

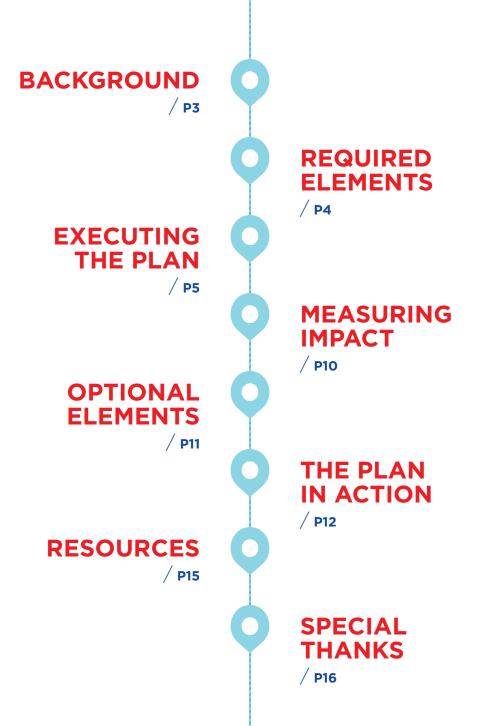
LOVE YOUR BLOCK

A CITIES OF SERVICE BLUEPRINT

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The city provides competitive mini-grants to community groups to purchase the supplies needed for their local project and coordinates city government services to support the effort. The mini-grants encourage community groups to identify priority projects and develop volunteer-fueled solutions. Common components of local projects include vacant lot cleanup, litter and graffiti removal, tree planting, and community garden development. Common city government services provided include pothole repair, replacing litter baskets, and speed bump installation.



BACKGROUND

Well-tended public spaces create a better quality of life that attracts tax-paying businesses and residents to communities. Experts consider such spaces to be essential to creating sustainable communities. Run-down, litter-strewn spaces, however, signal lawlessness and lack of community spirit that can lead to crime and other negative behaviors. Engaged communities are far less likely to let their neighborhoods fall into poor conditions and can act as a powerful force in preventing crime.

By providing small competitive grants and coordinating city services, the mayor's office can achieve measurable impact in local communities and strengthen social capital at a low cost.



REQUIRED ELEMENTS

- Mayor's office raises money to provide small grants to community groups for supplies and coordinates with city agencies to identify a menu of services that can supplement volunteer efforts at the neighborhood level.
- Mayor's office publicizes a grants competition soliciting proposals from community groups. Proposals must include: a description of the challenges on the block, a preliminary work plan and a basic budget that articulate how the grant would be used to address those challenges with volunteers.
- Mayor's office awards grants to community groups and coordinates city services as requested by the grantees to support the local volunteer effort. Community groups are trained on how to properly record and report impact metrics.
- Mayor's office tracks and reports impact metrics for each project.
 Required metrics include:
 - Number of blocks (or other geographic unit, i.e., lots or neighborhoods) revitalized, AND at least two of the following:
 - Square feet of graffiti removed
 - Pounds of litter collected
 - Number of trees planted
 - Number of green spaces or community gardens created



EXECUTING THE PLAN

COORDINATING CITY SERVICES

Consult with city agencies to develop a menu of city services that can be offered to grantees to improve the physical conditions of blocks. The city services are intended to complement the volunteer efforts, not replace them. Government provided services could include:

- Providing trash collection for block projects
- Repairing damaged or missing street signage
- Creating new tree beds
- Cleaning up illegal dumping
- Replacing broken or worn-out litter bins
- Installing speed humps or speed bumps
- Repairing potholes
- Cleaning vacant lots
- Removing graffiti
- Loaning gardening tools
- Repairing broken street lights



CONDUCTING A MINI-GRANTS COMPETITION

- Develop a simple application process to solicit proposals from community groups. The application should include information on the required impact metrics and the menu of city services that would be available. Proposals must include: a description of the challenges on the block, a preliminary work plan and a basic budget that articulates how the grant would be used to address those challenges with volunteers. They should also include "before" photos for reporting purposes. Applications can be considered in cycles (typically four to six months) to allow for planning and coordination of city services. (See Resources section for a sample application from NYC Service.)
- Advertise the grants competition broadly to ensure that all communities have access. Spreading the word via other local elected officials such as city council members can be particularly useful. Community newspapers may also be interested in reporting on the opportunity for their readers. Social media can also be a useful communication tool.
- Select a slate of grant winners. Cities may find it useful to seek a balance between projects that would require significant levels of agency resources, guidance and coaching from the department working with grant recipients, and those that can operate with greater self-sufficiency. Cities should also look for geographic diversity to ensure a broad reach.



