

Comprehensive Guide to

Designing a Storefront Improvement Program





About SBS

The **NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS)** helps unlock economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building thriving neighborhoods across the five boroughs.

The SBS Neighborhood Development Division works with community-based organizations to build vibrant neighborhoods where New Yorkers can shop, work, and live by:

- Overseeing the largest network of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the country, which delivers more than \$160 million in additional services throughout the five boroughs
- Offering training, tools, and one-on-one assistance to local community-based organizations
- Administering grant programs to strengthen and revitalize commercial districts
- Working with community partners to identify local commercial district needs and plan targeted solutions

This guide is a resource for community-based organizations that want to develop a Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) in their commercial corridors.



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Introduction

Steps

1. What is a Storefront Improvement Program?
2. Benefits of Storefront Improvement
3. Who Should Use This Guide?

What is a Storefront Improvement Program?

Introduction

Storefronts are important to New York City neighborhoods. They house local businesses, are a visible part of the street, and define the character and feel of a community. Strong neighborhoods are home to well-designed storefronts that enhance and give identity to the commercial district. Storefront improvement is a simple way to upgrade the visual appeal of a commercial district, making it a place where people want to live, work, and play. An active street becomes the center of a safe, stable, and thriving community. Storefront Improvement Programs (SIPs) encourage property and business owners to invest in their neighborhood. Local community-based organizations (CBOs) can play a vital role in enhancing a commercial district by administering these programs.

What is a Storefront Improvement Program?

Storefront improvements may include:

- Accessibility upgrades
- Building code violation corrections
- Door repair or replacement
- Exterior cleaning and painting
- Exterior lighting installation
- Façade renovation such as masonry repair or brick repointing
- Historic preservation or rehabilitation
- New signs and awnings
- Removal of solid panel security gates/replacement with open-grille gates
- Window framing and glass repair or replacement

Most Storefront Improvement Programs offer three key incentives:

1. Financial assistance for business and property owners
 2. Project management assistance and one-on-one support from CBO staff
 3. Technical assistance from experts, including architects and designers
-

Role of the CBO

A CBO must effectively strategize, fund, design, execute, and sustain an actionable plan for its SIP to achieve measurable success.

Therefore, CBOs are responsible for the following:

- Proactively building relationships with program participants
 - Identifying a knowledgeable and experienced team to lead the SIP
 - Partnering with other organizations to ensure the execution of the SIP
 - Developing, implementing, and managing projects that serve the overall commercial district
 - Securing funding and other necessary economic resources
 - Accurately tracking and reporting on program impact to communicate successes
-

Case Studies

Cities throughout the United States manage and fund SIPs. Although the programmatic structure and eligible improvements may vary by region, SIPs fundamentally share a standard directive to activate and strengthen local economies.

Here are a few examples of municipalities that have successfully used SIPs to enhance the physical appearance of their commercial districts:

- [City of Boston Storefront Improvements](#)
- [City of Philadelphia Storefront Improvement Program](#)
- [City of San Diego Storefront Improvement Program](#)

Benefits of Storefront Improvement

Introduction

Research indicates that a SIP can be a successful element of a more comprehensive commercial revitalization strategy.

Neighborhood Benefits

Storefront improvements can positively impact the overall neighborhood by:

- Attracting shoppers to local businesses
- Enhancing material conditions
- Improving safety

For example, [a University of Wisconsin-Extension report](#) found that “nearby businesses often enjoyed increased sales and may initiate their own storefront improvements...The indirect returns to the surrounding business district were amplified when the improved building was occupied by a tenant that generated foot traffic and complemented other nearby businesses.”

Here in New York City, CBOs are also enhancing their communities through SIPs. For instance, in Staten Island, Kathleen Sforza of Northfield Community Local Development Corporation said, “It only takes one storefront to make a difference to be the turning point in a neglected commercial district. Once one storefront has been renovated, it leads other property owners and store owners to inquire.”

Small Business Benefits

Improving a storefront often results in increased customer foot traffic and sales. According to the same [University of Wisconsin-Extension study](#), more than 90% of SIP-participating businesses experienced more significant revenue after completing their projects. Businesses also recognized a rise in first-time customer visits, while property owners witnessed an increase in new tenant attraction to vacant storefronts.

In Brownsville, Brooklyn, a SIP spearheaded by the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District found that “after years of neighborhood disinvestment, our property and business owners struggled to keep up with costly repairs needed for their buildings. Our façade improvement initiative now offers matching grants to owners to make these much-needed improvements.”

Organizational Benefits

A successful program can improve public perception of the managing CBO’s community development work. Additionally, it provides the CBO with valuable experience in:

- Project management
- Learning to navigate and leverage government resources
- The possibility of increasing staff capacity
- Fostering, developing, and strengthening relationships with local business owners

Who Should Use This Guide?

