LOCAL RAPID RECOVERY PLANNING – Q&A

DECEMBER 9, 2020

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1.WEBINAR RECORDING & SLIDES

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- **Will you provide the materials to all registrants after the program? Can this slide presentation be made available on the DHCD web site? Can I get a recorded copy of this presentation for my board members?**

  - All the information from the Information Session can be found at the MDI website:
    Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) | Mass.gov.

2. MASSACHUSETTS DOWNTOWN INITIATIVE

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- **Does this replace MDI?**

    - No, the MDI request for applications for the next fiscal year (2022) will be out in early 2021.

3. APPLICATION & APPROACH

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- **Should we have an idea or potential program to include in the application or be more vague?**

  - You do not need to have ideas or potential programs to include in the application. The Local Rapid Recovery Planning Process will help you develop and generate these ideas in response to COVID-19 impacts identified during the Diagnostic. This isn't an application for specific projects, the application is asking for impacts of COVID and thru the LRRP process, the community will identify specific projects.

- **Can RPAs also be lead applicants for individual town(s) and possibly more than one small town?**

  - No, RPA's should not be the lead applicant for communities. The application should be submitted from a municipality. If the application is from a group of communities, there should be a designated lead municipality for the group.

- **How can communities without a downtown area think about this innovatively? We are a large geographic town with ~15K residents.**

  - Communities without a "downtown" should think if there is a recognized commercial area that might function as their area of commerce. Another way to think about it is what area of your community has been impacted by COVID-19 economically and can that be recognized as a study area.

3. APPLICATION & APPROACH

- **We have a possible two organizations working together with one being the main applicant, looking at one study area. Does that arrangement fit under a single or group applicant (or not at all since it's not multiple focus areas)?**

  - Two organizations can apply to work together for a single Study Area, but one must be identified as the Lead Applicant. Please select Single Applicant, Single Study Area for Question #9 and describe the proposed partnership in response to Question #10. This is a single application with a recognized lead. The fact that there is second group that will assist with the plan is great, but does not impact the application process.

- **As regards community size, what about seasonal communities which can increase 5-fold in the summer?**

  - In response to Question #4 in the Application regarding Community Population Size, please give your year-round population figure in application. We understand that seasonal communities have very different summer populations. You can provide additional information in the open-ended questions.

3. APPLICATION & APPROACH

- **What's the interplay to being open to the work of the consultant in developing the plan and having a plan already in place?**

  - Local Rapid Recovery Plans will be focused on short-term, actionable projects that are responsive to COVID-19 impacts in your community. We see these plans as complimenting, rather than replacing other planning efforts that are already underway. The interplay between an existing plan and the plan that will be developed through LRRP process is that the existing plan will support the LRRP plan. The LRRP plan will include Covid-19 impact data and be project based, it will build on the existing plan and take that plan to actionable steps.

- **What is the criteria for determining a successful applicant?**

  - The LRRP program is not anticipated to be competitive. Should the $9.5 million be over subscribed, we will adjust scopes of plans to meet the need. We will use the commitment to the planning process, # of COVID cases, level of unemployment in the community and commitment to implement the LRRP plan as factors for adjusting the scopes.

3. APPLICATION & APPROACH

- **This timeline will make it very difficult if not impossible for multiple municipalities to submit together, simply because of Open Meeting requirements re discussion and approval of a joint application. Any workarounds?**

  - Yes, please submit the application by December 18 and signature page by January 8, 2021. If local requirements impair the ability to submit an application, contact Emmy Hahn at elizabeth.hahn@mass.gov to discuss the situation.

- **Our town won't have a select board meeting before December 18 to approve making such an application. Can we apply subject to that later approval, retroactively applied?**

  - Yes, please submit the application by December 18 and signature page by January 8, 2021.

- **How many of the awards will be given?**

  - The LRRP program is open to all 351 communities in the Commonwealth. We anticipate all applicants will receive some level of assistance.

3. APPLICATION & APPROACH

- **Can a community apply on their own if they are also represented on a regional application?**

  - No, only one application will be reviewed for each community.

- **How much detail do you want in the application (short, long term challenges)? I understand that this is a quick turnaround for us and DHCD to start the process. I want to provide the whole picture of what COVID has done to our DT business community but also want to mindful of all your applications you will be receiving.**

  - Please provide sufficient detail to succinctly describe your challenges. Use your judgement. A few paragraphs should be sufficient.

