

# Neighborhood Initiatives Fund (NIF) - 2024 Grant Program Guidelines

## Statement of Purpose

The Neighborhood Initiatives Fund Program (NIF or the Program), administered by the URA's Business District Services Unit, is designed to help to advance projects in Pittsburgh's neighborhood business districts that enhance the physical and visual elements of the corridor, and are aimed at improving the quality of life for both businesses and residents. NIF grants are designed to:

1. Help unlock the economic and placemaking potential within City of Pittsburgh neighborhood business districts.
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).

NIF projects include efforts that encourage investment through vacant property activation, building façade restoration, public space improvements, public art installations, public infrastructure improvements, and other eligible efforts.

**NIF grants will be between \$30,000 and \$150,000.**

**Letters of Interest (LOI) for the NIF program will be accepted on a rolling basis beginning JULY 1, 2024.** LOIs will continue to be accepted until the funds have been fully committed. *See the **How to Apply** section below for details.*

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. 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

**Neighborhood Business Districts** - 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.

**Soft Costs** – Costs associated with non-construction portion of a project. This includes but is not limited to: engineering or architect fees, legal fees, and permitting fees.

## **Use of Funding**

The Program will fund proposals for place-based initiatives and equitable neighborhood-scale projects within Pittsburgh’s neighborhood business districts. Funds are awarded on a competitive basis.

***Please note that NIF funds cannot be used for residential projects.***

Projects located throughout all neighborhood business districts in the City of Pittsburgh will be considered. You can find a map of NIF eligible areas [here](#). In the upper left corner click on “Layers.” A list will appear on the right. Select the “Neighborhood Business Districts” layer (you might also want to de-select the other options – it’s less confusing!). Projects located outside of these layers will be considered on a case-by-case basis; however, they must be adjacent to a business district, and adhere to the NIF guidelines.

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. Vacant property activation.
2. Facade or other exterior building improvements
3. Public realm improvements.
4. Public art.

## **Eligible Grantees**

Nonprofit entities, local businesses, and property owners are eligible to apply for this grant. **Please note that if the applicant is NOT a non-profit organization, they must include a letter of support from their local community and/or business district group with their final application.**

**Prior to submitting an LOI, all organizations 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.** Awards may be rescinded or reprogrammed if the applicant or partner organization fails to complete these requirements.

### **Eligible Activities**

**Non-housing** projects in neighborhood commercial districts that benefit the community and catalyze economic development. Projects must focus on construction of public space and neighborhood infrastructure improvements, including, but not limited to:

1. Exterior commercial building improvements;
2. Streetscape improvements;
3. Transit and transportation-related improvements;
4. Parks and open space improvements;
5. Green infrastructure;
6. Public art;
7. Façade or exterior building restoration.

Up to five percent (5%) of the grant award may be used toward operating costs including employee wages. This must be reflected in the project budget.

### **Ineligible Activities and Projects**

1. Projects outside of the City of Pittsburgh;
2. Projects that are not located in or adjacent to neighborhood business districts;
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. Ongoing programming costs;
12. Regular maintenance costs e.g., annual inspections, vehicle maintenance, mowing service, etc.;
13. Administrative fees exceeding the previously stated 5% allowance.
14. Development/developer fees; fiscal sponsorship fees.

