

City-Works Bureau of Neighborhoods Proposal
Best Practices Research
Objectives & Goals

Introduction

To rebuild New Orleans most effectively, the city government needs active participation of its citizenry and direct communication with its neighborhood leaders. Many cities around the country have an office that deals directly with the concerns of diverse neighborhoods. Baltimore, with seven neighborhood liaisons, or Boston, with a range of direct e-mail updates, serve as two of many good examples to emulate. Additionally, by establishing this bureau, overall city government would be strengthened because residents could see more transparency by having an office that is intimately tied to their neighborhoods, and that responds effectively and proactively to their concerns.

Since much recovery post-Katrina has been carried out by neighborhood groups, the city has a responsibility to help these efforts in every way they can. Because a Bureau of Neighborhoods would not only facilitate increased communication but aid neighborhood groups in their initiatives, its establishment would institutionalize direct help by the city. This would help to build trust on the part of neighborhood associations in the effectiveness and ability of the city bureaucracy. In addition, by providing capacity to organizations doing much of the grassroots work needed to revitalize neighborhoods, a Bureau of Neighborhoods can speed up overall recovery substantially.

Best Practices Research

Baltimore, Maryland ([Mayor's Office on Neighborhoods \(and Constituent Services\)](#))



Baltimore has an Office on Neighborhoods (and Constituent Services) that relies on **an executive director, two deputy directors, and seven neighborhood liaisons**. Its stated goal is “to ensure that city government is an effective partner with communities in improving the quality of life in neighborhoods through government and community partnerships.” To this end, it says it coordinates responses between city departments to ensure prompt and thorough answers.

Ongoing projects include a **Neighborhood Cabinet** that reports to the mayor monthly, a bi-monthly event called **Open Dialogue with the Mayor** at places around the city, a **matching capital grant program**, spring and fall **citywide cleanups**, and **Operation PROTECT**, a comprehensive, neighborhood-based crime reduction strategy. The office stresses that ongoing outreach to the community is an essential part of its mission, and that the neighborhood liaisons have established strong ties with neighborhood leaders, establishing trust. Its website has a list of neighborhood related hearings and events, such as an upcoming community open house on a possible new rapid transit line. Additionally, it has contact information for all of the staff, and a map to find your neighborhood liaison.

Charlotte, North Carolina ([Office of Neighborhood Development](#))



Charlotte's **Office of Neighborhood Development** has listed on its front page its three main goals of maintaining community standards (health, sanitation, and code enforcement), providing affordable housing (homeownership resources, foreclosure

information, etc.), and sustaining neighborhoods (community resources, leadership training, and neighborhood revitalization). As their mission statement says, “the business of Neighborhood Development is about making all neighborhoods better.”

Charlotte’s Office of Neighborhood Development has many ongoing projects, including a **neighborhood matching grant program**, ongoing **quality of life surveys** (with a neighborhood liaison program that focuses on those areas that are declining), and **Community University leadership training** for neighborhood group leaders. In addition, Neighborhood Development runs a number of citywide visioning efforts, including **VisionCharlotte**, the **Keep Charlotte Beautiful** committee, the effort to create **Model Neighborhood Standards**, as well as **Housing Charlotte 2007**, a convention devoted to affordable housing. Its website has links to information about all these programs, as well as mechanisms through which you can report code violations regarding sanitation and zoning.

Boston, Massachusetts ([Office of Neighborhood Services](#))



Boston has an **Office of Neighborhood Services** that “encourages, facilitates, and maximizes citizen input and participation in all aspects of government through service requests, neighborhood meetings, mailings, and emergency responses.” It has a **director**, **associate director**, and **seventeen neighborhood liaisons** covering all neighborhoods in the city as well as specific ethnic groups.

Major projects include facilitating the **Mayor’s 24 Hour Constituent Service**, as well as ensuring maximum participation across all of Boston’s neighborhoods. In addition, the neighborhood liaisons have **regular office hours** (at a designated location) during which they can hear citizens’ concerns. Additionally, one of ONS’ major services is to send out **regular mailings** to update constituents on a wide variety of issues, from recycling to arts and culture. ONS also has an **Early Notification System** specific to each neighborhood. Its website has links to sign up for these newsletters, as well as get information about registering to vote and the zoning board of appeal process. In addition, there is **an extensive calendar** with a listing of all city events and public meetings, as well as an online form to get into contact with the mayor’s constituent service.

