

03.19.2019

19-0309 - RNO Memo

To: Policy Committee

From: Emily Lapel,
Legislative Analyst

CC

Re: RNO Funding
Mechanisms and
Structures in Denver
and Peer Cities

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to research Registered Neighborhood Organization (RNO) best practices for increasing equity, diversity, accountability, and fairness. This paper will also explore how other cities in the United States provide funding for their RNOs.

Denver and Registered Neighborhood Organizations

The intent of council when creating RNOs was to increase access to city agencies and departments and improve the flow of information between RNOs and the City.¹ To become an RNO a group of residents and/or owners of real property within a prescribed boundary need to register with Community Planning and Development during the registration period². RNOs must hold meetings at least once a year, where all members may vote, and at least 12 members must be in attendance. All meetings are required to be open to the public, and notice must be posted prior to the meeting. Membership shall be open to any owner of real property or resident located within the boundaries of the RNO. RNO established boundaries may include one or more neighborhoods within Denver, but may not encompass all of Denver, and if they are to encompass another RNO that RNO must be notified.³

The D.R.M.C. also indicates when RNOs are to be notified on certain matters affecting areas inside of or within 200 feet of their boundaries. There are no specific powers or authority given to RNOs in the D.R.M.C.; however, RNOs can organize to advocate for their communities' interests such as file protest petitions and request needs and

¹ D.R.M.C. § 12-91

² Registration is from December - January and July (D.R.M.C. § 12-94(b))

³ D.R.M.C. § 12-93

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desires hearings for zoning appeals and liquor/marijuana/cabaret licenses. This right to protest is not exclusive to RNOs. RNOs can also wield soft powers in city planning initiatives, exploratory committees, or neighborhood advisory groups on city projects and initiatives.

Neighborhood Funding and Engagement Strategies in Peer Cities

Boulder, CO

Boulder Colorado has a Neighborhood Services agency that provides resources for constituents regarding neighborhood grants, building community within a neighborhood, connecting constituents to city projects and issues, and navigating city services.⁴ There is one staff person for the Neighborhood Services agency. There is no formal process in Boulder's Municipal Code for neighborhoods to register with the City.

Funding opportunities provided by the City of Boulder for neighborhoods are Neighborhood Connection Grants, its annual budget is \$50,000. Applicants can be a Home Owners Association, Neighborhood Association, or a group of neighbors with fiscal sponsorship. The purpose of this grant is to increase opportunities for neighbors to meet and get to know each other, provide community-building resources to under-resourced neighborhoods, and enhance community resilience through personal connections.⁵

⁴ [Boulder Neighborhood Services](#)

⁵ [Boulder Neighborhood Services - Grants](#)

Charlotte, NC

Charlotte has a subscription list of neighborhood leaders and residents throughout the city who have registered to receive communications from the City. Charlotte also has a civic leadership academy, neighborhood exchange and leadership awards, and neighborhood training programs. Community Engagement Service Area Teams are assigned to four areas of the city and work directly with citizens, neighborhood and business associations, civic groups, and other community organizations. The Community Engagement division falls under the Housing & Neighborhood Services department.⁶ Residents in Charlotte can sign up to be on a list-serve to receive notifications for rezoning requests, city events, and opportunities.

Neighborhood Association structures in Charlotte are diverse, and the city does not maintain official boundary information for all neighborhoods claiming, “divergent opinions about official boundaries; umbrella and regional organizations do not follow traditional neighborhood boundaries; and the difficulty in identifying boundaries for neighborhoods whose boundaries are not clearly defined.”⁷

Charlotte offers the Neighborhood Matching Grants Program (NMG) which assists residents in improving their neighborhoods. This program has been in effect since 1992, and the program specifically funds awards to eligible neighborhood-based organizations.⁸ The eligible geography for NMGs is based on median assessed home value, the threshold for eligibility is a median tax value below \$181,703 for 2018. Eligibility is updated based on citywide property revaluation. The maximum grant award is dependent on the assessed property value, applicants can earn between

⁶ [Charlotte Housing and Neighborhood Services Community Engagement Services Area Teams](#)

⁷ [Charlotte Neighborhood Organizations Contact List](#)

⁸ [Charlotte Neighborhood Matching Grants Program](#)

\$10-25k depending on their neighborhood's valuation.⁹ There are also size and age qualifications for neighborhood associations/organizations that are seeking to apply for an NMG. The City still offers 25% NMG to organizations that do not qualify for the full NMG.

Detroit, MI

Detroit has a separate department for neighborhoods, The Department Neighborhoods. The department has a 14-member team that includes a district manager and deputy district manager in each city council district. The managers directly engage residents and volunteers with their planning projects and initiatives, citizen complaints, and connect residents to city programs and policies.¹⁰

Detroit has neighborhood mini grants that can be awarded to community groups throughout the city to work on commercial corridor beautification and blight removal around green light locations. These mini grants are \$500.¹¹ It is not clear if this is an annual grant, or a one-time grant opportunity for 2018.

