

CITY OF LINCOLN/LANCASTER COUNTY
AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST
LOCAL ATTRACTIONS AND BUSINESS DISTRICTS

OVERVIEW

The City of Lincoln and Lancaster County invite letters of interest from nonprofit organizations and existing, City-recognized business improvement districts interested in implementing tourism, travel, and hospitality promotion initiatives, specifically supporting local attractions and business districts impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as aid for a planned expansion or upgrade of tourism, travel, and hospitality facilities delayed due to the pandemic. Funding is available through American Rescue Plan State Fiscal Recovery funds on a competitive basis. This invitation outlines: 1) an overview of Lincoln, Nebraska attraction, business district, and tourism/travel/hospitality focus areas, 2) the justification for implementing such initiatives, 3) goals for the effort, 4) format, timelines, process, and criteria for the letter of interest process, and 5) initial expectations for financial reporting and program oversight and 6) references.

FOCUS AREAS

1. Lincoln, Nebraska Attraction, Business District and Tourism/Travel/Hospitality Focus Areas

- a. Lincoln/Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan: The Comprehensive Plan states: “Public and private investment in Lincoln is evident in the Downtown, Antelope Valley, Innovation Campus, and West Haymarket projects. All of these assets should be emphasized to encourage economic development.[i]”
- b. Downtown Lincoln Master Plan: This plan, adopted by the City Council, prioritizes economic development initiatives and projects that catalyze future development and growth. For example, it specifically identifies a planned Downtown Music District, noting the job creation, talent retention and attraction, broader economic growth, and tourism benefits.
- c. Existing Business Districts: Business districts, such as the Lincoln Haymarket Development Corporation, have previously established goals and initiatives for economic growth in an established geographic area of the city. Such business districts may have specifically been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and/or planned expansions or upgrades may have been delayed due to the pandemic.
- d. Other Plans and City Approved Initiatives: Other formal City and County Boards and Commissions approve and recommend plans for attractions, business districts, and tourism/travel/hospitality projects. These Boards and Commissions, such as the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, may have reviewed or recommended proposals that were delayed due to the pandemic.

2. Justification for Investment in Local Attraction and Business District Initiatives

- a. American Rescue Plan: Support for local attractions and business districts impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as aid for a planned expansion or upgrade of tourism, travel, and hospitality facilities delayed due to the pandemic is a clear strategy for economic recovery and identified as an allowable use of American Rescue Plan State and Local Fiscal Relief Funding.
 - i. *Economic Impact*: Aid may be considered responsive to the negative economic impacts of the pandemic if it supports businesses, attractions, business districts, and Tribal development districts operating prior to the pandemic and affected by required closures and other efforts to contain the pandemic. For example, a recipient may provide aid to support safe reopening of businesses in the tourism, travel, and hospitality industries and to business districts that were closed during the Covid-19 public health emergency, as well as aid for a planned expansion or upgrade of tourism, travel, and hospitality facilities delayed due to the pandemic. Recipients should also consider whether impacts were due to the Covid--19 pandemic, as opposed to longer-term economic or industrial trends unrelated to the pandemic.
 - ii. *Disproportionately Impacted Populations and Communities*: The rule prioritizes programs, services, or other assistance provided to households, businesses, or populations disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 public health emergency. Qualified Census Tracts are a common, readily accessible, and geographically granular method of identifying communities with a large proportion of low-income residents. Using an existing measure may speed implementation and decrease administrative burden, while identifying areas of need at a highly localized level. Qualified Census Tracts can be identified on the Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research website: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sadda/sadda_qct.html
- b. Mayor’s Economic Recovery Task Force: The Task Force recognized the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on certain sectors, stating: “Our public health and economic recovery are closely intertwined – we cannot have one without the other, especially if we want to preserve the strength of those sectors that have been particularly impacted by Covid-19 like hospitality and arts, among others[ii].”

3. Goals of Lincoln, Nebraska Business District and Tourism/Travel/Hospitality Initiatives through the American Rescue Plan

- a. Economic Recovery: Economic recovery is the top priority of the American Rescue Plan with a focus on Tourism, Travel, and Hospitality. Letters of interest should identify ways in which projects identify the negative economic impact caused by the pandemic and their proposed remedy and/or the manner in which the planned expansion was delayed due to the pandemic[iii].

- b. Equity: Strategies should result in opportunities that improve the Lincoln, Nebraska communities disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic as defined by their location in a qualified census tract.
- c. Sustainability and Economic Impact: Priority will be given to entities that illustrate a sustainability plan to grow and develop hospitality, travel, and tourism in Lincoln and create economic impact or return on investment. Economic impact may also include the potential for related employment and the use of apprentices and union labor on building projects. Consideration will also be provided to proposals that offer significant matching funds.
- d. Alignment with City and County Planning: Priority will be given to entities or projects that have been identified, planned, or recommended through existing City and County plans, commissions, boards, and or other formal processes prior to the pandemic, including but not limited to the City/County Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown Lincoln Plan, Lincoln Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Local plan, and others.

