

DRI CHINATOWN BUILDING UPGRADE FUND: Frequently Asked Questions

Eligibility Questions

What costs are ineligible?

- Routine maintenance and repairs that address deferred maintenance are not eligible expenses under this program. Projects will be scored based on how they create a visible, transformative improvement beyond standard upkeep.

Are Mitchell-Lama housing eligible for the program?

- The focus of the Building Upgrade Fund is on commercial, not residential properties. However, Mitchell-Lama housing may be considered for grants if part of the property is leased to an eligible business or tenant, such as ground-floor retail, should all other program requirements be met.

Within the catchment area, many properties are aging and suffer from critical maintenance issues, such as water damage. Can BUF grants be used to offset the costs of ongoing renovations?

- Completion of deferred maintenance projects is not the core intent of this grant.
- The BUF is funded by the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, thus revitalization of the community is the focus of this grant. We encourage applicants to review our [scoring criteria](#) and consider how their project will contribute to broader community revitalization goals, enhance the surrounding area, and create a meaningful impact beyond addressing existing maintenance needs.

Can a project include ineligible improvements if the applicant separately pays for those repairs?

- Yes. Applicants may complete ineligible repair work separately at their own expense while seeking BUF funding for eligible improvements.
- The BUF grant can only be used towards eligible expenses.

For mixed-use properties, may grants be used to complete work on residencies as well as commercial space?

- No. BUF grant funds may not be used to upgrade features of residential units.
- In some cases, improvements to features shared by both a storefront and a residential entrance—such as an entry door, entrance, or exterior lighting—may be eligible for funding. However, the proposed work must be primarily focused on storefront improvements, with any residential benefit being incidental to the overall project scope and budget.
- Projects that include shared features will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine eligibility.

Can security, buzzer, or lighting systems qualify if they serve both the building's interior and exterior? How should the costs be divided?

- Potentially. If a security, buzzer, lighting, or other shared system serves both commercial and residential areas, the project costs must be allocated between the eligible and ineligible expenses.

- Only the costs attributable to the eligible commercial portion of the project may be funded through the BUF grant. Costs associated with residential units or other ineligible areas must be paid separately by the applicant.
- Applicants should clearly identify and document how costs were allocated as part of their project budget. Projects with shared systems will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Is a roll down gate eligible?

- Roll-down gates may be considered eligible if they are part of a broader improvement project that supports the goals of the Building Upgrade Fund, such as enhancing storefront appearance, safety, or the overall commercial corridor.

Are roof railings, rooftop security features, HVAC systems, and interior accessibility lifts eligible?

- Potentially. Eligibility depends on the specific project scope, its connection to the program goals, and whether the improvement creates a meaningful upgrade to the property. Applicants should provide details on how the proposed improvements support building functionality, accessibility, safety, or commercial corridor revitalization.

How can I update my property to be ADA compliant?

- The scope of ADA-related upgrades varies depending on the building and proposed project. If ADA improvements are included as part of an approved BUF project, they must comply with all applicable federal, state, and local codes and regulations.
- Applicants may choose to consult with a licensed architect, engineer, or qualified ADA accessibility consultant to determine what improvements may be needed to meet applicable accessibility requirements.
- Projects such as access ramps, lifts, compliant doorways, emergency exits may be considered for BUF grants.

Application Questions

Can I apply in Chinese?

- Application materials must be submitted in English for review purposes. However, language assistance will be available through office hours to help Chinese-speaking applicants understand the guidelines, prepare materials, and complete the application.

If an application is initially submitted incomplete, will there be an opportunity to submit the missing information?

- Only complete applications will be considered for the BUF grant. If an application is initially incomplete, CPLDC will work with applicants over the summer to help them provide any missing information. Applicants will be notified of outstanding documentation during the document request stage.

What do I do if my project is ready to be completed at the time the application is submitted? How will my review and construction timeline be impacted?