New York, NY

New York City created community boards and block associations to manage its neighborhood engagement. Community boards are local representative bodies that are comprised of 50 unsalaried members, half of whom are nominated by their district

⁹ [Charlotte NMG Program Guidelines](#)

¹⁰ [Detroit Department of Neighborhoods](#)

¹¹ [Detroit Mini-Grants Program](#)

City Council member and half are appointed by the Borough President.¹² There are 59 community boards in New York City.¹³

The city provides funding for community boards and their District Managers to “establish offices, hire staff, and implement procedures to improve the delivery of City services to the district.”¹⁴ Responsibilities of the community board are to receive complaints from constituents as well as process event permits. Each board can prioritize its own interests such as tenants’ associations and neighborhood beautification programs.

Community boards must be consulted on the placement of municipal facilities in the community. Community boards (CB) also review zoning and variance requests and their position is taken into consideration. CBs also participate in the City budgeting process by meeting with agencies and making recommendations. However, CBs do not have any legitimate authority over a City agency or official but remain influential in City decisions.¹⁵

Block associations comprise community boards and are typically made up of home owners; however, there has been an increase in renters entering the arena. This is evident in the Bed-Stuy neighborhood which has 75 neighborhood associations who have created an alliance to combat gentrification and displacement.¹⁶

¹² [New York City Community Boards](#)

¹³ *Id. at 12*

¹⁴ *Id. at 12*

¹⁵ *Id. at 12*

¹⁶ [NYU Ferman Center Study on Neighborhood Gentrification](#)

Portland, OR

Portland has the Office of Neighborhood Involvement the purpose of which is to facilitate citizen participation and improve communication among citizens, neighborhood associations, district coalitions and other entities. The City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement supports and funds these networks, which receive about \$1.2 million annually. Outreach specialists coordinate efforts with the district coalitions and neighborhood associations, provide technical assistance and train community members in leadership and community organizing skills.¹⁷ Neighborhood Associations have previously had funding earmarked in the coalitions' contracts with the City of Portland. These funds specifically went to assist in paying for communications, such as newsletters and publications. Funding mechanisms have stopped because the City is exploring other neighborhood engagement structures.

Community and Civic Engagement Small Grants Program has \$100,000 available for neighborhood and community engagement projects in 2019. The City of Portland's Office of Community & Civic Life partnered with Portland's seven neighborhood district coalitions to give out funds. The funding available differs by each neighborhood.¹⁸ The funding allocations are based on the percentage of the city's total number of households living in poverty within each coalition (2/3 weight) and the number of neighborhood associations in each coalition.¹⁹ These grants are not given to neighborhood associations but are given to community organizations and grass roots organizations. Organizations do not have to be a 501c3 in order to receive funds as the coalitions can act as a fiscal sponsor for the allocation of funds. The purpose of

¹⁷ [National League of Cities Local Practices in Public Engagement](#)

¹⁸ [Portland Community and Civic Engagement Small Grants Program](#)

¹⁹ [Portland Neighborhood Small Grants Program](#)

these grants is to expand neighborhood and resident contact with the city and increase diversity and inclusivity within Portland's Office of Community & Civic Life. In selecting an organization each neighborhood coalition has its own application process.

Types of projects funded over a five-year period from FY '06-'07 through FY '10-11':²⁰

Project Type: 443 projects funded to date. 55% (244 unduplicated of 443) projects addressed outreach to or engagement with underrepresented organizations defined as people of color, immigrant/refugee, low-income, youth and people with disabilities.

Project Type	Number of Applicants	Percentage *	Funds Awarded	Percentage *
General neighborhood projects	224	51%	\$417,319	50%
Youth or school projects	126	28%	\$209,548	25%
People of color projects	106	24%	\$235,283	28%
Low-income projects	91	21%	\$161,323	19%
Environmental projects	89	20%	\$153,020	18%
Arts and culture projects	72	17%	\$134,606	16%
Immigrant/refugee projects	51	12%	\$126,093	15%
Business projects	27	6%	\$44,289	5%
Crime prevention projects	21	5%	\$44,677	5%
People w/Disabilities projects	13	3%	\$29,078	4%
Elders/Seniors projects	8	2%	\$17,756	2%

Currently, Portland's Community and Neighborhood Involvement center is considering changes that would grant equal emphasis to grass roots organizations and community organizations rather than solely neighborhood associations. This consideration is due to an effort to increase inclusiveness and representation within Portland.²¹

²⁰ [Portland Cumulative 5-Year Summary Neighborhood Small Grant Program](#)

²¹ I had a phone call with Portland's Community and Neighborhood Involvement Center in which they shared this information.

