

MEMO

Date: 12/19/2018
To: CRA Board
From: Carlos Peralta, Project Manager
RE: 2019 Forward Fund

INTRODUCTION

From 2015 through 2018, the CRA's Forward Fund (the Fund) has been an annual micro-grant program intended to reinvest development revenue generated in the Kendall Square Urban Renewal Area into community infrastructure and innovative experimentation projects by non-profit organizations, community groups, artists, and small businesses across the City of Cambridge (City). Most recently, the majority of proposals submitted have been to support major physical improvement projects for various non-profits that are tasked with providing important services to a large number of Cambridge residents. Staff acknowledges the importance of the work conducted by the numerous non-profits throughout the City. Recognizing that for non-profits to continue aiding their clients, a significant portion of their budget is directed to resources not associated with the capital infrastructure needs of their facilities. This has led to staff recommending a realignment of the 2019 Fund to focus primarily on assisting non-profits with this much needed financial support. Additionally, lessons learned from the past four years have led to a set of recommended improvements that will simplify the Fund and utilize CRA staff resources more efficiently.

FORWARD FUND HISTORY SUMMARY

The objective of the Fund was to select a number of proposed projects throughout the City and to fund projects that corresponded with the CRA's mission to implement creative initiatives that promote social equity and the creation of a more balanced economic ecosystem. For the past few cycles the Fund included a Civic Experimentation grant and a Community Infrastructure grant. The Civic Experimentation grant's goal was encouraging, enabling, or executing physical innovation in placemaking or tactical urbanism in public and civic space. This grant type led to staff awarding funds to a broad set up projects completed by various non-profits, artists, and small businesses. Some great examples are FlyCycle, The Moses Youth Center Vertical Gardens, and The Looking Glass, to name a few. The Community Infrastructure grant delivered capital resources to community non-profits seeking to enhance their facilities utilized by the public. See [Appendix A](#) for a status update of all the past grants.

Each year, at the start of the funding cycle, staff has recommended improvements and modifications to the Fund with the objective of drawing interests from a larger pool of applicants.

Some of the changes throughout the years were:

- **Budget Change** – Increase annual allocation from \$40,000 in 2015 to \$125,000 in 2018.
- **Maximum Award Size** – Increase amount from \$10,000 up to \$25,000.

- **Program Refinement** – Discontinue the Planning & Design grant with the hope of receiving proposals for “ready to deliver projects” and added a Civic Experimentation grant that would include physical innovation associated with an open space improvement.
- **Process Improvements** - Extend the accepted project timeline from one year to two years, as well as extend the application period.

These changes have helped grow the funds reach, but the requests for funding physical improvement projects for non-profit facilities has remained consistently prevalent.

REALIGNMENT OF GOALS AND TARGET AUDIENCE

CRA staff recommends realigning the goals of the Fund with the reported City’s goals and action plan of [Envision Cambridge](#) and the [Community Needs Assessment](#)¹ and revamping the Fund to focus financial support towards organizations that own and/or operate community facilities servicing the needs described above. The Fund will contribute to infrastructure improvements or feasibility and engineering studies of planned capital investments. The target audience moving forward will be non-profits and community groups whose work consists of providing support, social services, resources with the goal of closing the gaps reported in the City’s reports. Applicants will be asked to provide a clear narrative on how their proposed project and organization’s mission is aligned with improving the overarching needs that are provided in the figure below.

Figure 1. Cambridge Community Needs Framework



PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Refining various procedures of the Fund to allow for a successful transition into 2019’s new program direction is also recommended. Suggested changes consist of the following:

¹ The comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of the City’s most pressing needs efforts can be found on the Community Development Department website under “Projects” at <https://www.cambridgema.gov/en/cdd/projects/planning/citywideplanning> and <https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Planning/cambridgneedsassessment>

- Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis throughout the year.
- Align eligibility and evaluation criteria with the new direction and goals of the 2019 Fund (Appendix B).
- Extended marketing of the Fund (monthly community meetings, Non-Profit Coalition steering committees, weekly email blasts, local newspaper articles, etc.).
- Modifying the Selection Committee's involvement.

