

# After the Vote: Participatory Budgeting Project Implementation in Providence, RI

A CASE STUDY ON THE NINE  
NEIGHBORHOOD FUND



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OCTOBER 2025



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# Acknowledgements

Many Central Providence community members and organizations made it possible to implement the Nine Neighborhood Fund projects and develop this case study.

Thank you to those who provided feedback on the projects funded through NNF through surveys. Special thanks to those who served on the Nine Neighborhood Fund Implementation Committee, on project-specific Subcommittees, and as Project Implementors; your leadership and contributions are invaluable.

Thank you to those who participated in interviews and feedback sessions; your insights and perspectives enrich this case study:

**Zachary Agush**, Project Implementer, RI Public Transit Authority

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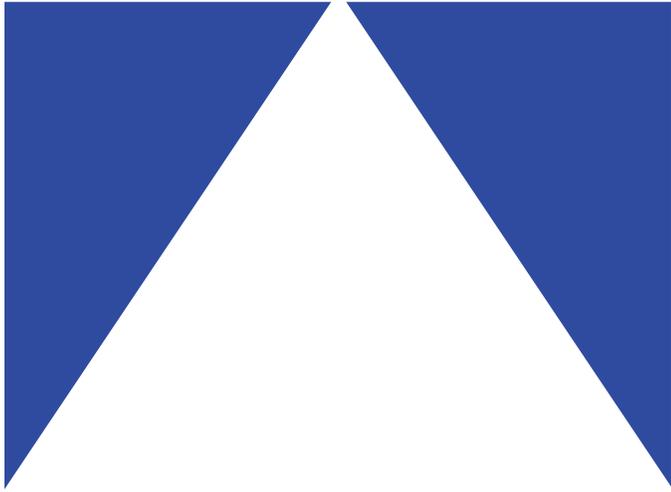
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**Diann Wilson**, Project Implementer, Chad Brown Alumni Association/North End Outreach

Thank you to Anusha Venkataraman, Kyle McKendall, and Bailey Doggett of One Neighborhood Builders for your keen edits and insights. Thank you, Eliana Rose Southworth, for designing this case study and bringing it to life. Thank you to the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Rhode Island Department of Health, and Blue Meridian Partners for their financial investments in the Nine Neighborhood Fund, which created an incredible opportunity for those who live and work in Central Providence to use their voices to positively impact their community.





## Executive Summary

This case study assesses the project implementation phase of the Nine Neighborhood Fund (NNF). NNF was a participatory budgeting process coordinated by Central Providence Unidos in Providence, Rhode Island from 2022 to 2025. Central Providence Unidos is a place-based initiative advancing health equity and economic mobility in nine neighborhoods in the 02908 and 02909 Providence ZIP Codes and is convened by One Neighborhood Builders, a community development nonprofit. Central Providence Unidos is part of the Health Equity Zone (HEZ) initiative housed at the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH).

In June 2023, over 1,200 people over 13 years old who live or go to school in Central Providence voted in NNF on how they wanted to spend \$1 million to improve health and well-being in their community. This led to the successful implementation of eight projects in Rhode Island's largest participatory budgeting process.

Past evaluations of participatory budgeting in Rhode Island, including NNF and in Pawtucket and Central Falls, focused on participatory budgeting process's impact. However, no other analyses of participatory budgeting in Rhode

Island have focused on the project implementation process – how people and organizations turn these winning projects into reality – and how this process can continue to center community members’ perspectives.

This case study focuses on the process of implementing the projects NNF voters selected. It presents outcomes of the winning projects and shares the results of surveys administered to project participants. These project outcomes and survey results demonstrate that these projects successfully reached residents, that residents want these projects to continue, and that the NNF process achieved many of its goals.

One Neighborhood Builders interviewed over 20 people involved in project implementation and observed several project meetings, and this analysis demonstrates that the Nine Neighborhood Fund’s project implementation phase successfully addressed its goals, especially centering community leadership and fostering civic engagement.

Many believed Central Providence Unidos’ role as a flexible, community-based coordinator supported the success of project implementation, though some mention future processes could better leverage participant skills.

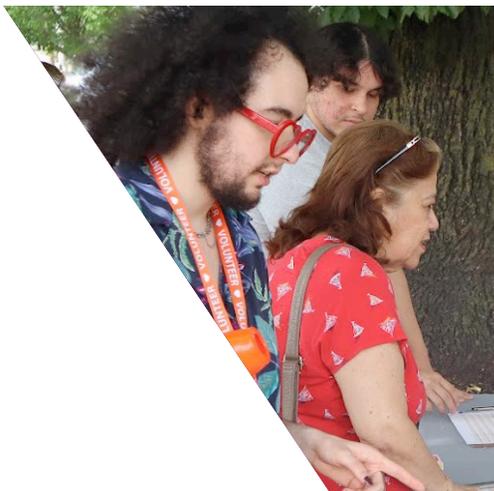
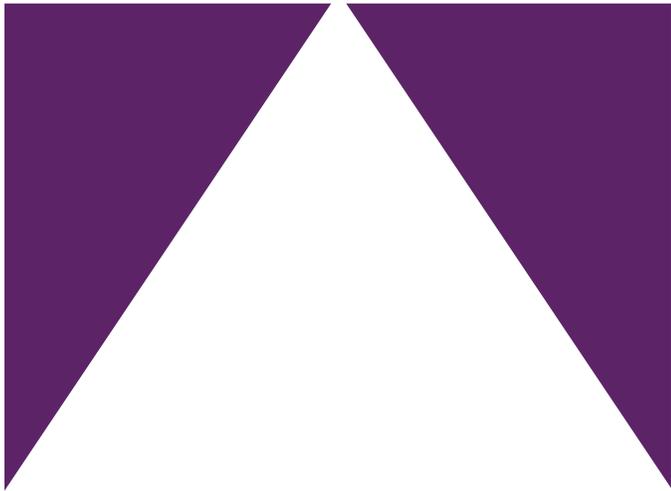




**Key considerations for future participatory budgeting processes include securing sustained public funding and resources for community management, strengthening government partnerships, and improving communication sharing. Participants, especially community members, consistently expressed that they want more participatory budgeting opportunities in Providence.**

Interviewees valued building relationships with various people and groups in their community. NNF implementation removed barriers to enable more equitable resource allocation.

This case study is for anyone interested in learning more about what participatory budgeting can look like in practice. It provides useful insights for those looking to know more about NNF and to better understand participatory budgeting project implementation, including tangible ways to continue to center community leadership. This case study also shows how participatory budgeting project implementation is a valuable tool for more democratic decision-making and community power-building.



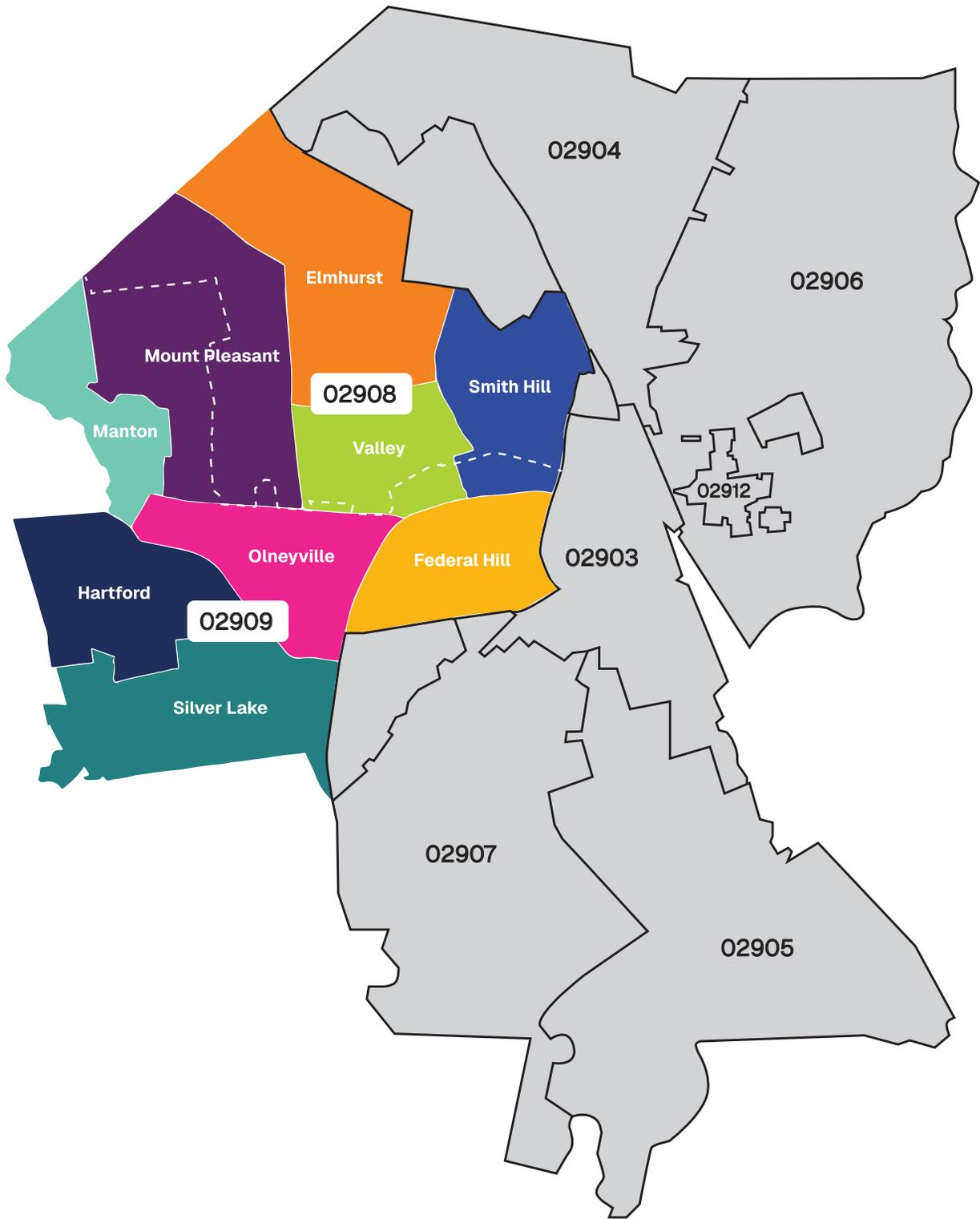


# Introduction

## What is Central Providence Unidos?

Central Providence Unidos, formerly known as Central Providence Opportunities: A Health Equity Zone, is a place-based initiative and Health Equity Zone (HEZ) that advances health equity and economic mobility in the 02908 and 02909 ZIP Codes in Providence, Rhode Island. A signature initiative of Providence-based nonprofit community development organization One Neighborhood Builders, Central Providence Unidos is one of 14 Rhode Island Health Equity Zones. The RI Department of Health (RIDOH) started the Health Equity Zone initiative in 2015 to improve health equity and outcomes through place-based initiatives and partnerships with communities.

Central Providence Unidos is a collection of community organizations, residents, and government partners working together to advance economic mobility and health equity across Central Providence. Nine Providence neighborhoods in the city's interior and western edges comprise Central Providence: Elmhurst, Federal Hill, Hartford, Manton, Mount Pleasant, Olneyville, Silver Lake, Smith Hill, and Valley. These neighborhoods contain a vast diversity of cultures, assets, and levels of investment and are home to more than 84,000 residents.