- To ensure the BUF grant is administered fairly and consistently, all applications will be reviewed after the September 7th application deadline. Applicants will be notified of their application status in Fall 2026, with approved projects anticipated to move forward in early 2027.
- Applicants are encouraged to apply even if their project is ready to begin or already underway, as the BUF grant is provided on a reimbursement basis. Eligible project expenses may be reimbursed after grant approval, subject to program requirements.
- Applicants are advised to begin project upgrades with elements that are not eligible for BUF grant funding, as these expenses would not be reimbursable through the grant program
- Applicants who begin project upgrades prior to receiving grant approval do so at their own risk. Any work completed before approval may not be eligible for reimbursement if the project is not approved or does not meet BUF grant requirements.

If I have already submitted an application, can I submit another to apply for another project type?

- Please submit one application per property. You may update your existing application to include your additional proposed project.
- If you are applying for different business locations or properties, submit a separate application for each property. However, please note that the intent of the Building Upgrade Fund is not to provide all grant funding to a single entity operating across multiple locations.

What does in-kind contribution mean in regards to the match requirement?

- Discounted or donated items do not count toward the 20% match requirement, regardless of their monetary value.

Do you have to be a U.S. citizen to apply?

- No.

Is scoring on a rolling basis or will applications not be reviewed until after the Labor Day deadline?

- Applications are likely to be scored prior to the deadline. However, applications will not be ranked and projects will not be selected until the deadline has passed. While we encourage you to apply early, when you submit your application will not affect your likelihood to receive a BUF grant.

Is there a difference between lessee and owner applications? Does one receive preference?

- No. The only difference between lessees and owners is in requested documentation. Tenants must have at least three years remaining on their lease as well as written owner permissions.

Is \$100,000 the absolute maximum for the Building Upgrade Fund?

- Yes. No one will receive grant funding beyond \$100,000.

Should commercial tenants who are all within one building, apply separately or as one entity?

- It depends on the nature of the project. If tenants have different goals, and the work may easily be separated into different projects, they may submit multiple applications. However, as a key priority of this initiative is to have a substantial or transformative impact on the neighborhood at large, we encourage tenants to apply together.

Can property owners apply on behalf of tenants and provide the match amount?

- Yes. Property owners may apply on behalf of their tenants, particularly if they intend to provide the required match amount. Who submits the application will not impact grant consideration.

Tenants are required to have a letter of permission written by their landlord, in addition to a minimum of three years remaining on their lease. What information should be included in that letter?

- The letter should clearly state that the landlord gives the tenant permission to undertake the proposed project.
- We do not have a specific template for the letter and it does not need to be lengthy. If you'd like help putting the letter together, please attend office hours.

Can I apply for more than one project type for one property?

- Yes.

Is funding awarded on a first-come, first-served basis?

- No. Applications will be reviewed together, and the review committee will select projects based on the program criteria and the overall combination of projects that can be supported. Applicants are still encouraged to apply early so they can receive assistance before the deadline.

Is there any lottery aspect to selection?

- No. Scoring is a competitive process and not a lottery.
- All applications will be reviewed for eligibility as well as their adherence to the scoring criteria.

Can a managing agent apply on behalf of a property owner?

- Yes. A managing agent may submit the application, although documentation showing that they are authorized to represent the property owner may be required.

Is there any guidance on funding the project cost up front since the BUF is a reimbursement-based grant? What happens if money is borrowed up front to fund the project, then the grant request is denied?

- Applicants who choose to finance their project before receiving a grant decision do so at their own risk. If a grant application is not approved, the applicant remains responsible for any costs incurred, including repayment of borrowed funds.
- If your BUF grant application is approved, your grant award can serve as documentation of anticipated reimbursement, which may be helpful when discussing financing options with a

lender. Applicants are encouraged to consult with their financial institution to determine the financing solution that best meets their needs.

- If you have additional concerns on financing your project, please attend an information session.

What documents do I need to provide to support my application?

- Applicants will be asked to provide:
 - **Budget Projection & Cost Breakdown:** Itemized breakdown of all project costs
 - **Proof of Property Ownership or Lease:** Deed, tax certificate, or lease agreement
 - **Project Plans, Renderings, or Specifications:** Architectural drawings, renderings, material samples, or scope of work document. Please note, that associated architectural, engineering, and environmental costs must constitute less than 18% of the award
 - **Contractor Bids or Quotes:** At least two competitive bids from licensed contractors
 - **Photographs of Existing Property:** Photographs will only be requested if applicable to the proposed project

Are all applicants scored the same? I am a small business owner, and am concerned that I may score lower on the economic and physical impact criteria than a larger business. Are small businesses evaluated differently from larger businesses when applications are scored?

