



# ArtsAlliance<sup>LLC</sup> *Help Desk*

# Exploring Space & Real Estate for Arts Organizations: Pre-Development Process and Players

March 24, 2026



ArtsAlliance<sup>LL</sup>



# Today's Program

## Arts Alliance Overview

Megan Lewis, Public Funding Navigator,  
Arts Alliance Illinois

## Predevelopment: Process and Players

Jessica Nepomiachi, Managing Director,  
Real Estate Solutions, IFF

Henry Wishcamper, Bustling Spaces

## Open Q&A

# Mission

Arts Alliance Illinois builds the creative sector's power through advocacy, policy change, and connection to resources to improve the quality of life in communities statewide.

Arts  
**Alliance**<sup>IL</sup>

# What We Do

## Advocacy

Organizing and equipping the creative sector to advocate for its own financial and policy interests.

## Creative Worker Support

Increasing the number of artists and creatives working and thriving in Illinois by increasing professional pathways and informing policy recommendations that protect workers.

## Arts Education

Ensuring all Illinois K-12 students have access to high-quality arts learning during the school day and beyond, regardless of race, zip code, or income.

## Public Funding Navigation

Support for the creative sector to access and navigate grants, other new resources, and complex systems, especially within the government.

## Research

Providing the data needed for case-making and increasing public understanding of the arts, culture, and creativity.



## The Help Desk is here to demystify public funding for the arts.

**We support individual artists, creative business owners, arts organizations, and beyond.**

From finding funding to troubleshooting your grant applications to connecting you with essential resources for your business or nonprofit, our expert Help Desk staff are here to help Illinois' creative sector thrive!





# Stay Connected

**Visit the Help Desk**

[artsalliance.org/  
support/](https://artsalliance.org/support/)

**Become a member**

[artsalliance.org/  
membership/join/](https://artsalliance.org/membership/join/)

**Join our advocacy**

[https://artsalliance  
.quorum.us/](https://artsalliance.quorum.us/)

# Pre-Development: Process and Players

ArtsAlliance<sup>LLC</sup>

# Pre-Development Process and Players

March 24, 2026

*Co-presented with Arts Alliance Illinois and Bustling Spaces*

# Presenters

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## **Jessica Nepomiachi**

Managing Director of Real Estate Solutions, IFF – Chicago

# Agenda

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-  **About IFF & Learning Objectives**
-  **Planning for Success at Ideation Stage**
-  **Phases of a Facility Project**
-  **Predevelopment Sources**
-  **IFF Readiness Framework**



# Learning Objectives



# Learning Objectives

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Understand **phases of a facility project, including predevelopment**



Learn about the IFF **readiness framework** for community development projects



Share **strategies** for the creative sector to access real estate

# IFF:

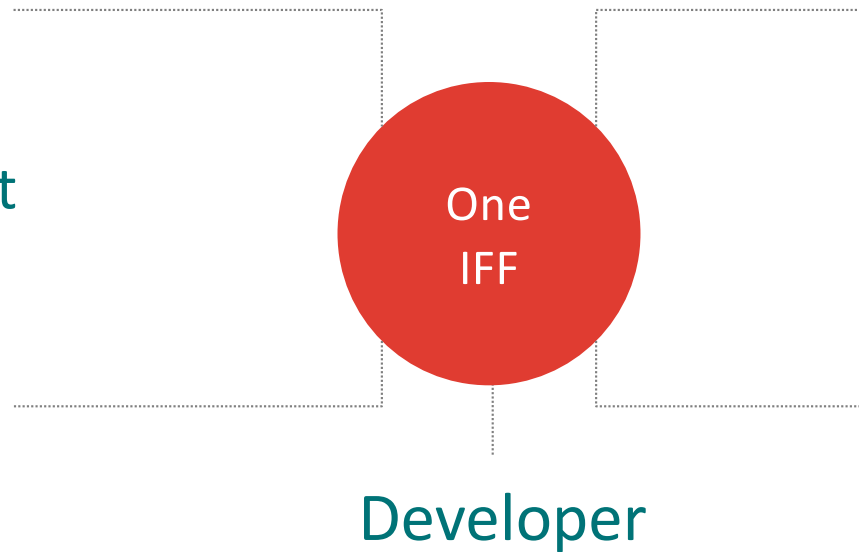
## Leading comprehensive community development

