

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

Eligibility

Who can apply for selection by the REDCs?

Only a municipality (cities, towns, and villages) can apply to the REDCs. However, the involvement and support of the local community is essential to the ultimate success of the DRI, so community members and local groups, such as chambers of commerce, interested in the program should contact their municipal leaders to discuss potential downtown areas for nomination.

If a community has already developed a downtown plan, can they be considered for this initiative?

Yes, communities that already have a downtown-focused plan are eligible. For selected DRI communities that are further along in the planning process, planning expertise could be valuable to update and expand upon existing plans and recommendations, to advance project planning, and to bring multiple plans together into a single, consistent, actionable downtown strategy.

If two municipalities share a downtown, can they submit an application for a single DRI award?

Yes, but only if the downtown is one, contiguous area. For example, where a single “Main Street” and downtown area is located in two different municipalities. The application to the REDC should be submitted by a clearly identified lead municipality, in partnership with the other municipality.

Does the downtown have to be a contiguous area? Can we nominate two neighborhoods that are a few blocks apart from each other as one downtown?

Downtowns should be a compact, contiguous area. However, a proposal identifying a workable connection between two neighborhoods in close proximity to each other could be eligible.

Is there a minimum or maximum size for a downtown?

No, there is no required minimum or maximum size. However, downtowns should be well-defined with clear boundaries.

Many regions have one big municipality and a number of smaller satellite communities. Is this program intended to support smaller satellite communities or will it focus just on larger communities?

The priority of the program is to focus funding in a downtown that would have the largest catalytic effect on the rest of the region. This may not necessarily result in the selection of the largest community in the region.

Will areas with greater financial need be prioritized?

Each REDC is charged with making a selection based on the criteria provided and additional local criteria appropriate for that region. Income levels may or may not be a factor that an REDC considers, however, the best downtowns will be those that are ripe for development.

If a municipality has no plan in place, will that be a problem?

No, a plan is not required to be selected for the DRI.

Can a Regional Council select a downtown that does not have all local policies in place necessary to support downtown revitalization at the time of application?

Yes. It is not expected that the selected downtowns will meet all of the criteria, but the municipality should demonstrate an interest in and ability to adopt modern policies that advance downtown revitalization.

Program Criteria**How do you define compact neighborhoods?**

A compact neighborhood is an area with a relatively high density of development that contains a variety of land uses.

What is the definition of a major job-creating project, as referred to in the DRI template?

Major job-creating projects are those that generate a significant number of jobs (in the context of that area) and have a noticeable impact on the community in question, such as the relocation or expansion of a large employer. These jobs can be located within, or in close proximity, to the downtown area.

What types of policies promote an inclusive environment towards New Americans, as referred to in the template?

Across the state, New Americans make up a large percentage of small business owners and are major drivers of economic growth and downtown revitalization. Municipalities should consider how best to build relationships between these newcomers and their local institutions and enable this population to be part of the downtown's growth.

Application Process**How do I apply?**

The application template can be found on the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council website at <http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/content/western-new-york>. Completed applications and attachments must be submitted by email to: Christopher Schoepflin, WNY Regional Director, Christopher.Schoepflin@esd.ny.gov

When is the application deadline?

Completed applications must be submitted to the WNY Empire State Development office by 4:00 p.m. on June 3, 2016. No late submittals

May one municipality submit multiple applications?

Yes, if a municipality includes more than one area that is consistent with the DRI criteria and would be a good candidate for the program, that municipality may submit a separate application for each potential downtown.

Since selection of downtowns doesn't occur until the end of June, is it correct to assume that downtown projects do not need to be in the 2016 Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) (open from 5/2/16 – 7/29/16)?

If a municipality interested in downtown revitalization has projects ready for this CFA cycle, they should be submitted this year for regular CFA funding. This year, all downtown projects will receive priority funding in the CFA. If a municipality is then selected for a DRI award, planners will begin work this summer to identify the projects to be funded from the \$10 million award.

Is there a restriction on the number of pages within the submission of the application?