Introduction

You will find this guide beneficial if your CBO aims to improve neighborhood storefronts concentrated in commercial districts. A SIP is a long and detailed process that includes:

- Initiating a programmatic structure
- Maintaining completed projects
- Monitoring and observing long-term impacts

How to Use This Guide

This guide is organized into five distinct sections:

1. Strategize
2. Fund
3. Design
4. Execute
5. Sustain

Each section of this guide reflects the individual phases of a typical SIP. This information will allow your CBO to understand the importance of each step of the program. Although these phases offer a roadmap, CBOs are encouraged to be creative in their approach to running a SIP program. After all, your program needs to be tailored to the specific needs of your community.

A SIP requires time and dedication. However, the payoff is substantial and will result in your community having an attractive, vibrant, and inviting commercial district.

This guide offers general tips, best practices, and real-life case studies to help you launch your SIP and achieve your neighborhood-specific goals.

*Before and After Photos of
New York Ophthalmology
(147-32 Jamaica Avenue,
Jamaica, Queens)*

Photo Credit: NYC SBS



Phase 1

Strategize

Steps

1. Assessment of Conditions
2. Build Organizational Capacity

Assessment of Conditions

Introduction

You should initiate a SIP when it is determined that there is a need to invest in the physical appearance of your commercial district.

During this initial phase, the managing CBO will document and assess the storefront conditions in your neighborhood. Next, your CBO will identify the specific purpose and goals of the SIP. Finally, you will be responsible for identifying strategic partnerships to ensure the successful execution of the program.

Is There a Need?

Conduct a needs assessment to document the current conditions of your commercial district and determine if a SIP is necessary. Be sure to capture notes and photographs of every storefront in your target area.

This in-depth assessment of your commercial district will allow you to:

- Identify the most critical issues
- Design a tailored program
- Develop a convincing and evidenced case to engage and retain potential funders
- Conduct targeted outreach to potential SIP participants

Your neighborhood will benefit from a SIP if there is:

- General disrepair and neglected building conditions
- Increased storefront vacancy rates
- Insufficient compliance with building regulations
- Negative perceptions of safety and low foot traffic

Refer to [Storefront Improvements: A Guide for Neighborhood Commercial Districts](#) and [Sample Program Guidelines](#) for more information on launching a SIP.

Consider the following questions while surveying storefront conditions:

- Are there specific areas that have historically had excellent or poor storefront conditions?
- In which areas do storefronts appear well-maintained, and where do they appear materially neglected?
- Is there a concentration of businesses with poor conditions within the commercial district?
- Which storefront issues are repeated along the corridor? Is there:
 - A significant lack of lighting?
 - An abundance of solid-panel security gates that limit visibility into retail space?
 - Too many large awnings obscuring historic building details?
 - Frequent instances of offensive graffiti?

Assessing Storefront Conditions

Walk the entire commercial corridor. For each storefront, record the address and physical conditions of the storefront on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) and take notes about specific elements. Record the conditions for all commercial storefronts, both occupied and vacant. Exclude any entirely residential buildings or single family homes that do not contain commercial space. You may want to observe each storefront during the day and at nighttime to analyze conditions at various times of the day (e.g. when security gates are up and down). Consider the following criteria when ranking a storefront's condition:

Poor (1-2 points)

- Worn, torn, or oversized awning, or awning covers upper floor windows
- Protruding security gates/panel gates
- Old, broken framing or door
- Limited visibility into store, windows are cluttered with posters or merchandise
- Insufficient exterior lighting
- Faded, derelict signage
- Architectural details are covered by layers of material, signage, or awning
- Graffiti on windows, gates, or signs
- Transom window above door has an AC unit

Average (3 points)

- One or two poor characteristics mixed with one or two excellent characteristics

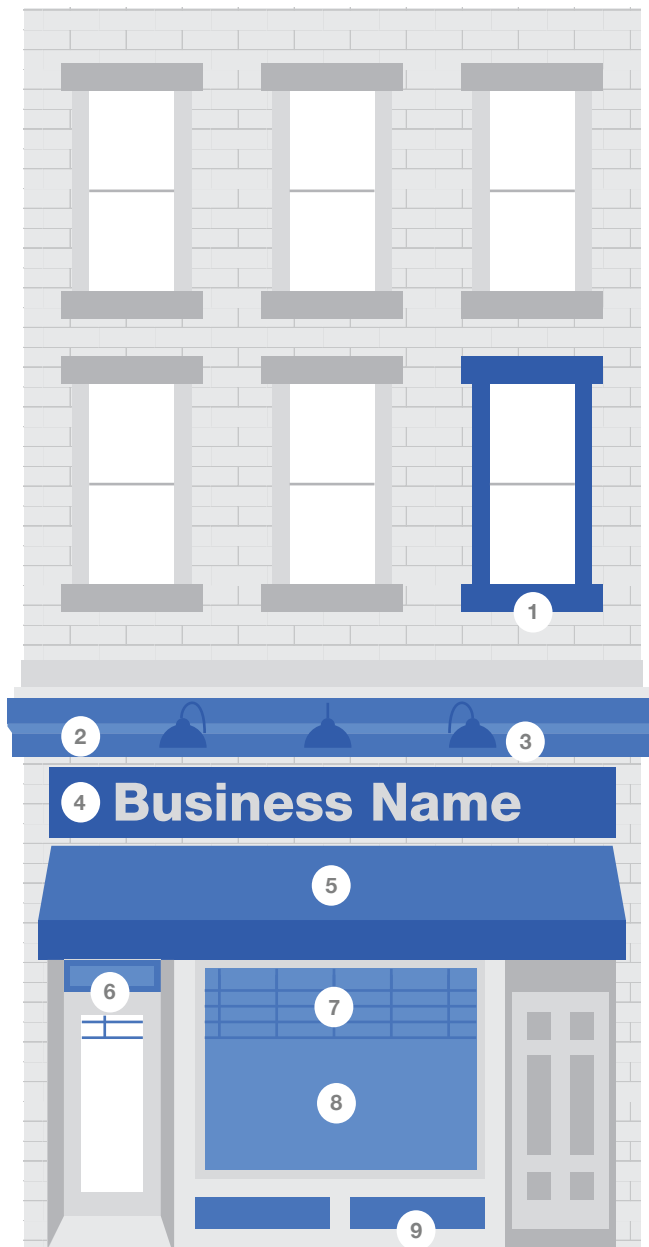
Excellent (4-5 points)

