



**Downtown  
Revitalization  
Initiative**



**NY Forward**



**Department  
of State**

# Downtown Revitalization Initiative and NY Forward

## NY’s downtowns are the heart and soul of our regions.

Utilizing the Department of State’s plan-then-act strategy, the synergy between the DRI and NY Forward connects the renaissance of magnet cities with the revitalization of smaller downtowns – creating greater opportunities for New York residents, businesses, and visitors.

New York’s downtowns are the heart and soul of our regions. They are both a reflection of our past and a catalyst for future growth and revitalization. They are centers for commerce, culture, diversity, entrepreneurship, ideas, and entertainment.

Governor Hochul has made downtown revitalization a central component of the State’s economic development policy. The DRI and NY Forward will accelerate and expand New York’s burgeoning downtown revitalization.

Through the first five rounds of the landmark Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), 59 communities have received a total of \$600 million in awards, creating a renaissance in downtown resurgence that shows no sign of slowing.

To accelerate that momentum, Governor Hochul announced two complementary downtown redevelopment programs—Round 6 of the DRI, funded at \$100 million; and the first round of NY Forward, a new program that targets downtowns in NY’s smaller and rural communities, also funded at \$100 million. The overarching goals of the two programs are to revitalize downtowns and reinvigorate local and regional economies by creating a critical mass of vibrant downtown destinations in each region. NY Forward diverges in several aspects to reach and serve the unique needs and characteristics of the State’s smaller and rural communities.

The following overview of each individual program —noting both their similarities and important distinctions—will help communities decide how to best pursue their revitalization goals in partnership with the State.



# Downtown Revitalization Initiative and NY Forward



## DRI

The Department of State (DOS) administers the Governor's Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) in close coordination with Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), Empire State Development (ESD), New York State Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA), and several other supportive agency partners. The DRI was launched in 2016 to accelerate and expand the revitalization of downtowns in all ten regions of the State so that they serve as centers of activity and catalysts for increased local investments. As a key program of the State's economic development policy, the DRI transforms downtown neighborhoods into vibrant centers that offer a high quality of life and become magnets for redevelopment, business growth, job creation and economic and housing diversity. These compact, walkable downtowns are a key ingredient in helping the State rebuild its economy and civic/community bonds after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The DRI represents an unprecedented and innovative "plan-then-act" strategy that couples strategic planning with immediate implementation. DRI plans do not just sit on a shelf- they serve as the blueprint and catalyst for immediate and ongoing action.

The DRI annually provides a \$10 million award to one community in each of the State's ten REDC regions. Applicants must demonstrate their readiness and capacity to identify and implement a slate of synergistic projects that collectively achieve a community-based vision for the downtown. The REDCs review applications and nominate winners to the DOS for final review and approval.

## DRI Process



## NY Forward Process





Winning communities are assigned a consulting team by the DOS to guide the community through the process of developing a Strategic Investment Plan that includes multiple complementary projects that together, form a whole that is greater than just the sum of its parts. The plan and projects are driven by both a Local Planning Committee and extensive community outreach and engagement. Once the Plan is approved, DOS and an expansive team of agency partners implement the projects expeditiously. The DRI has achieved remarkable results in its first five rounds, igniting a renaissance in downtown revitalization and showing no signs of slowing down.

## **NY Forward**

NY Forward supports a more equitable downtown recovery for New York's smaller and rural communities, with a focus on hamlets and villages.

Rural and smaller downtowns located in villages, hamlets and other small municipal and neighborhood-scale centers serve a more local economy and often have a distinct feel from larger, metropolitan urban centers. Their unique characteristics are easy to recognize. Architecture, building facades, small-scale streetscapes and the existence of a traditional "town square"—around which commercial, residential, civic, cultural and other amenities revolve—may help characterize a NY Forward community. Potential NY Forward communities are those former railroad, canal, coal, and mill towns that lost the industry around which their town grew – we often think of these as crossroads or bedroom towns, small business districts along corridors that connect major employment centers and magnet cities in their region. These communities provide neighborhood-scale, local goods and services with those iconic boutiques and mom and pop shops that enrich the unique character of that community. With bones built for a vibrant downtown, these downtowns, through NY Forward will attract more businesses, residents and visitors. A healthy regional economy relies on a critical mass of vibrant downtowns of various sizes, character, history, needs and challenges. NY Forward completes that picture.

