ENGAGING BOSTON
SERVICE PLAN 2017
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Letter from Mayor Martin J. Walsh

When I became Mayor of Boston three years ago, I pledged that I would listen, I would learn, and I would lead—because we are in this together. And because of our work together, the state of our city is stronger than it has ever been in our history. That’s a bold statement, I know. But when you look at what we’ve achieved together over the past 3 years—it’s hard to deny.

Unemployment is at a record low. High school graduation and college completion rates are at all-time highs. Violent crime and property crime have come down every year, and so have arrests. A record number of homes have been built for low- and middle-income families. We have become a headquarters city in the global innovation economy. Community-friendly development and good job growth are advancing all across our city. We have launched a long-range, citywide planning initiative that encompasses schools, land-use, transportation, capital development, climate change, arts and culture, and also—the resiliency of our fascinatingly diverse population groups.

None of this would have been possible without the input and hard work of so many Bostonians. I am deeply grateful for their commitment to our shared values and the city we love. One of the top priorities of my Administration is to leverage community engagement and volunteerism for visible neighborhood improvement. Accordingly, I’ve created an Office of Civic Engagement that combines the resources and experience of Neighborhood Services liaisons with our state-of-the-art 311 system that can identify neighborhood hot spots for rapid response.

We now present Engaging Boston, our Service Plan to promote impact volunteering through two initiatives that utilize technology and partnerships. Serve Boston and Love Your Block will connect residents to government to enhance public spaces, build social capital, and boost levels of civic engagement. Corporate, educational and community partners will contribute resources that sustain the initiatives.

Love Your Block has been warmly hailed as a game-changing initiative in the three neighborhoods we originally targeted, and has expanded by popular demand based on results. We look forward to gathering all our partners in 2018 to recognize the efforts of AmeriCorps VISTAs and citywide volunteers who go the extra mile to make Boston better. When we come together as a city and trust in our shared values, there’s nothing we can’t achieve. Thank you for your commitment.

Sincerely,

Martin J. Walsh
Mayor of Boston
Executive Summary

Engaging Boston is a service plan for Boston reflecting Mayor Walsh's vision for volunteerism and service across the city. By encouraging residents to come together to serve their neighborhoods, they will create lasting change in the City of Boston. To accomplish specific goals of Engaging Boston, the Office of Civic Engagement will implement two initiatives and corresponding strategies, creating a sense of ownership within communities.

To ensure success, we will:
Implement two initiatives, Serve Boston and Love Your Block, impact volunteer models that increase engagement and ensure that existing volunteer efforts meet targeted needs.

Serve Boston will take a two-pronged approach to achieve its goal of making it easier for residents to get involved in their communities. The first strategy is the Patriots for Volunteering Portal, a website connecting volunteer opportunities to interested individuals, organizations, and corporations. The other strategy is a Civic Engagement Ceremony, designed to keep volunteers involved and elevate engagement within the city. Neighborhoods will engage in a spirit of competition for various volunteer awards, and the City will recognize the efforts of volunteers who go above and beyond to make Boston better.

Love Your Block will enhance and unify existing volunteer strategies to encourage residents to take ownership of their neighborhoods. As a resource devoted to neighborhood beautification and cleanups, it will combine mini-grants, year-round cleanups (formerly Boston Shines), and community tool sheds. These programs will be expanded and organized as resources for Boston residents with the help of BOS:311 HotSpot data to locate and prioritize the communities with the most need.

Addressing the Mayor's priority to promote volunteering, the City of Boston will:
- Align, promote, and expand current City and nonprofit volunteer efforts;
- Track impact volunteer work in the City of Boston with appropriate metrics; and
- Cultivate deeper relationships with neighborhoods as a civic engagement strategy.
Cities of Service is a national nonprofit organization that helps mayors and city leaders tap the knowledge, creativity, and service of citizens to solve public problems and create vibrant cities. We work with cities to build city-led, citizen-powered initiatives that target specific needs, achieve long-term and measurable outcomes, improve the quality of life for residents, and build stronger cities.

Started in 2009 by New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, the Cities of Service coalition is now comprised of over 225 cities in the US and UK, representing nearly 55 million people in 45 states, and more than 10 million people in the UK. Visit us at citiesofservice.org or follow us on Twitter @citiesofservice.