- Awning is in good condition/not oversized
- Hidden security gates, or open-grille gates
- New or functional framing
- Clear display windows, interior is visible
- Simple, bright exterior lighting that illuminates signage or building details
- Clear, clean, simple signage
- Architectural details are preserved
- Storefront is clean and attractive
- Doorway and transom window are clear of any obstruction

“After years of neighborhood disinvestment, our property and business owners struggled to keep up with costly repairs needed for their buildings. With help from the SBS Avenue NYC program, we launched a façade improvement initiative and now offer matching grants to owners for commercial improvements.”

— Jesse Gericke, Pitkin Avenue BID

Features of a Model Storefront



1 Windows

Upper floor windows should be clear of signs and existing detail should be preserved and maintained.

2 Cornice

The cornice is a decorative and unifying piece of the storefront. Existing materials should be preserved.

3 Lighting

Lighting is used to illuminate signage and display windows. Good lighting is both eye-catching to shoppers and enhances safety.

4 Signage

Signs provide the best space to advertise the name of a business. Effective signs are simple; they are not too large and fit within the scale of the building.

5 Awning

Awnings add depth to the storefront and protect shoppers and window displays from sun and bad weather. They should fit appropriately above windows and doors and not project too far over the sidewalk.

6 Transom window

Transom windows allow more light to enter the store. They should be kept clear of opaque materials like cardboard or air conditioning units.

7 Security Gates

Security is important for protecting businesses and making customers feel safe. Open-grille security gates can be installed on the interior or exterior of the store. Interior gates are preferred, as they allow for a clean storefront and greater visibility.

8 Display Window

Display windows provide a great opportunity to show off merchandise. The number of signs and posters should be kept to a minimum. Small decals are an effective and inexpensive alternative.

9 Bulkhead

Bulkheads create a defined platform for window displays and are located at the base of the storefront. They should be proportionate to the building's size.

Build a Foundation

Introduction

Successful SIP initiatives are the result of well-organized strategic management. Therefore, you will need skilled and knowledgeable talent to help run your program. At this stage, if there is no conflict of interest, partner with organizations capable of managing a SIP.

Share information about the forthcoming SIP as early as possible with staff and volunteers in your organization. These communication efforts ensure the program goals are understood and used to assess interest levels and motivate feedback.

Organizational Staff

At least one person from your CBO should be involved in the leadership of your SIP initiative. An Executive Director, or appointed staff person, will need to dedicate several hours per week to manage program evaluations and deliverables.

Skills and qualifications for this position include:

- Ability to partner with a diverse set of stakeholders to complete tasks
- Experience effectively communicating, negotiating, and conducting outreach
- Knowledge of building codes, construction materials and techniques, and architectural design
- Strong project management skills
- Understanding of neighborhood context and experience to generate buy-in and participation from small businesses

Do not underestimate the intensive time requirement needed to appropriately manage a SIP. Consistent communication with participants and contractors to ensure projects remain on schedule is central to this work.

Consider the following questions when appointing a SIP team:

- Who is capable of leading the SIP?
 - What related experience or transferable skills do they possess?
 - How will they manage their time and responsibilities?
- Who can reliably support CBO leadership for this initiative?
 - What experience or transferable skills should the support team have?
- How will these staff members help with day-to-day program operations?
- Should you hire new staff to oversee or support the program? Why or why not?
- What tasks will be assigned to partner organizations?
- What roles, if any, can interns or volunteers fill?

Advisory Committee

An Advisory Committee can be a valuable asset to a SIP. An Advisory Committee establishes priorities, lends support, and secures community buy-in. Advisory Committees are often made up of vetted and approved stakeholders, such as:

- Members of your CBO's Board of Directors
- Local business owners, residents, and other community leaders
- Experts on storefront improvement or construction projects such as:
 - Architects
 - Designers
 - Historic preservationists

Advisory Committee members may support SIP success by:

- Evaluating program applications and making award recommendations
- Providing feedback on project designs and scopes of work
- Recommending general contractors and other vendors
- Signing letters of support for grant applications
- Promoting the program to networks or stakeholders outside of your CBO
- Helping with fundraising efforts

Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

Leverage the results of the storefront conditions assessment and your team's input to address the questions below. Responses to these questions will define your programmatic goals, objectives, and intended outcomes. Many of these questions may be revisited in Phase 3: Design while developing the operational framework.