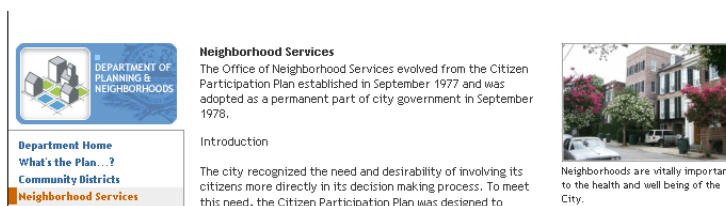
Buffalo, New York ([Division of Citizen Services](#))



Buffalo has a **Division of Citizen Services** that houses a variety of offices that aim “to work with residents, block clubs, and organizations to better service the community.” Within its structure, there is an **Office of Citizen Participation and Information** that coordinates with the Citizens’ Advisory Committee to oversee and administer a wide variety of programs and initiatives that encourage citizen participation as well as livable communities in the city. Each specific department is headed by **one director**. The offices included are the Mayor’s Call and Resolution Center, the Weed and Seed Program, the Mayor’s Quick Response Team (quality of life issues, has three people), the Office of Fair Housing, the abovementioned Office of Citizen Participation, the Office of Support Services (graffiti abatement, community volunteerism), and the Save Our Streets Program.

Ongoing projects are administered within the specific abovementioned offices. Notable is the **Livable Communities Grant** that is awarded to “block clubs,” civic organizations, and other community-based groups, with preference given to those in one of the targeted 13 Livable Communities neighborhoods. The Save Our Streets Program administers a **citywide cleanup**. The Office of Citizen Participation and Information runs a **Citizens Participation Academy**, where participants learn about the structure of city government and how best to access services and vital resources. Its website has information and contact info for the directors of these individual programs, as well as linking to the application for the Livable Communities Grant.

Charleston, South Carolina ([Office of Neighborhood Services](#))

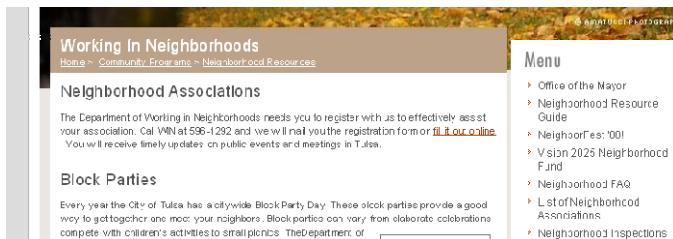


Charleston’s **Office of Neighborhood Services** evolved from the Citizen Participation Plan to involve citizens more directly in its decision making process. In addition, this plan “provides for an official process to recognize neighborhood organizations as the

citizens' voice from the neighborhoods by city government. The process is known as achieving Neighborhood Council status. This status is granted by a Neighborhood Commission when criteria established by the Plan are met.” The office is directed by **one division director**. As they sit, its role is “a conduit of assistance and action between the citizens and their city government.”

In Charleston, much of the office’s job is to administer this Citizen Participation Plan and oversee the Neighborhood Commission. Once groups achieve Council status, there are a variety of resources available to them from this office, including **ensuring concerns expressed by neighborhood representatives reach appropriate city officials**, initiating the **planning and implementation of self-help development action**, such as neighborhood cleanups and beautification, assisting with **newsletters**, and helping neighborhood councils get set up by providing **sample by-laws, guidelines, and requirements**. In addition, the Office of Neighborhood Services administers an honorary award to a citizen who has demonstrated “continuous and outstanding volunteer service.” Its website has information about all the abovementioned activities, as well as providing advice for meeting attendance and a **Neighborhood Council Manual**, which includes information about how they are set up and should be structured. The website also has a listing for all the neighborhood associations in the city.

Tulsa, Oklahoma ([Department of Working in Neighborhoods](#))



Tulsa’s **Department of Working in Neighborhoods** registers neighborhood groups as official, and then provides them with resources like the **Neighborhood Resource Guide**. Its focus is on how to “effectively assist” associations by providing them with the information and the tools they need.

The abovementioned **Neighborhood Resource Guide** is provided on the website, and it contains information on everything from organizing a neighborhood association to code enforcement to trash pickup to how to report pollution concerns. Additionally, it has a section of useful numbers. This is a great resource for neighborhoods to have. The office also is in charge of registering **block parties**, and provides a guide for how to make them a success. **Neighborhood inspections** enforce nuisance and zoning ordinances, and the department issues citations. The department also is in charge of special projects like **NeighborFest ’08**, an event where residents can meet and talk with their elected officials; there is one per city council district. In addition, the department administers **grants** to give to registered neighborhood organizations as a component of Tulsa’s Vision 2025.

The website has information on all these programs, as well as providing a **list of all registered neighborhood associations** (and an **online form to register** your own group).

