



Program website



Online Application



PROGRAM OVERVIEW: The FORT-ify Neighborhood Accelerator is designed for neighborhood association leaders who want to take their efforts to the next level! FORT-ify participants will take part in monthly in-person workshops, work with city staff to develop a Quick Action Plan (QAP), and complete hands-on activities between workshop sessions to put what they're learning into practice in their neighborhoods.

By 1) building their knowledge key areas, 2) obtaining access to coaching from City staff, and 3) strengthening their neighborhood's legal and financial infrastructure, participants enrolled in FORT-ify accelerate the progress of their neighborhoods.

The key areas of focus we cover in the FORT-ify activities and workshops include:

- Community Listening & Asset Based Approaches
- Association Governance and Succession
- Civic Engagement & Advocacy
- Fundraising & Grant Writing

ELIGIBILITY: FORT-ify is open to resident-led Neighborhood Associations registered on the Fort Wayne Neighborhoods website: <https://engage.cityoffortwayne.org/fortwayneneighborhoods>.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: 11:59 pm , January 30th

Applications can be submitted by using the online form or by completing the PDF application form and emailing it to rena.bradley@cityoffortwayne.org. Both the online and PDF forms can be found on our website at <https://engage.cityoffortwayne.org/fortify>.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE & TIMELINE: FORT-ify is organized into a series of workshops, hands-on learning activities, and coaching sessions. Workshops take place on Saturdays and last 4-5 hours and take place once a month from April through July. Coaching sessions/ hands-on activities take place from March – December to support participants as they complete their assignments, activities, and funding applications. (To ensure workshops and coaching sessions are easy to attend, we choose locations based on where participating neighborhoods are located.)

Coaching sessions

- **November**– Program Application Opens
- **January**
 - Program Application Deadline: January 30th
 - Selected neighborhoods are notified by March 2nd
- **April– August**– For 2026, workshops are tentatively scheduled for...
 - April 11th (8:30 am – 1:00 pm)
 - May 9th (8:30 am – 1:00 pm)
 - June 13th (8:30 am – 1:00 pm)
 - July 11th (8:30 am – 1:00 pm)

Activities, coaching, and homework will be completed between each workshop
- **August** – Associations Host Block Party/ Community Engagement Events
- **September** – Public Speaking Event 1: Inspire Conference
- **October**– Deadline for funding application (for eligible neighborhoods)
- **December**–Public Speaking Event 2: Graduation/ Celebration

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES: JULY WORKSHOP

Overall intake score: 5.06

Overall Exit Score: 9.19

Delta: 82% Improvement

Fort-ify participants don't just learn how to strengthen and advocate for their neighborhoods—they immediately put those insights into action.

From hands-on workshops where attendees report growth rates as high as 82%, to speaking engagements at local conferences and events, the impact of Fort-ify and our alumni associations is both measurable and inspiring.

Many participants have received various accolades- including neighborhood association of the year- and seen their community projects spotlighted by prominent media outlets including Input Media, Fort Wayne Magazine, and City TV.



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2026 Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT IS A NEIGHBORHOOD ACCELERATOR? Similar to small-business and start-up accelerators you may have heard of, FORT-ify supports growth-driven organizations through **education, mentorship and financing**. What differentiates FORT-ify from other accelerators is that it is designed to provide the accelerator experience specifically for Neighborhood Associations and their leaders. FORT-ify is a process of intense, rapid, immersive, and experiential education aimed at accelerating the progress of neighborhood associations – compressing years' worth of learning into just a few months.

Neighborhoods participate in the accelerator for a defined period of time, working together as a cohort—a group of neighborhood associations that learn, grow, and support one another throughout the program.

HOW WILL MY NEIGHBORHOOD BENEFIT FROM PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROGRAM?

Each Neighborhood Association enrolled from the 2026 Forti-fy cohort will...

- Obtain printed and digital copies of the Quick Action Plan (QAP) they create with City staff
 - Obtain a new association logo
 - Be funded to host an end of program block party/ community engagement session for their neighborhood in August
 - Be eligible to apply for \$5,500+ in funding to implement one or more projects from their QAP
 - Meet local elected officials
 - Have a member of their FORT-ify team speak publicly at local events
 - Have access to 1:1 coaching with city staff for 12 months
 - Build relationships with other local neighborhood associations
- ...and more!

Everything that is being taught [at the April FORT-ify workshop] is beneficial to me. It doesn't just apply to your community. It also applies to your personal growth goals..."

"Knowing your neighbors' names makes a huge difference," says [Neighborhood President Travis] Barman. "It builds trust, reduces crime, and strengthens the overall culture of the neighborhood."

"Seeing a tangible improvement lifts our spirits and shows us what's possible when we work together."



Just finished canvassing for [redacted] & I wanted to thank you because I took what we learned from the neighborhood survey & applied it to today....thank you!!

Tiffany Sewell • Aug 12, 2023

👍❤️👏..... Love every bit of this. Thanks for letting me know, Tiffany.