Why should we improve the commercial district?

- Attract more customers
- Improve perceptions of public safety
- Maintain regulatory compliance
- Restore historical character

Are the primary recipients of SIP incentives:

- Long-standing businesses?
- New start-ups?
- A mix of both?

Is the purpose of the SIP to enhance vacant storefronts to attract new tenants and entrepreneurs?

Will the SIP demonstrate the ability of your neighborhood to convert capital into visible enhancements?

Phase 2

Funding Your Program

Steps

1. Create a Budget
2. Find Funding
3. Craft Your Pitch

Funding Your Program

Introduction

Funding is essential to the success of a SIP, but it requires persistence and ingenuity.

Create a Budget

The SIP budget must include:

- Assistance from architects, engineers, environmental professionals, and other professionals
 - Grants to reimburse program participants for direct and indirect construction costs
 - Personnel costs
 - Additional miscellaneous expenses
-

Find Funding

New York Main Street

The [NYS Office of Homes and Community Renewal](#) awards grants through the [New York Main Street](#) program. Grants are awarded to nonprofit organizations and municipalities to support the revitalization of commercial districts statewide. Grants range from \$20,000 for technical assistance to \$500,000 for target area building renovations. Although the application process is lengthy, it is a significant SIP funding source to seriously consider pursuing.

Local Institutions

Large institutions, such as medical centers and universities, are potential SIP funders. These institutions have a vested interest in the quality of life of their surrounding neighborhoods and traditionally designate funds to support community investments.

Banks

Community banks can be major SIP stakeholders. For example, banks are often required to invest in the neighborhoods where they operate branches. Banks with business financing programs will be interested in participating in your program to offer various financial products, such as construction, general financing, or lines of credit to local businesses.

Real Estate Companies

Consider real estate companies that have annual budgets designated for local giving or community-based program sponsorship. These sponsorship opportunities reflect their interest in building corporate relationships within neighborhoods.

Private Foundations and Other Grant Opportunities

Grant opportunities are available through various community organizations, local government officials, and private foundations. Online platforms, such as [Candid](#), will help your CBO research grants and other funding opportunities.

Crowdfunding

Many organizations have used crowdfunding to subsidize their storefront improvement projects. Online platforms, such as [Ioby](#), help organizations that want to improve their community.

In-Kind Donations

Never underestimate the power of in-kind donations. Partners can provide meeting space, supplies, equipment, and even volunteers to support your efforts.

Please note: Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) cannot use their assessment budget to fund capital costs associated with improvements to private property. However, assessment budgets can help support administrative or technical assistance costs associated with a program.

Craft Your Pitch

Once you have identified potential funding sources, your CBO must share the need and purpose of your project and how funders will benefit from contributing to the project.

After securing funding, your CBO must also:

- Clearly articulate the SIP goals and objectives
- Share the SIP framework
 - Funders need to know how the program will operate
- Identify key staff members to spearhead and execute the SIP
- Emphasize the programmatic potential for measurable impact and quantifiable change (see Phase 5: Maintain for a list of metrics)
- Advocate for your SIP by sharing success stories of completed projects

After Photo of El Rincon (92-15
149th Street, Jamaica, Queens)

Photo credit: NYC SBS



Phase 3

Design

Steps

1. Program Framework
2. Program Materials

Program Framework

Introduction

Designing a SIP that meets the needs of participants will position your CBO for success. Although funders may determine some programming requirements, you will:

- Oversee development of marketing materials to advertise your SIP
- Recruit eligible participants
- Select the financial and technical assistance your organization will provide

Financial Assistance to Business Owners

Many SIPs provide financial assistance to businesses and property owners in the form of grants. Some grants may fund 100% of SIP improvement costs, while others may be matching grants. Your funding source(s) may determine the types of grants you award.

If you plan to provide financial assistance in the form of grants, consider the following:

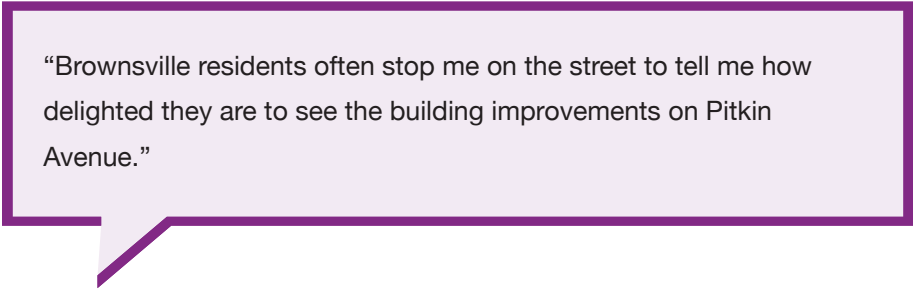
- Are grants distributed before or after construction completion?
- How much funding will the SIP grant award provide?
 - Will grants fund 100% of improvement projects?
 - Will the SIP offer large grants, small grants, or both?
- Will your SIP grants require a match from recipients?

