

Love Your Block 2026–2028 Program Guidelines & FAQ

Program Guidelines

About Love Your Block 2026–2028

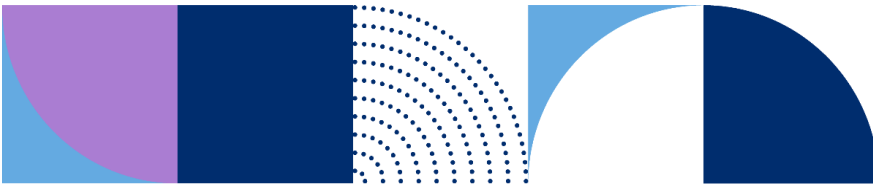
The Love Your Block Program includes a two-year \$270,000 grant for program implementation and staffing, focused on resident engagement, impact volunteering, and project management. An essential component of Love Your Block is the mini-grant competition, which serves as both a funding mechanism and an engagement tool by awarding \$1,500–\$5,000 in seed funding to residents and community partners to lead volunteer-driven neighborhood projects that reflect local priorities, build community pride, and strengthen neighborhood spaces and relationships.

The benefits of Love Your Block go far beyond physical improvements. According to the Urban Institute’s [Study of Love Your Block](#), strong social networks formed through meaningful engagement between city hall and residents can drive broad, long-lasting changes in municipal practices and policies, while also fostering improvements at the neighborhood level. Love Your Block activates and builds social networks between residents, their neighbors, and city hall. The relationships between residents and city hall strengthened through Love Your Block can drive collective efficacy that is often bidirectional. City officials can leverage neighborhood social capital to better implement mayoral goals and align them with community priorities. Residents can leverage greater responsiveness from officials to address their needs and give input into city programs. Love Your Block is a proven starting point for cities to engage their residents more meaningfully and improve their communities in holistic, sustainable ways.

Award Benefits

Over the two years of the grant term, selected cities will receive:

- \$70,000 in funding for program implementation and volunteer-led mini-grant projects.
- \$200,000 in funding to support up to two Love Your Block Fellows.
- Training, coaching, and programmatic support from the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University.
- Peer-to-peer learning with current and former Love Your Block grantee cities.
- Exclusive access to national experts, peer practitioners, and hands-on, in-person technical support at the Love Your Block annual convening.
- Recognition as a Love Your Block grantee city in the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University collateral, including on social media, the Center website, and other media.



Eligibility

This opportunity is an open invitation to all U.S. cities that meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Population of at least 50,000 residents
- Mayoral tenure through at least October 2028
- Mayoral pledge committing to partner with local communities for neighborhood improvement
- Continuous support and engagement from mayor and city leaders
- Designation of two city staff as program co-leads, who guide and enable implementation of the program, including:
 - Recruitment and management of up to two Love Your Block Fellow(s) for two-year fellowship(s)
 - Leadership, development, and management of Love Your Block program tailored to the city
 - Completion of all programmatic and grant administration and compliance

Cities that participated in the 2021-2023 or 2024-2026 cohorts of the Love Your Block programs are not eligible to apply.

Selection Criteria

Applications will be judged on criteria including, but not limited to:

- Definition of the challenge to be addressed and how and why it is a priority for the mayor and the city.
- How the city will tackle the challenge through Love Your Block. Initiatives that align with broader city strategies or address problems in innovative ways, supported by impacted residents and other stakeholders preferred.
- The specific neighborhoods that will be the focus of the initiative. Cities must identify a neighborhood in need. This can include historically disinvested neighborhoods. Provide a clear justification for its selection, demonstrating an understanding of the historical, social, and economic conditions shaping local needs. There must also be a demonstrated involvement of neighborhood-specific stakeholders in the proposed initiative or a commitment to doing so during the grant period.
- The resources the city will contribute to the initiative. Cities must outline how they will support the effort including coordinating resident volunteers, collaborating with specific city departments, and specifying the services, staff time, and operational capacity, and any optional financial investment the city will contribute to carry out the proposed work.



