

# B. BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

## INTRODUCTION

The City of Rochester benefits from having a wide variety of organized neighborhood and community groups. There are many opportunities for residents and business owners to engage and participate civically, whether it's by participating in a neighborhood association, commenting on a proposed development project, working to beautify their street, providing input to the City budget, or looking out for their neighbors.

Key to achieving full civic engagement, however, is that all community members – regardless of age, gender, ability, language, culture, tenure, income, etc. – have access to information and can share their voice to inform community and government activities and decision making. Robust and inclusive civic engagement is a driving force that will shape Rochester into a great city to live, work, play, and visit.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Everyone, regardless of age, gender, ability, language, culture, or housing situation should have access to participating in achieving the Goals of *Rochester 2034*.
- Public participation is essential to informed decision making.
- Collaboration among government, residents, businesses, neighborhood groups, and community development partners make it possible to pool knowledge, balance interests, reduce conflict, and sustain engagement.
- Neighborhood and community organizations are critical partners to implement *Rochester 2034*.
- Many neighborhood groups could benefit from additional support, resources, and/or technical assistance to better engage and represent the people and areas they serve.

## A GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD LEADER

- **Keeps the organization open and flexible** enough to bring in new members and ideas.
- **Encourages members to participate** in the association and committee planning process.
- **Defines and discusses the goals and objectives** of the association with the membership.
- **Includes all neighbors** in an organization, regardless of background, beliefs, or living situation.
- **Shares the power** and prepares other association members to assume leadership responsibilities.
- **Gives recognition to members** and committees who have contributed to the advancement of the neighborhood association.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

**“The importance of community-building cannot be overstated.”**



## B. BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY (CONTINUED)

### NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

There are over 50 neighborhood associations in the city and even more neighborhood groups if block clubs, business associations, and topic-based community groups are included. Rochester has a legacy of community involvement in decision making and neighborhood improvement. These neighborhood groups facilitate Rochesterians coming together to influence change and build community. By building and maintaining their capabilities, while creating partnerships with city government and other community organizations, they ensure their effectiveness to influence change and prioritize the people who live and work in the city.

Staff from the *Rochester 2034* project team met with each of the neighborhood associations in the city over the course of the Plan's development. **The following general observations were made with regards to the functionality and effectiveness of these groups:**

- 1** No matter the size of the group or neighborhood, **residents across the city expressed great enthusiasm and passion for where they lived.** Numerous residents have been involved in community organizing for most of their adult life and were eager to talk about what they loved about the city and their neighborhood.
- 2** **Almost all neighborhood associations are volunteer-led.** There is a substantial range in their resources, capacity, geographic coverage, and participation (in terms of size and diversity).
- 3** Many groups find it **difficult to achieve a consistent, representative turnout** from neighborhood residents.
- 4** The collection of neighborhood associations and their geographic reach results in **some overlapping areas and major gaps in coverage.**
- 5** Residents were enthusiastic about City engagement and **desire more consistent opportunities for interface with City staff.** Numerous times, the approach of neighborhood-based outreach versus quadrant-based outreach was noted as highly desirable for engagement with City staff.
- 6** Groups often **struggled to attract involvement from younger generations, tenants, and traditionally underrepresented populations.**
- 7** Some groups found that a **commitment to eating together each month, potluck style, was great for relationship building** prior to getting into meeting agendas. They noted that it contributes to a healthier, more respectful, and effective dialogue around challenging issues.
- 8** A few groups had agendas focused exclusively on development and/or public safety issues, which appeals to some residents but not all. During *Rochester 2034* community engagement meetings, **several young professionals expressed a desire to be more involved in their neighborhood, but did not necessarily feel welcome in their attempts to get involved.** These young residents are often **looking for a greater focus on community-building and the positive benefits of urban living.**

## NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY CONTINUED

In addition, the following capacity-building observations were made over the course of dozens of meetings with neighborhood groups:

- 1** Neighborhood groups could improve community outreach capabilities if they received a small amount of financial assistance to help with the cost of copying, postage, welcome packets, and food for meetings.
- 2** Groups need affordable public spaces for community-building events.
- 3** City Hall and various community partners could provide technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of neighborhood groups to serve the community. This assistance could be provided in the form of written documents, websites, and workshops on topics such as how to prepare a neighborhood plan, how to navigate bureaucratic processes, or understanding the role of the Zoning Board of Appeals.



