

Neighborhood Initiatives Fund (NIF) - 2023 Grant Program Guidelines

Statement of Purpose

The Neighborhood Initiatives Fund Program (NIF or the Program), administered by the URA's Business Solutions Unit, is designed to provide grants to:

1. Help unlock the economic and placemaking potential within City of Pittsburgh neighborhood commercial corridors.
2. Support vision-to-action community investment strategies that build a more equitable Pittsburgh; and
3. Formalize collaborative partnerships across the City of Pittsburgh (City).

The Program is intended to assist nonprofit and community-based organizations with neighborhood-scale projects within commercial corridors that improve quality of life and maintain the corridor as a desirable location for small business. NIF projects include efforts that encourage investment through vacant property reclamation and stewardship, historic preservation, brownfield redevelopment, public infrastructure improvements, and other eligible efforts. Nonprofit organizations with for-profit development partners are also eligible to apply. ([Apply here](#))

It is the intention of this Program to increase NIF Grantees' visibility and accessibility to funding.

The NIF program may be funded through the City of Pittsburgh, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), and other URA funding sources.

Please note that if a NIF grant is awarded, funds will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis only. If you are awarded a NIF grant, you CANNOT spend ANY funds on the NIF project until the project contract is signed by both the URA and your organization.

Definitions

Administrative Fees- Administrative Fees means the administrative and other costs, including but not limited to costs for Project preparation, Project supervision, and preparation of reports and unaudited or audited financial reports, incurred by the Partner Entities in connection with the management of the Projects.

Commercial corridor- places where local residents shop and gather; places where people build wealth through small businesses, find jobs, and share, celebrate, and preserve community culture.

Site Control – For the purposes of the Neighborhood Initiatives Fund, Site Control is defined as "explicit written permission from the property owner or landlord for use and improvements, or possession of a Title and Deed to a property." Restate – for purposes of the NIF program a sales agreement or exclusive negotiations does not constitute site control unless the following criteria are met:

- a. The closing date for the sale of the property occurs within 90 days from the submission of the NIF application.
- b. NIF funds **are not** to be used for the purchase of the property.

NOTE: If the sale of the building does not occur, for any reason, NIF funds will be rescinded and reprogrammed to another qualifying applicant.

Schedule

May 15, 2023	Funding round opens.
Information Sessions <i>Thursday May 25th 12:00 pm</i> <i>Wednesday June 7th 6:00 pm</i>	Registration opens May 15 (register here)
July 21 , 2023	Applications are due by 5 pm
July – August 2023	Review committee meets.
September 2023	Funding awards announced; awardee orientations are scheduled.
September-December 2023	Contracting process begins.

Use of Funding

The Program will fund **up to 15** proposals for non-housing related place-based initiatives and equitable neighborhood-scale projects within Pittsburgh’s neighborhood commercial corridors. Funds are awarded on a competitive basis.

Projects located throughout all commercial corridors in the City of Pittsburgh will be considered. You can find a map of City of Pittsburgh commercial corridors [here](#). This map also includes layers for Avenues of Hope corridors, CDBG eligible areas, neighborhood and council districts.

Proposals should identify the strategies and tactics associated with the proposed initiative and how the community will benefit from those strategic efforts. Potential tactics include but are not limited to:

- 1. Conceptual design and engineering.

2. Land remediation.
3. Vacant property activation.
4. Historic preservation.
5. Commercial district revitalization; and/or
6. Public realm improvements.

Eligible Grantees

Nonprofit entities ONLY (including government agencies and those nonprofits with for-profit development partners).

ALL **must** register their business with the City of Pittsburgh department of finance and be up to date on all local service and payroll tax filings.

Eligible Activities

Non-housing projects in neighborhood commercial districts that benefit the community and catalyze economic development. Hard and soft costs are typically eligible if they fall into the following categories:

1. Vacant property reclamation and stewardship;
2. Historic preservation;
3. Brownfield development;
4. Construction of public space and neighborhood infrastructure improvements, including, but not limited to:
 - a. Commercial building improvements;
 - b. Streetscape improvements;
 - c. Transit and transportation-related improvements;
 - d. Parks and open space improvements;
 - e. Green infrastructure; and/or
 - f. Public art
5. Filling development gaps in projects

Ineligible Activities and Projects

1. Projects outside of the City of Pittsburgh;
2. Projects that are located outside of City neighborhood commercial corridors;
3. Single or multi-family residential buildings, or the residential portions of mixed-use buildings;
4. Improvements proposed in the public right-of-way that have not been approved by and/or coordinated with the City of Pittsburgh;
5. Improvements proposed on properties without site control. Applicant must have explicit written permission from the property owner or landlord **or** possess a Title to the property. Sales agreements and exclusive negotiations agreements **do not** qualify as site control unless the following criteria are met:
 - a. The closing date for the sale of the property occurs within 90 days from the submission of the NIF application.

