I

A community engagement process to inform the



Last updated: 08 Mar, 2023

¿Le interesaría participar como voluntario de la ciudad

Figure 2: <https://engage.pittsburghpa.gov/>

SEATTLE, WA

Neighborhood District Councils

Seattle's community engagement structure was overhauled in 2016 when then Mayor Ed Murray cut funding to the 13 Neighborhood District Councils that had been tied to the city since the 1990s (Barnett, 2017). Before cutting ties with the district councils, Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods had staffed and provided resources to them. With the cutting of ties, the resources and funding that had been put toward the district councils were redirected to engagement efforts that were more representative of Seattle's population. According to interviewees, the district councils had been made up of mostly white homeowners over the age of 40. They received \$500 a year, meeting space, and the neighborhood coordinators would staff their meetings and be housed in the same building as the district council. On top of that, the district councils would have sway over the city's budgeting decisions.

While some of our interviewees said that cutting ties to the district councils was necessary to create more equitable engagement, they all said that it created animosity between the residents and the city. One of our interviewees said he would have refashioned the district councils instead of cutting ties with them as that would have been less disrespectful. This same interviewee also said that the district councils, while flawed, were an established way for residents to provide feedback to the city. People that didn't normally engage with the city could go to district council meetings to voice their opinions.

Department of Neighborhoods

Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods houses city-staff community engagement coordinators, community-volunteer liaisons, community

grants, a community gardening program, the Seattle Youth Commission, a civic academy for residents, and boards and commissions.

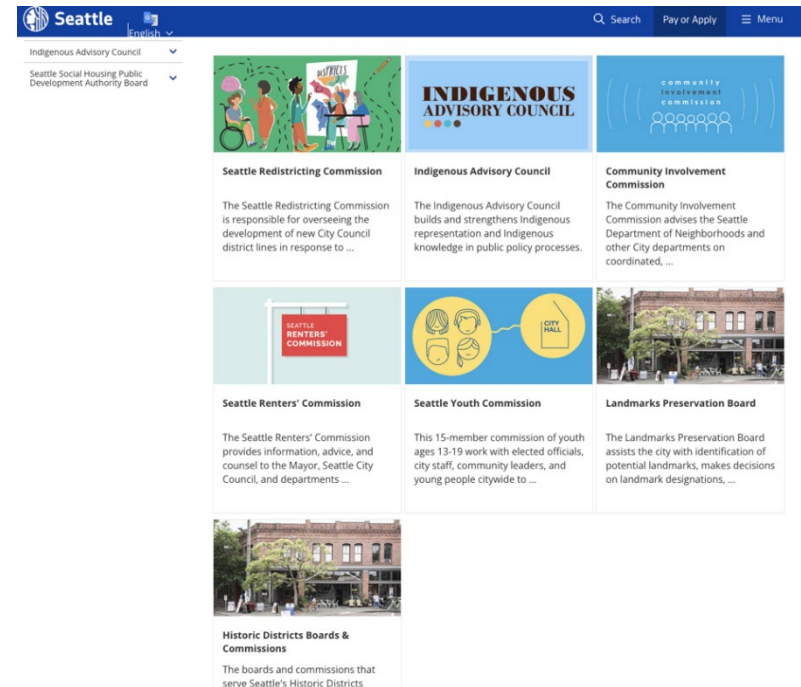


Figure 1: <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/public-participation/boards-and-commissions>

There are four community engagement coordinators housed in the Department of Neighborhoods and they each represent a different geographical area of Seattle. By both research on their website and by interviewing people at the Department of Neighborhoods, we were able to gather that their main role is to provide a bridge between the city and the residents of the neighborhood that they represent. They advocate for the concerns of the residents and the needs of the city. Interviewees said that the community engagement coordinators were key in setting up COVID-19 test sites around the city.

Another key function of the community engagement coordinators is to staff the Community Involvement Commission that was created at the same time that the city cut ties with the district councils. This commission is responsible for helping departments develop engagement that reaches all Seattle residents with more equitable engagement (Barnett, 2017). They also head an interdepartmental team that started around community engagement with COVID-19 and has turned into a team that deals with community engagement in general. The community engagement coordinators work to provide resources for and connections to the other services that the Department of Neighborhoods and that the city provides. These include the boards and commissions, community liaisons, and neighborhood matching grants.