Like the DRI, applicants must submit a vision for the downtown and a slate of developable projects to achieve that vision. REDCs review the applications and nominate winners. This process reflects the same "plan-then-act" methodology deployed through the DRI. DOS and its agency partners then engage the winning

communities through a strategic planning process with assistance from a consultant to develop a slate of readily implementable projects.

NY Forward awards will be smaller, but more numerous, than the DRI. Rather than one \$10 million award per region with the DRI, NY Forward allows up to three awards per region—either two \$4.5 million awards, or one \$4.5 million award and two \$2.25 million awards.

Although grant awards are smaller, NY Forward was not designed to fund one large, expensive project. Rather, NY Forward applicants should develop a full suite of synergistic projects, similar to the DRI, that may include one or two substantial anchor projects. Those anchor projects, however, should be supplemented by a variety of smaller supportive projects such as building facade renovations, activation of vacant upper-stories and shops, crosswalks, public art, parks and plazas, and other placemaking activities.

NY Forward funds will be used to provide capacity-building and technical assistance directly to communities throughout each phase of the program, from pre-application to implementation, as necessary. These are critical components of the application and planning process. By submitting a brief Letter of Intent indicating interest in applying for the NY Forward program, communities will be asked to participate in targeted capacity-building and will have access to consultants who can provide guidance on application development.

This capacity-building and technical assistance will have ripple effects beyond NY Forward, strengthening their ability to pursue and implement other funding opportunities.

Finally, while communities are permitted to apply for both the DRI and NY Forward in the same grant cycle, they are urged to first think carefully, strategically and pragmatically about which program may best suit their needs, circumstances and capabilities. The DRI—with a larger award and more numerous projects—may not be the right fit for every community which is why Governor Hochul created NY Forward.

The charts on the next page compare and contrast the many elements of the DRI and NY Forward to help communities understand the programs and make an informed decision about which to apply for. □

## Community Selection and Funding

DRI	NYF
\$10M in each region – either to 1 community or a joint application from 2-3 smaller communities with a single vision.	\$10M in each region – either 2 \$4.5M awards OR 1 award of \$4.5M and 2 awards of \$2.25M each.
\$300K assessed from each regional award for professional consulting services through the planning phase.	Professional, contracted support will provide interested applicants with capacity building webinars and technical assistance. This will begin during pre-application; the cost will not be assessed from the community awards.
REDCs nominate communities	REDCs nominate communities

## Community Characteristics

DRI	NYF
Larger, walkable, more dense geographical area with amenities that serve the regional community	Smaller, walkable, less dense geographical area with amenities that serve the immediate local community
Multi-modal transportation, including mass transit options	More vehicle dependent; patrons mainly arrive by car
Employment center for the regional economy (ex: CBD)	Community center that's service-oriented
Larger, urban tourist center with more attractions to offer spread out over several blocks of development – walkable between multiple nodes of activities/attractions	Small-town charm – with heritage, antiques, cottage, agriculture and other niche based tourism. In NYC, BID-scale residential-focused business districts.
Availability or potential for rail/bus/ferry public transportation making Transit Oriented Development possible	Vehicle dependent with limited public transportation potential. Residential, or rural agricultural centric development
Higher-density: height, units, acre, etc., potentially more than 1 commercial strip in the community	Low-density: building height, units, acres, etc., tight commercial strip
Existing or potential for higher density buildings, multi-story buildings with opportunities for upper story housing	Lower density – 2-4 story buildings with opportunities for upper story housing

## Potential Projects

DRI	NYF
Larger private, mixed-use projects	Smaller projects focused more on building renovation and redevelopment and activation of upper-story (ex: housing, additional commercial) rather than new construction
Adaptive use	Adaptive use
New construction projects on developable properties, creating new spaces	Projects that deal with vacancy rather than creation of new space
Projects that elevate urban and employment –based downtown qualities, enhancing the regional draw of the DRI area	Projects that elevate specific cultural, historical qualities that enhance feeling of small-town charm
Communities must demonstrate more than \$10M of shovel ready revitalization projects and high potential in leveraging capital investments in their applications	Application must demonstrate \$3-5M in multiple synergistic projects. Final project award funding cannot be used for one sole project.
Wayfinding projects to connect the network of amenities and attractions distributed over several commercial corridors	Tight commercial activity area with opportunity to enhance cultural heritage through signage of historic markers