- b. NIF funds **are not** to be used for the purchase of the property.

NOTE: If the sale of the building does not occur, for any reason, NIF funds will be rescinded and reprogrammed to another qualifying applicant.

6. Closing costs, down payments, or any other type of payment toward purchase of a property;
7. Security deposits; rent
8. Payment of back taxes, liens, and/or utility tap in/monthly fees;
9. Marketing and promotional expenses;
10. Travel expenses or any lodging/hotel expenses;
11. Operating, overhead, or ongoing programming costs;
12. Regular maintenance costs e.g., annual inspections, vehicle maintenance, mowing service, etc.;
13. Administrative fees including but not limited to, rent, utilities, insurance, employee wages, employee benefits, office supplies etc.
14. Development/developer fees;

Specialized Grant Categories

The Neighborhood Initiatives fund has grown since its founding in 2019. With additional funds the URA is now able to offer categorized grant opportunities to fit the growing needs of communities. Other listed eligibility requirements do not change for these categories. While these types of projects have always been eligible under the Neighborhood Initiatives Fund Program, funds will be set aside for these particular categories.

Note: the URA reserves the right to increase the funding amount and/or reprogram these funds if there are no/limited applicants or if the applicants do not meet other application and eligibility requirements. Applicants that apply for a Specialized Grant Category and are denied will still be considered among the larger pool of applicants.

ALL OTHER NIF GRANT REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES APPLY TO THESE CATEGORIES. NO EXCEPTIONS.

These categories are:

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upgrades in business corridors**- this includes but is not limited to, the removal of architectural barriers, sidewalk improvements, public restroom improvements, ramps, railing installation, etc.
Maximum Grant Amount: \$30,000
Number of Grants Awarded: Up to 2
- **Public Art Installation and Improvements** – public art improvements must be in business corridors and may be installed on public property. Installation on public property must follow all necessary policies and procedures of the City of Pittsburgh Art and Civic Design Commission. Temporary installations are not applicable under this grant category.
Maximum Grant Amount: \$30,000

Number of Grants Awarded: Up to 2

- **Nonprofit Building Improvements** – Pittsburgh building stock is aging and the NIF program has received several requests for items such as roof replacements and energy efficiency upgrades. Construction and improvement costs are rising and the URA understands the importance of groups and organizations occupying and owning space in their communities, which can be difficult if a building is not functioning properly. Use of funds must relate to the safety of the building; these funds can be used for items including but not limited to, roof replacement, window upgrades, brick pointing, stair repairs, mold remediation, soffit/fascia repairs, and lighting upgrades. These funds cannot be used for aesthetic improvements such as paint, signage, flooring, utility turn on fees or meter replacements, or any external utility improvements or replacements.

Note: the applicant must own the building, with no liens or back taxes (besides a mortgage) in order to qualify for this grant category.

Maximum Grant Amount: \$50,000

Grants Awarded: 1

- **Small Nonprofit Organization Grants**- in order to make the Neighborhood Initiatives grant more accessible to smaller groups the URA will be able to provide up to two (2) \$50,000 grants where matching components will not apply. The organization's **gross revenue and assets** must be less than or equal to \$250,000 in order to qualify. Applicants must demonstrate need and supply their most recent 990.

Maximum Grant Amount: \$50,000

Grants Awarded: up to 2

General NIF Grant Parameters

The minimum grant request is \$20,000 and the maximum is \$100,000.

For each NIF round grant requests less than \$20,000 will not be considered and investment in a project will not exceed \$100,000.00. Note that this is not on a per project basis, it is on a per round basis. I.e., projects that were funded in a previous round for a planning/architecture/engineering phase of the project may apply for funds to execute the construction phase or other next steps of a project.

