



Spokane Business District Toolkit

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Before We Begin

Neighborhood business districts sit in a unique space within a community. They are tied to a specific corridor, but their role goes far beyond any one business or property. At their best, districts help connect people who all care about the same place. That can include business owners, property owners, residents, nonprofit partners, and public agencies.

Because of that, district work goes beyond managing projects. It is about building relationships, managing expectations, and helping a place move forward.

For most districts, this work usually begins with a small group of people organizing something simple. Maybe it is an event, a cleanup, or a way to bring businesses together. Over time, that work grows. Communication expands.

Projects get bigger. More people get involved.

And with that growth comes a new set of questions:

- What is the district actually responsible for?
- How should leadership be structured?
- What is worth saying yes to, and what is not?

The following sections provide guidance for building sustainable district organizations, along with resources, examples, and pathways to support implementation as districts grow and evolve.

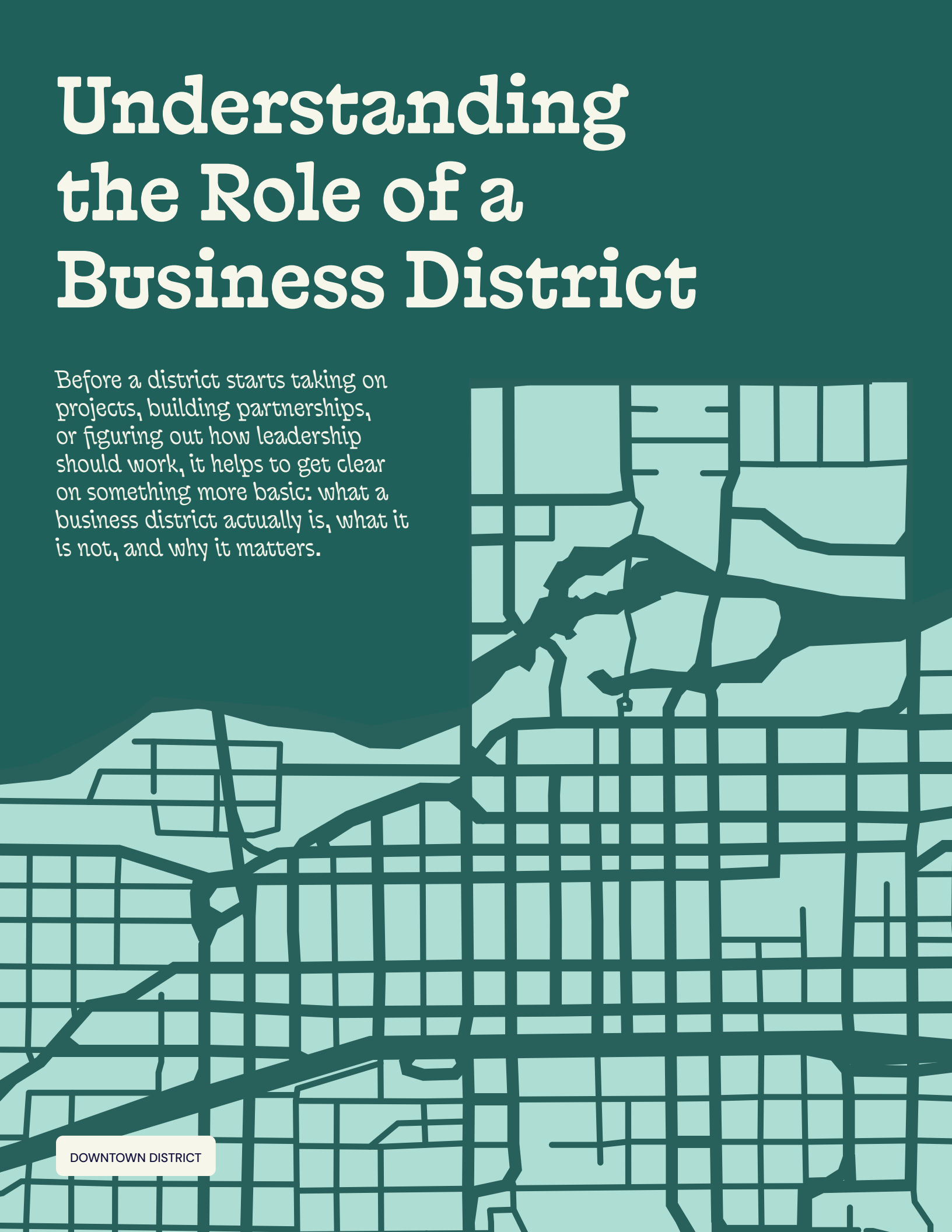
This Is Not Linear

District work rarely follows a predictable path. New funding opportunities, leadership transitions, and changes within the corridor can all influence how organizations evolve. The sections of this toolkit are connected, but they are meant to support reflection rather than dictate a specific order.



Understanding the Role of a Business District

Before a district starts taking on projects, building partnerships, or figuring out how leadership should work, it helps to get clear on something more basic: what a business district actually is, what it is not, and why it matters.

A stylized map of a city grid. The grid is composed of light blue lines on a dark teal background. A specific area in the upper right quadrant is highlighted with a darker teal color, representing a business district. A hand-drawn style line, possibly representing a river or a path, winds through the grid. In the bottom left corner, there is a small white rectangular box containing the text 'DOWNTOWN DISTRICT'.

DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

Walkable, vibrant commercial districts are ecosystems for small businesses. Research from across the country shows that thriving business districts create conditions that benefit not only the businesses within them, but also residents, visitors, property owners, and the broader local economy. These outcomes are a direct result of the coordination, investment, and stewardship that strong business districts make possible.

Beyond business health, neighborhood business districts serve functions that matter to the broader community.



Historic and Cultural Preservation

Business districts, particularly those in older commercial corridors, often contain the physical fabric that gives a neighborhood its identity. Active stewardship protects that character from being lost to neglect or incompatible development.



Walkable, Transit-Oriented Places

Thriving neighborhood corridors reduce dependence on cars by putting everyday goods, services, and gathering places within reach of where people live. That has real implications for equity, environmental sustainability, and quality of life.



Community Gathering and Belonging

Neighborhood business districts function as third places — not home, not work, but somewhere in between. They are where people run into each other, celebrate together, and feel a sense of connection to where they live.



Local Economic Circulation

Spending at locally owned businesses in organized districts recirculates more money within the local economy than spending at national chains, supporting jobs and tax revenue that fund community services.

The Civic Position of a District

A business district may work closely with public agencies, but it is not a government entity.

A district cannot pass laws, enforce code, or direct public spending on its own. It cannot require participation, and it does not carry the formal authority of a city department. At the same time, it is usually doing more than loosely representing a group of businesses with shared interests.

District organizations often coordinate communication, partnerships, improvement projects, events, and relationships with public agencies without having formal regulatory authority. It is built through trust, consistency, relationships, and the ability to keep showing up in a way that is useful over time. This middle position is a strength, but without clear expectations districts can easily take on responsibilities that belong elsewhere. Clarifying the district's role early creates a stronger foundation for future work.

How District Scope Evolves

District work usually does not begin with a fully formed structure or a long list of responsibilities. More often, it starts with something visible.

An event, a cleanup, a communication effort, a small improvement that shows people what coordination can look like when it actually happens. Early projects build trust, demonstrate what coordinated action can accomplish, and establish the district as a reliable partner.

As trust grows, districts are often asked to coordinate communication, partnerships, grants, planning, and improvement projects, expanding well beyond their original purpose.



Organizational Realignment

Revisiting the district's role is not about making the organization smaller. It is about making the work clearer. If the district has changed, the way it describes its role may need to catch up. If the corridor has changed, the organization may need to think differently about what it is best positioned to steward. Role clarity matters because it shapes what the district says yes to, what it communicates to others, and how leadership makes sense of the work ahead.

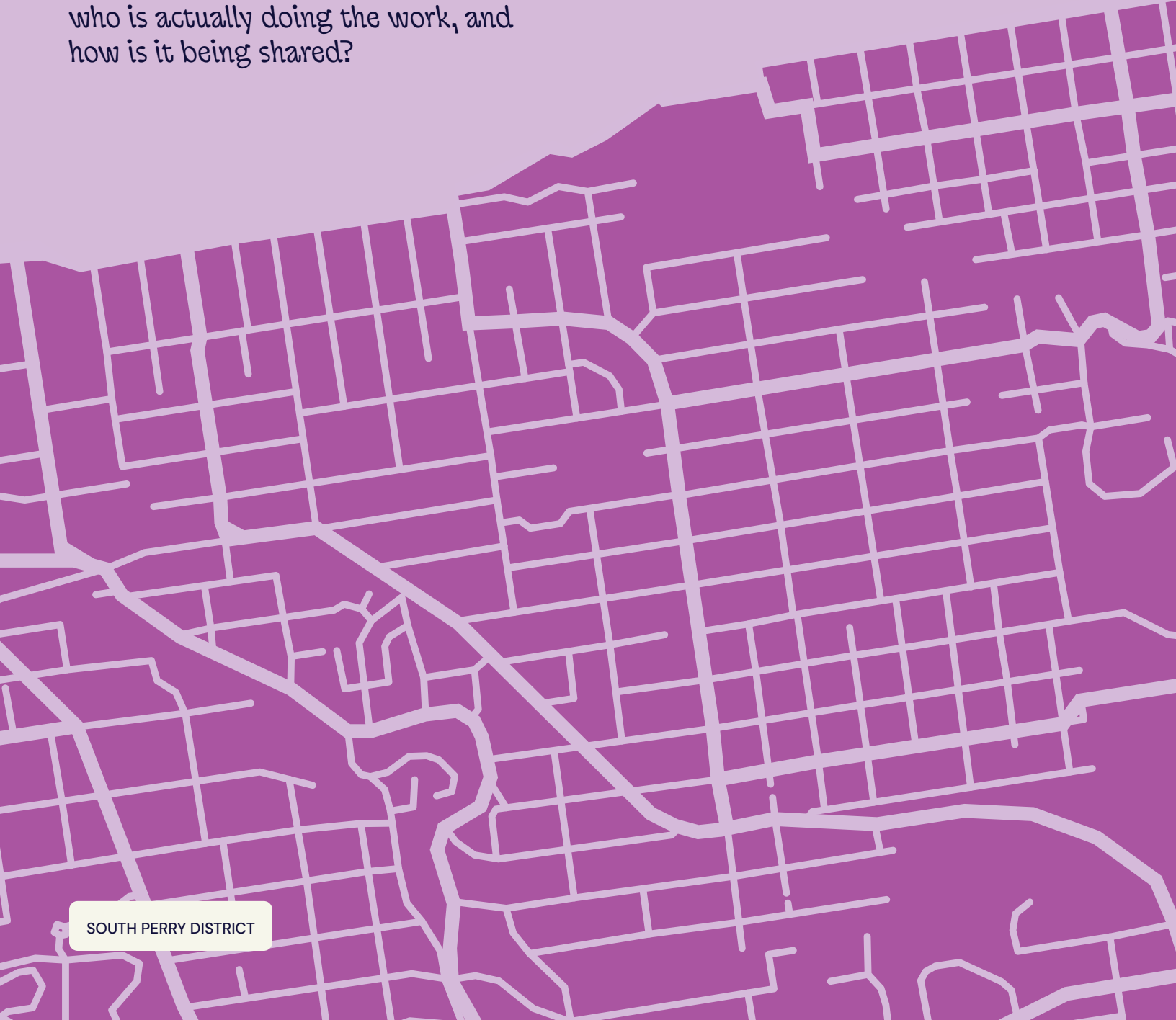
Districts change. Corridors change. The work changes too. None of that is unusual. It is part of how organizations evolve.

