



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** CRA Board  
**From:** Alexandra Levering and Joshua Croom  
**Date:** March 20, 2024  
**Re:** Forward Fund Capital Infrastructure Grant and Feasibility Study Program Recommendations

### OVERVIEW

The Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) intends to release the 2024 Forward Fund applications for Capital Infrastructure and Feasibility Study grants on April 1, 2024. Applications will be open to non-profit organizations looking to conduct capital infrastructure projects or feasibility studies to plan for capital projects within the City of Cambridge. The CRA Board allocated \$500,000 for Forward Fund grants in the 2024 CRA Budget. Organizations seeking Capital Infrastructure Grants can apply for an award of up to \$100,000, while Feasibility Study Grants will be eligible for an award of up to \$10,000.

As with previous years, the proposed 2024 Forward Fund program will fund projects that advance the CRA's mission to promote social and economic equity, and support organizations who provide services that align with action items identified in the [CRA's 2023 Strategic Plan](#), or in the [Envision Cambridge](#) citywide plan.

### FORWARD FUND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Forward Fund Grant eligibility is open to all non-profit organizations that own and/or operate community facilities within Cambridge. Applicants will be asked to provide a clear narrative on how their proposed project supports their organization's mission, and how their mission's goals are aligned with Cambridge's overarching needs, (see Appendix A – Eligibility Criteria).

### CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT RECOMMENDATION

CRA staff recommend a similar Capital Infrastructure Grant approach to 2023 as outlined below, with the addition of encouraging projects to incorporate a greater focus on accessibility. Accessibility encompasses, but is not limited to, different physical, emotional, and mental needs of the public. Staff seek to include accessibility as a new evaluation metric for proposed projects (see Appendix B – Evaluation Criteria).

**Capital Infrastructure Budget:** \$400,000\*

**Individual Grant Cap:** Up to \$100,000

**Matching Fund Requirement:** 1:1 matching funds required for any project funds requested above \$50,000. For clarity, see funding scenarios below:

1. An organization has a project that costs \$30,000. They would be eligible for a Forward Fund grant of \$30,000 with no matching fund requirements.
2. An organization has a project that costs \$80,000. They would be eligible for a Forward Fund grant of \$65,000, showing \$15,000 of matching funds.
3. An organization has a project that costs \$100,000. They would be eligible for a Forward Fund grant of \$75,000, showing \$25,000 of matching funds.
4. An organization has a project that costs \$150,000. They would be eligible for a Forward Fund grant of \$100,000, showing \$50,000 of matching funds.

**Project Completion Requirement:** Two years upon execution of the grant agreement

**Payment Structure:** ½ grant funding up-front, ½ after completion of the project

**Application Review Deadlines:** June 14, 2024 & September 27, 2024, additional review dates to be scheduled as needed.

**Evaluation Process:** A Selection Committee, made up of staff from the CRA and various City departments, will review and make recommendations on all Capital Infrastructure Grant applications.

\*CRA staff may seek to shift funds between the projected Capital Infrastructure Grant Budget (\$400,000) and the projected Feasibility Study Grant Budget (\$100,000) during the final round of application review to allow the Selection Committee the ability to better allocate all available funds based upon grant interest and applications received.

## FEASIBILITY STUDY GRANT RECOMMENDATIONS

Feasibility Study Grant awards will be offered to applicants seeking to conduct feasibility studies to gather pre-construction information or relevant data related to a capital improvement project. Feasibility studies are important for an organization to inform the staff resources, financial investments, programmatic needs, design opportunities/constraints and other general scope information needed to successfully complete an extensive construction project. CRA staff recommend a similar Feasibility Study grant approach to the previous year, with the addition of allowing community engagement project work as part of the study scope, as described below.

**Feasibility Study Budget\*:** \$100,000

**Individual Study Funding Cap:** Up to \$10,000

**Project Completion Requirement:** one year upon execution of the grant agreement

**Payment Structure:** ½ grant funding up-front, ½ after completion of the project

**Application Review Dates:** Applications will be received throughout the year and reviewed on a rolling basis

**Evaluation Process:** CRA Staff will determine the eligibility and funding for feasibility studies.

Additionally, CRA Staff recommend that studies be able to include community engagement to inform capital infrastructure improvements within their Feasibility Study grant scope. Community engagement processes for non-profits within a feasibility study can help organizations tap into their represented community and understand thoughts, impacts, concerns, and other insights that an organization might be unaware of for a given capital project. Staff believe engagement funds would help a study be more responsive to community needs, provide resources to facilitate more inclusive engagement events/meetings, and enable stakeholders to better engage with and learn the technical components of a capital project.