Matching grants require applicants to invest a portion of their own money into a project. Financial contributions from participants indicate they will take responsibility for the maintenance of improvements.

Examples of matching grant structures include:

- 75/25 or 3:1 match
 - Grant funds 75% of improvement costs
 - Grantee responsible for 25% of improvement costs
- 50/50 or 1:1 match
 - Grant funds 50% of improvement costs
 - Grantee responsible for 50% of improvement costs

You may also want to implement a maximum grant amount in case specific projects become expensive. This will ensure that your SIP can fund several projects and not be limited to matching the funds for only one or two large projects.



“Brownsville residents often stop me on the street to tell me how delighted they are to see the building improvements on Pitkin Avenue.”

— Jesse Gericke, Pitkin Avenue BID

The following sample projects detail the 3:1 matching grant structure:

Tier 1 Project	Tier 2 Project	Tier 3 Project
Minor improvements (e.g. new business signage, lighting, open-grill security gates)	Extensive improvements (e.g. Tier 1 + power washing, painting, and façade repair)	Significant improvements (e.g. Tiers 1 and 2 + storefront framing, window replacement, and accessibility upgrades)
Total Project Cost \$12,000	Total Project Cost \$25,000	Total Project Cost \$60,000
75% Grant \$9,000	75% Grant \$18,750	Maximum Grant \$20,000
25% Owner Match \$3,000	25% Owner Match \$6,250	Owner Match \$40,000

Costs are estimated and can vary widely

Types of Storefront Improvements

The results of the storefront conditions needs assessment, and guidance from your funding source(s), will determine the improvements in your commercial district.

The SIP Advisory Committee should consider the following when evaluating proposed improvements:

- Are there accessibility issues the program should address?
 - Installing ramps at entrances
 - ADA-approved door hardware
- Which common code violations should the program correct?
 - Illegal signage
 - Storefronts not in compliance with New York City’s latest Energy Conservation Code (ECC) regulations
- Which storefront improvements are a priority?
 - Removing cluttered signage and oversized awnings
 - Removing solid-panel security gates/replacing with open grille gates

Before and After Photos of Tino’s Unisex Hair Styling (1904 Mott Avenue, Far Rockaway, Queens)

Photo Credit: NYC SBS



Technical Assistance

Business and property owners will need your support from the launch of your SIP to its completion. One of the biggest challenges business owners face is identifying quality specialized and general contractors. Additionally, many business owners also require support in obtaining permits. Therefore, it is strongly encouraged that your SIP includes a technical assistance component to support participant needs.

Consider if you will provide the following technical assistance to participants:

- Architectural services, including design and construction drawings
- Bid sheets and material specifications
- Contractor selection
- General project scheduling, tracking, and management

Program Budget

Funders will require you to propose an initial comprehensive program budget that illustrates how much capital is needed to implement your SIP.

The following budget lines are standard:

- Grants
 - Most significant share of the SIP budget
 - Allocated towards capital costs
 - Not all participants will spend their maximum grant amount
- Personnel costs
 - Details base compensation to the Program Manager(s)
 - Estimated number of hours PM will dedicate to the program
- Soft costs
 - Building professionals fees, such as architects and expeditors
 - Permits required for trade workers, including electricians and sign hangers
- Technical assistance resources
 - Architect fees to create specific design guidelines for your commercial district
 - Research costs associated with procurement of historic tax lot photographs from the NYC Department of Records

Eligibility

To determine the eligibility of business and property owners, review the results of your storefront conditions needs assessment and the purpose of your SIP.

When determining the eligibility criteria for your SIP, consider:

- Will your program serve business owners, property owners, or both?
- Where is your commercial district located?
 - Is it a high-traffic shopping area?
 - Combination of residential and retail spaces?

Your funding source(s) may determine the eligibility requirements of business and property owners.

Program Materials

Introduction

Once the SIP operational framework has been determined, you will create public-facing materials to explain the purpose of your SIP and spread the word.

Materials might include:

- Design guidelines
- Presentations
- Program guidelines
- Program application
- Scope of work template
- Additional collateral

Program Guidelines

Potential SIP participants must understand the purpose of the SIP for your commercial district.

Program guidelines should include:

- Before and after photos of similar projects
- Funding availability and matching requirements (if applicable)
- Overview of the grant application and funding processes
- Project selection criteria
- Specific funder requirements, such as environmental testing

[Sample Program Guidelines can be found here.](#)

Program Application Checklist

All applicants must thoroughly outline their projects, timelines, and proposed budgets. The details applicants provide will help your CBO choose the most appropriate grant award recipients.

Applicants should provide:

- Contact information (name, email, phone number, property address, emergency contact)
- Proposed scope of work
 - Itemized list of improvements (e.g. signage, lighting, security gates)
 - Estimates from multiple contractors for the entire proposed scope of work
- Lease information (to determine the feasibility of maintenance)
 - Disclosure of monthly rent
 - Lease term
 - Record of annual rent increases may also be included as a standard part of the general application
- Tenant and property owner signatures, confirming they:
 - Have read the program guidelines
 - Approve of participation
 - Are committed to undertaking and maintaining the proposed project if selected

[Sample Program Application can be found here.](#)

Design Guidelines

Design guidelines communicate standards and visual/style priorities to SIP program participants and the public. In addition, design guidelines are helpful tools to draft scopes of work and special projects.