Section Reflection

- Do businesses, property owners, and public partners share the same understanding of what the organization does?
- How has the scope of your district's work changed over time?
- Are there responsibilities the district has taken on that exceed its current structure or capacity?

Designing & Strengthening Your Leadership Team

Once a district has a clearer sense of its role, the next question is practical: who is actually doing the work, and how is it being shared?



SOUTH PERRY DISTRICT

Even strong ideas don't move far on their own. Districts depend on people who can make decisions, follow through, communicate clearly, and keep the organization grounded as projects, partnerships, and expectations grow.

Starting With an Honest Assessment

Leadership does not exist separately from the people in it. A board can have bylaws, officer positions, and regular meetings and still not be especially strong if responsibilities are unclear, engagement is uneven, or too much of the work rests with a few individuals.

This is also where districts sometimes realize that a formal structure does not tell the full story. On paper, responsibilities may look shared. In practice, a president, treasurer, one especially reliable volunteer, or a staff member — if the organization has one — may be carrying far more than anyone else. Often this means the leadership structure has not caught up to the pattern of work. Looking closely at who is making decisions, who is following through, and where the organization is relying too heavily on individual effort can tell you much more than an org chart ever will.

Creating a Leadership Pipeline

When too much of the work depends on a small number of people, even a routine board transition can feel disruptive. Information leaves with them. Relationships leave with them. Context leaves with them. What often gets described as a succession issue is really a pipeline issue. New leaders have not had enough opportunities to learn the work before being asked to carry it.

That is one reason committees matter when they are used well. They are not just a way to divide tasks. They can also be one of the most practical ways for people to get familiar with the organization's priorities, decision making, and pace of work before stepping into board leadership.

In practice, that usually means creating more than one way to get involved. Not everyone needs to join the board first in order to become a meaningful part of the work. Some people need a committee role, a short term task force, or a smaller responsibility before they can see where they fit.

When too much of the work depends on a small number of people, even a routine board transition can feel disruptive.



Representation Within Leadership

A district board does not need to represent every possible perspective perfectly in order to function well. But it does need to be thoughtful about whether the people making decisions reflect the corridor and community in a meaningful way.

That kind of representation is not only about fairness. It also improves judgment. A board made up of people with similar experiences will usually see the district in similar ways, which can make blind spots harder to catch. A broader mix of perspectives tends to strengthen decision making because it makes it more likely that questions will be asked earlier, assumptions will be challenged, and different parts of the corridor's experience will be considered.

Clarity around representation also reinforces trust. When stakeholders can see how leadership is formed and whose perspectives are included, the organization is easier to understand and its decisions are easier to follow, even when not everyone agrees with them.

Leadership Continuity

Leadership continuity is not about keeping the same people in place for as long as possible. It is about making sure the organization can keep moving when people step away, rotate off, or shift roles.

This kind of continuity usually depends on more than goodwill. It comes from documented practices, shared access to information, clearer officer development, intentional recruitment, and enough participation before someone joins the board that they are not starting from zero once they get there.

Clarity around representation also reinforces trust.

Section Reflection

- How do new leaders currently become involved in the organization before stepping into board roles?
- Are board and officer roles aligned with people's actual capacity and interest, not just their professional background?
- Whose perspectives are well represented in leadership right now, and whose may be less present?
- If a key leader stepped away, what parts of the organization would remain steady and what parts would become harder to carry?



A stylized map of the West Central District, showing a grid of streets and blocks in white lines on a dark blue background. The map is oriented diagonally, with the top-left corner of the grid pointing towards the top-left of the page. A small yellow rectangular label with the text "WEST CENTRAL DISTRICT" is located in the top-left corner of the map area.

WEST CENTRAL DISTRICT

Organizational Capacity

As districts grow, capacity starts shaping the work just as much as vision does. Most organizations do not struggle because they cannot come up with ideas. More often, the challenge is that the work expands faster than the structure behind it.

Organizational capacity is not about whether people care enough and have good enough ideas, but rather about whether the organization can carry responsibility well without too much of the work settling around the same few people or depending mostly on memory and momentum.

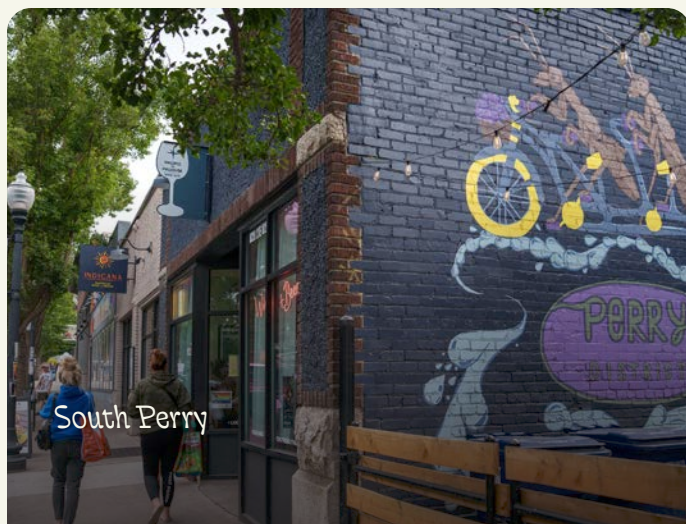
Time and Volunteer Capacity

A lot of district work is volunteer-led, which means the people carrying it are often doing this on top of running businesses, managing buildings, working full time, and handling family responsibilities. In organizations without staff, the board often ends up carrying governance, planning, communication, and implementation all at once, even though those are very different kinds of work and each one demands attention.

When districts start feeling stretched, that does not necessarily mean something is wrong. Often it simply means the organization has reached a point where the amount of work is asking for a stronger support structure than it needed before.

Administrative Infrastructure

Strong administrative systems help business districts operate consistently, preserve institutional knowledge, and reduce confusion during leadership changes.



While early-stage organizations may rely on one person's inbox, laptop, or memory, shared systems become increasingly important as the work grows.

Districts should establish basic systems for:

- **Governance:** Bylaws, meeting records, board calendars, and policies
- **Financial Management:** Budgets, bookkeeping, reporting, and grant tracking
- **Document Management:** Shared files, storage systems, and record retention
- **Technology:** Passwords, account access, and security practices
- **Operations:** Roles, project tracking, contracts, insurance, and recurring deadlines

Simple tools and clear processes help ensure important information stays with the organization, not just with the individuals currently managing it.

Implementing Major Projects

A project can be funded and still require a great deal of organizational capacity.

That fuller view of cost can be really helpful because many projects carry a second layer of work that is less visible at the beginning. Outreach, approvals, vendor coordination, scheduling, volunteer management, reporting, follow through, and all of the smaller administrative pieces around implementation still need attention, even when the direct expense has already been covered.

Thinking about the true cost of work this way does not mean districts should avoid ambitious projects. It just means funding alone does not always tell the full story. Time, systems, and leadership bandwidth are part of the cost too, and they shape whether a project feels manageable once it is actually underway.



North Monroe

Capacity Is Structural

A district organization's capacity is easy to describe as a feeling, but it is more helpful to think about it as structure.

- **Are responsibilities clear?**
- **Are records accessible?**
- **Are priorities realistic?**
- **Is leadership distributed?**

Can new people step in without having to reconstruct how everything works from scratch? Those questions tend to say more about organizational stability than enthusiasm ever will.

Capacity is not separate from the work. It shapes what a district can say yes to, how well it can follow through, and whether growth feels manageable and aligned as the organization continues to evolve.

Section Reflection

- What parts of the organization are well supported by systems, and what parts still rely more on informal coordination?
- When the district takes on a new project, what kinds of time and coordination does it usually require beyond the financial cost?
- Are there certain times of year when the district has more capacity for new work, and others when it makes more sense to focus on maintaining what is already underway?

Clarifying Direction & Priorities

With a clearer understanding of role, leadership, and capacity, the next question becomes direction. Districts cannot pursue every opportunity at once, and they usually are not meant to. Part of the work is deciding what deserves attention, what aligns with the district's purpose, and what kind of impact the organization is trying to have over time.

Defining the District's Purpose

If there is not real clarity about what the organization is there to do, priorities start getting set by whatever feels urgent, whoever asked first, or whatever funding opportunity happens to show up. That is usually when the work starts to feel scattered.

For most districts, getting clear on purpose or mission is less about writing the perfect statement and more about asking a few honest questions.

- What is the district consistently being asked to help with?
- What problems is it actually in a position to influence?
- What kind of work does it already have enough trust, relationships, or structure to carry well?

The goal is not to make the district sound bigger. The goal is to make decisions easier. If the organization is clear on what it is there to do, it becomes much easier to know what fits, what does not, and what may matter later but not right now.

Understanding Corridor Identity

Before a district can set useful priorities, it needs a reasonably honest read on the place itself. Not just what people hope the corridor becomes eventually, but what is already true about it now.

The goal is not to make the district sound bigger. The goal is to make decisions easier.

Getting clear on corridor identity is not a branding exercise. It is more basic than that. It means paying attention to what feels strongest in the district, what feels fragmented, what people consistently point to as an asset, and what keeps surfacing as a frustration. It also means noticing where there is alignment and where there is not. If businesses, property owners, and partners all describe the corridor differently, that is useful information. It usually means the district still has work to do in building a more shared understanding of the place itself.



