
City of Houston Super Neighborhoods

Program Guidelines
2024
Department of Neighborhoods



Welcome message from Director TaKasha Francis



Dear Civic Enthusiasts,

Welcome to a community of passionate individuals dedicated to making a positive impact on our society. The Houston super neighborhood program uses community voices like yours to drive meaningful change in your neighborhoods. Together, we can foster a culture of active citizenship, addressing local concerns and contributing to the greater good.

These guidelines are more than just rules; they are the blueprint for our collective success. They bring clarity to our mission, provide a structure for our actions, and ensure that we all move forward together.

By following these guidelines, we establish a common ground, creating a consistent and positive environment. They define our roles, set expectations for conduct, and guide us in planning impactful events and activities. Remember, these guidelines are not static – they evolve with us. As we grow and adapt, they serve as a foundation for our continued success.

Thank you for your commitment to Houston's super neighborhood program. Your passion and commitment make our collective efforts thrive and strengthen the fabric of our community. Together, let's make a lasting impact and shape a better future for our city!

Sincerely,

TaKasha L. Francis, Esq.

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Section 1

Super Neighborhood Overview





History and Purpose of the Super Neighborhood Initiative

Mayor Lee P. Brown launched the super neighborhood concept on June 7, 1999. The cornerstone of Mayor Brown's neighborhood-oriented government approach is problem solving on a manageable scale, which led to the creation of super-neighborhoods—a geographic framework of 88 neighborhoods in 1999. The geographic boundaries of each super neighborhood use major physical features (bayous, freeways, etc.) to group together smaller contiguous communities that share common physical characteristics, identity, or infrastructure.

Super neighborhoods were created because residents of individual communities have focused their attention on issues that only affected their narrowly defined neighborhood, often a subdivision, without considering the conditions in the broader area surrounding their community. Super neighborhoods were created to encourage residents of neighboring communities to work together to identify, prioritize and address the needs and concerns of the broader community. This creates a manageable framework for community action and allows the city to provide services more efficiently. The Super Neighborhood program was initially launched under the city's Planning and Development department. The program was codified in the city's Municipal Code under Chapter 33, ARTICLE VIII.

Four years later, the Super Neighborhood Alliance was organized pursuant to Chapter 2-621, et seq. (formerly Chapter 33-301, et seq.) of the Code of Ordinances, March 17, 2003, via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Houston. The Alliance was created as a grassroots meeting of super neighborhood presidents before and independently of its recognition by the City of Houston. Should the City cease recognizing the Alliance within its framework, the Alliance may continue to exist as an independent organization.

The Alliance recognizes that the best governments are those that govern with the informed consent of their citizens. This body of leaders strives to keep leaders accountable and aware of their needs. The Alliance's purpose is to, "serve as an organizational framework for Super Neighborhood Councils to discuss issues of community impact and make decisions that shall present a unified voice to the City" and establish, "an operating strategy for all councils to participate inclusively and

with accountability in that framework."

On September 17, 2007, the Alliance adopted its Mission Statement: "The Super Neighborhood Alliance, a meaningful partner of the City of Houston, will act as an advisory council to the Mayor focusing on issues of community impact and community outreach, will speak with one voice to the city, and will participate in decisions of local significance made by the city."

In 2023, under Mayor Sylvester Turner, the Department of Neighborhoods updated the initial guidelines to enhance clarity, ensure relevance, and adapt to evolving needs to improve the program's effectiveness. Additionally, the department successfully secured \$250k for the Super Neighborhood Program, gaining approval from Mayor Turner and the City Council. This funding will support small-scale projects, events, and provide essential administrative assistance in neighborhood management.

Today, Houston's Super neighborhood program is a significant opportunity for Houstonians to contribute to the success of our city, one super neighborhood at a time.