The community liaisons are paid members of a certain community, such as the Somali community, that act as communicators between the city and that community. They increase communication and trust between the city and these communities and seek to educate the community about city projects and services, and the city about community needs and complaints.

The neighborhood matching funds come in a Small Sparks Fund of up to \$5,000 in matching funds and a Community Partnership Fund in up to \$50,000. This gives communities the opportunity to take part in city building and creative place making, which increases their awareness of the workings of the city and gives them ownership over their space. This program was started in 1998 (City of Seattle, 2023).

Seattle English Search Pay or Apply Menu

Seattle Youth Commission
Seattle Renters' Commission
Community Involvement Commission
Meeting Agendas & Minutes
Meet Our Commissioners
Indigenous Advisory Council
Seattle Social Housing Public Development Authority Board

Community Involvement Commission

As Seattle's population changes, the City needs to continually revisit and expand its public engagement efforts to ensure growing demographic groups are represented in the City's decision-making processes and that barriers discouraging people from participating are eliminated.

In July 2016, [Executive Order 2016-06](#) was signed reaffirming the City's commitment to advance effective implementation of equitable and inclusive engagement strategies across all City departments. In the 2017-2018 Budget, legislation was passed that addresses the Mayor's outreach and engagement principles, outlines a new citywide framework for community engagement, and creates a Community Involvement Commission.

Role of the Community Involvement Commission

The Community Involvement Commission advises the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods and other City departments on coordinated, Citywide outreach and engagement activities. Its goals are to:

1. Provide advice on priorities, policies, and strategies related to equitable civic engagement and public participation in City decision-making processes. This includes the review of initiatives, strategies and proposals brought forward by the City, as well as ones identified by the Commission.
2. Provide feedback on the development of City departments' community involvement plans with a focus on implementing more equitable engagement strategies and identifying new ways to increase civic participation in City processes.
3. Develop and periodically amend bylaws and a work plan that enable the Commission to organize itself, perform its work, and advance program and policy proposals consistent with its mission.

Structure

Apply to Join the Commission

We are currently seeking community members to serve on the Community Involvement Commission. Application deadline is Sunday, July 9, 2023 at 5pm.

[APPLY NOW!](#)

Within the application page, it is necessary to click the dropdown and select Community Involvement Commission under "Which Boards would you like to apply for?".

If you cannot submit the application online, contact Laura Jenkins at [\(206\) 437-3735](tel:2064373735) and an application will be mailed to you.

Sign Up for E-mails

Receive information about the Community Involvement Commission.

[Subscribe Now](#)

Upcoming Events:

Date	Event
JUL 17 MON	Community Involvement Commission meeting Mon, Jul 17, 2023, 4:30pm Hybrid Meeting (in-person & virtual) - Meeting link & location information below
AUG 21 MON	Community Involvement Commission meeting Mon, Aug 21, 2023, 4:30pm Hybrid Meeting (in-person & virtual) - Meeting link & location information below
SEP 18 MON	Community Involvement Commission meeting Mon, Sep 18, 2023, 4:30pm Hybrid Meeting (in-person & virtual) - Meeting link & location information below

[See more events](#)

Figure 2: <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/public-participation/boards-and-commissions/community-involvement-commission>

City of Seattle's Neighborhood Matching Fund Invests \$1,012,644 in 25 Community-led Projects

by SEAnighborhoods on May 24, 2023



Festival Centro Americano

Figure 3: <https://frontporch.seattle.gov/2023/05/24/city-of-seattles-neighborhood-matching-fund-invests-1012644-in-25-community-led-projects/>

Another community building program housed in the Department of Neighborhoods is the P-Patch Community Gardening Program. The program manages 90 community gardens throughout the city (City of Seattle, 2023).

Constituent Services

According to interviews, Seattle's Find It Fix It constituent services mobile app is liked by some and hated by some. In this way, Seattle seems like most other cities. Although it does seem quite easy to report a problem with the mobile app.


Seattle


English


Search

Pay or Apply


Menu

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

News
Calendar

Public Participation
Community Connections
Community Grants
P-Patch Gardening
Historic Preservation
About Seattle

Home

P-Patch Gardening

Build community from the ground up through our organic urban agriculture program on community-stewarded open spaces.




P-Patch Community Gardening Program

Watch later
Share



Watch on




About the Program

We have 89 P-Patch community gardens distributed throughout the city.



