

# HENNEPIN COUNTY MINNESOTA

## 2026 Request for Applications

### Business District Initiative (BDI) Program



*City of Rogers (2021 BDI Grant Awardee)*

**Application period opens:** Thursday, March 5, 2026  
**Closing date for all questions:** Thursday, March 26, 2026 by 3 p.m.  
**Applications due:** Thursday, April 2, 2026 by 3 p.m.



# Business District Initiative Program Guidelines

## Background

The Hennepin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (“HCHRA”) is soliciting applications for the Business District Initiative (the “Grant”). As used herein, the entity/individual responsible for any awarded Grant may be referred to as the “Applicant” and the Applicant’s response to this request for applications (the “RFA”) may be referred to as the “Application”.

The Business District Initiative (BDI) supports suburban cities in strengthening priority business districts, main streets, commercial nodes, and town centers. Funded by HCHRA, the program invests in locally driven strategies that enhance economic vitality, create jobs, generate tax base, and build vibrant, compact, community destinations.

Administered by the Hennepin County Housing and Economic Development (HED) for HCHRA, the Business District Initiative (BDI) bolsters city efforts to invigorate small business districts, main streets, and cultural corridors. Thriving commercial areas provide essential goods and services, create a sense of place, and make communities more desirable and productive. Small businesses generate significant tax revenue, provide jobs, and serve as hubs of activity. Prosperous business districts and cultural corridors foster entrepreneurship and support the region’s innovation economy. The BDI program offers funding assistance for strategies that enhance the economic vitality of these priority areas throughout Hennepin County.

Cities are in the best position to design and implement strategies that support their community’s priority business districts. BDI program priorities are to create places that people want to be and build connections by:

- Enhancing compact, walkable environments and improving accessibility and safety for bike and pedestrian alternatives to driving
- Creating a vibrant sense of place with an inviting public realm
- Highlighting local community assets, including those that reflect the diverse values, culture, and heritage of the people who live and work there
- Supporting economic vitality, job creation, and equitable access to economic opportunity
- Building connections to the locally-owned, independent small business ecosystem

Hennepin County HED manages several other HCHRA and County programs that provide place-based assistance to cities, including the Hennepin Planning Grant and Active Living grants. HCHRA reserves the right to refer applicants to, or consider applications under, other programs that may be better aligned with proposed project goals, as timing and funding allows.

## Available Funding

In 2026, up to \$200,000 is available across the Business District Initiative (BDI) and Hennepin Planning Grants (HPG) programs.

The program is competitive. The maximum award per individual project shall not exceed fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000). Assistance under this program shall be provided exclusively in the form of grants. No loans or deferred loans are authorized or available through the BDI program.

Disbursement of funds under BDI shall be made on a cost-incurred, reimbursement basis only. Eligible expenses shall be limited to those incurred subsequent to the execution of the grant award agreement. Requests for reimbursement must be supported with appropriate documentation, which shall demonstrate consistency with the approved project budget and the terms of the executed grant agreement.

A local match is not required as a condition of award eligibility. However, the provision of matching funds will be considered as part of the evaluation process.

## **Eligible Applicants**

Suburban municipalities, housing and redevelopment authorities, economic development authorities, or port authorities. Other municipal jurisdictions, with authority to administer the proposed project, may submit proposals, and the Authority reserves the right to review and consider them.

## **Eligible Locations**

- Hennepin County business districts, main streets, and cultural corridors with high concentrations of locally-owned, neighborhood-focused retail, office, restaurant and/or entertainment uses that offer a variety of goods and services in a walkable or aspiring-to-be walkable environment
- Eligible locations may be a formally established business district, such as a traditional downtown, or business nodes and informal districts or business clusters that have been identified by the City as priority areas
- Proposals must include a minimum of four distinct buildings and a minimum of four distinct businesses. The scope of the project should ensure a direct or indirect impact on a majority of businesses within the area. The projects must benefit the district as a whole

## **Eligible Uses of Funding**

The Business District Initiative focuses on supporting vibrant business districts or nodes that are, or are trying to have an easily recognized identity, are more human-centered and walkable, are connected to places within and near the district or node, have public spaces that make people feel welcome, support sustainability and climate resilience in the public realm, and reflect the communities that they serve. While some business districts have developed over time to reflect most or all these elements, many districts, or business nodes are at different stages of achieving these characteristics. The BDI program funds activities that advance the above goals, but are also context sensitive, recognizing that in some areas more fundamental change is necessary to achieve greater walkability or compact development. In such cases other Hennepin County programs, such as the Hennepin Planning Grants program, may be more

appropriate. In general, eligible uses include, but are not limited to:

- **Attracting New Businesses:** Initiatives focused on recruiting new locally-owned businesses to the district through comprehensive district-wide marketing, branding, and promotion efforts.
- **Placemaking & Public Realm Enhancements:** Design and implement district-wide improvements that strengthen community identity, sense of place, and create welcoming and accessible public spaces, and enhance walkability (e.g., street furniture, wayfinding signage, and other related efforts).
- **Technical Assistance:** Support services, across a business district, for establishing special service districts or business associations, including financial, legal, tax-related services, and merchandising assistance.
- **Small-Business Incubators:** Establishment of incubators to support the growth and development of small businesses.
- **Additional Projects:** Other initiatives aligned with BDI objectives, subject to prior approval from Hennepin County staff may be considered.

The following table outlines different forms of business districts and potential BDI projects most impactful toward achieving BDI goals, for each district typology. Hennepin County encourages Applicants to review the table and closely consider the needs of the district and the type of intervention when completing the application.

<b>Business District Typology</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>BDI Eligible Uses</b>
<p>Historic Downtown</p> <p>Traditional "Main Street" business district with an assortment of retail, restaurants and services; easily recognized identity within the city and to nearby communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve access to public spaces</li> <li>• create cohesive brand identity reflected throughout district</li> <li>• enhance efforts to encourage walking and biking within and to the area</li> <li>• expand the walkable nature of the area to support Main Street businesses</li> <li>• support local businesses through targeted marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• district-wide marketing or branding efforts</li> <li>• placemaking and/or public realm enhancements</li> <li>• technical assistance as defined above across the business district</li> <li>• business recruitment</li> </ul>
<p>Suburban Downtown</p> <p>Suburban setting with occasional mixed-use developments, often features public spaces like nearby parks or plazas, more auto-oriented environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enhance connectivity to destinations nearby and within the district</li> <li>• foster a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environment</li> <li>• support local businesses through targeted marketing and branding</li> <li>• develop public spaces that encourage more foot traffic</li> <li>• encourage a diverse mix of tenants to enhance attractiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• district-wide marketing or branding efforts</li> <li>• placemaking and/or public realm enhancements</li> <li>• technical assistance as defined above across the business district</li> <li>• business recruitment</li> </ul>
<p>Neighborhood Business Node</p> <p>Smaller business districts serving local neighborhoods, mix of retail, services, and dining, walkable and bike-friendly with nearby residential areas, often includes assets such as libraries or community centers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strengthen existing walkability, and/or improve pedestrian environment</li> <li>• promote local businesses and community engagement</li> <li>• foster a sense of community through regular events and activities</li> <li>• support local businesses through targeted marketing and branding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• technical assistance as defined above across the business district</li> <li>• districtwide marketing or branding efforts</li> <li>• placemaking and/or public realm enhancements</li> <li>• business recruitment</li> </ul>
<p>Commercial Strip Mall</p> <p>Retail stores and service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve pedestrian and bicycle access</li> <li>• develop public spaces that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• technical assistance, as defined above, across the business district</li> </ul>

<p>businesses along major roads, mostly car-oriented with larger parking lots, typically features national chains and big-box retailers, limited pedestrian connectivity and public spaces</p>	<p>encourage foot traffic and contribute to a sense of place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diversify tenant mix to include more local and unique businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• business recruitment</li> </ul>
<p>Concentration of Stand-Alone Storefronts</p> <p>Individual freestanding commercial buildings spread over an area, variety of business types often locally owned, less cohesive identity compared to centralized districts, more car-dependent with limited walkability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enhance identity and try to connect to broader business and local community</li> <li>• promote collaboration and joint marketing/branding among businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• technical assistance across business district</li> <li>• business recruitment</li> </ul>

We encourage applicants to think strategically about the typology of their district and the most impactful intervention to achieve both the project and BDI program goals. Efforts to address the built environment might be more warranted before common BDI efforts, and program staff could discuss other available planning support. We recognize that individual districts may have requirements and needs that cannot easily be captured in these recommendations. Applicants are encouraged to reach out to staff to discuss any project ideas that are not identified in the eligible activities listed above or in the business district table to determine if they meet program goals.