Map of Central Providence Neighborhoods within Providence

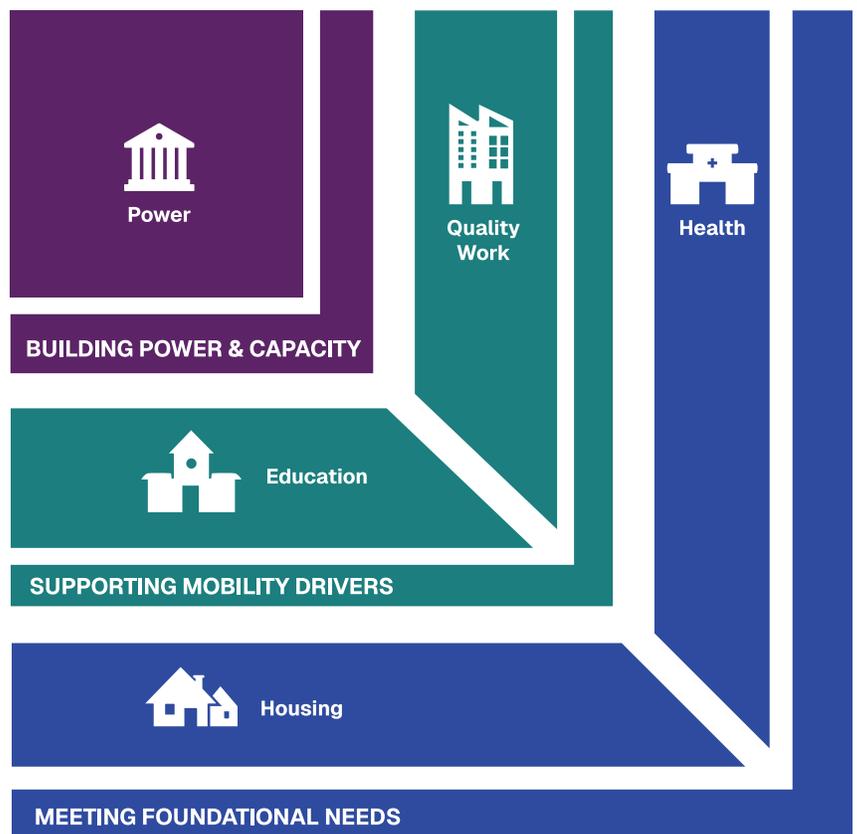


## Central Providence Roadmap

In spring 2025, Central Providence Unidos launched the revised Central Providence Roadmap, a guiding document for their work that recognizes that strategic coordination between partners and community leaders is essential for effectively addressing social determinants of health [1]. The co-designed Pillars and North Stars within the Roadmap in the graphic below demonstrate this theory of change.

### Theory of Change

Central Providence Unidos believes, if it invests operational, financial, and political capital into efforts that meet residents' foundational needs, increase residents' access to drivers of mobility, and amplify community power and capacity; then the conditions that drive health and economic disparities will improve.



Central Providence Roadmap Pillars and North Stars



## What is Participatory Budgeting?

In a participatory budgeting (PB) process, community members decide democratically how to spend some portion of public money or investment. PB processes vary depending on the geographic scope, amount of funding, funder, and the structure of supporting organizations.

For example, some PB projects focus on a single ward or neighborhood, while others focus on an entire city. However, they generally follow a similar trajectory with the goal of increasing direct civic engagement, strengthening communities, and advancing a more equitable distribution of resources [e.g., 2]. Participatory Budgeting Project, a nonprofit organization supporting communities implementing PB processes, describes PB in six key phases [2]:

## Six Key Phases of Participatory Budgeting



Source: Participatory Budgeting Project. Available at [participatorybudgeting.org/](http://participatorybudgeting.org/)



**These steps are a useful overview for understanding the PB process, however, they are missing an essential element of funding winning projects: **project implementation.****

**Project implementation involves several key decisions that community leaders can and should be able to shape. For example, who is selecting the organizations that will run the programs or install the capital projects? What are the criteria for selecting these implementers?**

Local governments first implemented participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989 and in the United States, in Chicago, in 2009 [e.g., 3-5]. Several cities of various sizes in the northeastern United States have funded PB processes with city funds, including Boston, Massachusetts; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Hartford, Connecticut; New York City, New York; and New Haven, Connecticut [6-14]. Some processes focus on certain populations; for example, Boston's Youth Lead the Change, one of Boston's PB processes since 2014, annually asks young people ages 14 to 25 to submit proposals on how they would improve the city [14]. Many municipalities – like Hartford, Cambridge, New York City, and Boston – fund PB processes annually [6-12]. Others, like New Haven, implemented PB once in one area of the city [13]. PB is also possible



for cities with budgets of diverse sizes: one of New York City's PB processes, PBNYC, allocated \$24 million in 2025 for infrastructure projects, while Hartford allocated \$107,000 in 2024 [10, 12].

NNF and the Pawtucket-Central Falls' HEZ PB processes are not the first PB processes in Rhode Island. Central Falls High School has implemented PB annually since 2019, enabling students to decide on how to allocate \$10,000 to improve their school. In addition, the Central Fall School District enacted a PB process, "Voces con Poder", to allocate \$100,000 of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, and the City of Central Falls allocated \$50,000 to the project in 2022 [15].

Studies demonstrate that PB can be a tool to engage residents from marginalized communities who are less likely to vote in traditional elections, including those earning lower incomes and people of color. In traditional U.S. elections, individuals earning higher incomes are more likely to vote than those earning lower incomes [e.g., 16-17]. Past research suggests that PB can increase civic engagement and build trust between community members and governments [e.g., 18-19]. An analysis of NYC's PB process found participants were on average eight percent more likely to vote in traditional elections, with greater effects among those who are less likely to vote in traditional elections [18]. In most of 29 PB processes evaluated in the U.S. and Canada in 2015, Black residents and residents from lower-income households were either overrepresented or proportionally represented among PB voters [5]. PB processes aim to allocate resources more equitably and increase social connection, among other shifts. Researchers claim these mechanisms have the potential to mitigate health disparities [20-21].



## Nine Neighborhood Fund Origins

In 2020, the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) released an investment strategy for social determinants of health through the Health Systems Transformation Project (HSTP). The HSTP included plans to expand participatory budgeting in Rhode Island beyond Central Falls High School [22]. Through the HSTP, Medicaid funds were used to expand PB across Rhode Island, making this PB process the first in the nation to receive Medicaid funding [23].

The RI Department of Health (RIDOH) collaborated with EOHHS to release a request for proposals for Health Equity Zones interested in leading a PB project in their community.

Central Providence Unidos replied to the state's RFP with a submission that built on the success of its Community Impact Fund, an initiative launched in 2021 offering grants up to \$5,000 for creative, community-driven projects for micro-enterprise (defined as nonprofit organizations and small businesses with under ten employees). Through the Community Impact Fund, Central Providence Unidos's Resident Advisory Council awarded \$100,400 to 21 businesses and organizations.





AKA in the following neighborhoods: Silver Lake, Hartford, Manton, Mt. Pleasant, Elmhurst, Smith Hill, Valley, Olneyville, or Federal Hill



**YOU CAN VOTE IF YOU...**

- ...are 13 years or older
- ...live or go to school in 02908 or 02909

## HOW SHOULD WE SPEND A MILLION DOLLARS?

The **Nine Neighborhood Fund** is using \$1,000,000 to fund projects that improve health in our communities - and YOU get to decide how! Your vote will determine which projects receive funding in our neighborhoods.

**Cast your ballot from June 6 - June 20!**

### COME TO OUR VOTING PARTY!

SATURDAY, JUNE 10th from 2pm-5pm  
DIKE STREET (Olneyville)

Music • Games • Childcare • Food • Interpretation

To vote online or to find a polling location near you, visit [decideRI.org](http://decideRI.org)



**Text PBCentralPVD to (401) 291-6788 for more info!**

This was an outreach flyer for a voting party for the Nine Neighborhood Fund. Flyers were distributed in English and Spanish.



RIDOH awarded Central Providence Unidos and another Health Equity Zone, the Pawtucket Central Falls HEZ convened by LISC Rhode Island, \$450,000 each to implement PB processes. One Neighborhood Builders also secured \$550,000 from Blue Meridian Partners, a private philanthropic partner, to supplement the funds for Central Providence Unidos’s participatory budgeting process, bringing the total funds to \$1 million. In 2022, Central Providence Unidos launched its participatory budgeting initiative as the Nine Neighborhood Fund (NNF), where residents 13 years or older who live or go to school in the nine neighborhoods of Central Providence decided how to allocate \$1 million to improve community health and well-being.

Central Providence Unidos saw participatory budgeting as a tangible way to center resident voice in critically important decisions—such as how money is spent—and provide additional funds to make community visions a reality. The Central Providence Roadmap, a ten-year guiding document, focuses on improving local power and capacity to positively affect communities’ access to resources, influence decision-makers to meet collective goals, and organize to affect change in their community [1]. Through NNF, Central Providence Unidos wanted to ensure that residents were involved not just in deciding what the money is spent on, but also how the money is spent in the rollout of the projects.







# Nine Neighborhood Fund Structure and Timeline

## Pre-Project Implementation

### **Steering Committee Formation and Rulebook Creation**

The NNF participatory budgeting (PB) process began in August 2022 when Central Providence Unidos staff created the Steering Committee, NNF's governing body. The Steering Committee had 17 members who lived, worked, or went to school in Central Providence. The Steering Committee was responsible for designing the PB process and making key decisions about PB implementation. The Steering Committee developed the Nine Neighborhood Fund Rulebook, which served as a guiding document and set of rules for the process [24].