GRANT TYPES

Organizations who meet the eligibility criterion, may apply for one of the two grant types.

- **Technical Assistance Grant** – Funding level request up to \$20,000
Awards will be offered to applicants seeking to fund a feasibility, final architectural design, or engineering study for organizations pursuing preconstruction information and relevant data related to a facility improvement project. This analysis can be important to the organization prior to committing their staff resources and financial reserves to an extensive construction project. Types of technical assistance may include, but are not limited to:
 - Architectural and engineering studies,
 - Business plans and market research related to an expanded or new facility, or
 - Comprehensive facility maintenance planning.
- **Community Infrastructure Grant** – Funding level request up to \$150,000
Awards will be offered to applicants seeking assistance with the construction, repair, renovation, rehabilitation, and/or other capital improvements, such as open space and landscape improvements associated with a civic mission that touches a significant amount of the population. Projects will need to specifically demonstrate the public value of the investment. If the grant to be part of a much larger project, the applicant will need to demonstrate that the CRA investment is filling a critically necessary gap in the viability of that project and show specifically how that money will be used.

TOTAL FUNDING AVAILABLE

The total dollar amount budgeted since the Funds inception has been approximately \$350,000. More than half of the awarded funds have been provided to capital infrastructure improvements. To permit the Fund to remain as one of the major forms of financial assistance for the City's non-profits and assist with a majority of infrastructure needs, staff recommends budgeting up to \$300,000 for the 2019 funding cycle. Staff endorses this sizeable increase to allow the Fund to reach a wide variety of City organizations and provide a level of investment in key projects.

WHAT'S NEXT

While efforts for the revamped 2019 Forward Fund will predominantly provide financial support towards technical and infrastructure projects to non-profit organizations, staff has begun brainstorming sessions regarding a new pilot program with an emphasis on public art and placemaking and how the CRA can make physical improvements to a number of Citywide locations. The potential sites will be selected during broader discussions with CRA staff and additional City departments, which will take place in 2019.

Staff has also discussed the possibility of a larger initiative focused on a Housing and Community Improvement Plan. This program may be used as a way for the CRA to provide tools and resources to assist partner organizations in Cambridge and would incorporate the Forward Fund program. Staff will report back to the Board with a more detailed plan in 2019.

Appendix A: Forward Fund Grant Status 2015 - 2018

Appendix B: Draft Eligibility and Evaluation Criteria

Appendix A: Forward Fund Grant Status 2015 – 2018

2015 PLANNING & DESIGN GRANTS

Grantee	Project Name	Total Funding	Status Update	Completion Year
Green Cambridge, Inc.	Social Umbrella	\$2,500	Designed several concepts and physical models.	2015
Friends of The Grand Junction Path // Livable Streets Alliance // Working with Toole Design	Closing 3 Gaps on the Grand Junction Path	\$2,500	Two design sessions occurred in summer and fall of 2015 with Toole Design, Livable Streets, CRA, CDD, and MIT.	2015
Just-A-Start Corporation	Churchill Court Vestibule Community Planning	\$2,500	Started outreach to neighborhood in the summer of 2015. Hosted two community engagement events in October 2015.	2015

2015 CAPITAL GRANTS

Grantee	Project Name	Total Funding	Status Update	Completion Year
Community Art Center (CAC)	Port Stories Public Art Project Mosaic Mural	\$10,000	Mural has become the welcoming art piece when one visits CAC.	2016
Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House	Revitalization and Care of National Historic Landmark	\$10,000	Major foundation work, new food pantry in the basement, heating and electricity, basketball hoop, fixed front steps, major window frame repairs were all funded with the grant.	2015

