

# Avenue NYC: Commercial Revitalization Program Guidelines City Fiscal Year 2023



careers  
businesses  
neighborhoods

## Overview

The New York City Department of Small Business Services' (SBS) Avenue NYC program is a competitive grant program that funds and builds the capacity of community-based development organizations (CBDOs) across the five boroughs to execute commercial revitalization initiatives. Avenue NYC is funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, which targets investments in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.

Avenue NYC Commercial Revitalization grants provide multi-year commitments aimed at building the capacity of partner organizations to better understand neighborhood needs, develop impactful programs, and sustain their work in the community for at least three years. Grantees will be awarded **up to \$100,000 per year for up to three years** for a maximum possible award of \$300,000.

During the three-year grant term, grantees will be supported in hiring a dedicated, full-time Avenue NYC Program Manager, who will participate in a cohort-based learning and training program, conduct an in-depth district assessment, and execute commercial revitalization programs and services. The district assessment findings will inform the programming activities the organization will implement during the remainder of the grant term. The goal of the new framework is to support our partners' capacity to develop more strategic, sustainable, needs-based programming and data-driven results for their commercial districts.

## Eligibility

### ORGANIZATION CRITERIA

#### Applicants must be:

- Nonprofit community-based organizations (BIDs, local development corporations, merchants associations, and other organizations) operating in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods within the five boroughs of New York City;
- Nonprofit organizations incorporated in New York State;
- Registered in the System for Award Management (SAM), [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov)
- Compliant with annual State and Federal filing requirements, including New York State Charities Bureau filings.

### INCOME ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Avenue NYC programming and services must demonstrate an Area Benefit to low- and moderate-income persons in accordance with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) national objectives. Avenue NYC grantees must target commercial districts serving residential areas designated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. Designation prescribes that at least 51% of the residents in the census tracts surrounding the targeted commercial district (also known as the service area) must be low- and moderate-income persons living in households with incomes below 80% of the median household income (\$63,350 for a 4-person household in 2010).

To determine eligibility, SBS, in collaboration with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), establishes neighborhood service areas using federal census tract information and the trade areas of neighborhood retail businesses served by grantee organizations. Census information is used to determine the total number of residents who reside within a census tract and their incomes. Through New York City PLUTO data provided by the Department of City Planning and the Department of Finance, tax lot and land use information is obtained to determine the total amount

of building area within a census tract and the amount of which is residential in use. To learn more about federal CDBG eligibility and to view the city's CDBG-eligible census tracts, please visit the [Department of City Planning \(DCP\)](#).

If you have questions about your target area's CDBG eligibility please email [neighborhoods@sbs.nyc.gov](mailto:neighborhoods@sbs.nyc.gov).

## Program Funding & Term

### FUNDING

Grantees will be awarded **up to \$100,000 per year for up to three years for a maximum possible award of \$300,000**. Grantees will be required to dedicate award funds to hire a full-time dedicated Avenue NYC Program Manager (details below). The balance of funds available each year can be used for project costs.

### TERM

The contract term will begin on July 1, 2022 (CFY 2023) and extend up to three years, with three-year awards ending on June 30, 2024. The terms of the agreement will be reevaluated at the conclusion of each fiscal year before being approved for the following year. The second and third years of funding (CFY 2024, CFY 2025) are contingent on grantee performance, an assessment of the grantee's progress towards multi-year goals for the organization and district, and the ongoing availability of Avenue NYC funding.

## Program Components

### PROGRAM MANAGER HIRING & EMPLOYMENT

#### Hiring

The funding of a full-time, dedicated Avenue NYC Program Manager for the three years of the contract term is a central component of Avenue NYC's development of sustainable programmatic capacity in partner organizations.

Grantees will receive resources and guidance throughout the hiring process. While grantee organizations will be responsible for the hiring of a full-time, salaried employee to fill the Avenue NYC Program Manager role, SBS will maintain an active oversight role, including but not limited to:

- Review of Program Manager job description and candidate qualifications
- Assistance in recruitment and referrals
- Guidance through the interviewing process

The Avenue NYC Program Manager is expected to begin work at the grantee organization by **August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022**. Upon notification of award in Summer 2022, SBS will provide guidance and recruitment assistance to help grantees identify and screen potential candidates in advance of contract commencement. Timely hiring by the grantee is essential so that the Program Manager is on board in advance of the required cohort-based training (details below).

#### Employment Costs

Grantees are strongly encouraged to dedicate approximately \$60,000 to \$70,000 of their annual award towards personnel costs, including salary and fringe benefits for the Avenue NYC Program Manager, and necessary managerial supervision. The Avenue NYC Program Manager's salary will be determined by the grantee organization in consultation with SBS during the hiring process and grant contracting.

