

# ENGAGING **BOSTON** SERVICE PLAN 2017



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## Letter from Mayor Martin J. Walsh

When I became Mayor of Boston three years ago, I pledged that I would listen, I would learn, and I would lead—because we are in this together. And because of our work together, the state of our city is stronger than it has ever been in our history. That’s a bold statement, I know. But when you look at what we’ve achieved together over the past 3 years—it’s hard to deny.

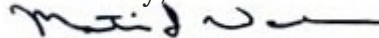
Unemployment is at a record low. High school graduation and college completion rates are at all-time highs. Violent crime and property crime have come down every year, and so have arrests. A record number of homes have been built for low- and middle- income families. We have become a headquarters city in the global innovation economy. Community-friendly development and good job growth are advancing all across our city. We have launched a long-range, citywide planning initiative that encompasses schools, land-use, transportation, capital development, climate change, arts and culture, and also –the resiliency of our fascinatingly diverse population groups.

None of this would have been possible without the input and hard work of so many Bostonians. I am deeply grateful for their commitment to our shared values and the city we love. One of the top priorities of my Administration is to leverage community engagement and volunteerism for visible neighborhood improvement. Accordingly, I’ve created an Office of Civic Engagement that combines the resources and experience of Neighborhood Services liaisons with our state-of-the-art 311 system that can identify neighborhood hot spots for rapid response.

We now present *Engaging Boston*, our Service Plan to promote impact volunteering through two initiatives that utilize technology and partnerships. *Serve Boston* and *Love Your Block* will connect residents to government to enhance public spaces, build social capital, and boost levels of civic engagement. Corporate, educational and community partners will contribute resources that sustain the initiatives.

*Love Your Block* has been warmly hailed as a game-changing initiative in the three neighborhoods we originally targeted, and has expanded by popular demand based on results. We look forward to gathering all our partners in 2018 to recognize the efforts of AmeriCorps VISTAs and citywide volunteers who go the extra mile to make Boston better. When we come together as a city and trust in our shared values, there’s nothing we can’t achieve. Thank you for your commitment.

Sincerely,



Martin J. Walsh

Mayor of Boston

## Executive Summary

*Engaging Boston* is a service plan for Boston reflecting Mayor Walsh's vision for volunteerism and service across the city. By encouraging residents to come together to serve their neighborhoods, they will create lasting change in the City of Boston. To accomplish specific goals of *Engaging Boston*, the Office of Civic Engagement will implement two initiatives and corresponding strategies, creating a sense of ownership within communities.

**To ensure success, we will:**

Implement two initiatives, *Serve Boston* and *Love Your Block*, impact volunteer models that increase engagement and ensure that existing volunteer efforts meet targeted needs.

*Serve Boston* will take a two-pronged approach to achieve its goal of making it easier for residents to get involved in their communities. The first strategy is the *Patriots for Volunteering Portal*, a website connecting volunteer opportunities to interested individuals, organizations, and corporations. The other strategy is a *Civic Engagement Ceremony*, designed to keep volunteers involved and elevate engagement within the city. Neighborhoods will engage in a spirit of competition for various volunteer awards, and the City will recognize the efforts of volunteers who go above and beyond to make Boston better.

*Love Your Block* will enhance and unify existing volunteer strategies to encourage residents to take ownership of their neighborhoods. As a resource devoted to neighborhood beautification and cleanups, it will combine mini-grants, year-round cleanups (formerly *Boston Shines*), and community tool sheds. These programs will be expanded and organized as resources for Boston residents with the help of BOS:311 HotSpot data to locate and prioritize the communities with the most need.

**Addressing the Mayor's priority to promote volunteering, the City of Boston will:**

- Align, promote, and expand current City and nonprofit volunteer efforts;
- Track impact volunteer work in the City of Boston with appropriate metrics; and
- Cultivate deeper relationships with neighborhoods as a civic engagement strategy.



## Cities of Service

Cities of Service is a national nonprofit organization that helps mayors and city leaders tap the knowledge, creativity, and service of citizens to solve public problems and create vibrant cities. We work with cities to build city-led, citizen-powered initiatives that target specific needs, achieve long-term and measurable outcomes, improve the quality of life for residents, and build stronger cities.

Started in 2009 by New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, the Cities of Service coalition is now comprised of over 225 cities in the US and UK, representing nearly 55 million people in 45 states, and more than 10 million people in the UK. Visit us at [citiesofservice.org](http://citiesofservice.org) or follow us on Twitter [@citiesofservice](https://twitter.com/citiesofservice).