  - The applicant should respond concisely to the questions. Thank you for being considerate of our review process, the description of the impacts of COVID short and long-term should serve as a strong description of what COVID has done to your business community. We do allow for additional narrative as per Question #10 in the application.

4. IMPLEMENTATION & PROJECTS

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IN RESPONSE TO ALL QUESTIONS ON SLIDES 15 - 17 RELATED TO IMPLEMENTATION & PROJECTS:

The Rapid Recovery planning process will include a diagnostic, project identification and vetting and refinement of projects. This funding is for planning, not implementation. All the following questions reference a specific plan or project. The list of projects in the application serves as examples of projects or specific plans that might come out of the initial diagnostic and project development phases.

Projects eligible for inclusion in the Final Local Rapid Recovery Plans must demonstrate a nexus between COVID impacts and recovery. Most projects, though not all, should focus on short-term actionable items, but we recognize that these funds are being developed outside of the regular state funding cycles and may support applications for funding in fiscal year 2022.

4. IMPLEMENTATION & PROJECTS

- My major question for today is "where is the line between Planning and Implementation?". For instance, if a community wanted to plan for a Springtime Arts Walk in a downtown, which includes working with artists and shop owners and owners of vacant storefronts to a) camouflage vacant storefronts, and b) support local retail and restaurants by bringing more folks downtown POST-COVID, can the Planning for this event include meetings with artists, shop owners, town planners etc. to plan the event, get commitments from store owners, design the flyers for the event, etc.???

- Similarly, how can planning for future POST-COVID but hopefully late spring events on the Town Green proceed? Can this work include working with musicians, local retail and restaurants, plan the advertising including flyers, etc. to plan events that will support downtown businesses? What is the line between Planning and implementation here?

- For a way-finding program, again, what is the line between planning and implementation? Can this include details such as locations of where signs and kiosks should be located, design of the signs, preparation of a logo for the downtown, etc., while leaving the actual construction to the future installation of the signage?

- Our community is interested in rehabbing an outdoor bandshell in town. Would that be of interest?

- Are transportation-related plans eligible?

- Are decorative lighting plans eligible for this grant?

4. IMPLEMENTATION & PROJECTS

- I am thinking of applying for an update to our Downtown Parking Study since it would support recovery by ensuring ample parking as we try to draw more people outside to our Town Common and vicinity. This study would benefit downtown businesses both in the short-term, but also the long-term. Is this type of effort enough of a recovery focused effort or is there any downside since this is something that we would have wanted to do eventually even before Covid?

- Can the project/application focus on challenges around finding resources + sustainability for existing plans or programs in this new mid-/ post-COVID environment? What if the issue is less coming up with great ideas, and more ways to help fund and support those ideas, especially now that the communities who might normally provide the funding are struggling themselves?

- Is online commerce for small businesses an eligible project?

- Is the evaluation of zoning and permitting an eligible project or is this more of a master planning effort?

- There isn't much planning needed to help with these activities. Are we not allowed to do things like promote a business district via social media, advertising, or updating a website?

- Is helping our local businesses move to selling products online, building their online presence, setting up a way to take up online payments, etc. an eligible project for the program? Considering that COVID-19 has created a demand for online marketing and sales.

4. IMPLEMENTATION & PROJECTS

- Can the project/application focus on challenges around finding resources + sustainability for existing plans or programs in this new mid- / post-COVID environment? What if the issue is less coming up with great ideas, and more ways to help fund and support those ideas, especially now that the communities who might normally provide the funding are struggling themselves?

- Looking at the application, we can use funds for things like the following. Is that accurate?

  - On-line marketplace for Study Area merchants

  - Social media promotion/marketing of retailers with Study Area

  - District Branding

  - Projection lighting or logo projections on downtown buildings

  - Shared advertising

  - Shopping directories

  - Marketing Campaigns (Shop Local, Stay-cation, Day Trip, etc.)

