

DC Office of Planning
Request for Applications (RFA)
“Crossing the Street: Building DC’s Inclusive Future through Creative Placemaking”
Questions and Answers on the RFA

Question and Answers discussed during the pre-application conference (December 21, 2015)

Q: How many projects do you anticipate funding? Are there multiple projects at the same time or are projects staggered?

A: We will provide more information on this, but there will be multiple projects and multiple neighborhoods. We do expect that projects may be staggered given the high customization of each project to the specific neighborhood, specific population, context and canvas. However, it could also be the case that some projects occur at the same time. The important thing to remember for this RFA is that OP is looking to select a set of curators, and we will then match the selected curators to target neighborhoods, and we will be thinking about the set of projects that make sense given capacity, timing etc. And so really what we are asking for under this RFA is the demonstration of qualifications, experience and approach.

Q. You are choosing to match the curator to the site of the project, and you have not identified the specific neighborhoods for projects. Are you looking to leverage any existing relationships we have with stakeholders in areas where we have done projects and are you interested in who we know?

A. We are making the selection of our target neighborhoods based on our grant criteria, but as part of your response, there are areas in the application where you could speak to your past projects, any relationships with stakeholders from those past projects, and the types of things that you typically would do to make projects successful, regardless of the location. This information can help us in evaluating the application. Please review Section V for more details on the factors the review panel will be looking for and against which responses will be evaluated.

Q: Can you explain the connection between Phase I and Phase II? Is Phase I the application process?

A. We are not in Phase I of the process yet. We are in a pre-Phase I stage in which we are looking for curators and asking for applications from qualified applicants. Once the selected curators are on board, that set of curators will be working with us on Phase I, which is project concept development and brainstorming. Phase II is implementation of projects. So, again, this is essentially a call for creative placemaking curators. It is not a call for projects at this stage, and it is not a call for neighborhoods.

Q. Then how do we propose/describe a project that is specific to an area?

A. The application should not include project proposals; it is intended to help us select curators with whom we will create and implement projects, and OP will match projects with a neighborhood. In your application, you can describe a project you are working on to help demonstrate your expertise in concept development and project management, but if you would like to expand it, that is outside of the scope of this RFA. Outside of this process, if you are a neighborhood-based organization and you would like to advocate for a specific project, you would do that by contacting the appropriate neighborhood

Ward planner at OP. And, if you have experience undertaking specific projects, the place in the application to describe that is under “demonstrated experience” because that will help demonstrate your capacity for future projects.

Q. If the curators are not applying for specific project-based assignments, are there then no budget requirements in the application?

A. At this stage, there are no budget requirements for the application.

Q. Have you decided in which neighborhoods these projects will occur?

A. We are still in process of deciding which neighborhoods will host projects, and once we get to the point of selecting curators, we will be having that conversation.

Q: We are somewhat bounded to certain neighborhoods, for example BIDs are largely bounded to certain geographical areas. Should we contact Neighborhood Planning to discuss this?

A. In that case, yes, you should have that discussion with your neighborhood planner if you feel strongly about a certain project in your BID area or neighborhood. Please keep in mind that this is a call for curators. Also, you should make a determination regarding whether to apply based on the specifics of the RFA and if you think it is a good fit in terms of what we are asking for and what your organization is interested in doing.

Q. So, are we proposing a project and then you match us to a neighborhood?

A. No, you are not proposing a project. We are looking to match curators to projects in part based on your demonstrated experience in leading similar projects. Please look at Section V’s first scoring criterion, where it is appropriate to demonstrate past experience such as leading a project concept development process and curating arts projects.

Q. For those organizations that are hyper-local, if we ended up being a resource, when, where and how would we learn about this in order to offer support? Would it be on OP’s website?

A. We plan on making an announcement in February of 2016. Going back to the key components of the RFA in terms of engagement, placemaking, etc., we do expect curators to work closely with OP and stakeholders on the rollout of these projects, and would appreciate the involvement of relevant stakeholders. We will post announcement information to our website. We also have your e-mails from the sign-in sheet today and we will inform you through e-mail.

Q. In the application content, is the concept process where we would conceptually state how we would hold community engagement?

