



The *Only in Seattle* Initiative

A retrospective and vision



only in
seattle.[™]
INITIATIVE

Photo credit: Ryan Castoldi

introduction

Colorful banners on poles, twinkly lights illuminating the trees, bicycles overflowing the racks – an overall sense of cohesion filling the air. Have you experienced this? You were probably walking in one of the thriving business districts sprinkled throughout Seattle. Over the years, numerous districts have turned to the City's Office of Economic Development (OED) for education and assistance in boosting commercial prosperity.

The *Only in Seattle* Initiative is a partnership between OED and Impact Capital to cultivate vibrant, financially sound neighborhood business districts. The initiative provides comprehensive, ongoing support to neighborhoods looking to organize members of their business district, attract small business owners, increase foot traffic, promote unique events, and ensure neighborhood cohesion and safety.

Vibrant districts emerge from a shared vision among community leaders, small business owners, and residents. Successful neighborhood districts create jobs, spur revitalization efforts, attract new businesses and property owners, and foster a sense of civic pride. District by district, as each community rallies to discover and promote its unique identity and offerings, a strengthened city emerges.

“Seattle is an extraordinary place to call home. Whether you're a resident, business owner, or community organizer, we are here to support you and your neighborhood any way we can.”

– Office of Economic Development



Seattle's Office of Economic Development (OED) supports a healthy business environment and empowers companies to grow and compete. They provide services directly to businesses through advocacy, retention and expansion assistance, and workforce development. OED's program to invest in neighborhood business districts is the *Only in Seattle* initiative, which works with businesses, property owners and other community leaders to organize around a common vision for a business district and attract investment.



Impact Capital is an intermediate lender providing credit, financial, and technical assistance to non-profit community development organizations and underserved communities across Washington. Working with partners, their goal is to transform distressed communities into vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable neighborhoods. They make strategic capital investments to improve the quality of life for residents in our region.

