CITY OF CLEVELAND
Mayor Justin M. Bibb

Request for Qualifications

Consultant/Facilitator for

Cleveland Community Development Ecosystem Planning

601 Lakeside Ave. E | Room 210 | Cleveland, OH 44114 |

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Scope of Work

Consultant/Facilitator for Cleveland Community Development Ecosystem Planning

Background

Cleveland's community development[1] system has long been anchored by a network of Community Development Corporations (CDCs[2]) that provide neighborhood-based services, engagement, and development. These organizations are supported primarily through City of Cleveland allocations of federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds (about $9 million annually, directed by Cleveland City Council), along with philanthropic support (much of it through intermediaries), City support, and additional project-specific funding.

The community development ecosystem is currently at its weakest point in a generation. Uneven, uncertain, and hard to spend funds combined with several years of declining funding have led to staffing instability, misalignment of resources, and lack of clarity of purpose amongst the CDCs. A variety of other nonprofits across the city provide some community development services, and while some have stepped into the gaps created by the absence or struggles of CDCs, many neighborhoods across the city are not receiving the attention or services they deserve or need.

The City of Cleveland, working in partnership with local foundations and Cleveland City Council, seeks to engage an experienced outside facilitator (ideally paired with a local partner) to lead a process that will help stakeholders better understand the current system, explore alternatives, and

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[1] Core functions of "community development" were recently organized and outlined by Cleveland Neighborhood Progress as part of their Advancement and Resiliency Initiative and are attached to this RFP. While we use these definitions as a starting point and are in general agreement, we are open to additional refinement and ideas as to the appropriate scope/functions of "community development" work.

[2] There are currently +/-20 CDCs in Cleveland

build a shared plan for the future of the community development sector. The goal is not necessarily to define *what* services/functions are needed, but to focus on the *who and how* of sustainable service delivery. While we have had a CDC focused system for several generations, we are open to innovative models of how to provide core community development services to our residents and neighborhoods.

Working Assumptions and Perspectives of the City and Foundation Partners

The City of Cleveland and its partners are entering this process with a set of working assumptions and perspectives that will guide the work – we remain open to viewpoints and learning that help evolve and adapt these perspectives:

- Federal funding volatility requires resilience: We recognize that philanthropy will not and cannot fill the gaps created by federal cuts. The system must be restructured to sustain and adapt to changes in local, state, and federal priorities and funding levels.
- Lean and resilient CDCs: CDCs must be able to operate efficiently and strategically to withstand volatility and remain focused on their missions.
- Capacity aligned with transformational initiatives: We must ensure that the sector has the strength and flexibility to support major citywide and neighborhood initiatives—such as site readiness, W25 Connects, Southeast Side redevelopment, modular housing, and the Woodhill Choice Neighborhood initiative as well as new and emerging initiatives.
- Re-examining the intermediary role: Intermediaries can be critical, but their role should be focused on driving cost efficiency, accountability, and performance evaluation for the system—rather than duplicating practitioner functions.
- Shared service and staffing models: Exploring collaborative models such as shared personnel, pooled staff, or shared back-office functions can increase efficiency and allow CDCs to concentrate on mission-critical work.

- Strategic operations and investment: CDCs must be encouraged and supported to operate and spend in a strategic manner, aligning resources with the greatest opportunities for impact.
- Neighborhood typology as a tool: Different neighborhoods have different strengths and needs, and the ecosystem should evaluate and support community development needs and tools based on where the neighborhood is in its development trajectory, funding the activities that best match neighborhood needs and potential.
- System can be more efficient/effective. We can't argue the current system is effective where resident/neighborhood outcomes are not positive. We believe there are better solutions that will deliver more impact, change, and transformation.

Goals and Objectives [3]

1. **Understand the Current Ecosystem**
   a. Provide an objective, data-informed picture of the community development landscape, including key players, financial health, operational realities, and current outcomes.
   b. Recognize the contributions of CNP, the City, philanthropy, and CDCs to date.

2. **Define Shared Goals and Priorities**
   a. Facilitate a consensus process to clarify what the community development sector is trying to achieve in Cleveland's neighborhoods.
   b. Establish a shared definition of effective, efficient, and sustainable community development.

3. **Explore Alternatives and Best Practices**
   a. Research models from other cities and sectors/industries that may inform Cleveland's future approach – understanding that different cities are in different positions vis a vis growth and resources.

