NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Regional Economic Development Councils

# Downtown Revitalization Initiative

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. | Office of Planning and Development

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. | Homes and Community Renewal



Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

# DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE

## Description

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) will invest $10 million in each of 10 communities ripe for development to transform them into vibrant communities where tomorrow's workforce will want to live, work and raise families. The program emphasizes using investments to reinforce and secure additional public and private investments proximal to, and within, downtown neighborhoods, and in doing so will build upon growth spurred by the Governor's Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs).

Cesar A. Perales has been designated Chairman to lead the initiative. Private sector experts and planners from the Department of State (DOS), with support from other state agencies, will assist selected municipalities in building strategic investment plans and identifying key projects consistent with the DRI's program goals.

## Downtown Identification

Each REDC will nominate one downtown in their region best positioned to take advantage of the DRI. The REDCs will use a template to nominate downtowns by June 30, 2016. The REDC may utilize an existing subcommittee or form a specific subcommittee to advance this project. The REDC may gather public input on downtowns under consideration.

REDCs will weigh, at a minimum, the criteria below when nominating downtowns:

1) Downtowns should be compact, with well-defined boundaries. There is no minimum or maximum size for downtowns. Downtowns can range from a corridor or block(s) of a neighborhood to the municipality's traditional central business district. However, core neighborhoods beyond the central business district are also eligible. For example, an arts or entertainment district could be the focus of the DRI, however, it should be shown how these areas complement existing downtowns.

2) The municipality, or the downtown's catchment area, should be of a size sufficient to support a vibrant, year-round downtown. In analyzing this, REDCs should consider whether there is a sizeable existing or increasing population within easy reach for whom this would be the primary downtown destination.

3) Downtowns should be selected that are able to capitalize on prior, or catalyze future, private and public investment in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas. When evaluating a downtown for nomination, the REDCs should consider:
    - The presence of nearby investments planned or undertaken through the REDCs or with other public or private funding;
    - Continuity with the REDC's previously articulated vision for the area/region and consistency with recent planning efforts for the area;
    - The existence of developable properties within the downtown, including properties that can be utilized for affordable housing;

- The growth potential and community involvement of anchor institutions in or near the downtown;
- The municipality's current investment commitment to the downtown, including through business improvement districts or partnerships with non-profits;
- The ability of existing infrastructure to support development of the downtown, and the potential to maximize recent infrastructure upgrades;
- Application of Smart Growth principles; and
- Investments in arts and cultural institutions and activities.

4) A crucial part of the selection of a downtown is the recent or impending job growth within, or in close proximity to, the downtown. The attraction of professionals to an active life in the downtown will support redevelopment and make growth sustainable in the long-term. In evaluating job growth near the downtown, REDCs should consider:
    - The presence of major job-creating projects and initiatives near the downtown;
    - The existence of new and expanding employers;
    - Whether new and existing jobs are accessible from the downtown by foot or via public transit; and
    - The diversity in area job opportunities, with different salaries/entry levels and potential for mobility between jobs.

5) The downtown must be an attractive and livable community for diverse populations of all ages, including millennials and skilled workers. In evaluating this, REDCs should consider whether the downtown contains, or could contain, the following physical properties and characteristics:
    - Developable mixed-use spaces;
    - Housing at different levels of affordability and type;
    - Commercial and retail main street businesses, including healthy and affordable food markets;
    - Multi-modal transit;
    - Walkability and bikeability, within the downtown and connecting the downtown to surrounding open space networks and regional destinations;
    - Accessible recreation amenities, parks and gathering spaces;
    - Access to health care facilities;
    - Cultural and entertainment amenities; and
    - Broadband accessibility.

6) The downtown should already embrace or have the ability to create and implement policies that increase livability and quality of life, including through:
    - Downtown plans;
    - Modern zoning and parking standards;
    - Management structure, such as a Downtown Manager or Downtown Business Improvement District;
    - Complete Streets plans and laws;
    - Transit-oriented development;
    - Land banks;
    - Energy-efficiency;
    - Smart Cities innovation; and
    - An inclusive environment for New Americans.

7) Downtowns must have sufficient local community and public official support in order to develop and implement their strategic investment plan. Local leaders and stakeholders who are committed to working together on a plan and the initial local lead should be identified.