- All applications are given the same consideration and scored based on their individual merit.
- The proposed economic and physical impact is considered relative to the size and scope of each individual project.
- For example, a smaller storefront proposing a \$50,000 investment may demonstrate a significant impact relative to the size and scale of its business, just as a larger storefront may demonstrate significant impact through a larger investment. The review committee will consider the intended impact of each project in the context of the proposed investment and the full set of scoring criteria.
- Strong applications will advance as finalists, and the scoring committee will review and discuss the full range of projects before making final selections.

How can I strengthen my application?

- Clearly explain the improvements you are proposing, why they are needed, and how they will benefit the property, its occupants or customers, and the surrounding commercial corridor. Applicants should be specific and make a clear case for their project.

Will I be notified if I am not selected for a BUF grant?

- Yes. Applicants not selected for a grant will be notified Fall 2026.
- In some cases, an application may be determined to be ineligible or incomplete during the initial review. If this happens, applicants will be notified during the document request stage and may be asked to provide additional information or make revisions so their application can be considered for a BUF grant. We encourage applicants to submit their applications early to allow sufficient time for review and, if needed, revisions.

Is DOB regulation implicated in the scoring criteria?

- Yes. DOB regulations are part of the project readiness scoring criteria. This includes an understanding of the required permitting and any licenses you may need to obtain.
- We understand that getting any project completed in New York City can be a process, and will work with applicants, when possible, to navigate the requirements and move their projects forward.

Grant Requirement Questions

Do I need a professional designer or architect?

- It depends on the project. Some smaller improvements may not require a professional consultant, while more complex exterior, signage, lighting, ADA, or other improvement projects may require professional drawings, filings, permits, or technical documentation.

Is there an insurance requirement?

- Yes. Contractors must carry general liability insurance with a minimum of \$1 million in coverage and maintain workers' compensation insurance.

How will I be reimbursed?

- CPLDC will ACH payments to selected grantees after receiving proof of qualified expenses.

Do I need to use a government approved contractor for the Building Upgrade Fund?

- There is no list of approved contractors to work with. There is a preference for MWBE contractors and we encourage applicants to consider businesses local to Chinatown, however this is not a mandate of applying for the grant.

What documents must be submitted to receive the ACH payment?

- Grantees selected for funding will receive a grant agreement from CPLDC outlining all requirements.
- To establish ACH payment, grantees will be required to submit a completed ACH authorization form and a voided check (or other required banking documentation).
- The grant is awarded through a reimbursement process. Documentation of all eligible, qualified expenses must also be submitted before reimbursement can be issued.

What permits or authorization documents will I need for my proposed project?

- Once awarded, grantees are responsible for obtaining any permits, approvals, licenses, or other authorization documents required for their project.
- Applicants should work with a licensed architect, engineer, or contractor, as appropriate, to determine which permits and approvals are required before beginning work.

If a contractor discovers an unexpected issue after a grant has been awarded, can the project scope or budget be changed?

- Grantees should notify CPLDC as soon as possible if unexpected conditions arise. Changes are not guaranteed to be approved and must continue to align with the goals and eligibility requirements of the Building Upgrade Fund.
- CPLDC will work with grantees to evaluate proposed changes on a case-by-case basis. Modifications may be considered if they remain consistent with the approved project objectives and the overall goals of the Building Upgrade Fund.

- Approved changes will not result in an increase to the grant award amount.

Other Questions

Who is providing funding for the Building Upgrade Fund and what is the total amount available for the initiative?

- The Building Upgrade Fund is supported by the New York State Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI). The DRI is led by the Department of State, in close partnership with Empire State Development, NYS Homes and Community Renewal and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.
- The total amount available for the Building Upgrade Fund is \$900,000.

If an application is approved and funding dispersed, is the grant tax-exempt?

- BUF grants may be considered taxable income, depending on your individual circumstances. We recommend consulting a qualified tax accountant or tax advisor to understand how a BUF grant may affect your tax situation.