### **Idea Collection**

Anyone interested could submit a project idea from September through December 2022. Over 300 ideas were collected in many ways, including through:

- Assembly meetings at accessible locations in the community
- Pop-up idea collection tables at community events and public housing
- Idea collection boxes at health centers, public spaces (including libraries and recreation centers), local businesses, and other frequented locations
- Face-to-face at busy locations like bus stops, markets, school drop off
- Door knocking at homes
- Online at [www.decideRI.org](http://www.decideRI.org)



# Nine Neighborhood Fund Timeline



## Design the Process

**August–September 2022**

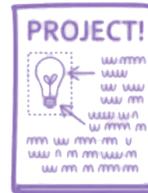
**August 2022:** NNF starts! Central Providence Unidos convenes the first meeting of the Nine Neighborhood Fund Steering Committee

**August–September 2022:** Rulebook development



## Brainstorm Ideas

**September–December 2022:** Idea collection and recruitment and Project Delegate onboarding



## Develop Proposals

**January–May 2023:** Proposal development refined to 20 projects



## Vote

**June 2023:** Voting phase: Over 1,200 Central Providence residents cast votes in NNF projects, and eight projects are selected



## Project Implementation Planning

**September 2023–June 2024**

**September 2023:** First Implementation Committee meeting

**October 2023:** First Project Subcommittee meetings

**November 2023:** First round of Requests for Proposals are released

**January–February 2023:** Subcommittees review first round of RFPs, conduct interviews, and select Project Implementers

**April 2024:** Second round of Requests for Proposals are released

**May–June 2024:** Subcommittees review second round of RFPs, conduct interviews, and select Project Implementers



## Project Implementation

**May 2024–December 2025**

**May–October 2024:** Park Stewards in Davis and Donigian Parks, Season 1 (Garden Time)

**May–September 2024:** Bike Distribution and Repair (Chad Brown Alumni Association/ North End Outreach)

**July–October 2024:** Life Skills Classes for Youth (Sin-cere Multiservice, Inc.)

**July 2024–May 2025:** Lead-Free Water Filters Distribution (Olneyville Resilience Hub - Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council)

**September–December 2024:** Peer Mental Health Program (Project LETS)

**May–August 2025:** Fruit-bearing Tree Planting (Providence Neighborhood Planting Program)

**May–October 2025:** Park Stewards in Davis and Donigian Parks, Season 2 (Garden Time)

**July 2025:** Bathrooms installed in Merino Park (Wasted\*)

**July–August 2025:** Soccer for Youth program (Providence Sharks Football Club, Guatemalan Center of New England)

**June–December 2025:** Bus Stop Improvements installed (RI Public Transit Authority)

## Nine Neighborhood Fund Roles

### Pre-Project Implementation Phase

ROLE AND DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBILITIES	MEMBERS
<p><b>Steering Committee</b> NNF's governing body</p>	<p>Designed the PB process, made decisions about PB implementation, and created the Nine Neighborhood Fund Rulebook [24]</p>	<p>17 individuals who lived, worked, or went to school in Central Providence</p>
<p><b>Project Delegate</b> Turned ideas into project proposals for resident consideration</p>	<p>Developed budgets, timelines, and project information</p>	<p>32 individuals who lived, worked, or went to school in Central Providence over the age of 13 and did not have a conflict of interest</p>
<p><b>Project Delegate Facilitator</b> Led Project Delegate committees</p>	<p>Helped Project Delegates review and prioritize ideas and turn them into ballot-ready proposals</p>	<p>Five individuals recruited by Central Providence Unidos staff</p>
<p><b>Collaborators</b> Subject matter experts who worked in municipal and state government, and at nonprofit organizations</p>	<p>Helped Project Delegates consider project feasibility and success</p>	<p>City of Providence, Departments of Parks and Recreation, and Public Property; Rhode Island Department of Health Asthma Control Program; Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA); Partnership for Providence Parks; GroundWork Rhode Island; West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation, Sankofa Initiative; Asthenis Pharmacy; Amos House; Providence Water</p>



## Nine Neighborhood Fund Roles Project Implementation Phase

ROLE AND DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBILITIES	MEMBERS
<p><b>Implementation Committee</b></p> <p>Provided high-level oversight, accountability, and consistency across the implementation of all projects</p>	<p>Developed consistent Requests for Proposal (RFP) review process and criteria for evaluating RFP responses, contributed to a PB advocacy strategy in coordination with Central Providence Unidos to identify sustainable opportunities to use public funds to implement future PB processes</p>	<p>10 individuals, including former Steering Committee members; a former Project Delegate Facilitator; and representatives from Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Service, the City of Providence, and One Neighborhood Builders</p>
<p><b>Project Subcommittee</b></p> <p>Focused on project implementation details</p>	<p>Reviewed Requests for Proposals (RFP) responses from organizations interested in implementing the project, selected the Project Implementer, informed neighbors on project updates, and provided feedback to partners</p>	<p>Consisted of one to three community members in addition to nonprofit and municipal partners</p>
<p><b>Project Implementer</b></p> <p>Selected to implement one of the eight winning projects</p>	<p>Implement and evaluate project, report on budgets and project to Central Providence Unidos and Subcommittee</p>	<p>Organizations that implemented the winning NNF projects</p>



## Proposal Development

From January to May 2023, 32 Project Delegates turned ideas into project proposals for resident consideration. Project Delegates had to live in or go to school in 02908 and 02909, be 13 years old or older, and not have any conflict of interest (such as elected officials, or staff or board members of an organization that might receive funding).

Central Providence Unidos formed thematic committees, and each committee reviewed ideas collected within their category. These committees were (1) public spaces and places (ideas that had to do with public infrastructure, recreation centers, roads, etc.), (2) environment, (3) community connectedness (projects that focused on bringing community members together through events, civic engagement, etc.), (4) community health, (5) crisis intervention (projects that addressed urgent needs, such as homelessness), and (6) learning and development (projects to support learning at all ages and workforce development). Each committee had a Facilitator that helped Project Delegates review and prioritize ideas and turn the ideas into a ballot-ready proposal that would include budgets, timelines, and project information for voters.

Project Delegates used the following factors when considering an idea for further development. This project would:

- Direct resources to low-income people of color
- Improve health and well-being in our community
- Be accessible to residents of 02908 and 02909
- Address an unmet need in our community
- Be possible within the \$880,000 budget

Facilitators and Central Providence Unidos staff brought in Collaborators: individuals who worked in municipal and state government, and at nonprofit organizations. Collaborators were subject matter experts who helped Project Delegates consider the feasibility of projects and how to ensure projects would succeed if the projects won the vote. Collaborators included representatives from RIDOH Asthma Control Program, City of Providence Parks Department, Zuccolo Recreation Center, Amos House, Asthenis Pharmacy, and Partnership for Providence Parks. Some Project Delegate groups also conducted site visits to better understand the needed capital improvements at areas like bus stops and parks.

### **Vote**

Finally, the proposals were compiled into a final ballot of 20 projects, which were separated into “large projects” and “small projects,” depending on the project’s budget. Anyone 13 years old or older and was a resident of or went to school in 02908 and 02909 was eligible. Voting was held both in-person and online. In-person voting included pop-up voting at Providence Housing Authority sites in the HEZ, setting up voting at middle and high schools, at well-trafficked areas like pharmacies, and through a voting party in Olneyville. Nearly 1,200 people cast votes in May and June 2023.





## Eight Project With the Most Votes Four Large, Four Small

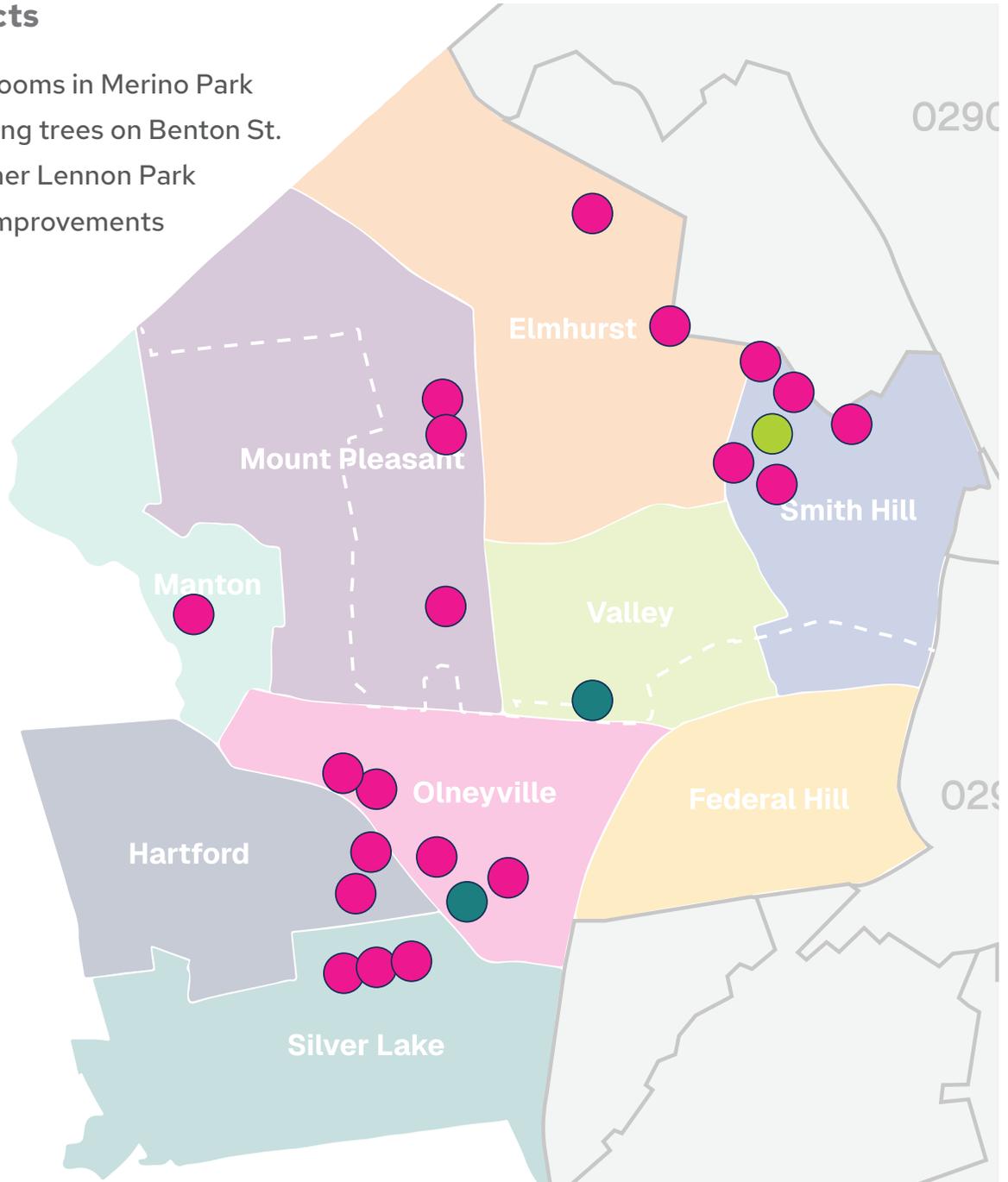
LARGE PROJECTS	 BATHROOMS AND PLANTS IN OUR PARKS	 LEAD-FREE WATER	 PEER MENTAL HEALTH	 IMPROVING OUR BUS STOPS
VOTES	728	708	686	662
BUDGET	\$368,000	\$330,000	\$50,000	\$132,000
SMALL PROJECTS	 LIFE SKILLS CLASSES FOR YOUTH	 FOOD BEARING TREE PLANTING	 SOCCER FOR YOUTH	 BIKE DISTRIBUTION AND REPAIR
VOTES	641	606	560	440
BUDGET	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000



## Map of Nine Neighborhood Fund Capital Projects In the 02908 and 02909 Zip Codes

### Capital Projects

- New bathrooms in Merino Park
- Fruit-bearing trees on Benton St. and in Father Lennon Park
- Bus stop improvements





## Pre-Project Implementation Impact

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) evaluated NNF and the Pawtucket-Central Falls PB processes through the voting results [23]. This analysis demonstrated that NNF successfully engaged historically marginalized communities in this democratic decision-making process.

