

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PARTNER FOR THE EAST SIDE BUILDING FUND

Issue Date: January 17, 2025

Submission Deadline: February 7, 2025, 5:00PM

Contact CRS regarding this RFP: info@centerforregionalstrategies.org



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I. INTRODUCTION

About The Regional Revitalization Partnership

The East Side Building Fund is a program of the Regional Revitalization Partnership (RRP)—a multi-year \$300M collaborative initiative between New York State's Empire State Development (ESD), the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation (RCWJF), local municipalities and other private philanthropic partners. Building upon and accelerating collaborative, community-driven work that is already underway, this public/private initiative co-invests in three interconnected communities in Western New York (Buffalo's East Side and the cities of Niagara Falls and Rochester) to create a comprehensive community-driven economic development vision to strengthen the regional economy and build pathways to individual wealth.

A combined \$180 million RRP investment on the East Side will scale up East Side Avenues' foundational public and philanthropic investments—driven by the community—that support small business improvements, redevelop key mixed-use properties, promote historic preservation, reinvigorate fundamental East Side anchors, and build capacity for nonprofit partners to implement this critical work.

About the East Side Building Fund

The East Side Building Fund is a joint, consolidated fund that aims to assist in the community-driven revitalization of mixed-use neighborhood commercial districts on Buffalo's East Side by providing ESD capital grant funds for targeted building and associated site improvements such as stabilization measures, façade renovations and interior building upgrades to commercial and mixed-use buildings.

The East Side Building Fund builds upon the work of three former East Side Avenues/ESD programs (East Side Commercials Districts Program, Commercial Building Stabilization Fund and Community-Based Real Estate Development Training Program Fund). The East Side Building Fund takes a more streamlined and holistic approach to capital funding. It considers the overall needs of a particular building and funds those needs through one source—cutting down on confusion and eligibility for multiple funding sources so that resources can move into the community more quickly.

To preserve the intent and the goals of the three aforementioned grant programs, under the new consolidated East Side Building Fund, there will be a strong preference for projects located within the four target commercial districts (Jefferson Avenue, Broadway Fillmore, MLK Park, and Kensington Bailey); stabilization projects for at-risk historic buildings to preserve the community's historic fabric; and for projects on the East Side initiated by graduates of the Community-Based Real Estate Development Training program.

Request Summary

CRS in collaboration with ESD seeks to award a contract of \$25,000/per year for up to three years to a qualified community nonprofit or for-profit Community Engagement Partner (CEP) to assist them with outreach and marketing to support the East Side Building Fund. The number of rounds of funding will be determined by applications received and capital funds available.

II. ABOUT THE PROGRAM PARTNERS

Center for Regional Strategies (CRS)

CRS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization focusing on planning, developing and implementing economic growth strategies through placemaking, workforce and small business development to build sustainable community wealth, especially in underserved areas. With research partner, University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI),

CRS conducts grounded quantitative and qualitative research and analysis to inform decision making. CRS provides services to inform, develop, and write strategic plans with partners to build capacity; and assists with program and project management, problem solving, developing metrics for evaluation and assessing progress over time. CRS works to develop full project portfolios with collaborative, leveraged funding sources to ensure long-term strategies have multi-year implementation opportunities. Through effective storytelling, CRS elevates partner voices and serves to communicate progress and lessons learned.

The CEP will be supported by RRP investments from local philanthropic organizations, administered by CRS through direct grants to support the CEP with staffing and administration resources to market the program, and through direct capacity building technical assistance by the CRS team.

Empire State Development (ESD)

ESD is New York State's Economic Development Agency with a mission is to promote a vigorous and growing state economy, encourage business investment and job creation, and support diverse, prosperous local economies across NYS through the efficient use of loans, grants, tax credits, real estate development, marketing and other forms of assistance. ESD's Western New York Regional Office is responsible for convening the WNY REDC and for facilitating the planning, funding, and implementation of large-scale regional economic development initiatives. These efforts involve strategies to invest in key tradeable economic sectors in WNY in a manner that facilitates revitalization of urban core neighborhoods, helps prepare the region's workforce, and advances smart growth sustainability principles.

ESD provides the capital funding and technical guidance for the East Side Building Fund,

III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Through the program, property owners and businesses are eligible to receive grants to cover the costs of building renovations, stabilization-related activities, exterior facade and storefront renovations, interior renovations, and/or selected site improvements for commercial or mixed-use buildings. Property owners will be required to provide a 10% contribution to the total construction cost of their project,

The East Side Building Fund is intended to contribute to the revitalization of mixed-use neighborhood commercial districts by:

- Building on existing planning processes to ensure that capital investments of public funds will enhance the aesthetics and economics of commercial districts;
- Stimulating the economic revitalization of commercial districts by providing financial incentives for the rehabilitation of traditional commercial building stock;
- Fostering small business development, thereby providing economic opportunities and promoting economic activity in neighborhood business locations;
- Fostering the next generation of developers on the East Side to emerge from the community itself;
- Supporting owner-occupied and underrepresented neighborhood-based businesses to improve the overall community's benefit of revitalization;
- Preserving significant and historic buildings and providing an environment that attracts new investment to enable the adaptive reuse of these buildings for new enterprises;
- Preventing further cases of "demolition by neglect" and preserving the existing urban fabric along commercial corridors;
- Addressing existing accessibility, code compliance, environmental, energy efficiency and health and safety issues to return vacant commercial spaces to active use; and
- Creating an incentive for comprehensive and enhanced rehabilitation projects rather than deferred maintenance and repair assistance.

IV. TARGET AUDIENCE

The CEP must align outreach with applicants/buildings that meet the following program eligibility:

The building must be a commercial or mixed-use property located on Buffalo's East Side. For the purposes of the East Side Building Fund, the East Side is defined as 17 square miles, bounded by the University at Buffalo (UB) to the north; Main Street and Michigan Avenue (excluding the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and Central Business District) to the west; I-190 and the Buffalo River to the south; and the City line to the east.

Applicants must demonstrate ownership of all buildings/real estate considered part of the proposed project or demonstrate expressed authorization of the property owner. Buildings must be privately owned.

In addition, strong preference will be given to projects which fall within one or more of the following categories:

Are located within the following identified Commercial District target areas.

Jefferson Avenue Commercial District

- Boundaries: Jefferson Avenue addresses between East Ferry Street and BFNC Drive, as well as establishments on corner lots in this targeted area.

MLK Park Commercial District

- Boundaries: Fillmore Avenue addresses between East Ferry Street and North Parade Avenue, as well as establishments on corner lots in this targeted area.

Broadway-Fillmore Commercial District

- Boundaries: Fillmore Avenue addresses between Sycamore Street and Paderewski Drive, and buildings with a Broadway address between Memorial Drive and Reed Street, as well as establishments on corner lots in this targeted area.

Kensington-Bailey Commercial District

- Boundaries: Bailey Avenue addresses between Winspear Avenue and Route 33, as well as establishments on corner lots in this targeted area.

Propose near-term stabilization measures for at-risk historic buildings.

For purposes of the East Side Building Fund, "stabilization" refers to undertaking preventative repairs that correct structural deficiencies or code violations, which if not corrected, could lead to loss of the building through collapse or demolition.

For purposes of the East Side Building Fund, "historic" means any building that has existed on the site since prior to urban renewal, or for at least 50 years; or that contributes to the unique neighborhood character of the place in which it is located and contributes to the vision for revitalized business districts through providing an opportunity for business development at the site and wealth creation in the neighborhood. Such buildings may or may not be listed on or determined to be eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NRHP).

Are initiated by graduates of the Community-Based Real Estate Development Training program who upon successful completion of the program, have engaged with the Technical Assistance from the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning (SAP) and CRS to assess readiness of a project to move forward; determine specific needs to advance a project, and as necessary, identify the appropriate funding program that could be accessed to assist in advancing a project. Visit <https://cbredt.org/> to learn more about the Community-Based Real Estate Development Training program.