Coalition cities around the world tackle pressing local issues from neighborhood revitalization to supporting youth and education. Cities of Service has joined with the City of Boston to change the paradigm of how government and its citizens work together to bring tangible change, build a community of trust, and create a stronger and more vibrant city.
Building on an already strong foundation of impact volunteering across the city, Boston’s priority is to increase engagement and ensure that existing volunteer efforts meet targeted needs, creating a sense of pride and ownership throughout the city. The Love Your Block program began in 2015 through a grant from Cities of Service. Through its development, the Office of Civic Engagement created *Engaging Boston* to further address the volunteer needs of the community. The table below reflects the structure and nature of these two initiatives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Specific Goal</th>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase engagement and ensure that existing volunteer efforts meet targeted needs</td>
<td>Make it easier for residents to get involved</td>
<td>Serve Boston</td>
<td>Serve Boston will unify volunteer opportunities and elevate the level of involvement in Boston through two strategies: The Patriots for Volunteering Portal will connect people with available volunteer opportunities through an online platform. The Civic Engagement Ceremony will present awards that are designed to highlight the benefits of volunteering while keeping everyone involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents take ownership of their neighborhoods</td>
<td>Love Your Block</td>
<td>Love Your Block is a resource devoted to neighborhood beautification. Mini-grants, tool sheds, and year-round cleanups will be available to citizens who want to clean up their community. 311 will generate HotSpot data to locate and prioritize areas with the most need.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initiative: Serve Boston

Goal
The goal of Serve Boston is to streamline and support volunteering in Boston. The Mayor’s Office of Civic Engagement will institutionalize volunteer opportunities within city departments, nonprofits, and corporate sponsors. It will then acknowledge the wonderful support from residents through an annual awards ceremony.

Background
To centralize Boston’s volunteers, the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) investigated past trends of volunteering, including:

Why Citizens are Volunteering & How Volunteers find Opportunities

The Patriots for Volunteering Portal and the Civic Engagement Ceremony will be shaped by creating and recognizing social and group-friendly volunteer opportunities. With more than one third\(^1\) of Massachusetts’ 1.3 million volunteers\(^2\) serving in Boston, contributing a combined total of 115.8\(^3\) million hours of service, Boston already has a strong volunteer base. A quarter of residents participate in volunteer activities\(^4\), matching the national average (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Volunteer Rate

Initiative: Serve Boston

Background continued

Why Citizens are Volunteering

The OCE partnered with Northeastern University to understand volunteer motivations and trends on individual and organizational levels. A strong social motivation was found behind volunteering, with 73 percent of respondents choosing to volunteer to “have fun” or to “socialize/meet people.” On average, members of groups volunteered three times more than sole individuals did (Figure 2). The OCE created the Patriots for Volunteering Portal to connect individuals to existing volunteer opportunities, especially those that promote the chance to join a group. Individuals who have participated in volunteer activities will be recognized among peers at the Civic Engagement Ceremony.

How Volunteers find Opportunities

Volunteers prefer opportunities where they can interact with other people. The Patriots for Volunteering Portal will address this by allowing the chance to state volunteer preferences. For example, a user could choose to volunteer in a group or alone (Figure 3).

For the portal, 42% of respondents felt a website would be the most convenient way to sign up to volunteer. More than half of respondents preferred a desktop website to a mobile platform, preferably an App (Figure 4). As such, the OCE will first launch the Patriots for Volunteering Portal as a website and then will add a mobile app in the future.

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Description

Patriots for Volunteering Portal
The Patriots for Volunteering Portal will be an interactive tool designed to allow city departments, and eventually nonprofit and corporate partners, to connect with Boston residents looking for ways to volunteer. The portal will be accessible in desktop and mobile versions and allow users to create a profile, sign up for volunteer opportunities, and track their service hours. The portal will allow residents to choose from a variety of different service areas and select the neighborhood in which they would like to volunteer. The portal will also allow departments and partners to search for volunteers whose profiles match their needs. The Patriots for Volunteering Portal will first be released as a basic version where it will further develop into a more sophisticated website upon collection of data (please see the “Progress” section for more details).

The Patriots for Volunteering Portal will carefully track volunteer interest by neighborhood, enabling the OCE to track the number of residents engaged in volunteer efforts and number of service hours completed. The Love Your Block initiative, discussed later in the plan, will also be tracked from sign-up to project completion in the Patriots for Volunteering Portal. Love Your Block will track neighborhood engagement by recording volunteer hours in neighborhood cleanups and mini-grant projects. In short, the Patriots for Volunteering Portal will provide the necessary data to be able to reward volunteers for their service.