Application Dates

Informational Webinar Session 1	April 20, 2026 1 to 2 p.m. ET Register here
Informational Webinar Session 2	May 15, 2026 1 to 2 p.m. ET Register here
Application Deadline	June 15, 2026 11:59 p.m. ET

Program Dates for Selected Cities

Award Notification and Announcement	August 2026
Contracting Period Between Johns Hopkins University and Selected Cities	August to December 2026
Love Your Block Cohort Launch	January 1, 2027
Love Your Block Academy for City Leaders On-Site at Johns Hopkins University	January 2027

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between a public problem, a city priority, and a proposed project?

In the Love Your Block application, these three concepts should be clearly connected but serve distinct purposes. Together, they help tell a complete and compelling story about what challenge your city is addressing, why it matters, and how Love Your Block will support resident-driven solutions.

A **public problem** describes the specific challenge facing a neighborhood or community, including its scale and who it affects. For example, in Durham, North Carolina, data showed that trash and debris removal accounted for nearly 70% of neighborhood service cases in 2023, particularly in areas with vacant or underused spaces. This identified a clear public problem affecting neighborhood safety, environmental health, and quality of life for residents.



A **city priority** explains why this public problem matters to your city right now. This section should connect the problem to the mayor's priorities and broader city goals, describe why it has been elevated for action, and summarize any previous or ongoing efforts to address it in the focus neighborhood or elsewhere. In Durham, reducing litter and improving conditions in underused spaces aligned with citywide goals around neighborhood improvement, environmental stewardship, and community connection.

A **proposed project** describes how your city plans to address the public problem through Love Your Block. This includes the specific interventions you will implement. In Durham, proposed projects included clearing litter and invasive species along neighborhood waterways, transforming city-owned land into natural gathering spaces, and improving community gardens and outdoor seating areas.

Together, these responses should tell a coherent story: what problem exists, why it is it a priority for city leadership and residents, and how Love Your Block will support residents and the city in working together to address it. View additional examples of past Love Your Block projects [here](#).

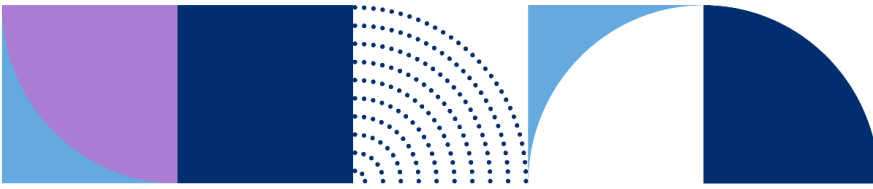
What is the Love Your Block program's approach to impact volunteering and volunteer engagement?

Love Your Block engages community members as co-designers of the initiative, as mini-grant recipients whose ideas are funded through a mini-grant competition, and as co-implementers who work together to carry out small-scale revitalization projects.

Impact volunteering is a strategy that engages resident volunteers to identify and solve public problems in partnership with local government. It is a participatory process in which residents and city officials develop a shared vision, set short- and long-term goals for their community, and work together to achieve them. As partners, they communicate throughout the process and reflect on their work together. The city collaborates with community members to evaluate the initiatives they have implemented and their impact, and to hold themselves accountable for results.

How do mini-grants work?

A key component of the Love Your Block program is the mini-grant competition – small grants ranging from \$1,500 to \$5,000 awarded by the city to a resident or community partner, such as a neighborhood association. Cities participating in the Love Your Block grant commit to open at least two mini-grant opportunities over the course of the two-year grant. To do that, cities will design a process to solicit mini-grant proposals from residents, neighborhood groups, and community partners, inform relevant communities about the opportunity and encourage them to apply, and select the winners.



Mini-grants are intended to support volunteer-driven neighborhood improvement projects that can be implemented through Love Your Block’s impact volunteering model, with grant funds primarily covering project supplies and other implementation costs. Projects are completed by resident volunteers recruited and managed by the Love Your Block city team in collaboration with funded organizations and community groups. Projects requiring more than \$500 in compensated skilled or expert labor, or that cannot be safely or reasonably implemented by volunteers, should not be funded.

The mini-grant competition is a great way for the city to build awareness and enthusiasm for the initiative and enables the city to co-create solutions with residents by providing seed funding and support for the most promising proposals. The competition also empowers residents to take ownership of their neighborhoods and strengthens neighborhood groups’ capacity to design and implement improvement projects.

What is included in the grant award?