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[3] We are open to refined objectives that address the overall challenge we've presented in this RFP

      b.   Explore options for funding alignment, system design, and the role of intermediaries.

4. **Build Consensus Around Change**
   a. Lead structured, inclusive conversations with funders, City leaders, council representatives, CDCs, and community stakeholders.
   b. Test solutions on the ground with residents and community groups to ensure buy-in and agreement.
   c. Build trust among participants, surface tensions, and guide the group toward shared understanding and agreed-upon actions.

5. **Deliver Recommendations and Roadmap**
   a. Provide actionable recommendations that reflect stakeholder consensus.
   b. Develop an implementation roadmap with both near-term stabilization strategies and longer-term reforms.

Key Questions to Address

- How should we think about the community development sector not just from a service delivery standpoint, but also from an operations and business model perspective?
- How can community development organizations strengthen their business practices and be sustainable?
- How can community development organizations manage personnel and capacity constraints to ensure leadership continuity?
- What, if any, are the historical trends related to the operational challenges faced by community development organizations and what can be learned from these trends?
- How can organizations position themselves to "ask for the right things" from funders and partners?
- What are the most important goals we are trying to accomplish in Cleveland neighborhoods, and what system design best supports those goals?
- Are we defining the community development sector too narrowly around CDCs, and if so, what other players and strategies should be included?

- What does highly effective community development look like, and what resources and structures are required to achieve it?
- Are there examples from other cities where CDCs, nonprofits, intermediaries, and municipal partners are functioning in ways that Cleveland could learn from?
- What role should an intermediary play in Cleveland's system going forward?
- What are the right models for aligning philanthropic, corporate, and municipal funding in support of neighborhood development?
- What models exist around shared administration, function, or governance across an ecosystem?
- How does this work fit into parallel efforts including the Urban Agenda, Citywide Plan, and revised strategic approaches from each foundation?
- What does the future of AI and technology mean for the future of community development?

Deliverables

1. **Landscape Analysis & Benchmarking Report**
   a. Summary of current ecosystem, funding flows, and system strengths/challenges.
   b. Case studies of best practices from peer cities.
2. **Facilitated Stakeholder Sessions**
   a. At least 4–6 structured convenings with city, philanthropy, CDC leaders, and community voices.
   b. Clear documentation of emerging points of consensus and outstanding questions.
3. **Strategic Framework**
   a. Shared goals for community development in Cleveland.
   b. Options for system structure, intermediary role(s), and funding alignment.
4. **Final Report & Recommendations**
   a. Consensus-driven strategies to strengthen and sustain community development.

      b. Tool/mechanism to collectively guide resource allocation for maximum impact
1. Implementation roadmap with specific short-, medium-, and long-term actions.

Consultant Qualifications

- Demonstrated experience in facilitating complex, multi-stakeholder processes.
- Knowledge of community development systems, including CDCs and CDBG funding.
- Experience with system design, organizational development, and funding alignment.
- Strong communication and consensus-building skills.
- (Preferred) Familiarity with Cleveland or similar urban environments.

Timeline[4]

- Phase 1 (Month 1–2): Research, data collection, and stakeholder interviews.
- Phase 2 (Month 3–4): Facilitated engagement sessions.
- Phase 3 (Month 5): Draft recommendations and test with stakeholders.
- Phase 4 (Month 6): Final report and presentation.

RFQ Selection Process and Evaluation

Project teams are invited to submit qualifications for the Cleveland Community Development Ecosystem Planning opportunity. **Teams should submit responses no later than January 10, 2026, by 5 PM EST.**

Applications should be submitted as PDFs to
IntegratedDevelopment@clevelandohio.gov

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[4] We acknowledge this is an aggressive timeline – we've targeted six months but are open to discussion about timelines between six and nine months.

Proposals must include qualifications, proposed methodology, team composition, and relevant project examples. It is preferred, but not required, that teams operating outside of Cleveland include a local partner or co-respondent to ensure understanding of local context and relationships.

Through this RFQ, we are looking to identify:

- Consultants/facilitators with experience in multi-stakeholder processes and community development systems.
- Teams capable of leading an inclusive, consensus-driven planning process with innovative approaches to system design, funding alignment, and shared services.
- Partners who can work collaboratively with municipal and philanthropic stakeholders to strengthen and sustain the community development ecosystem.