  - Enhanced Community events

4. IMPLEMENTATION & PROJECTS

- **Can you give some examples of short & med term priorities?**

  - The application asks for short -term challenges. Examples could include support for small businesses through streetscape design for warm or cold weather activation in the town center to bring more shoppers to the business center, and a shop local campaign. Medium or long-term challenges could include changing zoning to support outdoor dining or consuming alcohol in the public way (sidewalk). We will be asking Plan Facilitators to group projects under the following categories:

    - Public Realm Improvements, Placemaking - I.e., alley activation, lighting of trees/buildings. Public space improvements intended to accommodate social distancing, sidewalk reconstruction or improvement, etc.

    - Redevelopment and Private Investments - façade improvement programs, vacant storefront programs, etc.

    - Retail Sales Strategies – Shop Local Marketing Campaign, Tourism Campaign, Postcards or mailings to residents, etc.

    - Capacity & Regulatory Issues – streamline permitting, allow flexibility in allowable uses, streamline or as-of-right outdoor dining, etc.

    - Tenant Mix (retail retention & attraction) - Restaurant recovery grant program, technical assistance to support on-line sales, etc.

5. DATA COLLECTION

5. DATA COLLECTION DURING LRRP

- **Can we get a list of all the baseline data categories now?**

  At this time, we project plan facilitators will collect the following baseline data:

- Overall Study Area(s) Baseline Data:
  - Map of Study Area
  - Map of existing Study Area public spaces annotated to show conditions
  - # of Study Area storefronts and an assessment of overall conditions
  - Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) on roads within the Study Area
  - Pedestrian counts (if available)
  - Estimate the amount of Retail SF in the Study Area
  - # of Parking Spaces within study area (on street & off street)
  - Other components of Study Area impacted by COVID-19, Culture/Arts and Housing

- Market & Business Conditions – Pre & Post COVID should include to the extent practical:
  - Estimate the number of Businesses in March 2020
  - Estimate the number of Business closures since March 2020
  - Estimate the number of Current Vacant Storefronts
  - Estimate the number of Current Businesses
  - Categorization of Businesses within Study Area by NAICS code
  - Basic Study Area Demographics
  - Summary of Study Area Pre-COVID Customer Base, to include:
    - Resident population demographics (in addition to standard age distribution, income, population, education, etc.)
    - Estimates of Employee population (using On The Map or other similar Census Based tool)
    - Estimates of secondary and post-secondary student population (if applicable)
    - Other

5. DATA COLLECTION

- **The application asks for a description of the impact of COVID on the municipality, but you are also providing baseline data as part of the rapid planning process--what level of data describing the impact of COVID on municipalities are you anticipating in the application?**

  - In the Community Application - asked for overall COVID impact, tell us what you know, during planning process we'll get into diagnostic (consultant will help complete.)

6. CONSULTANT SELECTION

6. CONSULTANT SELECTION

- **Can you share more about the subject matter expert selection process? Is that part of the RFR that will be released or is that a separate RFR? And would those SMEs be assigned to a project only if the consultant lacks that expertise or is there an expectation that the consultants will work with at least one SME on a project?**

  - Subject Matter Experts (SME) will be sought in the Consultant RFR process. Respondents will be asked to choose Plan Facilitator and/or SME. SME's will be assigned if the Plan Facilitator does not have the needed expertise. Plan Facilitators may select SME categories in addition to "Plan Facilitator"

  - SME categories are:

    - Transportation or Infrastructure planning

    - Placemaking, Landscape Architecture, Architecture & Design

    - Cultural/Arts Needs Assessment

    - Marketing and Promotion

    - Land Use, Zoning, Policy, and Regulations

    - Small Business Technical Assistance

7. BUDGET & IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

7. BUDGET & IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

- **You said this program is not competitive--will every municipality that applies be funded?**

  - The LRRP program is not anticipated to be competitive. Should the $9.5 million be over subscribed, we will adjust scopes of plans to meet the need. We will use the commitment to the planning process, # of COVID cases, level of unemployment in the community and commitment to implement the LRRP plan as factors for adjusting the scopes.

- **Who determines the budget? Do applicants ask for a certain amount of funding or is funding based on your review and assessment of what an applicant's needs are?**

- **Who determines how much the grant award to a community should be? I didn't see anything in the application about this, but do we need to make an "ask"?**

- **In the application, it doesn't appear that the applicant requests a dollar amount of planning assistance. How is the dollar amount of planning assistance determined for each award?**

- **Will funding be available to implement the plans developed?**

  - In response to the above group of questions, the MDI program will develop the initial scope of services with consultants and community applicants. Once there is a scope of services, the MDI program will work with consultants to develop the budget for each Community (or possibly for a certain Study Area, depending on the complexity) using the billing rates submitted with the Consultant responses to the RFR and estimate of level of effort needed. Generally, there will be templates for various levels of projects (simple, typical, complex and very complex) and then the scope of services and budgets will be tailored to each community and consultant.