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Program  
management  
& development

Research,  
Evaluation,  
Community  
planning



Capital  
market maker

Real estate  
solutions

# Capital Solutions

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- Accessible capital for nonprofits
- Tailored solutions for community facilities
- 5- to 15-year loans
- Financing from \$10,000 to \$6.5 million+
- Construction Bridge loan financing for capital grants
- Arts and Culture Loan Fund
- Flex Loan
- New Markets Tax Credits
- Affordable housing loans



CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT:  
Family Christian Health Center – Harvey, IL

“When you work with a partner like IFF that has a like-minded approach and recognizes the value of the work that you’re doing for the community, it’s not a matter of whether it can get done, but how it will get done.”

Dr. Lisa Green, CEO and Co-Founder

# Real Estate Solutions

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- Facilities planning thought partner
- Real estate expertise and advice
- Technical Assistance for capital and real estate readiness
- Facility Feasibility Analysis
- Predevelopment Services
  - Real estate support for funding and financing request
  - Development team selection, including procurement
- Design and Construction Oversight
  - Payment application and processing for construction



“At the moment where Appleseed could have stopped, IFF gave us the lifeline to move forward. Appleseed is not where we are without IFF, and we would not be opening a 75 seat, high-quality early learning center in rural Rensselaer, Indiana.”

Adam Alson, President

# Planning for Success



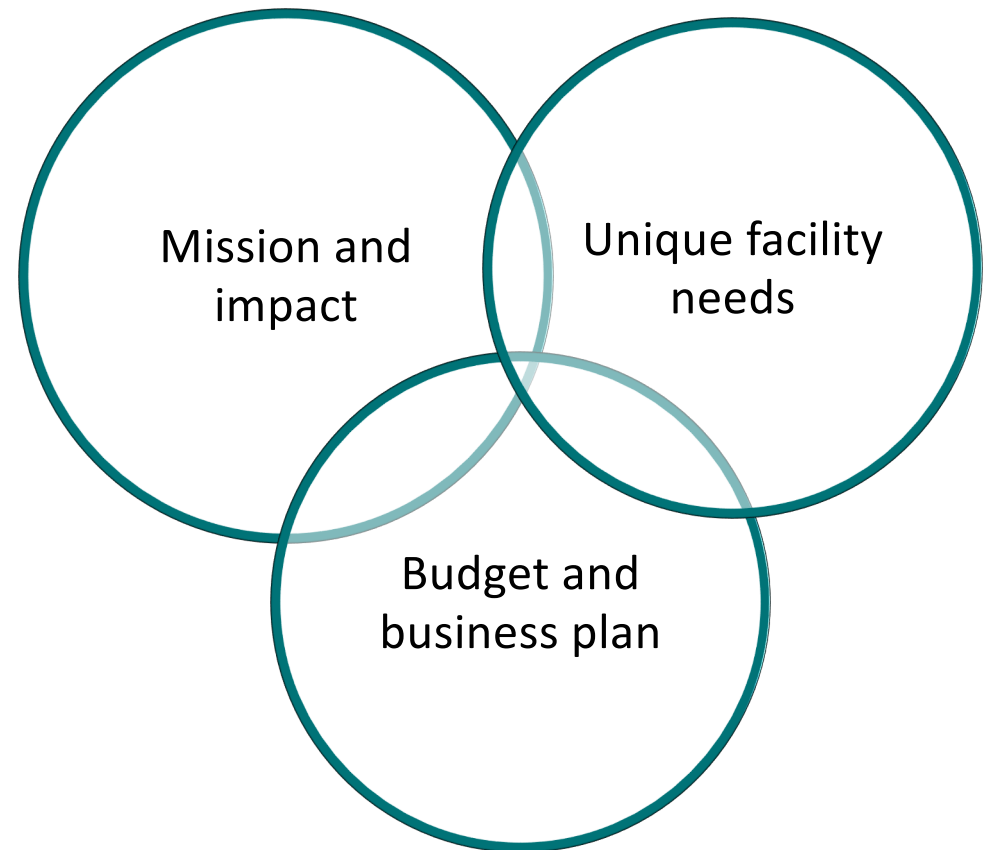
# Planning for Success at Ideation Stage

