After another year of significant change, Venture Portland (formerly the Alliance of Portland Neighborhood Business Associations or APNBA) began FY 11-12 with a new name that more clearly supported the organization’s strategic focus. Venture Portland’s leadership, including an energized membership and full staff effectively implemented an aggressive work plan focused on strengthening the organization’s capacity, building business district capacity and promotion that resulted in major successes for Portland’s neighborhood business districts. The following report outlines Venture Portland’s FY 11-12 accomplishments.
“Venture Portland strengthened business districts; between December 2009 and December 2011, membership increased 46% and revenue increased 130% across business districts city wide.”
Building Business District Capacity

Working with our partners to align and coordinate resources, Venture Portland launched a year-long series of capacity building programs including significant training and technical assistance for business district leaders. Representatives from 39 business districts (5% increase over FY 10-11) participated in at least one of Venture Portland’s capacity building programs. By addressing all aspects of business district operations from insurance coverage to membership growth over the last two years, Venture Portland strengthened business districts; between 12/31/09 and 12/31/11, membership increased 46% and revenue increased 130% across business districts city wide. Additional achievements are noted below.

Best Practices
Recognizing the wealth of expertise in Portland’s neighborhood business districts, Venture Portland continued business district sharing with trainings focused on grant, event, social media and governance best practices. Venture Portland facilitated 15 ‘mentoring connections’ linking leaders from 20 business districts to discuss best practices around business district formation, street banners, websites, working with property owners, grant management, storefront vacancies, successful membership campaigns and association revitalization. Venture Portland brought together leaders from the city’s four industrial districts to discuss shared issues and future collaboration and hosted bi-monthly Staffer lunches to increase collective business district staffing skills and connect colleagues across districts. Finally, Venture Portland created the Business District Annual Check-up to help business districts ensure appropriate governance, membership and financial infrastructure and implement best practices.

Training and Technical Assistance
In partnership with PDC, Venture Portland hosted 12 trainings that covered everything from the legal responsibilities of officers to successfully pitching stories in the changing media environment. The organization continued its successful ‘mini-series’ training format with the three-part ‘Strategically Social’ series, hosting the most popular training series in the organization’s history. Toolkits from all trainings, as well as case studies, grant writing resources and the Business District Annual Check-up are available on ventureportland.org. Venture Portland provided 841 training hours and 430 hours of technical assistance to business district leaders from established and emerging districts. Public training hours increased 54% over FY 10-11 with 347 business district leaders participating in Venture Portland’s trainings, an 89% increase over last year.

Insurance Coverage
In 2011 Venture Portland provided a city wide subsidy that helped 12% of business districts invest in general liability insurance for the very first time. Staff provided additional insurance referrals throughout the year and attended a training on Board liability and legal protection.
“Venture Portland’s new site features a comprehensive calendar, interactive map and great photos of signature businesses.”
ventureportland.org
PROMOTE AND MARKET BUSINESS DISTRICTS

Venture Portland started the year by announcing its new name and emerged onto the public stage with overwhelmingly positive media coverage for the organization and neighborhood business districts. To increase Portlanders’ understanding of the value of business districts to the city’s economy, Venture Portland created partnerships with key opinion leaders and stakeholders. As a result, the organization facilitated 26 media interviews and secured 67 positive media stories with 370 business district mentions. Additional successes are noted below.

Branding
Venture Portland launched in August with an unprecedented run of positive earned media, branding both the organization and the city’s neighborhood business districts. The organization’s new visual identity was designed to put business districts first, with neighborhood business district names as the central design element. After defining brand use guidelines, Venture Portland trademarked the name, logo and five taglines, protecting the organization’s intellectual property.