There are no restrictions on the number of pages applicants can submit; however, applicants are encouraged to submit a concise and focus proposal.

Where can WNY DRI questions be directed to?

Questions can be emailed to Mo Sumbundu at Mo.Sumbundu@ESD.NY.Gov

REDC Selection Process**Can a Regional Council nominate more than one downtown?**

No, REDCs are charged with selecting only one downtown area.

If the region already identified downtowns for revitalization as a part of its URI plan, can it simply select one of those downtowns for DRI funding? Can the region rely on planning contained in URI plans instead of engaging the outside experts?

While URI plans should not be ignored where they address downtown revitalization, REDCs must still conduct a full outreach and engagement process. Planning consultants will be instructed to build on and further existing plans that are in place.

Will REDCs create a subcommittee to guide their selection process for the DRI?

Yes, members of the WNY REDC will serve on the DRI selection committee.

How will proposals be evaluated?

There are program-wide criteria as follows:

- Compact, Well-Defined Boundaries
- Sufficient Population
- Potential to Build on and Increase Public and Private Investment
- Recent or Impending Job Growth
- Characteristics that Increase Livability
- Local Policies that Advance Revitalization
- Community Support

The Western New York Regional Economic Development Council will also consider the following criteria:

- Alignment with strategies and project criteria in the WNY Strategy for Prosperity
- High population density
- Demonstrated opportunity for revitalization that will create a diverse and vibrant community
- Established high impact leverage/matching funding within target area
- Capacity and ability to execute the strategic plan

Will applicants be interviewed?

Applicants may be requested to participate in a brief interview regarding their proposal with the DRI Review Committee in Buffalo on June 13 or June 14 between 9:00am-11:00am

If the REDC outreach and nomination process reveals promising projects in downtowns that are ultimately not selected as the DRI winner, will there be any funding for those projects?

Yes, these projects should be submitted through the CFA, where there is priority placed upon projects that advance downtown revitalization, regardless of whether they are in a selected downtown. Project funding is also available for downtown planning through regular CFA programs (applicants should consult the CFA booklet on www.regionalcouncils.ny.gov).

Will REDC members be able to vote on downtowns in their own counties?

Each Regional Council will determine its own selection process, following the uniform code of conduct.

Can public outreach meetings held by an REDC use crowd-sourcing to ascertain public support for selection of particular downtowns?

REDCs are free to use public meetings and/or public engagement tools as appropriate to inform their selection process.

Consultants

Will the funds used to pay consultants be in addition to the \$10 million award?

The costs for private sector planning experts will be paid out of the \$10 million award, so if planning costs are less, the remaining funds will be available for project implementation. Up to \$300,000 will be available per community to pay these experts for assistance in developing a strategic investment plan for revitalization unique to the selected downtown.

Can an REDC or municipality choose a consultant to undertake the DRI plan?

No. Planning consultants will be selected by the state from a list of pre-qualified firms and will be assigned downtowns that are appropriate for the consultant team's experience, qualifications and expertise. The planning consultants will be paired with downtowns after the nominations are made.

Awards

What types of projects can the \$10 million award be used for?

The funds are not currently restricted to capital projects, and we expect that a variety of economic development, transportation, housing, and community projects will be identified for funding.

Is there a match requirement for projects identified in the initial application to REDCs and the DRI Strategic Investment Plans?

No, but the ability to leverage a DRI award with past CFA investments and other State funding could be an element of regional criteria REDCs used to help select a downtown for participation in the DRI program.

Will the funds be provided on a reimbursement basis or upfront?

The financial terms for payment will be determined based on the type of project.

Is the \$500,000 for projects consistent with the Healthy Food/Healthy Communities program included in the \$10 million for each downtown?

The \$500,000 is included in the \$100 million for all ten REDCs and may be included as part of the \$10 million for one or more of the selected DRIs, where the planning process identifies a need for healthy and affordable food markets.

When will awards be announced?

The selected DRI community will be announced in early summer 2016