### Ineligible Uses of Funds

The following uses cannot be used for reimbursement under the BDI program:

- Building façade improvements
- Land use planning or zoning studies
- Redevelopment feasibility or market analyses
- Business organization operational support
- Internal administrative and overhead costs
- Projects that disproportionately benefit a single property owner
- Stand-alone landscaping projects
- Temporary improvements or events
- General replacement or maintenance of infrastructure

## Contracting and Reporting

Any grant agreement resulting from this RFA will be a written instrument or electronic document defining the legal relationship between HCHRA as the granting agency, and the grantee. The main purpose of this relationship and agreement is to transfer public funds to the grantee to support a public purpose authorized by law. By comparison, the grant agreement is not a professional or technical contract where HCHRA is acquiring goods or services for HCHRA's direct benefit or use.

HCHRA requires all awarded projects to include a final report summarizing the process, outcomes, and impacts of the completed work and a memorandum, upon request, detailing feedback on how to improve the HPG program and application process.

HCHRA is obligated to follow the Minnesota Data Practices Act, which means that applications will likely be public data after the evaluation and selection process. A statement identifying data as copyrighted or otherwise protected does not prevent public access to the data contained in the response if such data does not qualify as trade secret data.

Receiving funds through this program does not guarantee that future capital funding will be made available.

## Request for Applications (RFA) Process

Applications must be submitted through Hennepin County's [Supplier Portal](#), accessible via the Hennepin County [BDI website](#). In order to submit an Application, you must first register with the Supplier Portal. For more information on how to register, please go to the [Supplier Portal help page](#). Applicants are urged to be as complete with their application as possible. Clear and concise responses are appreciated, and bulleted points are encouraged.

- **Applications are due by 3:00 p.m. April 2, 2026.** Incomplete applications or applications submitted outside of the designated Supplier Portal may not be reviewed.
- Applicants are strongly encouraged to make their submissions well in advance of the application due date as the process may take some time to complete. Failure to submit an application on time may be grounds for rejection of the application; however, HCHRA reserves the right, in its sole and absolute discretion, to accept applications after the time and date specified.

Applications must include the following items:

1. 2026 Business District Initiative Application, including Outcomes, Deliverables and Measures of Success Form and BDI Budget Form (included with application)
2. Map(s) of project area(s)
3. Resolution, or letter(s) of support

Applicant shall be solely responsible for securing all additional funds necessary for completion of the Project.

When submitting an Application, Applicants must follow the specific format and content requirements in these guidelines and in the application. Failure to do so will likely prolong the evaluation process and/or may be grounds for rejection of the Application.

Applicant shall describe, in detail, the proposed uses of the Grant funds for the Project. Any other use of Grant funds is strictly prohibited. Applicant shall be solely responsible for securing all additional funds necessary for completion of the Project.

By submitting an Application, Applicant agrees to only use the Grant funds for the uses indicated above. Use of Grant funds for any other purpose is strictly prohibited. If Applicant uses Grant funds for any other purpose, Applicant shall, upon HCHRA's written demand, repay all Grant funds awarded.

These dates are subject to revision or cancellation by HCHRA in its sole and absolute discretion. Funding recommendations and consultant assignments are anticipated in June. Awards are not final until approved by the Hennepin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

Eligible costs must be incurred by December 31, 2027.

## **Inquiries**

Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to review projects with HED staff prior to application submittal. Questions regarding specific program requirements or the application after March 5 must be submitted via email to Nathaniel Hood, [nathaniel.hood@hennepin.us](mailto:nathaniel.hood@hennepin.us), no later than March 26, 2026.

HED staff cannot respond to questions about program requirements or projects after the March 26 deadline. Responses will be posted by 3:00 p.m., March 27 through the Supplier Portal.

Send questions to:

Subject line: 2026 Business District Initiative RFA

To: Nathaniel Hood  
Email: [Nathaniel.Hood@hennepin.us](mailto:Nathaniel.Hood@hennepin.us)

Copy to: Ryan Kelley  
Email: [ryan.kelley@hennepin.us](mailto:ryan.kelley@hennepin.us)  
Christine Longwell  
Email: [Christine.Longwell@hennepin.us](mailto:Christine.Longwell@hennepin.us)

Applicant-specific written notes will, in accordance with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, be considered public data after the conclusion of any negotiation process resulting from this RFA.