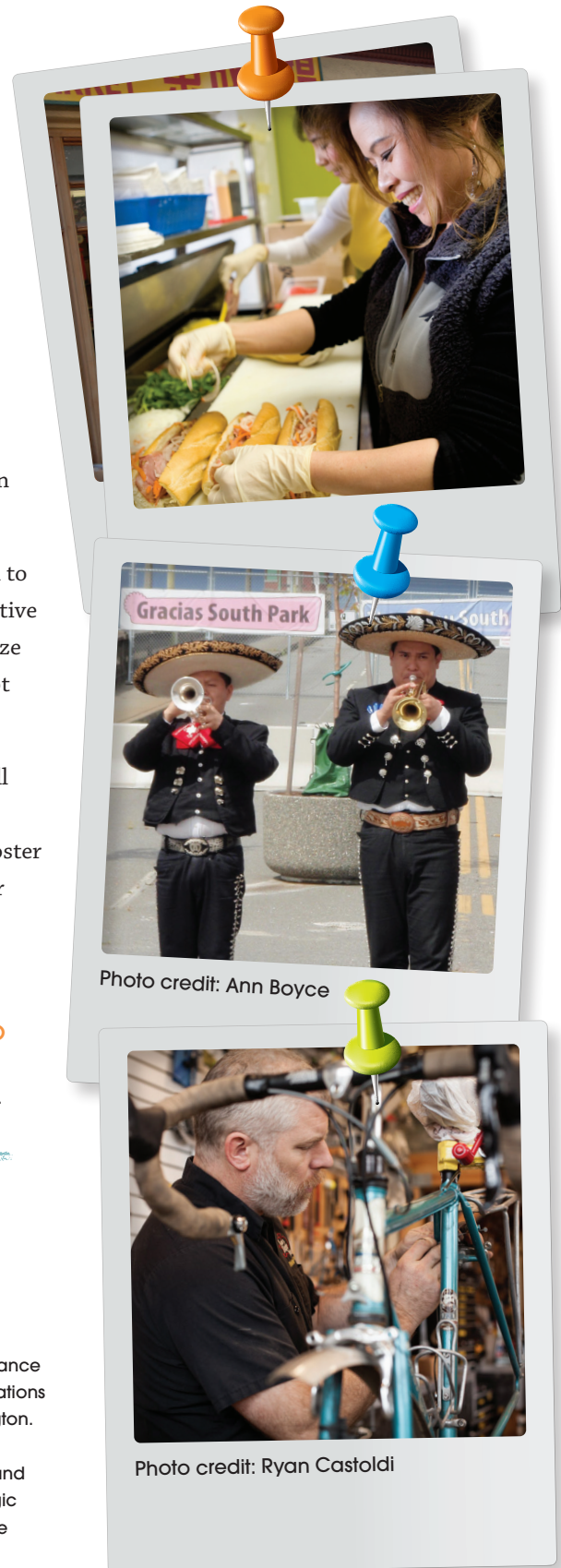


Photo credit: Ann Boyce

Photo credit: Ryan Castoldi

methodologies

The *Only in Seattle Initiative (OIS)* utilizes proven methodologies for creating flourishing business districts in vibrant neighborhoods. These core principles, ideally executed simultaneously, are critical components of a successful district. The five strategy areas are:



BUSINESS ORGANIZATION

Thriving districts begin with people. Developing community leaders, hiring full- and part-time employees, recruiting volunteers, and encouraging resident participation are the foundational supports for an organized district. When a neighborhood organization is backed financially and supported by partner agencies and invested team members, change will occur at a confident and sustainable pace.



BUSINESS AND RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

- Existing merchants are the backbone of a district; it's important to acknowledge their history and the neighborhood identity they've helped establish. OIS works with owners to grow their business via technical or accounting support, marketing assistance, and help finding loans.
- Retail and market studies facilitated by OIS funding provide invaluable data that assists retailers in understanding the demographics and spending power of a neighborhood. This information helps existing businesses adapt to the current landscape, and is also a tool for attracting new businesses and development.
- Realtors, developers, and new business owners are the key to revitalization efforts. OIS helps districts reach out to specific, neighborhood-relevant retailers to promote the assets of a district to targeted parties – with some programs acting like a commercial broker to market specific vacant properties.



APPEARANCE & PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

OIS knows that perception matters. It's important to showcase the positive existing traits of a neighborhood's character, as well as its future potential. Real estate projects rehabilitate or replace underutilized spaces. Signage and facades are clean and cohesive; new developers are encouraged to be consistent and unified with the neighborhood. The retail and pedestrian environment is attractive and easily accessible by numerous modes of transportation.



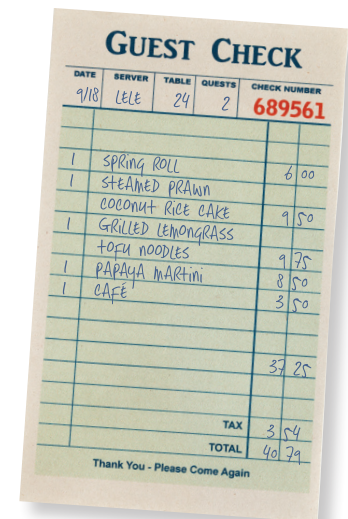
MARKETING & PROMOTION

As a neighborhood discovers its identity, promoting the new image is important. OIS works with districts develop or enhance their brand, advertise collectively, generate positive media coverage, and build a community website and other collateral materials. In addition to building brand identity, organized neighborhood events allow residents to gather and celebrate, as well as attract visitors.



CLEAN & SAFE

In addition to the visual perception of a business district, it's critical for people to perceive a neighborhood as safe. Residents and merchants are encouraged to work with police, report crimes, and address physical conditions that encourage crime. Successful districts are most sustainable when they have an active street life and healthy sense of community.



WHAT IS A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA?

A [Business Improvement Area](#) (BIA) is a financial mechanism in which businesses in a district petition and approve self-initiated assessments to fund district improvements. The City collects this assessment from district ratepayers within a defined boundary based on the square footage, assessed land value and/or revenue for each business or property. Funds collected by the City are then returned to the district's BIA and can be used for parking improvements, joint marketing, cleanup and maintenance, security, special events, beautification, management, and administration.