Case Study | Understanding Corridor Identity

South Perry Community-Driven Banner Project

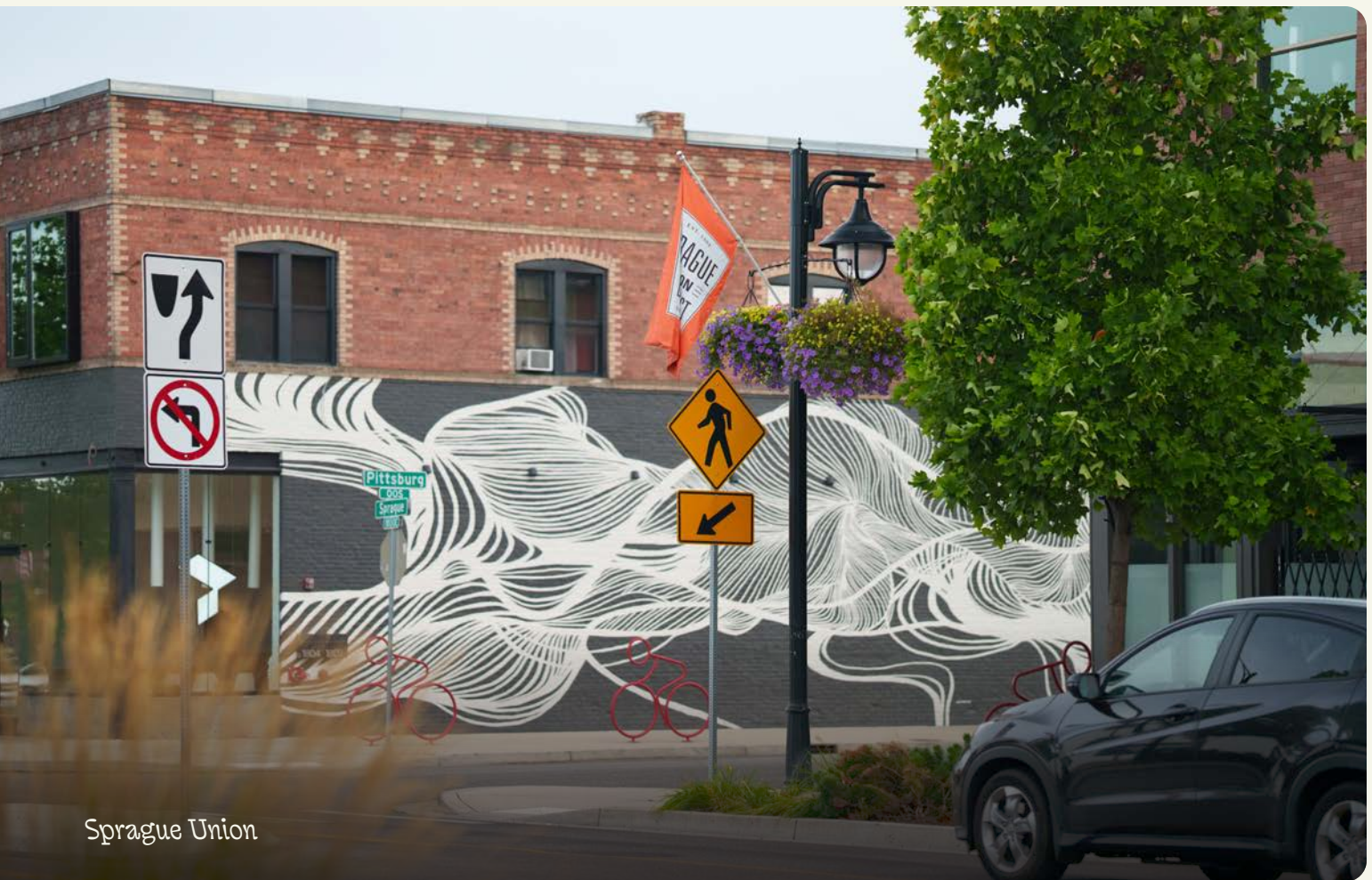
South Perry Together's public art initiatives included strong community engagement from the very beginning. The district hosted town halls, attended the Thursday Market and Pride in Perry with outreach booths, and distributed both online and paper surveys to gather community input. This process generated unique ideas about the district's identity and existing assets.

A second round of engagement asked residents what words and images best represented the neighborhood. Common themes included nature, dogs, raccoons, beer, the market, warmth, inclusivity, and a colorful, quirky character. These ideas became the creative foundation for the project.

South Perry Together used an artist directory and online groups to invite local artists to apply for the opportunity to create banner designs inspired by the community's feedback. Avista approved the pole attachments and reviewed the artwork before installation. A local sign company managed the printing, installation, and seasonal banner changes.

The early investment in community input paid off, creating a meaningful public art project that reflects the character of the South Perry district.





Balancing Short-Term Wins and Long-Term Impact

Some efforts are visible right away. An event goes well. A cleanup improves the corridor. A promotion brings people in. Those kinds of wins matter because they build energy, create confidence, and help people feel that something is moving forward.

Other work is slower and much less visible. Strengthening board systems, improving business communication, building relationships with property owners, or developing partnerships may not create the same immediate sense of progress, but that does not make it less important. In many cases, that quieter work is what makes the more visible work possible later.

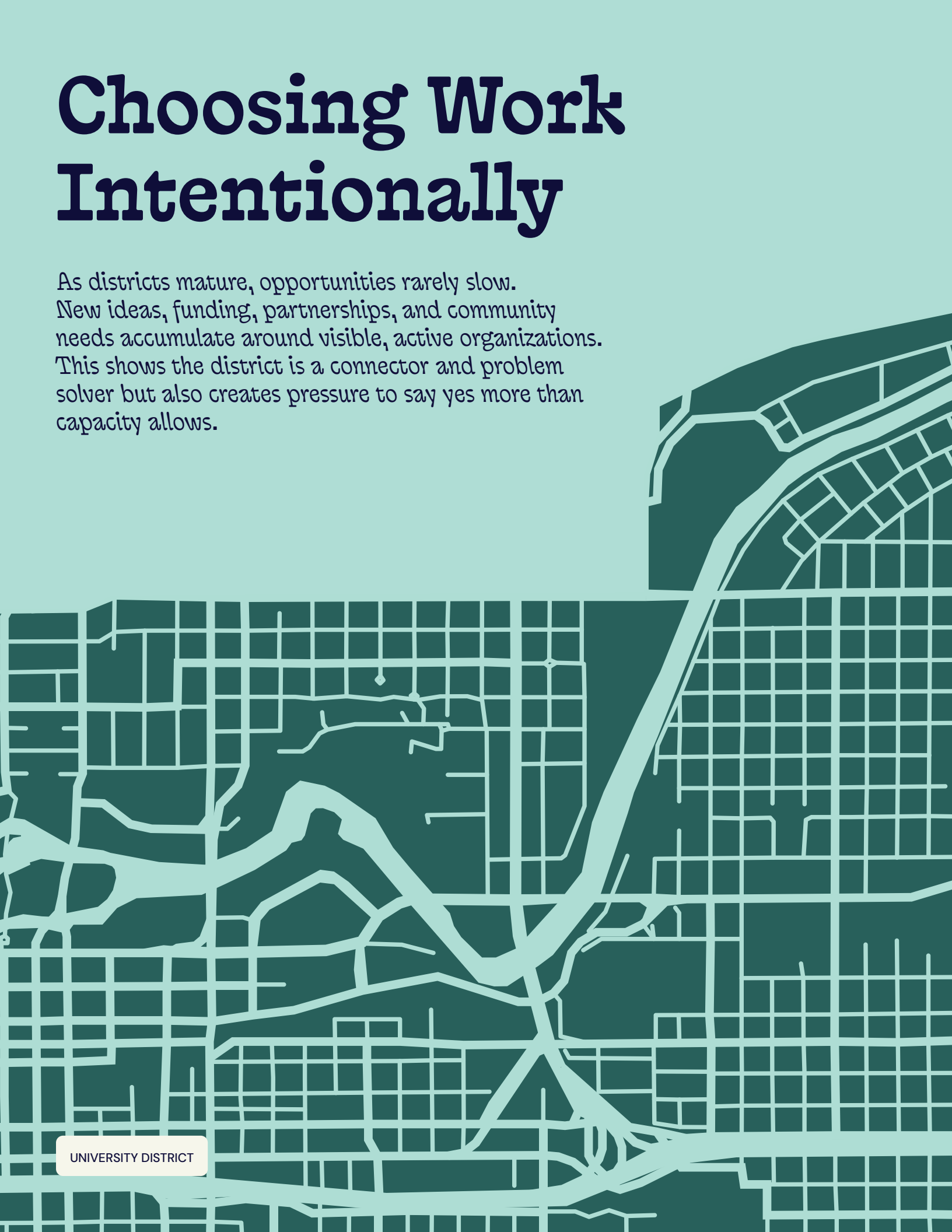
Strong organizations need both. They need enough short term progress to build confidence and enough long term focus to keep the work from becoming a series of disconnected efforts.

Section Reflection

- What are the district's greatest existing assets, and how well do the district's current priorities reflect that?
- Where is the district focusing on visible progress, and where is it investing in work that may matter more over time?

Choosing Work Intentionally

As districts mature, opportunities rarely slow. New ideas, funding, partnerships, and community needs accumulate around visible, active organizations. This shows the district is a connector and problem solver but also creates pressure to say yes more than capacity allows.



UNIVERSITY DISTRICT

Evaluating Opportunities

Not every opportunity that comes to a district is equally aligned with its role, capacity, or direction. Some are strongly connected to the organization's purpose. Others are simply available, timely, or attached to funding that is hard to ignore.

Evaluating opportunities well means creating space to pause before committing. This does not need to be a complex approval process. It can be as simple as a consistent set of questions that leadership returns to when something new is introduced.

Common considerations include:

- Does this align with the district's current priorities and defined role?
- What level of staff or volunteer capacity would this require beyond what is visible at the start?
- Is this a short-term project or something that creates ongoing responsibility?
- Who will actually be responsible for carrying this work through?
- What might need to be paused or reduced in order to take this on well?

The goal is not to evaluate opportunities only on whether they are "good ideas." The real question is whether they are the right fit for the organization at the time they are being considered.

Knowing When to Say No

Turning something down can feel like missing out, disappointing a partner, or slowing momentum. However, capacity is not unlimited, and not every opportunity is meant to be carried by the district itself.

Saying no is often appropriate when:

- There is no clear capacity to support the work without compromising existing commitments
- The project creates long-term responsibility without long-term support
- The district would be acting primarily as a coordinator for work that belongs elsewhere

Saying no does not necessarily mean disengaging. In some cases, it may mean redirecting, supporting a connection, or helping identify a more appropriate lead.

Over time, districts that are clear about what they will not take on tend to become more effective in the work they do choose to carry. Boundaries create focus. And focus, in this context, is what makes sustained impact possible.

Project Coordination and Oversight

Once a project is approved, the work shifts from decision-making to coordination. Projects often involve multiple moving parts: partners, timelines, approvals, vendors, communication needs, and reporting requirements. Even smaller initiatives can require consistent oversight to ensure that tasks do not fall through gaps between different people or organizations.

Clear coordination includes:

- A clear point person or lead for the project
- Defined roles for partners and vendors
- A basic timeline with agreed-upon milestones
- A shared understanding of what "success" actually means
- Regular check-ins to track progress and adjust as needed

Managing Vendors and Partners

Districts frequently rely on external partners to complete projects, especially in areas like design, construction, events, marketing, or consulting. These relationships can significantly expand what the organization is able to accomplish.

Strong vendor and partner relationships tend to be built on:

- Clear scopes of work before projects begin
- Written agreements that define responsibilities and timelines
- A shared understanding of communication expectations
- Designated points of contact on both sides
- Regular check-ins during active work phases

When these elements are missing, districts often end up absorbing coordination work that was never formally part of the agreement. Over time, this can create strain on internal capacity and reduce clarity about who is responsible for what.

Good partnerships reduce workload.
Unclear ones quietly increase it.



South Perry



Case Study

Garland Business District Sidewalk Project

When the City of Spokane allocated ARPA funding to four business districts, the Garland Business District quickly and clearly identified the need to address deteriorating sidewalks that had become both a safety hazard and a financial burden for property owners. Many sidewalks, originally installed in the 1940s and 1950s, had been damaged by tree roots, and insurance companies had notified business owners they were responsible for repairs.

A city-approved contractor was hired to complete repairs across five blocks serving roughly 80 businesses. Choosing a preapproved contractor proved especially valuable, as they were already familiar with city permits, planning requirements, and infrastructure standards, reducing the administrative burden on the district.

Construction was completed over two weeks in March and April 2026. Work was phased by block and coordinated with individual businesses to avoid

closures and minimize disruptions. Once the sidewalks were repaired, the City followed with restriping and added new parking spaces along the corridor.

The project demonstrated the value of completing improvements as a district rather than business by business. Coordinating the work created a consistent result, streamlined construction, and eliminated the need for each business owner to manage contractors independently.

District leaders also emphasized the importance of persistence. The project followed four years of advocacy, board collaboration, and community discussions. Throughout construction, a small group of district leaders communicated daily with businesses and the contractor, addressing concerns as work progressed and helping ensure the project stayed on schedule and earned broad community support.



The Main Street Approach: A Framework for Organizing District Work

There is no need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to organizing business district work. The Main Street Approach is a tried-and-true framework that leverages a district's unique assets around an intuitive committee structure that includes four interconnected areas – Design, Economic Vitality, Outreach, and Promotion. The Approach is built on the idea that incrementally moving these four areas of work forward produces lasting change, not just short-term activity. Each of the four areas is typically supported by a committee, which makes it a useful structure for recruiting a diverse set of volunteers, implementing a complex work plan, and building a leadership pipeline for your district organization.