The suggested gross personnel cost above is based on a SBS survey of competitive program manager salaries in the fields of economic development, urban planning, marketing, and community organizing.

## Terms

Grantee organizations are expected to make every effort to retain the Avenue NYC Program Manager in employment throughout the three-year contract term, and will be required to fill the position in a timely manner and pursuant to SBS guidance in the event of the program manager's resignation or early termination. Failure by the organization to fill the program manager position, causing interruption to planned programming, may result in early termination of grant funding.

In the event of internal candidates being considered for the Avenue NYC Program Manager role, employees of the grantee organization applying for the position must resign fully from their existing roles and responsibilities in order to accept the Avenue NYC Program Manager position.

## TRAINING & COHORT-BASED LEARNING

### Orientation Training

Near the beginning of the grant term, Avenue NYC Program Managers will participate in mandatory training to learn information essential to begin performing needs assessments and community engagement within their neighborhoods. Program Managers will meet their NDD project teams and fellow Avenue NYC Program Managers from the organizations that make up the Avenue NYC CFY23 cohort.

### Cohort-Based Learning

Throughout the one- to three-year term, the Avenue NYC Program Managers will convene regularly for cohort-based learning such as trainings, activities, workshops, and district tours. Avenue NYC Program Managers will cover subjects such as community engagement, data analysis, program design, and advanced commercial revitalization strategies, while sharing their individual challenges, successes, and best practices with the cohort.

Participation in orientation training and cohort-based convenings will be mandatory. In addition to the one- to two-week training, grantee organizations should prepare for Program Managers to be away from their districts 1-2 times per month. Furthermore, organization leaders and/or supervisors will be required to attend occasional trainings and/or events.

## DISTRICT NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND EARLY-ACTION PROJECTS

### Commercial District Needs Assessment (CDNA)

In the first two quarters of the grant term, Avenue NYC Program Managers will be guided through a methodical and structured process of gathering and evaluating information to diagnose the economic health of their organization's commercial district. The assessment is intended to help the grantee organization identify appropriate strategic programming and services that can improve the conditions of their commercial districts and ensure that they effectively meet the needs of low- and moderate-income residents and businesses.

The assessment will be comprised of three parts: Partnerships, Corridor, and People. These parts correspond to the three lenses the assessment applies to uncover information about a commercial district: the stakeholders and institutions that make up the district's organizational ecosystem; the physical contents of its corridors; and the people that rely on its services and contribute to its vitality. As a result, each part will involve a distinct data collection methodology.

Grantees will receive training and technical assistance from SBS throughout the assessment process and will use their findings to inform their commercial revitalization project plans for the remainder of the three-year term.

### Early Action Projects

In tandem with the pre-established CDNA and community engagement deliverables, first-year grantees may implement one or more **Early Action Projects**. Early Action Projects can start as early as July 1, 2023, and can begin prior to hiring a full-time Program Manager.

Early Action Projects can be used as an opportunity to test a concept or innovate a project as a catalyst in advance of full-time programming in the 2nd and 3rd years of the Avenue NYC grant. Grantees are encouraged to think innovatively and where possible adapt or leverage planned or existing programming and activities to enhance COVID-19 recovery efforts.

## COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION PROGRAMMING & SERVICES

After completion of the comprehensive district assessment, grantee organizations will develop a project plan for executing commercial revitalization programming and services during the remainder of the multiyear grant term. Project plans will be strategic and demonstrate progression toward district goals over the three years. Deliverables will be realistic, well-planned, measurable, and directly informed by the needs identified in the district assessment findings.

### **Commercial revitalization programming and services may include:**

- Merchant organizing and engagement
- Business support and retention
- Commercial vacancy reduction and retail mix enhancement
- Public space activation and management
- Storefront improvement program development
- Commercial district marketing and promotion
- Neighborhood beautification program development
- Business improvement district feasibility analysis

### **COVID-19 Recovery Programming**

Commercial revitalization programming and activities proposed for Fiscal Year 2023 should seek to incorporate your organization's COVID-19 recovery efforts into the broader commercial revitalization strategy responding to the district's needs and opportunities identified in the CDNA. Grantees are encouraged to think innovatively and where possible adapt or leverage planned or existing programming and activities to enhance COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

Avenue NYC grantees may find that COVID-19 response and recovery has become central to their commercial revitalization strategy and must be prioritized in the immediate term. When developing a Scoping Proposal, grantees will have the option to cite COVID-19 recovery in addition to CDNA findings when justifying the rationale for proposed activities.