Some grant requests may be partially funded due to funding source, availability of funds, and eligible/ineligible uses in the grant request.

All NIF awards are subject to availability of funding.

All grant awardees must complete a grant report upon the closing of their NIF grant. Organizations that fail to complete their grant report before the next round of funding opens **will not** be considered for another NIF award. Information on accessing and completing the grant report will go out to awardees

upon grant orientation, upon the final reimbursement request and closing. Reminders will also be sent each quarter before the upcoming grant round to organizations who must complete a grant report.

There are two tiers of NIF grants:

1. Tier 1 – \$20,000 to \$30,000
No matching requirement.
2. Tier 2 - \$30,000.01 to \$100,000.00
Matching requirement: For every two dollars (\$2) of Program funds committed to a project, there must be at least one dollar (\$1) of match invested into the NIF project. Matching funds must be committed (not pending) and come from non-URA and non-City sources. For example, a loan from the URA's commercial lending department does not count as matching funds but can be included in the project budget if a loan agreement was signed.

Funds already expended toward the project, prior to execution of a contract agreement, **do not** count as matching funds and cannot be reimbursed, regardless of funding source.

Grantee must show proof (in the form of paid invoices) of the use of matching funds when the Grantee submits the quarterly and final reports.

Grant Disbursement:

Grants will be disbursed according to the following schedule:

- Upon the execution of the grant agreement and finalization of the project scope, the awardee will submit a request to the URA for up to 90 percent of the award amount.
- Upon completion of the project, the awardee will submit a final report and invoice to the URA for the remaining 10 percent of the grant amount.
- *NOTE: Awardees will be required to submit quarterly reports throughout the agreement period. Quarterly reports must include a detailed accounting of expenditures, including all receipts and evidence of matching expenditures if required. Awardees must submit reports according to the schedule established in their grant agreement, and must adhere strictly to their approved budget, or risk having to return funds to the URA.*

Please note that if a NIF grant is awarded, funds MUST ONLY be spent according to the agreed upon scope and budget. If you are awarded a NIF grant, you CANNOT spend ANY funds on the NIF project until the project contract is signed by both the URA and your organization.

Conditions and Criteria for Grants

1. Proposals must meet the following criteria to be eligible for a NIF grant:

- a. The project must demonstrate public support (i.e., undertaken by a community-based organization, letters of support from community organizations/council office(s), public meeting minutes, petitions, etc.).
 - b. The project must be located within a neighborhood commercial corridor.
 - c. The project must be financially feasible.
 - d. Project matching funds must be committed and on hand at the time of submission. Pending funds will not be accepted as match. Other URA funding sources do not count towards matching funds.
 - e. The project must contribute to neighborhood commercial corridor stability or revitalization.
 - f. The project must be in compliance with a neighborhood comprehensive plan (if one is available).
 - g. The project must include a maintenance plan, if applicable.
 - h. The project must have documented control of the project site.
2. Because there may be insufficient funds to approve all eligible proposals that meet the minimum criteria, proposals for NIF funding will be evaluated based on criteria competitive basis, including, but not limited to the following additional criteria:
- a. Degree of distress of the neighborhood in which the initiative/project will be located. Priority consideration will be given to projects within Avenues of Hope commercial corridors or corridors within CDBG eligible Census Tracts
 - b. Measurable impact of initiative/project to be undertaken, such as permanent job creation, area benefit, individuals served etc.
 - c. Projects that address neighborhood equity disparities.
 - d. Project innovation/creativity
 - e. Sustainability/longevity of the project
 - f. Financial feasibility of completing and maintaining the project
 - g. Readiness of project (shovel ready and able to be completed within the term of the contract).