How to Sign Up

Instructions about how to sign-up for a P-Patch in your neighborhood.



Map of Gardens

Map of the City's P-Patch gardens.



Garden List

List of the City's P-Patch gardens and links to their webpages.

Overall, Seattle has created a community engagement apparatus that works to bring equity and community concerns to the forefront. Its many programs engage residents in a variety of ways and provide opportunities for communication between the city and communities. It is a viable model for Denver to emulate.

ST. PAUL, MN

Neighborhood Organizations

St Paul has a system of District Councils (DC's) that are funded by the city and tied to distinct geographic areas. It was created through an ordinance dating back to 1975. They were created around the neighborhood planning process and capital improvement budgeting process (City of St. Paul, 2023). Essentially, the District Councils, neighborhood planning, and capital improvement budgeting were all tied together to provide better coordination. It was an intentional effort to respond to neighborhood outcry stemming from the negative impacts of urban renewal.

DC's have a hand in creating the neighborhood plans. Every 10 years is the goal, but it can vary. Our interviewee from the city noted that most neighborhoods are behooved to do the neighborhood plans as it helps them justify requests for resources and investment from the city in their neighborhoods. They observed that there was only one DC during their time as Community Engagement Coordinator that had an outdated plan.

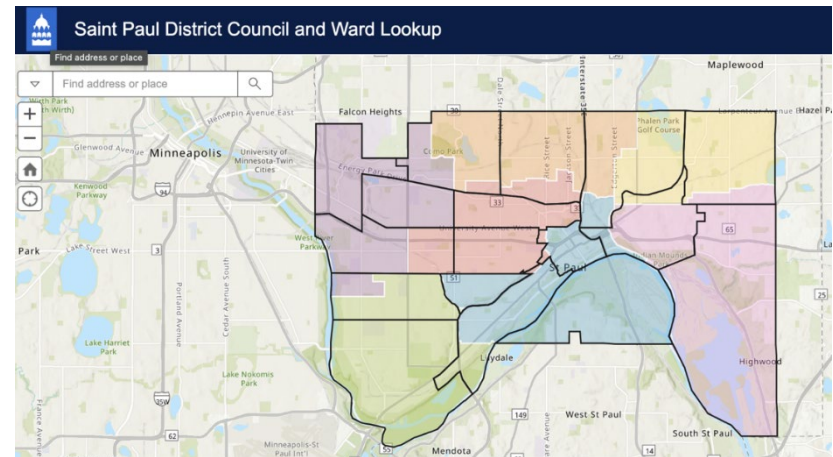


Figure 1: Image from: <https://stpaul.maps.arcgis.com/apps/InformationLookup/index.html?appid=8d3e5bc01c624dcbb4542fc4db9d920c>

Support

Some neighborhood orgs are funded with CDBG money. There is also money for neighborhood orgs in the city's general budget. Additionally, there are grants available to neighborhood orgs that are processed through the Economic Development department. There are some specific funds such as recycling/composting through public works. Sometimes project specific funding through depts like Parks & Recreation.



Figure 2: Image from: <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/financial-services/capital-improvement-budget-process/community-development-block-grant>

Total funding for the 17 District Councils in 2019 (the last year data is available online) was \$1.4 million with \$993,371 coming from the general fund, \$345,000 coming from CDBG funds, and \$102,833 from the Innovation Fund (City of St. Paul, 2023). According to a representative from the city's budget office, the current level of funding is similar to what it was in 2019 (H. Huston, personal communication, March 3, 2023).

Funding is allocated across district councils on a formula that takes into account the following factors (percentage influence in parentheses):

- Total population (75%)
- Poverty (15%)
- Non-English speaking residents (5%)
- Employment (5%)

The calculation for funding is based on data collected in the decennial census. The city also has a community liaison position to serve DC's. However, it is currently vacant. To receive city funding, District Councils

simply identify goals and report on outcomes. Our interviewee described it as a "toothless" process with little accountability or incentive to meet the city's objectives regarding increasing equity and representation.

Representation

St. Paul has made considerable efforts to improve equity and inclusion in the city. Each DC receives an equal amount of funding from the city's Innovation Fund to promote equitable practices (approximately \$6,000 annually). St. Paul's efforts received a 2017 [Minnesota Local Government Innovation Award](#). Background on processes and outcomes can be found [here](#) and a summary of work [here](#). Despite these efforts, there is not a clear indication that District Councils are becoming more inclusive. While the city asks the District Councils to report on outcomes, there is not a penalty clause or withholding of future innovation funds for non-compliance. The staff person interviewed also noted that city funding of District Council's has always been a given and never based on performance. The District Councils feel entitled to their funding in part because they have always received it, but also because they are asked to work on the neighborhood plans.