## Requirements

### CONTRACTING & COMPLIANCE

#### **Agency Contracting & Compliance Requirements**

Organizations applying for Avenue NYC funding must fulfill the requirements listed below to enter into a registered contract with the City of New York. Applicants must ensure their organization is current and compliant with contracting requirements as soon as possible, including but not limited to:

- Registration on the HHS Accelerator Financials system
- Registration on the NYC Payee Information Portal (PIP) system
- Registration with the New York State Charities Bureau
- Registration in PASSPort with the Mayor's Office of Contract Services
- Current general liability, workers compensation, and automobile insurance
- Audited Financial Statements

#### **Program-Specific Requirements**

In addition to complying with the policies related to the Avenue NYC Program Manager and programming activities, Avenue NYC grantees must comply with program-specific evaluation and reporting requirements throughout the three-year term. Evaluation and reporting requirements include participation in regular check-in calls with SBS staff, completion of quarterly progress reports, periodic compliance evaluation, and hosting SBS staff for district site visits upon request.

## PAYMENTS

### Contract Registration

Avenue NYC grantees are reimbursed for contract expenses on a monthly basis once the contract has been registered with the New York City Comptroller's Office. Grantees are expected to begin their projects as early as July 1, 2022, and will submit requests for reimbursement of project-related expenses upon registration of their contract and monthly thereafter as incurred. The length of time required to register a contract varies, and is **contingent upon the timeliness and completeness of contracting materials** submitted by organizations.

### HHS Accelerator

Avenue NYC grantees will use the HHS Accelerator Financials system to manage contract budgets, invoices, and payments. HHS Accelerator is an online system designed to improve financial processes to providers delivering direct services to clients and communities, and will provide grantees a more efficient budget review and approval process, submission of program expense reimbursements, and tracking of expenditures to budget information. SBS will work closely with the HHS Accelerator team to provide Avenue NYC grantees with hands-on training and guidance throughout the contracting process.

### Expenses

Avenue NYC funding can be used to cover the following program expense categories, as approved by SBS prior to contract registration:

- Personnel Services (PS) – The salary, fringe expense and benefits associated with the full-time Avenue NYC Program Manager.
- Other Than Personnel Services (OTPS) – Indirect costs or 'overhead' associated with the Avenue NYC program. The proportion of these expenses charged to the program will be determined by a cost-allocation framework; examples include rental of office space, utilities, phone/internet, etc.
- Operating Expenses (OE) – Direct expenses associated with Avenue NYC programming and services. These can be charged in full to the program; examples include production of program marketing and communication/advertising expenses, program event expenses, program-specific equipment or space rental, and outside professional services (subcontractors).

### Ineligible Activities

All activities must be CDBG-eligible and are subject to approval by SBS. Direct expenses, including but not limited to, the following activities are not eligible:

- Installation of banners and/or holiday lights
- Graffiti removal
- Job training or workforce development initiatives
- Promotional activities designed to attract non-residents to district
- Fundraising events and/or sponsorship solicitation
- Lobbying activities
- Legal/Incorporation Fees

## Application Process

### TO APPLY

Applications will be collected online through Survey Monkey Apply. Applicants will be required to answer a series of questions related to organization capacity, goals and vision, and commercial revitalization priorities, as well as upload PDF attachments. **Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022.**

To apply visit: <https://smallbusinessservices.smapply.io/>

Organizations interested in applying are strongly encouraged to attend an information session. During these sessions, SBS staff will provide a detailed explanation of the program goals, requirements, structure, and timeline.

- In-person Information Session: [RSVP](#)  
**Wednesday, May 4, 2022** at 4:00 p.m.
- Webinar Information Session: [RSVP](#)  
**Thursday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022** at 10:00 a.m.

## APPLICATION REVIEW & SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants will be evaluated and selected by a review committee comprised of representatives from SBS. Avenue NYC grants are competitive and applications will be evaluated on three key criteria and rated on a corresponding point scale. Award decisions will be contingent on the availability of Avenue NYC funding.

### **Organization | 30 points**

Assessment of the organizational need, strengths, challenges, goals, vision and capacity.

### **Commercial District | 40 points**

Analysis of the applicant's understanding of the targeted commercial district, including strengths and needs.