Civic Engagement Ceremony
The Civic Engagement Ceremony will further promote and reward a culture of volunteerism in the City of Boston. The Patriots for Volunteering Portal will collect data on volunteer sign-ups and metrics from the Love Your Block projects. The Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) will use this information to present volunteering awards to neighborhoods, organizations, and individuals at the annual Civic Engagement Ceremony.
## Initiative: Serve Boston

### Progress

For the Patriots for Volunteering Portal, the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) will work with the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) to develop a pilot website. The results of searches and volunteer postings will be monitored by the OCE to populate terms for when the official Patriots for Volunteering Portal eventually launches through a professional web development service used by several Cities of Service participants for volunteer centralization. The first Civic Engagement Ceremony will be held in the spring of 2018, using data from the Patriots for Volunteering Portal and Love Your Block projects collected during 2017.

### Metrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Impact Metrics</th>
<th>Participation Metrics</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Initiative Lead &amp; Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patriots for Volunteering Portal</td>
<td># of volunteer to opportunity matches</td>
<td># of volunteers generated</td>
<td>The OCE will work with the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) to provide a basic website for a beta trial</td>
<td>Lead: Department of Innovation &amp; Technology (DoIT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># of volunteer hours being tracked</td>
<td># registered user profiles</td>
<td></td>
<td>External Partners: Northeastern University - Computer Science and Marketing Departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of volunteer sign-ups from portal</td>
<td># opportunities posted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># registered city departments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Engagement Ceremony</td>
<td># of participating: neighborhood volunteers, nonprofits, and corporations</td>
<td># of registered user profiles</td>
<td>Current neighborhood volunteer efforts, such as Boston Shines and Love Your Block mini-grants</td>
<td>Lead: Office of Civic Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># participating neighborhoods</td>
<td></td>
<td>Internal Partners: City Departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># of youth that participate</td>
<td></td>
<td>External Partners: Nonprofits &amp; Corporations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>% of volunteer distribution among neighborhoods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goal
The goal of Love Your Block is to provide residents with opportunities to create a sense of pride and ownership by beautifying their neighborhoods, thereby reducing blight and improving the safety, health, and vibrancy of Boston.

Background
Love Your Block started in the fall of 2015 as a mini-grant program supported by a three-year grant from Cities of Service. Under the Engaging Boston Service Plan, Love Your Block will add year-round cleanups and neighborhood tool sheds as additional ways to beautify Boston. The year-round cleanups started as the Boston Shines program, a spring-cleanup initiative that began in 2003. Love Your Block allows residents to now host cleanups on their own with the coordination of the OCE throughout the year instead of only in the spring.

To identify which neighborhoods would most benefit from Love Your Block, the OCE will utilize the Boston 311 system. Unveiled in 2015, BOS:311 is a telephone system and mobile reporting app that handles non-emergency requests for city services and information. BOS:311 has collected data to create a “HotSpot” report that will allow Love Your Block to locate and prioritize project areas with frequently reported damages.

In deciding to make Love Your Block a permanent City of Boston initiative, the OCE researched its benefits through a review of public research and academic papers (outlined below).

Social Capital
“Social capital” is described as people and organizations working in a trusting atmosphere to accomplish a mutual goal.6 This concept is reflected in Love Your Block by the by bringing together individuals, neighborhood organizations, and the City of Boston itself to achieve the common goal of improving Boston.

Broken Windows Theory
Broken Windows Theory suggests that run-down, litter-strewn spaces signal a lack of neighborhood pride and ownership, which tends to lead to crime and other negative behaviors.7 The Love Your Block initiative intends to address this by positively engaging residents to take ownership of their neighborhoods before they fall into poor condition, acting as a powerful force in preventing crime.

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https://www.britannica.com/topic/broken-windows-theory.
Initiative: Love Your Block

Description

Love Your Block empowers Bostonians to improve their neighborhoods through creative projects that address community challenges. Residents will partner with the City to better their neighborhoods through (1) neighborhood mini-grants, (2) year-round clean ups, and (3) community tool sheds.

>>>Mini-grants

The competitive Love Your Block mini-grants provide funding to residents who improve their neighborhoods through innovative projects. Residents design their projects based on their neighborhood’s needs. Project examples include: the creation of green-space, improvements to parks or streets, and public art displays. By providing small competitive grants and coordinating city services, the OCE can achieve measurable impact in local communities and strengthen social capital at a low cost. In the past, grants were awarded each year to applicants from target low-income neighborhoods. As Love Your Block expands, need will still be a priority supported by 311 data, but readiness and capacity will also be considered.