Civic Training Opportunities / Youth Engagement

St. Paul has an innovative [Emerging and BIPOC Developer Training and Engagement Initiative](#) that is a partnership between the city and [NEOO Partners](#). It aims to increase the representation of emerging developers and leaders who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) in the real estate development community.

The city has a position titled: Communication and Youth Engagement Coordinator. There is also St. Paul Youth Services (SPYS), an organization founded 45 years ago jointly by the city and the police department. The organization went on to become an independent non-profit and has reported success in its mission of interrupting the cradle-to-prison pipeline.

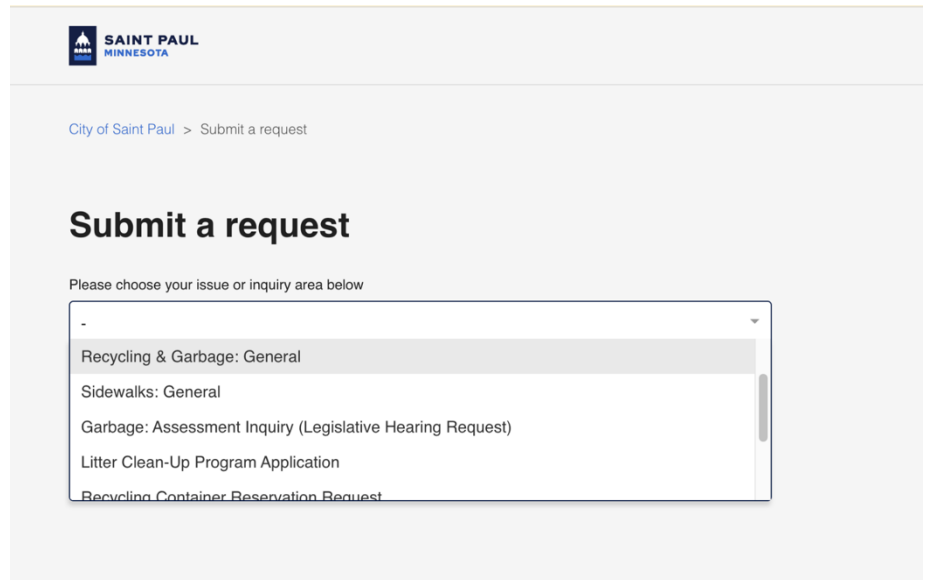
Constituent Services (e.g. 311)

St. Paul does not use 311. Residents can call a number or report online.

According to our interview with a member of the city's IT department, they looked at various ticketing options and ended up going with Zendesk. They like the user experience and optimization options that are available. Leveraging technology to build equity is a priority of the current administration.

They are doing a pilot with Zendesk and the Public Works Department's Waste Collection Division. They intentionally started with a pilot and found a willing and ready department in Public Works' Waste Collection Division. The Waste Division contracts with third-party haulers. There was not a good system to hold haulers accountable when they did not meet their contractual obligations or complaints were rendered against them. With the new system, they were able to significantly improve contract enforcement. Our interviewee said the ability to set up automated workflows makes a big difference.

They are expanding the pilot this year, then they will ask for an enterprise-level investment. The ultimate goal is to have a virtual constituent management capability. They feel one of the biggest things with constituent management is getting people a response and hopes better systems and some automation capability will help them deliver. Our interviewee said they leaned into Zendesk because Salesforce is so expensive. They can't imagine a local government having adequate resources to effectively utilize Salesforce.



The screenshot shows the 'Submit a request' page on the City of Saint Paul's website. At the top, there is a header with the Saint Paul Minnesota logo and a breadcrumb trail: 'City of Saint Paul > Submit a request'. Below the header, the title 'Submit a request' is prominently displayed. Underneath the title, a prompt reads 'Please choose your issue or inquiry area below'. A dropdown menu is open, showing a list of categories: 'Recycling & Garbage: General', 'Sidewalks: General', 'Garbage: Assessment Inquiry (Legislative Hearing Request)', 'Litter Clean-Up Program Application', and 'Recycling Container Reservation Request'. The first option, 'Recycling & Garbage: General', is highlighted.