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Community development projects meet at the intersection of:

- **Mission** and **impact**
- Unique **facility needs**
- Feasible **budget** and sustainable **business plan**



# Planning for Success at Ideation Stage

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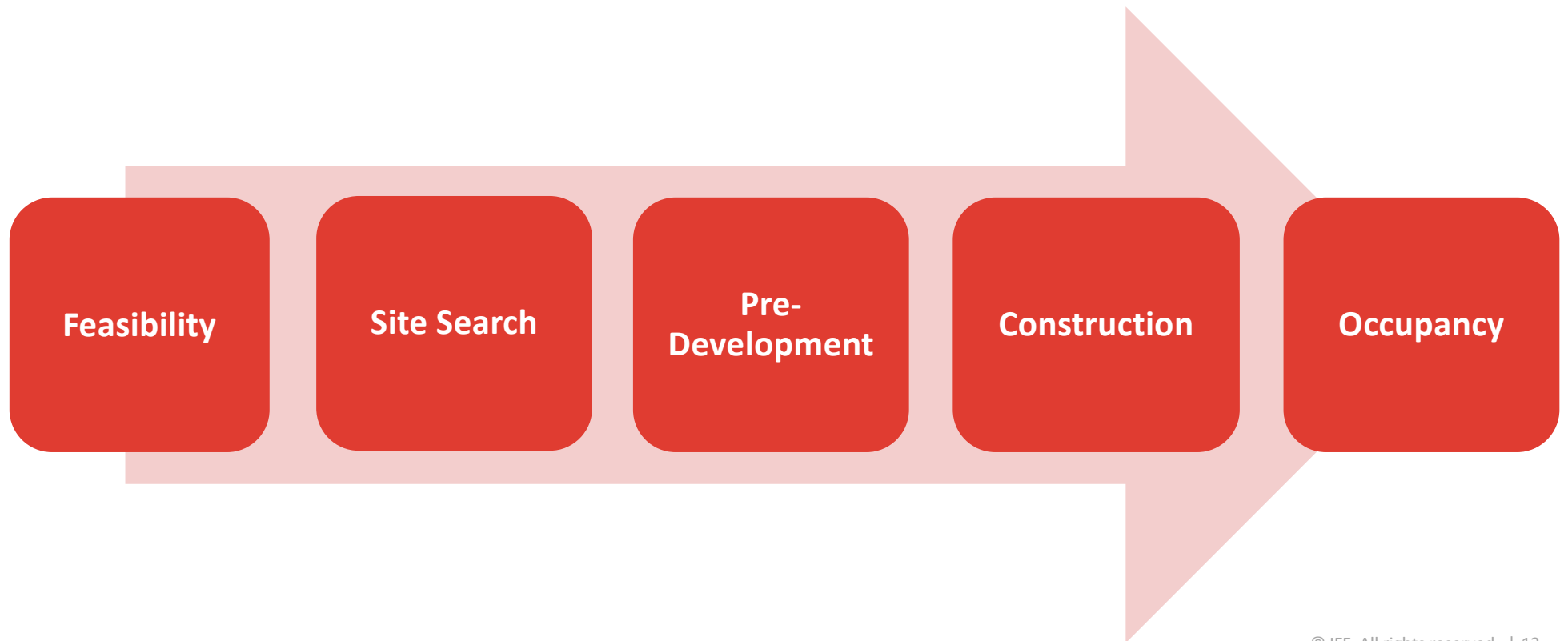
- **Impact:** How does your project deliver impact?
- **Feasibility:** How can your project drive long term financial sustainability?
- **Community:** Who will participate in planning?
  - Residents? Stakeholders? Tenants?
- **Location:** Is your project a place-based initiative rooted in a specific geography? What is important about your facility location?
- **Partners:** Who are allies in the ecosystem that support your project today? Could support you along the way?