## B. BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY (CONTINUED)

### NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITY-BUILDING GRANTS

The [Rochester Area Community Foundation](#) offers “Special Regional Improvement Grants” – also known as **NeighborGood Grants** – which are awarded to resident-controlled, neighborhood-based organizations in the city. Eligibility rotates each year from west-side organizations to east-side organizations so a given neighborhood group is eligible to apply every other year. Grants are awarded for up to \$2,500 for Neighborhood Associations, \$750 for Block Clubs, and \$2,000 for other neighborhood organizations like landlord-tenant groups or business associations.

[Love Your Block](#) is a national funding source for cities to provide small grants that support volunteer-led neighborhood improvement projects like turning vacant lots into community gardens, removing graffiti, or helping elderly neighbors with simple home repairs that allow them to keep their homes. Resident volunteers use this grant to help their neighborhoods and their cities be better places to live.

### COLLABORATION AND INCLUSION

Collaborative efforts between City government, residents, local businesses, and other community development stakeholders have historically led to the best outcomes. When community or business groups come together with the City and other community development partners to work on revitalizing a target area, reviewing a proposed project, or creating new policies or programs, it is possible to:

- **Pool knowledge.** Each participant in a collaborative process brings unique knowledge, perspectives, and experiences to the table. Engaging upfront to listen and learn from one another sets the table for more creative visioning and problem solving.
- **Balance interests.** Combining residents’ understanding of specific conditions in a neighborhood with the City’s understanding of the broader city context and relevant data can help improve decision making and help residents and business owners understand and participate in the process of balancing sometimes competing interests.
- **Reduce conflict.** Building relationships and creating channels for open communication among residents, business owners, City staff, and other community development partners puts everyone on the same team, and encourages respect among everyone involved.
- **Sustain engagement.** Engaged residents, business owners, developers, and other community development actors bring tremendous energy and commitment to the city. We will only achieve the vision and Goals for *Rochester 2034* if we work together, so learning to collaborate and sustain that level of engagement over time is critical to our community’s future.

**Critical to a reliable partnership is the assurance that organizations acting on behalf of a group are being inclusive. City Hall must have confidence in community groups that when they are speaking on behalf of a group or neighborhood, they have made every attempt to ensure their representation is inclusive and that they are consistently and actively reaching out and welcoming all residents, business owners, and other stakeholders.**

## COLLABORATION AND INCLUSION CONTINUED

Also critical to reliable partnerships among city staff, stakeholder groups, and community members is easy and effective access to City government information, offices, and staff. To that end:



**[CityOfRochester.gov](http://CityOfRochester.gov)**. The City's website is a hub for all public information including City and community events and meetings, development project updates, property information and interactive maps, snow plow resources, online bill pay, and the latest press releases.



**City Hall**. City Hall offices are open to the public 40 hours a week and the building is usually open for public meetings, hearings, and events "after hours" each week.



**Community Meetings**. City leadership and staff frequently attend or convene meetings and work one-on-one with community members, both at City Hall as well as in community settings and outside business hours inside and outside of regular business hours.



**Communication**. The City uses communication tools, such as websites, social media, press releases, the 311 Call Center, newsletters, and community facilities (Libraries, Rec Centers, and Neighborhood Service Centers) to help share information with the public.

## B. BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY (CONTINUED)

### COLLABORATION AND INCLUSION CONTINUED

One of the most significant challenges to open communication and inclusive engagement is that the city and its neighborhoods are always changing. One example that impacts Rochester, and several neighborhoods in particular, is our growing population of immigrants, refugees, and non-English speaking residents. According to 2016 ACS estimates, nearly 9% of city residents (more than 18,000 people) were born outside the U.S. and nearly 20% of city residents (more than 34,000 people) do not speak English at home.

The Catholic Family Center has helped to settle more than 15,000 refugees from a wide range of cultures, ethnicities, and languages here, and nearly 3,400 refugees from Puerto Rico moved to Rochester after Hurricane Maria in 2017 and 2018. Our community and neighborhoods benefit from the rich cultural diversity that these new residents bring, but these population changes also create challenges to effective communication and engagement, which the City and community partners should work to address.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

“There needs to be more effort to incorporate people of diverse backgrounds to work together in neighborhoods.”