Figure 3: Image from: <https://saintpaul.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/requests/new>

WASHINGTON D.C.

Community Associations:

The **Federation of Community Associations (FCA)** is Washington DC's system of neighborhood level organizations. The FCA is to act as the coordinating body for Washingtonians' interests and bring the voice of District taxpayers to policy discussions. The FCA's purpose is described as the following:

- To provide a forum for the expression and interchange of informed opinion;
- To further the interests of the people of the District of Columbia and of the city as a whole; and
- To secure and take effective united action.

The FCA was created in 1910 without an ordinance. The Federation was organized in 1910 and incorporated in 1940 as a non-profit organization, organized under the laws of the District of Columbia.

However at the time, it was almost entirely white community members in the Federation. Black residents wanted to participate, so they formed the Federation of Citizens Associations. These operated as separate associations until 2022, when the Federation of Community Associations and the Federation of Citizens Associations combined and are now known jointly as the Federation of Community Associations, with the goal to leave the past behind and move forward as a unified, inclusive organization.

Activities of the Federation involve neighborhood-specific and city-wide issues and include submitting comments and testifying on behalf of the

people of the District before local and regional agencies, the Council of the District of Columbia and the Congress of the United States. The Federation also serves as liaison with the DC Mayor and City Council on matters important to District citizens. It works in concert with other community organizations to accomplish specific goals. They mayor is a very integral aspect of the FCA. Assembly meetings are held to highlight an array of topics important to residents, such as education, homeland security and public safety, zoning, local news, city budget, ethics, health care, transportation and other infrastructure, parks, libraries, and summer jobs, as well as to provide assistance to member associations dealing with neighborhood issues. The FCA often brings speakers from different interest groups or stakeholders to the meetings to talk about and address relevant issues.



[Home](#) [About](#) [Officers](#) [Bylaws](#) [Members](#) [News & Events](#) [Contact](#)



Article I

The organization shall be known as:

Federation of Community Associations of the District of Columbia (referred to herein as the "Federation").

Article II

Object and Jurisdiction

- Section 1- The objective of the Federation is to provide a forum for the expression of opinions, to further the interests of the people of the District of Columbia as represented by the Federation's member organizations, and to secure and make effective their united action.
- Section 2 - The jurisdiction of the Federation shall extend to matters of both general and specific interest, to which member organizations may require concerted action.

Figure 1: Image from: <https://dcommunityfederation.org/bylaws/>

Support

The supporting organization for these associations is the **Community Associations Institute**. It's mission statement reads as follows: "to optimize the operations of community associations and foster value for our business partners". The support they offer is outlined as follows:

- *Advocacy*
We have three legislative teams in Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C., establishing and improving relationships with legislators and government officials and advocating on behalf of community associations.
- *Education*
We strive to provide a world-class curriculum for community association leaders, managers and even businesses serving community associations. We do this by publishing Quorum monthly and by hosting 18 in-person education programs conveniently rotated throughout the chapter.
- *Member Development*
Our volunteers and staff are always trying increase participation in the organization and at our events. This way, we have more experiences for our members to draw from and are able to create deeper connections.

Funding:

The FCA does not receive any government funding. Members of the FCA must pay dues, which act as a source of funds. The FCA itself cannot

receive grants, however the community associations themselves may receive community grants. Community Associations also have the ability to sue the city or developers, which may result in funds to be used to fund their activities.

Constituent Services

311

Washington DC does have a 311, located at **311.dfc.gov/citizen/home**. The FCA interacts with 311 about things like trash pick up, rodents, or any other issue the community is facing. Often the FCA will also have directors of different agencies come to community association meetings so that they may issue complaints to them as well.