- More than 20% of NNF voters who were eligible to vote in traditional local elections noted that they never, rarely, or sometimes voted in local elections
- Both PB processes engaged:
  - **Medicaid members** (over 40% of Budget/Project Delegates and Steering Committee members)
  - **BIPOC residents** (75% of Steering Committee members and Project/Budget Delegates)
  - **Low-income households** (over half of Steering Committee members and Budget/Project Delegates earned less than \$49,000 in annual household income, and 62% of voters' households earned less than \$25,000 annually)
  - **Voters who were ineligible to vote** in traditional elections, most of whom were young people (88% of ineligible voters)

The evaluation found statistically significant improvements in civic skills among Budget/Project Delegates in NNF and the Pawtucket Central Falls PB processes, including increased comfort with public speaking, understanding government documents, and interpreting budget spreadsheets. Beyond skill-building, the evaluation reported that Budget/Project Delegates and



Steering Committee members in both PB processes expressed that the PB process profoundly impacted their understanding of health and community responsibility; Delegates and Steering Committee members demonstrated increased awareness of community challenges, health as interconnected with community well-being, and how residents can affect change in their communities.

Steering Committee members and Budget/Project Delegates in both PB processes interviewed in this evaluation overwhelmingly wanted to continue to see PB in their communities and appreciated direct resident involvement in resource allocation decisions. In the evaluation, RIDOH concluded that the PB framework is easily replicable and provides a worthwhile community-driven framework for investing current federal and state funding streams in Rhode Island communities [23].

One Neighborhood Builders conducted a survey in 2025 to assess NNF's impact on those engaged with NNF a year later. The survey was shared with all NNF voters, Project Delegates, and Project Delegate Facilitators. Respondents (40 people) – who included NNF voters, Project Delegates, and Subcommittee members – expressed exceptional satisfaction with NNF. On average, respondents rated their overall experience as 4.55/5 (5 was the most favorable rating), and over 90% of respondents would recommend participatory budgeting to friends. Although this is a small sample, it demonstrates that many of those involved in NNF still found the process valuable a year later.



Multiple survey respondents noted they appreciated building inclusive community through NNF.

**“[I most appreciated] the collaboration with other community members, seeing the results of our efforts together, the unity and bond we were able to build through this process.” – RESPONDENT**

**“I truly enjoyed the relationships I gained through this process and the knowledge we obtain[ed]” – PROJECT DELEGATE**

**“Que no importando mi idioma, se me dió la oportunidad de ser parte de este gran comité, excelentes líderes y excelente comunicación.”**

**– RESPONDENT**

*That regardless of my language, I was given the opportunity to be part of this great committee, excellent leaders, and excellent communication.*

**“[Mi parte favorita del proceso fue la unidad la] unidad de diversas razas y culturas buscando cuál sea la mejor propuesta para mejorar nuestra comunidad.” – RESPONDENT**

*My favorite part of the process was] the unity of diverse races and cultures seeking the best proposal to improve our community.*

## Project Implementation

Following NNF’s voting period, Central Providence Unidos was tasked with implementing the eight projects that won the most votes. Central Providence Unidos wanted the project implementation process to maintain the same community-driven process that makes participatory budgeting so impactful. In this vein, Central Providence Unidos created two committees to lead project implementation – an Implementation Committee and Project Subcommittees – to ensure that the project implementation process was community driven and was aligned with the spirit of NNF and PB, generally.



## **Implementation Committee**

The Implementation Committee included former Steering Committee members; a former Project Delegate Facilitator; and representatives from EOHHS, the City of Providence, and One Neighborhood Builders. This group provided high-level oversight, accountability, and consistency across the implementation of all projects. The Implementation Committee also contributed to a PB advocacy strategy in coordination with Central Providence Unidos to identify sustainable opportunities to use public funds to implement future PB processes. For example, this group identified that they would like to see Providence City Council discretionary funds used for future PB processes.

## **Project Subcommittees**

Each winning project also had an accompanying Project Subcommittee. These groups varied in size but consisted of one to three community members in addition to nonprofit and municipal partners. Project Subcommittees focused on project implementation details and reviewed Requests for Proposals (RFP) responses from organizations interested in implementing the project. The Subcommittee determined which applicants to interview, selected the Implementer, informed neighbors on project updates, and provided feedback to implementing partners.

## **Standardizing the Process**

The NNF Implementation Committee developed a consistent RFP process across all projects. The Implementation Committee wanted the application process to be as accessible as possible, especially for organizations who did not have the capacity to have paid grant writers on staff. The Implementation Committee determined that there would be two steps to the process. First, an organization would submit an application that included an overview of the organization, their history in the community, and their vision for the project. Then, the Subcommittee would interview potential implementers, so Subcommittee members were not relying solely on the applicant's ability to write grants. There would also be RFP Office Hours to ensure additional support was available to interested applicants.



The Implementation Committee determined the evaluation criteria and their weight. Below are the Implementation Committee’s criteria for reviewing RFP responses:

## Implementation Committee’s Criteria for reviewing RFP responses

<b>CRITERIA AREA</b>	<b>PROPOSAL DEMONSTRATES</b>	<b>MAX. SCORE PER CATEGORY</b>
<b>Completeness</b>	All specified application components are included in the correct format, and all questions have been addressed.	10 points
<b>Community Involvement</b>	Evidence that community will be equitably involved in the design and leadership of project implementation.	25 points
<b>Health Equity Alignment</b>	Clear articulation and clear demonstration of serving BIPOC residents of 02908 and 02909.	30 points
<b>Capacity, Readiness, and Impact</b>	Clear demonstration of ability and capacity to conduct all activities and actions of project implementation. Ability to conduct project activities in a way that will maximize impact Evidence of relevant experience to complete all aspects of project.	25 points
<b>Sustainability</b>	The applicant has demonstrated the potential to achieve long-term change beyond the end of the performance period.	10 points

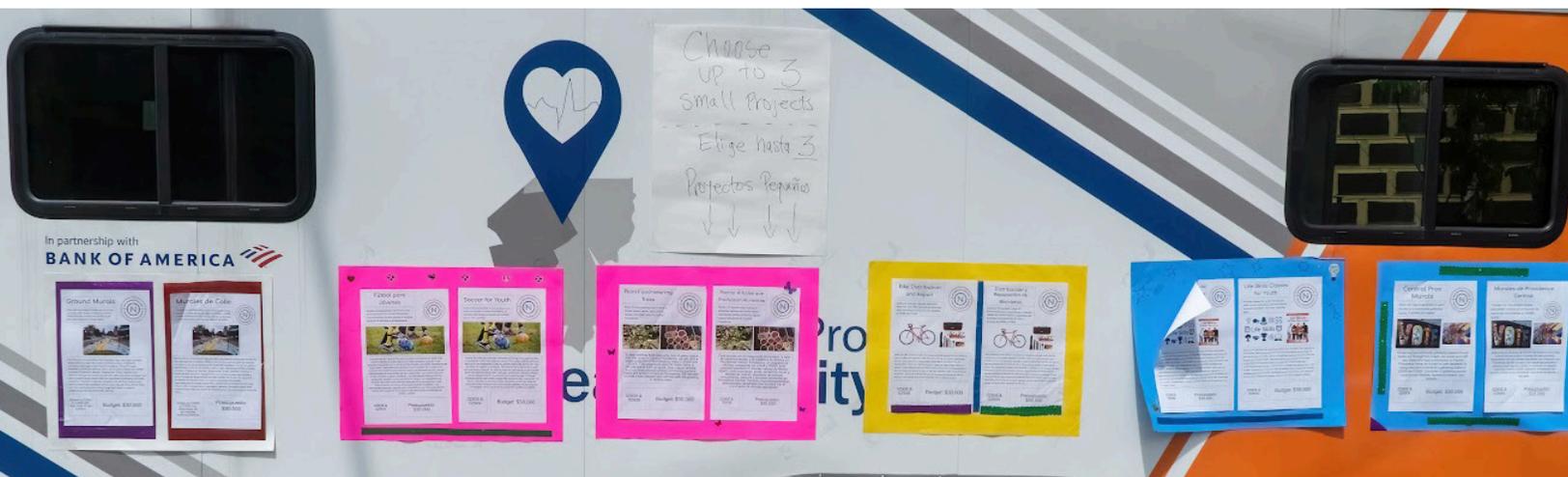


## RFP Review and Selection Process

Of the eight winning projects, most required Requests for Proposals (RFP) to determine the Project Implementer. Capital projects that installed permanent infrastructure – bus stop improvements, the new bathrooms at Merino Park, and food-bearing tree plantings – did not have a formal RFP structure. However, the Project Subcommittees were still engaged in procurement decisions.

With a consistent RFP structure, each Project Subcommittee reviewed the RFP template and application questions. The first round of RFPs (for Peer Mental Health, Bike Distribution, Lead-Free Water, and Park Stewards) was released on November 20, and responses were due December 15. The second round of RFPs (for Life Skills for Youth and Soccer for Youth) was released on April 8, and RFP responses were due April 29.

After receiving RFP responses, Subcommittee members evaluated responses using a rubric based on the five categories shared above. Central Providence Unidos staff then applied the weights of each category with the Subcommittee members’ rankings to get a score. Each Subcommittee discussed each response’s strengths and challenges and identified which respondents they wanted to select for in-person interview. Interview questions were sent in advance to provide prospective Implementers with time to prepare. After conducting interviews, Subcommittees selected the Project Implementer.







## Case Study Context and Purpose

A 2022 systematic literature review of 139 articles on participatory budgeting (PB) processes categorized the articles by which stages of the PB process the article analyzed (1) the governmental environment, (2) the design of the process, (3) the mechanisms used for participation, or (4) the goals and outcomes of participation in budgeting [25]. This review established that most of these articles focused on the design of the PB process, typically on engaging residents in the PB process up to and including the voting phase.

This literature review identified several gaps in existing research on PB processes nationally. Few of the articles analyzed by this comprehensive review assessed the goals and outcomes of the PB process or whether the PB process achieved its initial goals. Additionally, few studies in this literature review analyzed the impact of PB processes on project participants, for example those who received services or used the new resources funded and distributed through the PB process. Not many studies explored the role internal government actors or external, non-government individuals or organizations can play in starting or expanding PB processes [25].

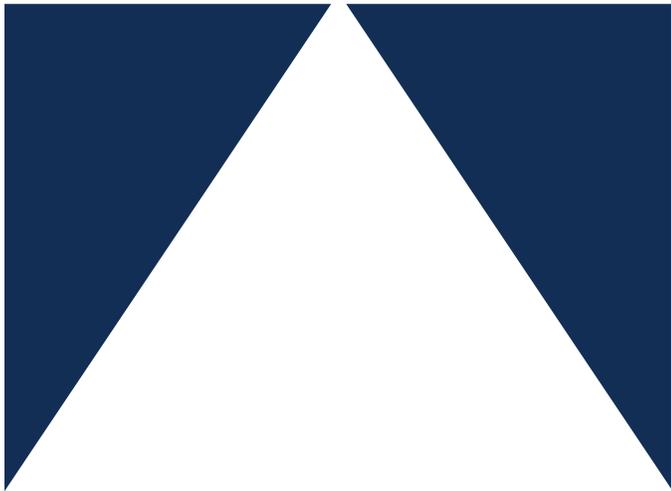
In Rhode Island, RIDOH conducted a critical evaluation of NNF and Pawtucket-Central Falls's PB processes, up to and including the voting phase [23]. However, there are no case studies that have assessed the process of implementing these winning projects in Rhode Island. Projects funded by PB processes are newer to Rhode Island, and it is critical that those looking to fund or implement future PB processes understand both (1) the outcomes of projects funded by PB and (2) experiences of individuals involved in project implementation.