Not every district has a BIA; in 2013, Seattle had eight. The ultimate advantage of a BIA is that it offers funding beyond what the City can provide and propels a district toward self-stewardship and long-term district health.

chinatown/id



SEATTLE SPOTLIGHT:
**APPEARANCE & PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT
CLEAN & SAFE**

Located in the heart of the city, Seattle's [Chinatown – International District](#) is a stone's throw from two sports stadiums, the train station, and the bustling financial district. The community has welcomed immigrants since the late 1800s and is now the multicultural epicenter of Seattle.

Since 2011, the Chinatown-International District Business Improvement Area has partnered with Seattle Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDpda) and *Only in Seattle* to improve sanitation and beautification efforts in the district. To facilitate community participation in combating street crime, the neighborhood hosts regular safety meetings and focuses efforts on block watch education, training, and outreach. Funds have been spent to improve business facades, lighting, landscaping, and paving. Both Canton Alley and Maynard Alley were awarded “City Infrastructure” awards for proposed alleyway enhancements. Each alley is transforming from a corridor of dumpsters into paved pedestrian pathways graced with planters, storefronts, and festoon lighting overhead. These alleys are becoming gathering places for events, boosting positive perceptions of the district and increasing business revenue. Chinatown – I.D. is making great strides and is on target for its 2014 goals.



georgetown



SEATTLE SPOTLIGHT:
MARKETING & PROMOTION

This bohemian enclave, just south of downtown and straddling the I-5 corridor, is a haven for blue-collar workers, creatives, and independent businesses owners. Appealing to musicians and artists, [Georgetown](#) celebrates a colorful, tawdry past and is known for its retro, gritty aesthetic.

The Georgetown Carnival arts festival, held annually in June, attracts thousands of visitors. Building upon the district's artistic brand identity and success of the arts festival, the Georgetown Merchants Association debuted the monthly Second Saturday Art Attack. The art-centric events continue to draw visitors year-round to Georgetown galleries and shops, making the district a vibrant destination for artists and art enthusiasts.



Photo credit: Paulina Lopez

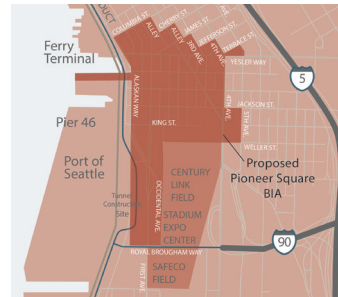
pioneer square



SEATTLE SPOTLIGHT: BUSINESS ORGANIZATION

Nestled along the southern edge of the downtown core, in the shadow of the Alaskan Way Viaduct, [Pioneer Square](#) is a neighborhood steeped in history. The Alliance for Pioneer Square, launched in June of 2010, has aggressively demonstrated its dedication to all five strategy areas suggested by the *Only in Seattle* Initiative.

In 2013, the Alliance engaged in a massive community outreach to expand its Business Improvement Area (BIA). The BIA is a self-help, funding mechanism where business owners within defined boundaries financially assess themselves to improve their district. With the expanded BIA, Pioneer Square will have the funds to keep growing its marketing and promotion, safety initiatives, and improvements to walkability and aesthetics. The Alliance meets regularly with existing business owners and actively recruits new businesses to the district. Regular interaction ensures ongoing dialogue about what is happening in the district and where improvements still need to be made. With its long-term revitalization strategy, the Alliance has effectively recruited new businesses and is on target to achieve its goal of a robust and prosperous commercial district by 2015.



Map credit: The Alliance for Pioneer Square

madison valley



SEATTLE SPOTLIGHT: MARKETING & PROMOTION

Two miles east of downtown and one mile west of Lake Washington, [Madison Valley](#) has been dubbed the “Little France” of Seattle. In 2010, a major stormwater project disrupted the neighborhood and negatively impacted businesses, prompting the Madison Valley Merchants Association to strategize about how to attract customers and businesses back to the district.

Influenced by its French businesses, the neighborhood rebranded itself as a quaint European village. Efforts focused on revamping the community’s website and social media strategy, developing membership recruitment materials, and launching the annual Bastille Bash. The July event has been a huge success – garnering media attention, showcasing area businesses, and attracting new visitors. The convivial atmosphere of the event lays a foundation of connection between owners and customers that lasts throughout the year.



mlk in the valley



SEATTLE SPOTLIGHT: BUSINESS AND RETAIL DEVELOPMENT MARKETING & PROMOTION

Sound Transit's light rail has brought an influx of visitors and residents to this emerging district located along [Martin Luther King Jr. Way](#). This community's identity is multi-faceted, comprised of a patchwork of cultures that can be found on the district's restaurant menus, colorful storefronts, and faces of its residents.