City Roles and Responsibilities

The City of Houston provides oversight of the Super Neighborhood Initiative program through the Mayor's Assistance Office (MAO) division of the Department of Neighborhoods. The city's authority, influence, and/or assistance is limited to general information and guidance to Super Neighborhood Organizations (SNO) in formation, by-laws, and operation.

While the city typically does not interpret or enforce by-laws, there are instances where we engage in mediating internal disputes that are clear and obvious. The city offers advice and guidance to on the format and content of by-laws ensuring alignment with programmatic guidelines.

SNO's are required to abide by all guidelines to be recognized as a super neighborhood organization. The City can, at any time, withdraw its recognition as a SNO and attendant benefits of the program for failure to abide by the program

guidelines. Once recognition is withdrawn, the entity can no longer identify itself publicly as a SNO nor receive the benefits of the program.

The director of the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) shall develop and promulgate written guidelines and criteria for participation in the program. Additionally, the director shall recommend to the mayor whether stakeholders of a proposed SNO have satisfied the criteria needed to achieve recognition. The mayor shall make the final determination regarding recognition.

Super neighborhood liaisons are assigned to work with each SNO. The role of the liaisons is to:

- Assist with SNO formation.
- Assist with community outreach to determine fellow organizers and stakeholders.
- Assist with the handling of community concerns and providing appropriate follow ups.
- Attend SNO meetings to educate and update assigned stakeholders on city and neighborhood concerns.
- Work with SNOs to develop and monitor Super Neighborhood Action Plans (SNAP) and execution.
- Communicate with City departments on community concerns.

Benefits to the Super Neighborhood Initiative program

- Mayoral recognition as an active SNO.
- Community liaison appointment to provide direct city government access and coordination.
- Technical assistance in formation, organizational guidance, by-laws, and operation of SNO.
- A direct, clear line of communication to city government regarding area-specific concerns for the broader community.
- Assistance with resource matching for SNAP and projects.
- Access to classes, presentations, and trainings that are developed and designed to provide valuable information to strengthen the existing skills of community leaders and constituents as they work to implement goals,

- actions and project aspirations laid out in the plans.
- Monthly televised programming of Super Neighborhood Alliance (SNA) meetings as resources allows.
 - Arrange and host virtual meetings for SNOs upon request through Microsoft Teams as resources allow. This does not include providing equipment and technical training.

Super Neighborhood Organization

A *Super Neighborhood Organization (SNO)* is a city recognized entity comprised of a representative group of stakeholders from a previously mapped area that is formally recognized by the mayor. The SNO will serve as a forum where residents and stakeholders can discuss issues impacting their super neighborhood, develop Super Neighborhood Action Plans (SNAP), and ultimately, reach a consensus on priority projects to improve the broader area of the overall community.

A SNO may be formed in each of the defined super neighborhoods (SN) areas, or they have the option to partner with adjacent SNs and become a joint SNO.

The governing body of each SNO is named the Super Neighborhood Council (SNC). Standard office positions include but aren't limited to president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

Objectives and duties of a Super Neighborhood Organization (SNO)

- (a) The SNO objective is to serve as a forum where stakeholders may identify and discuss broad-based issues that affect their super neighborhood, develop a consensus on community priorities for action, and formulate a plan to address, execute, and resolve the issues and priorities.
- (b) A SNO may undertake various activities, including but not limited to the following:
 - (1) Conduct meetings no less than four times annually. More meetings can be scheduled as often as preferred and outlined in their by-laws.
 - (2) Promptly educate and update their stakeholders on city and neighborhood concerns.

- (3) Development of a written Super Neighborhood Action Plan (SNAP) for review and consideration by appropriate city departments and funding sources.
- (4) Annual submission of the SNAP to the Super Neighborhood Alliance (SNA) for inclusion in the SNA's annual report to the mayor and city departmental officials.
- (5) Research and identify public/private partnerships and resources to facilitate and execute SNAPs.
- (6) Annual review of by-laws and amendments when necessary; and
- (7) Designation of a representative and alternate to the SNA.