**This case study aims to address some of these gaps in several ways:**

- 1. This case study presents the initial goals and outcomes of the NNF projects, including through survey data from some project participants.**
- 2. It focuses on the experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in implementing NNF projects.**
- 3. This case study explores the role of the PB coordinator – Central Providence Unidos – and perceptions of government actors in NNF project implementation.**



# Methods

The key research questions for this case study included:

1. What were the outcomes of NNF projects?
2. What were the reflections of individuals involved in the implementation process? These individuals included Implementation Committee members, Project Subcommittee members, Project Implementers, and Central Providence Unidos staff who coordinated the NNF process.
3. What did they think went well? What could have been improved? What were dynamics between the various stakeholders?
4. What can be learned from participant reflections to inform future participatory budgeting implementation processes?

To explore these questions, this case study employed a mixed-methods approach, using surveys, interviews, and participant observation.



A One Neighborhood Builders staff member not involved with NNF and a One Neighborhood Builders intern attended meetings for several NNF projects and interviewed 25 people involved in the project implementation process, including:

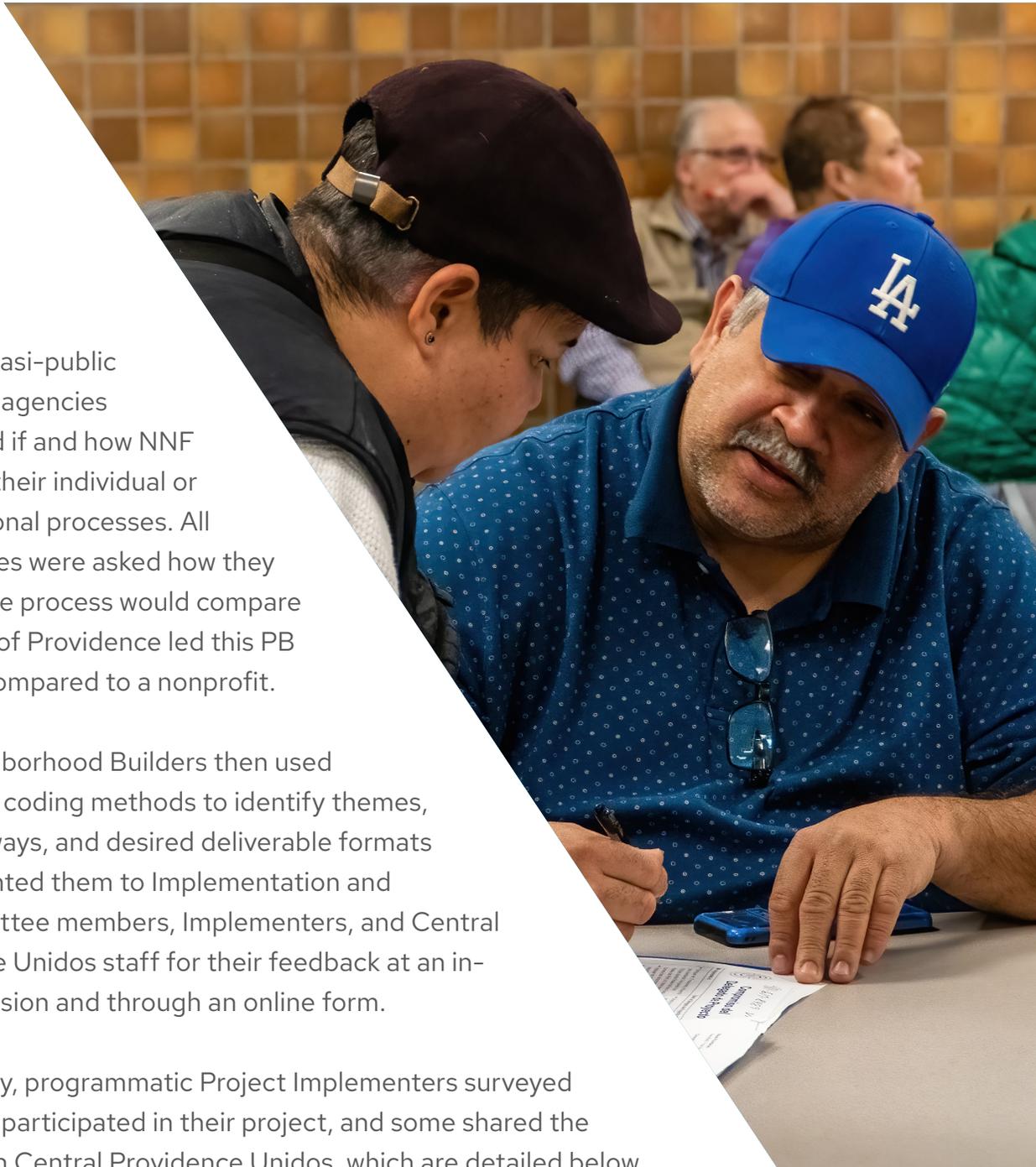
- Five Implementation Committee members
- 11 Project Subcommittee members from six projects
- Four Project Implementers (seven individuals)
- Two Central Providence Unidos staff members who coordinated NNF's implementation process

These interviewees held different identities and roles that shaped the approach to the interview:

- Three of these interviews were conducted in Spanish with an interpreter
- Three of the interviewees were governmental or quasi-governmental agency representatives
- At least 12 of the interviewees were Central Providence residents

Implementation Committee members and Project Subcommittee members were asked about how their role in NNF implementation impacted them, what skills they gained, what went well and could have been improved through the project implementation process, and how well they thought NNF achieved its stated goals in the Rulebook [22]. Implementation and Project Subcommittee members who were not otherwise compensated through their job to participate in the committees received a \$20 gift card for participating in the interviews.

Project Implementers were asked about their reflections on the implementation process, how the RFP process compared to others, and what working with Central Providence Unidos staff and the Subcommittee looked like.



Staff at quasi-public and public agencies were asked if and how NNF impacted their individual or organizational processes. All interviewees were asked how they thought the process would compare if the City of Providence led this PB process, compared to a nonprofit.

One Neighborhood Builders then used qualitative coding methods to identify themes, key takeaways, and desired deliverable formats and presented them to Implementation and Subcommittee members, Implementers, and Central Providence Unidos staff for their feedback at an in-person session and through an online form.

Additionally, programmatic Project Implementers surveyed those who participated in their project, and some shared the results with Central Providence Unidos, which are detailed below.





# Results and Analysis

## Project Outcomes

As of publishing, all but one of eight projects (Improving our Bus Stops) have been implemented. Three capital projects installed new permanent infrastructure: Improving Bathrooms in Our Parks, Improving our Bus Stops, and Fruit Bearing Trees. The remaining projects were programmatic and ran for a specific time period. Improving Bathrooms in Our Parks also had a programmatic component, as Park Stewards only served for two seasons. Below are the project outcomes and initial project goals that were on the NNF ballot [26].

Two of the programmatic projects – Bike Distribution and Repair & Soccer for Youth – surpassed the initial goals of the number of participants. Survey responses from programmatic project participants demonstrate high levels of participant satisfaction and increased sense of community connection and ability to affect change in their communities.

## Bathrooms and Plants in Our Parks

### Capital and Programmatic Project

#### Project Implementers

Garden Time, Park Stewards; and Wasted\*, bathroom build-out

- Garden Time is a Providence-based organization that prepares currently and formerly incarcerated individuals for the workforce
- Wasted\* is a Vermont-based company focused on circular sanitation

#### Initial Goal

\$368,000 will be directed to install two new composting toilets at Merino Park and increase access to existing bathrooms in Donigian and Davis Parks. In addition, this initiative will support the planting of native shrubs to enhance the beauty of green space, encourage community use, and protect the environment.



## Outcomes

- Park Stewards
  - Garden Time increased bathroom access by providing Park Stewards with bathroom keys for existing bathrooms at Donigian and Davis Parks. Park Stewards were present from June to October 2024 and 2025, ensuring 20 hours of bathroom access per week at each park
  - Stewards noted that increasing access was especially important in the evenings and varied depending on the park
  - Central Providence Unidos worked with Heavenly Cleaning Services, a Central Providence based cleaning company, to ensure bathrooms were regularly cleaned and Park Stewards could elevate any emergency clean-up needs.
- Bathroom Build-out
  - Wasted\* installed two ADA-accessible, sustainable toilets in summer 2025 at Merino Park and will service them for the life of the bathrooms





## Lead-Free Water Filters

### Programmatic Project

#### Project Implementer

Olneyville Resilience Hub – Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council (WRWC)

- The Olneyville Resilience Hub is an initiative started by the City of Providence Department of Sustainability and is a community-driven facility focused on increasing a community's ability to adapt to, respond to, and recover from climate change-related threats. WRWC leads programming at the Olneyville Resilience Hub.

#### Initial Goal

\$330,000 will be directed to provide at least 2,000 Central Providence households who have lead-contaminated water pipes with a National Science Foundation (NSF)-certified water filter and dispenser. Additionally, funds will help support community education about lead safety.

#### Outcomes

- Distributed one water dispenser and three NSF filters certified to remove lead to 2,000 Central Providence households
- Circulated online educational videos about the hazards of lead in water and how to use the pitcher and filter to the public and each recipient
- Conducted outreach at over 50 locations, including public housing complexes, schools, the Olneyville Neighborhood Association, libraries, and other community events to inform individuals about the available filters and provide education on the dangers of lead exposure
- Hosted a workshop at the Olneyville Resilience Hub in collaboration with Childhood Lead Action Project about lead and its health impacts
  - Recipient feedback (100 responses)
  - Majority of recipients were Latino



- High program satisfaction: 85% of respondents gave the highest rating for program satisfaction, and over 90% would recommend the program
- Increased community connection: most respondents felt more connected to their community (83% yes) and feel capable of making change (78% yes)
- Participatory budgeting remains invisible: 63% of respondents were unaware that the project was funded through participatory budgeting, but 25% expressed interest in learning more, indicating potential for expanding community engagement in future PB processes
- Word-of-mouth drove success: 58% heard through friends, neighbors, or family members
- Strong demand for program expansion: Participants and prospective participants consistently asked about extending to more ZIP codes and neighborhoods, indicating the program addressed a community need that extends beyond current boundaries





## Youth Peer Mental Health

### Programmatic Project

#### Project Implementer

Project LETS

- Project LETS is a national nonprofit organization based in Providence led by and for people with lived experience of mental illness, disability, neurodivergence that builds peer support collectives

#### Initial Goal

\$50,000 will be directed to launch a peer mental health training program for high school students in Central Providence. The training will help young people detect signs that their classmates and friends may be experiencing mental health issues. Students who complete the training will receive a certificate and have the opportunity to train other students in their school.

#### Outcomes

- Facilitated eight sessions each (16 total) for Spanish and English cohorts. Topics included peer support skills, how mental health interacts with identity and culture, and plant medicine
- 56 students who live in Central Providence completed the course
- Student participants expressed feeling more confident in knowing how to communicate with peers who are struggling or in distress and were interested in the program continuing past the grant period

## Improving Our Bus Stops

### Capital Project

#### Project Implementer

Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA)

- RIPTA provides public transportation, primarily through buses, throughout Rhode Island



### **Initial Goal**

\$132,000 will be directed to add seating, lighting, and additional amenities near approximately four bus stops that currently do not have shelters.

