



MEMORANDUM

To: CRA Board
From: Alexandra Levering
Date: May 10, 2023
Re: Forward Fund Feasibility Study Grant Awardees and Capital Grant Program
Recommendations and Budget Amendment

OVERVIEW

The Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) released the 2023 Forward Fund Feasibility Study grant application on January 20, 2023. Applications were open to Cambridge based non-profit organizations looking to conduct feasibility studies for capital improvement projects. The CRA Board allocated \$100,000 for Forward Fund feasibility grants in the 2023 budget, with each grant application being eligible for an award of up to \$10,000. Grants are being accepted on a rolling basis, and to date, the CRA has received applications for feasibility studies from two organizations, The Multicultural Arts Center and the YWCA Cambridge. Upon review, CRA staff recommend awarding funds to both organizations. Project information is detailed below.

Staff are also presenting recommendations for the 2023 Forward Fund Capital Grant program. For 2023, staff recommend a similar Forward Fund Capital Grant approach to the 2019 and 2021 program, which focused on awarding infrastructure grants to mission aligned non-profit organizations for facilities utilized by the public. As with previous years, the proposed 2023 Capital Grant program will fund projects that advance the CRA's mission to promote social and economic equity, and support organizations who provide services that address City needs identified in [Envision Cambridge](#).

FEASIBILITY STUDY GRANT RECOMMENDATIONS

On April 25, 2023, CRA staff evaluated the feasibility study grant proposals received. Based on the quality of their proposals, and organizational alignment with City goals, staff recommend awarding \$10,000 to both proposals.

MULTICULTURAL ARTS CENTER
THEATER ACCESSIBILITY AND USABILITY
RENOVATION FEASIBILITY STUDY

\$10,000

Non-Profit Organization 501(c)(3)

Adria Katz; Executive Director

Project Location: 41 Second Street, Cambridge, MA 02141



Quoted from the Forward Fund Application Form:

The purpose of this project is to improve the accessibility, efficiency and usability of our theater and backstage areas through renovation of our technical theatrical infrastructure and creation of accessible, all gender restrooms.

Our mission is to make our theatrical facility accessible to all artists. The Multicultural Arts Center serves more than 9,000 community members, and close to 1,000 artists each year who show at 10 - 12 visual art exhibitions and 80 - 100 performing arts events annually. These stakeholders must be able to access our facility to participate in our program, specifically the theatrical infrastructure/network and the second-floor studios and restrooms. We provide an incubator space for new work, and partner with community groups to rehearse, workshop, and teach. We are a cultural hub in the greater Boston area, drawing a diverse audience with interests across the artistic spectrum to our events and exhibitions.

Our 2nd floor consists of two studios and gendered restrooms with nonfunctional showers, and it is currently not accessible by elevator. These rooms function as dressing rooms, dance and movement rehearsal studios, photography/video/audio recording studios and more. The need to create access to these rooms and offer accessible all gender restrooms has become critical.

Our theatrical lighting/electrical system is also inaccessible and beyond its expected end of life. Funding would enable a study to upgrade to a network-compatible system which will allow us to offer broader theatrical lighting, while reducing our power consumption. The network capabilities would enable greater access to control the technical systems which are now not accessible by users with wheelchairs.

While we have established a working timeline and budget, and a volunteer has drafted plans for implementation, a feasibility study would not only ensure that our budget and timeline are realistic, but they would also enable us to have professional architectural and structural engineering verification of the viability of the project, and comprehensive design of electrical and network improvements. It would also provide a detailed analysis of the technical and financial requirements of the project, and help to identify any potential challenges or risks that may arise during the project in order to refine our comprehensive project plan, to ensure that the project is completed on time and within budget.

YWCA CAMBRIDGE

ADA IMPROVEMENTS & COMMUNITY SPACE
RENOVATIONS FEASIBILITY STUDY

\$10,000

The logo for YWCA Cambridge, MA is displayed in a light gray rectangular box. It features the text "eliminating racism" and "empowering women" in a smaller, orange, sans-serif font at the top. Below this, the word "ywca" is written in a large, bold, orange, lowercase sans-serif font. At the bottom, "cambridge, ma" is written in a smaller, orange, lowercase sans-serif font.

Non-Profit Organization 501(c)(3)

Cassandra Ling; Executive Director

Project Location: 7 Temple Street, Cambridge, MA 02139

Quoted from the Forward Fund Application Form:

YWCA Cambridge's feasibility study project aims to assess its capital needs in two main areas. The first is to provide much-needed ADA improvements to its historic facilities. This will involve updating the elevator that serves all SRO residents, incorporating automatic push buttons at main entrances, and converting stairs into accessible ramps, which will help to alleviate congestion at the elevator. These improvements will ensure that all residents have easy access to essential services and amenities, regardless of their mobility needs.

The second component of the project is needed capital improvements to two of its main community centers. These centers are vital spaces for local organizations, fitness groups, and others to rent out event and practice spaces. However, much of the interiors have reached the end of their lifespan and require renovation to continue to serve the community as a gathering place. These upgrades will contribute to the Vibrant Communities value by providing proper spaces to the Arts, Culture, and Recreation communities, as well as to the basic housing, safety, and security needs of all individuals, including those covered by the ADA

Both of these packages align with the Envision Cambridge and Community Needs Assessment plans, which aim to create a safe and inclusive community for all. The feasibility study will provide vital information on the cost and feasibility of these projects, as well as assist YWCA with the prioritization of these much-needed capital improvements.