Super Neighborhood (SN) boundaries

The 88 SNs identified on the map created by the director and placed on file in the director's office on or before November 5, 2003, are hereby established as the initial super neighborhoods of the city for purposes of this article. The director of the Department of Neighborhoods, exclusively, may create additional SNs and adjust the boundaries of a SN from time to time to reflect changes in physical characteristics, community demographics or changes in the corporate limits of the city. **Super Neighborhood Organizations must be located within the Houston city limits.** Super neighborhoods may not change the existing boundaries. The official list of SN and maps of their boundaries shall continue to be maintained by the director.

Operational Guidelines for duly recognized Super Neighborhood Organizations

A duly recognized super neighborhood is one that has been officially endorsed by the city and meets the criteria outlined herein.

- SNOs are NON-PARTISAN and may not be formed or operated as vehicles for special interests, personal interests, business interests and/or partisan interests, or personal causes. Non-partisan activities to encourage civic duty and engagement are permitted.
- Community members shall comprise a 51% majority, or simple majority of the members on each super neighborhood council (SNC).
- Outgoing organization presidents should be given a seat on the new board in for a term of one year thereafter in a mentorship role to encourage smooth transitions and a willingness to work together. The outgoing president will be

a non-voting member and may only vote to break a tie.

- The contact email for the SNO will be generic and feature the name of the SNO @ the chosen server. *Example: Superneighborhoodxx@gmail or yahoo.com.* A generic email makes new board transitions easier for the city and community members.
- All Executive Board members of SNOs are required to submit all paperwork, records, email passwords, and transition documents within 30 days of election to newly elected executive board members.
- All SNOs must submit their by-laws and minutes to the City of Houston for records and website posting to their assigned Mayor's Assistance Office (MAO) liaison.
- SNC must utilize Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised edition to govern the proceedings of their meetings. COH will provide the necessary training if requested.
- Disputes within the SNO that impede organization operation and/or activities are required to submit to city-assigned mediation if available. If city-assigned mediation is not available, SNOs must assume the costs of private mediation. SNOs may initially seek free assistance through the Harris County Dispute Resolution Center or assume the costs of private mediation.
- Members of SNOs and the Super Neighborhood Alliance (SNA) will serve without compensation or conflict of interest. A conflict of interest for these purposes is any situation in which a person can derive personal and/or monetary benefit from actions or decisions made in their official capacity.
- Each member of an SNO shall abstain from voting on matters in which there is or may be a conflict of interest, shall not participate in any activity of a SNO or the SNA in which there is or may be a conflict of interest, and shall not participate in any city contract that relates to the duties of the SNO or the SNA.
- SNOs may not utilize the city seal and any department logo without written permission from the City of Houston. The city seal and department logos are the property of the City of Houston and may be used by city employees and elected or appointed city officials in connection with the performance of official city business or city sanctioned events.

The approval to use the city seal or any department logo under this section shall be limited to only the event or item for which the approval is granted for. The director of the Department of Neighborhoods or their designee will approve or deny requests. Failure to comply shall be grounds for the city's

termination of permission to use the seal or department logo and the city attorney shall pursue all steps reasonably necessary to restrain the improper use of the city seal or department logo. (*See City of Houston Code of Ordinances Sec. 2-83. - Use of city seal and department seal for official use.*)

Stakeholders

The Department of Neighborhoods can help you identify major stakeholders in your community. All stakeholders must be located within the City of Houston and there is no requirement on the number of stakeholders to start.

Residents and stakeholders (i.e. businesses, faith institutions, schools, etc.) of each SN will join ranks and form an SNO. Stakeholders means the residents, civic clubs, non-profit associations, community development corporations, business associations, school districts or systems, faith-based institutions, and other institutional organizations located or operating in a super neighborhood. Residents are defined as community members who reside within their SN boundaries.