The Main Street Approach is a flexible framework that has been used in hundreds of downtowns and districts across the country, and there are many resources available through both Main Street America and Washington Main Street.

Learn more here:

preservewa.org/mainstreet

Section Reflection

- When a new opportunity comes to the district, what is the current process for evaluating it — and how consistent is that process across leadership?
- Where are the district's current vendor or partner relationships working well, and where is the district quietly absorbing coordination work that was never formally agreed to?
- What is one thing the district has been reluctant to say no to, and what has that cost in terms of staff time or focus?

Funding & Financial Stewardship

Funding is key to district work and shapes its evolution. Financial stewardship means more than accurate records; it involves understanding how funding affects capacity, direction, and decisions, often in subtle ways.

Understanding Revenue Streams

The districts that stay financially healthy over time are usually the ones that have thought carefully about where their money comes from, what each source requires of the organization, and what would happen if any one stream went away. Building a mix of revenue types is not just good strategy; it is a form of organizational resilience.



Event and Programs



Special Assessments & BIDs



Sponsorships



Partnerships and Contracts



Grants



Other

Event and Program Revenue

Events can generate revenue through vendor fees, ticket sales, booth rentals, and activity sponsorships.

The practical challenge is that events cost money and time before they make money. Permitting, equipment, logistics, promotion, and volunteer coordination all add up. Treating event revenue as net profit without accounting for true cost is one of the more common ways districts end up financially stretched. A separate event budget that tracks both direct costs and staff or volunteer time gives a more honest picture of what each event actually contributes.

Special Assessments and BID Structures

A Business Improvement District — also known in Washington State as a Parking and Business Improvement Area (PBIA) or Business Improvement Area (BIA), all referring to the same structure — is a formal mechanism through which businesses or property owners within a defined area agree to pay an additional assessment that funds services and improvements within the district. BIDs are established through a public process and governed by specific state law. In Washington State, the process involves property owner petitions, local government approval, and ongoing oversight under Chapter 35.87A RCW.

Sponsorships

Sponsorships allow businesses, property owners, or outside organizations to contribute to a specific program, event, or initiative in exchange for recognition. They differ from membership in that they are typically tied to something specific rather than general organizational support.

Sponsorship requests also need to match what the district can reliably deliver. A sponsor who pays for logo placement on event materials and then does not see it will not renew. Tracking sponsor commitments and fulfilling them completely is as important as landing the sponsorship in the first place.

Public Funding Partnerships and Contracts

Some districts formalize relationships with city or county government through service agreements or contracts in which the district is compensated for specific work it performs on behalf of a public partner.

These arrangements can provide stable, predictable revenue. They also create accountability structures and reporting obligations that function differently from grant funding. The district needs to be clear about what it is agreeing to deliver, what the timeline looks like, and what happens if circumstances change.

Understanding Grants

Grants are one of the most common funding sources for business districts, but they require careful planning and realistic expectations. Grants can be awarded for general operations, specific projects, or on a renewable basis. Every grant requires an application — sometimes lengthy — along with ongoing reporting and data or narrative tracking throughout the grant period. Before pursuing a grant, it's worth understanding what you're committing to administratively, not just financially.

Grants are generally not flexible, unrestricted funding. Most are project-specific, meaning funds must be used for a defined program or activity outlined in your application and approved by the funder. Other important considerations for business districts:

- **Restricted use** — Funds must be spent only on the purposes described in your application and cannot be redirected without funder approval
- **Not always renewable** — Many grants are one-time awards, and some funders will not accept a new application from organizations that have previously received funding
- **Time-limited** — Grants have a defined start and end date; unspent funds may need to be returned
- **Paid upon completion** — Some grants are reimbursement-based, meaning your district spends the money first and is paid back after submitting documentation — this requires having cash flow to cover costs upfront



Case Study

North Monroe Bus Shelter Partnership

North Monroe's bus shelter project started with a simple problem: litter.

Through conversations with businesses, residents, and other community members, the district consistently heard that litter around bus shelters was one of the corridor's most visible challenges. Bus stops along Monroe are some of the highest-traffic locations in the district, making them both highly visible and persistent litter hot spots. The district approached Spokane Transit Authority (STA) about installing larger trash receptacles at 11 shelter locations, and during those conversations discovered an even bigger opportunity: STA was open to allowing vinyl wraps on the back panels of its bus shelters.

North Monroe had recently engaged local artists through an open call for its district banner program, selecting four artists whose work reflected the neighborhood's character. Two of those designs translated especially well to the bus shelter format. The vinyl wraps were designed at 50% transparency so riders could still see through the panels while experiencing the artwork. One artist even incorporated the district's personality directly into the design, including a UFO beaming up trash, a playful nod to the litter response that inspired the project. The wraps and four new trash receptacles across the 11 locations came in at approximately \$24,000 total, with STA handling their own printing and labor and North Monroe funding the project through ARPA. The designs were also built to align with North Monroe's existing banner program, creating a cohesive visual identity across the corridor.

The process of working with STA required persistence but moved more smoothly than expected once the right people were involved. The district connected through its City Council representative, was introduced to STA's community outreach team, and submitted a detailed formal request to the CEO that clearly outlined the project and responsibilities. According to district leadership, the proposal was specific enough that it was approved with very little back-and-forth. STA's brand guide allowed flexibility in color selection and permitted the use of the North Monroe name in the designs, though no STA logo was included. Throughout the process, the district kept business owners and stakeholders informed through surveys and newsletters, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

While there was no established model for incorporating community artwork into active transit shelters, the project demonstrated what can happen when a district brings a well-developed idea to a willing partner. For North Monroe, the experience reinforced that public agencies are often open to creative collaborations—they may simply be waiting for someone to ask.

If your district has a strong visual identity and a clear ask, asserting that personality in unexpected places can open doors that would otherwise stay closed.

Public agencies are often open to creative collaborations—they may simply be waiting for someone to ask.

Other Revenue Sources

Districts sometimes generate revenue through means that do not fit neatly into the categories above. These can include:

- **Merchandise sales:** branded items sold at events or online that generate modest revenue and build corridor identity
- **Fee-for-service arrangements:** charging for specific services the district provides, such as managing a market, operating a storefront activation program, or providing coordination support to a third party
- **Fundraising events:** one-time or annual events designed specifically to raise unrestricted funds for the organization, distinct from programming events that generate revenue as a byproduct
- **Crowdfunding and community campaigns:** small-dollar fundraising from a broad base of community supporters, particularly effective for visible, tangible projects with clear community benefit
- **Membership or Friends programs:** A district organization has a variety of stakeholders who may be interested in supporting the organization's mission on an ongoing basis through annual dues or donations. Membership can take a variety of forms, but often implies certain benefits for dues-paying members, sometimes based on a tiered system that provides more benefits for larger contributions. Consult your organization's bylaws to determine if membership is a formal structure that also gives members voting rights on board appointments. Other forms of recurring donation programs utilized by district organizations are Partnership programs (also targeting district businesses, property owners, and other organizations, but without the promise of specific benefits) and "Friends of" programs, geared toward individual residents (especially effective when offered as a small monthly automatic donation).



Financial Transparency

Financial transparency in district work is not only about compliance. It is about trust.

Because business districts operate in public-facing and community-connected roles, financial decisions are rarely seen as purely internal matters. Businesses want to understand how funds are being used, what priorities are being supported, and how decisions are made around spending.

Transparency does not require overwhelming detail in every communication. It requires clarity, consistency, and accessibility.

Strong financial transparency practices often include:

- Regular financial reporting to leadership and stakeholders
- Clear documentation of income sources and spending categories
- Open communication about funding constraints and limitations
- Consistent budgeting processes that reflect actual organizational priorities
- Shared understanding among leadership about financial realities

For districts that are structured as nonprofits, transparency also carries specific legal and ethical expectations.

Nonprofit organizations are required to maintain accurate financial records, follow established governance practices, and comply with federal and state reporting requirements. Tax-exempt nonprofits must file an annual IRS Form 990, which provides information about the organization's finances, governance, and activities. Form 990 is a public document that must be made available upon request and is often accessible through online nonprofit databases.



Section Reflection

- How clearly does district leadership understand where each revenue stream comes from, what it can be used for, and what reporting it requires?
- How would member businesses describe the district's financial transparency — and how close is that perception to reality?
- Where does the board currently feel confident in its financial oversight, and where are there gaps in understanding or engagement?

The Invisible Infrastructure of District Work

Some of the most important functions are not tied to projects, events, or public-facing outcomes. Instead, they live in relationships, communication patterns, shared expectations, and the trust that develops over time between the district and its stakeholders.

This invisible infrastructure of district work is often what determines whether a district feels stable or fragile, credible or unclear, supported or constantly misunderstood.

Building Credibility

Credibility in district work is not established through a single initiative or moment of success. It is built gradually through consistency. In Spokane, districts operate in an environment where collaboration with public agencies, nonprofits, and small businesses is common.

A district does not need to do everything. But it does need to do what it says it will do.

Over time, credibility affects how easily a district can coordinate with partners, access funding, and work effectively with public agencies.

Communication and Expectations

Communication in district work is not only about sharing updates. It is also how expectations are formed.

Effective communication often includes:

- Regular updates, even if progress is limited
- Clear explanation of what the district is and is not responsible for
- Transparent timelines and constraints
- Consistent points of contact
- Shared understanding of how decisions are made

When expectations are clear, the district spends less time correcting misunderstandings and more time focusing on actual work.

Navigating Conflict

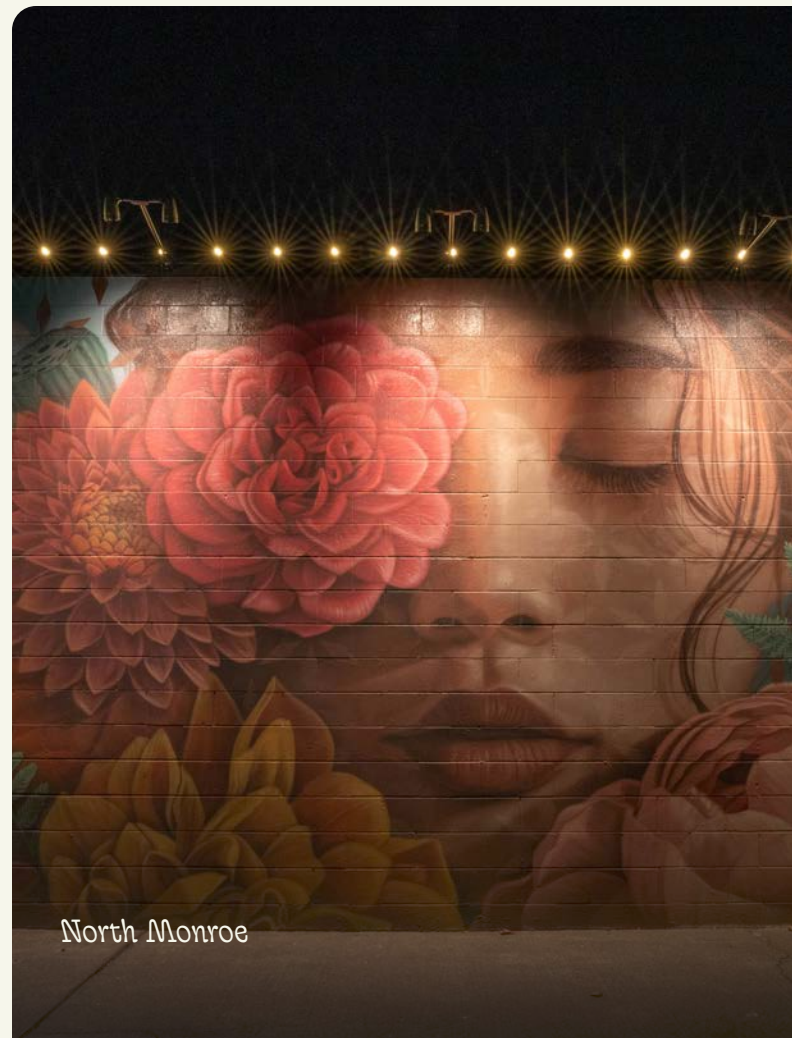
Conflict in district work is not unusual. It is often a natural result of working in shared public spaces with multiple stakeholders.

