



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

Program Guidelines

Every day, mayors and the cities they serve struggle with the negative impacts that vacant, abandoned, and deteriorating properties have on neighborhoods and the people living in them. Blighted properties – including but not limited to abandoned single-family homes, apartment buildings, commercial buildings, vacant lots, deteriorating parks, and other public spaces – harm neighborhoods by posing safety hazards, decreasing surrounding property values, reducing tax revenue, and eroding social cohesion. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these problems, particularly for communities and people in economically distressed areas, and cities continue to feel the harmful effects of blight today.

Building on more than a decade of support for mayors led by Michael R. Bloomberg and Bloomberg Philanthropies that includes millions of dollars in funding and a growing portfolio of government innovation initiatives, the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins is pleased to announce that applications are open for Love Your Block, an impact volunteering grant program supporting volunteer-fueled projects that address local public problems. This grant program focuses on supporting cities to partner with community groups and activate resident volunteers to repair, remediate, and address blight in their neighborhoods.

Love Your Block is based on the Cities of Service Love Your Block Blueprint and builds on the experience and lessons learned from 14 years of program implementation in 50 cities around the country. In collaboration with the AmeriCorps VISTA program, Love Your Block furthers the principles of an anti-poverty focus, community empowerment, sustainable solutions, and capacity-building to exemplify transformation in communities. [Click here to learn more about AmeriCorps.](#)



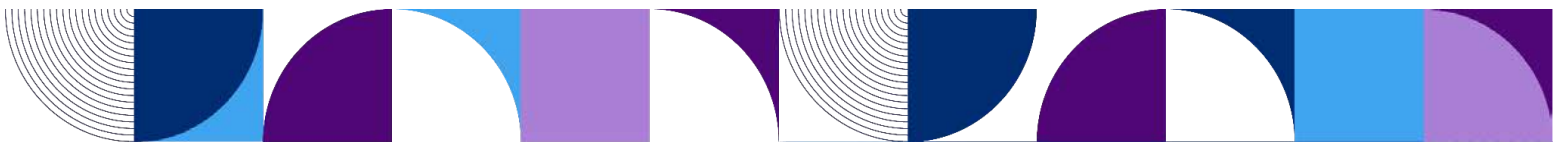
Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

About the Love Your Block Program

The Love Your Block program brings city leaders and residents together to build stronger neighborhoods, one block at a time. Cities participating in Love Your Block invite community groups to identify priority projects and award mini-grants to support neighborhood-driven solutions that the community can implement. From turning vacant lots into community gardens to helping elderly neighbors with home repairs so they can avoid fines and safely age in place, resident volunteers are “loving their blocks” and making their neighborhoods and cities better places to live. The Love Your Block Program is a two-year grant in the amount of \$100,000 which includes a Fellow and an AmeriCorps VISTA focused on impact volunteering and civic engagement.

The benefits of Love Your Block go far beyond physical improvements. Urban Institute found in its 2021 [Study of Love Your Block](#) that social networks sparked by deep resident-to-city-hall engagement can initiate neighborhood-level improvements in addition to larger, sustainable improvements to municipal practices and policies. Love Your Block activates and builds social networks between residents, their neighbors, and city hall. This resident-to-city hall engagement can lead to collective efficacy that is often bidirectional. City officials can leverage neighborhood social capital in service of mayoral goals, and residents can leverage greater responsiveness from officials to address their needs and priorities. Love Your Block is a proven starting point for cities to more meaningfully engage their residents to help improve their communities in holistic and sustainable ways.



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

Award Benefits

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

- \$40,000 in funding for program implementation and volunteer-led mini-grant projects.
- \$60,000 in funding to support a local, full-time Love Your Block Fellow from the community. The Love Your Block Fellow must have strong ties to the community being served (i.e., current resident or a previous longtime resident with active ties to the neighborhood) and have a track record of building local relationships. Working under the direction of the designated city lead, the Fellow is responsible for developing and implementing a robust community engagement strategy and project management of program activities.
- One (1) AmeriCorps VISTA member each year working under the direction of the designated city lead. The VISTA will lead volunteer recruitment and impact volunteering in accordance with the core principles of the [VISTA program](#) to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.
- High-touch training, coaching services, and programmatic support from the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins.
- Peer-to-peer learning with current and former Love Your Block grantee cities.
- Invitations to an annual convening.