A. The first part of Section V’s scoring criteria is ‘demonstrated experience’ and under that is ‘leading a project concept and brainstorming process.’ So that is where you would tell us about previous brainstorming efforts that led to a project or set of projects. Then, under the second scoring criteria, we would like you to tell us what your approach would be in the future development of a project. So, knowing everything that you now know of how we are running this program, tell us hypothetically how you would apply that to potential projects.

Q. We are struggling to understand the hyper-local element in the presentation. If we apply the conceptual approach, it would need to be completely different for each neighborhood. For example, community organizing in Ward 7 versus Ward 3 would be totally different; engaging with corporate stakeholders versus residents is completely different.

A. Let me give an example that might be helpful. We do planning projects – neighborhood-scale as well as citywide projects. Our approach to our own work, as well as the work we do with consultants, is that there are certain things we always do no matter who we are interacting with or in which part of the city. In this instance, one way to think about it is to use the past project examples you referenced. There are certain things you do regardless of which community you work with or where the project location is. You can also speak about different options, e.g., if we are working with these types of stakeholders, this is what you would do versus working with a different type of stakeholders. The overall focus will be hyper-local, but for the application think more holistically and conceptually because you do not know who the stakeholders or what the conditions would be. However, you can provide us with some understanding regarding how you would look at different situations and how you may approach them. You can also focus on what you excel at and what approach you are more comfortable with. If you are very comfortable working with certain neighborhoods, then you may want to share that information and we will take that into consideration. Also, you can make a link between your demonstrated experience and a proposed approach or process would be going forward. You can tie back to the examples that you provide in the ‘Demonstrated Experience’ section.

Q. Number ‘4’ confuses me. I have a project idea but it is difficult to describe knowing that it will change through the concept development process.

A. You are referring to item number 4 in ‘Application Content’ (approaches for project implementation), which relates to Section V, ‘Project Implementation’ in terms of the scoring criteria. If you look at Section V, part B.III, it tells you how the evaluation team will score your application. For example, how would you approach a project drawing on your previous experience? What are the important components that would need to be in place?

Q. Is it okay to refer to past projects even though that would sound less innovative than to conceptualize a new project?

A. We understand it is hard for you to think of a project because we have not told you what we want you to do. Instead, you could state your concept. You may for example state: “I want to connect to a stakeholder group, highlighting these themes...”. Then working with us on our neighborhood analysis, we will match you to an area. In terms of your application response, you would have written up your narrative on ‘Demonstrated Experience.’ Then, under the ‘Approach for Concept Development Process or Implementation,’ you might state that there were some really great approaches you have undertaken previously that you would apply going forward. However, you might also say you would do things differently going forward based on your knowledge of previous projects. Or, perhaps there are things that you didn’t get a chance to apply previously that are, for example, thematic-based or process-based and that you would like to apply on a future project. As planners, we are limited in our approach -- we would like your input on how your previous experience will be applied and improved upon in working

with our projects. We are looking for and value your experience and how it could apply to any sort of project going forward.

Q. Is your goal to match one curator to one project or one curator to several projects?

A. We will be making that determination.

Q. Sounds like you are looking for a temporary hire, like temporary creative placemaking managers. Is it kind of like you are applying for a job or giving your qualifications for an unknown product? In essence, are you giving your qualifications to do the job requirements?

A. Our grant period closes by December 2016 so it is a limited engagement with a set of selected curators who will be undertaking project management and execution in collaboration with OP. The job application perspective is one way to think about the RFA.

Q. Is the neighborhood and site selection simultaneous with the selection of a curator? Is it the agency's challenge at the end to reconcile the potential elimination of applicants that may have been a good fit for a neighborhood?

A. Please do not focus at this stage on neighborhood and site selection. The focus at this stage is a Request for Applications, which is essentially a call for curators. Once we get through that process, we will focus more on neighborhood and site selection with the set of curators. We provided the information [about neighborhood and site selection] so that you would understand the expectations if you are selected and the process we would be going through with curators regarding project concept development and neighborhood and site selection.

Q. Will award amounts be coordinated once you select the curator or will that be later? Will you make award amount decisions even though you have not chosen a project for them?

A. We have to make award amount decisions as part of a project grant agreement, and so it will happen at the time we select curators.

Q. Can you clarify the role the selected curators will have in deciding on the project and neighborhood with DCOP?

A. It will be a collaborative process that the selected curators go through. Keep in mind it will be highly customized to each neighborhood and the eventual site-selection process. It may be a different process for each curator. At this point it is difficult to say or generalize what that process may look like. However, we did want to give you an overview of the process, program and our expectations for curators.