The challenge is managing it in a way that maintains trust and keeps communication open.

This usually depends on:

- Transparency about how decisions are reached
- Defined boundaries around scope and authority
- Willingness to engage in discussion rather than avoid it
- Maintaining relationships even when disagreement exists

When handled well, conflict can improve clarity and strengthen decision-making. When handled poorly, it tends to persist and resurface in future work.



North Monroe

Working With City Departments

Business districts often collaborate with departments within the City of Spokane on projects that affect public space, infrastructure, or community development.

- **Development Services Center** — the primary entry point for permits and project review, including building permits, land use applications, and code compliance
- **Public Works Department** — oversees infrastructure-related work, including Engineering, Integrated Capital Management, and the Streets Department
- **Office of Neighborhood Services** — supports neighborhood and district-level coordination, community engagement, and connection to City programs and resources

City processes are designed to evaluate safety, infrastructure impact, and compliance with municipal code. Because of this, city staff are generally able to respond more effectively when proposals are specific.

In practice, this means:

- Clearly identifying the location of a proposed project
- Defining what is being proposed
- Providing a simple visual, sketch, or map when possible

Districts do not need fully developed plans before reaching out. However, bringing a defined concept allows city staff to provide clearer guidance, identify constraints, and suggest next steps.

Many projects that take place in the public right-of-way, such as sidewalks or streets, require permits and review. This review process ensures that projects meet safety, accessibility, and infrastructure standards.

Another key factor is responsibility. When an installation or improvement is placed in public space, there must be a clearly defined entity responsible for it. This includes maintenance, repair, and liability.

For districts, this often means considering:

- Who will maintain the installation over time
- Whether insurance coverage is required
- How repairs or replacements will be handled
- What happens if the installation creates a safety issue

City processes are structured this way to protect public safety and ensure that infrastructure remains functional over time. Working effectively with the city is less about navigating a single department and more about understanding how systems connect.



Case Study

Hillyard — Façade Grant Program

Hillyard's façade grant program grew out of a straightforward observation: few things change the perception of a corridor faster than buildings that look cared for. District leadership shared that Hillyard had long struggled with a reputation tied to its physical appearance—a sense that little investment was happening and, if no one else was investing, why would anyone else start? Rather than focusing on one large capital project, the district chose to invest in improvements that would be visible across multiple properties.

The program was funded through ARPA dollars, in partnership with the City, Spokane County, and Economic Development Services. It was structured around historic preservation principles and the needs of Hillyard's small business owners, prioritizing permanent improvements — lighting, refinished storefronts, structural repairs — over temporary fixes. Matching funds were preferred but not required, since many applicants were small family-owned businesses for whom removing financial barriers mattered more than enforcing a match.

The approach paid off: the first funding round leveraged roughly \$80,000 in private matching investment, and the second generated another \$50,000–\$60,000. Projects were evaluated by a committee of historic preservation professionals, neighborhood stakeholders, and community members, who walked the corridor together to assess each proposal's potential impact.

After the first round, the district refined the program — strengthening evaluation criteria, improving outreach materials, and limiting each property owner to one project per cycle so more businesses could participate.

According to district leadership, compliance proved to be the most challenging aspect of the program. Public funding in historic buildings required navigating prevailing wage requirements, procurement rules, and permitting processes that many local contractors had never encountered. Hillyard benefited from technical assistance provided by the Northeast Public Development Authority (NEPDA), which helped contractors understand public contracting requirements and kept projects moving forward.

Looking back, district leaders view the façade grant program as one of their highest-impact investments. While the visible building improvements changed the appearance of the corridor, they also demonstrated that small, strategic investments can encourage additional private investment. Their biggest piece of advice for other districts is to plan for the administrative side of the program as carefully as the funding itself. Technical assistance, clear compliance expectations, and contractor support can make the difference between projects that move forward and projects that stall.



City Council operates as the legislative and policy-making body for the City. They are not responsible for day-to-day operations, but instead focus on long-term direction, public priorities, and addressing barriers that show up in systems, codes, or ordinances.

When working with a council member, it is important to understand the difference between operational issues and policy issues.

Council is most effective when the conversation is centered on:

- Barriers in policy or city code that impact businesses or districts
- Structural challenges that cannot be solved through staff alone
- Community-wide concerns that require legislative attention
- Long-term vision and economic development priorities

Less effective when used for:

- Individual service requests or day-to-day operational issues
- Issues that can already be resolved through city departments
- Informal complaints without clear context or impact

Council members serve as advocates and connectors. They can elevate issues into policy conversations, help identify pathways for change, and bring attention to systemic challenges that affect multiple businesses or districts. Legislative assistants are often key in this process — they help track communication, coordinate follow-up, and ensure issues do not get lost between meetings or departments.

Over time, strong relationships with council members can help districts move from reactive problem-solving to proactive policy and systems improvement.



Section Reflection

- Where has a miscommunication or unclear expectation with a city department, partner, or business created friction that took significant time to resolve?
- When conflict arises in the district, what is the current approach to managing it — and does that approach tend to resolve things or push them forward?
- What communication habits does the district currently have that build trust, and what habits might be quietly undermining it?

Institutional Memory & Succession

Leadership transitions are inevitable in district work. Board terms end, officers rotate, and people take on new roles or step back. Without preparation, knowledge, relationships, and context leave, forcing the organization to rebuild what it knew.

Who Is Responsible for Succession Planning

Succession planning is a board-level responsibility, though in practice it's shared across several roles:

- **Board president/chair** — ensures the succession process starts well before a term ends and fosters a culture of proactive planning.
- **Governance or nominations committee** — coordinates the practical work of recruitment, orientation, and transition timelines.
- **Outgoing officers** — complete the knowledge transfer process and support incoming leaders during the handoff.
- **New officers** — complete orientation and actively seek out context rather than waiting for it to come to them.

For districts without a formal committee structure, the board president typically holds primary responsibility for treating succession as a governance function rather than an afterthought.

Board Policy and Term Limits

Succession planning works better when it is governed by written policy rather than habit. A board that manages transitions informally will almost always experience gaps when people leave. A board with written expectations holds everyone to a shared standard regardless of who is currently in the room.

At minimum, your bylaws and board policies should address term limits, officer rotation, vacancy procedures, and the process for elections. Term limits are one of the most practical succession tools available. They create predictability, open pathways for new leadership, and prevent any single person from becoming the organization's indispensable point of knowledge.

Your policies should also address how vacancies are filled mid-term, what constitutes a quorum during transition periods, and how long an outgoing officer is expected to remain available to support the incoming officer.

Term limits are one of the most practical succession tools available.

Access and Credentials

One of the most immediately disruptive gaps in a leadership transition is not knowing who has access to what. Passwords, login credentials, and account ownership need to be documented, secured, and transferred as part of every transition.

This includes:

- Organization email accounts and admin access
- Website and hosting account
- Social media platforms — noting the difference between admin and editor roles
- Online banking login and any secondary approver requirements
- Grant portal accounts
- Filing accounts with the Washington Secretary of State
- Shared drives and file storage

Best practice is to use a password manager or a secured shared credentials document that is updated with each transition and stored in the organization's permanent records rather than on a personal device.

Legal and Compliance Documents

New officers need to know where foundational documents are kept, what filings are due, and who is responsible for them. Missing a filing deadline because of a leadership gap can have real consequences.

Documents that should be accessible and transferred include:

- ☐ Articles of Incorporation and current bylaws with the date of last revision
- ☐ IRS determination letter (if 501(c)(3)) and federal EIN and state UBI number
- ☐ Annual report filing with the Washington Secretary of State — with due date and responsible party noted
- ☐ IRS Form 990 or 990-EZ — with preparer information and filing deadline
- ☐ Charitable solicitations registration renewal dates if applicable
- ☐ Insurance certificates with expiration dates
- ☐ Signed conflict of interest forms for all current board members
- ☐ Any formal agreements with the City of Spokane or BID formation documents

Someone should be designated in writing as responsible for tracking all renewal dates in a shared board calendar. This should not live in a single person's personal calendar.

The Board Buddy System

One of the most effective and underused succession tools is also one of the simplest: pairing incoming board members and officers with an experienced counterpart for a defined period.

The idea is straightforward. New leaders should not have to figure out the organization on their own. A board buddy is not a supervisor. They are a resource. The goal is context transfer, helping new leaders understand how the organization actually works, who the key relationships are, and what unwritten norms or expectations shape the work.

Financial Access and Signatory Authority

Bank accounts, check signatories, and payment authorizations often create the most friction during transitions if not addressed proactively. Some financial institutions require board action and in-person documentation to change signatories — leave sixty to ninety days of lead time.

Each transition should include:

- Confirming current authorized signatories on all accounts
- Initiating signatory changes with the bank well before the transition date
- Canceling old debit or credit cards and issuing new ones to incoming officers
- Reviewing online bill pay and recurring payments to confirm who manages them
- Transferring admin access to any payment processing accounts
- Reviewing the current year budget and most recent financial statements with the incoming officer

Explicitly documenting any outstanding loans, active grants under contract, or financial obligations with deadlines.



Organizational History and Decision Context

This is the category most often overlooked and the one most likely to cause confusion for incoming leaders. Why did the district decide not to pursue a particular partnership? What was the outcome of a grant application two years ago? Why is a certain relationship complicated?

Not all of this can be fully documented, but the most consequential decisions should be. Meeting minutes serve this function when they are substantive. A brief narrative summary of major decisions or turning points updated annually can prevent incoming leaders from relitigating history they do not know exists.

Key practices include maintaining complete and substantive board meeting minutes that capture key discussion points and not just votes, keeping a project history file for major initiatives that notes outcomes and lessons learned, documenting the rationale behind significant policy decisions, and noting any unresolved items or agreements that are being held for a future term.

Contacts and Relationships

When a long-tenured leader steps away, the most common loss is not information — it is relationship context.

A contact log should capture:

- City of Spokane contacts by department and project
- City Council legislative assistants for the relevant districts
- Partner nonprofit contacts
- Key landlord and property owner relationships, especially those involved in active projects
- Anchor business contacts and association members
- Grant program officers with program names and active grant periods noted
- Vendors for events, insurance, legal, accounting, and other services
- Media contacts covering the district
- Any relationships where the incoming officer would benefit from context about the history or tone of the relationship

Section Reflection

- When does your current board structure require officers to rotate, and are those dates tracked in a shared place?
- If your president or treasurer stepped away tomorrow, what information would be hardest to reconstruct?
- Does your board have a written transition checklist, and when was it last used?
- What relationships or decisions in your district's history are currently known by only one or two people?