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

- Recognition as a Love Your Block grantee city in the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins collateral, including on social media, the Center website, and other media.

Love Your Block Eligibility

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

- Minimum population of 30,000
- Mayor has at least three years remaining in their current term
- Mayoral signature and commitment to the Cities of Service [Declaration of Service](#)
- The capacity to recruit for and manage a Love Your Block Fellow for a two-year fellowship
- The capacity to recruit and manage an AmeriCorps VISTA member each year of the two-year grant program
- The capacity to manage and complete all programmatic reporting documentation and tasks

Cities that previously participated in Love Your Block programs are not eligible to apply.



Love Your Block 2023 Program

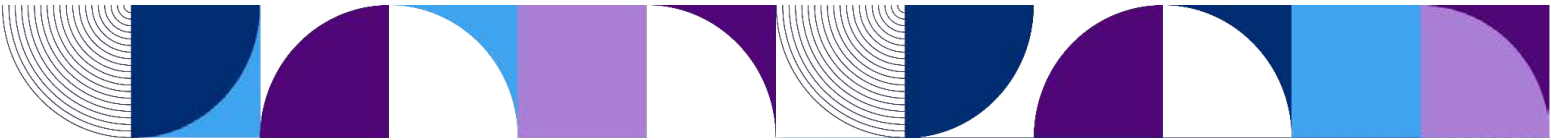
Guidelines & FAQ

Selection Criteria

Up to twenty (20) cities will be selected to participate in Love Your Block.

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

- The nature of the public problem the city is trying to solve as it relates to vacant and abandoned properties and the mission of the Love Your Block grant program.
- The readiness of the mayor and city team to accept the Love Your Block grant and related supports and engage in the program.
- How the proposed impact volunteering initiative will tackle the challenge. We are looking for initiatives that tie to larger city strategies or that address the problem in innovative ways that are supported by impacted residents and other stakeholders.
- The role of resident volunteers. We are looking for cities to engage volunteers within the neighborhoods of focus. In addition, we are looking for initiatives that engage volunteers early in the project design stage as well as during implementation and evaluation. We are looking for cities to engage volunteers for their time as well as for their lived experiences and skills.
- The role and level of engagement of the city chief executive and relevant city agencies and departments.
- The specific neighborhoods that will be the focus of the initiative. We are looking for demonstrated involvement of



Love Your Block 2023 Program

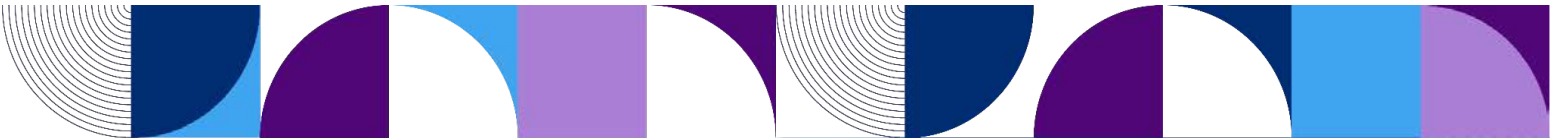
Guidelines & FAQ

neighborhood-specific stakeholders in the proposed initiative or commitment to doing so during the grant period.

- The proposed roles for the AmeriCorps VISTA member and Love Your Block Fellow and how the city will support them in their work.
- Clear commitment to tracking critical metrics to demonstrate impact.