WORKING WITH GRANT RECIPIENTS

- Conduct an initial orientation meeting for grant recipients (best times are after work hours or weekends). The orientation meeting is an opportunity to:
 - Determine which, if any, in-kind city services could enhance the overall results of the revitalization project.
 - Explain impact reporting methods and requirements for expenditure and receipt tracking so that grant recipients understand city expectations and how they will be held accountable for use of funds and completion of projects. Completing grant agreements with community groups that include clear, quantifiable metrics is strongly recommended.
 - Request that grant recipients begin thinking about a long-term maintenance plan.
- Based on the availability of city services, work with Love Your Block grant recipients to conduct pre-site visits with appropriate agency liaisons and project managers as well as schedule project implementation dates. To increase visibility of the initiative, coordinate mayor participation in specific community projects and plan for press coverage of community projects



FUNDRAISING FOR LOVE YOUR BLOCK

Love Your Block is a compelling funding opportunity for foundations and corporations with a commitment to your city or specific neighborhoods or communities within your city. Home repair/improvement companies, utility companies, local businesses, national corporations with local stores, or community foundations are all strong prospective funders for Love Your Block. Once you identify a list of possible funders, you can approach them in person or by phone, letter, or email to request cash, inkind services, or gift cards. In all cases, you will want to bring a short proposal that describes the opportunity for support and how the funds would be used.

The elements of a typical proposal include:

- Description of the Love Your Block initiative
- How this initiative would positively impact the community (e.g., improvements in key neighborhoods, increased community ownership of neighborhood spaces, more green spaces, increased safety)
- Proposed breakdown of gift cards or mini-grants (e.g., 10 projects at \$500 each)
- Metrics that would be collected to assess progress
- Information on Cities of Service (this is especially helpful for national organizations)
- Recognition plan for the donor (e.g., logo on volunteer t-shirts, branding on your city's service website)

After the funds are distributed and the projects are complete, provide a brief thank you note and report to the donor. Typically, this report will include a list of the projects completed, major successes and challenges, and any metrics collected from your partners. If you have "before and after" photos or video from the initiative, include them with your report.

In some cases, private funders may not want to provide funding directly to city governments. In those instances, you should seek out a local nonprofit partner to receive the funds and serve as a fiscal sponsor for the grant.



RECOGNIZING AND THANKING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer recognition is an effective recruitment and retention tool. Research by Points of Light Institute and HandsOn Network reveals that recognition not only motivates volunteers, but also promotes public awareness in local communities. To recognize volunteers for Love Your Block, consider sending thank you letters and/or providing information on the impact of the Love Your Block effort (e.g., "before and after" photos, impact metrics) to those who volunteered.



MEASURING IMPACT

Collecting data on the impact of each Love Your Block project is critical. In addition to reporting out on the number of blocks (or other geographic unit, i.e., lots or neighborhoods) revitalized, each grant recipient must report on at least two of the following metrics:

- Square feet of graffiti removed
- Pounds of litter collected
- Number of green spaces or community gardens created

Community groups should also submit "before and after" photos and report any additional metrics that reflect their specific project as outlined in their work plan



OPTIONAL ELEMENTS

Some cities may choose to partner with a local nonprofit organization in order to execute Love Your Block. In New York City, for example, the mayor's office partners with Citizens Committee for New York City. Citizens Committee for New York City conducts the mini-grant competition and works with grantees in coordination with the mayor's office. An ideal nonprofit partner will have experience in organizing and engaging citizens in revitalization projects or providing direct services for these types of efforts.

Potential responsibilities of a nonprofit partner could include:

- Running the application process
- Screening applications and preparing a slate of potential grant recipients
- Advertising grant application deadlines to neighborhood associations, civic organizations, places of worship, and nonprofit organizations
- Making flyers and brochures and staffing tables at community events
- Conducting site visits
- Training or coaching grant recipients on effective project development and volunteer management
- Collecting and synthesizing impact reports
- Creating/managing a "tool library" where neighborhood groups can borrow tools for cleanup projects; tools are returned after projects are completed for future use by other groups

Some nonprofit partners that are also volunteer-managing organizations (e.g., HandsOn Network, United Way) can provide additional resources by connecting Love Your Block projects to other community programs, events, or activities. These groups can also help provide additional volunteers to Love Your Block activities through their outreach and marketing efforts.

Additionally, your city may be interested in including a community garden component in your Love Your Block initiative. If so, we recommend that you follow the steps in the **Cities of Service** Let's Grow Blueprint, which details how to set up a community garden and support local groups in tracking its impact on the neighborhood. For more information about Let's Grow, see the Resources Section.