**Strategic Investment Plans**

DOS will rapidly launch the DRI Fast Track Planning Initiative in July 2016 following certification of 10 downtowns. The communities will enjoy technical support from both state and private sector planning experts and a locally established committee. Private sector planning experts will be paid out of the $10 million awards (up to $300,000 per community), with the remainder of the award utilized to implement the plan. For downtowns that identify a need for healthy and affordable food markets, up to $500,000 of implementation funding will be available statewide for projects that are consistent with the Healthy Food/Healthy Communities Initiative.

The strategic investment plans will examine local assets and opportunities to build a vision for revitalization unique to that downtown. The plans will include identification of economic development, transportation, housing, and community projects that align with that vision and can be leveraged for additional investment.

Work on the strategic investment plans will be overseen by a local DRI Planning Committee. This committee should include representatives from a number of the following interest groups and organizations:

- The REDC for the municipality's region;
- Local and regional government officials;
- Neighborhood associations, homeowners, and renters;
- Property owners, local developers, and realtors;
- Chambers of commerce, local business associations, and business owners;
- Community foundations and community loan funds;
- Local development corporations, housing corporations, Industrial Development Agencies, and business improvement districts;
- Cultural institutions, including museums, historic sites, theaters, etc.;
- Educational institutions, including administrative and student leadership of area universities and colleges;
- Local non-profit and advocacy organizations that address quality of life (i.e. bicycle coalitions, park conservancies, arts organizations, YMCA, etc.);
- Social and public service organizations (local police, health care providers, etc.); and
- Faith-based organizations.

While strategic investment plans will be individualized to ensure sustainable growth in each unique downtown, fundamental goals include:

1) Creation of an active, desirable downtown with a strong sense of place;
2) Attraction of new businesses (including "Main Street" businesses), high-paying jobs, and skilled workers;
3) Arts and cultural attractions;
4) A diverse population, with residents and workers supported by complementary housing and employment opportunities;
5) An enhanced local property tax base; and
6) Amenities to support and enhance downtown living and quality of life.

Strategic investment plans will also consider, as appropriate for each community, the municipality's ability to create or improve these elements of the selected downtown, through policies as well as specific projects:

- Proximity and accessibility to daily destinations - particularly jobs and different housing types;
- Density in the downtown - compact zoning and building;
- Diversity in land uses and a zoning code enabling a mix of uses;
- Transit-oriented development with access to reliable public transit (within ½ mile of the downtown);
- Walkability/bikeability;
- Sustainable, energy-efficient development that aligns with the goals of the State Energy Plan;
- Smart Cities innovations that lower local government costs while improving municipal service delivery;
- Presence of and collaboration with anchor institutions in or near the downtown;
- Existence of healthy and affordable food markets;
- Accessible parks, public gathering spaces, and entertainment amenities;
- Inclusiveness of New Americans; and
- Demonstrations of support from key stakeholders and local capacity for implementation.

# Downtown Revitalization Initiative
# Instructions for Submitting Applications

The information below outlines application details including deadlines, e-mail addresses for submission, and links for additional information specific to each regions DRI criteria. Please refer to your specific Regional Council's website for additional information on the criteria and template/application as they may vary per region.

| Region | Application Deadline | Email to Submit Applications | Regional Webpage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Capital Region | Wednesday, June 01, 2016 | heidi.pasos@esd.ny.gov | Capital Region |
| Central NY | Tuesday, May 31, 2016 | James.Fayle@esd.ny.gov | Central New York |
| Finger Lakes | Friday, June 10, 2016 | NYS-FingerLakes@esd.ny.gov | Finger Lakes |
| Long Island | Friday, May 20, 2016 | LIREDC@esd.ny.gov | Long Island |
| Mid-Hudson | May 27, 2016 by 4:00pm | nys-midhudson@esd.ny.gov | Mid-Hudson |
| Mohawk Valley | Monday, May 23, 2016 | Kenneth.Tompkins@esd.ny.gov | Mohawk Valley |
| New York City | June 3, 2016 by 5:00pm | NYC-DRI@esd.ny.gov | New York City |
| North Country | May, 27, 2016 by 4:00pm | Nys-northcountry@esd.ny.gov | North Country |
| Southern Tier | Tuesday, May 31, 2016 | Donna.Howell@esd.ny.gov | Southern Tier |
| Western NY | Friday, June 03, 2016 | Christopher.Schoepflin@esd.ny.gov | Western New York |

# DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE – DOWNTOWN TEMPLATE

THIS TEMPLATE IS PROVIDED AS GENERAL GUIDANCE AND THE MINIMUM CRITERIA NECESSARY FOR THE REDCS TO EVALUATE AND SELECT A DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD. INDIVIDUAL REDCS MAY REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AS PART OF THEIR SELECTION PROCESS. PLEASE CHECK YOUR SPECIFIC REGIONAL COUNCILS WEBSITE FOR ADDITIONAL CRITERIA. WWW.REGIONALCOUNCILS.NY.GOV

## BASIC INFORMATION

**Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region:** Click here to enter text. **Municipality Name**: Click here to enter text.

