



# **City of Toledo**

## **Office of Community Services**

### **Civic Engagement in Toledo**

**Chief of Impact, Dr. Tiffany Whitman & Commissioner of Civic Engagement, Caryn Maloney**

# Office of Community Services

The Office of Community Services focuses on the human infrastructure of the city and supports the City's community impact work to strengthen resident engagement, improve service delivery, expand access to opportunity, and enhance neighborhood outcomes.

**Strategic Plan Priority:** Build Safe, Vibrant, and Connected Neighborhoods

# Overview of Toledo Boards & Commissions

- 26 Active Commissions
- Members appointed by the Mayor, confirmed by Council
- Primary mechanism for resident civic voice
- 20+ Inactive Boards

# Analysis of Community Engagement and COT Boards and Commissions

## Bowling State University Center for Regional Design

- **Primary Objectives**
  - Assess strategies for community engagement utilized by the city
  - Evaluate the effectiveness and participation levels of the city's boards and commissions
  - Identify barriers to engagement and participation within the structures
  - Provide recommendations

# Included in the Analysis

- Interviews with City Liaisons
- Interviews with Commission Chairs
- City-wide survey (484 responses)
- Comparative best practice review

# Findings

- **Public Awareness is Low**

- Familiarity with COT Boards and Commissions
  - Only 12.8% satisfied
  - Only 8% know how to apply to serve

**Key Insight:** Most residents don't know how to engage

- **Participation Gap**

- Have you ever participated in COT Boards and Commissions?
  - 6.6% regularly
  - 27% Once or twice
  - 47% Want to participate

**Key Insight:** Nearly half of residents who took the survey are open to serving.

# Findings

- **Trust and Perceived Effectiveness**

- 63% Report moderate or higher trust in the work of COT boards and commissions
- 97% Rate effectiveness as fair or worse

**Key Insight:** Residents see potential but not impact

- **Barriers to Engagement**

- Top Barriers
  - 72% Don't know how to apply
  - Lack of information
  - Lack of time
  - Feeling unqualified
  - Concern their voice won't matter

# Findings

## Overall

- Awareness is low
- Impact is unclear
- Recruitment is often by word-of-mouth
- Communication is siloed

# The Engagement Gap

# Residents Want to Serve

- 62% of respondents are currently interested or might consider serving
- 70% say diverse representation on COT boards and commissions is “very important”
- 73% say investment in commissions is important

*The desire for civic engagement exists.*

# What Residents Prioritize

## Top Issues Residents Want to Focus On:

1. Housing and neighborhood development (63%)
2. Public safety and justice (55%)
3. Economic development (50%)
4. Youth programs (41%)

*Engagement must align with both City of Toledo priorities as well as lived priorities.*

# A Modern Civic Engagement Ecosystem

## Without Reform:

- Continued vacancies
- Quorum failures
- Declining trust
- Parallel systems duplicating work
- Missed opportunity for civic renewal

# An Evolution of Civic Engagement

# Engagement Must Evolve

## Shift from:

- Passive appointment systems
- Informal recruitment
- Meeting-based engagement

## Toward:

- Transparent pathways to service
- Centralized volunteer management
- Digital visibility
- Community-building frameworks

# Core Strategic Recommendations

## 1. Centralized Civic Engagement for Boards and Commissions

- Application portal
- Transparent vacancies
- Clear onboarding
- Standardized trainings

## 2. Modernize Communication

- Public dashboard of boards and commissions
- Social media integration for boards used as engagement mechanisms
- Hybrid meeting structures
- Digital newsletters

# Core Strategic Recommendations

## 3. Address Inactive Boards

- Sunset inactive boards
  - Develop a sunset criteria
  - Recommendations for approval from Council
- Consolidate duplicative missions
- Align missions and goals to City Strategic Priorities

## 4. Create Clear Pathways for Residents to Civically Engage

- Ambassadors
- Interns
- Boards and Commissions
  - Human Relations Commission
- City of Toledo Volunteer Program – ServeTOL