Other neighborhood entities such as businesses, schools, churches, and hospitals should be represented through their umbrella organizations and coalitions rather than as single entities. Where there is no coalition organization, one could be formed, and a representative elected to serve on SNO as outlined within the by-laws of corresponding SN area. This encourages enhanced cooperation and collaboration between similar groups. For example, instead of a bank president, the chair of the local chamber of commerce would be preferred. Each stakeholder organization has the option to designate a delegate among their group. The designated person doesn't necessarily need to be the president of their organization or a standing board member. It is that committed person who will represent the interest of that organization to sit on the super neighborhood organization.

During this process, we ask for each participating stakeholder organization to submit an authorization letter designating that committed person as their delegate to sit on the Organization.

For example: The XYZ Civic Association designates Suzy Q as the primary delegate of the XYZ Civic Association to be seated on the ANC SNC. The alternates of the XYZ Civic Association, in lieu of Suzy Q, are John Q. Public and Jane Doe.

Once identified, some or all the stakeholders can begin the process of forming an organization. Stakeholder organizers will spearhead the process of forming or re-organizing the organization. To be recognized as an SNO, you must demonstrate that identified stakeholders were given ample opportunity to participate and that no interested and qualified stakeholder was denied participation.

The following list of actions can be taken to prove stakeholder engagement:

1. Meeting Records: Maintain detailed records of stakeholder meetings, including attendance sheets, minutes, and any documented contributions or feedback.
2. Surveys and Feedback: Conduct surveys or gather feedback forms to collect stakeholders' opinions and insights, providing tangible evidence of their engagement.
3. Email Correspondence: Keep a record of email communications with stakeholders, demonstrating their involvement through active discussions, questions, or responses.
4. Workshops and Focus Groups: Document participation in workshops or focus groups, highlighting the stakeholders' direct involvement in collaborative sessions.
5. Social Media Interaction: Track and compile instances of stakeholder engagement on social media platforms, such as comments, shares, or discussions related to the project.
6. Endorsements or Statements: Collect written endorsements, statements, or letters of support from stakeholders, showcasing their commitment and involvement.
7. Project Contributions: Highlight specific contributions made by stakeholders to the project, whether through expertise, resources, or collaborative efforts.
8. Attendance at Events: Record stakeholders' attendance at relevant events, conferences, or project-related gatherings as evidence of their active engagement.

Section 2

Activation process and by laws



How to get started

An active Super Neighborhood Organization (SNO) is one that operates in accordance with their approved by-laws. A SNO is deemed inactive when they are operating outside the scope of their by-laws. This includes, but not limited to, failure to update by-laws in accordance with the current SNO guidelines, Super Neighborhood Council (SNC) with only one elected board member, not hosting elections in a timely matter, not hosting regular meetings, or not serving as an information hub for your area civic groups. Each liaison will annually review the status of their assigned super neighborhoods to determine whether they are active or inactive on or before June 30 of each calendar year, ahead of the city's annual budget process.

Activation Process

1. Submit Activation Application
2. Identify and enlist participation from stakeholders
3. Agree on organizational framework for the SNO
4. Formulate and adopt by laws
5. Mayoral recognition of the SNO

To form or reactivate an SNO, organizers shall complete the SNO application found on the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) website under the Mayor's Assistance Office (MAO) division web page.

<https://forms.office.com/g/bAm7zzLpRp>

Once the application is completed, a staffer from MAO will be assigned to serve as a super neighborhood liaison. The assigned liaison will assist the by-laws committee, provide research for key community players, and help coordinate the necessary community meetings needed when forming/reactivating a SNO.