### **Projected Outcomes**

- RIPTA aims to complete this project by the end of 2025
- RIPTA will add bus shelters, seating, and lighting to six bus stops across Central Providence
- RIPTA will install lighting and seating at 15 additional bus stops throughout Central Providence

## **Life Skills Classes for Youth**

### **Programmatic Project**

#### **Project Implementer**

Sin-cere Multiservice Inc.

- Sin-cere Multiservice Inc. is a local nonprofit organization that provides financial literacy, employment, and entrepreneurial educational services

### **Initial Goal**

Provide classes for youth that discuss skills around parenting, personal finance, domestic activities, and other basic life skills.

### **Outcomes**

- Hosted 10 sessions with two cohorts on topics, including credit and personal finance management, parenting, entrepreneurship, workforce readiness
- More than 50 youth participated in classes and received take-home materials
- Many participants expressed that these skills helped them better consider future career and business opportunities
- Many participants stayed involved with Sin-cere after the program and enrolled in other Sin-cere workshops



## Food Bearing Tree Planting Capital Project

### Project Implementer

Providence Neighborhood Planting Program (PNPP)

- PNPP is a local nonprofit organization that engages communities in planting and stewarding trees to create a more robust and equitable urban forest in Providence

### Initial Goal

Plant 20 food-bearing trees native to Rhode Island (apple, pear, peach, berries, nut trees) around Central Providence to help address food insecurity, lack of green space and tree cover.

### Outcomes

- Established two Community Orchards in the Olneyville and Smith Hill neighborhoods
- Held planting and informational workdays at the orchards
- Planted sour and sweet cherry, plum, apple, paw paw, pear, persimmon, and nut trees





## **Soccer for Youth Programmatic Project**

### **Project Implementer**

Providence Sharks Football Club, with Guatemalan Center of Rhode Island as a fiscal sponsor

- Providence Sharks Football Club is a local organization that teaches young people how to play soccer and provides opportunities to play competitively, and connects families with athletic scholarship opportunities
- The Guatemalan Center of New England is a Rhode Island-based nonprofit organization that hosts educational, arts, and cultural events that promote and share Guatemalan culture and establish cultural connections between Guatemala and New England

### **Initial Goal**

Expand the accessibility of soccer-playing to more local youth in Central Providence, by providing free access to equipment, outdoor space, and coaching to at least 25 kids and teenaged participants.

### **Outcomes**

- Surpassed the original goal: 97 Central Providence young people played soccer through the program
- Participant feedback (57 responses):
  - Increased community connection: 96.5% of survey respondents felt more connected to their neighbors or community
  - Possible to change their community: 98.2% felt they could positively change their community through participation and would recommend the program to a friend
  - More aware of participatory budgeting: 61% of respondents were aware of the Nine Neighborhood Fund, the most of any project



## Bike Distribution and Repair Programmatic Project

### Project Implementor

Chad Brown Alumni Association/ North End Outreach

- Chad Brown Alumni Association/North End Outreach is a local nonprofit organization focused on community development and growth through dialogue, service, and mentorship. The organization is a collective of former residents of Chad Brown public housing, located in the 02908 ZIP code.

### Initial Goal

Distribute 50 bikes and repair kits and offer bike maintenance and repair workshops to low-income residents of the 02908 and 02909 ZIP codes.

### Outcomes

- Surpassed original goal: Distributed 75 bikes and repair kits, which enabled an additional 25 young people to participate in this program
- Hosted bike repair, maintenance, and safety trainings through a collaboration with Providence Bike Collective (now known as Lefty Loosey Bike Collective)
- Participant feedback (65 responses):
  - Over half of participants surveyed were youth of color
  - After participating, more than 75% of parents/guardians surveyed felt their child was more comfortable riding a bike in the neighborhood
  - Room for more improvement with confidence in repairing bikes: a third or parents/guardians felt their child was more comfortable repairing a bike after participating





## Interviews Results and Analysis

Several key themes emerged from 25 semi-structured interviews and observations from meetings with Implementation Committee members, Project Sub-Committee members, Project Implementers, and Central Providence Unidos staff, namely:

- 1. Value of participatory budgeting project implementation for community building, skill growth, and process shifts**
- 2. Participatory budgeting project implementation processes benefit from a flexible and active community-based coordinator that also prioritizes participant skill growth**
- 3. Considerations for future participatory budgeting processes**

Below are insights from interviews that supported these key themes:

### **1. Value of participatory budgeting project implementation for community building, skill growth, and process shifts**





**Many committee members and Project Implementers appreciated building relationships with people in their communities whom they otherwise would not have met. Residents who served on committees valued connecting with organizations in their communities.**

### **A. Relationship and community building**

The implementation process connected committee members, Project Implementers, and governmental and quasi-governmental agencies to work collaboratively.

- One Steering Committee and Implementation Committee member who previously lived in Central Providence expressed the value of relationship building to work together to advance health in their community: “Being able to build my network and relationships had an impact on me, because I was able to meet folks that live and work in the community and learn about what they do [...], hear their personal stories about why their community is important to them, and also just bringing in my own personal experience. Living in this area was tough, and I know firsthand that not a lot of opportunities were being offered to individuals [...] to improve our well-being and health.”
- A Project Subcommittee member expressed the importance of building community after the COVID-19 pandemic: “Since the pandemic, we’ve kind of forgot what that community looks like [...] This opportunity awakened the community, like there is so much more out there. It awakened me as well.”
- “[NNF] helped me to learn more about the organizations that are here in my community, understand the landscape of who is doing what,” said a Central Providence resident who served as an Implementation and Subcommittee member.



Relationships and existing networks also contributed to NNF's success. Many committee members who were residents said they became involved through direct outreach from Central Providence Unidos staff or from word of mouth. Additionally, some Project Implementers noted that they had been embedded in their communities and had existing networks that helped them attract potential project participants.

These insights demonstrate how much individuals and relationships mattered to the success and value of the NNF project implementation and PB processes.

### **B. Diverse perspectives moving toward a common goal**

All interviewees noted there was a shared goal of improving the community, which supported group cohesion. One Project Implementer noted this, saying, "We were from different worlds, coming together to do something for the community."

**Throughout the interviews, committee members discussed the value of hearing differing perspectives during the decision-making processes, and most felt that their input was valued. All committee members appreciated the varied perspectives in the group, and nearly all felt their perspective was seen as valuable.**

Several committee members expressed the importance of having space for disagreement. For example,

- One Project Subcommittee member reflected on how they had a distinct perspective on police presence at events than the Project Implementer. They said, "You have to meet the community where it is at, regardless of what your values or morals or opinions are. If that is what the community is doing, you

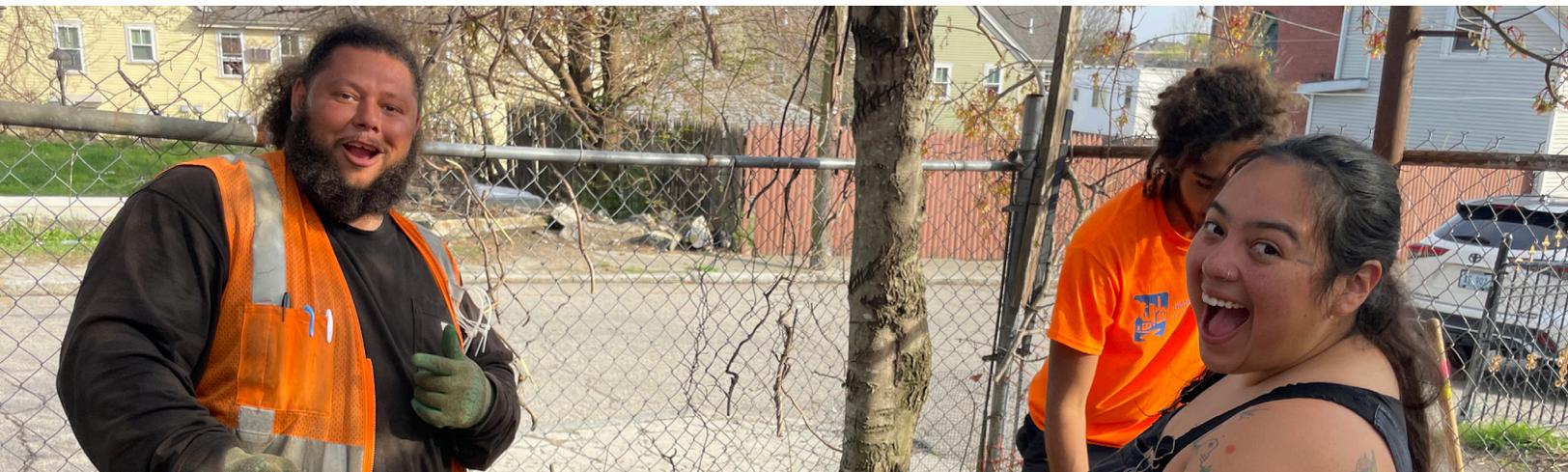


need to meet them halfway and understand their own strategies and how they are protecting their people in their own way.”

- A Steering and Implementation Committee member highlighted the respect that group members had for each other: “It was a pretty honest process. People were free to disagree, and people were very invested in talking things through [...] I felt a certain amount of camaraderie.”

An Implementation Committee member noted that there was a balance of power during the implementation process: “We were always treated as equal individuals. We were given the opportunity and space to be ourselves, [...] we all sort of shared the power dynamic equally, which is always good [...] The process that the HEZ implemented really helped with having a balance and ensuring that everyone felt heard and felt valued and respected, and that no one was above anyone else.”

These sentiments demonstrate that the NNF project implementation process was largely able to move beyond quick agreement to explore tensions in community change, while making many involved feel valued, appreciated, and united in a shared goal of serving those who live in the 02908 and 02909 ZIP codes. These sentiments also align with findings of other PB evaluations that PB fosters a greater sense of community and understanding [27-28].





### **C. Leadership and skill-building opportunities for committee members**

Many residents who served on the committees were already involved in their communities and were drawn to NNF for the opportunity to impact their communities and, for some, to learn skills. Committee members appreciated being part of decision-making processes, gaining leadership skills and opportunities – including through resident-focused leadership trainings like NeighborWorks’ Community Leadership Institute – and many became more involved in their communities after serving on a committee.

**Several Implementation Committee members noted the positive personal impacts that serving on the committee had on them, including feeling more confident in themselves and their abilities, gaining new skills, and learning the political and organizational landscape in their communities.**

For example, some Implementation Committee members shared how serving on the committee affected them:

- “It had a tremendous impact on my learning abilities. It also has given me a little more courage.”
- “[Central Providence Unidos] and One Neighborhood Builders, really helped me feel comfortable in my own skin.”
- “[After being involved with the NNF implementation process,] I have an increased ability to engage with people across differences.”
- “I had never written RFPs before or done anything really like that. So it was very interesting for me to be involved in that process.”
- “Civic engagement is not always about a person getting elected. It is about things getting done. Things can get done; that only elevates civic engagement.”