The MLK Business Association and partner affiliates HomeSight and the Rainier Valley Community Development Fund are working together to support local businesses. A business case manager designed a series of business development workshops focused on finding new customers, using social media, creating revenue streams, and cross-cultural customer service. In addition, social mixers and seasonal walking tours of the district familiarize business owners with each other and introduce community members to local businesses.

The district's "Plate of Nations" is a food-centric event in the spring that showcases the neighborhood's independently owned restaurants. Folks pick up their forks, pull out their wallets, and discover cuisines that flavor this vibrant district. This annual event has grown by over 50% in three years and has attracted positive media attention and thousands of customers. It officially lasts only two weeks, but brings visitors back to the district throughout the year.



u district



SEATTLE SPOTLIGHT: BUSINESS ORGANIZATION BUSINESS AND RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

The bustling [University District](#) is home to over 14,000 residents. The University of Washington anchors the community and draws over 80,000 students, faculty, and staff annually to its world-class campus and the surrounding district.

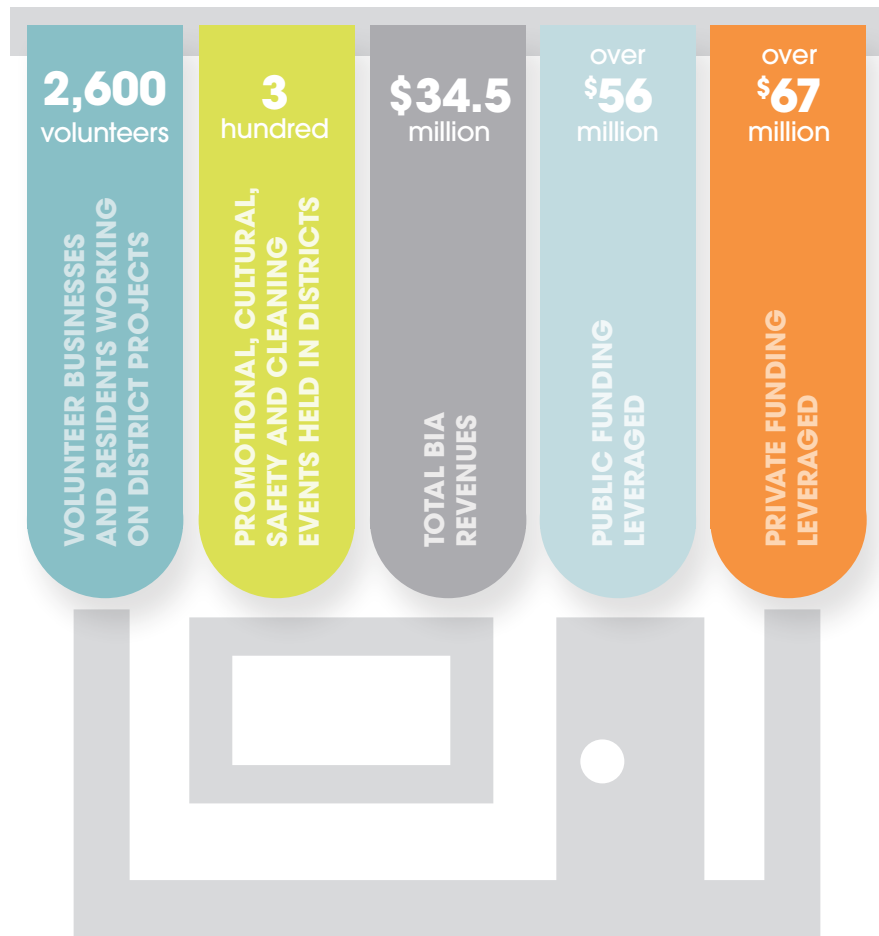
Maintaining a culture of collaboration between area leaders, business owners, campus representatives, and residents is crucial for the advancement of the district. To facilitate dialogue, the U-District Livability Partnership hosted events to engage community members in a strategic plan for the commercial district. Social media efforts and surveys have also proven invaluable in generating excitement, providing education, and engaging over 15,000 users via online forums. Focusing on housing, transportation, business attraction, branding, beautification, and walkability – members of the district's public, private, and nonprofit sectors have cooperated to develop a shared vision and action plan to implement changes.