When establishing design guidelines, incorporate NYC Department of City Planning and NYC Department of Buildings codes and regulations. Although design guidelines may be organized as a simple bullet point list, you may also want to provide sample drawings to potential participants.

For general best practices in storefront design, see the NYC Department of Small Business Services publication [Storefront Improvements: A Guide for Neighborhood Commercial Districts](#).

Marketing Materials

Marketing materials are needed to promote your SIP. Examples of marketing materials include brochures, email marketing blasts, flyers, posters, postcards, and websites.

Sample postcard for the Transform Tremont Program.



Grant Agreement

Grant agreements are critical when establishing your SIP. Before kicking off a construction project, execute a grant agreement between your organization and the grant funder. Grant agreements hold all parties accountable.

The grant agreement will define:

- Participant responsibilities
- Maximum reimbursable amount for grant
- Outcomes for each grant award
- Scope
- Terms

Reimbursement of grants requires oversight from the CBO. A reimbursement requirement holds the grant recipient accountable for following the SIP rules and construction regulations. Grant reimbursement also helps the CBO avoid spending money on services that may not be delivered, such as walk-away contractors.

Your CBO can use property maintenance declaration forms to ensure property owners appropriately maintain the building. These declarations can also include provisions that the property is not sold for a predetermined number of years after SIP program completion.

Phase 4

Execute

Steps

1. Program Launch
2. Project Selection
3. Project Planning
4. Construction and Closeout

Program Launch

Introduction

Your SIP will require time and commitment. The executive team of your CBO may define a programmatic vision, but the daily operations of a SIP are the responsibility of a dedicated Executive Director or Program Manager(s).

Be Prepared

The following steps will help make your outreach successful:

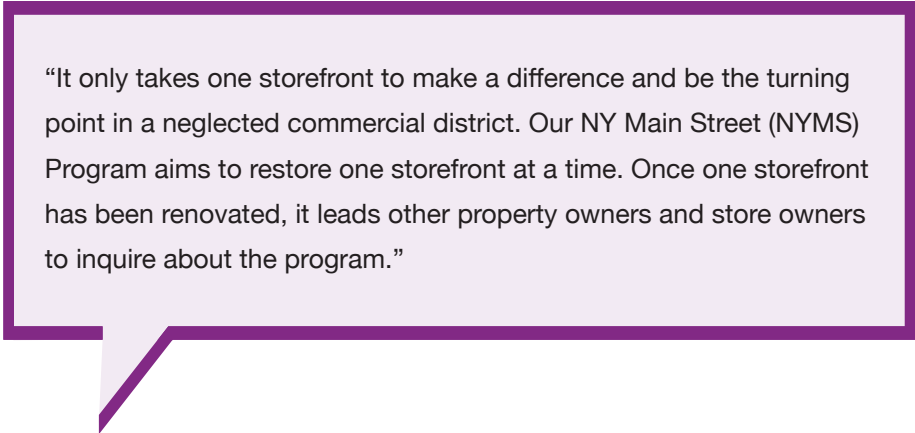
- Be prepared for questions and skepticism regarding grant funding
- Anticipate applicant questions in advance
- Practice responding to questions
- Publish a FAQ handout to support your outreach efforts
- Establish application deadline
- Follow up with eligible participants to receive a reasonable number of applications
- Remain focused on the personal benefit for property and/or business owners
- Share before and after photos of successful storefront improvement projects to help potential applicants understand the impact it can have on their businesses

Spread the Word

As discussed in Phase 3: Design, your CBO must advertise the program appropriately to generate interest from eligible applicants and collect applications.

Forms of outreach:

- Host informational sessions
- Invite business and property owners to apply
- Obtain referrals from community stakeholders such as community board members and elected officials
- Promote SIP at community board meetings
- Remind potential applicants through personalized phone calls
- Send multiple email blasts
- Visit property owners and businesses in-person



“It only takes one storefront to make a difference and be the turning point in a neglected commercial district. Our NY Main Street (NYMS) Program aims to restore one storefront at a time. Once one storefront has been renovated, it leads other property owners and store owners to inquire about the program.”

— Kathleen Sforza, Northfield Community LDC,
Port Richmond, Staten Island

Project Selection

Introduction

After spreading the word and receiving applications, you will review submissions and select candidates for storefront improvement projects.