Coalition cities around the world tackle pressing local issues from neighborhood revitalization to supporting youth and education. Cities of Service has joined with the City of Boston to change the paradigm of how government and its citizens work together to bring tangible change, build a community of trust, and create a stronger and more vibrant city.



## Service Plan at a Glance

Building on an already strong foundation of impact volunteering across the city, Boston’s priority is to increase engagement and ensure that existing volunteer efforts meet targeted needs, creating a sense of pride and ownership throughout the city. The Love Your Block program began in 2015 through a grant from Cities of Service. Through its development, the Office of Civic Engagement created *Engaging Boston* to further address the volunteer needs of the community. The table below reflects the structure and nature of these two initiatives:

Priority	Specific Goal	Initiative	Description
Increase engagement and ensure that existing volunteer efforts meet targeted needs	Make it easier for residents to get involved	<i>Serve Boston</i>	<p><i>Serve Boston</i> will unify volunteer opportunities and elevate the level of involvement in Boston through two strategies:</p> <p>The <i>Patriots for Volunteering Portal</i> will connect people with available volunteer opportunities through an online platform.</p> <p>The <i>Civic Engagement Ceremony</i> will present awards that are designed to highlight the benefits of volunteering while keeping everyone involved.</p>
	Residents take ownership of their neighborhoods	<i>Love Your Block</i>	<p><i>Love Your Block</i> is a resource devoted to neighborhood beautification. Mini-grants, tool sheds, and year-round cleanups will be available to citizens who want to clean up their community. 311 will generate HotSpot data to locate and prioritize areas with the most need.</p>

# Initiative: Serve Boston

## Goal

The goal of *Serve Boston* is to streamline and support volunteering in Boston. The Mayor’s Office of Civic Engagement will institutionalize volunteer opportunities within city departments, nonprofits, and corporate sponsors. It will then acknowledge the wonderful support from residents through an annual awards ceremony.

## Background

To centralize Boston’s volunteers, the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) investigated past trends of volunteering, including:

### Why

Citizens are Volunteering

&

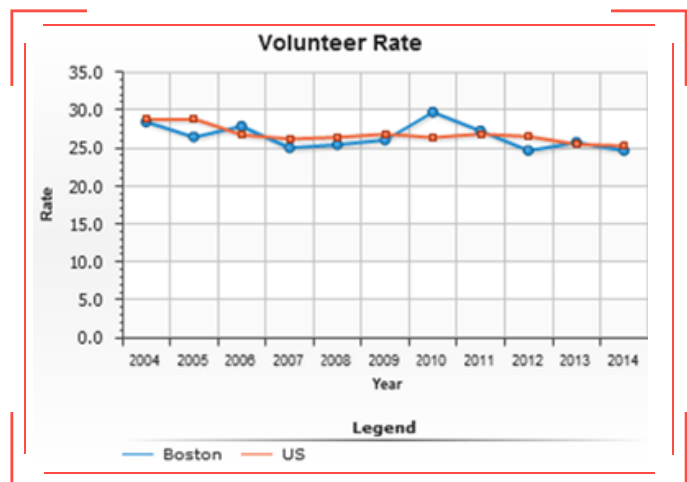
### How

Volunteers find Opportunities

The *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* and the *Civic Engagement Ceremony* will be shaped by creating and recognizing social and group-friendly volunteer opportunities. With more than one third <sup>1</sup> of Massachusetts’ 1.3 million volunteers <sup>2</sup> serving in Boston, contributing a combined total of 115.8 <sup>3</sup> million hours of service, Boston already has a strong volunteer base. A quarter of residents participate in volunteer activities, <sup>4</sup> matching the national average (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Volunteer Rate**

Digital image. *Volunteering and Civic Life in America 2015*. Corporation for National & Community Service, 2015. Web. 19 Oct. 2016.



1,3: "Volunteering and Civic Engagement in Boston, MA." *Volunteering and Civic Life in America 2015*. Corporation for National & Community Service, 2015. Web. 19 Oct. 2016. <<https://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/MA/Boston>>.

2,4: "Volunteering and Civic Engagement in Massachusetts." *Volunteering and Civic Life in America 2015*. Corporation for National & Community Service, 2015. Web. 19 Oct. 2016. <<https://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/MA>>.

