

**only in seattle.**<sup>TM</sup>  
**INITIATIVE**

**Program Description**

Neighborhood business districts are the places where small businesses thrive, communities engage, and jobs are created. Successful small businesses are the key to creating and preserving vibrant, safe, sustainable districts and businesses are most successful when they are located in neighborhoods with an active street life and healthy sense of community.

The *Only in Seattle* Initiative empowers neighborhood business districts to organize around a common vision and attract investment. This initiative provides district leaders with funding and support to harness their collective strengths, decide on joint action and make changes to improve their districts.

This initiative is based on proven methodologies for creating vibrant business districts. A set of core building blocks are the critical components of any successful district. Business districts benefit most from comprehensive approaches that work simultaneously to build the following (5) strategy areas:

1. **Organization:** Neighborhood organizations, residents, property owners and business owners collaborate and work together toward a common vision for the business district.
2. **Marketing & Promotion:** District has a positive, consistent image that helps draw more customers to visit
3. **Business & Retail Development:** Businesses prosper because they are collaborative, supported by the community and receive assistance to strengthen and grow. New businesses open in the district that complement and improve the business mix.
4. **Appearance & Pedestrian Environment:** Retail and pedestrian environments are attractive, inviting and easily accessible. Catalyst real estate projects rehabilitate or replace underutilized spaces, generating a sense of forward momentum and improvement.
5. **Clean & Safe:** The district is clean and customers feel safe and welcome.

*Note:* See *STRATEGY AREAS* for detailed description of the types of activities that fit into these strategy areas.

## **PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

This initiative provides seed funding and support that can help a business district move ahead of its current state to a new level of organization and operations. Participating districts develop a strategic vision of where they want to be, an action plan to achieve that vision and clear outcomes that are intended from the work. The action plan should be developed and implemented with strong community stakeholder participation, coordinated and led by a lead agency. The action plan should be focused on making an impact in the business district and building a foundation for long-term sustainability. Neighborhoods will receive technical assistance and support from local and national experts and OED staff assistance to develop and implement these plans.

**Action Plans** – The cornerstone of the initiative is the development of an action plan, which contains the vision, key revitalization activities and the outcomes to be completed within up to a three-year period. Some business districts may have these plans and want to focus on their implementation while others may want to develop a plan for their districts.

**Lead Agency** – There must be one organization identified as the lead for managing the implementation of the action plan.

**Strong Community Stakeholder Participation** – While the activities are led by a local lead organization, no one agency can do everything. Public agencies, nonprofit organizations, area residents, businesses and property owners must share investments in and responsibility for strengthening their neighborhoods. Action Plans must be developed with the input and involvement of key stakeholders and each component of the plan must identify the organizations, staff or volunteers identified to take responsibility for ensuring implementation.

**Impact and Long Term Sustainability** - The Action Plans should be focused on making an immediate impact in the district and developing infrastructure that will allow the work to be sustainable over time.

**Investment** - OED will make an investment of grant dollars, technical assistance and training resources and staff time in each participating business district. The grant funding can reimburse operating and direct costs incurred by the lead agencies and other agencies submitting joint proposals. This can include staff costs, supplies, marketing, etc. Funding can also be used for physical improvement projects such as façade improvements and business district beautification.

## ***SERVICES AVAILABLE TO PARTICIPANTS***

**Technical Assistance and Support:** As a participant in this program, business districts will be involved in coordinated peer-to-peer learning opportunities on topics relevant to the challenges they face in their work. There is also limited funding to bring in specific expertise when needed, such as retail study or marketing assistance.

**Business Improvement Area Formation and Support:** Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) are assessment districts created to provide an ongoing annual budget that can be used for implementing many of the revitalization activities described in Section I. BIA assessments are collected by the city, held in a dedicated account, and used to reimburse the cost of BIA activities. Each BIA has a governing board made up of rate payers in the district who make local decisions about how their assessments will be used. Business districts interested in learning about creating a BIA or revising an existing BIA, can work with experienced city staff and consultants to explore these possibilities.

**Business Advocacy and Farmers Market Support:** The Business Services Team at OED will guide businesses through the city bureaucracy and provide unmatched customer service. When your district or a business is having a city-related issue and does not know where to turn, this team can help to resolve it.

**Organizational Capacity Building and Creation of a District Vision:** OED will provide facilitated trainings for selected business district stakeholder groups on strategies for successful board development and how to maintain strong community-based partnerships. The trainings will lead to the creation of an actionable vision for their district as the basis for a business-oriented work plan. Trainings would be held over a 2-3 month period in both individual and group settings.

