



Office of Brownfields and Capital Projects
Small Business and Community Development Program Unit

CT Communities Challenge Grant Program
Notice of Funding Availability – Round 1

Date: Released - October 18, 2021

Summary

The Department of Economic and Community Development (“DECD”) is undertaking a competitive grant application process to fund multiple projects under the CT Communities Challenge Grant Program in an effort to improve livability, vibrancy, convenience and appeal of communities throughout the state.

Successful projects will likely include multiple of the below elements:

- Transit-oriented development that densifies commercial and/or residential land uses near transit hubs,
• Downtown / major hub development that improves or reuses existing property (Brownfields remediation may be a component of such application)
• Essential infrastructure that facilitates future development
• Housing to support affordability, accessibility and local workforce,
• Mobility improvements that increase connectivity to transit and promotes economic activity, including pedestrian, ADA, and bicycle improvements
• Public space improvements that provide amenities to the community, including open spaces, public art projects, wayfinding, and lighting and safety improvements

Other projects that can demonstrate livability, vibrancy, convenience and appeal of communities throughout the state are also eligible, provided it is shown that there are no other dedicated funds for these projects under other currently offered state or federal programs.

DECD invites municipalities, economic development agencies and regional council of governments to apply for the grant program. DECD encourages public-private partnerships. Eligible entities are welcome to partner with one or more private developers, business organizations, other institutions or each other, to submit an Application.

Schedule (Round 1)

Monday, Oct 18, 2021 Application/NOFA Available
Friday, Dec 3, 2021 Intent to Apply Form
Friday, Jan 14, 2022 Application Deadline
March- April 2022 (Tentative) Announcement of Awards

The schedule for Round 2 will be announced at a future date.

Application Process and Forms:

The Intent to Apply and the Application Forms are available on the DECD Website on the Funding Opportunities Page dedicated for the CT Communities Challenge Grant Program. https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/Business-Development/05_Funding_Opportunities/CT-Communities-Challenge-Grant

Step 1: Submit the Intent to Apply Form to CTCommunitiesChallenge@ct.gov by 3:00 PM on Friday, December 3, 2021.

Step 2: Submit your completed application form (electronic format) to CTCommunitiesChallenge@ct.gov by 3:00 PM on Friday, January 14, 2022.

Larger attachments can be shared via a cloud-share link (such as Dropbox), provided it does not require DECD staff to create a new account to access the files. Alternatively, please contact CTCommunitiesChallenge@ct.gov and a secure sharefile-folder (cloud-based provision) will be sent to you, where you will be able to upload the files.

Application Page limit (excluding attachments): DECD encourages all applicants to be as succinct as possible with their responses to the questions in the application forms. DECD will only accept responses to the questions included in the space provided within the forms. Responses presented outside of the forms may not be reviewed. Incomplete applications will be rejected.

Grant Size: \$1M to \$10M per project.

Available Funding (Round 1): DECD will release between \$20 and \$50 million in this competitive round. The remaining available funds that are not awarded will be made available along with other authorized funds for Round 2.

Source of Funding and Enabling Statutes: Public Act No. 21-2 (2021), Sec. 488, authorizes the DECD Commissioner, in coordination with the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, to implement this Program under the state's Economic Action Plan.

Eligible Applicants: Municipalities, economic development agencies and regional councils of governments are eligible to be the primary applicants for this Program. DECD encourages public-private partnerships. Eligible entities are welcome to partner with one or more of the following types of organizations: private developers, business organizations, other institutions or each other to submit an Application.

All applicants (or Project Applicant Teams) must provide proof of access to the site, site control or a path to site control if required to implement the project.

Applicants may submit multiple projects; however, DECD recommends that applicants submit shovel-ready applications.

Eligible Uses: DECD would prefer that the majority of grant funds be used for construction- and renovation-related hard costs. A limited and reasonable portion of the funds may be used for design and engineering-related soft costs, land acquisition, project management, administrative and DECD's legal expenses to prepare the Contract. DECD's legal expenses for the DECD contract work (Assistance Agreement) is usually in the range of \$5K to \$10K depending on how complicated the project is. DECD funds cannot be used for legal expenses of the client team for the Assistance Agreement work.

Match Criteria: This is a matching grant program and therefore, preference will be given to applications that demonstrate public-private partnership and significant leverage of state funds with private and local funding. The minimum match requirement for distressed municipalities is 25% and for other municipalities is 50%. All non-state funds will be counted as local match. In general, contributed soft costs including contribution of land will be accepted for match; however, in-kind staff time will not be counted.

Please note that any federal funds in the project will trigger a review by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Definitions

- 1. Distressed Municipalities List:** The Distressed Municipalities' lists identify the state's most fiscally and economically distressed municipalities. The lists are based on statistical indicators measuring the fiscal capacity of each municipality including tax base, personal income of residents and the residents' need for public services. The 2021 Distressed Municipalities list includes 25 municipalities (Ansonia, Bridgeport, , Chaplin, Derby, East Hartford, East Haven, Griswold, Hartford, Meriden, Montville, New Britain, , New London, Norwich, , Putnam, Sprague, Stratford, Torrington, Voluntown, Waterbury, West Haven, Winchester, Windham, Groton, Plainfield, Sterling).
- 2. Opportunity Zones:** A Qualified Opportunity Zone (OZ) is an economically distressed community where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment. Localities qualify as OZs if they have been nominated for that designation by a state, the District of Columbia, or a U.S. territory and that nomination has been certified by the Secretary of the U.S. Treasury via his delegation of authority to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Please click the links for more information on [Connecticut's OZ Program](#), the [CT OZ Map](#) and the [U.S. HUD OZ Map](#).