SNO organizers are expected to work cooperatively with liaisons and fellow organizers. Organizers must observe and comply with all stated Super Neighborhood Initiative guidelines and objectives. Individuals demonstrating behavior that continually and unreasonably impedes the group moving forward can be removed by majority vote of the organizers. Discourteous and disruptive

behaviors can include, but are not limited to:

1. Lack of Communication: Not keeping team members informed, ignoring messages, or withholding important information.
2. Dominating Discussions: Continuously monopolizing discussions without allowing others to contribute or express their opinions.
3. Disrespectful Language: Using offensive or disrespectful language that undermines team cohesion and creates a negative atmosphere.
4. Missed Deadlines: Consistently failing to meet deadlines without prior communication or valid reasons.
5. Lack of Accountability: Refusing to take responsibility for individual tasks or not acknowledging mistakes and working towards solutions.
6. Ignoring Others' Ideas: Disregarding or dismissing the input and ideas of other team members without proper consideration.
7. Constant Criticism: Offering criticism without constructive feedback, which can demoralize and hinder collaboration.
8. Micromanaging: Overly controlling or scrutinizing the work of others, leading to a lack of trust within the team.
9. Non-Participation: Consistently not contributing to discussions, tasks, or the overall project, leaving others to pick up the slack.
10. Interrupting Others: Continually interrupting or talking over team members, hindering effective communication and collaboration.

Addressing these behaviors promptly and promoting open communication can help maintain a positive and productive group dynamic.

Organizational Framework

There are various forms of organizational structures. The SNO may choose to simply adopt "Articles of Association" with the approval of all participating entities. As others join, they too would agree to the Articles of Association. In a more structured approach, stakeholders may agree to form a tax exempt 501 c3. non-profit corporation or similar entity. The City of Houston does not provide assistance to start (or operate) a non-profit entity.

By- Laws

After determining the SNO framework, stakeholders will formulate and adopt by-

laws. By-laws address fundamental issues on conducting business and making decisions. A template will be provided for reference. By-laws should address the following criteria and adhere to the guidelines of the Super Neighborhood Initiative program.:

- *Listing of SN boundaries- No change to the existing SN boundaries*
- *Right of Representation*-The right of any stakeholder within SN boundaries to be represented, either through new or existing organizations. SNOs cannot exclude any stakeholder organization from participating. Participation includes but is not limited to meeting attendance and voting.
- *Assignment of Seats and Voting Authority*-The manner in which SNO seats and subsequent voting authority is assigned. One scenario might be that each stakeholder organization holds a seat within the SNO.
- The manner in which the SNO meetings will be conducted.
- Clearly defined terms regarding board and membership roles and processes, including but not limited to nominee, delegate, member, etc.
- The clearly illustrated method for the election process and appeals, if applicable.
- *Mechanism for Assuring Open Meetings*-The method by which residents will participate in organization activities and be informed of decisions.
- *Open meeting requirement*- The method for assuring that all SNO activity is conducted in open meetings where all residents may observe discussions and participate under defined circumstances. Meeting must be open to the public; whereas only delegates are allowed to vote but others are able to observe and participate within defined circumstances of the SNO.
- *No Imposition of Memberships or Fees* -A declaration assuring that participation is not limited by the imposition of membership requirement or fees either by the organization or participations organizations. Participation includes but is not limited to formal and informal activities such as voting, volunteering, organization activities, attending meetings, etc.
- *Inclusivity for all stakeholders*- A prohibition against exclusion of any individual or organization based on race, creed, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation or national origin from participating in SNO activities or serving as a SNA member.
- *Amendment process*- The clearly illustrated method which members will utilize to change existing by-laws that ensures every member has an opportunity to weigh in on a change. A suggested process can be provided upon request.
- By-laws should be updated as often as needed. All revisions to SN by-laws

must be approved by the DON Director to ensure compliance with the program requirements before presenting to your SNO for a vote.

Recognition by the City

Once all requirements have been met and approved by the DON Director, the SN is granted an active status by the Mayor. The organization will be invited to City Hall to be recognized before City Council, usually on a Tuesday before Public Session begins. The Mayor will acknowledge their active status, and the organizing committee will receive certificates commemorating their work in activation/reactivation of the organization.