Important Application Dates

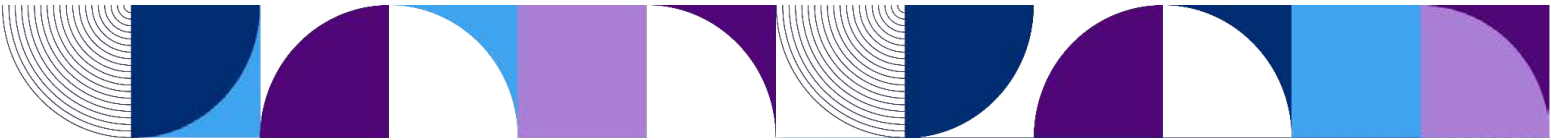
Application Launch	October 19, 2023
Informational Webinar Session I	October 26, 2023 (Register here) <i>Note: Attendance at Informational Webinar Session I OR Session II is mandatory to submit an application.</i>



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

Office Hour	November 2, 2023 (Register here) A one-hour session dedicated to applicants who have an idea they would like to discuss or who need specific points of clarification prior to submitting the grant application. <i>Note: Attendance at the Office Hour is optional.</i>
Informational Webinar Session II	November 9, 2023 (Register here) <i>Note: Attendance at Informational Webinar Session I OR Session II is mandatory to submit an application.</i>
Application Deadline	11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on November 17, 2023



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

Important Program Dates for Selected Cities

Welcome Webinar for Participating Cities	January 9, 2024
Love Your Block Fellow and AmeriCorps VISTA Recruitment Commences	January 9, 2024
Grant Agreements Executed	January 9 – March 2, 2024
Love Your Block Fellow Start Date	April 1, 2024
Love Your Block AmeriCorps VISTA Start Date Range	April 1, 2024 – April 30, 2024

Use of Funds

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

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



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

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 grant funds may not support:

- Services covered by existing city infrastructure, such as standard trash collection and existing staff salaries
- Rent or utilities
- 501(c)(3) incorporation fees
- Speaker honorariums
- Improvement projects that primarily serve churches and/or other religious organizations
- Scholarships or other direct support to individuals or families



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

- 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

About the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins

The Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins 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

For questions, please feel free to contact bcpicivicengagement@jh.edu.



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

When did Love Your Block start?

Since 2009, Cities of Service has supported Love Your Block grant programs in 50 cities. Many other cities have implemented Love Your Block on their own using our [Love Your Block Blueprint](#).

Does my city need to join the Cities of Service Coalition to apply?

Yes. If your city is not a coalition member, please complete and upload a [Declaration of Service](#) for your application to be considered. The Declaration of Service must be signed by the city chief executive currently serving. If you are unsure if your city is a member, click [here](#) to check.

If my city is a previous Cities of Service grantee, can it still apply?

Yes. However, the cities that participated in the Love Your Block City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA program in 2015, 2018, or 2021 may not apply.

What is the duration of the grant?

The grant term is two years. However, the second year of funding is contingent on the successful completion of the first year's activities and milestones.

How do you define “blight”?



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

We use the word blight to refer to properties in need of significant repair or remediation. Love Your Block projects can address property blight by engaging volunteers to transform vacant lots into community gardens, repair or replace dilapidated playground equipment, or remove trash and debris from a public right of way. Love Your Block projects can also address property blight by preventing vacancy in the first place.

What is the definition of “volunteer engagement”?

We are looking for projects that involve community members at various points of the project. This includes project design, implementation, and evaluation.

[Check out some of our favorite engagement techniques](#) that could be used during each of these stages.

What is included in the grant award?

Selected cities will receive support from one (1) [AmeriCorps VISTA](#) member annually for two years, \$60,000 to hire a Love Your Block Fellow for two years, and \$40,000 in seed funding for the Love Your Block program implementation and mini-grants. Participants will receive high-touch technical assistance, coaching, and program support from the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins, as well as training and peer-learning opportunities.

What is the best way to distribute the funding?