Returning to Role

This toolkit covers a lot of ground; role clarity, leadership structure, capacity, priorities, funding, succession, and the quieter work of keeping an organization aligned with itself over time. It is worth pausing at the end to come back to something simpler.

Why did you start this work in the first place?

A district exists to serve a place and the people connected to it. Not to maintain compliance or build governance structure for its own sake. When the operational side of the work gets heavy, it is easy to lose track of that.

Returning to the role means periodically asking whether the work the district is doing still reflects the reason people joined it, and whether the energy going into structure and coordination is in proportion to the energy going into the corridor itself.

A corridor belongs to more people than show up to any given meeting. It includes the businesses and property owners who are formal stakeholders, and it also includes employees, residents, customers, cultural communities, newer arrivals, and longtime members who carry decades of history. The most effective districts find ways to keep that broader group connected to the work in forms that fit real lives and real capacity. Community does not self-organize into the shape a district needs. It has to be invited, welcomed, and given real reasons to stay.

The work in this toolkit does not end here. The questions it raises will come up again at different stages, and the answers that feel right today may need to be revisited as the corridor changes and leadership turns over. What stays constant is the reason any of it matters. A district earns its place in a community by making connection more possible, more visible, and more durable over time. That does not happen by accident. It happens because people decide it is worth doing, and then keep deciding that through the hard parts and the slow parts and the parts that do not show up in any report.



Garland

Resource Index

The following resources are included to support common areas of district work. Local contacts, permitting information, and external organizations can help districts navigate projects, partnerships, and administrative responsibilities.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

A Business Improvement District — also known in Washington State as a Parking and Business Improvement Area (PBIA) — is an alternative to the nonprofit model for funding and managing a business district. Rather than relying on voluntary dues or fundraising, a BID creates a mandatory special assessment collected from commercial, multifamily residential, and mixed-use properties within a defined boundary. Those funds are then used exclusively to provide services that benefit the assessed properties — things like cleaning, safety, marketing, events, and placemaking. In Spokane, both the East Sprague Business Improvement District (ESBID) and the Downtown BID (DBID) operate under this model, with the Sprague Union District serving as a local example of how a neighborhood business district can use a BID to fund consistent, professional district management.

Is a BID Right for Your District?

Before pursuing a BID, there are a few key questions to work through:

- What are the specific needs of businesses in the area, and do they align with the allowable purposes under RCW 35.87A?
- How much will it cost to deliver those services, including staffing?
- Are there property owners who would oppose inclusion, and is there enough support to sustain the district?
- How much needs to be assessed to cover costs, and will the BID be financially sustainable over time?

BIDs work best when businesses are actively engaged and willing to lead — the governing Ratepayer Advisory Board must be formed by businesses themselves, and at least one full-time staffer is likely needed for daily administration.

How a BID Is Established

- **Petition:** At least 60% of businesses, multifamily residential, and mixed-use properties within the proposed area must sign a petition in support. This is by far the most difficult and time-consuming step.
- **Resolution of Intent and Public Hearing:** The City publishes notice at least 10 days before a public hearing, and all potentially affected properties must receive direct notice. If a majority of properties formally protest at this stage, the process terminates.
- **Adopting Ordinance:** If the process moves forward, the City Council passes an ordinance that codifies the district boundaries, property classifications, benefit zones, assessment rates, and the allowable uses of revenue.

Assessment Rates and Benefit Zones Assessment rates can be structured to reflect the level of benefit each property receives. Districts can establish benefit zones — for example, properties on a main commercial corridor that receive the most benefit pay the highest rate, while properties in an adjacent zone receiving only basic services like trash and graffiti removal pay a lower rate. Rates may also account for parking facilities separately.

Revenue collected from assessments can only be spent on the purposes outlined in the adopting ordinance, and the Ratepayer Advisory Board makes recommendations to the City Council on spending. Assessments are collected twice per year, and rates typically adjust annually based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to account for inflation.

Important Operational Considerations

- There is no funding in the first year of operation — planning ahead for startup services is essential
- The Ratepayer Advisory Board must be formed before any hiring decisions can be made
- Labor costs, inflation, and increases in illegal dumping or camping can put pressure on the budget
- Physical assets such as equipment require storage space
- Outreach to property owners is ongoing and burdensome but necessary to maintain projected assessment revenues

Layering a BID with Other Structures

A BID does not have to operate in isolation. Many districts layer a BID with other organizational structures to expand capacity and access more resources — for example, pairing a BID with a Creative District designation, a Chamber of Commerce, or a business association can broaden the range of services and funding streams available to the district.

More information: [RCW 35.87A](#)





Case Study

Sprague Union District PBIA

The East Spokane Parking and Business Improvement Area — operating as the Sprague Union District — is one of Spokane's active examples of a BID in practice. Established along East Sprague Avenue, the district uses assessments collected from commercial and multifamily properties to fund a consistent set of services including cleaning and graffiti removal, neighborhood beautification, district marketing, safety advocacy, and administration.

Three service zones were established within the boundary to reflect different levels of benefit across the district, and assessment rates adjust annually based on the Consumer Price Index. Day-to-day management is handled through the East Spokane Business Association, and a Ratepayer Advisory Board made up of property owners guides all program decisions — with City Council retaining final approval authority.

More information: spragueuniondistrict.com/pbia

Preservation Resources

Historic Preservation and Property Development

For business districts with older building stock, historic preservation programs help protect the character that makes a corridor distinct, while unlocking incentives that make rehabilitation projects more financially viable. In Spokane, this is administered through the City's Historic Preservation Office, which supports the protection and adaptive reuse of historically significant buildings within designated districts. Hillyard, for example, has properties listed on the Spokane Register of Historic Places, and properties within or adjacent to historic areas may face specific review requirements before exterior alterations.

Design Review (Certificate of Appropriateness)

Exterior changes to historic properties — storefronts, façades, signage, and other character-defining features — typically require a Certificate of Appropriateness before a building permit can be issued. This is especially relevant when member businesses plan renovations, awning replacements, window changes, or other visible improvements to contributing buildings. The goal is to preserve a corridor's historic identity while still allowing appropriate updates.

Many projects can be reviewed administratively by City staff; more complex proposals go before the Spokane Historic Landmarks Commission at a public hearing. Property owners and business districts should consult the Historic Preservation Office early in project planning — it can save time and help avoid costly mid-project surprises.

General inquiries: preservation@spokanecity.org

More information: historicspokane.org/design-review

Spokane Register of Historic Places

Individual buildings within a business district can be nominated for listing on the Spokane Register of Historic Places, which formally recognizes their historic significance and provides access to preservation incentives. For business districts, encouraging property owners to pursue listing can strengthen a corridor's identity, support grant eligibility, and attract investment in building rehabilitation.

Prior consultation with the Historic Preservation Office is recommended before beginning the nomination process to confirm eligibility. Nominations are reviewed by staff and then presented to the Spokane Historic Landmarks Commission at a public meeting, which includes a site visit. If approved, the designation is finalized through a Management Agreement with the City, recorded on the property title. The designation stays with the property permanently and cannot be removed by future owners.

More information:

historicspokane.org/spokane-register

Preservation Incentives

The Federal Historic Tax Credit is available to owners of properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places investing in substantial renovation. The tax credit equals 20% of the amount spent on rehabilitation of a historic structure.

Often working hand-in-hand with Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax credits, Special Valuation is a statewide tax incentive program typically managed at the local level that provides a 10-year tax break that reduces property tax liability by effectively lowering the assessed value by total rehabilitation costs of a project.

More information:

preservewa.org/historic-property-resource-guide/

Activation & Placemaking

Banners and Streetscape Elements

Banners are one of the most visible and accessible ways a business district can activate a corridor and build a sense of place. Done well, they signal that a district is organized, invested, and paying attention to how the street looks and feels. Getting there takes more groundwork than most people expect — and on Avista-owned wood poles, a specific approval process that runs through both the City of Spokane and Avista before anything goes up.

Identifying Locations

Start by mapping every possible banner location in the corridor and be as specific as you can. Note the type of pole — wood poles are typically Avista utility poles, while metal poles in the right of way are usually City-owned. Note whether the pole is tall or short, whether it is in or out of the public right of way, and whether it currently has any existing hardware or attachments. If you can identify pole numbers from the street, include those too — it significantly speeds up the review process.

Submit more locations than you think you will need. If you send thirty, expect ten to be approved. If you send ten, you may end up with none. Not every location will clear utility, safety, or structural requirements, and some will be ruled out for reasons that are not visible from the street. A long list protects you from ending up with too few approvals to make the installation feel meaningful across the corridor.

Agreements and Responsibility

Before any banner goes up, the business district organization should have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place with the owner of the poles where the banners will be installed, whether that is the City of Spokane, Avista, or another property owner. The MOU should clearly define who is responsible for installation and removal, who handles maintenance and upkeep, and what happens if a banner is vandalized or damaged — whether the property owner absorbs that cost or the district manages it. These questions are much easier to answer before an incident than after.

For banners on City-owned poles or in the public right of way, the organization that initiates the installation is typically responsible for managing it — putting banners up, taking them down seasonally, and handling any issues that arise. Confirm this arrangement in writing with the relevant City department before installation begins.

Hiring an Artist

If your district is commissioning original artwork for banner designs, Spokane Arts is a good starting point for finding local artists, and your organization's own network and social media channels are also effective. Whatever process you use, be transparent about what the work involves. Specify the number of designs needed, the dimensions and file format requirements, the timeline, and the payment clearly and upfront. Artists should know exactly what they are being asked to produce and what they will be compensated before they agree to the work. Ambiguity at the start of a creative relationship tends to create friction later.

Quick Reference: Banner Checklist

- ☐ Banner is fabric, 20 square feet or less
- ☐ Air slits included in design
- ☐ Pole locations and numbers identified
- ☐ City of Spokane graphic approval received — contact Gabby Ryan, gryan@spokanecity.org
- ☐ Avista Details Submission Form completed and submitted — contact Ryan Arnold, Ryan.Arnold@Avistacorp.com
- ☐ Qualified contractor identified for installation and removal
- ☐ Installation and removal dates confirmed
- ☐ MOU signed for any private property locations
- ☐ Costs for installation, removal, and maintenance budgeted

Murals & Public Art

Arts commission contact

[The Spokane Arts](#) Commission works to promote and enhance arts and culture in the Spokane area. The commission hosts 16 volunteer positions. Commissioners serve three-year terms, attend monthly meetings on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 4:30 pm, and have the opportunity to work on specific projects and initiatives.

The Spokane Arts Commission serves as an advisory board to both the City of Spokane and Spokane Arts, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Commissioners represent a variety of arts disciplines, neighborhoods, and skill sets. In addition to monthly meetings, each commissioner serves on one or more committees.

Contact:

artshelper@spokanearts.org or 509-321-6444.

Planning a Mural

Before starting a mural project, there are a few key decisions to work through — location, property ownership, artist selection, and materials. The steps below outline the essentials for a business district.

Location

Choose a wall that is visible to pedestrians and passing traffic, appropriately sized for your budget, and free of climate concerns (e.g., avoid north-facing walls in rain-heavy areas). A cooperative, accessible property owner is essential — a reluctant or hard-to-reach owner can stall or derail the project. Consider how this mural fits with any future murals in the district to maintain a cohesive look.

Property and Permits

- **If the wall is on private property**, get written permission from the owner — this is also a good opportunity to ask about sponsorship or material storage.
- **If the wall is on public property**, contact the relevant city department (e.g., Parks for Riverfront Park) and plan for a longer approval process, including permits, insurance, and design approval.