Selected cities will receive \$70,000 in funding to support volunteer-led mini-grant projects and program implementation, including modest costs associated with advertising the program, renting tools, and purchasing project supplies. Selected cities will also receive \$200,000 in funding to support up to two local Love Your Block Fellows from the community, who will work under the direction of designated city co-leads to focus on development and implementation of a robust community engagement strategy and project management of program activities.

What is the duration of the grant?

The grant term is two years, with the second year of funding being contingent on the successful completion of the first year’s activities and milestones. Participating cities must confirm mayoral tenure through at least October 2028.

What support can I expect from the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University if my city is selected for Love Your Block?

Participating cities will receive technical assistance, training, coaching, and program support from the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University, including site visits and cohort-wide annual convenings. The program’s technical assistance program helps participating cities develop and implement the Love Your Block program and strengthen their civic engagement approaches through best practices tailored to each city’s specific priorities and needs. Selected cities receive additional benefits and support through active participation in the Love Your Block community of practice with other Love Your Block cities.



This program requirement includes participating in Love Your Block virtual and in-person events, including training, workshops, and cohort-wide convenings, where team members can connect with other cities, share best practices and lessons learned, and learn from peers.

What are the expectations of the mayor?

Mayors play a critical role in the success of Love Your Block. Mayoral commitment signals the city's dedication to partnering with residents to strengthen neighborhoods and ensures the initiative has the visibility, authority, and support needed to succeed. Mayors and city managers are expected to advocate for the team and its work with key stakeholders, elevate Love Your Block in public moments, and promote the initiative to reinforce its importance and legitimacy across the city. They should remain engaged and accessible to the team as needed, encourage ambitious approaches and thoughtful risk-taking, and help connect Love Your Block initiatives to broader mayoral priorities. As part of the application, cities must submit a Mayoral Pledge committing to partner with local communities for neighborhood improvement. This pledge reflects the city's commitment to sustained engagement, public support, and collaboration with residents to co-create solutions that improve neighborhood conditions and strengthen trust between community members and city hall.

What are the expectations for a Love Your Block City Lead?

Love Your Block city leads commit to a two-year role overseeing the program on behalf of the city. City leads make strategic decisions, drive internal and external partnerships, align with the mayor and city leaders, and supervise and support the Love Your Block Fellow(s), providing guidance and approvals throughout the grant term. City leads also serve as the primary point of contact with the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University. They are expected to participate in technical assistance (e.g., one-on-one check-ins, webinars, orientations, training sessions, convenings, and site visits) and communicate regularly with the Center's Civic Engagement team.

City lead responsibilities include guiding the development of community outreach and communications plans; supporting the design and rollout of the mini-grant application, timeline, and grantee orientations/trainings; ensuring all grant and technical assistance deliverables are completed on time; coordinating with the Mayor's Office and city departments; managing the program budget and financial decisions; planning for post-grant sustainability; and making key decisions related to program planning, implementation, delivery, and evaluation to ensure goals and targets are met.

What are the expectations for a Love Your Block Fellow?

The Love Your Block Fellow(s) serves in a two-year, grant-funded role and should have strong ties to the community being served (e.g., a current resident or a longtime former resident with active ties to the neighborhood), with a track record of building local relationships that can be leveraged



throughout the life of the program. Working under the direction of designated city leads, the Fellow is responsible for developing and implementing a robust community engagement strategy, recruiting and managing volunteers for project implementation, and providing project management support for program activities. Love Your Block Fellows' priorities are day-to-day program planning and management, assisting with program outreach strategies, partnership development, data collection, and activities that ensure impact in inclusive, equitable, and sustainable ways.

What is a key partner?

A key partner is an organization, institution, or entity that will play an active and meaningful role in helping your city plan, implement, or sustain the Love Your Block initiative. Key partners typically contribute expertise, capacity, resources, or community trust that strengthens the city's ability to engage residents and successfully implement volunteer-driven projects. Examples of key partners may include community-based organizations, neighborhood associations, anchor institutions, nonprofits, philanthropy partners, or relevant city departments/agencies.

Key partners should be directly connected to the proposed work, for example, supporting resident outreach, helping manage volunteers, providing tools or materials, hosting or coordinating projects, or aligning Love Your Block with broader neighborhood or city initiatives.

What should letters of support include?

