



**COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT
COMMISSION**

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



City of Seattle



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the annual report of the Community Involvement Commission. Members of the commission ask continuously: “How can we help to engage and empower residents of the City of Seattle who may not be visible, heard, or understood?”

As the composition of Seattle’s population changes, the City of Seattle needs to continually revisit and expand its public engagement efforts to ensure growing demographic groups are represented in decision-making processes, and that barriers discouraging participation are eliminated.

In July 2016, an Executive Order established principles for public engagement and outreach. The Order directed the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods to lead a citywide effort for timely implementation of equitable outreach and engagement practices that reaffirmed the City’s commitment to inclusive participation by all departments.

Those public involvement programs and practices were to reflect Seattle’s commitment to the Race and Social Justice Initiative, which focuses on ending structural racism and race-based inequities both within City government and across the community.

From this, the Community Involvement Commission was created.

The commission remains dedicated to holding the City accountable for increasing participation and engagement – especially amongst those who have been forgotten or discounted in the past. Seattle already benefits from strong local traditions of community service and innovation; our challenge is to nurture and channel those resources in ways that will provide maximal benefits to our residents and neighborhoods.



COMMISSIONERS

Commission Members*:

Felix Chang
Natalie Curtis
Emily Kim
Karyn Kubo Fleming
Sharif Mahfouz
Thais Marbles
Chris Maykut
Ben Mitchell
Julie Pham
Carol Redfield
Bill Southern
Alison Turner
Marcus White

*Current as of January 1, 2020

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods Staff Liaison: Hilary Nichols





ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT COMMISSION

THE COMMISSION ACTS IN AN ADVISORY CAPACITY TO:

- Make recommendations to the Mayor, City Council, and City departments 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.
- Provide advice on priorities, policies, and strategies related to equitable civic engagement and public participation in City decision-making processes.
- Advise the Department of Neighborhoods on review of community grant processes.
- Hold accountable the City of Seattle's community involvement practices to ensure they align with the Race and Social Justice Initiative.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT COMMISSIONERS DO NOT:

- Conduct direct community outreach nor act as a conduit to the community.
- Represent and/or speak on behalf of specific communities or groups.
- Represent Community Involvement Commission (CIC) in non-CIC meetings, unless specified to do so.
- Act as a focus group on any issues not related to the community involvement process.

