

Survey for Best Practices, Citizen-Driven Capital Project Implementation Programs

The research process uncovered three types of “Citizen-Driven Capital Project Implementation Programs”: neighborhood grant programs, formal citizen involvement in capital planning, and Citizen-driven Capital Improvement Programs. The proposed process for the Community Advisory Committee Capital Improvement Project Program most closely aligns with the latter.

Neighborhood grant programs

Neighborhood grant programs invite neighborhood associations, community organizations, and other similar groups to develop a small- to medium-scale neighborhood improvement project. Goals of these types of programs tend to focus on community building, often (but not exclusively) in low-income areas of the municipality. Matches are typically required in the form of volunteer time towards the project’s implementation. Most grant programs of this type provide a reimbursement to the applicant organization. Staff support is limited to application review, reimbursement processing, and general program administration. This model is used throughout Virginia (Charlottesville, Roanoke, Arlington, Fairfax) and the country (Austin, Boulder, Charlotte). None of the programs reviewed funded projects in excess of \$50,000, and most have caps of <\$10,000. Projects include community gardens, signage, landscaping, neighborhood clean-up days, and neighborhood events. For more information, see PDF attached.

Formal citizen involvement in capital planning

Formal citizen involvement in capital planning creates a structure for soliciting input on capital projects from citizens. Often, a dedicated citizen committee is created and appointed by the Board to represent a diversity of community interests (Mecklenburg County, Arlington (TX), Chattanooga). Where smaller community committees exist, they are included through a formal survey process (San Diego, Anchorage) that is incorporated into the traditional CIP process. Baltimore County, MD holds a community open house at the start of their CIP process to allow citizens to ask questions and voice support/opposition to projects.

Citizen-driven Capital Improvement Programs

Citizen-driven capital improvement programs allow citizens to pitch projects for capital improvement dollars using a participatory budgeting process. These projects typically are managed by the municipality’s public works departments and have budgets on the order of \$10,000-\$250,000. Projects include capital improvements such as traffic calming, park improvements, bike lanes, street trees, and public art. This method has been used in large cities at the individual ward levels in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Los Angeles, targeted at youth citywide in Boston, and deployed citywide in small cities, including Greensboro, NC, Vallejo, CA, and Guelph (Ontario, CAN).

Each city has tailored the process to best meet local needs, but generally:

- Allocation of funding pool for the program made by local elected officials (\$100,000 - \$1M)
- Program process approved by elected officials
- Citizen Orientation
- Community Brainstorm sessions to develop project lists

- Citizen/Staff develop most popular ideas into proposals with budgets
- Citizens vote to indicate top priority projects
- Elected officials consider top priority projects and appropriate funding