# Initiative: Serve Boston

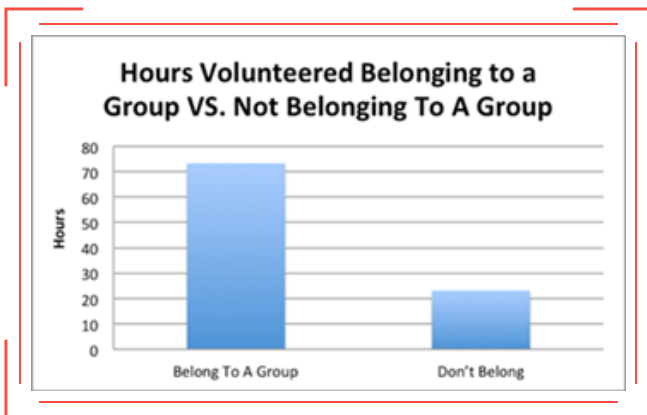
## Background continued

### Why Citizens are Volunteering

The OCE partnered with Northeastern University to understand volunteer motivations and trends on individual and organizational levels. A strong social motivation was found behind volunteering, with 73 percent of respondents choosing to volunteer to “have fun” or to “socialize/meet people.” On average, members of groups volunteered three times more than sole individuals did (Figure 2). The OCE created the *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* to connect individuals to existing volunteer opportunities, especially those that promote the chance to join a group. Individuals who have participated in volunteer activities will be recognized among peers at the *Civic Engagement Ceremony*.

**Figure 2: Hours Volunteered Belonging to a Group vs. Not Belonging to a Group**

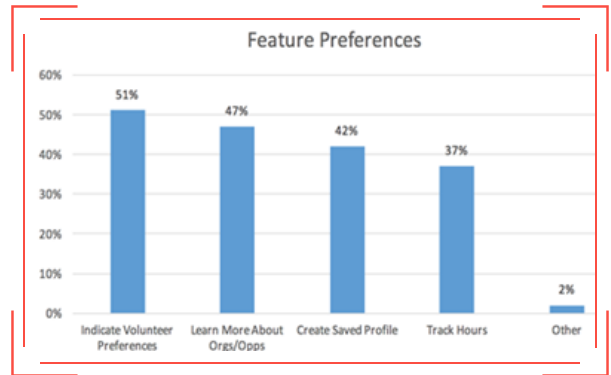
Conway, Megan, Macarena Valdes, Andrew Divincenzo, Samuel Kleper, and Alexandra Rafter. Final Client Marketing Research Report. Rep. Northeastern University, 19 Apr. 2016. Web. 19 Oct. 2016.



5: Johnson, Grossnickle and Associates. "What Specific Type of Volunteer Activities Do You Prefer?." Statista - The Statistics Portal. Statista. 26 Jan 2016. <<http://www.statista.com/statistics/235460/generation-y-and-us-nonprofits/>>

### How Volunteers find Opportunities

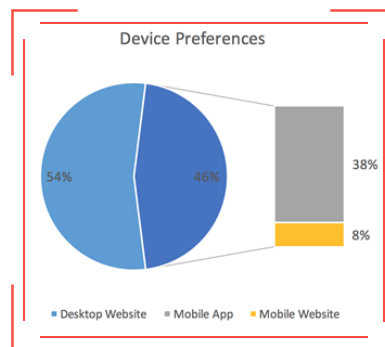
Volunteers prefer opportunities where they can interact with other people.<sup>5</sup> The *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* will address this by allowing the chance to state volunteer preferences. For example, a user could choose to volunteer in a group or alone (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Feature Preferences**

Laaman, Derek, Lilliana Urbina Revuelta, Chris Bubnov, Brett Stevenson, and Seung Ha Lee. Group Volunteerism. Rep. Northeastern University, 2016. Web. 19 Oct. 2016.

For the portal, 42% of respondents felt a website would be the most convenient way to sign up to volunteer. More than half of respondents preferred a desktop website to a mobile platform, preferably an App (Figure 4). As such, the OCE will first launch the *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* as a website and then will add a mobile app in the future.



**Figure 4: Device Preferences**

Laaman, Derek, Lilliana Urbina Revuelta, Chris Bubnov, Brett Stevenson, and Seung Ha Lee. Group Volunteerism. Rep. Northeastern University, 2016. Web. 19 Oct. 2016.