Selection Process

Follow these steps to avoid bias and create a fair selection process:

1. Form a selection committee
2. Create an evaluation sheet for reviewers, including project selection criteria and program goals (sample below)
3. Conduct application review by a minimum of two committee members
4. After reviewing applications, meet to evaluate the submissions and collectively select finalists
5. Send award notification letters restating the terms of the grant, funding amount, and next steps

Sample Evaluation Form

Selection Criteria	Max Score	Score	Notes (Strengths/Weaknesses)
Does the application include at least one estimate for all improvements listed in the proposed project?	10		
Is the applicant prepared to begin construction immediately or within three months?	10		
Has the applicant described their ability to cover the total cost of the project upfront before reimbursement?	3		
Has the applicant included at least one photograph of the building's façade?	1		
Does the application include the signed statement of support from the property owner?	1		
Total Score	25		

Project Planning

Introduction

Before construction begins, businesses must finalize project details:

- Scope
- Design
- Cost estimates

Finalize the Scope of Work

The program application will include preliminary information on the intended scope of work. SIP participants will need to finalize the scope, often in consultation with a design or other building trades professional. SIP grantees should submit a bid sheet to SIP administrative staff before requesting proposals from contractors.

Sample Scope of Work

STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENTS TO BE PERFORMED AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATION			
Business/Property Owner: Furniture Store at 123 Main Street, New York, NY 10021			
	Eligible Storefront Improvement	Estimated Cost	Description of Work
1	Removal and disposal of existing signs	\$5,000	Contractor will remove and dispose of current signage to provide a clear surface for new signage.
2	Fabricate and install two new sign cabinets	\$3,500	Contractor will fabricate and install two new 20" x 200" signs with laser-cut letters.
3	Sign permits	\$1,200	Contractor will file for two NYC Department of Buildings (DOB) sign permits to conduct sign installation.
4	Façade painting, power washing, and patchwork	\$3,700	Contractor will power wash the façade, fill visible cracks, and paint the façade.
Total Budget		\$13,400	

Design Services

Architectural design services are often required to install:

- New storefront framing
- Windows
- Other façade treatments

For small projects, relevant contractors, such as licensed sign hangers or electricians, will be needed to complete a new sign or lighting fixtures. These contractors can also help design the sign or provide a product catalog for business or property owners to choose materials.

Always include photographs or designs of the final product with the invoice before beginning a construction project.

Project Bidding

Once the scope of work and design is finalized, your CBO must recruit qualified contractors to perform the job. It is recommended and required by some funders to acquire at least two bids for every project. Securing multiple offers ensures program participants and the CBO are provided with fair and reasonable quotes.

Your CBO can approach project bidding by:

- Using a prequalified pool of contractors as recommended in the [New York Main Street \(NYMS\) Program Guide](#). NYMS also suggests using contractors who are:
 - Actively licensed
 - M/WBE certified
 - Sufficiently staffed
 - Local to project
- Requiring grantees to seek contractor bids independently
- Releasing formal requests for proposals (RFPs) for each project

Once finalized scopes of work are submitted, review them with the grantee and help select appropriate contractors. When evaluating estimates from contractors, consider the following:

- Are you using the [SBS Online Directory of NYC Certified Businesses](#) to support minority- and women-owned contractors?
- Have you reviewed referrals or recommendations from previous clients?
- Is the contractor licensed and insured? Refer to the [NYC DOB License Lookup](#)
- What are the contractor's fees?
- What other projects has the contractor satisfactorily completed?

All participants must sign a contract with the selected contractor. The contract must clearly define:

- Terms of the agreement
- Payment structure
- Other important project details

Permits

Many SIP projects will require permits. Licensed professionals and architects will advise your CBO on the permits needed to complete the project. You can also refer to the [NYC DOB Permit Requirements](#).

Do not overlook the importance of acquiring the appropriate permits. Projects that do not have the proper permits can receive citations, which will result in additional project costs.

Construction and Closeout

Introduction

The construction and closeout phases require you to stay in constant communication with participants and contractors. You will want to perform several site visits and document progress. When projects are complete, it's time for you to celebrate!

Keep Track of Progress

Once construction begins, track the progress of your SIP regularly. Frequent communication with all participants will keep your SIP on schedule and ensure your CBO adheres to the grant terms. Your CBO should perform periodic site visits during this phase.

If applicable, architect site visits can ensure the construction work aligns with the agreed-upon scope and design. Site visits typically occur at:

- Pre-construction
- Project kick-off
- Mid-point
- Closeout

Keep a record of each point of contact you have with a program participant to remain on schedule for the construction project.

Take photographs before, during, and after the construction process. Photographs illustrating the progress of a project will be beneficial in future marketing efforts.

Post-Construction and Closeout

Once construction is complete, start the project closeout process. Always perform a closeout site visit to ensure contracted work is completed. During this visit, take photographs of the property to use for future marketing materials.

If you provide a reimbursement grant, collect proofs of payment for completed work and any other documentation required by your program or funder to process payment. After the construction and closeout processes are complete, deliver the grant payment.

If your grant is awarded to business and property owners at the beginning of the construction phase, make sure to visit the property to perform a closeout site assessment.

Share Your Success

Celebrate the success of your SIP by sharing it with the local community!