Community Engagement funds within a Feasibility Study could be allocated toward:

- Hiring a consultant to facilitate, strategize, and/or implement a community engagement process,
- Hosting community events: space rentals, incentives for community participation, translation services, food, etc.,
- Outreach Materials: flyers, posters, surveys, and other engagement materials,
- Non-profit staff time, up to a limit of 20% of the requested Feasibility Study grant, to manage engagement work related to a capital project.

## OUTREACH FOR FORWARD FUND PROGRAM

Working off the success of last year's outreach strategy, which brought a record number of Forward Fund applications for projects, the CRA will use multiple approaches to get the word out that funding is available. This will be accomplished through:

- Posting on the CRA website & CRA social media,
- Sending emails to contacts who have requested to be on the CRA Forward Fund's list serve,
- Reconnecting with organizations that expressed interest in the Forward Fund previously,
- Emailing the CRA's aggregated list of non-profits who own property in Cambridge, as per the Cambridge Assessor's database.
- Connecting with previous recipients of the Forward Fund Feasibility Study Grants,
- Leveraging the CRA Board and Forward Fund Selection Committee to spread the word,
- Collaborating with the Cambridge Non-Profit Coalition, the Cambridge Community Foundation, the Cambridge Historic Commission, and CDD's Economic Opportunity and Development Division,

- Posting advertisements in local publications, including the Cambridge Day, Harvard Crimson and the Patch,
- Placing flyers within CRA buildings/spaces at 99 Bishop Allen, The Link, and the Foundry,
- Posting at public information boards throughout the City, and
- Connecting with CCTV, and other media outlets.

The CRA also plans to host virtual and in person open office hours to enable interested Forward Fund applicants to ask questions about the grant application or process. CRA staff will also be available to discuss project ideas and conduct site visits with any organization that is interested.

### RECOMMENDED BOARD MOTION

*Draft Motion: Authorizing the Executive Director to initiate a new cycle of Forward Fund capital infrastructure and feasibility study grants for nonprofit organizations, consistent with the authorized budget of \$500,000 for this year's program.*

## APPENDIX A: ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The criteria below must be met for a project or organization to be eligible:

- The project is in Cambridge.
- The applicant is a nonprofit organization (501c3), or a community group or organization with a fiscal (501c3) sponsor.
- The applicant has control over the proposed project site, or has a letter of support from the property owner detailing a long-term lease, or other agreement.
- The project will fund a capital improvement project/study, and is not intended for programming, or other non-capital infrastructure work.
- The applicant can explain how the project being studied/implemented will help achieve the priorities identified in the CRA's mission or 2023 Strategic Plan, or the City's [Envision Cambridge](#) citywide plan.
- The project is publicly accessible, or is part of an institution with a civic/social/neighborhood mission that serves the community.

## APPENDIX B: EVALUATION CRITERIA

CRA staff will evaluate Feasibility Study Grant proposals. A Selection Committee, made up of individuals from City departments and CRA staff, will evaluate the Capital Infrastructure Grant proposals. The CRA anticipates offering awards to a diverse set of organizations whose proposals are feasible and, once completed, will create a more livable and equitable City. Specifically, projects will be scored based on the following criteria:

1. The application includes a clear narrative on how the project aligns with action items identified in the [CRA's 2023 Strategic Plan](#), or in the [Envision Cambridge](#) citywide plan.
2. The applicant demonstrates staff capacity for the organization to successfully implement the project.
3. The project is feasible and can be implemented within a one/two-year time frame. Additionally, if the project/study costs more than what is requested from the Forward Fund, the applicant has a plan to pay for the remaining cost of the project/study.
4. The project has a high level of public accessibility or visibility.
5. The applicant has a clear narrative on how the organization's space that will be improved by the capital project meets ADA accessibility standards, and/or how the proposed capital project incorporates efforts to improve accessibility.
6. The project aspires to sustainable environmental guidelines, as outlined in planning and building codes.
7. The project has an ability to inspire or facilitate other community invest