One Bike Subcommittee member expressed how the process gave them a sense of optimism that projects can be successful and center community priorities: “It made me optimistic. Sometimes I can be a little jaded and be like, ‘Oh, it’s not going to turn out how I want it, or the people that don’t deserve it are going to get the grant, or it’s going to give kids that didn’t need bikes or didn’t want bikes.’ [...] But it was a good lesson for me to see that it can work well.”

These statements demonstrate that the NNF project implementation process succeeded in another of NNF’s goals: “We will foster personal changes in participants’ skills, attitudes, and behaviors related to civic engagement and empowerment” [24]. Those on the committees said they learned new skills or shifted their attitudes on the success of community-centered projects and civic engagement from participating in NNF implementation. The Participatory Budgeting Project also suggests that new community leaders are an important impact of PB [2]. Many committee members have continued being involved in their communities, demonstrating how NNF helped strengthen community leaders in Central Providence.





#### **D. More equitable resource distribution**

The Implementation Committee decided on rubrics that each Project Subcommittee would use to select Project Implementers. In practice, these criteria led some Project Subcommittees to prioritize distributing funds to organizations with more community connections to low-income communities of color (one of the goals in the Rulebook) and with less access to financial resources [24]. These Subcommittees tried to remove barriers to participation for smaller organizations, including through simplifying the Request for Proposals (RFP) process and using interviews in their selection process.

One Project Subcommittee member expressed this intention regarding their Implementer selection process:

- “There was a lot of humanity in the process in regard to resources and access to language, and I think in the group that we actually chose, there were some written responses that we did not quite understand. [...] And so being able to ask a follow up [question] or asking for another version of something, there was a really equitable experience and opportunity to have people present themselves in a way that felt the most compelling. And that did add more time in the selection process, but that was time well spent. [...] And we did a really beautiful job with keeping each other accountable to the integrity of the of the process.”

**Many Project Subcommittee members and other actors in the NNF implementation process expressed this consistent commitment that the PB projects directly impact low-income communities of color, which was one of the goals in the NNF Rulebook.**



The implementation process intentionally distributed resources to community groups in ways that were atypical of traditional resource allocation, signaling a successful implementation of the goals of PB processes, including more equitable and effective public spending [e.g., 2].

### **E. Opportunities for collaboration and transparency between public agencies and community members**

Two of the three government and quasi-governmental staff interviewed expressed that their involvement with NNF improved their understanding of how to involve community members early and often in their work. These staff also expressed that their experiences with NNF informed how they would conduct community engagement work with their agency in the future. One quasi-governmental agency representative saw the NNF project implementation process as a valuable way for the Project Subcommittee members to gain more insight into their agency's processes and timelines.

**Implementation Committee members and Central Providence Unidos staff noted that working on NNF opened new opportunities to collaborate with agencies, including RIPTA and the Providence Parks Department, and that both organizations respected the PB process and were eager to work on projects.**

The NNF Rulebook established a goal that PB will be adopted by more elected officials and government entities, and these new collaborations represent critical steps toward increasing transparency and accountability of government and quasi-governmental agencies to residents, which is also a goal of PB processes, generally [24, e.g., 27].



## 2. PB processes benefit from a flexible and active community-based coordinator that also prioritizes participant skill growth

### A. Central Providence Unidos's intentional, collaborative, and flexible approach

Most committee members and Implementers appreciated Central Providence Unidos staff's flexibility and openness, including their willingness to meet outside of the traditional working hours (including evenings and weekends), which allowed residents and volunteer organizations to participate more fully. Central Providence Unidos staff also approached each project differently and tailored it to the needs of the implementing organization and the project itself. For example, staff provided more administrative support to some Project Implementers than others, depending on the Implementer's needs.

### Several committee members and Implementers noted valued the flexibility and community-centered role that Central Providence Unidos played in the implementation process:

- One Implementer liked that they had agency in how they implemented the program and how Central Providence Unidos supported them, which built trust and felt different and more positive than past relationships with other organizations.
- One Project Subcommittee member expressed how they appreciated how Central Providence Unidos staff always kept them informed, was helpful at hearing their concerns, liaised effectively with the City of Providence, and considered community voice primarily.
- One Project Subcommittee member and community member valued Central Providence Unidos' focus on communities: Central Providence Unidos "seemed like a natural fit" and was "very sensitive to needs of community."



- A project Subcommittee member and Central Providence resident noted, “What I appreciated was it felt grassroots in all levels, even though a nonprofit was leading the work.”

Even during this case study process, after Central Providence Unidos staff heard that many Subcommittee Members wanted more communication on project status, Central Providence Unidos staff scheduled additional meetings between Project Subcommittees and Implementers for appropriate projects. These meetings allowed Subcommittee members to be more involved in ongoing project updates.

## **B. Effective coordination for informed decision-making and project management**

Many interviewees noted that Central Providence Unidos staff – Dominique Resendes and Michael Nina – fostered open dialogue, played a useful role, and curated committees with diverse views and backgrounds during the implementation process. Most interviewed said that the process was well-organized and well-communicated. For committee members who spoke Spanish or were newer to community engagement, having a strong rapport with Nina, who speaks Spanish and interpreted between English and Spanish in meetings, contributed to their positive perception of their experience with NNF overall.

One Implementation and Steering Committee member emphasized how Central Providence Unidos staff’s role as facilitator helped the Implementation Committee make informed decisions: “[Central Providence Unidos staff] really pushed the group to talk below the surface, as opposed to just, ‘Yeah, that’s a great idea, let’s do it.’ And they walked through, ‘Alright, what about, you know, X scenario, or Y scenario? Where will we get the resources?’”



**Many Implementers and Committee members highlighted the importance of Central Providence Unidos's staff liaising between public agency Implementers and Subcommittee members and supporting logistical processes.**

Having an active coordinator and liaison was especially helpful in capital projects involving collaboration with government and quasi-governmental agencies (bathrooms and bus stops). These projects took longer to implement and had more robust procurement and permitting processes, which surfaced frustration among some committee members with the pace of bureaucratic change in their communities. Central Providence Unidos staff did note that this liaising role between Project Subcommittees and Implementers was sometimes challenging as they had to coordinate with several groups and relay decisions that they did not make.

**C. Opportunities for enhanced committee member skill building**

Although Central Providence Unidos's active facilitator role was perceived positively among interviewees, some Implementation Committee members suggested Central Providence Unidos could have delegated some facilitating and liaising roles. Two Implementation Committee members felt an external, trained facilitator would have helped navigate some tensions during meetings. Central Providence Unidos had an external facilitator for some Steering Committee meetings before voting, but not Implementation Committee meetings. Another Implementation and Steering Committee Member and Central Providence resident noted that Central Providence Unidos staff took on a lot of the liaising between Project Implementers and committees, and this could have been delegated to bring community members into that part of the process more and use their skillsets.



As one Project Subcommittee member and resident expressed, “I would have liked to learn some of the skills myself in regard to the more project management aspect skills. [...] I wonder what other untapped skillsets were unknown that could be leveraged. They knew I was a former principal and that I am a coach. Could this have led to an education initiative that I could be doing one-on-one coaching for people for free? I wonder, how else could we be utilized.”

These sentiments demonstrated that many committee members were excited to learn more about the NNF Implementation process, build their own skills, and contribute skills they already had prior to the process.

**Some committee members and implementers felt their skills could have been better utilized and that they could have contributed more to the implementation process.**

These insights from those involved with NNF project implementation help address a gap in PB research in Rhode Island around specific examples of how a non-governmental PB coordinator like Central Providence Unidos can support successful project implementation and center community leadership.

### **3. Considerations for future PB processes**

#### **A. Desire for sustained PB processes with public funds and community management**

Throughout the entire NNF process, in the RIDOH evaluation, and through these interviews, those involved in NNF overwhelmingly expressed a desire for more PB processes to continue funding these projects and other community priorities. Many interviewed expressed that additional public funds are crucial for project sustainability.



One Implementation Committee member and Central Providence resident spoke about the need for additional and more consistent funding to achieve the NNF Rulebook goals: “The funding was not enough. It could become a more routine thing [...]. Now people are getting used to the process, and it is going to encourage more folks to be involved.”

**Although many wanted additional public funds for PB processes, non-governmental interviewees expressed significant skepticism of local government’s ability to advance PB projects with the same speed, community focus, flexibility, and priority on funding grassroots organizations as a nonprofit organization would.**

One Programmatic Implementer expressed this sentiment heard in most interviews: “If the city were leading the process, it might have been more bureaucratic, with additional layers of approvals and potentially a longer timeline. Nonprofits tend to have a more community-driven, flexible, and direct approach, which helped make this process smooth and engaging.”

Capital Projects like expanding bathroom access in parks and improving bus stops did take the longest and did require compliance with governmental procedures, which caused some frustration. On the bus stop project, Central Providence Unidos staff noted that RIPTA staff had to spend time building trust with the Subcommittee, which staff thought improved the project experience.

Interestingly, for these Capital Projects, one representative from a public agency, who served as a Subcommittee member and was engaged in the project



development phase, thought the process would have been smoother and clearer if the City were leading: “If the City were leading, there would likely have been earlier engagement with permitting agencies and maintenance teams to ensure feasibility from the outset. While the participatory model is valuable for community engagement, City-led processes tend to have clearer pathways for regulatory compliance and long-term sustainability planning.”

Some PB evaluations demonstrate that PB increases public trust of government and participation in traditional civic engagement [e.g., 18-19]. However, the sentiments from many Committee members and distrust of local government suggest that strengthening trust between community members and local government may take more than one PB process. If cities were to lead a participatory budgeting process or if governmental or quasi-governmental agencies were involved, they would have to contend with this skepticism of local government and balance community engagement with permitting and procurement procedures.

## **B. Gaining public official support and engagement**

A goal in the NNF rulebook was to engage government beyond elections: “The PB process will begin a change in the dynamic between elected officials and Central Providence neighborhoods, increasing their availability and accountability to residents outside of election years” [24]. This was partially successful; elected officials engaged more with Central Providence Unidos staff – for example, Central Providence Unidos staff were invited to meetings with elected officials and elected officials attended community events around PB. However, there was limited interaction between public officials and committee members outside of events. For example, one Project Subcommittee Member expressed how engagement with public officials was limited: “I think the only time that a public official was involved was when they were thanking us.”



Through these conversations, it seemed that, although committee members appreciated elected officials coming to events, they wanted more meaningful opportunities to engage with elected officials to affect resource allocation and change conditions in their communities. Developing a strategy for engaging elected officials on PB and addressing their concerns may facilitate more sustained and routine PB processes.

### **C. Implementation planning and feasibility**

Through these interviews, committee members, Implementers, and Central Providence Unidos staff emphasized the importance of considering implementation during proposal development.





**On capital projects, Subcommittee members and Unidos staff felt a lack of clarity on the feasibility from agency partners during the project implementation process, and staff thought having clearer guidelines on feasibility earlier, even during the proposal development process, would have expedited their work.**

Additionally, future PB processes may benefit from finalizing details around financial feasibility, payment and reimbursement, and evaluation processes earlier. For example, for the bike project, Chad Brown Alumni Association bought the bikes from Walmart because they were the least expensive. When reflecting on the NNF Implementation process, Central Providence Unidos staff acknowledged they would have liked to have gotten budget quotes from local partners for new bikes so that buying bikes locally would have been more realistic.