Ideas for publicizing the completion of a SIP project include:

- Distributing a press release to local news outlets
- Host an unveiling of completed projects and invite funders, community stakeholders, and program participants to attend
- Share before and after photos with business and property owners in your commercial district to encourage additional SIP projects

Sample Program Timeline

<p>Month 1: Initiation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin establishing program framework • Build SIP Advisory Committee • Conduct storefront conditions inventory • Define program goals, objectives, and outcomes
<p>Months 2-3: Program Design & Launch</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure funding sources • Finalize program framework, grant structure, selection criteria • Create program documents and other collateral and materials • Publicize program and conduct outreach plan • Collect application submissions • Create and release RFP for design services and contractors for future projects
<p>Month 4: Project Selection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review submitted applications with staff and committee • Screen finalists to clarify proposed project scope, ability to cover costs, and confirm commitment to design • Select and notify grantees to move forward
<p>Months 5-7: Project Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct site visit(s) to further discuss the scope of work with participants • Coordinate with selected vendors/contractors and program participants to finalize design and project details • Execute grant agreement with program participants
<p>Months 8-11: Pre-Construction and Construction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a pre-construction meeting with each grantee, contractor(s), and program architect (if applicable) to ensure all parties are in agreement about the project scope, timeline, and construction start date • Confirm contractor(s) have filed for the appropriate permits • Conduct regular site visits during construction, ensuring work adheres to the agreed-upon scope and schedule <p>Note: It is essential to emphasize that construction time can vary, and projects will move at different speeds. Timelines vary based on the complexity of the project, reliability of contractors, weather, and responsiveness of the business or property owner.</p>
<p>Month 12: Post-Construction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute grant payments • Emphasize ongoing maintenance responsibilities with grantees • Showcase completed projects and notify local stakeholders to celebrate success • Ongoing communication, maintenance, and additional improvements

Phase 5

Sustain

Steps

1. Maintenance and Communication
2. Measure and Evaluate Impact
3. Continue Improving Your Community
4. Resources

Sustain the Program

Introduction

Although storefront improvements can make a significant one-time impact, the benefits can be even greater if the program continues and expands.

Maintenance and Communication

Remind business and property owners that it is their responsibility to maintain the improvements.

Your CBO should offer ongoing assistance to participants, such as sharing maintenance tips and best practices with SIP participants. Visit the corridor regularly to assess and report any items in disrepair.

Measure and Evaluate Impact

The impact of a SIP may be measured through various metrics:

- Additional interior or exterior improvements completed by participating in the SIP
- Business success case studies
 - Extended store hours
 - Increased sales
 - Hiring staff
- Number of participating businesses
- Number of participating M/WBEs – program participants and hired contractors
- Percentage of the commercial district served
- Public and private investments
- Total improved square feet or street frontage

Establishing metrics and gathering data are essential to effectively communicate the success of your CBO's SIP and its overall impact on the community. Consider conducting a short survey to solicit testimonials from SIP grantees. Surveys also allow for the collection of vital feedback that may inform future iterations of the SIP. Survey data may also be shared with funders and saved for future pitches by your CBO.

Determine the best metrics to demonstrate the program goals that align with the strategic priorities of your organization and the goals set in Phase 1.

Get creative! Develop innovative metrics to track the impacts of your SIP that are relevant to your stakeholders.

Continue Improving Your Community

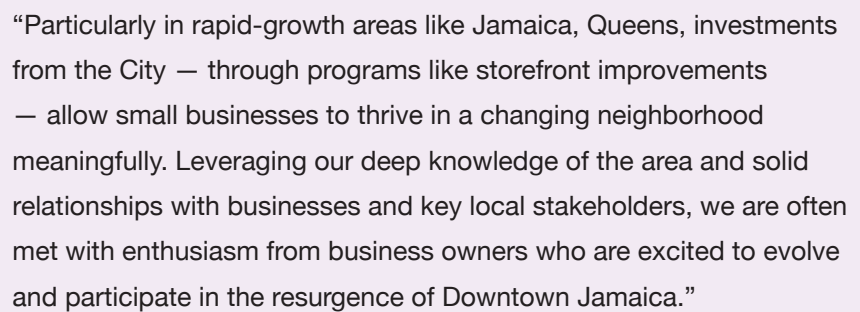
If you believe the SIP was a good fit for your CBO and commercial district, continue implementing improvement projects in your community. Review the storefront conditions needs assessment to identify further improvements that community members desire.

If you are looking to grow the impact of your SIP results, additional projects will be beneficial in enhancing your neighborhood. For example, many CBOs host workshops on storefront design and maintenance and organize corridor cleanup days. These smaller interventions, paired with completed improvement projects, can bolster your SIP and help improve your commercial district.

Resources

Have questions about starting a SIP?

SBS provides technical assistance to CBOs pursuing storefront improvements in their commercial districts. Visit nyc.gov/storefronts for more information.



“Particularly in rapid-growth areas like Jamaica, Queens, investments from the City — through programs like storefront improvements — allow small businesses to thrive in a changing neighborhood meaningfully. Leveraging our deep knowledge of the area and solid relationships with businesses and key local stakeholders, we are often met with enthusiasm from business owners who are excited to evolve and participate in the resurgence of Downtown Jamaica.”

— Greater Jamaica Development Corporation



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The NYC Department of Small Business Services helps unlock economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building thriving neighborhoods across the five boroughs.

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