Area Four Neighborhood Group / Margaret Fuller House	6 Little Free Libraries	\$2,100	The Little Free Libraries have been used by residents and visitors of The Port. Additional libraries have been installed after the original success of project.	2016
EMW Bookstore	EMW Bookstore Community Space and Frontage Improvements	\$10,000	The capital improvements assisted with supporting EMW's mission of being a community-oriented space and resource for the community.	2016

2016 PLANNING & DESIGN GRANTS

Grantee	Project Name	Total Funding	Status Update	Completion Year
Cambridge Community Center (CCC)	Building Modernization	\$5,000	CCC's Building Modernization planning study led to the non-profit installing a new energy efficient heating system.	2017
Community Art Center	Home Port Kiosk	\$5,000	Funds supported design sessions with the community.	2016
Earthos Institute / Jerry's Point Action Committee	Russell Pathway Jerry's Pond Public Info Kiosk	\$5,000	The funds assisted the project team with hosting a series of public design workshops and conversations in the community. It also supported a greater recruiting effort of local high school students and college interns to assist the projects planning and design efforts.	2017
The Port Cafe	Community Sign Engagement	\$5,000	The project team explored two concepts for increasing public engagement with The Port Café efforts of easing the isolating effects of gentrification in The Port.	2017

2016 CAPITAL GRANTS

Grantee	Project Name	Total Funding	Status Update	Completion Year
Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association (CNA)	Magazine Beach Public Boat Dock	\$16,286	The project scope has grown since its original submission. The dock and kayak launch will celebrate a ribbon cutting in the spring.	Anticipated completion in 2019
East End House (EEH)	Kitchen Renovation	\$10,000	Students are now participating in hands-on cooking projects. EEH clients have benefited from nutrition education and healthy meals cooked in the new kitchen.	2018
MassRecycles	MBTA Single Stream Recycling Kiosks	\$10,000	MassRecycles expanded its recycling pilot program and brought the kiosks to Red Line stops throughout Cambridge	2017
Linnean Solutions/Kendall Square Ecodistrict	FlyCycle/High Density Bike Parking	\$8,000	FlyCycle designed prototypes and piloted their project in and around publically-accessible locations in Kendall Square.	2017

2017 CIVIC EXPERIMENTATION GRANTS

Grantee	Project Name	Total Funding	Status Update	Completion Year
Friends of the Greenway, Inc.	Tunnel of Light	\$10,000	The project, which plans to repurpose the abandoned rail tunnel into an outdoor, public performance space, has been put on hold while awaiting the completion of DCR's Watertown-Cambridge Greenway Phase 2 construction project.	n/a
Innovators for Purpose	Wayfinder (The Looking Glass)	\$25,000	The Galaxy Park installation and celebration for The Looking Glass is scheduled for the spring of 2019.	Anticipated completion in 2019

Carolyn L. Arts	Moses Youth Center Vertical Gardens	\$6,000	The garden installation provided aesthetic, ecological and social benefit to the Center. Youths used the vegetables harvested in healthy meals prepared at the Center.	2017
ROLO	Suitsculpters	\$7,500 (returned to the CRA)	Unfortunately, the project was discontinued prior to its installation.	n/a

2017 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS

Grantee	Project Name	Total Funding	Status Update	Completion Year
East Cambridge Business Assoc. (ECBA)	Cambridge Street Beautification	\$5,214	Streetscapes improvements to Cambridge Street's business district with American flags in the summer and Holiday baskets in the winter where competed with this award.	2017
Agassiz Baldwin Community (ABC)	Fort Agassiz Annex	\$5,000	ABC constructed new playground equipment for the Center with the award. Students met with architects and carpenters to design and build the finished product.	2018
Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House (MFNH)	Building Pillar 1: Child & Teen Services	\$25,000	Due to unforeseen circumstances, MFNH had to pivot from the original plan and instead renovate their food pantry.	2018
Cambridge Community Center (CCC)	Building Modernization Project	\$10,000	CCC upgraded the Center's computer lab. The ribbon cutting was attending by CRA staff and Board members.	2017
Cambridge Art Center (CAC)	Port Kiosk	\$25,000	Originally funded as a 2016 planning and design grant, the fabrication and installation of the kiosk will be completed with 2017's grant. The planned celebration will take place in the early summer of 2019	Anticipated completion in 2019