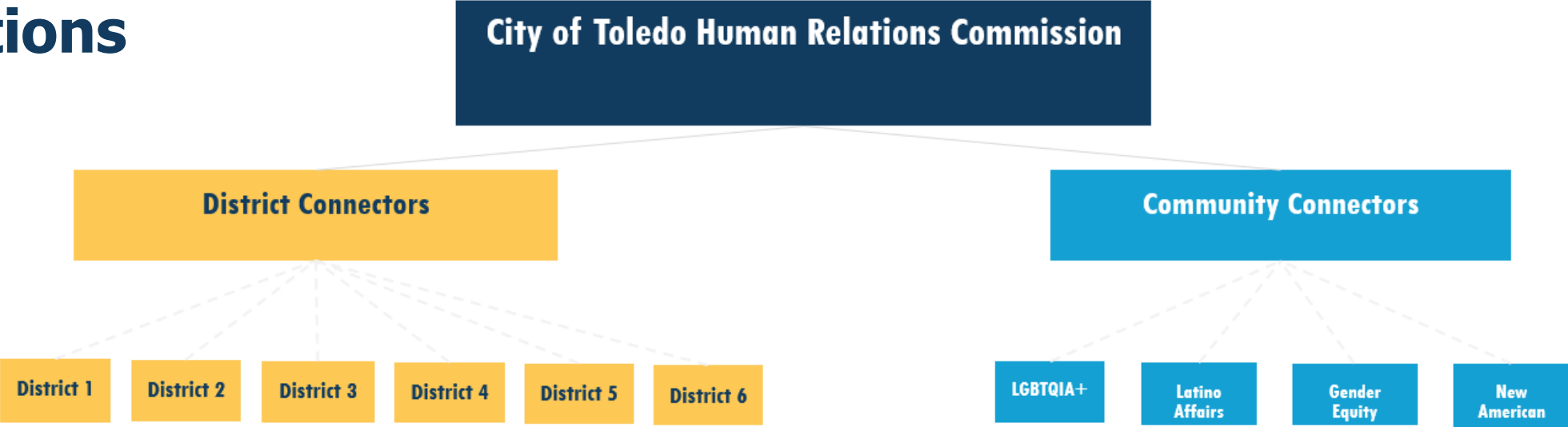
**How does this look?**

# A Modern Civic Engagement Ecosystem

## Planning for Modernization:

- **Restructure and Absorb Boards and Commissions with Duplicative Missions**
  - Human Relations Commission
- **Development of a City of Toledo Volunteer Program**
- **Code changes for boards and commissions**
  - Comprehensive Annual Review
  - Elimination Criteria

# City of Toledo Human Relations Commission



- **Ambassadors**
- **Charge:**
  - Serving as the connection for the City to District Neighborhood Groups

- **Ambassadors**
- **Charge:**
  - Time limited
  - Goal driven—in alignment with City priorities

# A Modern Civic Engagement Ecosystem

## Planning for Modernization:

### Boards and Commissions

- **Standardize Trainings**
  - Onboarding
  - Legal Requirements
  - Clear Expectations
- **Mission Alignment and Strategic Plans**
- **Standardize Meeting Requirements**
  - Agenda and Minutes Templates
  - Reporting Requirements
    - Portal
  - Toolkits for Chairs
- **Standardize Recruitment and Appointments**

# City of Toledo Volunteer Program - ServeTOL

## Diverse Volunteer Pool

- Community Events
- Youth Serve
- Skills Based
- Neighborhood
- Administrative

# ServeTOL

- Ambassadors
- Current and former volunteers
- Recruitment Strategy for New Volunteers

**Recruit**  **Train**  **Activate**  **Acknowledge and Celebrate**

# City of Toledo Volunteer Program

Timeline: February 2026 – November 2026



	Date	Task to be Completed
<input type="checkbox"/>	February 13, 2026	Deadline for Needs Assessment Survey
<input type="checkbox"/>	February 9-27, 2026	Meet for one-on-ones with <b>COT employees</b> who work directly with volunteers
<input type="checkbox"/>	March 2-13, 2026	Meeting with <b>Marketing</b> to create Volunteer Position Descriptions
<input type="checkbox"/>	March 2-13, 2026	Establish Platform for Recruitment and Management of Volunteers
<input type="checkbox"/>	March 2-31, 2026	Meeting with <b>Law</b> and <b>HR</b> to determine Legalities and Liabilities – <b>Legislation?</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	April 2026	Meeting with <b>HR</b> to determine necessary trainings
<input type="checkbox"/>	May 4-15, 2026	Meeting with <b>Marketing</b> to establish recruitment strategies and materials
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 2026	Connection with Already Established Volunteers
<input type="checkbox"/>	June-July 2026	Recruitment of New Volunteers
<input type="checkbox"/>	August 2026	Begin Background Checking and Training
<input type="checkbox"/>	September 2026	Background Checking and Training
<input type="checkbox"/>	October 2026	Match verified and trained Volunteers to Departments
<input type="checkbox"/>	November 2026	Program Launch



**Thank you.**

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