Letters of support should come from key partners and clearly describe:

- The organization's role and relationship to the proposed Love Your Block initiative
- How the partner will support program planning, resident engagement, or project implementation
- Why the partner believes the initiative is important for the focus neighborhood(s)
- The partner's commitment to collaboration with the city and community throughout the grant term

Strong letters of support demonstrate active partnership, shared ownership, and alignment with the goals of Love Your Block, rather than general expressions of endorsement.

What types of metrics will cities be expected to collect and report?

As part of the Love Your Block program, participating cities will be required to track and report core program metrics on a monthly basis using tools provided by the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation. These metrics are designed to support consistent reporting across cities, strengthen accountability, and help cities understand and communicate the impact of their work.



Metrics generally fall into the following categories:

Resident and volunteer engagement, including the number of residents engaged, volunteer hours contributed, participation in deliberation or outreach activities, and diversity of participation within the focus neighborhood(s).

Mini-grant activity and implementation, including the number of mini-grants awarded, types of projects funded, timelines for project completion, and use of grant funds for eligible purposes such as supplies and materials.

Project outputs, such as the number of projects completed, volunteer events held, physical improvements made (e.g., lots activated, cleanups completed, home repairs supported), and other tangible outcomes aligned with the proposed work.

Partnership and capacity-building indicators, including collaboration with city departments and community partners, resident leadership development, and the city's role in supporting volunteer-driven implementation.

Cities will receive clear guidance, definitions, templates, and reporting tools to support monthly data collection and submission. Applicants are not expected to have all systems in place prior to selection, but should be prepared to dedicate staff capacity to regular tracking and reporting and to use metrics as a learning and management tool throughout the grant period.

How can grant funds be used?

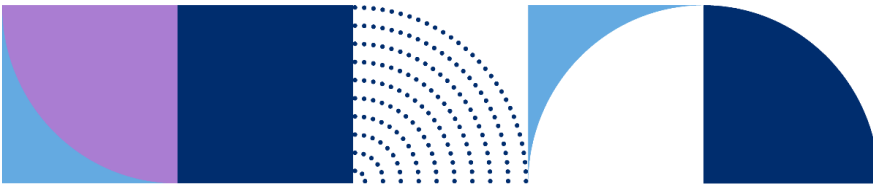
Awarded cities will be expected to use funds in accordance with the intentions of the Love Your Block program and provide direct support for impact volunteering initiatives.

Fellowship grant funds are restricted to the direct compensation of the identified Love Your Block Fellow(s).

Cities are expected to fund mini-grant projects that can be implemented through the program's impact volunteering model, with grant funds primarily for project supplies, and implementation completed by resident volunteers recruited and managed by the Love Your Block city team. Projects that require the compensation of skilled or expert labor in excess of \$500 and/or that cannot be safely or reasonably implemented by volunteers should not be funded by the grant.

Acceptable use of project implementation grant funds includes, but is not limited to, costs associated with engaging volunteers in:

- Activating vacant lots or empty storefronts/buildings



- Neighborhood clean-ups
- Transforming vacant lots into vibrant community spaces
- Educational outreach and skills-based support for individuals and community groups
- Basic code compliance repairs for homes

The Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University grant funds may not support:

- Services covered by existing city infrastructure, such as standard trash collection and routine maintenance of public facilities.
- Rent or utilities
- 501(c)(3) incorporation fees Speaker honorariums
- Improvement projects that primarily benefit private businesses, churches, and/or other religious organizations
- Scholarships or other direct support to individuals or families
- Partisan political organizations, political candidates, fundraisers, or projects. Events such as block parties, conferences, festivals, dinners, sports competitions, art exhibits, and fundraisers (e.g., dinners, walks/runs/relays, golf tournaments, and auctions), unless directly in service to the larger strategic initiative
- Capital campaigns, endowments, or endowed chairs
- Labor fees and compensation for work that are non-essential to project implementation or exceed \$500.

About the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University

The Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University drives innovation in local government by marrying cutting-edge practice with world-class research. Together with public servants and government innovators around the world, the Center is transforming the culture in municipal management, delivering exceptional results for residents, and deepening trust in public service worldwide. The Center integrates successful global approaches to government innovation with an array of programs that serve city governments and work to build innovation capacity among public servants.

Contact

If you still have questions, please contact BCPIcivicengagement@jh.edu.