## **How to Apply**

1. **Letter of Interest:**
  - a. **Applicants MUST submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) for an eligible project located in a City of Pittsburgh neighborhood business district to be considered for NIF funding.**
  - b. **Letters of Interest for the NIF grant will be accepted on a rolling basis beginning July 1, 2024.**
  - c. Interested eligible applicants will submit a no more than 3-page letter of interest including the following:
    - i. Location of project
    - ii. Statement of need
    - iii. Project description and activities
    - iv. Project budget and timeline
    - v. A signed 2024 W9 form
  - d. The letter of interest can be uploaded here (link) or submitted to [NIF@ura.org](mailto:NIF@ura.org)
  - e. **PLEASE NOTE: Submission of an LOI does not guarantee funding.**
2. **Site Visit:**
  - a. Following receipt of an eligible LOI, URA staff will set up a time to visit the proposed project site and discuss a potential application, including items and activities that would be eligible within the NIF guidelines.
  - b. **PLEASE NOTE: Completion of a site visit does not guarantee funding.**
3. **Application:**
  - a. Following completion of the site visit, URA staff will provide the applicant with a link to the full NIF application.
  - b. The applicant will submit the fully completed application to the URA. All information and attachments requested in the application MUST be included in the submission. Incomplete applications will not be considered.
  - c. **PLEASE NOTE: A completed application does not guarantee funding.**

## **Application/Award Timeline**

NIF applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. Below is an example of timeline, from URA receipt of an LOI to disbursement of funds (if awarded). **Please note that this is an estimate – unforeseen factors may affect the timeline.**

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|---|---------|
| 1. URA receipt of LOI to site visit:  | 6 weeks |
| 2. Date of site visit to submission of full application:                                      | 2 weeks |
| 3. URA receipt of full application to final approval of award:                                | 1 month |
| 4. Final approval of award to issuance of commitment letter:                                  | 2 weeks |
| 5. Execution of commitment letter to final execution of contract:                             | 6 weeks |
| <b>Please note: work cannot begin on the proposed project until the contract is executed.</b> |         |
| 6. URA receipt of first invoice to awardee receipt of funds:                                  | 2 weeks |

### General NIF Grant Parameters

Interested eligible applicants will submit a no more than 3-page letter of interest (see How to Apply instructions above) addressing the following:

1. Statement of need
2. Project activities
3. Project budget and timeline

The minimum grant request is \$30,000 and the maximum is \$150,000.

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

For each NIF round, grant requests less than \$30,000 will not be considered and investment in a project will not exceed \$150,000.00. Note: 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.

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 – \$30,000 to \$50,000  
No matching requirement.

2. Tier 2 - \$50,001 to \$150,000.00

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 and in hand (not pending) at the time of application. Matching funds must come from non-City or non-URA sources. For example, a loan from the URA's commercial lending department, or grant funds from the Neighborhood Economic Development grant do not count as matching funds but can be included in the project budget.

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.

**Grant Disbursement:**

Grants will be disbursed according to the following schedule:

- Grantee may provide reimbursement requests no more frequently than once every two calendar weeks. Requests are to be completed [online](#).
- The URA shall endeavor to pay the draw request amounts within thirty (30) days of receipt of the disbursement request.
- Ten (10) percent of the total award amount will be withheld from reimbursement. 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 must submit reports according to their grant agreement, and must adhere strictly to their approved budget, or risk having funds rescinded or reprogrammed.**

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., letters of support from community organizations/council office(s), public meeting minutes, petitions, etc.).
  - b. The project must be located within or adjacent to a City of Pittsburgh neighborhood business district.
  - c. The project must be financially feasible. Applicants must provide a full sources and uses table using the template provided in the application.
  - 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 and/or City funding sources do not count towards matching funds.
  - e. The project must contribute to neighborhood business district stability or revitalization.

- f. The project must include a maintenance plan, if applicable.
  - g. 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 project will be located.
  - 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. 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.
4. 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.

5. The Grantee and the chosen consultant and/or contractor is/are bound by all relevant payment and inspection procedures imposed by the URA.
6. Payment requests will need to include proof of payment.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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. 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.

### **Inspections and Design Standards**

1. Construction activities under NIF are subject to inspections by the URA.
2. The URA will review the scope of work to determine if the cost estimates for the proposed scope are reasonable and conduct an initial inspection of the Project Site.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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](#).
7. 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](#).

### **Notification of Awards**

The URA reserves the right to:

1. Reject any and all letters of interest and/or applications.
2. Announce all awards publicly.

### **Additional Information**

For additional information, please contact: [NIF@ura.org](mailto:NIF@ura.org)

*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.*