



# Downtown Revitalization Initiative

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### Context

#### 1) How did communities get selected for participation in the Downtown Revitalization Initiative?

The ten Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) solicited interest in the program from communities in each of their regions. Interested communities submitted applications using a [template](#) provided by the state. The REDCs reviewed the applications against a list of desired attributes outlined in the [DRI Two Guide Book](#) and heard presentations from representatives of the most promising DRI applications. The REDCs then nominated one downtown in their region best positioned to take advantage of the DRI.

#### 2) What other support is available for New York State's downtowns?

Communities interested in downtown revitalization may apply for funding from other eligible state programs that promote revitalization. Examples include the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program at the Department of State, Restore NY at Empire State Development, and the New York Main Street program at the Division of Housing and Community Renewal. State funding initiatives included in the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) provide priority consideration to projects and proposals which demonstrate they will advance downtown revitalization through transformative housing, economic development, transportation and community projects that will attract and retain residents, visitors and businesses.

#### 3) Is the DRI focused on business development in the downtown?

Providing a catalyst for business development is an important aspect of DRI, but also important are other activities that will help the community reach its untapped potential. That means that DRI funding can support downtown revitalization through transformative housing, economic development, transportation and community projects that will attract and retain residents, visitors and businesses.

#### 4) May the DRI boundary proposed in the application be modified?

Yes. The DRI boundary proposed in the application was an initial determination of where a community wanted to focus its revitalization efforts. As the selected DRI municipality goes through the planning process, it may be determined that the initial boundary should be modified to address local issues or to capitalize on opportunities outside of the original boundary. The resulting DRI

area, however, should be generally consistent with the area proposed in the DRI application and continue to follow the guidelines of a compact and well-defined area.

## Roles

### 1) Who prepares the DRI Strategic Investment Plan for each DRI community?

Development of a DRI Strategic Investment Plan is a collaborative and open process that builds on the community's vision for downtown revitalization, the projects identified in the DRI application and other local planning efforts. A Local Planning Committee (LPC) will lead the Downtown Revitalization Initiative in each community, assisted by state planners from the NYS Department of State, NYS Homes and Community Renewal, and a consulting team hired by the state. Consultants will work with the LPC and state planners to develop and execute a public outreach plan that informs, educates, and engages members of the local community in the process of developing the plan.

### 2) How is a Local Planning Committee formed?

The LPCs are made up of local and regional leaders, stakeholders, and community representatives. Each LPC is led by two co-chairs consisting of the local elected official (or his or her designee) and a member of the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC). LPC membership will be determined by the State of New York in consultation with local leadership.

### 3) What is the role of the Local Planning Committee?

The Local Planning Committee (LPC) will work with the consulting team, state planners, and key municipal representatives to:

- Create a profile of the downtown.
- Refine the vision that was included in the community's DRI application.
- Develop strategies and identify methods to achieve the downtown vision.
- Select projects key to overall downtown revitalization.
- Develop and adopt a Downtown Revitalization Initiative Strategic Investment Plan.
- Engage the public in the planning process.

LPC members will attend a variety of meetings at which they will be asked to brainstorm ideas, provide direction to consultants, review planning products, and prioritize actions.

The LPC may form work groups to provide an opportunity for some members to dig deeper into an issue, sometimes with the help of non-committee members, such as local business persons, labor specialists, academic experts, and neighborhood activists. Work groups provide an opportunity for brainstorming, for building a sense of community spirit and buy-in of the plan, and allow for better time management at LPC meetings. Work groups could be developed around any topic, such as developing a public engagement strategy, business development, identification of projects and actions, and implementation of the plan.

LPC members will vote on the final DRI Strategic Investment Plan, and will also weigh in on various components of the plan, such as the selection of key projects. They will also be asked to agree to a Code of Conduct as a reminder that they must always act in the public interest in their role as LPC members.

#### **4) What is the role of the state planners?**

A planner from the Department of State (DOS) will be assigned to each LPC and will manage the consulting team assigned to the LPC. The planner will assist the consultants and LPC in meeting preparation, as well as preparation and review of DRI documents. When needed, the DOS planner will facilitate assistance from other state agencies.