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

“A community is only as strong as the individuals who make it up. When those individuals are engaged in partnering together for community building, everyone wins.”



## CITY BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Public participation in government is a keystone of democracies and is made possible through local board and commission actions and membership. Residents serving on a public board or commission help to ensure that decision making is based upon the public interest and residents' points of view. The hard work and dedication of people who serve on more than a dozen boards in the City of Rochester contribute to the successful operation and development of our city. These bodies have a positive and direct effect on the quality of life and economic vitality of Rochester. Boards include, but are not limited to:

- City Planning Commission
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Rochester Preservation Board
- Rochester Environmental Commission
- Board of Assessment Review
- Board of Ethics
- Board of Stationary Engineers
- Electrical Examining Board
- Rochester Economic Development Corporation

Becoming a board member often requires Mayoral and/or City Council approval and members are bound by a Code of Ethics. These are important appointments and any city resident is usually eligible to apply, unless a particular expertise is required. More information on Rochester's Boards and Commissions, can be found [here](#).

Becoming a member is only one way to get involved with boards and commissions. Attending meetings to hear about projects, get to know review processes, and/or to provide input is also an effective way to be engaged and participate in local government decision making.

## RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE CITY BUDGET PROCESS

Fundamental to government operations is the operating budget and capital improvement program. Robust community engagement in the budgetary processes is critical to be effective in impacting priorities and actions in local government. The City of Rochester is committed to resident involvement in the process of developing the City budget. During the budget process, community input is typically solicited through facilitated meetings at City Hall, telephone town hall meetings, and online surveying.

During the *Rochester 2034* public input process, the concept of Participatory Budgeting was mentioned numerous times by the community. Participatory Budgeting is a democratic process used to determine how funds are spent in a community. The Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI) is currently conducting a pilot of Participatory Budgeting in Rochester and Monroe County, with \$175,000 allocated for participants to decide how to spend on projects in their community.



# B. BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY [BCC]

## ACTION PLAN

GOAL	STRATEGIES	PARTNERS
<p><b>BCC-1</b> Build the capacity of community organizations and associations.</p>	<p>BCC-1a Establish a funding program, through the City budget, grants, or by seeking philanthropic donations, to provide small financial contributions to neighborhood and business associations for capacity-building activities. This can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Neighborhood events</li> <li>– Printing and distribution of materials</li> <li>– Signage</li> <li>– Website design</li> <li>– Communication tools</li> </ul>	<p><b>City,</b> Neighborhood Groups, Community Groups/Funders</p>
	<p>BCC-1b Create a Neighborhood Toolkit, inclusive of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How to create a community website</li> <li>– Effective and inclusive neighborhood outreach</li> <li>– How to plan and facilitate an effective meeting</li> <li>– Preparing “Welcome to the Neighborhood” packets to recruit new members</li> <li>– How to organize a community garden</li> <li>– Zoning 101</li> <li>– How to effectively engage in land use and development decisions</li> <li>– How to navigate the City Council legislative process</li> <li>– How to access and use City open data</li> <li>– Successful grant writing and fundraising</li> <li>– Tips for running a successful, inclusive neighborhood association</li> <li>– How to prepare a neighborhood plan</li> </ul>	<p><b>City,</b> Neighborhood Groups</p>

**Notes:**

1. Partners listed in bold are recommended to lead the implementation of that strategy.
2. For a list of partner acronyms see [Appendix A](#).

GOAL	STRATEGIES	PARTNERS
<b>BCC-1</b> Build the capacity of community organizations and associations.	BCC-1c Make a concerted effort to expand neighborhood association membership to include all age groups, people from diverse racial and socio-economic backgrounds, people with disabilities, tenants, and business owners.	<b>Neighborhood Groups</b>
	BCC-1d Pursue a Love Your Block Grant or similar grant, which would give the City funds to provide small grants to support volunteer-led community projects in neighborhoods.	<b>City</b> , Community Groups/Funders, Neighborhood Groups
	BCC-1e Support and participate in the creation of a deaf community master plan by deaf Rochesterians.	<b>Deaf Community</b> , City
<b>BCC-2</b> Continuously improve City Hall public outreach and communication of City services.	BCC-2a Continue to promote City services through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Media and social media outreach</li><li>– Web maps and apps</li><li>– City staff attendance at community meetings</li><li>– Tabling at special events</li></ul>	<b>City</b>
	BCC-2b Continue to host meetings with neighborhood and business groups to encourage collaboration between the City and the community.	<b>City</b> , Neighborhood Groups, Business Community
	BCC-2c Have City staff more regularly attend community meetings to provide direct interface with constituents.	<b>City</b>
	BCC-2d Develop a “Public Engagement Protocol” for City departments to clearly outline goals, objectives, approaches, and tools for all City staff to reference when interacting with constituents. Ideas for meeting locations, times, formats, style, and inclusive outreach should be included in the protocol discussion and product.	<b>City</b>

