

## **Downtown Revitalization Initiative Three: Frequently Asked Questions**

For the most recent version of the FAQs, please check the DRI website at [www.ny.gov/dri](http://www.ny.gov/dri).

### **Context**

#### **How are communities selected for participation in the Downtown Revitalization Initiative?**

The ten Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) solicit interest in the program from communities in each of their regions. Interested communities submit applications using an application provided by the state. The REDCs review the applications against a list of desired attributes outlined in the Downtown Revitalization Initiative Guidebook, and may also hear presentations from representatives of the most promising DRI applications. The REDCs then nominate one downtown in their region best positioned to take advantage of the DRI.

#### **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.

#### **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 downtown 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.

#### **May the DRI boundary proposed in the application be modified?**

Yes. The DRI boundary proposed in the application is an initial determination of where a community wants to focus its revitalization efforts. As the selected DRI municipality goes through the planning process, it may determine that the initial boundary of the downtown area 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

### **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 DRI application and other past planning efforts that present a vision for downtown revitalization and potential projects and initiatives 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 agency staff from the NYS Department of State, NYS Homes and Community Renewal, and a consultant team hired by the state. Consultants will work with the LPC and state agency staff 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.

### **How is a Local Planning Committee formed?**

After a community is selected to participate in the DRI, a Local Planning Committee (LPC) made up of local and regional leaders, community representatives, and other stakeholders in the downtown is formed. 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). A DRI application may identify key individuals and/or organizations that should be considered for inclusion on the LPC, but final LPC membership will be determined by the State of New York in consultation with local leadership.

### **What is the role of the Local Planning Committee?**

The Local Planning Committee (LPC) works with the consulting team, state planners, and key municipal representatives to develop a Downtown Strategic Investment Plan for the revitalization of its downtown. The LPC's role is to ensure that the Plan reflects the unique nature of the downtown and that it fully addresses current and potential residential, commercial and institutional interests. The LPC will meet at least monthly to brainstorm ideas, review products and proposals, and provide direction and feedback to consultants.

The LPC will work with the consultant and state team 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.
- Identify and select projects key to overall downtown revitalization.
- Develop and adopt a Downtown Revitalization Initiative Strategic Investment Plan.
- Guide the development of a plan for public engagement appropriate for the community.

LPC members will also serve as ambassadors for the DRI, ensuring that their networks are effectively informed and engaged throughout the DRI planning process.

In addition to full LPC meetings, which may take place on a monthly or more frequent basis, LPC members may lead, or participate in, work groups or subcommittees.

LPC members will 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. Any member of the committee with a real or perceived conflict related to a specific project will be given the opportunity to recuse from voting on or opining on the project that presents a conflict while still participating in decision-making for other projects.

### **What is the role of the state team?**

Each DRI community is supported by a team of State agency staff from the Department of State (DOS), Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), and Empire State Development (ESD). The DOS planner, with assistance from HCR staff and the ESD Regional Director, manages the consultant team, and assists the consultants and LPC in meeting preparation, as well as preparation and review of DRI documents. The HCR representative brings to the planning process their knowledge of the community and expertise in housing development, CDBG, and HCR grants and programs. The ESD Regional Director provides a wealth of knowledge of past, present, and proposed development in an around the downtown. When needed, state agency staff will facilitate assistance from other State agencies.

The state team also works with the consultants to ensure project profiles include the appropriate level of information needed for state evaluation of projects, and that the final Strategic Investment Plans are fully compliant with all requirements set by the state.

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

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

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

Public engagement is a key component of the DRI planning process. A transparent and open planning process is fundamental to the success of the DRI effort, which will culminate in a DRI Strategic Investment Plan that reflects local needs and interests and can demonstrate broad public support. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders in the community, including municipal government, key employers and institutions, residents, business owners, stakeholder groups and organizations, and the general public are invited to attend LPC meetings and public workshops to learn about the DRI process and its intended outcomes; to pose questions; to comment on the findings, goals, and recommendations; and to contribute project ideas.

## **Where can I find more information about the roles of the Local Planning Committee, Consultant Team, and State Planners?**

The roles and responsibilities of each Local Planning Committee created as part of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, the Consultant Team assigned to the community, and the State Planners working with them are described in the document, [Roles & Responsibilities](#).

## **Process**

### **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 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.

### **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 2019. However, it is anticipated that the LPC will hold in-person meetings 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.

### **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 provided through local media, municipal websites, and in any other manner deemed appropriate by the LPC to reach all members of the community. In addition, meeting notices for all LPC meetings are posted on the state DRI website at: <http://www.ny.gov/dri>.