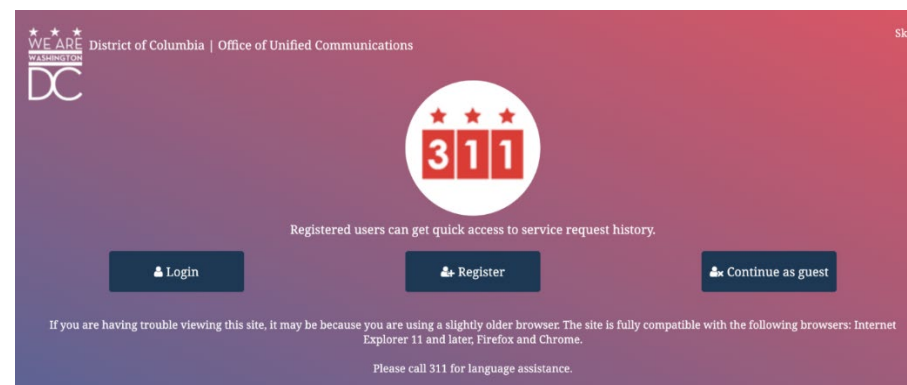
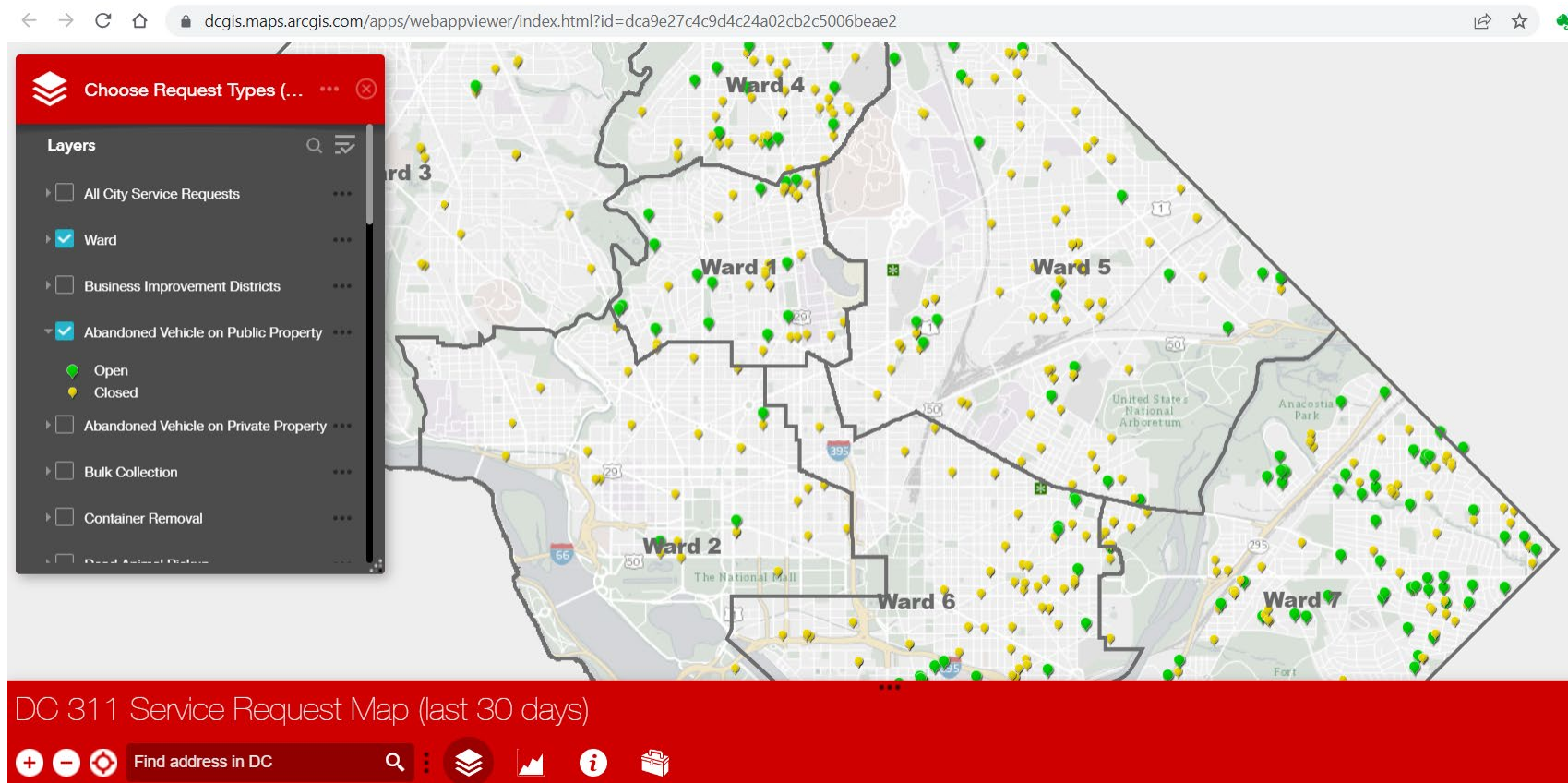