This is a unique opportunity to shape the future of community development in Cleveland and help build a system that is resilient, equitable, and strategically aligned to neighborhood needs. We look forward to receiving your qualifications and working together to support thriving Cleveland neighborhoods.

Submission Guidance

Responses should be no more than 10 pages and should include:

1. **Consultant/Team Qualifications & Approach (4 pages maximum)**
   - Overview of your firm/team and key personnel
   - Relevant certifications, licenses, and areas of technical expertise
   - Description of experience with multi-stakeholder facilitation and community development systems
   - Your overall philosophy and approach to mission-aligned, community-rooted municipal work
   - Approach to designing inclusive, equitable, and innovative processes

- o Relevant experience with projects of similar scale and complexity

2. **Stakeholder Engagement & Methodology (3 pages maximum)** Describe your approach to authentic engagement with community, City, and philanthropic stakeholders. Consider including:
   - o How your team ensures diverse perspectives are included
   - o Examples where equity and community input shaped recommendations
   - o How your methodology will address Cleveland's specific context and ecosystem needs

3. **Project Examples (3 pages maximum)** Provide three examples of comparable projects that demonstrate:
   - o Experience in multi-stakeholder facilitation and system design
   - o Experience working with municipalities, community-based partners, or in Cleveland/similar markets
   - o Evidence of successful outcomes, measurable impact, and implementation follow-through
   - o Application of innovative practices in community development
   - o For each project, include: project name, location, completion date, budget/size, your role, client contact information, and a brief description focusing on engagement process and outcomes.

4. **Team Members** Include an organizational chart and résumés for key team members (not counted toward page limit). Clearly identify lead and supporting roles, including local partner/co-respondent if applicable.

5. **Submission Method and Deadline** Submit via email to IntegratedDevelopment@clevelandohio.gov with subject line: "Cleveland Community Development Ecosystem RFQ" no later than January 10, 2026, by 5 PM EST. Late submissions will not be considered.

The contract will be awarded to the team determined to be most qualified based on the evaluation criteria. Following selection, the City will negotiate final scope, budget, and deliverables with the selected team.

Selection Timeline

Step	Dates	Key Activities
1. RFQ Release and Questions Period	Dec 8 – Dec 18, 2025	RFQ is released to consulting teams. Applicants may submit written questions for clarification during this period to IntegratedDevelopment@clevelandohio.gov
2. Proposal Submission	Jan 10, 2026, 5:00 PM EST	Teams submit PDF proposals including qualifications, methodology, team composition, and project examples.
3. Initial Review & Shortlisting	Jan 11 – Jan 24, 2026	Selection committee reviews proposals for completeness, responsiveness, and minimum qualifications. Proposals are scored using the evaluation criteria. A shortlist of 3–5 finalist teams will be selected.
4. Finalist Presentations and Interviews	Jan 27 – Feb 7, 2026	Shortlisted teams participate in structured presentations and interviews with City and foundation partners. Presentations should include approach, methodology, and innovative solutions for system design. Reference checks may also be conducted.
5. Final Evaluation & Contract Award	Feb 10 – Feb 21, 2026	Selection committee finalizes scoring and makes a recommendation for award. Contract negotiation and execution will follow immediately. The project is expected to begin in March 2026.

Evaluation Criteria

Category	Weight	Description
Relevant Experience	25%	Demonstrated success leading multi-stakeholder, cross-sector projects—especially those involving community development systems, urban transformation efforts, or complex municipal initiatives. Includes evidence of measurable impact, ability to move work from planning to implementation, and experience collaborating with both public and philanthropic partners.
Proposed Approach, Methodology & Innovation	35%	Clear and feasible process for research, stakeholder engagement, consensus-building, and strategy development. Innovative approaches to system design, funding alignment, shared service models, or collaborative practices are highly valued.
Expertise & Qualifications	20%	Professional background, technical expertise, and depth of subject-matter knowledge in urban systems, organizational design, municipal operations, cross-sector governance, and community development. Evaluates the team's ability to bring national best practices, apply lessons from other cities, and produce recommendations that are operationally grounded.
Capacity & Team Composition	10%	Availability and commitment of key personnel, clearly defined roles, and

		effective integration of a local partner/co-respondent if applicable.
Cost / Value	10%	Reasonable budget relative to scope of work, demonstrating cost-effectiveness while maximizing value through expertise, deliverables, and methodological rigor.