V. CONTRACT TERM

The term of the contract is anticipated to begin in the first quarter 2025.

VI. EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

CRS invites financially-sound community nonprofits and for-profit businesses to submit proposals. The respondent should have a full range of relevant experience in community engagement and improving business districts. The following expertise is of particular value to the project:

- Experience in outreach for the East Side Commercials Districts Program, Commercial Building Stabilization Fund and Community-Based Real Estate Development Training Program Fund, Buffalo Main Streets Initiative program, New York State Main Street program and/or related commercial district program.
- Economic development and planning for business districts.
- Experience working on the East Side of Buffalo with a proven track record for establishing trusted relationships.
- Strong marketing/communications expertise.

VII. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The CEP is responsible for outreach and marketing to support the East Side Building Fund. CEPs will work to identify eligible and interested building owners in the four targeted commercial districts/and or structures in neighborhoods that hold high community significance and interest in redevelopment, and that the priorities are driven by the community.

Note: A qualified nonprofit Local Program Administrator (LPA) (selected through a separate and ongoing solicitation process) will be responsible for evaluating and selecting activities to be supported by the East Side Building Fund—adhering to strict project selection criteria, project selection processes, and existing design guidelines. They will also be responsible for all aspects of grant administration including: entering into contracts with participating property owners and contractors; managing applicable contracts for Technical Consultants and construction contractors; financial management of all grant funds including contractor payment; assuring compliance with all local, state and federal laws and regulations; and ensuring successful completion of all assisted projects. This assistance ensures CRS and ESD have the technical and administrative expertise necessary to establish a portfolio of solid projects that have the greatest impact on the East Side's commercial corridors.

The CEP will need to be aware of these concurrent efforts and work in coordination with the LPA and/or be able share information on projects.

1. Conduct marketing and outreach in the target areas

The CEP is responsible for promoting the new program and for making eligible property/business owners (see section IV) aware of the availability of financial assistance through the East Side Building Fund. The CEP should communicate with building owners and encourage projects that achieve program priorities and are applying for eligible uses of program funds.

Note: While the CEP is responsible for promoting the program, CRS and ESD will provide the CEP with all marketing/outreach materials. The CEP will not be responsible for developing, designing or printing marketing and media materials, and should not include these costs in their budget. The CEP should include costs for direct mailing in their budget.

In particular, the CEP will:

- Fully understand the application guidelines so they can explain the program requirements to business/property owners in coordination with ESD.

- In coordination with ESD and CRS, utilize informational materials to market the program and explain program requirements (i.e. website content, eNews, post cards and flyers, print ads).
- In coordination with ESD and CRS, distribute marketing and informational materials (how to apply for assistance/application, District Design Guidelines for the four target areas, and required forms). This may include but is not limited to:
 - Door-to-door canvassing of target areas;
 - Direct mail pieces to businesses/building owners in target areas (include costs for direct mailing);
 - Enews blasts to established mailing lists;
 - Social media posts;
 - Distribution to local partners such as governments, libraries, chambers of commerce, business associations, and other local partners.
 - Planning, coordinating and marketing at least one public informational meeting within the community to present information and answer questions in coordination with ESD.
 - Retain distribution lists, public notices and other documentation of marketing and outreach efforts in program files and be able to report on progress upon request.
 - In needed, promote opportunities for community-based, qualified contractors.

VIII. REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF PROPOSAL

Proposals should demonstrate an understanding of the requirements of this RFP and present the following information in the same format as presented below, clearly divided by the following topic areas. Respondents should provide the following information:

1. Cover Letter and/or Executive Summary

- a. Summarize your organization/business' ability to undertake the work being solicited for in this RFP.
- b. Present the major themes of your proposed approach to the effort—how you will meet the challenge.
- c. Present the main strengths of your skill sets and experience in administering related programs.
- d. Present key abilities of your proposed team and discuss any critical “distinguishers”—why your organization should be selected over others.