## Application Evaluation and Recommendations for Selection

Applications will be evaluated based on the following priorities:

- **Alignment with BDI program priorities**

- Degree to which the proposed activities relate to the type of business district and strategies relate to fundamental aspects of walkability and district vibrancy
- Generating economic activity and supporting equitable access to economic opportunity, including support for small, locally-owned, and/or disadvantaged-business enterprise (DBE) businesses
- Improving sense of place and the public realm emphasizing pedestrians and bicyclists, in more pedestrian-oriented environments
- Improving or increasing access to public spaces that are vibrant and welcoming

- **Completeness and clarity of proposal**, including:

- Clear description of project area and how it meets program criteria
- Detailed list of tasks or activities with explanation for how they will improve the business district and result in the desired outcomes
- Reasonable budget commensurate with proposed activities

- **Readiness and need**

- Organizational capacity for implementing project
- Support from business and property owners
- Expressed support from City Council
- Identified matching sources of funds for the proposed activities and additional investments in the business district

The HCHRA has a strong interest in measuring the impact of BDI awards. It is expected that cities will work with Hennepin County staff to develop a process and metrics for evaluating the results the BDI award made, including pre-and post-intervention assessments. Successful applicants will be encouraged to provide baseline and follow-up data to evaluate the impact of their projects.

Applications will be reviewed by a committee consisting of Hennepin County Housing and Economic Development staff and additional reviewers as deemed necessary to thoroughly evaluate applications as needed to ensure a thorough assessment of proposals.

HCHRA may require the entities selected to participate in negotiations to submit fiscal, technical, or other revisions of their applications that may result from negotiations.

HCHRA reserves the right to determine whether any aspect of the Application satisfactorily meets the criteria, the right to seek clarification or additional information from any Applicant(s), and the right to waive any irregularities or informalities that HCHRA deems are in the best interests of the public purpose of the grant. Submission of an Application shall neither obligate nor entitle an Applicant to enter into a grant agreement with HCHRA or to receive any grant funds.

## **Debarment**

HCHRA will reject an application if the Applicant, its proposed subcontractors, its sub-grantees, its co-applicants, or its affiliates are barred from doing business with either the Federal or State of Minnesota Governments as a result of debarment proceedings. Persons or entities are affiliates of each other if, directly or indirectly, either one controls or has the power to control the other or a third party controls or has the power to control both. The ways to determine control include but are not limited to:

- Interlocking management or ownership,
- Identity of interests among family members,
- Shared facilities and equipment,
- Common use of employees; or
- A business entity which has been organized following the exclusion of a person which has the same or similar management, ownership, or principal employees as the excluded person.

## **Evaluation of responsiveness**

HCHRA will consider all the material submitted by the Applicant to determine whether the Applicant's application is in compliance with the terms and conditions set forth in this RFA. Applications that do not comply with the provisions in this RFA may be considered nonresponsive and may be rejected. Notwithstanding the foregoing, HCHRA expressly reserves the right to reject any or all Applications with or without cause.

## **Execution of Grant agreement**

HCHRA may condition the Grant award upon Applicant's execution of a Grant agreement provided by HCHRA. As applicable, the Grant agreement shall define the legal relationship between HCHRA and Applicant.

## **General rules**

### **Addenda**

The HCHRA reserves the right to modify this RFA at any time prior to the Application due date. An addendum will be posted in the Supplier Portal if the RFA is modified. Addenda may be viewed by clicking on the 'View Documents' on the Event Details page. It is the responsibility of each prospective Applicant to assure receipt of all addenda.

HCHRA will modify the RFA only by formal written addenda. Applications should be based on this Solicitation document and any formal written addenda. Applicants should not rely on oral statements, or site visits.

### **Applicant's right to edit or cancel an Application**

An Application may be edited or cancelled in the Supplier Portal prior to the Application due date. For instructions, go to the [Supplier Portal help page](#).

## **Applications will not be returned**

Upon submission, Applications will not be returned.

## **Applicant's costs**

HCHRA shall not be responsible for any costs incurred by Applicant in relation to this Solicitation. Applicant shall bear all costs of Application preparation, submission, and attendance at interviews, or any other activity associated with this Solicitation or otherwise.

## **Conflict of interest**

The Applicant affirms that to the best of its knowledge the submission of its Application, or any resulting Grant award, does not present an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Strictly for illustration purposes, a personal relationship with a County employee directly or indirectly involved in the Grant evaluation or management process may be a conflict of interest.

The Applicant agrees that should any actual or perceived conflict of interest become known, it will immediately notify HCHRA and will advise whether it will or will not avoid, mitigate, or neutralize the conflict of interest.

HCHRA may make reasonable efforts to avoid, mitigate, or neutralize a conflict of interest by an Applicant. To avoid a conflict of interest by an Applicant, HCHRA may utilize methods including disqualifying an Applicant from eligibility for the Grant or terminating the Grant if the conflict is discovered after the Grant has been issued. HCHRA may, at its sole and absolute discretion, waive any conflict of interest.

## **Attachments**

Attachment 1 – Application format and content, including 2026 Outcomes, Deliverables, and Measure of Success form and 2026 BDI Budget Form