2023 FORWARD FUND CAPITAL GRANT RECOMMENDATION

In 2019 and 2021, the Forward Fund focused on awarding infrastructure grants to mission aligned non-profit organizations to improve the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of organization facilities that provide services that benefit Cambridge residents, workers, or visitors.

For 2023, CRA staff recommend a similar Forward Fund Capital Grant approach for a few reasons. First, it will give time for staff gain familiarity and build capacity with the current Forward Fund program. It will allow staff to research and recommend an expanded 2024 Forward Fund grant program, and ensure it is aligned with any strategic planning updates identified in the CRA's soon to be finalized 2023 Strategic Plan. Lastly, through the feasibility study outreach process, staff have learned of several projects interested in the CRA's Forward Fund Capital Grant, and believe the following proposed fund details will be able to provide targeted funding to enable needed capital improvements projects throughout the City.

Capital Infrastructure Fund Budget*: \$400,000

Grant Cap: Up to \$100,000.

Matching Fund Requirement: 1:1 matches required for projects requesting more than \$50,000.

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

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

Eligible Applicants: Non-profit organizations whose missions are aligned with the CRA's 2023 Strategic Plan goals, and/or the City's goals outlined in [Envision Cambridge](#) See Appendix A for additional eligibility criteria.

Application Review Dates: August 30, 2023, October 31, 2023, additional review dates to be scheduled as needed.

Evaluation Process: A Selection Committee, made up of staff from various City departments, will review and make recommendations on all applications. See Appendix B for committee details and evaluation criteria.

This proposal asks the CRA Board to approve an additional \$400,000 to allocate to the Forward Fund Capital Infrastructure Grant Proposal. This is in addition to the \$100,000 already budgeted for the Forward Fund Feasibility Grants. This would make the total Forward Fund budget allocation for 2023, \$500,000.

*In addition, CRA staff would like to request budget flexibility to shift funds between the requested Capital Infrastructure Grant Budget (\$400,000) and the existing Feasibility Study Grant Budget (\$100,000) which will have \$80,000 remaining after the current grants are awarded. This flexibility could help CRA staff and the Selection Committee better allocate funds based upon grant interest and applications received.

OUTREACH

The CRA will use multiple approaches to get the word out that Capital Grant funding is available through the Forward Fund. This will be accomplished through:

- Connecting with previous recipients of the Forward Fund Feasibility Study Grants,
- Sending emails to contacts who've requested to be on the CRA Forward Fund's list-serve,
- Sending targeted emails to non-profits who own property as per the Cambridge Assessors Database,
- Leveraging the CRA Board, the Strategic Advisory Group and 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 Development Department,
- Posting on the CRA website & CRA social media,
- Posting in local publications, including the Cambridge Day, and the Patch,
- Placing information pamphlets within our buildings/spaces at 99 Bishop Allen, the Link and the Foundry,
- Investigating information boards where we can post about the Forward Fund.

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 conduct site visits to any organization that is interested.

RECOMMENDED BOARD MOTION

Draft Motion: Authorizing the Executive Director to initiate a new capital grant cycle of the Forward Fund for grants up to \$100,000 to nonprofit organizations, consistent with the program outline described by staff, and to approve a budget amendment of \$400,000 to administer this program.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Draft Eligibility Criteria

Appendix B: Draft Evaluation Criteria

APPENDIX A: DRAFT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Eligibility is open to all Cambridge-based non-profit organizations that own and/or operate community facilities. The organization's mission should provide support, social services, and/or resources to those in Cambridge with the goal of closing the gaps reported in *Envision Cambridge*.

Applicants will be asked to provide a narrative on how their proposed project supports their organization's mission, and how their mission's goals are aligned with Cambridge's overarching needs.

Specifically, projects must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible:

1. The project is located in Cambridge.
2. The applicant is a nonprofit organization (501c3).
3. The applicant has control over the proposed project site, or has a letter or support from the property owner detailing a long-term lease or other agreement.
4. The project will fund a capital infrastructure improvement, and is not intended to be used for programming, or other non-capital infrastructure expenses.
5. The award will facilitate a capital improvement that does not require additional ongoing funding from the CRA or the City to operate or maintain.
6. If the project costs more than what is requested by the Forward Fund, the applicant shall identify how the remaining cost of the project will be paid for.
7. The applicant can explain how the capital project funded by the Forward Fund will help to achieve the priorities identified in the City's *Envision Cambridge* report.
8. The project is publicly accessible or is part of an institution with a civic/social/neighborhood mission that is open to and serves the community.

APPENDIX B: DRAFT EVALUATION CRITERIA

A Selection Committee, made up of individuals from City departments will evaluate the Capital Grant proposals on a bi-monthly basis, and make project funding recommendations.

The CRA anticipates offering awards to a diverse set of organizations whose proposals are both feasible and, once completed, will create a more livable and equitable City. Specifically, the Selection Committee will evaluate and score each proposal based on the following criteria:

Project Related Scoring Criteria:

1. The application includes has a clear narrative of how the project aligns with the action plans of *Envision Cambridge* report.
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 two-year time frame.
4. The project has a high level of public accessibility or visibility.
5. The project has an ability to inspire or facilitate other community investments.