A planner from Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) will provide additional expertise to the planning process and will assist the DOS planner as needed in review of deliverables submitted by consulting firms. The HCR representative will bring to the planning process their knowledge of the community and their expertise in housing development, CDBG, and HCR grants and programs.

#### **5) What is the role of municipal staff from the DRI communities?**

Municipal staff from the DRI community will provide local assistance to the consultants and state planners when local resources or expertise are needed. Municipal staff may assist with meeting logistics, will help identify municipal programs and resources that can be leveraged to advance the DRI planning process, and will act as local point of contact for public engagement.

#### **6) What is the role of the public?**

Public engagement is a key component of the DRI planning process. Consultant teams and state planners will seek input from all stakeholders in the community including municipal government, key employers and institutions, residents, business owners, stakeholder groups and organizations, and the general public. The objective will be to ensure that all stakeholders have ample opportunity to know and understand the DRI process and its intended outcomes; to comment on the study as it progresses; to feel their concerns and ideas have been heard; and to contribute to building a consensus about the vision for the Downtown and other outcomes, culminating in a locally supported DRI Strategic Investment Plan.

A transparent and open planning process is fundamental to the success of the DRI effort, and all LPC meetings are open to the public. Members of the public are encouraged to attend LPC meetings and to contribute ideas, comments, and questions at the appropriate time.

## **Process**

#### **1) Who is the primary driver of the planning process?**

The DRI is a collaborative program that includes key partners, including the Local Planning Committee, state agency staff, and a consultant team. The LPC is responsible for representing the interests and priorities of the community, while the state agency staff will ensure that the process

and deliverables are consistent with the goals, priorities and requirements of the Initiative. In addition, the state planning team, together with the consultants, will provide the necessary expertise, guidance, and technical assistance to develop a strategic investment plan that will achieve the vision and goals for revitalization of the downtown as approved by the LPC.

## **2) How will the LPC meetings be scheduled?**

There is no prescribed meeting schedule for the LPC. The LPC members, working with the consultants and state planners, will determine the most appropriate meeting schedule to achieve the goals/milestones identified to be able to deliver a final DRI Strategic Investment Plan in the spring of 2018. However, it is anticipated that the LPC will meet at least monthly throughout the process.

LPC meetings should be held at the best time to accommodate LPC members – whether during the day or evening. The public is welcome to attend no matter when the meetings are scheduled.

## **3) Must LPC meetings be open to the public, and if so, how will notice be provided?**

LPC meetings must be open to the public; notice to the community should be given as it would any other public meeting – through local newspapers, municipal websites, and flyers at key locations throughout the DRI municipality. In addition, meeting notices for all LPC meetings are posted on the state DRI website at [www.ny.gov/DRI](http://www.ny.gov/DRI).

Scheduled LPC meetings should be held in person at regular intervals. Conference calls may be used for matters that require immediate LPC attention or for working groups/committees if they are formed.

## **4) Will the public be able to participate in LPC meetings?**

The extent that the public will be able to actively participate in a meeting will depend on the purpose and structure of the meeting. In general, meetings will fall into three categories:

- Open House – These sessions will be largely conducted by consultants for the purpose of educating the public and getting the public's reactions to information and ideas. LPC members may also be present.
- LPC Meeting – These sessions are working meetings conducted by the LPC co-chairs for the purpose of discussion among the LPC members and presentations on scheduled topics. At the discretion of the LPC, meeting agendas may include time for public comment or other engagement exercises.
- Workshop – These sessions will be held to solicit ideas from the public, and comments on various planning topics. These public engagement workshops are intended to be very interactive, with participation by both the public and LPC members.

**5) Will there be other ways to participate if I can't attend the open houses, meetings, or events?**

Program guidelines emphasize the importance of public engagement. In addition to open houses, meetings, and workshops, outreach should include an interactive web presence and focus groups or interviews with selected stakeholder groups. Additional activities may include but are not limited to charrettes, surveys, information booths, and storefront information centers. Each DRI municipality has an individual page for posting meeting materials, draft products, surveys, etc. DRI municipalities may also use their own websites for posting DRI information, providing links to the State DRI website.