Website/Electronic Communications/Social Media
In conjunction with the new brand, Facebook and Twitter accounts were launched and weekly posts highlighted business district events city wide. And, after an extensive design process, ventureportland.org launched in May. The new site features an interactive custom calendar with approximately 1,000 business district events; an interactive custom map of Portland’s business districts and individual business district pages that highlight 136 historically relevant or signature businesses with representational district photos. At the end of the first month of operations, the site had almost 1,000 visits from 619 unique visitors. The site launch was followed by ‘Venture Out’, a new monthly newsletter featuring business districts. Staff continued the internal monthly newsletter, ‘Venture Portland Means Business’, highlighting meetings, membership benefits and critical organizational information and increasing communication with business district delegates, presidents, staff and emerging district leaders.
“To increase Portlanders’ understanding of the value of business districts to the city’s economy, Venture Portland created partnerships with key opinion leaders and stakeholders.”
Annual Marketing Campaigns
Venture Portland implemented an annual marketing calendar featuring four campaigns to highlight business districts: ‘Portland Celebrates Small’ (May); ‘Summer Local’ (June-September); Entrepreneurs Month (October); and ‘Localize the Season’ (November-February). Venture Portland kicked off ‘Localize the Season’ with a first-ever paid ad campaign and a calendar with more than 50 holiday sales and events. Small Business Week launched with the first street fair of the season and ‘Portland Celebrates Small’ signs filling business windows city wide and culminated with the Mayor proclaiming May 20-26 ‘Venture Portland Celebrates Small Business Week’. And, the ‘Summer Local’ calendar featured 50 business district events and 13 farmers markets. Working closely with a designer, Venture Portland set design standards for campaign collateral to reinforce the organization’s brand.

Partnerships/External Affairs
Venture Portland strengthened relationships with key stakeholders including City Commissioners, Neighborhood Notes, Office of Neighborhood Involvement, The Oregonian, Portland Business Alliance, Portland Business Journal, Portland Development Commission, Small Business Advisory Council and Travel Portland to align and coordinate resources while consistently seeking new partners. Venture Portland’s Executive Director represents the organization on several business support and city-facilitated groups. Working closely with both PBA and SBAC, Venture Portland co-hosted several leadership events including two ‘City Business’ trainings and small business testimony before City Council. Venture Portland worked closely with PDC to define and implement the Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative and secure support from business districts, PDC and BPS Commissions, City Council and other stakeholders. Finally, throughout the year, Venture Portland’s leadership consistently appeared before City Council and other legislative bodies.
“From July 2011 to June 2012, Venture Portland awarded $68,000 in grants to fund 30 projects in 21 business districts.”
Fund Business District Economic Development

Venture Portland implemented the completely revised Capacity Building Economic Development Grants Program this year, significantly expanding its grantmaking portfolio with the addition of biannual Benchmark, annual Economic Development, and as-needed Start-up Support grants. The program included a Grant Certification Training featuring local funders and a professional grant writer. Staff provided 162.23 hours of technical assistance to business districts with the implementation of dedicated ‘grants office hours’ prior to each grant deadline and significantly increased stewardship activities including reminding business districts about state and federal filing deadlines.

Business districts received 26 Benchmark grants in one of eight categories designated as components of a successful and self-sustaining business district. Four business districts received inaugural Economic Development grants, focusing their efforts on job and business retention and creation and neighborhood business revenue growth. Finally, staff discussed Start-up Support grants with 10 emerging districts.

In total, Venture Portland awarded $68,000 to fund 30 projects in 21 business districts, leveraging an additional $260,348 in private investment (a 78% increase over FY 10-11), an almost 4-to-1 match. In addition, Venture Portland formalized the variance and evaluation process to ensure appropriate stewardship of grant funds and increased transparent oversight throughout each grant cycle.
“Venture Portland’s dedicated leaders came together for 54 meetings; contributing 1,062.75 volunteer hours.”
Strengthen Venture Portland Capacity

After a year focused on infrastructure implementation, Venture Portland continued to refine its internal systems and used its successful operations as a best practice model for business districts. As a result, significant positive results were achieved as noted below.

Strategic Focus
During Venture Portland’s Third Annual Strategy Summit, the Board reaffirmed the organization’s strategic priorities: fund business district economic development; build business district capacity; market and promote business districts; and strengthen Venture Portland capacity. The summit launched a year-long strategic planning process that will guide the organization beyond 2012.