ELIGIBILITY, FUNDING, FORMAT, PROCESS, and TIMEFRAMES

4. Eligibility, Funding, Format, Process, and Timeframes

- a. Eligible Entities: Applications may be accepted from established nonprofit organizations or existing city-recognized business improvement districts. Applications will not be accepted from for-profit organizations or entities that have not been formally recognized.
- b. Eligible Projects: Projects must meet the following criteria:
 - i. Must be filed by an eligible entity.
 - ii. Must exist in a qualified census tract ^{IV}. (See footnotes for details)
 - iii. Must be a project related to tourism, travel, or hospitality or be a project of a city-recognized business district.^V(See footnotes for details)
 - iv. Must identify a negative economic impact caused by the pandemic and the project must address the proposed remedy.
 - v. Must be recognized specifically in the City of Lincoln Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown Master Plan or other planning process documents developed in partnership with the City of Lincoln and/or City of Lincoln Boards or Commissions.
 - vi. Projects offering matching funding will be prioritized as will projects that illustrate a clear economic impact and/or multiplier effect.
 - vii. Projects using union labor and/or recognized registered apprenticeships will be prioritized.
- c. Available Funding
 - i. Projects that meet the eligibility criteria above and were planned prior to the pandemic will be eligible for funding. Up to \$17 million in funding may be awarded over a two-year period. Funding may also be set aside for publicly owned projects.
 - ii. Tier 1 application - large projects: Applications will be considered for aid for a planned expansion or upgrade of tourism, travel, and hospitality facilities delayed due to the pandemic. Tier 1 applicants may apply for between \$6 million and \$13 million dollars.

- iii. Tier 2 applications – small projects: Applications will be considered for aid for a planned expansion or upgrade of tourism, travel, and hospitality facilities delayed due to the pandemic. Tier 2 applications may apply for between \$250,000 and \$2.5 million.
- d. Letter of Interest Format: Letters of interest should follow the following format completely and should use the corresponding roman numerals for each section. Letters should be no more than three pages.
 - i. A description of the existing nonprofit or already-recognized business improvement district serving people in the city of Lincoln, Nebraska including project contact person, email address, and phone number.
 - ii. The physical location of the applicant and whether or not they are located in a qualifying census tract. (See footnotes for details)
 - iii. A description of the proposed attraction, business district, and or tourism/travel/hospitality facility project, including a description of the manner in which the project was planned and delayed due to the pandemic.
 - iv. Letters of interest should identify ways in which projects identify the negative economic impact caused by the pandemic and their proposed remedy.
 - v. How the proposed project achieves the goals in section three.
 - vi. How the proposed project aligns with the eligible funding priorities of the American Rescue plan outlined in section 2 a, the total amount of matching funds identified, and the total amount requested.
- e. Letter of Interest Process: Letters shall be received at LincolnForward@lincoln.ne.gov no later than 5:00 pm November 11, 2021. Letters received will be reviewed by a committee of city and county experts. The committee will select organizations that will be invited to participate in a second phase application process¹. (See footnotes for details) A webinar will be held at 3:00 pm on Tuesday, October 26th at 3:00 pm. Questions may be directed to Kate Bolz at KBolz@lincoln.ne.gov.
- f. Timeline:
 - i. October 21 – November 11, 2021: Letters of Inquiry Accepted
 - ii. November 20 – November 24, 2021: Review of Letters of Interest
 - iii. November 24 – December 10, 2022: Second Round Proposals Developed by Invited Applicants
 - iv. December 10 – December 29, 2021: Second Round Applications Reviewed and Accepted
 - v. Beginning January 2022: Contracts Developed and Projects Implemented

FINANCIAL REPORTING

5. Financial Reporting and Program Oversight

- a. Financial Reporting: Organizations must comply with reporting requirements of the City of Lincoln and the America Rescue Plan, including but not limited to providing quarterly project

and expenditure reports providing financial data, information on expenditures and eligible uses, and outcomes of the initiatives.

- b. Program Oversight: Organizations shall, at a minimum, report out the number of individuals served and successfully receiving living wage employment and/or education or training in a field directly related to an opportunity for living wage employment on an annual basis.
- c. Additional Reporting and Oversight: Additional reporting and oversight shall be required as necessary to comply with federal requirements and shall be included in detail in contracts developed with accepted organizations. Audits should be expected.

REFERENCES

6. References

^[i] City of Lincoln Comprehensive Plan <https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/files/sharedassets/public/planning/long-range-planning/comprehensive-plan/parks.pdf>

^[ii] Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force:

https://app.lincoln.ne.gov/city/covid19/pdf/Mayor's%20Economic%20Recovery%20Task%20Force_Report.pdf

^[iii] Treasury Interim Final Rule: <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/FRF-Interim-Final-Rule.pdf>

^[IV] Qualified Census Tracts may be found here: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sadda/sadda_qct.html

^[IV] Business Improvement Districts recognized by the City of Lincoln:

- College View Maintenance Business Improvement District
- Havelock Avenue Maintenance Business Improvement District
- North 27th Street Maintenance Business Improvement District
- South Street Maintenance Business Improvement District
- University Place Maintenance Business Improvement District
- West O Street Maintenance Business Improvement District
- Core Management Business Improvement District
- Downtown Management Business Improvement District
- Downtown Maintenance District
- West Haymarket/Downtown Maintenance District

ⁱ Instructions will be provided for applicants invited to the second round. Phase two will be for invited applicants only. Invited applicants will be asked to provide the following information, in addition to other information requests.

- i. Specific goals of the proposed project and a summary scope of work.
- ii. A proposed timeline of project completion dates or benchmarks.
- iii. A staffing plan: please list the organization Executive Director and the Program/Project Director and their respective biographies.
- i. A program budget including whether the applicant is applying for tier 1 or tier 2 as outlined in 4c above. Allowable expenses include but are not limited to: aid to support safe reopening of businesses in the tourism, travel, and hospitality industries and to business districts that were closed during the Covid-19 public health emergency, as well as aid for a planned expansion or upgrade of tourism, travel, and hospitality facilities

delayed due to the pandemic, aid for business districts experiencing a specific economic harm due to the pandemic and implementing a district approach to remedy the harm.

- ii. Description of the manner in which the projects using union labor and/or recognized registered apprenticeships, if applicable.