2018 CIVIC EXPERIMENTATION GRANTS

Grantee	Project Name	Total Funding	Status Update	Completion Year
Central Square Business Assoc. (CSBA)	Central Square Mural Project	\$25,000	The CSBA mural project has completed 8 murals to date. Fundraising efforts were successful during 2018 and the funds will assist in completing and 5 additional murals in the spring of 2019.	2019
MathTalk	Mathscapes: Activating Public Spaces for Early Math Learning	\$25,000	MathTalk has completed design phase. In early 2019 they will be working with Microsoft Makespace and Autodesk Build Space staff to utilize their space and equipment to complete the fabrication of prototypes for their planned summer installation.	Anticipated completion in 2019
Innovators for Purpose (iFp)	Genius of 700 Main Street	\$10,000	iFp students spend the summer researching the site and its history in preparation of drafting a final design that will be fabricated in the summer of 2019. Additional funding for the project has been provided by MIT.	Anticipated completion in 2019

2018 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS

Grantee	Project Name	Total Funding	Status Update	Completion Year
Cambridge Community Center (CCC)	Cambridge Street Beautification	\$25,000	CCC will complete a full relocation and renovation of their kitchen. Construction began earlier this month following annual Thanksgiving community feast.	Anticipated completion in 2019
CommonWealth Kitchen (CWK)	CWKendall	\$18,000	CWK successfully completed the build out of the CWKendall project for its first tenant. The grant helped with the installation of new and repurposed equipment and new signage.	2018

East Cambridge Open Space Trust (ECOST)	O'Connell Library Parklet	\$25,000	In partnership with the City of Cambridge, ECOST will transform the O'Connell Library's uninviting and under-utilized outdoor space into a welcoming public "pocket park". The contractor is scheduled to select by February with the hope of starting construction in mid-March.	Anticipated completion in 2019
Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS)	Elevator Improvement Project	\$25,000	MAPS has selected a contractor that will replace their elevator that is used by their seniors in the program. Work is scheduled to begin in January.	Anticipated completion in 2019
Vinfen	950 Cambridge Street Façade Improvements	\$5,000	The award helped Vinfen with façade improvements. The window decals and banners have helped the building present a lively and friendly appearance to pedestrians and members of the neighborhood.	2018

Appendix B: Draft Eligibility and Evaluation Criteria

In addition to a realignment of the Funds goals, staff is drafting additional criterion to that of the previous funding cycles on which applicants will be evaluated on.

ELIGIBILITY

Projects must meet all of the following yes/no criteria in order to be eligible:

1. Publically accessible or is part of an institution with a civic/social/neighborhood mission that is open to and serves the community.
2. Achieves a physical improvement that does not require any additional ongoing funding from the CRA to operate or maintain. Funds are not to be used for programming, only physical improvements or technical assistance.
3. Request does not exceed award maximums.
4. Applicant is a Cambridge-based nonprofit organization (501c3). No public-sector applicants are allowed.
5. Applicants must explain or show how the CRA will be directly and creatively acknowledged as a funding source in their application and how the project relates to the CRA mission and operating principles.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Project Related Scoring Criteria:

1. Alignment with the purpose and goals of the Fund and the CRA mission and operating principles
2. Demonstrates a tangible public benefit in an under-resourced area of Cambridge designated by the City of Cambridge [Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Areas](#)
3. Exhibit a clear narrative of project and how it will improve the quality of life and have a direct client impact in relations with the goals and action plan of [Envision Cambridge](#) and the [Community Needs Assessment](#).
4. Level of public access and visibility of the project

Applicant Related Scoring Criteria:

1. Demonstrated capacity of applicant to successfully implement the project
2. Realistic financial feasibility of the project
3. Financial need of applicant

The CRA would reserve the right to apply additional evaluation criteria before accepting projects.