

## 2017 Forward Fund Proposal

### SUMMARY

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For the 2017 Forward Fund program, Staff has proposed an increase in budgeted funds and some modification to the grant structure as well as a change to one of the themes.

This coming fiscal year staff have recommended ending the Planning and Design grant and adding a theme to the capital grant programs: **Connections**. Last year the least awarded grant was the Planning and Design grant. The award maximum was \$5,000, four grants in total were awarded. A majority of the awardees are currently still in the design phase of their projects. For this year it is suggested that the program to focus on projects ready for investment, and to increase the maximum capital award to \$30,000. The target applicants remain the same: community organizations, local non-profits, innovative thinkers, artist, and small businesses. The suggested theme of **Connections** can be interpreted in many ways: connections within the community, connections to history, or connections to natural systems. The theme should be reflected in the grant applications and the selection process will focus on proposals that facilitate **Connections** within the diversity of Cambridge.

### PURPOSE AND GOALS

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The CRA hope to offer awards to a diverse set of entities whose proposals are both feasible and supportive of economic vitality, livability, and sustainability in Cambridge.

The CRA's Forward Fund is a micro-grant program intended to support specific **physical improvement projects** that better Cambridge's built environment for the benefit of all the city's residents, workers, and visitors.

*The Fund's goals are to:*

- **Advance the CRA's mission to implement creative initiatives that promote social equity and a balanced economic system.**
- **Support innovative proposals that craft resourceful projects to take advantage of local knowledge in order to maximize potential benefits.**

For 2017, the theme of the Forward Fund grant program is to support projects that create, maintain, or enhance **Connections** within Cambridge. Grant applicants should approach this theme by promoting inclusive, collaborative, and resourceful processes as defined below:

- **Inclusive:** Projects that meaningfully engage key stakeholders, and / or provide a venue to engagement. Applicants should be thoughtful identifying those needed to create the intended change and including those directly affected by the problem
- **Collaborative:** Applicants are encouraged to undertake joint effort with partners willing to share ownership and decision-making regarding a project and program its project may facilitate.
- **Resourceful:** Projects proposals should use existing resources and assets creatively to make the most of what a community already has, and build upon them.

The Forward Fund seeks proposals that lead to a community innovation – projects that present a breakthrough in addressing a community need or opportunity for connections in effective, equitable, and sustainable approaches.

## FUNDING

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After two successful Forward Fund granting cycles, the CRA Board, requested that Staff explore how the grant program could be expanded. During the 2015 inaugural grant, the amount budgeted was \$40,000, and a total of \$37,500 was awarded. In 2016 there was an budget increase of \$20,000. From the \$60,000 that was originally budgeted for the Fund, \$58,000 has been awarded. The awarded grants have previously been, \$10,000 or less.

Staff proposes a Forward Fund budget of **\$125,000**, this represents more than a 100% increase from last year. The advisory group will receive clear instructions that they do not have to commit to award all of the \$125,000, but only to award the highest quality, most qualified and promising projects that most closely fit the intent of the program. The advisory group would need to determine how to apportion the split between the two grant types described below, as that will not be prescribed ahead of time.

In addition to increasing the program budget, Staff suggest increasing the available grant size. The CRA has become aware of the increased need of many organizations for capital funds, and the potential limitations to impactful investments or application of innovative ideas due to resource constraints. Thus the grant cap has been suggested to be raised to \$25,000. Smaller scale grants may still be more competitive as they would allow the program to reach more projects, however if a larger scale proposal appears to clearly align with the Forward Fund goals and theme, then Staff would support the provision of a more generous grant allocation. The CRA reserves the right to suggest revisions to the application request for funds.

## TWO TYPES OF GRANTS

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Forward Fund Capital Grants have required a 1:1 organizational match - which could include another outside funding source or in-kind/volunteer matching resource.<sup>2</sup> Capital grants are paid 50% at the time of award, and 50% at the completion of the project. Funds are not to be used for programming, only specific physical improvements.

### CIVIC EXPERIMENTATION CAPITAL GRANTS

Funding Level Requested (\$5,000 - \$25,000)

Awards would be offered to applicants piloting innovative specific physical improvement projects. Something that encourages, enables, or executes a physical innovation, avant garde placemaking, or tactical urbanism in public and civic space, whether publically or privately owned.

### COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE CAPITAL GRANTS

Funding Level Requested (\$5,000 - \$25,000)

Awards would be offered to applicants seeking to fund a physical improvement project that serves a civic facility that provides public services and facilities community Connections. or neighborhood need regardless of innovativeness. This may include a building or infrastructure project for a non-profit or a Cambridge-based

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<sup>2</sup> For example, due to the required 1:1 match if the ask is \$25k, the total project *value* is expected to be \$50,000 and above, if the ask is \$20k, the total project *value* is expected to be \$40k and above, etc. In-kind matches such as pro-bono work by an architecture firm for example must have a letter that specifies a statement of value of those in-kind matching services.

independent small business with a neighborhood function that touches a significant amount of the population. Projects involving private property will need to specifically demonstrate the “publicness” and civic value of the investment. If the proposal is for the grant to be part of a much larger project, it will need to demonstrate that the CRA investment is filling a critical gap in the viability of that project and demonstrate how that money will be used for a particular project element related to the Forward Funds purpose and theme.

## GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

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A CRA staff member will manage the Forward Fund on a day-to-day basis. This Project Manager will be responsible for conducting outreach, receiving applications, responding to questions regarding the application process, facilitating the review of applications, and monitoring the implementation of the funded projects. An Advisory Group consisting of CRA and City of Cambridge staff from various departments and agencies (Community Development Department, Department of Public Works, Department of Human Services, Cambridge Housing Authority) will be appointed to evaluate proposals and determine program awardees.

## WHO SHOULD APPLY

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The Fund is intended to use resources generated in Cambridge, combined with talent and organizational capacity within Cambridge, to ultimately benefit the city in new and imaginative ways. Grant eligibility is open to any Cambridge-based nonprofit (501c3) organization, Cambridge-based community organization that has an agreement with a fiscal sponsor, or a Cambridge-based independent small business. It is anticipated the applicants may include neighborhood groups, human services organizations, independent restaurants, retailers, inventors, artists, educators, entrepreneurs, civic organizations, and more.

Previous awardees will be allowed to apply, and those who won a planning & design grant previous will be encouraged to apply for a capital grant this coming year. Eligibility would generally remain the same as last year.

### *The Eligibility Criteria:*

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

1. Located within Cambridge.
2. Achieves a physical improvement that does not require any additional ongoing funding from the CRA or the City to operate or maintain. Funds are not to be used for programming, only physical improvements.
3. Request does not exceed award maximums.
4. Applicant is a Cambridge-based nonprofit organization, a Cambridge-based organization that has an agreement with a fiscal sponsor, or is a Cambridge-based independent small business.<sup>3</sup> No public sector applicants are allowed.
5. All applicants must explain or and how the project relates to the CRA mission and operating principles.
6. The applicant must have control over proposed installation site, or have a letter of support from the property owner.

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<sup>3</sup> If an organization is *not* a 501c3 it must have an agreement with a fiscal sponsor that will act as the fiduciary for the purposes of disbursing CRA funds.

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## EVALUATION CRITERIA

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Project proposals will be evaluated and scored based on the following criteria by the Advisory Group after all applications are received:

Project Related Scoring Criteria:

1. Alignment with the purpose and goals of the Fund and the CRA mission and operating principles
2. Improvement to the quality of the built environment, the public realm, or a built structure that provides a public need, or neighborhood amenity.
3. Provision of a tangible public-purpose investment, preferably in an under-resourced area of Cambridge designated by the City of Cambridge [Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Areas](#).
4. Alignment with and support of current Cambridge planning and development efforts.
5. Clear public accessibility and visibility of the project
6. Demonstration of design and fiscal feasibility.
7. Ability to inspire, or inform other community investments.
8. Alignment with the 2017 Forward Fund theme of Connection.

Applicant Related Scoring Criteria:

1. Capacity of applicant to successfully implement the project.
2. Partnerships and programmatic connections to the proposed site.
3. Financial need of applicant.

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

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## FORWARD FUND 2017 MARKETING STRATEGY

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In an effort to gain a greater diversity of applicants amongst these groups we will broaden and be more strategic about the CRA's marketing efforts in 2017. Meetings will be setup in January in diverse venues in order to build up the base of applicants for the Forward Fund grants. The CRA staff will develop new collateral, website materials, and social media content focused on the grant application.

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## OUTCOMES

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As the CRA seeks to continuously improve and expand our program offerings, we hope to understand and document the positive impact of the Forward Fund program in the Cambridge community. Awardees will be required to document the impact of the final project with any combination of photos, a 1-2 page written narrative, a video, or other creative mediums, and awardees are asked to submit these materials within two months of project completion but no later than January 15<sup>th</sup> of the following year . Quantitative data and/or

testimonial information is encouraged, if relevant and available, to demonstrate their project's impact for the community.

## TIME PERIOD

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The kickoff of the Forward Fund advertising and application process will be early next year, with the application period ending in March. The Advisory Group will meet in March and the announcement of awards will take place in April. The grant contract with the CRA will follow the same format as the previous year. The projects should have a completion date no later than one year after the award year, however provisions for extensions especially for larger scale projects will be considered.

## LEGAL AUTHORITY

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Discussions were held with the CRA's legal counsel regarding if the procurement implications of larger grants would potentially implicate G.L. c. 30B and/or anti-aid amendment concerns. As that the Forward Fund does not seek services for the CRA's own use; rather, the intent is to further the public purpose of learning about improving the City's built environment, the state procurement laws do not apply. Moreover, the grants do not replace services that the CRA would otherwise procure, because the CRA has no active program by which it seeks out community improvements projects to undertake.

The CRA is an urban renewal agency formed under c. 121B, meaning that it has the powers (1) specifically enumerated in c. 121B, § 46 and § 11, and (2) "necessary or convenient to carry out and effectuate the purpose of relevant provisions of the General Laws."

The current themes for the Forward Fund, are based on ways to carry out and effectuate provisions contained in c. 121B, § 46. Some of those provisions are:

- *"to prepare or cause to be prepared [...] workable programs for development of the community, general neighborhood renewal plans, community renewal programs [...]"*
- *"to conduct investigations, make studies, surveys and plans and disseminate information relative to community development, including desirable patterns for land use and community growth [...]"*
- *"to develop, test and report methods and techniques and carry out demonstrations for the prevention and eliminations of slums and urban blight [...]"*

The CRA's stated mission and the Forward Funds purpose tie together explicitly, and as the program continues to evolve, the Forward Fund grants shall continue to carry out that goal.