### **Commercial Revitalization Services | 30 points**

Evaluation of the proposed commercial revitalization services, their connection to district challenges and needs, ability to leverage the district's assets, and low- and moderate-income resident engagement.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### COVID-19 QUESTIONS

#### **Is Avenue NYC a New COVID-19 Relief Program?**

No. Avenue NYC is an established grant program that targets investments in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, whose goal is to build the capacity of community-based development organizations to execute commercial revitalization initiatives. Each organization's commercial revitalization priorities should respond to specific needs identified in their Commercial District Needs Assessment (CDNA). Grantees may find that COVID-19 response and recovery has become central to their commercial revitalization strategy and must be prioritized in their Avenue NYC programming in the immediate term.

#### **Can COVID-19-related activities be paid for with Avenue NYC funding?**

Yes, if they are in eligible commercial revitalization program areas. Commercial revitalization programming and activities should seek to incorporate your organization's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts into the broader commercial revitalization strategy responding to the district's needs and opportunities identified in the CDNA. Grantees are encouraged to think innovatively and where possible adapt or leverage planned or existing programming and activities to enhance COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

### PROJECT-RELATED QUESTIONS

#### **I know there are commercial revitalization needs in my district, but I'm not sure what programming would address them; will my application be considered if I do not have a specific project to propose yet?**

Yes. As part of the Avenue NYC Program's shift from project-based awards to long-term capacity-building commitments, applicants will not be proposing fully developed projects upon applying, but rather indicating commercial revitalization areas of interest based on the needs they perceive for their district. As grantees, they will develop their programming strategically based on the findings of their needs assessments.

#### **Can I use split some the personnel funding designated for the Avenue NYC Program Manager among multiple staff members at my organization?**

No. The full-time, dedicated Avenue NYC Program Manager will be one the most valuable assets in building long-term organizational capacity, and it is imperative that their compensation is commensurate to the skills and service level expected of them in the role. While the exact figure for personnel services will vary by organization based on benefits structure and necessary management and supervision, organizations are expected to make every effort to retain the services of the Avenue NYC Program Manager throughout the three-year term, and this includes providing competitive compensation.

#### **I have existing research and am very familiar with my corridor already; is the district assessment mandatory?**

Yes. Because the Avenue NYC Program aims to build impactful programs based on neighborhood need, assessing district conditions and measuring the impact of projects based on those assessed needs is essential. SBS staff will provide technical assistance and make sure your existing research and knowledge is leveraged in the assessment of your district.

#### **I have a specific project to propose. Can I skip the district assessment and get funding to execute it?**

No. Avenue NYC's focus on needs-based programming relies on documenting the needs of the district through data collection and on-the-ground relationships and strategically responding to those needs. The district assessment provides a methodical framework for establishing baseline metrics and more effectively measuring the impact of your programming.

## ORGANIZATION-RELATED QUESTIONS

**I have sufficient staff to execute commercial revitalization programming in my district. Am I obligated to hire a dedicated Avenue NYC Program Manager as part of the grant?**

Yes. By bringing on a full-time Avenue NYC Program Manager, grantee organizations will have the opportunity to leverage the added capacity of a staff member dedicated exclusively to commercial revitalization, as well as the resources provided to the Program Manager by SBS. Cohort-based learning activities such as trainings, workshops, and district tours will only be available to full-time dedicated Avenue NYC Program Managers.

**I am the Executive Director of my organization and I would like to lead the implementation of the Avenue NYC program; can I use the personnel funding designated for the Avenue NYC Program Manager to offset my own salary and do the work myself?**

No. As part of the Avenue NYC Program's goal of building the capacity of partner organizations, the Avenue NYC Program Manager must be dedicated exclusively to commercial revitalization programming and activities, and the role cannot be shared by multiple individuals. Employees of the organization that wish to apply for the position must resign fully from their existing roles and responsibilities in order to accept the Avenue NYC Program Manager position.

**My organization does not have salaried employees or offer insurance/benefits to staff; can I hire an Avenue NYC Program Manager as a consultant or independent contractor?**

No. Avenue NYC will provide funding for personnel costs associated with the Avenue NYC Program Manager over the three-year term, including salary and fringe benefits, as well as for necessary managerial supervision. Avenue NYC contracting policy requires that all grantees provide proof of a worker's compensation insurance policy and fringe benefits package, and does not allow for program personnel roles to be filled by independent contractors.

**My organization may not have the capacity to identify, interview, hire, and prepare a candidate to begin work by the July 1<sup>st</sup> deadline; is this flexible?**

According to this year's timeline, Avenue NYC Program Managers are expected to begin work at grantee organizations no later than August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Grantees will receive guidance and recruitment assistance from SBS in order to identify and screen potential candidates in advance of the contract commencement. Timely hiring by the grantee is essential so that the Program Manager is on board in advance of required cohort-based training.