## Initiative: Serve Boston

### Description

#### »»»»» Patriots for Volunteering Portal

The *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* will be an interactive tool designed to allow city departments, and eventually nonprofit and corporate partners, to connect with Boston residents looking for ways to volunteer. The portal will be accessible in desktop and mobile versions and allow users to create a profile, sign up for volunteer opportunities, and track their service hours. The portal will allow residents to choose from a variety of different service areas and select the neighborhood in which they would like to volunteer. The portal will also allow departments and partners to search for volunteers whose profiles match their needs. The *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* will first be released as a basic version where it will further develop into a more sophisticated website upon collection of data (please see the “Progress” section for more details).

The *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* will carefully track volunteer interest by neighborhood, enabling the OCE to track the number of residents engaged in volunteer efforts and number of service hours completed. The *Love Your Block* initiative, discussed later in the plan, will also be tracked from sign-up to project completion in the *Patriots for Volunteering Portal*. *Love Your Block* will track neighborhood engagement by recording volunteer hours in neighborhood cleanups and mini-grant projects. In short, the *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* will provide the necessary data to be able to reward volunteers for their service.

#### »»»»» Civic Engagement Ceremony

The *Civic Engagement Ceremony* will further promote and reward a culture of volunteerism in the City of Boston. The *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* will collect data on volunteer sign-ups and metrics from the *Love Your Block* projects. The Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) will use this information to present volunteering awards to neighborhoods, organizations, and individuals at the annual *Civic Engagement Ceremony*.

# Initiative: Serve Boston

## Progress

For the *Patriots for Volunteering Portal*, the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) will work with the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) to develop a pilot website. The results of searches and volunteer postings will be monitored by the OCE to populate terms for when the official *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* eventually launches through a professional web development service used by several Cities of Service participants for volunteer centralization. The first *Civic Engagement Ceremony* will be held in the spring of 2018, using data from the *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* and *Love Your Block* projects collected during 2017.

## Metrics

Initiative	Impact Metrics	Participation Metrics	Baseline	Initiative Lead & Partners
<i>Patriots for Volunteering Portal</i>	# of volunteer to opportunity matches # of volunteer hours being tracked % of volunteer sign-ups from portal	# of volunteers generated # registered user profiles # opportunities posted # registered city departments	The OCE will work with the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) to provide a basic website for a beta trial	<i>Lead:</i> Department of Innovation & Technology (DoIT)  <i>External Partners:</i> Northeastern University - Computer Science and Marketing Departments
<i>Civic Engagement Ceremony</i>	# of participating: neighborhood volunteers, nonprofits, and corporations	# of registered user profiles # participating neighborhoods # of youth that participate % of volunteer distribution among neighborhoods	Current neighborhood volunteer efforts, such as <i>Boston Shines</i> and <i>Love Your Block</i> mini-grants	<i>Lead:</i> Office of Civic Engagement  <i>Internal Partners:</i> City Departments  <i>External Partners:</i> Nonprofits & Corporations

# Initiative: Love Your Block

## Goal

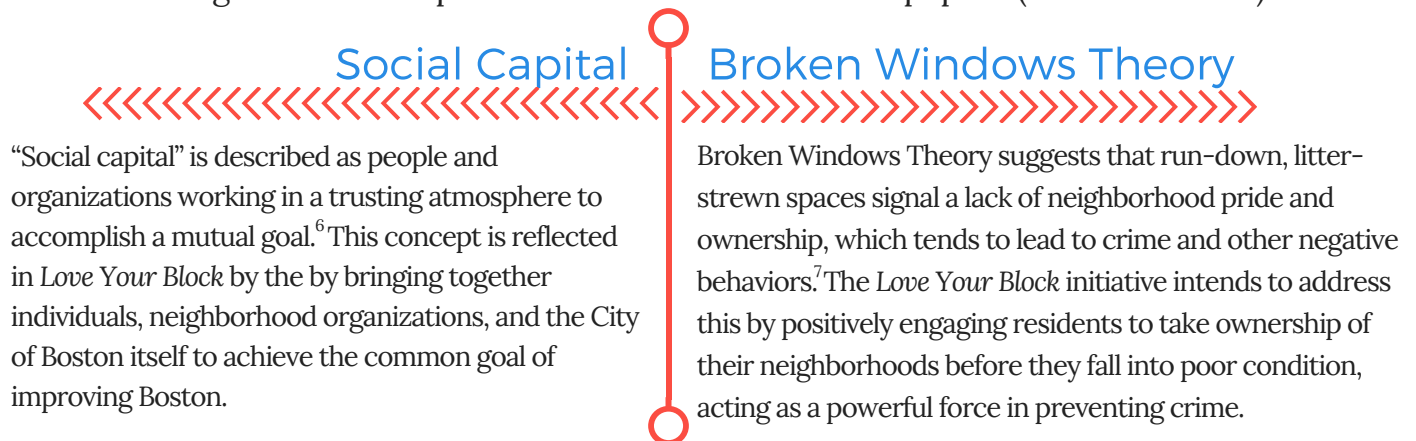
The goal of *Love Your Block* is to provide residents with opportunities to create a sense of pride and ownership by beautifying their neighborhoods, thereby reducing blight and improving the safety, health, and vibrancy of Boston.