Budget

Professional mural artists typically charge \$15–\$35 per square foot. The budget should also account for primer, paint, equipment (scaffolding, ladders), supplies, and any required permits. Measure the wall early — this drives both cost estimates and artist conversations.

Finding an Artist

Post the opportunity through the Spokane Arts opportunities page or use SmarterSelect to run a call for artists (Spokane Arts can assist). Applications should request a resume, proof of experience, and a design concept. Have the artist complete a W-9 before work begins and provide an invoice and paint color list upon completion.

Installation

Prep the wall with powerwashing, cleaning, and primer before the artist begins. Confirm logistics in advance: storage, scaffolding, special accommodations, and supply responsibilities. Notify nearby businesses and media before install. After completion, apply an anti-graffiti coating — Spokane Arts sources this from the Sherwin-Williams commercial location on Trent.

Events & Activation

Special Event Permits

Most public events in Spokane require a Special Event Permit through the City. This includes events that use public property, impact streets or sidewalks, require city safety services, or involve street closures. Private events may also require a permit if they affect public safety.

Timeline and Fees

Submit the application at least 30 days before the event, though 90 days is recommended. Once submitted, the City routes the application to affected departments and provides initial feedback within 10 days. Application fees are based on event size, and additional fees may apply for Fire Department permits, city park use, off-duty police or paramedics, and traffic control or barricades, which are the event organizer's responsibility to provide.

Do You Need a Permit?

A permit is likely required if your event involves any of the following:

- Street closures, moving routes, or impacts to parking meters
- Amplified sound
- More than 200 people in a city park, or more than 10,000 total attendees
- Use of a stage, tent, canopy, or bouncy structures
- A caterer, food vendors, or alcohol
- A sports tournament, parade, or public demonstration



Additional Permits to Know

- Food vendors require a [Temporary Food Establishment Permit](#) from [Spokane Regional Health District \(SRHD\)](#)
- Alcohol requires a Special Occasion License from the [WA State Liquor and Cannabis Board](#) — allow at least 45 days
- Temporary entertainment facilities (concerts, dances, carnivals) require a Temporary Entertainment Facility License
- Electrical — temporary power or generators require an electrical permit and inspection; existing on-site power typically does not
- Filming or photography in city parks may require a reservation or permit — call Park Operations at 509-363-5455
- If your event is at a City Park, apply for a [Parks Reservation Permit](#).

Apply online: events.my.spokanecity.org

Contact: eventpermits@spokanecity.org or 311 (509-755-2489 outside the city)

Street Closures

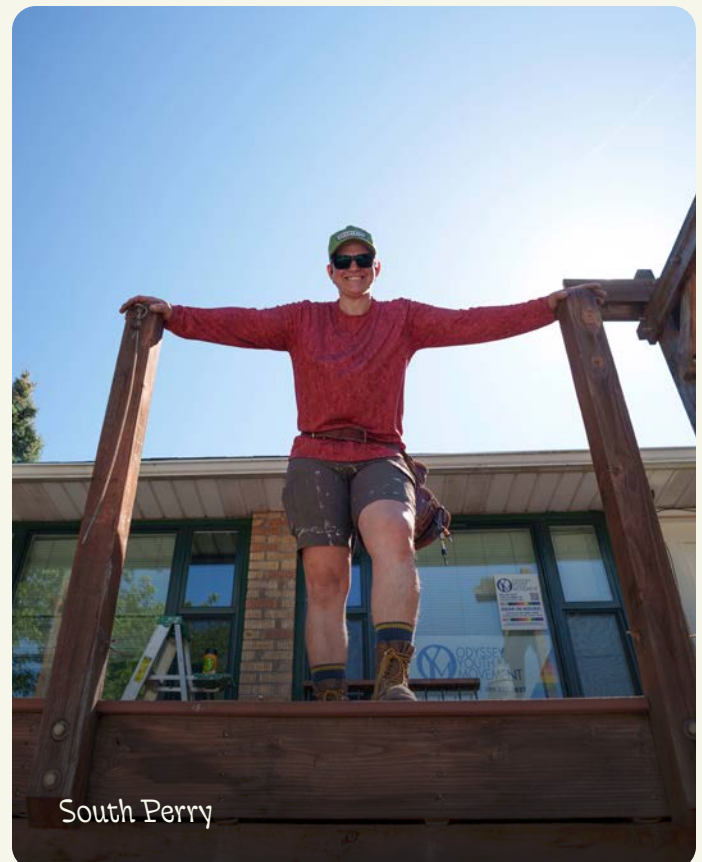
Most principal arterials are not suitable for special events. The general rule is that principal arterials cannot be closed outside of the downtown core — review the [principal arterial map](#) before planning your route. If your event is on one of those streets, contact the Special Events Coordinator before submitting a permit application. Event organizers are responsible for providing their own barricades. Events in the right of way may also require a separate [Fire Permit](#).

Insurance Requirements

All applicants must carry comprehensive general liability insurance with at least \$1 million in single-limit coverage, naming the City of Spokane as an additional insured. For small residential block parties, a homeowner's policy may be accepted in lieu of commercial coverage.

For a broader overview of how the City of Spokane is structured — including how City Council works, how ordinances become law, and how residents can get involved — the *This Is Spokane: A Civic Guide for Neighbors* is a useful reference. Published in 2025 by the City's Office of Neighborhood Services, it covers city and county structure, the budget process, planning and zoning, public safety, and more.

[This Is Spokane: A Civic Guide for Neighbors](#) — Office of Neighborhood Services



South Perry

Funding & Grants

Local Funding Opportunities

City of Spokane Community Engagement Grant

The City of Spokane's Community Engagement (CE) Grant Program provides funding to Neighborhood Councils and Community Assembly committees to support outreach, resident engagement, and community participation efforts. Eligible groups may apply for funding to support projects such as neighborhood events, outreach materials, mailers, community meetings, promotional items, and other activities designed to increase awareness and participation within Spokane neighborhoods. Funding amounts vary annually, and applicants are typically required to attend a grant training and submit meeting minutes showing council approval of proposed expenses. Application deadlines, eligibility requirements, and guidelines are updated each year through the City of Spokane Office of Neighborhood Services.

This grant program can also be a valuable opportunity for collaboration between Neighborhood Councils and local business districts or business organizations. Partnering on community events, outreach efforts, beautification projects, or neighborhood engagement activities can create mutually beneficial outcomes by increasing community participation, supporting local businesses, and strengthening neighborhood connections.

Learn more: [City of Spokane Community Engagement Grant Program](#)

State & Regional Partners

Washington State Department of Commerce

Offers grants, loans, and technical assistance for economic development, infrastructure, community development, and local government initiatives.

Learn more: commerce.wa.gov/contracting

Washington State Main Street Program

Supports downtown and commercial district revitalization through the Main Street Approach™, providing training, technical assistance, and resources focused on Design, Economic Vitality, Outreach, and Promotion.

Learn more: preservewa.org/programs/mainstreet

Innovia Foundation

Supports nonprofits, community initiatives, and regional projects through grants and partnerships.

Learn more: innovia.org

Avista Foundation

Supports nonprofits and community programs focused on economic vitality, education, and community development.

Learn more: avistafoundation.com

Grant Ready Checklist

Before applying for grants, it's important to make sure your organization has the administrative, financial, and governance basics in place. A grant readiness checklist ensures you have the materials most funders will ask for — and helps streamline the submission process so you're not scrambling at the last minute.

This checklist is especially useful if your organization is applying for its first grant, if you're working with a grant consultant, or if you want to make an existing grant process more efficient.

Additional resource: [Funding for Good Grant Readiness Checklist](#)

Organizational Structure

Nonprofit and Fiscal Sponsorship

Most neighborhood business districts operate as nonprofits. Starting one involves a few key steps, beginning with the Washington Secretary of State (OSOS). Note that Washington State nonprofit status or federal 501(c)(3) status does not exempt your organization from state taxes, labor laws, or other regulations — additional agency registrations will likely be required.

Is 501(c)(3) Status Worth It?

Being tax-exempt means the organization does not pay federal corporate income tax, and contributions made to your nonprofit may be tax-deductible for donors. Before pursuing 501(c)(3) status, consider the following:

- **Funding requirements** — Most government, foundation, and corporate funders require 501(c)(3) status. If you plan to apply for grants, your organization will need its own status or must be fiscally sponsored by another nonprofit that has it— we'll get into that later in this section.
- **Donor deductions** — Tax-deductible donations are only beneficial to donors who itemize on their tax returns. Donors should consult their own tax advisors regarding their gifts.
- **Annual reporting** — You must apply for the exemption and file an annual report (IRS Form 990) to maintain it.

For more guidance, visit the [Washington Nonprofit Handbook](#).

Choose Your Tax-Exempt Status

The most common designations for business districts:

- **501(c)(3)** — charitable organization; donations are tax-deductible
- **501(c)(4)** — social welfare organization
- **501(c)(6)** — business league or chamber of commerce

File Articles of Incorporation

Articles of Incorporation are your founding document, filed with the OSOS. They must include the organization's name, purpose, registered agent, initial board of directors, and how assets will be distributed if dissolved. Filing can be done online, in person, or by mail. Once approved, you will receive a UBI number, which is required for additional state registrations.

Register with State Agencies

Depending on your activities, you may need to register with several Washington State agencies beyond the OSOS:

- **Department of Revenue** — collects taxes and handles business licensing
- **Department of Labor & Industries** — required if you have employees; covers workers' compensation, safety, and wage laws
- **Employment Security Department** — required if you have employees; covers unemployment insurance
- **Liquor & Cannabis Board** — required if you serve alcohol at events
- **Gambling Commission** — required if you hold raffles or offer prizes
- **Department of Health** — required if you serve food
- **Department of Licensing** — required if your work needs special licenses
- **Public Disclosure Commission** — required if you engage in lobbying

You may also need to register with OSOS as a charity if you raise more than \$50,000 from the public or pay anyone to work.

Adopt Bylaws

After incorporation, the board of directors must formally adopt bylaws at a recorded meeting. Bylaws govern the internal operations and affairs of the organization and should be signed, dated, and kept on file.

To learn more about adopting bylaws and access templates to use as a starting place, visit the Nonprofit Association of Washington (NAWA) at nonprofitwa.org/topics/bylaws.

Ongoing Filing Requirements

Nonprofits registered as charitable organizations have two annual filing deadlines with the OSOS — an annual report and a charity renewal. If your organization solicits or receives public donations, you may also need to register through the SOS Charities Program.

Contact: *Washington Secretary of State* — corps@sos.wa.gov or 360-725-0377

The [Starting a Nonprofit in Washington State](#) guide walks you and your group through key decision-making points to assess whether a nonprofit is the best structure to accomplish your goals. If you decide to move forward, the guide — alongside the [Washington Nonprofit Handbook](#) — covers compliance and practices for becoming an operational organization.



Fiscal Sponsorship

If you're not ready to obtain 501(c)(3) status — or have decided it isn't the right fit — a fiscal sponsor may allow you to access grant funding and tax-deductible donations in the meantime. Depending on the grants you plan to apply for, this can be a practical path forward while your organization is getting started.

What Is Fiscal Sponsorship? A fiscal sponsorship allows emerging nonprofits and for-profit entities to apply for grants and receive donations through an existing 501(c)(3) organization. The fiscal sponsor tracks grant revenue and income, processes tax receipts, and provides other administrative services — giving your organization access to funds that would otherwise be unavailable. This creates a flow-through pathway for revenue that is tax-deductible to donors through the sponsor.