A key component of the Love Your Block program is the mini-grant competition – small grants typically in the range of \$500 to \$2,000 made from the city to a community partner such as a neighborhood association. The mini-grant competition is a great way for the city to generate awareness of and enthusiasm



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

for the initiative, provide seed money and other resources for the most promising proposals, help empower residents to take ownership over their neighborhoods/blocks, and build the capacity of neighborhood groups to design and implement these programs. The eligible organization will need to design a process to solicit mini-grant proposals from neighborhood groups and community partners, inform relevant communities about the opportunity and encourage them to apply, and select the winners.

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

Participating cities will receive high-touch technical assistance, training, coaching, and program support from the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins. Delivered during mandatory technical assistance calls and office hours, the technical assistance is designed to help cities develop and implement the Love Your Block program. Selected organizations will be required to play an active role in the Love Your Block community of practice.

This includes attending the Love Your Block webinars and other training as a group, such as conference calls, workshops, and a cohort-wide convening where team members can network and learn from peers. The AmeriCorps VISTA members will receive additional training and support through a dedicated Love Your Block AmeriCorps VISTA Leader.

What are the expectations for a Love Your Block Fellow?



Love Your Block 2023 Program

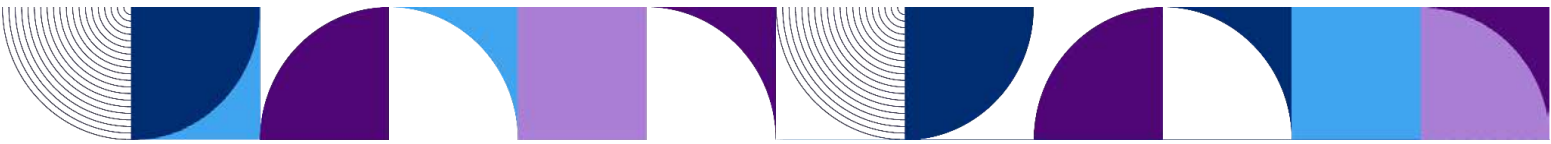
Guidelines & FAQ

The Love Your Block Fellow should be someone who comes from the community on which your Love Your Block program will focus, who has existing relationships within the community that could be leveraged throughout the life of the program. The Love Your Block Fellow must have strong ties to the community being served (i.e., current resident or a previous longtime resident with active ties to the neighborhood) and have a track record of building local relationships.

Working under the direction of the designated city lead, the Fellow is responsible for developing and implementing a robust community engagement strategy and project management of program activities. The Love Your Block Fellow's priority should be day-to-day program planning and management, assisting with program outreach strategies, partnership development, data collection, and anything else that would help move the work forward in inclusive, equitable, and sustainable ways. Fellow eligibility does not have the same restrictions as the AmeriCorps VISTA program.

What is AmeriCorps VISTA?

AmeriCorps VISTA is a federal anti-poverty program. AmeriCorps VISTA members are full-time volunteers who support projects at nonprofits, grassroots organizations, and local government agencies that operate programs to help alleviate poverty in the United States. They strengthen and support these organizations by improving their infrastructure, expanding community partnerships, securing long-term resources, training program participants, and developing other activities that help build long-term sustainability for overcoming poverty.



Love Your Block 2023 Program

Guidelines & FAQ

AmeriCorps VISTA members commit to a full year of service and receive a living stipend as well as an end-of-service award upon completion of their service. One (1) AmeriCorps VISTA member each year works under the direction of the designated city lead. The VISTA will lead volunteer recruitment and impact volunteering. AmeriCorps VISTA members' time must be used in accordance with the core principles of the [VISTA program](#) to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

To learn more about the AmeriCorps VISTA program, eligibility requirements, and benefits, visit:

<https://americorps.gov/serve/americorps/americorps-vista>.

What are the obligations for cities that receive an AmeriCorps VISTA grant ?

As an AmeriCorps VISTA program, this grant requires the initiative to target low-income communities, specifically neighborhoods that are lower than the Census Bureau's average median household income in the city.