**6) How will LPCs make decisions?**

The LPC decision-making process will be left up to the discretion of each individual LPC. With public input, LPCs will help to determine the vision, goals, objectives, strategies, and projects for the DRI municipality. As a team, each consultant and state planner will work with their respective LPC to establish a process for decision making – whether by consensus or voting.

**7) How many public engagement events will be required, and will they need to address specific plan components?**

A minimum of three public meetings are required. However, LPCs are encouraged to work with the consultant and state planning teams to creatively and consistently engage the public throughout the planning process beyond the three meetings. To this end, the consultant team will draft a public engagement strategy that specifies the level, type, format, and purpose of engagement most appropriate for the specific community. Once approved by all parties, this strategy will be used to as a guide for community engagement in the DRI. Public engagement events will be designed to address specific topics appropriate to different stages of the planning process.

**8) What milestone dates have been established for project deliverables?**

The final DRI Strategic Investment Plan must be completed in March of 2018. We are in the process of identifying appropriate interim milestones to ensure project components are completed in time to meet the plan target date.

**9) What website resources will be available for each DRI municipality?**

The state has developed a DRI project website ([www.ny.gov/DRI](http://www.ny.gov/DRI)) which provides general program information and includes a webpage with information and announcements for each of the ten downtowns selected to participate in the DRI. Information posted on the website includes DRI applications, maps of each of the downtowns, planning committee lists, meeting and event notices, presentations and other products developed for the DRIs, and other relevant and useful information.

## **10) What is the scope of work for the consultant teams?**

Each team of consultants will provide the expertise and technical services required to complete a detailed and actionable DRI Strategic Investment Plan to achieve revitalization of each of the downtowns. These services will fall into the following basic tasks:

- Coordinate the Local Planning Committee
- Create and Implement a Community Engagement Strategy
- Prepare Downtown Profile and Assessment
- Develop Downtown Vision, Goals and Strategies
- Develop Detailed Priority Project Profiles
- Propose Performance Indicators/Metrics
- Complete the Final DRI Strategic Investment Plan

## **11) Will the planning effort revolve just around major projects and their impact?**

The DRI planning effort will include a robust public planning process that will confirm the community vision and develop goals, strategies, and projects to implement those strategies. Projects will include both large- and small-scale projects as well as a variety of initiatives and programs for achieving identified strategies.

## **DRI Strategic Investment Plan**

### **1) Must the DRI Strategic Investment Plan include descriptions of previously completed planning efforts or just reference those efforts when necessary?**

The Strategic Investment Plan should include short descriptions of recently completed planning efforts and reference other planning initiatives as necessary to provide adequate context. To the extent that existing plans or strategies have already been developed for a particular downtown, the consultants will build on, rather than replicate, such plans.

### **2) Will timelines or project phases need to be estimated?**

Project profiles in the DRI Strategic Investment Plan will include a general timeframe and phasing for implementation with milestones and deliverables, with immediate next steps expressed in number of months. If precise dates are not available, provision of a general timeframe with milestones will be acceptable.

### **3) What kind of projects may be recommended in the DRI Strategic Investment Plans?**

DRI Strategic Investment Plans are expected to include an extensive list of projects that may be implemented with a variety of public and private resources, including but not limited to the DRI allocation. Recommended projects may range in cost and scale from small improvements to large-scale construction projects, from local programs and zoning updates to major infrastructure projects. The following types of projects are anticipated:

- Public Improvements. For example, broadband and other communications connectivity, water supply, wastewater, storm water, green infrastructure, streetscape improvements, transportation, recreational trails, parking, signage, open space improvements, and access and trail connections.
- New Development and Rehabilitation of Existing Structures. For example, development or redevelopment of real property including pre-development or pre-construction activities, new construction, infill development, demolition in support of new development, and environmental review.
- Revolving Loan and Grant Funds. For example, grants or loans for activities such as façade improvements, minor residential improvements, sidewalk improvements, public art and public realm improvements, physical improvement to existing and/or vacant commercial space, e.g. tenant fit-up, and other similar activities. A local/regional entity with the capacity to maintain such a fund is however critical and therefore a loan/fund may not be approved in every community.
- Branding and Marketing. For example, branding and marketing of the downtown to the public, including residents, investors, developers, tourists, and visitors. As the goal of the DRI is complete catalytic project, branding and marketing projects should be limited, extremely targeted and not support ongoing operations or permanent staff salaries except under very limited circumstances.