# Phases of a Real Estate Project

# Phases of a Real Estate Project

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# Feasibility



## Define the project parameters

- How will this space impact/support your mission, and/or serve your clients and community?
- What is the proposed business plan?
- How much space is required?
- Where to focus a site search?
- Unique facility requirements?
- Lease or buy?

## Identify potential funding sources

- Public funding (e.g., city, state)
- New Markets Tax Credits
- Opportunity zones
- Grants
- Capital campaign
- Loan

## Identify next steps

- Who is engaged as a decision maker?
- What are the decision-making criteria?
- Which facility option is the best solution?
- What are the assumptions to inform site selection (e.g., budget, size, etc.)?
- What else is needed to start a site search?

# Site Search

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## Prior to searching for a property, IFF recommends nonprofit staff and board align on the following:

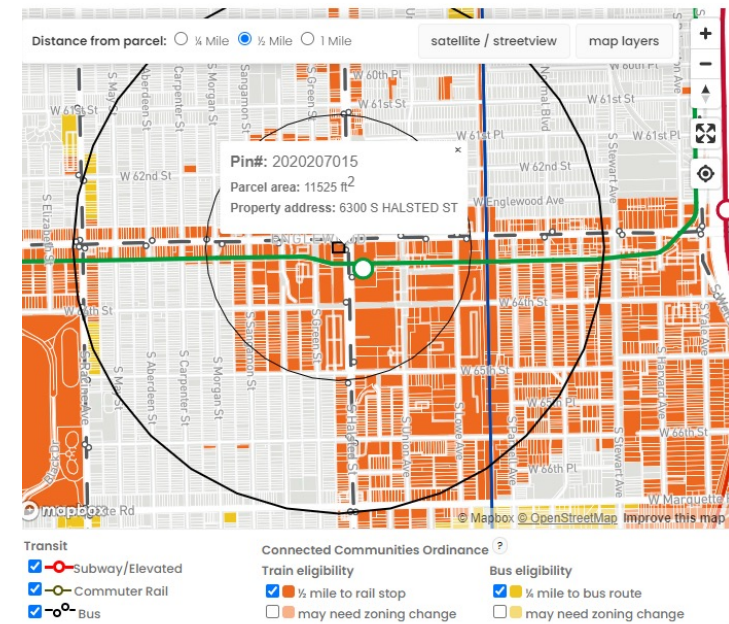
- **Project budget:** Estimated project budget based on property size and informed by construction assumptions
- **Operating budget:** Estimated annual operating budget that considers facility impacts including **program revenue/expense** growth and changes to **occupancy costs**
- **Potential capital sources of funding:** Some capital funding is tied to location – is this funding important for your project?

# Site Search



Prior to searching for a property, IFF recommends nonprofit staff and board align on the following:

- **Property search area:** e.g., geographically defined with N/S/W/E boundaries
- **Proposed space needs:** list of proposed facility needs with estimated square foot/property size
- **Important property criteria:** building type, neighborhood characteristics, parking, transit, etc.



# Site Search



## Timeline

- 3-6 months, depending on assumptions, market, space needs
- Work with a broker?
- Consider off market properties
- Identify site search requirements
- Create a short list of properties
- Visit & assess the condition evaluate properties for suitability of location, programming potential, & renovation needs

## Budget

- Development budget
- Acquisition, hard costs, soft costs, contingency
- Operating pro forma with estimated occupancy costs
- May need to revisit site search criteria if available properties don't meet criteria and adjust search area, square footage and/or budget

## Real Estate Readiness

- Attorney
- Purchase and sale contract
- Lease negotiations
- Complete due diligence
- Inspections
- Environmental
- Survey
- Zoning

# Predevelopment



## Financing and Fundraising

- Secure financing commitments, including bridge loan, public financing, or other capital sources, if applicable

## Site Due Diligence

- Conduct due diligence including zoning review, environmental testing, other site reporting and testing, if necessary

## Development Team

- Engage architect for schematic drawings/design development, construction drawings
- Engage contractor for cost estimates
- General Contractor bid process and contract negotiation

## Project Readiness

- Obtain construction permits
- Financial closing

# Predevelopment: Building a Team / Building Capacity

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- Architect and Engineers
- Preconstruction Services
- Predevelopment Services
- Owner's Representative
- General Contractor
- Environmental
- Environmental
- Geotechnical
- Survey
- Furniture (FFE) Vendors
- Low Voltage/CCTV
- Commission Agent / Energy Efficiency team

## **Resource:**

[Building a Team: Roles and Responsibilities for Nonprofit Facilities Project](#)

# Construction and Occupancy



## Construction Cost/Duration

Cost/duration depends on size of space and scope of renovation:

- **Minor:** paint and carpet
- **Moderate:** changing layout, improving building systems
- **Gut:** typically stripping building to core and shell and improving most or all systems

## Owner/Owner's Representative

- Attend regular (e.g., weekly) Owner/Architect/Contractor meeting (OAC)
- Track/approve change orders and contingency balance
- Review/process monthly payment requests from General Contractor and any other project vendors

## Turnover and Occupancy

- Inspect/accept work during punch list process
- Coordinate Owner vendors (e.g., signage, security, furniture, low voltage)
- Train maintenance staff and review warranty information



# Creative Sector and Real Estate



# Art and Real Estate



- Arts and Culture Strategy - Elevated Chicago
  - Culture Near Transit
  - Workshops on Art and Economic Vitality
- Placemaking
- Vacant site and Corridor Activation
- Murals  
<https://greenstarmovement.org/>

CONGRATULATIONS INAUGURAL  
CULTURE NEAR TRANSIT GRANTEES!

 Puerto Rican  
Arts Alliance

**PUERTO RICAN  
CULTURAL CORRIDOR:  
MURALS, MUSIC &  
MARKETPLACES**

Led by Puerto Rican Arts Alliance, this community-driven placekeeping initiative activates public spaces near CTA stations in Avondale, Logan Square, and Humboldt Park.



# Art and Real Estate



Photo courtesy of IMAN

## Public Outdoor Plaza (POP!) program



Photo courtesy of Lamar Johnson Collaborative, Westside Health Authority



# Predevelopment Funding Sources



# Predevelopment Funding Sources



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- Philanthropic Sources
  - Sector-specific funding
  - Capital Campaigns
    - Board experience
    - Feasibility study
    - Meetings with current funders
  - Other examples
    - Landmarks Illinois
    - Chicago Community Trust Predevelopment Fund Grant
    - JCUA Community Ventures Program- Predevelopment Loan

# Legislative Earmarks



- Funding from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) can be secured by talking with state senators and representatives
- IFF recommends starting these conversations early to see what is possible and what the requirements around securing the money will be
  - All state funding will be subject to procurement requirements
  - Securing funding is dependent on the project being in the legislator's district
  - To find your elected officials, [see here](https://www.elections.il.gov/electionoperations/districtlocator/districtofficialsearchbyaddress.aspx) ( <https://www.elections.il.gov/electionoperations/districtlocator/districtofficialsearchbyaddress.aspx> )
  - **Can request up to 30% in Working Capital to be used for predevelopment**
  - Remaining grant is reimbursable

# Arts Work Fund



- Arts Work Fund (<https://artsworkfund.org/>) offers grants to enable arts organizations to change operational and/or artistic practices to meet a changing arts environment.
- Grants are intended to give organizations room to plan for (THINK) and test and enact (EXPLORE) shifts in organizational structure, operations, and/or financial practices. The grants are intended **not** for ongoing and regular operational costs but to help organizations redefine key partnerships, address longstanding challenges, navigate critical organizational transitions, and build a foundation of resilience to ensure they can effectively meet their missions.
- Eligibility
  - Organizations with an arts-based mission and IRS 501(c) (3) public charity designation, fiscal agent
  - Arts organizations led by, for, and about Black, Indigenous, and People of Color with operating expenses of \$2 million and below.
  - Any arts and culture organization with operating expenses of \$800,000 and below.
  - Located in and serves Chicago and Cook County.