Seattle, WA

In the summer of 2016 Seattle's mayor issued an Executive Order to terminate the City's official relationship with its 13 district councils. This decision was based on data showing that councils were not truly representative of the population demographics and a need to improve the participation framework between the city and its residents.²² The Executive Order also recognized the City's community engagement system had not been significantly updated since 1987.²³

District councils were composed of volunteers from a range of organizations such as business groups, non-profit organizations, and residents. These councils were provided a city neighborhood coordinator as well as funding in the form of grants that they were responsible for allocating throughout the neighborhoods in their districts.²⁴ However, the Department of Neighborhoods expressed an interest in steering away from a community engagement system that was geography-based because it was exclusive towards communities who build and experience community around non-geographic concepts like language, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or issue-based interests.²⁵

²² Data showed that district council membership was primarily of older, white homeowners which was not truly representative of the communities they served.

²³ [Seattle EO 2016-06 FAQ](#)

²⁴ These grants were: [Neighborhood Park and Street Fund](#) – funding safety and accessibility improvements for parks and streets, Neighborhood Street Fund, and the [Neighborhood Matching Fund](#) – funding community groups for physical projects and cultural programs.

²⁵ [Seattle Memo Department of Neighborhoods](#)

The new Department of Neighborhoods has three commissions: Community Involvement Commission, Seattle Renters' Commission, and the Seattle Youth Commission.

- The Community Involvement Commission (CIC) has 16 members and their purpose is to advise and make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on the development of plans, policies, regulations, strategies, and community grant funding processes that advance equitable public engagement and civic participation in The City of Seattle.²⁶
- The Seattle Renters' Commission (SRC) is comprised of 15 appointed members and their purpose is to provide information, advice, and counsel to the city concerning issues and policies affecting renters, including, but not limited to: housing affordability, transportation access, land use, public health and safety, and economic development. The SRC also monitors the enforcement and effectiveness of legislation related to renters and renter protections and provides periodic advice on priorities and strategies for strengthening enforcement and effectiveness of renter protections.
- The Seattle Youth Commission (SYC) is comprised of 15 appointed teens and their purpose is to advise on city policies and discuss issues youth in Seattle are facing.

In an effort to make their engagement strategies more inclusive the Department of Neighborhoods has Community Engagement Coordinators who:

- Connect community members and groups that share common interests or concerns

²⁶ [Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#)

- Help neighborhood groups involve and engage all community members through inclusive outreach
- Facilitate equitable discussions on the community to help neighbors problem-solve issues or brainstorm opportunities
- Share resources that the City or local organizations have to offer – from funding opportunities to programs that support the community's needs or interests
- Help residents work with city departments to get information they need
- Connect specific communities to the Mayor's Office and city departments to share insights and communicate concerns.

In-lieu of funding individual council districts with grants they can then dole out to organizations and pet projects; Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods begun a participatory budgeting program that provides \$2m to go towards a small-scale park or street improvements.²⁷ However, the city still offers the Neighborhood Park and Street Fund and the Neighborhood Matching Fund for local community projects that improve public safety and beautify the neighborhood.

Washington, DC

Washington DC's neighborhood engagement structure is very different from others in that it has an Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC). The ANC is a neighborhood body comprised of locally elected representatives. Representatives serve two-year terms without pay and are elected at DC Elections in November in even-numbered years.²⁸

²⁷ [Seattle Department of Neighborhoods - Your Voice, Your Choice](#)

²⁸ [DC - ANC](#)

ANC's are subdivided into smaller areas (Single Member District) that contain 2,000 people; however, ANCs can have different numbers of SMDs. The purpose of ANCs is to serve as the neighborhood's official voice in advising the government on things that affect their neighborhoods.²⁹ District officials are not required to take ANCs' opinions into consideration, but they are encouraged to take ANCs' opinions into consideration when making municipal decisions.

The District provides funds to ANCs out of the general revenues of the District, and funding is allocated based on population.³⁰ Funds may be used by ANCs to "employ staff, and to conduct programs for the welfare of the people."³¹ There are currently 40 ANCs in the District of Columbia.

Questions to Explore and Considerations

- The importance of civic engagement and civil society to a productive democracy.
- Creating the opportunity for individual residents of Denver to sign up for a list of notifications to receive from the City regarding zoning and licensing.
- Non-geographic based community outreach efforts
- Connecting agency outreach efforts with neighborhoods because these efforts live in several different departments: CPD, Office of Neighborhood Engagement, City Council Offices, Excise and License, Denver Economic Development & Opportunity.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ [D.C.M.R. §1-207.38\(e\)](#)

³¹ *Id.* at 30

- Auditing registered neighborhood organizations to ensure they are abiding by the law.
 - Increasing access to information and the City for renters and non-real property owners in Denver
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