**4) Are DRI funds limited to capital projects, such as infrastructure, or can DRI funding be used for projects such as promotion or marketing of the downtown, rezoning, or establishment of local policies?**

DRI funds are not restricted to capital projects. However, the vast majority of projects should transform the physical infrastructure of the community in ways that will benefit current residents and future generations. It is expected that a variety of economic development, transportation, housing, and community projects will be identified for funding. Where necessary and under limited circumstances, downtown marketing, rezoning, and development of local policies may all be considered as potential projects for DRI funding in support of the vision and needs of the community..

**5) Are there any types of projects that are ineligible for DRI funding?**

DRI funds are intended to make a transformational impact on the downtown. Most, but not all those funds support improvements to the physical environment. However, there are some project types that would not be considered eligible for DRI funds. Those project types are:

- Planning activities. Projects need to be implementable action items. Utilizing DRI funds for additional planning is not the goal of the program.
- Staff costs. This includes costs for implementation of DRI. Any cost increase that takes away from a transformative project must be avoided.
- Training expenses. Training expenses are not viewed as transformative projects in the second round of DRI.

- Program expenses. DRI was not intended to supplement existing programs.

While these types of projects may be worthy of investment, those program types are not the intent of the DRI. Under extremely limited circumstances the above expenses may be approved for funding however LPC members will need to engage the consultants and state planners early in the process to ensure the DRI area's success is contingent upon an extremely targeted and strategic expense similar to the ones above. Even in this scenario it may be determined local or other resources are more appropriate.

**6) Are the projects that will be funded limited to the projects proposed in a community's DRI application?**

Communities that applied to the DRI were asked to describe a range of transformative projects that could become part of the community's DRI Strategic Investment Plan to demonstrate that the community is ready to move forward with thoughtful and catalytic projects that will benefit a growing downtown. However, the application form notes that all projects submitted in the DRI applications will be further vetted by both the community and the state during the plan development process. The planning process, including community engagement, will result in a list of major projects that may include both projects included in the initial proposal and others that were not on the immediate radar of the official submitting the DRI application.

**7) What level of detail and justification must appear in the revitalization plan for DRI funded projects?**

For each project proposed for DRI funding, a detailed profile is required that presents the project in the context of the overall revitalization plan, and describes the relationship of the project to other priority projects. Sufficient information should be presented to provide a clear path forward to implementation, including but not limited to a project rendering, map, estimated cost, required permits, timeframe, project partners, and potential funding sources. The profile shall describe the catalytic impact of the project and including estimates for job creation and retention, where relevant.

**8) Will an assessment of possible funding sources need to be provided for each proposed project?**

An assessment of possible funding sources should be undertaken for projects recommended in the DRI Strategic Investment Plan. Both public and private sources of potential funding for each project should be identified in the plan, including but not limited to funds through New York State's Consolidated Funding Application (CFA), other state funds, private capital, and other potential funding sources.

## Implementation

**1) How will progress toward implementation of the DRI plans be made available to the public?**

It is anticipated that the state's DRI website will continue to serve as a source of information for the Initiative. Final DRI Strategic Investment Plans will be posted and updates will be provided on DRI-funded projects.



**2) Who is eligible to receive funding for a project in a DRI?**

There are no restrictions on the type of entities that may receive DRI funding to undertake projects in the final DRI plan. Planners from DOS and HCR will work officials from the DRI community to identify the appropriate entity to hold the state contract, such as the municipality, a local development corporation, a non-profit organization, or a for profit business.

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

Funds will be administered through the appropriate state agency. While there may be some variation between agency administration and the project type, awarded project funding will be provided on a reimbursement basis.

**4) May funds be used as match for NYS or federal grant funding?**

The DRI funds may be used as match for other grant funding if permitted by the granting agency. However, the priority is to fund projects that are ready for implementation. Therefore, DRI funds should not be held as matching funds for other grants whose award or implementation cycles are in the out-years.

**5) How and when will funds be disbursed and by what agency/agencies?**

Projects selected for DRI funding will be assigned to the appropriate state agency to manage implementation of the project. The state agency selected and method of funding disbursement will be dependent on the specific project.