2. Qualifications Statement

- a. **Proposed Team:** Respondents should include a profile of the proposed organization/business.
- b. **Relevant Past Projects:** Respondents should provide no more than five, one-page experience sheets summarizing the best examples of current and/or past projects undertaken by the organization and/or members of the team that are most similar and relevant to the process outlined in this RFP (see Section VI Experience and Expertise).
 - i. Information with respect to location, size, uses, approximate contract value, and dates of engagement.
 - ii. Contact information (i.e., name, phone, and email) for applicable references for each representative contract.

3. Project Team Organization

- a. Include an organizational chart identifying members of the organization/business as well as their respective administrative, management and professional responsibilities.
- b. Submit individual resumes for key team members that will be engaged in the project (no more than one [1] page in length for each staff member), stating registrations and licenses; professional and educational background; and experience relevant to this project.

4. Project Understanding/Overall Approach

- a. Based upon information in this RFP and from individual research, set forth your team's overall understanding of the effort, the key objectives, challenges, and overarching issues associated with realizing these objectives.
- b. Based upon your preliminary understanding of the project context, present your team's overall project approach to the objectives outlined in this RFP.

5. Fee Estimate

- a. Respondents must provide a fee estimate for each task. Compensation for work will be provided on a time and materials basis with a not-to-exceed limit.

Note: While the CEP is responsible for promoting the program, CRS and ESD will provide the CEP with all marketing/outreach materials. The CEP will not be responsible for developing, designing or printing marketing and media materials, and should not include these costs in their budget. The CEP should include costs for direct mailing in their budget.

IX. SELECTION PROCESS

The contract will be awarded to the organization or business that submits the most responsive proposal that best demonstrates relevant experience and expertise; and which, upon evaluation of all proposals received, best demonstrates its ability to achieve the objectives of this RFP; which offers the best value; and which in the judgment of CRS, would best serve the public interest.

CRS reserves the right to reject any and all proposals especially if they are incomplete and incorrect, and solicit a new request for proposals.

Proposal Procedures & Due Dates

It is anticipated that a contract will be awarded in response to this RFP based in the following schedule:

Date	Milestone
January 17, 2025	RFP Issue
February 7, 2025	Proposals Due
February 14, 2025	Recommendation of a CEP
March 1, 2025	Anticipated Contract Start Date

CRS reserves the right to change any of the dates stated in this RFP. CRS reserves the right to request an interview from respondents.

Questions

Questions about this RFP should be submitted in writing via email to info@centerforregionalstrategies.org with the subject line: RFP East Side Building Fund CEP.

Questions and responses will be posted [here](#).

Proposal Submission

Respondents will not receive compensation or reimbursement of any expenses associated with preparing and/or submitting the proposal.

Respondents are required to upload one electronic copy of their proposal [here](#) by **5:00 P.M., Friday, February 7, 2025. Late proposals will not be reviewed.**

X. EVALUATION CRITERIA

All proposals will be evaluated on criteria that will include the following, provided that the relative value of all financial offers will be evaluated based on a standard term.

1. Experience & Qualifications (55 Points)

- a. Respondent has successfully completed project(s) similar in size and scope and have developed a team with the skillsets to perform the duties outline in the scope of services.

2. Project Understanding (35 Points)

- a. The respondent demonstrates a clear understanding of the project.
- b. Ability to perform the required scope of services in given timeframe. Demonstrates that the organization has sufficient capabilities, resources and staff to deliver high quality services on a short time frame and within budget.
- c. Quality and Completeness of the Application Proposal: All required documents have been submitted and the project is presented in a clear and concise manner.

3. Fee Estimate (10 Points)

Respondents to the RFP will be evaluated to the RFP will be evaluated on the quality of the overall fee estimate. Elements to be evaluated include but are not limited to:

- a. The use of reasonable and attributable assumptions;

- b. The anticipated level of effort proposed for each task related to descriptions/assumptions included in the Scope of Services;
- c. Reasonableness of in the programming of labor categories/rates for each task based upon experience/skill sets required; and
- d. Overall projected cost of the effort.