GO LOCAL!

To Nurture Neighborhoods and Advance Equity We Must Empower Small BIDs and Other Public Space Partners

Business Improvement Districts WORK!

These local nonprofits:
▶ Are the single greatest non-governmental investors in managing and programming streets, sidewalks, and public spaces, spending $187M/year in neighborhoods citywide
▶ In 2022 alone, hosted over 3200 public events with 30 million attendees, maintained 176 public spaces, and hosted 154 public art installations
▶ Are the leading voice for over 23K stores and small businesses citywide
▶ Have broad political support: in the last 21 years, the City Council has voted unanimously 168 times to pass legislation approving BIDs’ budget increases or expansion plans
▶ Are trusted local partners, convening and coordinating different agencies and services to respond to their community’s unique needs

However, most BIDs are SMALL and under-resourced:
▶ 68% have budgets under $1 million, with the median budget being $350,000
▶ 65% of small BIDs are in low-to-moderate income areas
▶ Among ALL BIDs, ⅓ have only one full or part-time employee, and another ¼ have only two full time employees
▶ Are struggling with or forced to scale back new public space responsibilities

Simple Steps to Make BIDs Even More Effective

▶ Reduce the pain points and trust those with a track record.
Reduce or remove bureaucratic barriers that have historically held back community participation in less-resourced neighborhoods. Create a tiered Trusted Partner Program that extends existing tools for empowerment to more places and a New Partner Program that nurtures nascent place-based partners.

▶ Develop the city’s internal and external capacity to support place-based partnerships.
Support, connect, and empower those within and alongside government agencies who are advancing public space goals. Identify or create an independent citywide non-profit partner to work with NYC SBS, NYC DOT, and the Chief Public Realm Officer to help facilitate the implementation of innovative programs and support community partners managing streets and plazas, especially those with fewer resources and capacity.

▶ Explore funding tools and templates to capture the value created by the work of place-based non-profits in lower income areas.
To leverage private and philanthropic resources in the face of ever-greater fiscal constraints, explore the feasibility of new models for value capture and community wealth building for self-levy districts like BIDs. Also, use City and other matching funds to acknowledge and incentivize investments by small BIDs, especially in neighborhoods that have lacked investment.
Regional Plan Association, SharedCitySharedSpace, and Streetsense have partnered together to develop a series of resource toolkits and policy recommendations, as well as the GO LOCAL! report, to help BIDs and community partners address common challenges as they work to manage and maintain critical public realm assets across the city. These resources will be available for free on RPA’s website. To access them, scan the QR code or visit rpa.org and search Sustaining Commercial Districts.

“...people who have forged neighborhood networks... are a city’s irreplaceable social capital.”

– Jane Jacobs

We are grateful to the NYC Department of Small Business Services and the Association for a Better New York for their generous support of this work.