Nashville, Tennessee ([Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods](#))



The **Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods** has the goal of improving “the quality of life in Nashville's neighborhoods through a more informed, active and involved citizenry and enhanced governmental response to community needs.” It is a lean organization with only **one director** and **two neighborhood liaisons**.

Ongoing outreach activities include **Mayor's Night Out** meetings around town “to talk one on one with residents about issues specific to their neighborhood.” The office is instrumental in organizing the annual **National Night Out Against Crime**. Its website, however, is very sparse, with only minimal information for citizens.

Seattle, Washington ([Department of Neighborhoods](#))



Seattle's **Department of Neighborhoods** is a large, capable bureaucracy that helps “build strong families and healthy communities” by “connecting people, communities, and government.” To this end, the department runs **Neighborhood Service Centers**, the Mayor's **Customer Service Bureau**, the **Neighborhood Matching Fund**, and the **Office for Education**. Additionally, the **City Neighborhood Council** is citizen-led advisory group, organized within this department, which provides city-wide coordination for the Neighborhood Matching Fund, neighborhood budget prioritization, and neighborhood planning programs.

Projects administered by the Department of Neighborhoods include historic preservation, where they **oversee historic districts and the designation process**. The **Neighborhood**

Matching Fund has four separate funds: the Large Project Fund, the Small and Simple Projects Fund, the Tree Fund (to plant 10-40 trees in planting strips), and the Neighborhood Outreach and Development Fund (to involve new people in neighborhood activities). The department runs **the neighborhood planning process**, where 38 neighborhoods participate in shaping their development plans. Final execution of these plans is coordinated with the District Councils. **Neighborhood Service Centers**, 13 of them across the city, are places where the community can get information on neighborhood events and services, organization contacts, land use and zoning, job opportunities, crime prevention, along with application forms for the neighborhood matching fund, voter registration, as well as for a US passport. The **Office for Education**, under the auspices of the Department, runs programs to close the achievement gap through partnerships with schools and the community. The Department also runs **organic community gardens** throughout the city, as well as taking the lead on the mayor's **Race and Social Justice Initiative**. The expansive website has information on all these programs, as well as locations of the neighborhood service centers, distribution of the **Neighborhood News newsletter**, a **directory of neighborhood group websites** (along with free web hosting), as well as a link to directly contact city government.

Minneapolis, Minnesota (Neighborhood Revitalization Program)



Minneapolis' **Neighborhood Revitalization Program** "is an innovative effort to bring residents into the priority-setting process of their city. It is based on the belief that the empowerment of residents and the mobilization of untapped resources, energy and creativity can make our progressive vision of the future a reality." NRP, more than the other departments, is a **planning process/framework to involve the community** in the improvement of Minneapolis' neighborhoods.

The website has a copy of each neighborhood's action plan developed during the NRP process, as well as a **list of contact information for each neighborhood's participating organization**.

Best Practices Summary

Goals

In all the cities researched, the goals of their offices of neighborhoods remained fairly constant. They all were working for increased citizen participation in government, and for more effective government treatment of neighborhood concerns. Seattle's goal of **connecting people, communities, and government** summarizes the best practice goal across all of these city agencies.

Projects

Whereas the goals stated by these organizations stayed fairly constant, they all had novel ideas of projects they could administer that would obtain their ends. In Charleston, the Office of Neighborhood Services assists in the **planning and implementation of self-help development action**, like neighborhood cleanups and beautification. To help groups even more, the majority of these offices provided **neighborhood matching grants** to help neighborhood associations with projects. Charlotte's **Community University leadership training program** is a best practice for providing neighborhood leaders with methods to build capacity and take their associations to the next level. Additionally, to achieve the above goals of government accessibility and transparency, many of these offices have **neighborhood liaisons** and public **meetings with the mayor**, most notably Baltimore's **Open Dialogue with the Mayor**, at locations throughout the city.

Mechanisms & Hierarchy

Many of these offices were under the **direct purview of the mayor**. However, others are housed within planning departments (Charleston) or exist in an autonomous state (Minneapolis). It seems that the best practice is to house them within the mayor's office, through which they act as an effective carrier of city policy as well as being a logical place for citizens to participate within city government.

Website & Communication

The best websites of this bunch were the ones that had the most tangible information for residents, as well as the ones that provided ways to interact online and contact officials directly. **Boston's** website provided an easy way to get in touch with the mayor's office with an **online comment form**. Boston also was unique in providing a way to sign up for **e-newsletters specific to each neighborhood**, although Seattle also publishes a great **Neighborhood News**. Tulsa's **Neighborhood Resource Guide** provides a wealth of information for citizens about ordinances, signing up for block parties, etc. Many of these websites publish **links to all neighborhood organizations** and list each group's contact information.