**Staff Liaison Support:** Business Districts will have staff liaisons at OED who will be assigned to problem solve and bring in expertise as needed.

## **PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS**

**Target Area:** Business districts will have clearly defined geographic boundaries that will be the focus of the work.

**Action Plan:** Each district must be developing or have a detailed plan related to their proposal describing the vision, goals, strategies and actions to accomplish the vision. This Action Plan must be submitted with the proposal for funding or, if the plan has not been developed yet, the proposal can request funding to create it. These Action Plans will be evaluated based on the criteria listed in Section IV below.

**Lead Agency:** Each district's Action Plan must be coordinated by a lead agency that is located in or has significant ties to the neighborhood business district it will be working in. The lead agency must have nonprofit status, or must have a fiscal sponsor that is a nonprofit organization. The fiscal sponsor or lead organization must have basic infrastructure in place, including a financial accounting system, and general commercial liability insurance with limits that fulfill city contracting requirements. Depending on the funding received, the fiscal sponsor or lead agency might be required to have an annual audit performed by a Certified Public Accountant.

**One Proposal per Business District:** Efforts in the district should be coordinated among community stakeholders. Therefore, we will only accept one application from each commercial district. Multiple applications from different potential lead agencies will not be accepted. The application can include funding for multiple agencies; the lead agency will be responsible for managing the overall contract and will be responsible for managing sub-contracts to other organizations utilizing funding from this program.

**Funding Requirements:** Funding for this program is primarily federal – Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). There is also City General Funds. Business districts receiving federal funds will need to be located in primarily residential (as opposed to primarily industrial) areas with over 51% of low-moderate income residents served by the district. Business districts that do not meet this requirement can still be eligible to receive City General Funds.

**Neighborhoods Qualifying for Federal Funds:** Business districts within the following neighborhoods would potentially qualify for the federal funding: Central Area, Rainier Valley, Chinatown International District and Little Saigon, Capitol Hill, White Center, South Park, Pioneer Square, Delridge, University District and Lake City. Federal funding eligibility will need to be determined for each proposal.

## **CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING PROPOSALS**

The Initiative will prioritize business districts serving low-income neighborhoods. The level and duration of funding commitments will be based on the quality of the proposals as determined by the following criteria:

- Is there a unified vision for the district that helps to drive strategies and actions for revitalization?
- Is the need and potential impact demonstrated?
- Have business district stakeholders been successfully engaged?
- Is there a lead agency with the ability to successfully implement the initiative?
- Will the effort be sustainable after public funds are expended?

## **INVESTMENT TIERS**

*Please note that meeting the following criteria within each tier does not guarantee the maximum grant amount. Applicants will be evaluated against the criteria and competing applications.*

**Tier I: Action Plan Grants.** These grants fall into three categories, based on the district's work:

**Organizing** – For districts working on organizing (or reorganizing) stakeholders in the district to develop a shared vision and create a new action plan. Grants are generally for consultants and/or staff to conduct outreach, facilitate planning meetings, develop a plan and complete early projects that build momentum.

**Transforming** - For districts with a new action plan beginning implementation. The grants are given to a lead agency that serves as the central hub for the vision and action plan and coordinates implementation and communication with and between all participating parties. Grants can cover staff, project costs, consulting, etc.

**Established** - For districts with an established action plan and ongoing implementation that have a key project that will help grow the district's work. Grants can cover staff, project costs, consulting, etc.

### **Tier II: Business Improvement Areas Consultation**

Tier II is intended for commercial districts that are seeking assistance in forming a Business Improvement Area (BIA), modifying an existing BIA's boundaries or rate payment structure, or exploring the feasibility of a BIA. Districts receive consulting services to guide them through the steps from feasibility analysis to the legislative process.

### **Tier III: Improving Outreach to Businesses**

OED and the Department of Neighborhoods' Public Outreach and Engagement Liaison (POEL) program are partnering to offer POEL resources to business districts in need of better outreach to under-represented businesses and business of color in their districts. The program hires liaisons who share language, culture, ethnicity, or other demographics with local business owners to provide a bridge of communication and understanding between the businesses and the local organization. These liaisons can do outreach, conduct surveys, help facilitate focus groups, etc. in close partnership with the local organization.