Figure 2: Image from: <https://311.dc.gov/citizen/home>



Resident Services

Office of Community Engagement

Washington DC has two central offices of community engagement, both under Mayor Muriel Bowser. Both serve different purposes, as outlined below:

Mayor's Office of Community Engagement and Services

This office deals with day-to-day issues, problems, and community concerns. Mayor Bowser has two community engagement representatives in each ward, of which there are 8 wards. These 16 representatives act as the mayor's eyes and ears in each part of the city. They can attend community meetings and events that the mayor cannot make it to and keep her informed and connected to issues in each community so that their needs may be met. This office is the closest DC has to community engagement from the state or the district level.

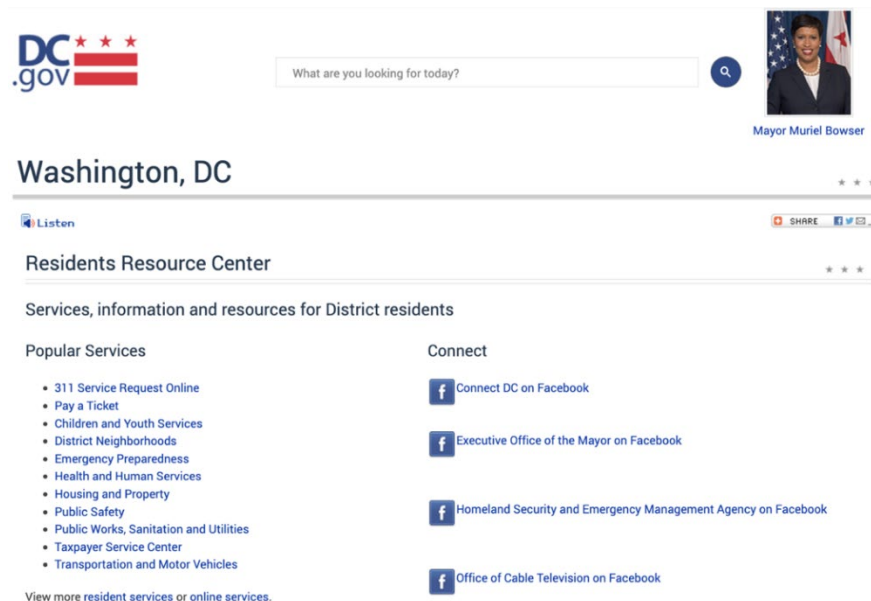


Figure 3: Image from: <https://dc.gov/page/residents-resource-center>

Mayor's Office of Community Affairs

The Mayor's Office of Community Affairs has 13 offices that fall under it. These include offices such as the Mayor's Office of African American Affairs, and the Mayor's Office of Latino Affairs. Generally, this office houses different entities that represent different demographic groups within the city.



Figure 4: <https://communityaffairs.dc.gov/>

Civic Academies/ Resident Government Training

The Community Associations Institute provides education for community association leaders, managers and businesses that serve community associations. They do this by hosting 18 in-person education programs rotated throughout the chapter and by publishing Quorum Monthly.

CASE STUDY REFERENCES

Boston

<https://www.boston.gov/government/cabinets/community-engagement>
<https://www.boston.gov/departments/neighborhood-services>
<https://boston.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/lookup/index.html?appid=fb99773425244b3888aa7077e7c8cfd>

Boulder

<https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/neighborhood-connection-grants>
<https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/community-connectors-in-residence>
<https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/neighborhood-services#section-9545>
<https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/neighborhood-services>

Charlotte

<https://charlottenc.gov/hns/ce/Pages/default.aspx>
<https://www.charlottenc.gov/Streets-and-Neighborhoods/Housing/311-Info>
<https://www.charlottenc.gov/Streets-and-Neighborhoods/Get-Involved/Community-Engagement>

Golden

www.guidinggolden.com
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Los Angeles

<https://empowerla.org/about-neighborhood-councils/>

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<https://empowerla.org/nctrainings/>
http://ens.lacity.org/done/legaladvice/donelegaladvice106847619_09112007.pdf

Minneapolis

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<https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/government/departments/ncr/inclusive-community-engagement/connections-conference/>
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