Membership
After significant membership growth over the last two years, Venture Portland ended the year with 32 members. Based on individual membership and revenue growth, 13% of Venture Portland’s business district members increased a membership level (moving from small to medium or medium to large). Staff met with 10 emerging districts and all six NPI areas – providing significant technical assistance on association structure and formation, membership building and events and identifying new business district leaders – bringing member prospects into the Venture Portland fold.
“Venture Portland staff visited business districts 101 times, increasing understanding of each district’s unique character, issues and volunteers to better deliver services and share best practices.”
Governance
At the organization’s 26th Annual Meeting Venture Portland’s membership elected 29 delegates, bringing together business district leaders from across the city. Of those elected, 31% were new to the Board, adding fresh perspectives to Venture Portland’s leadership. And, after two years of increasing engagement, 100% of Board members served on a Committee. Venture Portland’s dedicated leaders came together for 54 meetings (almost 5 per month); contributing 1,062.75 volunteer hours to build organizational and business district capacity and market and promote business districts. These volunteer hours, equal to .5 FTE or 20 hours/week were in addition to each Board member’s work in their own business and business district. The Board approved several critical policies and amended its bylaws to reflect the organization’s new name. Finally, the membership approved restated Articles of Incorporation, bringing the organization’s governing documents in line with current state law, finalizing the name change, and clarifying Venture Portland’s corporate structure.

Finances
Venture Portland successfully completed its second external financial review, objectively confirming that business district dues and the city’s funds were well-managed and modeling GAAP best practices for business districts. And, the organization approved financial policies, based on GAAP and non-profit best practices, which reaffirmed the conflict of interest policy and strengthened internal controls.

Personnel
Venture Portland experienced its first year fully staffed and each employee received an annual performance review. The organization continued to leverage staff’s expertise with outside consultants. Staff took advantage of professional development training opportunities and gained valuable skills in nonprofit management, change management, grants administration and the changing media environment. Finally, staff visited business districts 101 times, increasing understanding of each district’s unique character, issues and volunteers to better deliver services and share best practices.

Office/Operations
Using the new document retention and destruction policy, staff culled through 25 years of historical records, protecting the organization’s archives and improving office filing systems. Shared electronic files were updated and a streamlined server infrastructure was implemented to increase office efficiency. Finally, staff instituted a year-end ‘in-service’ period to thoroughly wrap-up and analyze current programs, laying the foundation for a successful FY 12-13. Following last year’s upgrades and infrastructure improvements Venture Portland continued to increase operations efficiency allowing the organization to prioritize building business district capacity.
“Venture Portland begins FY 12-13 with a clear focus on neighborhood economic development.”
Conclusion

Once again, Venture Portland ended FY 11-12 a much stronger organization than when the year began. After two years of strategic change, Venture Portland’s efforts to build organizational and business district capacity resulted in significant, sustained growth. Critical partnerships with key stakeholders, a new name and a compelling message about the importance of neighborhood business districts resulted in increased recognition for the value of Venture Portland and neighborhood business districts to Portland’s economy. Finally, diverse new leaders continued to guide Venture Portland successfully into the future.

Venture Portland begins FY 12-13 with a clear focus on neighborhood economic development and the infrastructure, programs and leadership to successfully continue its partnership with the City of Portland.
About Venture Portland

Venture Portland means business. Through grants, trainings and technical assistance the organization invests in the smart, strategic growth of Portland’s unique neighborhood business districts. Portland’s neighborhood business districts comprise approximately 16,000 businesses and nearly 200,000 jobs. Venture Portland’s board leadership comes from the diverse business district associations city wide that collectively represent local, regional, national and international demand for goods and services. For more information visit ventureportland.org.
Our Members

42nd Avenue Business Association  Hawthorne Blvd. Business Association  Parkrose Business Association
82nd Avenue of Roses Business Association  Hillsdale Main Street  Pearl District Business Association
Alberta Main Street  Historic Mississippi Avenue Business Association  Portland International Business District
Alberta Street Business Association  Hollywood Boosters Business Association  Raleigh Hills Business Association
Beaumont Business Association  Kenton Business Association  Sellwood-Westmoreland Business Alliance
Belmont Area Business Association  Lloyd District Community Association  South Portland Business Association
Burnside East Business Association  Midway Business Association  St. Johns Main Street Coalition
Central Eastside Industrial Council  Montavilla/East Tabor Business Association  Woodstock Community Business Association
Columbia Corridor Association  Multnomah Village Business Association  Swan Island Business Association
Division/Clinton Business Association  NE Broadway Business Association
Foster Area Business Association  North/Northeast Business Association
Greater Brooklyn Business Association  NW Industrial Neighborhood Association