Community Action Plans

Community Action Plans (CAP) are plans that identify broad-based issues that affect the SNO, establish priorities, and formulate plans to address, execute, and resolve the issues and priorities. Every SNO has the option to participate in this process. Actions identified in an action plan can be implemented through a variety of avenues including, but not limited to, public/ private partnerships, grant funding, Organization District Service Funds (CDSF), and Capital Improvement Plans (CIP), DON Matching Grant program.

SNOs may prepare either or both of the two following community action plans:

Super Neighborhood Action Plan

S.N.A.P. (**S**uper **N**eighborhood **A**ction **P**lan) is a short- term action plan that can be completed within 12-18 months and are not considered capital improvement projects. Examples include but not limited to park improvements (picnic tables, BBQ grills, park signage, street overlays/ concrete Street Patch etc.), traffic control/signage, street sign toppers, entryway signage, entryway columns, esplanade landscaping and irrigation, park benches, electrical signage, walkways with pavers, and murals)

S.N.A.P. can be executed via Organization District Service Funds (CDSF), public/ private partnerships, and grant funding. The process for execution varies depending

on the chosen funding stream.

- The S.N.A.P. process is conducted yearly. The Department of Neighborhoods will prepare and host a citywide SNAP preparation workshop to explain the SNAP process (which may change from year to year).
- Every SNO is encouraged to send a representative(s) to the citywide workshop.
- After the SNAP preparation workshop, all SNC are charged with creating an ad-hoc SNAP Committee (if they choose to submit a SNAP) to compile potential SNAP items among their respective SNO.
- The deadline to forward their SNO SNAP to their assigned MAO Community Liaison is December 31st annually to be included in the annual SNA report for consideration in the upcoming fiscal year.
- DON will review the submitted SNAP requests for any discrepancies and compile for the annual SNA report.
- City departments are given 60 days to review the submittals and response by end of March.
- By April 1, the SNAP responses are posted on the DON website for review.
- **Accept** (which includes an estimated start date and estimated completion date)
- **Evaluate** (need more time to review) – usually given 30-45 more days
- **Ineligible** (doesn't fit the City's existing criteria or doesn't have funding this fiscal year to implement)

Capital Improvement Projects (CIP)

Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) are large funding projects based on the City's 5-year plan. The CIP is the City's annual multi-year plan that forecast a schedule of spending for all anticipated capital projects. As a planning tool, it enables the City to identify needed capital projects and coordinate facility financing, construction, operational and the timing thereof.

Capital Improvement Projects take five years or more to complete. Examples include but not limited to major renovations to public facilities (fire station, neighborhood library, etc.), thoroughfare reconstruction, major Park Improvements (basketball court, new bleachers, concession stand, parking, Public Utility Improvements.

Capital Improvement Plan meetings are hosted periodically by the office of the mayor and/or district council members. SNOs are encouraged to attend those CIP meetings and see what projects are planned/proposed within their respective SNO area. Further, all SNCs are strongly encouraged to work through their district council member with submitting CIP projects. Your council member is your lobbyist!

Dispute resolution process

Conflicts are a natural part of human interaction. While uncomfortable at times, conflict provides opportunities to consider new ideas, innovation and flexibility. However, unhealthy conflicts and disputes can impede processes and stagnate organizations if not properly addressed in a timely matter. Therefore, disputes within a SNO that impede operation and/or activities are required to submit to city-assigned mediation. Currently the Harris County Dispute Resolution Center offers free mediation services. If city-assigned mediation is not available, organizations must assume the costs of private mediation.

To request mediation services, complete a “Request for Dispute Resolution” form found on the Department of Neighborhoods website under the Mayor’s Assistance Office division web page.

<https://forms.office.com/g/mZM5qvPcgz>

Once completed, your case will be referred to the Harris County Dispute Resolution Center for scheduling. Failure to participate in mediation can result in the stakeholder's removal from the super neighborhood organization by the City.