3. **Economic Development Agencies:** “Economic development agency” means (A) a municipal economic development agency or entity created or operating under chapter 130 or 132; (B) a nonprofit economic development corporation formed to promote the common good, general welfare and economic development of a municipality or a region that is funded, either directly or through in-kind services, in part by one or more municipalities; (C) a nonstock corporation or limited liability company established or controlled by a municipality, municipal economic development agency or an entity created or operating under chapter 130 or 132; or (D) an agency, as defined in section 32-327

4. **Regional Councils of Governments (COGs):** For the latest list of the COGs and the list of member municipalities, please visit: <https://portal.ct.gov/OPM/IGPP-MAIN/Responsible-Growth/Regional-Planning-Organizations-RPO>

5. **Transit-oriented Development -** C.G.S. Section 13b-79o, *Transit-oriented Development* refers to the development of residential, commercial, and employment centers within one-half mile of walking distance of public transportation facilities, including rail and bus rapid transit and services, that meet transit supportive standards for land uses, built environment densities, and walkable environments, in order to facilitate and encourage the use of those services.

6. **Brownfields –** C.G.S. Section 32-760 (2), “Brownfield” means any abandoned or underutilized site where redevelopment, reuse or expansion has not occurred due to the presence or potential presence of pollution in the buildings, soil or groundwater that requires investigation or remediation before or in conjunction with the redevelopment, reuse or expansion of the property.

7. **Environmental Justice -** The U.S. EPA defines [Environmental Justice](#) as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys: 1. The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and 2. Equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

Award/Scoring Criteria

- A. Features and Characteristics of Proposed Project that support the livability and vibrancy in the local community and region
- Downtown and major hub development
 - Transit-oriented Development
 - Optimal mix of uses to generate vibrancy of neighborhoods
 - Connectivity options for pedestrians and non-pedestrians

- Optimal increase in residential density, supported by available infrastructure, that will enhance the vibrancy of community
- Improvement of infill, vacant, dilapidated and underutilized sites in the community
- Public space improvements including open spaces, active gathering spaces, public art etc.
- Adaptive Reuse of property
 - Brownfield Redevelopment
 - Historic and/or cultural preservation
 - Redevelopment of Areas with Available Infrastructure
- Other features and characteristic that will enhance livability, vibrancy, convenience and appeal of communities

B. Community Benefit/Engagement, Inclusive Growth and Resilience

- Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) of development team
- Proactive efforts for proposed development to serve and benefit existing communities, their people and their cultures
- Mitigation of previous negative effects on historically disenfranchised communities, including people with disabilities and elder residents
- Consideration of Environmental Justice (EJ) initiatives and goals
- Provision of some asset that is otherwise absent in the community
 - affordable/workforce housing,
 - food access,
 - open/recreational space,
 - gathering space etc.
 - public/regional facilities
 - ADA Improvements
- Enhancing resiliency/green energy/sustainability
- Location in an Opportunity Zone, Enterprise Zone or Distressed Municipality category

C. Economic Impact

- Return on Investment
 - Local match/share of total cost
 - DECD share of total cost
 - Total debt leverage
 - Private debt leverage
- Job creation (permanent full-time equivalent; direct)
- Increase in tax contribution/increase in grand list/increase in property value

D. Shovel-readiness

- Level of planning/drawings (conceptual, 30%, 60%, 90% etc.)
- Assembly of funding/capital stack and presence of private and other partners crucial to project implementation

- Level of local approvals obtained (zoning and other permits); plan or path charted out to obtain necessary local and state permits
 - Level of infrastructure available (missing infrastructure and cost/plan/source)
- E. Applicant team
- Applicant Team experience completing similar projects and on time
 - Private partner experience completing similar projects and on time
 - Project examples and available references
 - New partnerships that offer creative and dynamic solutions to the challenge project described in the application

Contact/Questions: Questions regarding the Application should be addressed to CTCommunitiesChallenge@ct.gov. Any clarification or supplemental information will be added to the dedicated [Program Webpage](#).

Mailing List: Sign up for the [Mailing List](#) to receive any notifications on this Program.

***Disclaimer:** DECD reserves the right to amend or cancel this NOFA, to modify or waive any requirement, condition or other term set forth in this NOFA or the program application, to request additional information at any time from one or more applicants, to select any number of applications submitted in response to this NOFA, or to reject any or all such applications, in each case at DECD's sole discretion. DECD may exercise the foregoing rights at any time without notice and without liability to any applicant or any other party. Applications to this NOFA shall be prepared at the sole expense of the applicant and shall not obligate DECD to procure any of the services described therein or herein from any applicant. DECD shall not be obligated to any applicant until a final written agreement has been executed by all necessary parties thereto and all applicable approvals have been obtained. As such, any funds expended by the applicant prior to these approvals will be done so entirely at the risk of the applicant.*