# B. BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY [BCC]

## ACTION PLAN

GOAL	STRATEGIES	PARTNERS
<p><b>BCC-3</b>  <b>Improve City Hall systems to make them more inclusive and accessible.</b></p>	<p>BCC-3a Implement the City of Rochester Language Access Plan, including providing greater provisions for non-English speakers and blind/hearing impaired individuals.</p>	<p><b>City</b></p>
	<p>BCC-3b Develop protocol for when to make language interpreters available at City meetings and events, and as well as when City publications or surveys should be translated.</p>	<p><b>City</b></p>
	<p>BCC-3c Improve the accessibility of City communications, including developing a protocol for when webpages and online documents need to be 508 compliant, and implementing training for City web coordinators on how to improve the accessibility of pages they manage.</p>	<p><b>City</b></p>
	<p>BCC-3d Explore options for improving access to 311 for non-English speaking residents.</p>	<p><b>City</b></p>
	<p>BCC-3e Leverage City Hall relationships and permitting to support improved accessibility provisions at special events, festivals, and other community gatherings throughout the city. This could include offering training for event organizers in ways to make events more accessible.</p>	<p>City, Center for Disability Rights, Event Sponsors</p>
	<p>BCC-3f Consider creating a new City position for an Immigrant/Refugee liaison to help better engage immigrant/refugee communities in the city, gather their input, and connect them with services, resources, and opportunities.</p>	<p><b>City</b></p>

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GOAL	STRATEGIES	PARTNERS
<b>BCC-3</b> <b>Improve City Hall systems to make them more inclusive and accessible.</b>	BCC-3g Apply for the Gateways for Growth Challenge grant to secure funds for the development of municipal initiatives that support immigrants.	<b>City</b>
	BCC-3h Join over 100 cities in becoming a Welcoming America member, to better develop partnerships and resources that can help to support the immigrant and refugee communities.	<b>City</b>
<b>BCC-4</b> <b>Increase resident engagement in City decision-making processes.</b>	BCC-4a Attend board and commission meetings to learn about or to provide input into local government decision making.	<b>Residents</b>
	BCC-4b Actively engage and invite city residents to participate in boards and commissions. Create strategies for engaging traditionally underrepresented populations and young people that would bring an important perspective to decision making.	<b>City</b>
	BCC-4c Get involved in City government by becoming board and commission members.	<b>Residents</b>
	BCC-4d Continue to involve residents in the budget process through community meetings and other means that encourage input from all residents.	<b>City, Residents</b>
	BCC-4e Work with the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative as they pilot a Participatory Budgeting demonstration project to see what can be learned from their results, as well as from past City-led examples of this model.	<b>City, Residents, RMAPI</b>

# B. BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY [BCC]

## ACTION PLAN

GOAL	STRATEGIES	PARTNERS
<p><b>BCC-5</b> Increase youth engagement and empowerment.</p>	<p>BCC-5a Prepare a citywide youth master plan to assist the community in prioritizing the needs of children, establishing goals, aligning resources, and maximizing youth potential and outcomes.</p>	<p><b>The Children's Agenda,</b> Center for Teen Empowerment, City, RCSD, Monroe County, Community Groups/Partners,</p>
	<p>BCC-5b Engage youth in community organizations, such as Neighborhood Associations.</p>	<p>Neighborhood Groups, Community Groups/Funders, City, The Children's Agenda, Center for Teen Empowerment</p>
	<p>BCC-5c Continue ongoing professional development for all City employees that engage with youth and encourage other groups who work with children to be trained in: Restorative Practices, De-escalation Techniques, and Trauma-informed approaches.</p>	<p><b>City,</b> Community Groups/Funders</p>