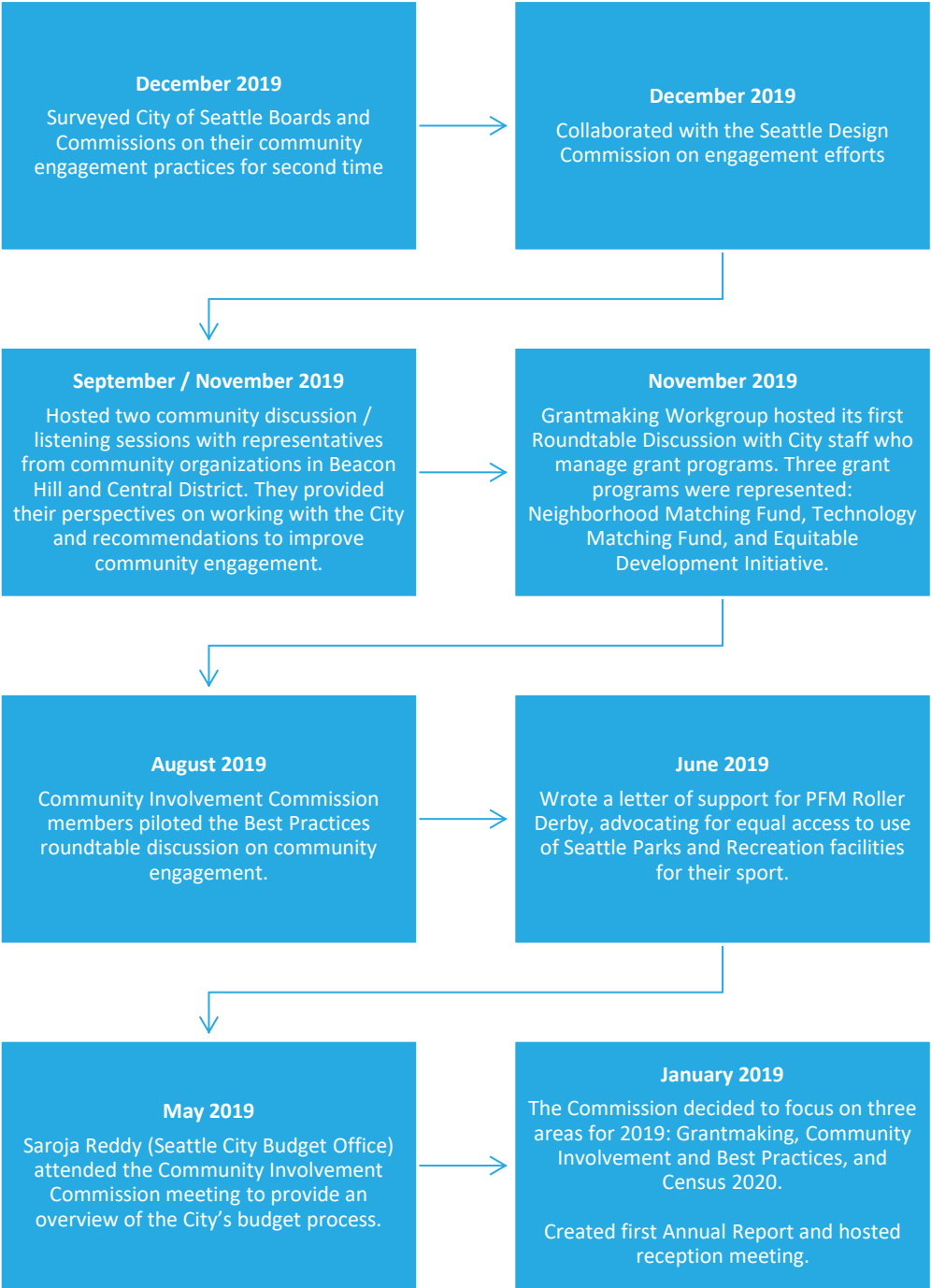
“The Community Involvement Commission recommended that City Light needs to be specific in defining what we mean by environmental equity for the Integrated Resource Plan. That resonated strongly with the program manager. The commission also reminded the presenters that our 1,700 employees are excellent resources for engaging the community.”

Jenny Levesque, Seattle City Light



TIMELINE

Highlights of the Community Involvement Commission in 2019:





ENGAGEMENTS AT MONTHLY MEETINGS

The following departments, offices, and programs have consulted with the Community Involvement Commission regarding their community engagement practices:

- Seattle Department of Neighborhoods
- City Budget Office
- Neighborhood Matching Fund
- Technology Matching Fund
- Equitable Development Initiative
- Office of Economic Development
- Seattle Human Resources
- Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs
- Office of Planning & Community Development
- Seattle Department of Transportation
- Seattle Public Library
- Office of the Mayor
- Seattle City Councilmember Bagshaw



GRANTMAKING WORK GROUP

PURPOSE

Through the lens of race and social justice, the Grantmaking Work Group makes recommendations to City Council, Departments, and Staff and facilitates opportunities to advance equity in City grantmaking and community engagement.

ACTIONS

- **Engaged** grant applicants, recipients, and reviewers across diverse neighborhoods in Seattle to learn about their experiences with City grantmaking processes.
- **Facilitated** a workshop for grant administrators from multiple City departments. Shared learnings from community engagements and brainstormed opportunities to improve City grantmaking processes.

TAKEAWAYS

Top recommendations for advancing equity in City grantmaking and community engagement.

1. CREATE A CITY-WIDE PROCESS FOR ADVANCE FUNDING OF GRANT INVESTMENTS

CHALLENGES

- Many City grants currently operate on a reimbursement model, where grant recipients do not receive investment funds until milestones well into a project or program timeline.
- We heard from grant recipients that they often must pay for initial project expenses and costs out-of-pocket, placing a heavy burden on community members and organizations, who are often resource constrained.

RECOMMENDATION

- City Council, City Budget Office, Finance and Administrative Services, and City Departments that grant should collaborate to develop a City standard for providing at least partial advance funding of awarded grant investments.