Staff also noted that managing eight projects was too much for them and that they think managing fewer projects would have been more feasible. It is important for participatory budgeting projects to include operation budgets for managing organizations. Central Providence Unidos staff coordinators estimated that two full-time staff members spent 70% of their time on NNF in the pre-project implementation and 40% of their time on NNF during the project implementation phase. Additionally, Central Providence Unidos had to budget for participant stipends, printing, interpretation, refreshments, and other operating expenses. The scale of the PB process would likely affect the size of future PB operations budgets, but it is important to ensure managing organizations have access to funds to implement PB successfully.



#### **D. Broader context and transparent communication**

Committee members and Implementers wanted more information from Central Providence Unidos about the broader NNF process, the timeline, and the future of the process.

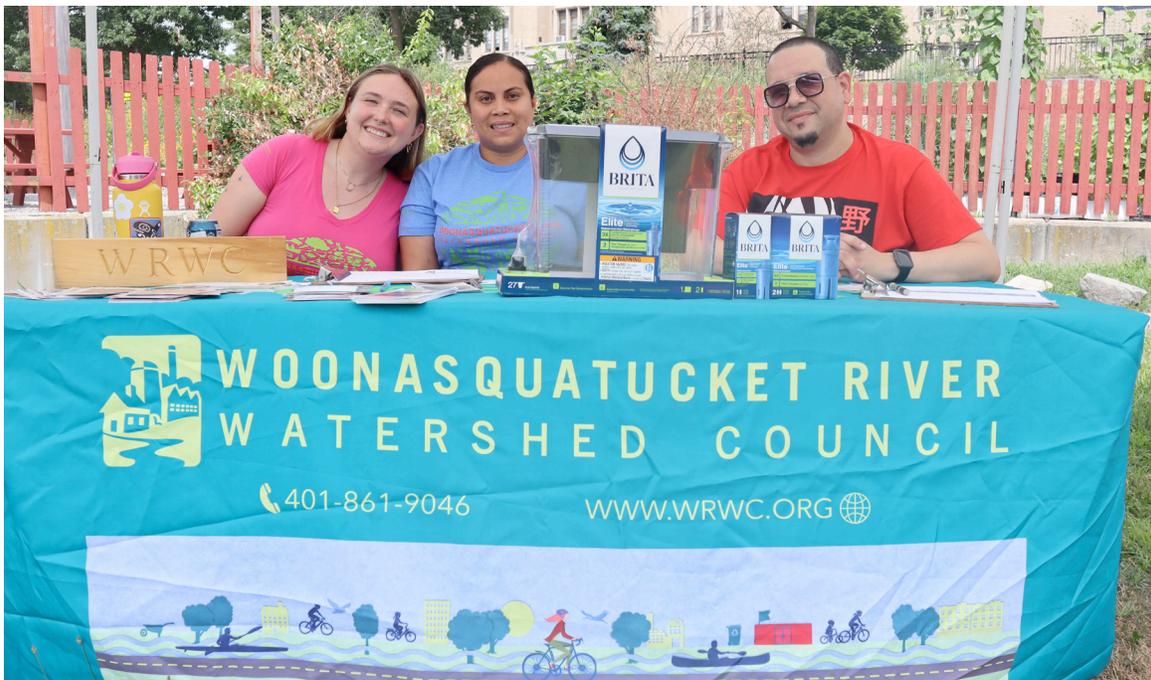
**Although Implementers noted that Unidos staff were very reachable, a couple expressed they would have benefited from clearer expectations about evaluation needs earlier and that reimbursement could have been quicker.**

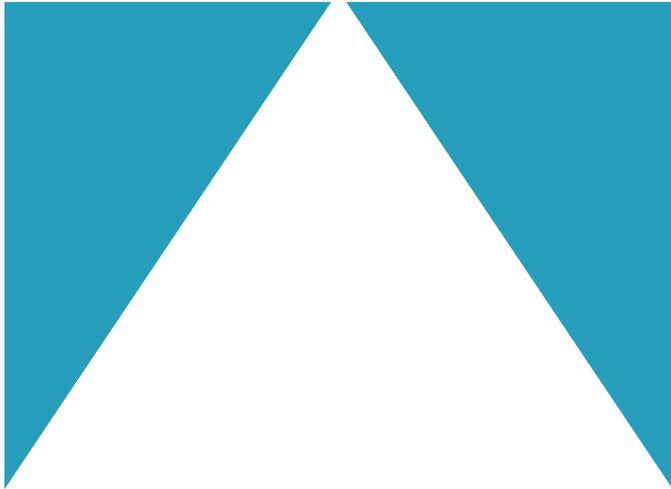
One Project Subcommittee member thought that there was also a need for better communication about the NNF process externally through “storytelling.” Committee members and Implementers often only understood the parts of NNF that they were involved with and had little context for other projects or how their work fit into the larger NNF structure. One NNF’s goals was, “The PB process and the implementation of the projects selected by the community will be conducted in a transparent way, meaning there is regular communication about process updates and implementation status” [24]. Unidos staff shared updates regularly through email, but that so many committee members were unaware of these updates indicates that the communication was not effectively reaching stakeholders. Future PB processes should consider how to communicate context and implementation updates most effectively with stakeholders.



## Limitations

There are certainly lessons from this analysis that can be applied to other places, however, this analysis is specific to this participatory budgeting process and the individuals involved. As with many interview analyses, an interview process and its analysis are subject to the interviewers' bias in what questions and quotes to include or exclude. Much of the data was self-reported, which creates the possibility of social desirability bias. Additionally, although the interviewers interviewed most committee members and Implementers, the interviewers were unable to interview or get feedback from everyone involved with the implementation process. This may represent a selection bias that those who were more engaged in the interview process had a more positive experience.





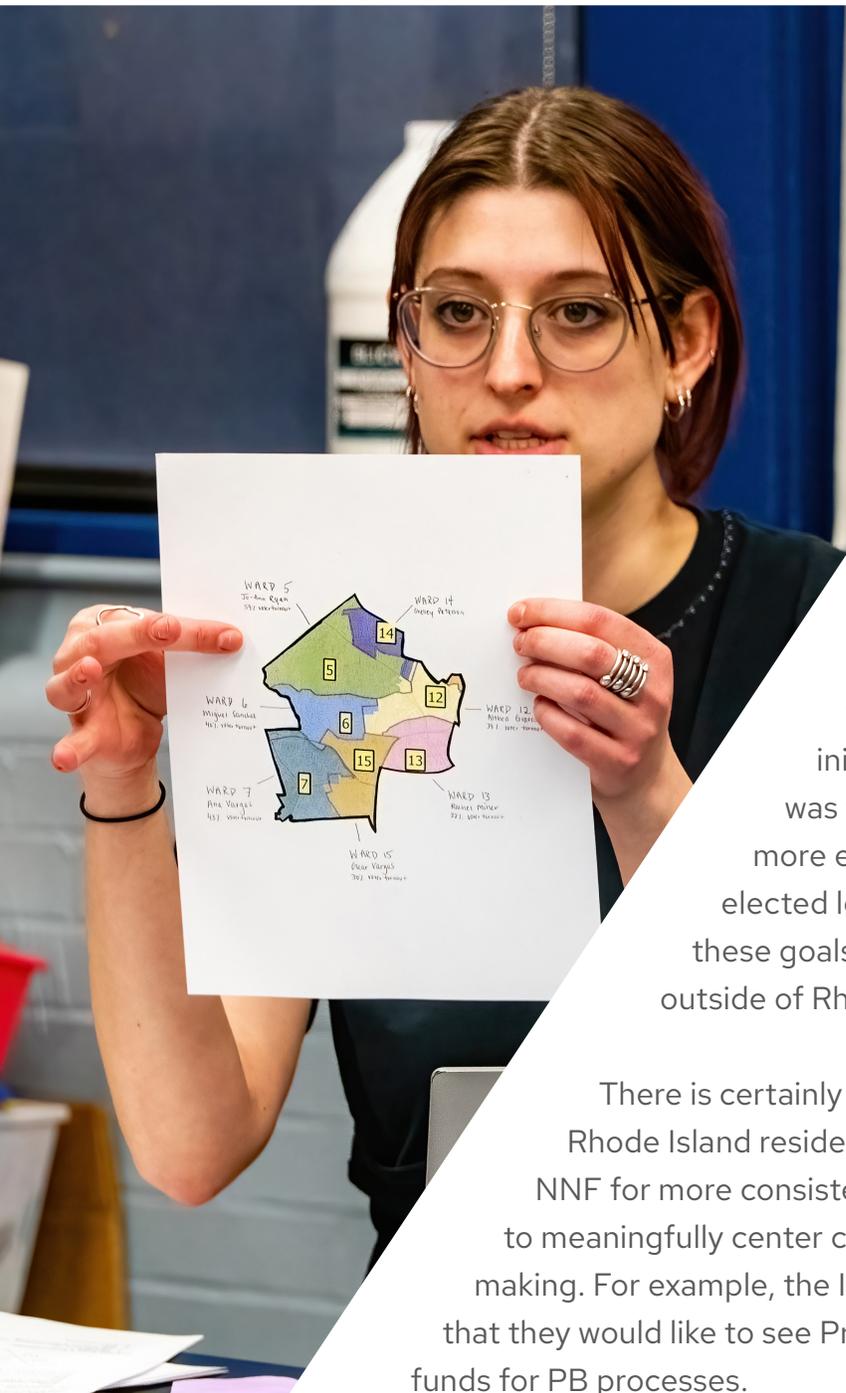


## Conclusion

This case study is the first to focus on implementing winning projects in a Rhode Island participatory budgeting process. All projects, except one, have been fully implemented and met their initial goals, with the last being implemented by the end of 2025. Many project participants viewed the projects favorably, gained skills and in some projects, wished for them to be expanded. The programmatic projects that reported survey data demonstrated that most participants were people of color, achieving one of NNF's goals.

The interviews and survey results demonstrated that the NNF project implementation phase and the process in general were successful in meeting many of its initial goals in the Rulebook, especially in emphasizing inclusivity and transparency. The implementation process supported community building, diverse perspectives coming together in a common goal, and more equitable resource allocation.

Newer resident leaders expressed that they grew in their self-confidence and leadership skills, and some agencies expressed greater willingness to involve community members sooner and more often. Even committee members who did not feel they gained explicit skills expressed optimism that more equitable and community-centered processes of resource allocation can succeed in Providence. Committee members and Implementers appreciated the active coordination role Central Providence Unidos played, though some committee members desired more opportunities for participant skill development and leveraging their existing knowledge.



NNF participants, committee members, and Implementers consistently asked for Rhode Island city and state governments to fund more participatory budgeting initiatives. One of the Rulebook’s goals was to see more PB opportunities and more engagement and accountability from elected leaders, and many interviewed felt these goals were not yet realized. Many cities outside of Rhode Island fund annual PB processes.

There is certainly an appetite from Providence and Rhode Island residents to apply the learnings from NNF for more consistent PB processes and opportunities to meaningfully center community leadership in decision-making. For example, the Implementation Committee identified that they would like to see Providence City Council use some of its funds for PB processes.



**This case study also demonstrates that, in addition to deciding to allocate funds to PB processes, it is important for policy-makers to consider how PB processes are designed and managed to achieve goals of inclusivity, transparency, and deliberation from project development through implementation.**



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