Q. Do you expect the curator to have previous community engagement experience?

A. If you look at Section V as well as the Application Content section, 'Demonstrated Experience' includes engaging diverse stakeholders via a range of engagement platforms using traditional and nontraditional approaches.

Q. Will the DCOP team be working hand-in-hand on those projects? Will you bring your relationships to this process, like a scaffolding role in making introductions? It is short timeline.

A. Correct, we will be collaborating very closely with our curators. There is a neighborhood planner in each ward and we are looking on this program as an opportunity to encourage staff innovation and engagement on creative placemaking projects. However, engagement is the responsibility of the curator. We are here to support and help ensure these projects are successful and - as part of that - leveraging our existing community engagement networks. You are not going to be left alone on this. You will have a number of resources within our office, in particular neighborhood planners who have a stake in this as well. You bring a value-add to this given your creative background, experience and projects you have done in the past in which you have learned from and can apply that knowledge base to this process. Think of it as a palette of resources you have in our office. However, you will be the lead curator, and we are not undermining that role.

Q. I understand this application essentially establishes our qualifications and experiences as curators for this project. As final projects should not resemble past or current projects in the District, is it possible for these projects to build on our current work?

A. That may be another discussion that we may have with this particular or other organization if there is a project that is already underway. This particular RFA is not the method to propose projects at this point.

Q. How do we leverage relationships and best practices, lessons learned, collaborations in place? Will the final projects build on work established so far in terms of scaling them larger or applying them to a different neighborhood?

A. If you applying under this RFA you can tell us about your projects and creative placemaking work as a part of your demonstrated experience, but again OP will be making the selection on the final neighborhoods based on criteria stated in our grant, including areas that have previously undertaken or have planning efforts underway, areas where DDOT has or is planning on conducting studies and areas undergoing rapid change. We will be matching curators to our target neighborhoods.

Q. Are the final projects a dialogue with the curators or will they be imposed by OP?

A. It will be an iterative and collaborative process in terms of identifying the specific final project but projects will be in the target neighborhoods established and identified by OP. We are bringing curators to help us innovate and brainstorm and to end up with a really exciting set of projects. So we do not want to take away from the integrity and expertise of the curator, and that is why we want to bring them on board. At the end of the day, we are planners and can struggle with innovation. We received this grant under the 'Pioneering New Approaches' program of the Kresge Foundation, and we are trying to raise the level of creativity and innovation of creative placemaking in the District and then learn what that means for a planning organization. In order to this successfully, we need to work with curators. We could move forward with these projects ourselves, but they would not be as impactful, vibrant or engaging as they could be from working with a great set of curators.

If you have expertise and lessons learned from previous work, obviously we want to draw from that and learn from that. That does not mean we can guarantee a past project you have been working on can be expanded or added onto because in the end the project will be made in collaboration with OP and the curators and based on the targeted neighborhoods that we have chosen. If you have things you have learned through previous work, we would certainly want to know and draw on that.

Additionally, if you are currently working on a specific project and want to be able to have that conversation with OP, then the appropriate point-of-entry would be the respective neighborhood planner for that ward. That is a separate conversation outside of this RFA process.

Q: It is difficult for us to understand because I and others here have some site-specific project we would like to propose. In the RFA, it seems you are being graded on site-specific work but then again you are not being asked for a site-specific concept. We are the ones dealing with the permitting, site and other factors and it makes it difficult to not know where the project takes place, because we want to leverage our resources and contacts.

A. We are asking you to hold off on those site-specific thoughts right now because this is a call for creative placemaking curators. We are saying this RFA is open to organizations with site-specific curatorial experience that relates to what your experience has been in undertaking projects previously. If you look at Section V.B.iii under 'Scoring Criteria', tell us what your approach would be for a project concept development process going forward, irrespective of the site. We are not asking for project concepts or project concepts for specific sites. Please do not come to the table with pre-baked concepts. In terms of approaches for project implementation, do you know the public space permitting and committee process, do you know how to do a project timeline? Please state the things that make for a successful project implementation in your application, e.g. engagement, working with artists, etc. Please state what would make for a successful approach.