#### **Criteria for Evaluating Proposals:**

- The outreach fits naturally into the applying organizations' existing programs and services and will strengthen the organization and their ability to serve businesses.
- The organization has an existing, demonstrated competency in engaging immigrant and refugee business owners and/or has an interest in building its capacity to do so.
- The outreach is part of a comprehensive action plan for a business district, such as those developed for the Only in Seattle Program, and enhances, supports and/or leverages business district revitalization efforts.
- The applying agency is located in a business district with many immigrant and refugee businesses and/or business owners of color or other under-represented groups.
- Potential to make a significant impact by providing support.

#### **Tier IV: Grant for Façade Improvements**

Seattle Investment Fund LLC (“LLC”) is a limited liability company established by the City of Seattle to participate in the New Markets Tax Credits (“NMTC”) program. The NMTC program purpose is to assist the economic development of economically distressed neighborhoods. The LLC is working with the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development (“OED”) to invest \$100,000 in 1-3 neighborhood facade improvement projects in Seattle. Tier IV grants are for design and construction costs to make significant improvements to a building façade along a major commercial corridor in the district.

##### **Criteria for Evaluating Proposals:**

- Project improves the physical appearance of a business district, including but not limited to façade renovations, improved signage, awning replacement and painting, streetscape improvements
- Predominant benefit of improvements accrues to small business owners
- Improvements occur in business districts serving low and moderate income residents
- Improvements are concentrated in a small geographic area to maximize cumulative impact
- Project management capacity is available to reduce administrative costs and ensure compliance with associated rules and regulations
- The building or business must have property insurance (proof of insurance will be required to receive funds).
- The Seattle Investment Fund LLC anticipates awarding \$100,000 split between 1-3 projects in Seattle.
- There is a unified vision for the district that helps to drive strategies and actions for revitalization, and business district stakeholders have been successfully engaged in its development.

#### **Tier V: Consultation to Enhance Cultural Place Making**

OED and the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs (ARTS) are offering technical assistance and funding to business districts that have an existing or potentially strong connection to arts and culture as part of the identity of their district. The goal of this partnership is to support or facilitate a connection between artists/arts organizations/cultural organizations and business districts to develop a common vision and plan for enhancing art and culture as a significant identity/component of the neighborhood.

Districts can apply for technical assistance and smart ventures funding to strengthen a connection with local arts and cultural organizations.

##### **Criteria for Evaluating Proposals:**

- Applying agency has significant ties to the business district
- Comprehensive action plan such as those developed for the Only in Seattle Program and demonstrate how the project enhances, supports and/or leverages business district revitalization efforts.
- Demonstrate strong community involvement
- Existing arts and cultural assets within the business district as evidenced by: arts or cultural institutions operating there, artists located or holding performances/events there, cultural festivals and events held there, it is a current or historical home to cultural/ethnic communities, etc.

- Art and cultural events within its action plan.
- Potential for better collaboration and/or capacity building between existing organizations. For example; there are many small organizations organizing events that are not connected to business district action plans, etc.
- Potential to increase race and social justice through building partnerships and collaboration between business districts and arts/cultural organizations and events.
- Potential to make a significant impact by providing support.

### **Tier VI: City Infrastructure Improvements**

The City of Seattle through the Seattle Department of Transportation has available a pool of \$500,000 for capital improvement projects that enhance business districts. Neighborhood business districts that have paid on-street parking are eligible to submit proposals. Tier VI projects include design, cost estimating and construction of infrastructure and amenities in parks and in the public right of way.

#### **Qualifications**

- Paid on-street parking in the business district. A map showing on-street paid parking areas is available here: <http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/parking/paidparkingrates.htm>
- Applying agency has significant ties to the business district

#### **Criteria for Evaluating Proposals:**

*The level and duration of funding commitments will be based on the quality of the proposals as determined by the following criteria:*

- Comprehensive action plan such as those developed for the Only in Seattle Program and demonstrate how the project enhances, supports and/or leverages business district revitalization efforts.
- Clear vision for project and community capacity to work with the City as needed.
- How does this project enhance revitalization for the district and relate to its unified vision?
- What is the potential impact of the proposed project? Will the project have a positive impact on race and social justice by benefitting a district serving a diverse customer base?
- Are there any Historic and/or Landmarks affected by this project?
- Have business district stakeholders been successfully engaged?
- Is the project included or prioritized in other city planning efforts? Is the proposed project consistent with the City's adopted modal plans, including the Pedestrian Master Plan, the Bicycle Master Plan and the Transit Master Plan?
- If the project is in the concept stage, can it be reasonably designed and implemented with the dollars available (i.e. is it a feasible project idea)?
- Does the proposed project leverage other public or private funding sources?
- How will the proposed project address future maintenance needs once the project is installed/completed? Is the business organization willing to obtain annual permits and assume maintenance responsibilities for certain improvements? Assets owned by the city will be maintained by the City. These include items such as new drainage features, curbs, lighting.

## DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGY AREAS

Commercial district revitalization includes analyzing business districts' physical, economic and social needs, assessing strengths and challenges, setting forth concrete results and measuring outcomes. The goal is to build the necessary foundation and infrastructure so that the neighborhood will be able to continue to implement and sustain positive changes.

Neighborhoods can engage in a number of common activities employed by organizations across the country to create positive change. When several activities are concentrated in a focused geographic area, they can leverage and reinforce one another to create more significant impact. The following six categories of activities are described by nationally recognized commercial district revitalization experts such as National Main Street, LISC and the International Economic Development Council as the primary areas of focus. These are examples of the types of activities that are eligible for this award but this is not an all-inclusive list of potential activities that could be employed.

### 1. BUSINESS ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Creating and maintaining organizational capacity can include recruitment of volunteers, developing community leadership, facilitating organizational partnerships and forming and sustaining business district improvement programs. Supporting the organization or organizations that are leading and implementing neighborhood revitalization is critical to the success of neighborhood change. Ensuring their capacity to fund and sustain activities is an important part of reaching revitalization goals.

### 2. MARKETING & PROMOTION

- *Neighborhood Promotion*, work develops and implements promotional strategy for the district, including developing a district identity/brand, collective advertising opportunities, generating positive media coverage, creating a website, walking guide and other collateral materials. Promotion is important in contributing to and managing a new positive image for the district.
- *Community Events*, programs plan and prepare for events to promote the corridor and raise funds for the revitalization program. Events can range from a large street festival or block party to smaller events, such as grand openings or "taste of" restaurant promotions. Events provide an opportunity to highlight positive changes in the neighborhood, allow the community to gather and celebrate, bring new people to the district and can further brand it as a destination. Well organized events can help to change overall perceptions of the area.

### 3. BUSINESS & RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

- *Business Support and Retention*. Existing merchants create a district's character and identity and provide important goods and services to residents. Work to support and strengthen these businesses to help them stay and thrive in the neighborhood can lead to expansion of available goods and services as well as job growth. Many programs help merchants find technical business assistance such as marketing, accounting or merchandising support, and/or assist in finding loans for stabilization or expansion.

- *Retail and Market Study* provides the necessary data and analysis to define the trade area of the district and learn about demographic and spending power of the neighborhood. These tools will help existing business better market their services or meet existing demand, and provide the foundation for strategies to attract new businesses.
- *Business Attraction*, activities promote their district to realtors, brokers or business owners with brochures or other materials. Some identify specific retailers that could contribute most to the district and reach out to them. Other revitalization programs act like a commercial broker and market specific vacant properties.

## APPEARANCE & PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

- *Design Guidelines and Principals*, draw attention to the existing character of architecture and design, and highlight the qualities the neighborhood values most for new development. They help to ensure that new development, signage and facades contribute to a consistent sense of character and provide elements that unify the streetscape and built environment.
- *Streetscape Improvements*, include a focus on the condition of streets and sidewalks, including repaving streets, rebuilding sidewalks, installing street furniture, trash cans and way finding.
- *Storefront Improvements*, include grants and/or low-interest loans to merchants and property owners to invest in façade improvement projects including new signs, paint, awnings, etc. A large number of these relatively small changes can add up to a whole new look for the entire district.
- *Transportation and Parking Improvements* include improving public transit, pedestrian and/or bicycle access to the neighborhood and managing on-street or shared parking lots.
- *Signage and way finding* including banners, historic place information, parking location signs etc.
- *Real estate development*. Many urban districts have abandoned buildings, vacant lots or underdeveloped parcels in key locations. Redevelopment of these properties creates an opportunity to bring new residents and retailers and contributes to a sense that the neighborhood is revitalizing.

## 4. CLEAN & SAFE

- *Crime Prevention and Security*, programs often work with police departments to organize merchants and residents to report crimes, address physical conditions that could reduce crime and make the retail environment feel safe for shoppers and residents.
- *Clean Activities*, range from managing neighborhood cleanup days to hiring regular cleaning crews for garbage pick-up and sidewalk and street cleaning. A clean business district not only creates an inviting shopping environment, it also influences perceptions of safety and demonstrates an investment in the district's surroundings.