THE PLAN IN ACTION

NEW YORK, NY

Love Your Block was first implemented in New York City in 2009 as part of NYC Service, the city's high-impact service plan. NYC Service partnered with Citizens Committee for New York City, a local nonprofit, to revitalize 72 blocks in the program's first two grant cycles. Participating groups were awarded \$500 grants to implement their projects. In its third round, NYC Service chose to increase the grants to \$1000 and selected fewer organizations (50) in order to enhance impact by encouraging each group to revitalize a larger area

Below are some key lessons learned from the first year of implementation:

- Plan to spend significant time synchronizing, scheduling, and communicating with city government agencies and volunteer groups.
- Manage expectations. Failing to provide clear information on what services will be provided by city government will leave resident groups feeling as though some promises were unmet.
- Launch an aggressive PR campaign to ensure broader participation from underrepresented areas. Reach out proactively to: neighborhood groups, churches, community boards, city council, libraries, local officials, etc.
- Strike a good balance between groups that request city services and groups that plan to do most of the work independently.
- Encourage and look for creativity among the project applications.
- Identify city staffers who are available during nights and weekends (when neighborhood groups typically meet).



• FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

Love Your Block was first implemented in Fall River, Massachusetts in 2013 as part of the city's high-impact service initiative. A small city with vibrant neighborhood associations, Fall River anticipated a robust response to its Love Your Block minigrant competition. To limit replication of key resources requested by neighborhoods, the city created a mobile tool library and an urban tree farm. The mobile tool library delivered tools and other cleanup supplies to neighborhoods when they were needed for revitalization projects; neighborhoods then returned the tools to the city when projects were completed. The urban tree farm provided a renewable source of trees that could be replanted in neighborhoods as part of local beautification efforts.

Lessons learned from the first year of implementation include:

- Stretch limited resources through the use of a mobile tool library, which encourages neighborhoods to share tools and prevents duplicative purchasing of similar items by different sets of grantees.
- Save money on the cost of trees through the use of an urban tree farm which provides a sustainable source of trees that could be replanted in a city's neighborhoods upon request – as opposed to each community making one-off purchases of new trees at higher price points.



FLINT, MICHIGAN

Love Your Block was first implemented in Flint, Michigan in 2013 as part of the city's high-impact service plan. Rather than offering cash grants or gift cards to community groups, Flint only offered city service support which included trash pickup and free cleanup supplies. Additionally, recognizing that a major neighborhood concern was illegal dumping often in the form of abandoned tires, the city offered free tire removal services for city residents. Volunteers agreed to transport 25 tires each to a central location for removal and were given a \$25 stipend to cover transportation expenses. The city then worked with a private contractor to remove the discarded tires at half-cost. Over 5,000 tires were collected – more than four times the anticipated response.

Lessons learned from the first year of implementation include:

- Confirm that community groups fully understand the requirements of the initiative and have a clear plan in place to track the impact of their projects.
- Prepare for a volunteer response that may exceed your initial expectations by having trained volunteer managers available to direct community members efficiently. This will ensure that everyone has tasks to complete and that all volunteers feel engaged in the project.



RESOURCES

Let's Grow Blueprint from Cities of Service, a high-impact service strategy in which the mayor's office engages volunteers to improve access to healthy foods in low-income neighborhoods where grocery stores and fresh produce markets are scarce. Visit: http://citiesofservice.org/resources/blueprints/lets-grow

To apply for Community Impact Grants from The Home Depot, visit: https://corporate.homedepot.com/CorporateResponsibility/HDFoundation/Pages/ComImpactGrant.aspx

For more information on **Love Your Block in New York City**, and links to an informational flyer and the grant application, visit: http://www.citizensnyc.org/grants/love-your-block

For briefs issued by **Action for Community Trees on Green Streets**; Healthy Parks, Safer Communities; Neighborhood Stabilization and Revitalization; and Growing Healthier Greener Business Districts, visit: http://bit.ly/17XhoIO

For information on strategies to improve quality of life in urban neighborhoods, read: U.S. Department of Justice, Executive Office for Weed and Seed, "Citizen Action for Neighborhood Safety: Community Strategies for Improving the Quality of Life", August 1997, http://bit.ly/15Xeosf

For information on how to **recognize volunteers**, visit www.PresidentialServiceAwards.gov or www.PointsofLight.org



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Cities of Service is a national nonprofit that designs and supports the implementation of high-impact service strategies that can be widely replicated in cities worldwide. We provide technical assistance, programmatic support, planning resources, and funding opportunities. Cities of Service supports a coalition of nearly 200 cities whose mayors are committed to using citizen volunteers to solve local pressing challenges, from increasing high school graduation rates to improving energy efficiency in buildings. We help coalition cities share solutions, best practices, and lessons learned, as well as spread awareness about their great work.

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