>>>Year-round Cleanups

In addition to the mini-grants, Love Your Block’s year-round cleanups (formerly Boston Shines) provide residents with ongoing opportunities to beautify their neighborhoods. Groups or individuals will sign up online via the Patriots for Volunteering Portal to receive city support for tools to remove litter and do gardening, with trash pickup also available.

>>>Community Tool Sheds

Tool sheds will be located within several neighborhoods as another way for residents to "love their block." Residents can organize their own cleanups and work with their OCE Neighborhood Liaisons to gain access to a variety of gardening and cleanup tools. The OCE will work with other city departments, such as Boston Centers for Youth and Families and Boston Parks and Recreation, to supply, manage and maintain the tool sheds.
Initiative: Love Your Block

Progress

In its inaugural year, Love Your Block awarded six mini-grants totaling approximately $11,000 across three target neighborhoods: Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan. The mini-grants funded the creation of four public art projects, a new community garden, and multiple landscape improvements in the spring of 2016. Some metrics for the first year include: 42 bags of waste collected, 32 newly planted flower boxes, and a total of 56 volunteers donating over 158 hours of their time to beautify their neighborhoods. The first year had over 20 applications submitted, and the winners demonstrated a reduction in blight. The second year is in progress at the time of this document, targeting Mattapan and East Boston with community support.

One project in particular captured the strength and efficacy of Love Your Block. In an area attracting unwanted activity, the Shangri-La Rock Garden relocated several massive boulders, removed trash, and planted flowers. One passing bystander gave insight to the power of communities taking ownership through Love Your Block:

“I’m one of the guys that's been drinking over here and had left my beer bottles.... I’m sorry about that. This garden looks so beautiful. I’m not going to do that anymore.”
## Initiative: Love Your Block

### Metrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Impact Metrics</th>
<th>Participation Metrics</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Initiative Lead &amp; Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love Your Block</td>
<td># of repeat volunteers</td>
<td># of volunteers on project days</td>
<td>Cities of Service</td>
<td>Lead: Office of Civic Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-Grants</td>
<td># of youth volunteers</td>
<td># of volunteer hours</td>
<td>Three-Year Grant</td>
<td>Internal Partners: Public Works, Parks and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># of mini-grant applications received</td>
<td>Year One: 2015-2016</td>
<td>External Partners: 2015-2016: Northeastern University, Union Capital Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Year Two: 2016-2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Year Three: 2017-2018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Your Block</td>
<td># of empty lots by square foot cleaned</td>
<td># of groups participating</td>
<td>Formerly Boston Shines, which was started in 2003 - starting with data</td>
<td>Lead: Office of Civic Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanups</td>
<td># of school/community building clean-ups</td>
<td>% of first time groups participating</td>
<td>from 2016</td>
<td>Internal Partners: Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Neighborhood Services, Boston Public Schools, Boston Centers for Youth &amp; Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># displays created</td>
<td>% of returning groups participating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Your Block</td>
<td># of community gardens cleaned</td>
<td># of residents checking out tools</td>
<td>Two toolsheds currently maintained by the Office of Neighborhood</td>
<td>Lead: Office of Civic Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool Sheds</td>
<td></td>
<td># of civic groups/nonprofits using community tools</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Internal Partners: Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Boston Public Schools, BCYF Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># of small cleanups organized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion & Acknowledgments

Engaging Boston aims to meet the Mayor Martin J. Walsh's priority of increasing engagement and elevating existing volunteer efforts. To address this priority, the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) identified two specific goals and corresponding initiatives. In order to make it easier for residents to get and stay involved, Serve Boston will be implemented through the creation of the Patriots for Volunteering Portal and the Civic Engagement Ceremony. Additionally, Love Your Block is designed to encourage residents to take ownership of their neighborhoods by making resources readily available for neighborhood beautification.

Mayor Walsh would like to take the time to thank the following organizations, individuals, and agencies whose time, talent, and resources were invaluable the Engaging Boston Service Plan.

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United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley
Volunteers of America
Boston Arts Commission
Boston Centers for Youth and Families
Bostons Elections Department
Commission on Affairs of the Elderly
Office of Arts and Culture
Office of Emergency Management
Office of Environment, Energy and Open Space
Office of Financial Empowerment
Office of Immigrant Advancement
Office of Recovery Services
Office of Tourism, Entertainment and Special Events
Office of Workforce Development
Parks and Recreation
Registry Office

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- Nick Tinsley
- Shiyu Wang
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