## Background

*Love Your Block* started in the fall of 2015 as a mini-grant program supported by a three-year grant from Cities of Service. Under the *Engaging Boston* Service Plan, *Love Your Block* will add year-round cleanups and neighborhood tool sheds as additional ways to beautify Boston. The year-round cleanups started as the *Boston Shines* program, a spring-cleanup initiative that began in 2003. *Love Your Block* allows residents to now host cleanups on their own with the coordination of the OCE throughout the year instead of only in the spring.

To identify which neighborhoods would most benefit from *Love Your Block*, the OCE will utilize the Boston 311 system. Unveiled in 2015, BOS:311 is a telephone system and mobile reporting app that handles non-emergency requests for city services and information. BOS:311 has collected data to create a “HotSpot” report that will allow *Love Your Block* to locate and prioritize project areas with frequently reported damages.

In deciding to make *Love Your Block* a permanent City of Boston initiative, the OCE researched its benefits through a review of public research and academic papers (outlined below).



6: Anderson, Andrea A., and Sharon Milligan. "Social Capital and Community Building." *Community Change: Theories, Practice, and Evidence*. Washington D.C.: Aspen Institute, 2006. 19-46. Print.  
 7: Mckee, Adam J. "Broken Window Theory." N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 13 June 2013. Web. 20 Nov. 2016. <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/broken-windows-theory>>.

## Initiative: Love Your Block

### Description

*Love Your Block* empowers Bostonians to improve their neighborhoods through creative projects that address community challenges. Residents will partner with the City to better their neighborhoods through (1) neighborhood mini-grants, (2) year-round clean ups, and (3) community tool sheds.

#### >>>>>> Mini-grants

The competitive *Love Your Block* mini-grants provide funding to residents who improve their neighborhoods through innovative projects. Residents design their projects based on their neighborhood's needs. Project examples include: the creation of green-space, improvements to parks or streets, and public art displays. By providing small competitive grants and coordinating city services, the OCE can achieve measurable impact in local communities and strengthen social capital at a low cost. In the past, grants were awarded each year to applicants from target low-income neighborhoods. As *Love Your Block* expands, need will still be a priority supported by 311 data, but readiness and capacity will also be considered.

#### >>>>>> Year-round Cleanups

In addition to the mini-grants, *Love Your Block's* year-round cleanups (formerly *Boston Shines*) provide residents with ongoing opportunities to beautify their neighborhoods. Groups or individuals will sign up online via the Patriots for Volunteering Portal to receive city support for tools to remove litter and do gardening, with trash pickup also available.

#### >>>>>> Community Tool Sheds

Tool sheds will be located within several neighborhoods as another way for residents to "love their block." Residents can organize their own cleanups and work with their OCE Neighborhood Liaisons to gain access to a variety of gardening and cleanup tools. The OCE will work with other city departments, such as Boston Centers for Youth and Families and Boston Parks and Recreation, to supply, manage and maintain the tool sheds.



# Initiative: Love Your Block

## Progress

In its inaugural year, *Love Your Block* awarded six mini-grants totaling approximately \$11,000 across three target neighborhoods: Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan. The mini-grants funded the creation of four public art projects, a new community garden, and multiple landscape improvements in the spring of 2016. Some metrics for the first year include: 42 bags of waste collected, 32 newly planted flower boxes, and a total of 56 volunteers donating over 158 hours of their time to beautify their neighborhoods. The first year had over 20 applications submitted, and the winners demonstrated a reduction in blight. The second year is in progress at the time of this document, targeting Mattapan and East Boston with community support.