Q. What is the budget for the number of activities that you will have?

A. We will have that discussion when it comes to the selection of the curators. It will be specific to curators, etc. The only thing we are saying about budget is that the maximum for each award is \$125,000.

Q. Would you be willing to extend the deadline so that DCOP could put out a short list of neighborhoods under consideration because applicants are really interested and have expertise in certain neighborhoods?

A. Please think about as a reference point the DC Commission of Arts and Humanities (DCCAH) 5x5 project, which was a call for curators. If you looked at that funding opportunity, that was a similar process (at a high-level). The RFA that we have released is what we are seeking applications and responses on. If it is the case that your particular organization has strong interest in a specific neighborhood, let us know that in your application because that tells us your organization might have experience in public engagement or implementation in diverse neighborhoods and areas. If that is the situation, then you can leverage that as something you are able to do, and it will help inform our

selection process. This is most applicable to the 'Demonstrated Experience' scoring criterion, which also has the most points.

Q. What is the process for some of the sites? Do you plan to engage the community or is this an internal discussion?

A. That is something we will discuss at a later date. If you have an approach in mind, you can lay that out as part of the project concept development process and/or project implementation.

This discussion points to a tension, but not in a bad way. Planners have a lot of ideas. And we know how to understand urban problems, analysis, spatial analysis, understand how to digest and synthesize community priorities and best practices. We do this very well. That is a process we are going through right now because this ties to our planning process. So, we are not being dismissive in saying that we do not know the places/sites. We are instead really trying to identify the places that have the highest impacts and showcase them. We want to highlight a policy goal, a planning goal, a potential solution, or a possible beginning of a dialogue. We are also crunching numbers.

Artists have to set a similar level of innovation and have the same excitement to propose their ideas based off their mission and communities they work in. So this is actually a challenge for both sides. We are venturing into discovering what data-driven art looks like and what does art-driven planning look like?

We are really excited about having creative energy, and this is a great opportunity to intersect that with planning. At a later time when you know more factors, that would be the opportunity for your creative ideas to flow. You may have a great idea now and it might be even be more phenomenal when you have all the information.

Q. Did you mention there is some opportunity to implement some projects before June 2016?

A. Yes, that is correct – there is potential for projects to occur before June 2016.

Q. In looking at curator selection, are you prioritizing qualitative or quantitative impact? Could it be a hyper-local micro project with impact on small group of people or are we looking for large scale?

A. That's a great question. It ties to when we were talking about the specific project metrics that we know we need to capture, but there are also perception-based and other types of indicators that we want to develop when we get our curators on board. Whether it is qualitative or quantitative, we will be reflecting on that and it will probably be one of the discussion items with our curators. This is why we need to work with curators – we need the ideas and we need to be pushing ourselves, and we want to work with curators on moving forward projects.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS received by email and RESPONSES

Q. What is the cap on indirect costs/administrative fees?

A. Indirect costs are those facilities and administrative costs incurred for a common or joint purpose and therefore cannot be identified readily and specifically with a particular sponsored project or

instructional activity or other institutional activity (“direct costs”). This grant opportunity is capping indirect costs at 10%, and this cap will be referenced in any project agreements.

Q. Please clarify eligible candidates for this funding opportunity.

A. Please see Section III.A of the RFA, ‘Eligible Applicants’

Q. Does the phrase “and submit all required information as directed by the Sourcebook as part of the application” only refer to Section 7.2 or all parts of the Sourcebook?

A. It applies to Section 7.2. Potential applicants must review and comply with the full list of terms, conditions, and requirements listed in Section 7.2 (“Specific RFA Provisions”) of the Citywide Grants Manual and Sourcebook available at <http://opgs.dc.gov/book/citywide-grants-manual-and-sourcebook/70-nofa-and-application-process>

Q. Is there language in the RFA that describes application partners and collaboration? Please clarify if curators can work together as partners.

A. The RFA allows for collaborating organizations both in terms of the applicant team as well as in framing approaches for undertaking projects and project management. Please see Sections V.B.iii., V.B.iv. and V.B.v.

Q. What is the cutoff for submitting questions on the RFA?

A. OP is establishing December 30th, 2015 as the deadline – please submit all questions on the RFA by this date. Any questions that we receive that are not addressed under this first Q & A amendment will be addressed in a second Q & A amendment issued by OP early the week of January 4th, 2016.