Procedures for the Grant

1. The grantee must be a registered nonprofit and have tax clearance with the City of Pittsburgh. <https://pittsburghpa.gov/finance/new-bus-reg>.
2. The grantee will work with URA staff to finalize the scope of work and grant agreement for the project. **Please note that if a NIF grant is awarded, funds MUST ONLY be spent according to the agreed upon scope and budget. If you are awarded a NIF grant, you CANNOT spend ANY funds on the NIF project until the project contract is signed by both the URA and your organization.**
3. Any costs incurred prior to the execution of the grant agreement will be ineligible for reimbursement. **Costs incurred prior to the grant agreement are also ineligible for use as matching funds.**

4. The NIF project must meet all State and Federal statutory mandates (i.e., wage rates, insurance/bonding requirements, competitive bidding). Project managers will guide awardees through any necessary processes.
5. If the NIF project involves construction or related tasks, the grantee must account for prevailing wage rates in the project budget.
6. The NIF project must document, when required, the availability of funding match (e.g., grant award letter, or grant agreement). Please note that a pending application DOES NOT qualify as documented match.
7. The URA acknowledges the City of Pittsburgh's goal of 18% minority-owned business enterprise (MBE) and 7% women-owned business enterprise (WBE) participation in projects with total projects costs of \$250,000 or greater. The same Minority-owned and Women-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) goals apply to professional service contracts of \$75,000.00 or greater. All successful applicants are required to demonstrate and document a good faith effort to obtain MWBE participation in work performed with the use of URA funding for projects or activities that meet or exceed the thresholds mentioned above.
8. Construction activities under NIF are subject to inspections by the URA.
9. The Grantee and the chosen consultants and/or contractors is/are bound by all relevant payment and inspection procedures imposed by the URA.
10. The URA Site Advisor will review the scope of work and conduct an initial inspection of the Project site.
11. The URA will review the scope of work to determine if the cost estimates for the proposed scope are reasonable.
12. Contracts may be subject to a competitive bidding process or subject to the URA review of the consultants' or contractors' proposed costs.
13. The URA Construction Advisor will conduct on-site stage inspections for construction contracts or shall review consultant contracts at the time the Grantee requests reimbursement for work completed.
14. Payment requests will need to include proof of payment to consultants.
15. At the time Project construction is completed, a final inspection may be conducted by the URA Construction Advisor. A Senior Construction Supervisor or Manager may also inspect the property. If necessary, a City Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections (PLI) Advisor may also perform an inspection of the completed work.
16. The project will be assigned a URA project manager, who will be the grantee's primary contact throughout the process and will provide additional technical assistance to the grantee as necessary.
17. **Grants will be disbursed on an up to 90-10 basis, as outlined in the Grant Disbursement section above.**
18. **Please note that if a NIF grant is awarded, funds will be disbursed as outlined in the Grant Disbursement section above. If you are awarded a NIF grant, you CANNOT spend ANY funds on the NIF project until the project contract is signed by both the URA and your organization.**
19. The final disbursement of NIF funds will not be released until a final grant report has been submitted. The final grant report may be completed online and must document the following:

- a. How the project fulfilled the goals of the program (improved quality of life and equitable neighborhood investment);
 - b. Measurable positive impacts of the project (job creation, placemaking, expansion of the City's tax base, etc.);
 - c. Construction and permanent job creation, including number of local resident jobs and wage rates, if applicable;
 - d. Funding leveraged as a result of NIF funding; and
 - e. MWBE good faith effort and participation rates if applicable.
20. Recipients will be required to expend all NIF grant funds on the project within 12 months from the date of execution of the NIF grant agreement. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.
21. NIF grant funds may be rescinded and reprogrammed if the grant recipient does not sign a commitment letter acknowledging the award of funds within the time period specified in the letter.
22. NIF grant funds may be rescinded and reprogrammed if the grantee fails and/or refuses to acquire or meet necessary project requirements including but not limited to estimates, drawings, permits, and other applicable Federal/state/local requirements.
23. NIF grant funds may be rescinded and reprogrammed if requirements within the grant agreement are not adhered to and/or funds are not expended within the one-year agreement period.

Design Standards

1. Projects that propose work in the public right-of-way, (publicly owned streets and sidewalks), must comply with standards established by the City of Pittsburgh. URA and City staff will review all designs to ensure that they are consistent with the approved City standards. The City's right-of-way procedures policy can be downloaded [here](#).
2. Projects that propose public art on City-owned property or in the City's right-of-way must have the project approved by the City's Art and Civic Design Commission. The Commission's procedures can be accessed [here](#).

Additional Information

For additional information, please contact:

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The Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh abides by all applicable laws and regulations regarding nondiscrimination and refrains from discriminating on the basis of age, race, color, religious

creed, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, political or union affiliation, and/or disability. No person shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination solely on the basis of any of the above factors under the loan and grant programs operated by the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh.