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Public-Private Partnership – JobsOhio’s Vibrant Community Program

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JobsOhio, the private nonprofit economic development organization for the State of Ohio, recently updated the guidelines and checklist for the Vibrant Communities Program. The program provides funding for projects in distressed, small and mid-sized Ohio cities. The program provides an opportunity for the community to receive financial support for catalytic development projects. These projects are typically in downtowns or commercial districts, and may include new construction or renovation of existing buildings. The program can help fill the gap to support projects that demonstrate a market need and a meaningful reinvestment in the community, but where the community does not have adequate resources to support the project and attract the private investment.

The program eligibility has been expanded to include more communities, with currently over 350 municipalities under 75,000 people and at or above the state's poverty rate. To see the list of eligible communities, [click here](#)). This is an increase from the 98 originally eligible municipalities when the program initially required cities with minimum populations of 5,000. Among the other updates, the program now runs through June of 2025 (previously 2024), and generally provides up to 50% of eligible costs and up to \$1 million per project (down from the prior cap of \$2 million).

To apply, the lead applicant must be the eligible community or the local/regional economic development organization. The project may support the owner of the building/property, developer, or other project company (project beneficiary). The program's focus is de-risking and attracting reinvestment in eligible distressed communities.

Either the applicant or project beneficiary should have control, or a feasible plan to obtain control, of the property in question. In addition, the project must have at least one identified end-user committed to at least 30% of the project's usable square footage to serve as an anchor tenant. For a mixed use development, the anchor tenant could be

retail, housing, hotel, health care or education; otherwise eligible anchor tenants include office, co-working spaces, business incubators, business accelerators, research and development spaces, innovation centers, makers spaces and light industrial tenants. Recreational facilities, sports and entertainment venues and purely speculative spaces are not eligible.

The applicant will need to demonstrate leverage of outside funds. Eligible costs include: building construction and expansions, on-site infrastructure, environmental remediation, demolition, removal and disposal of universal construction waste, asbestos abatement, lead-based paint abatement, machinery and equipment (fixed assets) and building renovation. There are special considerations for eligible costs, but they must be approved in advance by JobsOhio.

The project may be defined as a single building or parcel, or multiple buildings and parcels in the same area, and mixed use projects are encouraged. The program guidelines reserve some flexibility and discretion with JobsOhio, including potentially allowing a project in townships contiguous to an eligible municipality, if the project meets all other eligibility criteria.

The program may provide an excellent opportunity to shore up the capital stack for public-private partnership projects in smaller, distressed communities. In conjunction with Ohio transformational mixed use development tax credits, Ohio opportunity zone tax credits, new market tax credits or other state programs, the program may be able to help fill a funding gap in a project that can have a significant impact on, for instance, a distressed downtown.

JobsOhio's regional network partners can discuss eligibility and will conduct preliminary vetting of projects, with JobsOhio evaluating the projects and making the funding determinations based on its criteria.

A complete list of evaluation criteria, eligible communities, special considerations for eligible costs, ineligible costs, and other requirements can be found [here](#). The vetting process and checklist can be found [here](#).

For questions on Vibrant Community Program or other incentives matters, please contact: Scott J. Ziance, 614.464.8287, sjziance@vorys.com; Christopher J. Knezevic, 614.464.5627, cjknezevic@vorys.com; R. Elissa Wilson, 614-464-6224, rewilson@vorys.com; Sean Byrne, 614.464.8247, spbyrne@vorys.com; Jonathan K. Stock, 614.464.5647, jkstock@vorys.com; or Janie S. Hanna, 330.252.5703; jshanna@vorys.com.