2. INCREASE AWARENESS AND LITERACY OF GRANT APPLICATION PROCESSES

CHALLENGES

- It can be difficult for applicants searching for funding sources to know which City grant may be most appropriate for their projects. Additionally, it can be hard to stay on top of the varying application timelines and cycles of different grants.
- Grant applicants, especially those not awarded a grant, can feel frustrated and want to learn how they can improve their applications.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand outreach and training for applicants. Potential ideas include the creation of a City-wide grant cycle calendar or newsletter. Additionally, increased use of technology and videos could increase the scale of outreach and improve language accessibility.
- Continue and expand grant application support, including consistent feedback on how to improve applications that are not funded.

3. STREAMLINE GRANT APPLICATIONS WHILE INCREASING FLEXIBILITY

CHALLENGES

- Hoping to fund a single project, applicants often apply to multiple grants to maximize their chances of funding. This redundancy across applications is highly time-consuming.
- Downstream, multiple City staff across different departments may read an application for the same project, leading to duplication of effort and time.

RECOMMENDATION

- Continue to develop the centralized City grant application portal and collaborate across grants and Departments to share resources and knowledge.

“I found the experience with the Commission's Grantmakers Roundtable to be very valuable. It was great to take the time to discuss best practices and ways we can improve our funding programs with my colleagues at the City.” - Delia Burke, Seattle Information Technology / Technology Matching Fund

“I found the session very productive and I look forward to working together in the future.” - Workshop attendee



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & BEST PRACTICES WORK GROUP

PURPOSE

1. Surface common impediments and challenges that City departments face with regards to their community outreach and engagement efforts.
2. Identify resources, or practices that seem promising and could be taken up more widely.
3. Offer high-level recommendations to City Departments with regards to community outreach and engagement.

ACTIONS

- **Interviewed** staff members from Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Public Utilities, Seattle City Light, and the Office of Planning and Community Development on their community engagement and best practices.
- **Piloted** a roundtable discussion for City staff to discuss outreach and engagement best practices.

TAKEAWAYS

1. REDEFINE EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CHALLENGES

- There is a mismatch between topics the City is interested in and those residents are interested in. Issues often deal with the minutia of delivery of city services which many residents do not want to deal with. For example, for most people the placement of a bus lane is too granular of an issue to be interested in and getting equitable engagement around things like this will be inherently challenging.
- Civic engagement is resource intensive. Participating in politics or volunteer groups requires extensive amounts of work, time, and effort to have influence. Applying for modest grants for neighborhood projects also consumes a large amount of time.
- Outreach efforts may be dominated by a few people with time, commitment, and passion for single issues. The same people occupy spaces intended to promote equitable participation.
- Residents perceive the City as one entity. This can result in “engagement fatigue” when residents simultaneously feel they are constantly asked for input from the same group but don’t see the results from their input.



RECOMMENDATION

- Focus on engaging communities around higher level values, goals, or desires. Engagement at that level would be of interest to more people. For other issues, consider letting the City departments deliver programs with the expertise they have.



FUTURE: CENSUS 2020 WORK GROUP

The Census 2020 Work Group is a nascent work group working with the existing Seattle Census Task Force to ensure effective engagement practices and extending the outreach and response in the upcoming census. Much of our work will involve training Census Connectors. Census Connectors are trained volunteers to assist people in filling out the Census. They also serve as ambassadors, letting people know about the Census and answering questions. Census Connectors will be posted at the seven locations (one per district) of the Census Assistance Drop-In Centers and the mobile Census van.

PURPOSE

1. Coordinate with Seattle Census Task Force to hold Census Connector training for relevant City of Seattle commissioners.
2. Create a Census Connector Webinar Training.

ACTIONS

- Spoke with a member of the Seattle Census Task Force and identified Hard to Count populations (HTC) and mediums to reach them.
- Scheduling Census Connector training for early 2020.



2019 Community Involvement Commission Retreat



The Community Involvement Commission advises City of Seattle departments and staff on coordinated, citywide outreach and engagement activities.

Learn more at:

seattle.gov/neighborhoods/community-involvement-commission

If you have questions or would like to contact the commission, send an email to:

CommunityInvolvementCommission@seattle.gov

If you are interested in attending a Community Involvement Commission monthly meeting, check the website for current meeting schedule.

The Community Involvement Commission is staffed by the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods.