**Downtown Name:** Click here to enter text.

**County:** Click here to enter text.

Downtown Description - Provide an overview of the downtown and summarize the rationale behind nominating this downtown for a Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) award):

Click here to enter text.

## DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

This section should be filled out with reference to the criteria set forth in the DRI Guidelines.

1) **Boundaries of the Downtown Neighborhood.** Detail the boundaries of the targeted neighborhood, keeping in mind that there is no minimum or maximum size, but that the neighborhood should be compact and well-defined. Core neighborhoods beyond a traditional downtown or central business district are eligible, if they can meet other criteria making them ripe for investment.
   Click here to enter text.

2) **Size.** Outline why the downtown, or its catchment area, is of a size sufficient to support a vibrant, year-round downtown, with consideration of whether there is a sizeable existing, or increasing, population within easy reach for whom this would be the primary downtown.

   Click here to enter text.

3) **Past Investments & Future Investment Potential**. Describe how this downtown will be able to capitalize on prior, and catalyze future, private and public investment in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas.

   Click here to enter text.

4) **Job Growth.** Describe how recent or impending job growth within, or in close proximity to, the downtown will attract professionals to an active life in the downtown, support redevelopment, and make growth sustainable in the long-term.

   Click here to enter text.

5) **Attractiveness of the Downtown.** Identify the properties or characteristics the downtown possesses that contribute or could contribute, if enhanced, to the attractiveness and livability of the downtown. Consider, for example, the presence of developable mixed-use spaces, housing at different levels of affordability and type, healthy and affordable food markets, walkability and bikeability, and public parks and gathering spaces.

   Click here to enter text.

6) **Policies to Enhance Quality of Life.** Articulate the policies in place that increase the livability and quality of life of the downtown. Examples include the use of local land banks, modern zoning codes, complete streets plans, or transit-oriented development. If policies achieving this goal are not currently in place, describe the ability of the municipality to create and implement such policies.

   Click here to enter text.

7) **Local Support.** Set forth the local and community support that exists for the revitalization of this downtown and the commitment among local leaders and stakeholders to building and implementing a strategic investment plan. Identify an initial local lead for the program that will work with outside experts to convene a local DRI Planning Committee to oversee the plan.

   Click here to enter text.

8) **Other.** Provide any other information that informed the nomination of this downtown for a DRI award.

   Click here to enter text.

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# DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Eligibility

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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

13. Is the template for the use of the Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) for final submissions of the 10 downtowns, or for the municipality to submit information to the REDCs?
    - Both. Each REDC will need to submit their nomination to the State using the template. REDCs have been invited to modify the template to include local criteria, and use it as a tool for interested communities to fill out and submit for their consideration. Each REDC will post their own version of the template for municipalities to use on their regional webpages, found by following the links at www.regionalcouncils.ny.gov.

14. 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.

15. 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.

## REDC Selection Process

16. Can a Regional Council nominate more than one downtown?
    - No, REDCs are charged with selecting only one downtown area.

17. 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.

18. How will the REDCs select one downtown?
    - Although the details of the process may vary between regions, all REDCs will use the criteria provided to inform their decision.

19. Will REDCs create a subcommittee to guide their selection process for the DRI?
    - Yes, although we are not requiring that a subcommittee be created if REDCs have an alternate mechanism that they would like to use.

20. Can the REDCs conduct interviews with representatives of nominated downtowns?
    - Yes. REDCs are encouraged to implement an inclusive process to identify and evaluate downtown neighborhoods. Interviews may be conducted as part of this process.

21. 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).

22. 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.

23. 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

24. 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.

25. 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

26. 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.

27. 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.

28. 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.

29. Can regions that competed for the Upstate Revitalization Initiative (URI) funds use their $500 million or $50 million award to compound the impact of the DRI funds?
    - Yes, REDCs are not restricted from investing the funds in the same area.

30. 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.

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