**ONLY IN SEATTLE
NEIGHBORHOODS:**

BALLARD
BEACON HILL
BELLTOWN
CAPITOL HILL CENTRAL
DISTRICT CHINATOWN -
ID COLUMBIA CITY
FREMONT
GEORGETOWN
MADISON VALLEY MLK
IN THE VALLEY PHINNEY-
GREENWOOD PIONEER
SQUARE QUEEN ANNE
RAINIER BEACH
ROOSEVELT
SOUTH LAKE UNION
SOUTH PARK
UNIVERSITY DISTRICT
WALLINGFORD
WEST SEATTLE
WHITE CENTER

outcomes



capitol hill



SEATTLE SPOTLIGHT:
APPEARANCE & PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

[Capitol Hill](#) is rapidly evolving. *Only in Seattle* supports the Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce and the district's lead agency, Capitol Hill Housing, in their efforts to create the retail, housing, and community vibe that honors the district's long-standing ideals of diversity balanced with the excitement of change. Through the 12th Avenue Initiative – an effort to invigorate underutilized spaces along 12th Avenue - emerged 12th Avenue Arts, The Jefferson mixed-use housing projects, as well as new park space. With streetcar and light rail construction currently underway, abundance of pedestrian traffic will soon descend on the neighborhood.



HOW CAN MY DISTRICT PARTICIPATE IN THE OIS PROGRAM?

I want my neighborhood's business district to benefit from unparalleled access to OIS services and support! What steps must my district take?

Target Area: The business district must have clearly defined geographic boundaries in which to focus revitalization efforts.

Action Plan: Each district works to produce a detailed plan that describes their vision, goals, and strategies to accomplish their mission.

Strong Community Stakeholder Participation: Action Plans must be developed with the input and involvement of key stakeholders and each component of the plan must identify the organizations, staff or volunteers identified to take responsibility for ensuring implementation.



One Proposal Per District: There must be one organization identified as the lead for managing the implementation of the action plan. Each commercial district is allowed to submit only one application.

Funding: Funding for the program is mostly federal, meaning districts need to be located in primarily residential (versus industrial) areas, and have 51% of low- and moderate-income residents served by the district. City General Funds may be available to districts that do not meet this eligibility requirement.

HOW DOES THE OIS PROGRAM EVALUATE PROPOSALS?

The duration and level of funding will be based on the thoroughness and quality of the proposal, as well as the following:

- Is there a competent lead agency that can successfully steer the initiative?
- Are community stakeholders successfully engaged?
- Is there a unified vision for district revitalization that is strategic and action-oriented?
- Does the proposal demonstrate adequate need and potential impact?
- Will the effort be sustainable once public funds are expended?

STAGES OF ONLY IN SEATTLE DISTRICTS

ORGANIZING	TRANSFORMING	ESTABLISHED
Organizing a Stakeholder Group	Organizational structure established (lead agency identified)	Financially stable organization
Developing a Shared Vision for the district	Implementing an Action Plan	Ongoing work plan
Creating an Action Plan	Early win projects completed	New projects to expand impact

Photo credits: Unless otherwise noted, photo credits are 206inc for OED's *Only in Seattle*.



FALL APPLICATIONS

OED has an annual, fall application process to select new neighborhoods to be part of the OIS Initiative. Funds are disbursed on a milestone-based schedule starting the first quarter of the next calendar year.

For more about the application process and deadlines, visit:
www.seattle.gov/economicdevelopment/oisi/grants.htm

only in seattle.
INITIATIVE

City of Seattle's
Office of Economic Development

PO Box 94708
Seattle, WA 98124-4708
Phone: 206.684.8090
Fax: 206.684.0379

www.seattle.gov/economicdevelopment/oisi

www.onlyinseattle.org