### **Must LPC meetings be held in accessible locations?**

Yes, LPC meetings should be held in facilities that are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

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

All full LPC meetings are open to the public. The extent that the public will be able to actively participate in a meeting will depend on the purpose and structure of the meeting. However, every meeting will include some time set aside for public comment to be received.

**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 a page on the state DRI website for posting meeting notices. DRI information, such as meeting materials, project concepts, online surveys, and comment forms, may be posted on websites set up by the consultant team or on existing local websites.

**How will LPCs make decisions?**

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

**How many public engagement events will be required?**

A minimum of three public meetings or workshops are required. However, LPCs are encouraged to work with the consultant and state teams to creatively and consistently engage the public throughout the planning process beyond the three meetings. To this end, initiatives and activities to promote and encourage participation by all sectors of the local population are encouraged, including focus groups, an interactive web presence, charrettes, surveys, information booths, and even storefront information centers.

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

The final DRI Strategic Investment Plan must be completed in March of 2019. Other anticipated milestones have been established to ensure project components are completed in time to meet the plan target date:

- November 2018: Completion of the downtown profile and assessment and DRI goals
- December 2018: Completion of strategies to implement DRI goals
- January 2019: Submission of draft project profiles
- March 2019: Submission of DRI Strategic Investment Plan with profiles of projects recommended for DRI funding

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

The state has developed a DRI project website: <https://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 third round of the DRI. Information posted on the website includes DRI applications, maps of each of the downtowns, meeting and event notices, and other relevant and useful information.

The website also retains information about prior rounds of the DRI, including copies of the plans and lists of projects awarded DRI funding.

### **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 and, Goals
- Develop Revitalization Strategies and Projects
- Prepare detailed Project Profiles
- Identify a Downtown Management and Implementation Strategy
- Complete the Final DRI Strategic Investment Plan

### **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**

### **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.

### **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, such as the month and year (July 2020), quarter or season (3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr, fall 2019) or for projects that are further out, just the year (2021).

### **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 economic development, transportation, housing, and community projects that align with the community's vision for the downtown and 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 zoning updates to major infrastructure projects. The recommended projects must clearly implement the vision, goals, and strategies for revitalization of the downtown, and taken together, should represent a holistic approach to downtown revitalization.

### **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 majority of projects should transform the physical environment of the downtown 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, certain non-capita projects such as downtown marketing, rezoning, and development of local policies may all be considered as potential projects for DRI funding in support of the goals and needs of the community.

### **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 costs that are not considered eligible for DRI funding, including: :

- Planning activities. Following the preparation of the DRI Strategic Investment Plan, all DRI funds must be used for projects that directly implement the plan. Utilizing DRI funds for additional planning is not the goal of the program.
- Operation and maintenance. DRI funds cannot be used for on-going or routine expenses, such as staff salaries and wages, rent, utilities, and property upkeep.
- Pre-award costs. Reimbursement for costs incurred before the DRI plan is complete and before funding awards are announced is not permitted.
- Property acquisition. A DRI project profile may include the cost of acquisition in the budget of a larger redevelopment, but it must also show that the acquisition itself will be, or has already been, covered by another funding source.
- Training and other program expenses. DRI is a one-time infusion of funds, and cannot be used to cover continuous costs, such as training programs, that would cease to exist once the DRI funds have been expended.
- Expenses related to existing programs. DRI is not intended to supplement existing programs or replace existing resources.

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

During the application process, communities are 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 open, community-based planning process is designed to encourage creative and innovative approaches to downtown revitalization, and will result in a list of potential projects, including some that were contemplated in the initial application and others that arose during the process.

**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 projects recommended for funding. Each project profile will include the project, its location, ownership and partners. Among the other details to be provided will be a description of the capacity of the project sponsor to implement and sustain the project; the budget and source of project funding; a construction and project cost estimation; regulatory requirements; conceptual design; and project readiness and a timeframe for implementation.

**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.

**Will a local match be required for DRI-funded projects?**

There is no local match requirement for DRI-funded projects. However, while DRI funding may be used to cover the entire cost of project, leveraging of investment dollars from other sources (i.e., private, local, federal, or other state sources) is strongly encouraged.

## **Implementation**

**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.

**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. Agency staff from DOS and HCR will work with 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.

**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.

**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 authority. 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.

**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 or authority to manage implementation of the project. The state agency or authority selected and method of funding disbursement will be dependent on the specific project.