One project in particular captured the strength and efficacy of *Love Your Block*. In an area attracting unwanted activity, the Shangri-La Rock Garden relocated several massive boulders, removed trash, and planted flowers. One passing bystander gave insight to the power of communities taking ownership through *Love Your Block*:

*“I’m one of the guys that’s been drinking over here and had left my beer bottles.... I’m sorry about that. This garden looks so beautiful. I’m not going to do that anymore.”*



2016

Shangri-La Rock Garden



2016

Egleston Square



2016

Waldren Road Community Garden

# Initiative: Love Your Block

## Metrics

Initiative	Impact Metrics	Participation Metrics	Baseline	Initiative Lead & Partners
Love Your Block Mini-Grants	<p># of repeat volunteers</p> <p># of youth volunteers</p>	<p># of volunteers on project days</p> <p># of volunteer hours</p> <p># of mini-grant applications received</p>	<p>Cities of Service Three-Year Grant</p> <p>Year One: 2015-2016</p> <p>Year Two: 2016-2017</p> <p>Year Three: 2017-2018</p>	<p>Lead: Office of Civic Engagement</p> <p>Internal Partners: Public Works Parks and Recreation</p> <p>External Partners: 2015-2016: Northeastern University Union Capital Boston</p>
Love Your Block Cleanups	<p># of empty lots by square foot cleaned</p> <p># of school/community building clean-ups</p> <p># displays created</p>	<p># of groups participating</p> <p>% of first time groups participating</p> <p>% of returning groups participating</p>	<p>Formerly Boston Shines, which was started in 2003 - starting with data from 2016</p>	<p>Lead: Office of Civic Engagement</p> <p>Internal Partners: Public Works Parks and Recreation Neighborhood Services Boston Public Schools Boston Centers for Youth &amp; Families</p>
Love Your Block Tool Sheds	<p># of community gardens cleaned</p> <p># of park/urban wild clean-ups</p> <p># of feet of sidewalks swept</p>	<p># of residents checking out tools</p> <p># of civic groups/nonprofits using community tools</p> <p># of small cleanups organized</p>	<p>Two toolsheds currently maintained by the Office of Neighborhood Services</p>	<p>Lead: Office of Civic Engagement</p> <p>Internal Partners: Public Works Parks and Recreation Boston Public Schools BCYF Centers</p> <p>External Partners: Home Depot *2015-2017</p>

# Conclusion & Acknowledgments

*Engaging Boston* aims to meet the Mayor Martin J. Walsh’s priority of increasing engagement and elevating existing volunteer efforts. To address this priority, the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) identified two specific goals and corresponding initiatives. In order to make it easier for residents to get and stay involved, *Serve Boston* will be implemented through the creation of the *Patriots for Volunteering Portal* and the *Civic Engagement Ceremony*. Additionally, *Love Your Block* is designed to encourage residents to take ownership of their neighborhoods by making resources readily available for neighborhood beautification.

Mayor Walsh would like to take the time to thank the following organizations, individuals, and agencies whose time, talent, and resources were invaluable the *Engaging Boston* Service Plan.



AmeriCorps members for Cities of Service:

- Sarah Iacomini
- Jarred Johnson
- Emily March
- Janet White

- Boston Cares
- Boston Partners in Education
- Cities of Service
- City of Baltimore
- Corporation for National and Community Service
- Massachusetts Service Alliance
- One Brick Boston
- United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley
- Volunteers of America
- Boston Arts Commission
- Boston Centers for Youth and Families
- Boston Elections Department
- Commission on Affairs of the Elderly
- Office of Arts and Culture
- Office of Emergency Management
- Office of Environment, Energy and Open Space
- Office of Financial Empowerment
- Office of Immigrant Advancement
- Office of Recovery Services
- Office of Tourism, Entertainment and Special Events
- Office of Workforce Development
- Parks and Recreation
- Registry Office

Northeastern University  
Center of Community Service

Professor Daniele Mathras  
and her Marketing Research class:

- Chris Bubnov
- Madeline Conway
- Andrew Divincenzo
- Samuel Klepper
- Derek Laaman
- Seung Ha Lee
- Alexandra Rafter
- Liliana Urbina Revuelta
- Brett Stevenson
- Macarena Valdes

Professor Michael Weintraub  
and his Software Development class:

- Ryan Aljondi
- Jackson Bowman
- Olivia DeFlumeri
- Zach Ferland
- Andrew Knueven
- Branden Rodgers
- Shivanjali Singh
- Nick Tinsley
- Shiyu Wang
- Joseph Wood

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