Why Use a Fiscal Sponsor? Most grant funders require recipients to be standalone 501(c)(3) organizations. If you are just starting your nonprofit, want to apply for a project-specific grant, or want to collect donations while building your organization, a fiscal sponsor makes this possible without having your own tax-exempt status in place.

[Fiscal Sponsorship Toolkit](#) — Communities of Opportunity's guide to navigating fiscal sponsorship relationships, including agreement and shared values templates.

Governance Best Practices

Volunteers, Interns, and Board Members

As your organization grows, understanding how to properly classify and manage the people who do your work is essential — and required by law. The following guidance is drawn from the [Nonprofit Labor & Industries Navigator](#), produced by Nancy Bacon Consulting in partnership with the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, and the [Charity & Nonprofit Board Service in Washington State Quick Guide](#), produced by the Washington Secretary of State and Office of the Attorney General.

An important note: Washington State nonprofit status or federal 501(c)(3) status does not exempt your organization from state labor laws. These rules apply regardless of your tax status.



Board Members and Governance

Under Washington law, board members are responsible for the management and affairs of the organization. This does not mean managing day-to-day operations, but it does mean appointing officers, supervising leadership, and ensuring the organization operates in accordance with its mission. Board members are held to three core fiduciary duties:

- **Duty of Care** — Board members must actively participate, attend meetings, review financial reports, evaluate leadership performance, and ensure accurate recordkeeping. The board is ultimately responsible for safeguarding the organization's assets and preventing fraud. A Finance Committee with at least one member with financial experience is strongly recommended.
- **Duty of Loyalty** — Board members must act in the best interests of the organization at all times, never using their position for personal gain. The board should have a written conflict of interest policy, and any transaction involving a board member must be disclosed and approved by other members in good faith.
- **Duty of Obedience** — The board must remain faithful to the organization's mission and ensure compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, including tax filings, payroll withholding, and reporting requirements. Directors should maintain the organization's corporate status through timely filings with the Secretary of State.

Practical Board Responsibilities

- Hold regular meetings with proper notice and keep written minutes of every meeting
- Ensure the organization carries appropriate insurance — including general liability and Directors and Officers (D&O) liability insurance
- Investigate any reports of financial mismanagement or misuse of resources, with protections in place for those who report concerns
- Make the organization's Form 990 and governing documents available to the public
- Discuss safety and health as a standing agenda item at least twice a year

Volunteers

A volunteer is someone who freely gives their time without expectation of pay. Volunteers may receive a stipend or nominal fee, but if that compensation resembles a wage — in amount, regularity, or perception — the volunteer may be reclassified as an employee, triggering minimum wage, overtime, and workers' compensation requirements. When in doubt, **contact L&I for a determination at determinations@lni.wa.gov**.

If an employee also volunteers for your organization, be careful: they may not volunteer to perform the same type of work for which they are employed, the volunteering must be truly voluntary, and there must be no expectation of compensation.



Interns

Interns engage in work-related learning for a limited period, often tied to a formal educational program.

There are two types:

- **Paid interns** are considered employees under L&I and must receive at least minimum wage with all applicable employment protections
- **Unpaid interns** must be working toward academic credit, and their work must be distinct from that of paid staff — you cannot replace a paid position with an unpaid intern

Maintain a clear paper trail for unpaid interns, including a position description, written educational purpose, and a signed acknowledgment that no compensation is expected.

Workers' Compensation

All paid staff must be covered by workers' compensation. Volunteers of 501(c)(3) organizations may also be covered optionally — but if you elect coverage, it must apply to all volunteers, not just select groups. Workers' compensation covers medical costs for volunteers; wage replacement does not apply to unpaid workers.

Membership Dues and Recurring Support Programs

Not all recurring support structures work the same way, and it is worth being intentional about which model fits your district's goals. Membership dues are about selling benefits — a business pays because it receives something concrete in return.

A partnership or sponsorship program is about selling a vision — a business or property owner invests because they believe in what the district is building, often at a higher level with more prominent recognition.

A friends or community supporter program is about belonging — individuals or small businesses contribute because they want to be part of something, often with minimal benefits attached. Each model also has different implications for your bylaws and nonprofit structure.

The key to making membership work is making sure the benefits are real — not aspirational, but tangible things a business can actually use. If a member cannot point to something concrete they received in exchange for their dues, renewal becomes harder every year. Before setting a membership price or benefit list, it is worth asking honestly whether the district has the capacity to deliver what it is promising.

Common membership benefit structures include:

- **Basic membership** — listing in a district directory or map, inclusion in newsletters and social media, access to district events and meetings
- **Business member** — all basic benefits plus logo placement on the district website, featured social media post, priority access to vendor or market booth opportunities
- **Supporting or sponsor member** — all business benefits plus prominent recognition in event materials, co-branding on a specific program or activation, direct acknowledgment at public events

Additional Resources

[Nonprofit L&I Navigator Guide](#)

[Charity & Nonprofit Board Service Quick Guide](#)

[BoardSource — Governance Resources](#)

[L&I Small Business & Nonprofit Liaisons](#) or email smallbusiness@Lni.wa.gov

[M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust](#)

Small Business Support Organizations

Spokane Independent Metro Business Alliance (SIMBA)

A local nonprofit supporting independent businesses and nonprofits across Eastern Washington. A good resource for both small business support and nonprofit setup and compliance.

Learn more: spokaneindependent.org/

SCORE Spokane

A free mentoring and education resource for small businesses at any stage, operating as a nonprofit partner of the SBA.

Learn more: score.org/wa/spokane/

StartUp Spokane

A free resource through the Spokane Public Library connecting entrepreneurs with tools, research, and support to launch and grow.

Learn more: startupspokane.com/

City Coordination

Traffic Calming

Traffic calming refers to physical and educational measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, slow driver speeds, and improve conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists. For neighborhood business districts, a safer, more walkable street environment directly supports foot traffic, customer comfort, and overall district livability. The City of Spokane's Safe Streets for All program — funded through speed and photo red camera revenue — is the primary avenue for pursuing traffic calming improvements in your area.

How the Program Works

The Safe Streets for All program operates in cycles. Neighborhoods and community members submit traffic safety concerns through the City's Safe Streets Survey, which are then evaluated and prioritized for future project cycles. Approved projects move through an adaptive design phase before permanent construction. Techniques can include roadway narrowing, traffic circles, pavement markings, signage, and other physical changes to alter driver behavior.

How to Get Involved

If your district has traffic safety concerns — speeding, pedestrian crossings, cut-through traffic — submitting those concerns through the Safe Streets Survey is the first step. Concerns submitted during the active cycle window are considered for the next round of projects; concerns submitted outside that window are reviewed on an ongoing basis for future cycles. Coordinating with your neighborhood council to advocate for specific improvements can also strengthen a submission.

For speeding concerns in the meantime, contact the Spokane Police Department's Traffic Unit Hotline at 509-625-4150.

For property or vehicle damage, contact Spokane County Crime Check at 509-456-2233.

Additional Resources:

[Safe Streets Survey](#) — submit a traffic concern

[Traffic Calming Map](#) — view completed projects citywide

[Mobile Speed Feedback Program](#)

[Traffic Calming Summary Report](#)

Street Maintenance

The City of Spokane Streets Maintenance team is responsible for cleaning, repairing, and performing preventative maintenance on more than 2,200 lane miles of paved streets across the city. For business districts, understanding what the City maintains — and how to request service — is useful when managing the appearance and safety of your corridor. Street conditions directly affect how customers, residents, and visitors experience your district.

City-Maintained Services

The Streets Maintenance team provides the following services throughout the year:

- **Pavement repair and management** — patching, resurfacing, and long-term pavement management
- **Street sweeping** — regular cleaning of paved streets
- **Snow removal** — plowing and ice treatment during winter conditions
- **Leaf pickup** — seasonal collection in residential and commercial areas
- **Street grading** — maintenance of gravel streets
- **Weed control** — vegetation management along rights of way
- **Guardrail repair and installation**
- **Removal of branches in the roadway**
- **Public stair maintenance**

Reporting an Issue

If your district has a street maintenance concern — a pothole, debris, damaged signage, or other issue — the fastest way to report it is through Spokane 311. Issues submitted through 311 are routed to the appropriate department and tracked for follow-up.

Additional Resources:

[Pavement Repair](#)

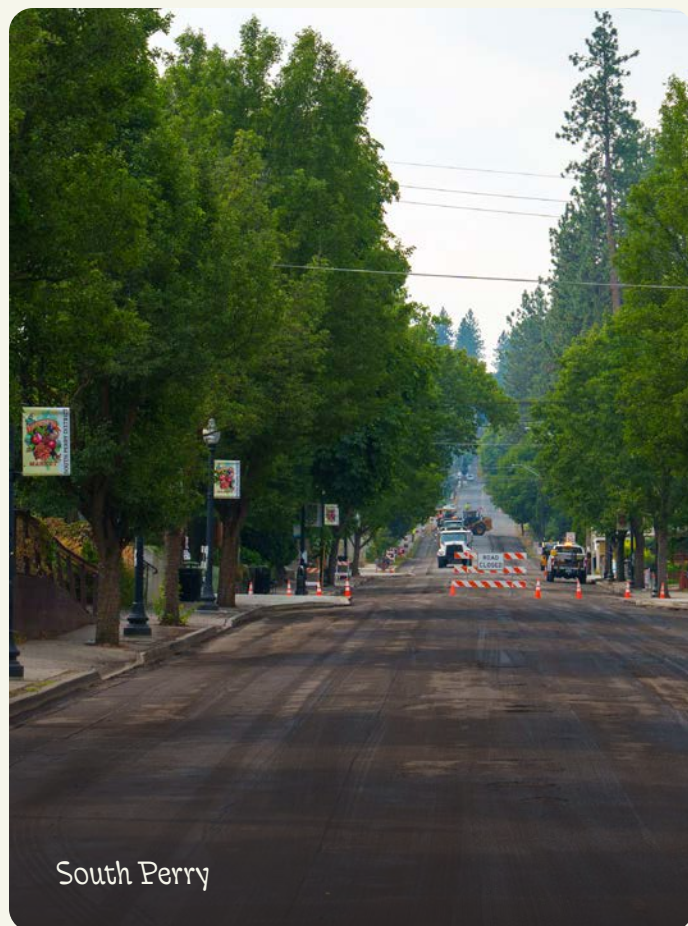
[Street Sweeping](#)

[Snow Removal](#)

[Leaf Pickup](#)

[Weed Control](#)

Contact: Spokane 311 — [Spokane311.org](https://spokane311.org) or dial 311 (509-755-2489 outside city limits)



South Perry

Bike Rack Program

The City of Spokane installs bike and scooter parking throughout Spokane on public sidewalks and in the right of way. The program is funded through the City's shared mobility program — operated by Lime for e-scooters and e-bikes — and supports safe, accessible parking options across neighborhoods and commercial corridors. For business districts, having ample bike and scooter parking nearby encourages people to arrive by bike or scooter and spend time at local businesses.

In 2021, the City partnered with Spokane Arts to create six bike parking corrals featuring murals by local artists — a model worth noting for districts interested in combining functional infrastructure with public art.

How to Request a Bike Rack

Businesses and neighborhood organizations can submit a request for a bike rack to be installed near their location through the City's online form. The City reviews requests and installs racks on public sidewalks and in the right of way at no cost to the requester.

[Request a Bike Rack](#)

[Bicycle Parking Guidelines](#) — recommended styles, spacing, and models for short and long-term parking

[Bicycle Parking Standards](#)

[WheelShare](#) — Spokane's Shared Mobility Program



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