Angela Magallon



- **FEES:** FORT-ify is offered free of charge to registered neighborhood associations located within the City of Fort Wayne. To confirm your neighborhood registration is complete and up to date, please visit: <https://engage.cityoffortwayne.org/fortwayneneighborhoods>.
- **SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS:** Applications must be submitted by **11:59 pm EST, January 30th**
 - Online applications can be submitted at <https://engage.cityoffortwayne.org/fortify>
 - Completed PDF applications can be emailed to rena.bradley@cityoffortwayne.org.
**Please note that no hand-written applications will be accepted and that all questions can be previewed by downloading the PDF application.*
- **NEIGHBORHOOD REPRESENTATIVE LIST:** One component of the application includes listing 3-5 residents/stakeholders who agree to attend FORT-ify workshops. Ideally each representative will attend 100% of the workshops and activities. However, Department of Neighborhood staff understands that circumstance may arise that impact attendance. In the event that a representative cannot attend a workshop each association should consider a backup representative who could act as a substitute attendee if necessary.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS?

- **ATTENDANCE:** Each association must have at least three (3) representatives of their neighborhood present at all learning sessions as well as the end of program block party/ community engagement event. Two (2) or more representatives must be present during activities and coaching sessions. No more than two participants can be members of the same household(s).
- **PARTICIPATION:** Each program participant is expected to actively engage during workshops and activities, and with workshop facilitators, coordinators, other participants, volunteers, etc. FORT-ify offers basic tools, information, access to funding, and coaching. It is ultimately the role of each association to gain as much as possible from the program and put those lessons into practice.
- **DELIVERABLES:** In addition to actively engaging in workshops, each neighborhood association will be expected to complete monthly homework assignments as well as organize and host a block party/ community engagement session in August.

HOW MANY ASSOCIATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED INTO THE PROGRAM THIS YEAR?

The 2026 cohort will have a maximum of two (2) neighborhood associations participate (6-10 individuals). Neighborhoods must be located within the city limits of the City of Fort Wayne. Up to five representatives of each association can be part of the neighborhood's application. One of the participants must be the association's acting president or vice-president and at least three participants must be neighborhood residents.

HOW MANY ASSOCIATIONS CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PROGRAM FUNDING?

Associations that complete the accelerator and their Quick Action Plan (QAP) will be eligible to apply for \$5,500 in funding to implement a project from their neighborhood's QAP. Details about the application process will be shared with eligible applicants once requirements have been met.

WHEN WILL ACCEPTED ASSOCIATIONS BE NOTIFIED?

City staff will notify accepted applicants via email...

- within two (2) business days that their application has been received, and
- by 5:00 pm EST, March 2nd if they have been accepted into our 2026 cohort.

WHAT IS A QUICK ACTION PLAN (QAP)?

Unlike long-range neighborhood plans that take up to 18 months to complete and require approval of various City departments, Quick Action Plans are documents adopted only by the neighborhood association to record their goals and priorities for the next five (5) years.

HOW WILL MY NEIGHBORHOOD'S APPLICATION BE EVALUATED?

Projects must be reviewed and evaluated by City of Fort Wayne staff members. Using the rubric below, staff members will score each application on a scale of up to fifty (50) points. The City retains sole discretion in determining how proposed projects, programs, and activities meet the program guidelines and criteria.

- **Completeness** – Maximum score of 6 points
- **Relevance** – Maximum score of 7 points
- **Team skills and background**– Maximum score of 7 points
- **Perceived need of assistance** (high or low) – Maximum score of 15 points
- **Potential benefit** from Programming offered/ How aligned interested are with workshop topics – Maximum score of 15 points

WHAT TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES WILL BE COVERED EACH MONTH?

An overview of program workshops, assignments, and activities is provided below.

- **March:**
 - Introduction Meeting
 - Assignments: Bios and Headshots; Establish Event & Coaching Dates
- **April**
 - Workshop: Community Listening/ Asset-Based Community Development
 - Activity: Plan Listening Tours
 - Assignment: Target Market Identification

- **May**
 - Workshop: Governance & Succession
 - Activity: Community Listening Activity
 - Assignment: Target Market Recruitment, Board Member Secession & Recruitment Plans, Agenda Refresh, Speaking Dates
- **June**
 - Workshop: Civic Engagement
 - Activity: Update Association Documents & Infrastructure
 - Assignment: Bylaw Review, Legal Structure, Block Party Homework
- **July**
 - Workshop: Fundraising & Grant Writing
 - Activity: Signature Gathering + Promotion (for block party/ community engagement event)
 - Assignment: Speaker & Fundraising Schedule
- **August**
 - Event: Host Block Party/ Community Engagement Event
 - Activity: Review Listening Data; Draft Mission, Vision, Values, Strengths & Gaps
 - Assignment: Prepare for presentations
- **September**
 - Event/ Activity: Inspire Conference Public Speaking
 - Assignment/ Activity: Review and begin drafting funding application
- **October- November**
 - Activity: Complete and submit outstanding assignments and funding application
 - Assignment: Prepare for final celebration even in December
- **December**
 - Event: Graduation/ Final Celebration at President's Meeting
 - Activity: Final public speaking session at President's Meeting

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

If you have any additional questions, contact Réna Bradley at rena.bradley@cityoffortwayne.org or by calling 260-427-2284.