7. BUDGET & IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

- **Will grants be available to fund project recommendations?**

  - We anticipate that both existing programs and new recovery programs will be available for some of the implementation projects. We will provide information about various funding sources throughout the planning process.

- **Is there a maximum grant request amount? Required match?**

  - No, community applicants are not asked to estimate the amount of contract value for the technical assistance that will be provided by the consultants. There is no required match.

- **Will there be a budget assessment for the implementation stage?**

  We anticipate that projects including in final plan documents will include generic estimates of cost that fall into budget categories. We do not anticipate that projects will include highly detailed cost estimates for implementation.

7. BUDGET & IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

- **Will the program cover graphic design costs for brochures or other efforts?**

    - No, this is for planning, not implementation.

- **I know there are a number of grant programs for physical improvements to the public realm in downtowns, but will there be any new grants created for improvements to businesses within middle income communities (i.e. sign and facade, outdoor seating in private parking lots, ADA ramps, etc.)?**

    - We will provide information about various funding sources throughout the planning process.

8. PROGRAM DESIGN

- **It sounds like a community doesn't need a specific project in mind, like we would need for the MDI program. We can identify areas of concern through the application process, work through them with the professionals, and come out with several project ideas to address our areas of concern. Is this a fair assessment of how it will work?**

  - Yes, it is.

- **Can you provide an estimate of the amount of anticipated time commitment from the point person for a small community - under 7,000?**

  - It is difficult to estimate the time commitment. The responsibilities generally are:
    - To coordinate about the scope of services,
    - To promote the planning process in the community
    - To coordinate with the consultant for outreach efforts
    - To participate in plan development / review

8. PROGRAM DESIGN

- **With subject matter experts, what level of detail will engineer, or landscape architects be able to provide? For instance, my community has a specific concept in mind already but would be most interested in getting design work done.**

  - The Rapid Recovery planning process will include a diagnostic, project identification and vetting and development of the concept. While LRRP funding is for planning not implementation, at the culmination of the planning process the Commonwealth anticipates providing continued coordination to participating communities to support implementation through resources identification and capacity building support.

- **Are there plans for high level interactions between Streetsense and service providers?**

  - Yes, starting in January 2021.

- **What about the significant difference in needs between large and small communities? What type of experience does Streetsense have in this area?**

  - Streetsense staff have extensive knowledge of planning and diagnostic work in a variety of Downtown environments and have experience worked in hundreds of communities large, medium and small as well as rural, suburban downtown and highly dense, diverse urban environments.

8. PROGRAM DESIGN

- **If a municipality does not apply for participation in this program, is there any possibility a municipality person may view the webinars you mentioned earlier once the program is underway?**

    - Yes, all webinar participants will need to register and be verified in order to secure the webinars.

- **Will the consultants be able to help with any market analyses that can inform plan recommendations?**

    - The diagnostic includes the gathering of market information, but the anticipated scope will not include a traditional market analysis. The goal of the effort is to build consensus for actions that are informed by market & business conditions and respond to a community's existing capabilities and interest in advancing initiatives that will have immediate impact. We should also acknowledge that COVID has wrought significant changes in spending habits, buying power and business sales. Owing to that fact, syndicated data that reflects pre-COVID conditions is of limited utility at this time. This effort aims to give communities enough comprehensive information to make informed choices while also helping develop clear, concise and consensus-driven blueprints for action.

8. PROGRAM DESIGN

- **Is the expectation that the community engagement process will be uniform across all communities, or will each community have an opportunity to develop an engagement process tailored to their community with the consultant facilitators during the scoping period in January?**

  - We do have certain expectations about standard process, this includes 4-6 weeks of outreach. A plan for outreach can be developed in consultation with your Plan Facilitator and customized for your unique issues.

9. FINAL PLANS

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- **Can you provide links to the plans that were created through the similar program in NY?**

  - https://www1.nyc.gov/site/sbs/neighborhoods/commercial-district-needs-assessments.page