# Readiness Framework



# Readiness



**IFF's Real Estate Solutions' approach is to consider three types of readiness:**



**Organizational  
Readiness**



**Real Estate  
Readiness**



**Capital  
Readiness**

# Organizational Readiness

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## Organizational readiness in the context of community development:

- Organization's ability to achieve facility project goal
- Consider your resources, schedule, capacity, and skills, gaps inclusive of staff, financial and administrative infrastructure, and partnerships

# Organizational Readiness

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## Organizational readiness in the context of community development:

- **Staffing / Project Team**
  - Client day-to-day lead: capacity and experience
  - Project team: capacity and experience
- **Organization/Board:**
  - Real estate experience
  - Fundraising experience
  - Sustainable business model

# Real Estate Readiness



## Real Estate Readiness in the context of community development:

- **Site Control:** Is there a site? Is it owned?
  - Site conditions: environmental, survey, geotech, etc.?
- **Zoning:** Is a zoning change required?
- **Design:** Is an architect selected? What design milestone is the project at?
- **Construction:** Is there a cost estimate? A bid? A contract?
- **Permit:** Is the building permit ready?

# What is Capital Readiness?



- Capital readiness, in the context of community development, refers to **readiness to seek capital funding for a facility project**
- In addition to program impact, funders are, typically, looking at **organizational capacity, real estate readiness**, and financial sustainability of **operations**
- Understanding project narrative and constraints support capital readiness
  - **Project gap, project timeline, project risks -> timing of capital needs**
- What do we know about ecosystem **AND** project that can help the project get funding?

# Capital Readiness

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## Capital Readiness in the context of community development:

- **Amount:** What does the project cost, and *how much has been raised?*
- **Timing:**
  - **Predevelopment** funding for expenses in next 6-12 months
  - **Construction** phase funding: will a bridge loan be needed because grants come in at completion?

# Predevelopment and Readiness

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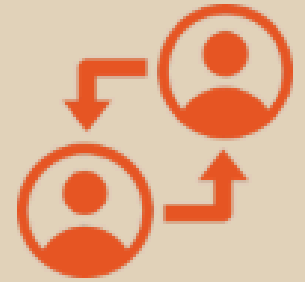
- Predevelopment timelines are subject to **aligning** real estate, capital and organizational readiness
- Project **budgets change** – revisit and update them!
- The project **scope, budget, and timeline** will evolve as more information becomes known over time and assumptions are replaced with knowns
  - Examples: environmental remediation, construction cost

# Bustling Spaces

**Bustling Spaces, LLC** supports artists, community groups, and creative businesses in historically disinvested communities to manifest their visions, access new resources, and tell their stories.



# We Provide:



**Strategic Consulting**



**Grant Writing**



**Project Support**



**Storytelling Support**



**Programming Support**



**BTS**

# Meet Bustling Spaces: *Leadership*



**HENRY WISHCAMPER**

**Founder**



**EVIN MARIE**

**Consultant, Chief Strategist**



**JUEVEL HUTTON**

**Chief Operating Officer**



# Meet Bustling Spaces: *The Team*



**BERYL BRIANE FORD**

**Consultant**



**LYNN BARLOW**

**Consultant**



**PAIGE BROWN**

**Program Associate**



**KIMECO ROBERSON**

**Consultant**



**SAMANTHA BROWN**

**Administrative & Program  
Support Coordinator**



# Bimonthly funding opportunities newsletter



**Funder:** Arts Works Fund

**Grant Program:** Think & Explore

**Maximum Grant Size:** \$20,000 & \$25,000 *respectively*

**Application Closes:** May 15, 2025

**Discipline/Area:** Multiple Disciplines (Organizations)



# Preparing Organizational Readiness for Predevelopment



# Introduction

Building from Jessica's overview of the predevelopment process from the real estate side, I'm going to focus on steps you can take to prepare your organizational readiness for predevelopment.





## Predevelopment is more challenging for non-profit cultural institutions than it is for commercial developers:

1) High learning curve

2) Our highly skilled professional staffs have years of training and experience... in other things

3) Our balance sheets probably don't fully align with lenders and funders' concerns

4) We typically have less history with and/or access to debt financing

5) Typically, many predevelopment costs are paid for by developer fees generated by other projects in a developers' pipeline.



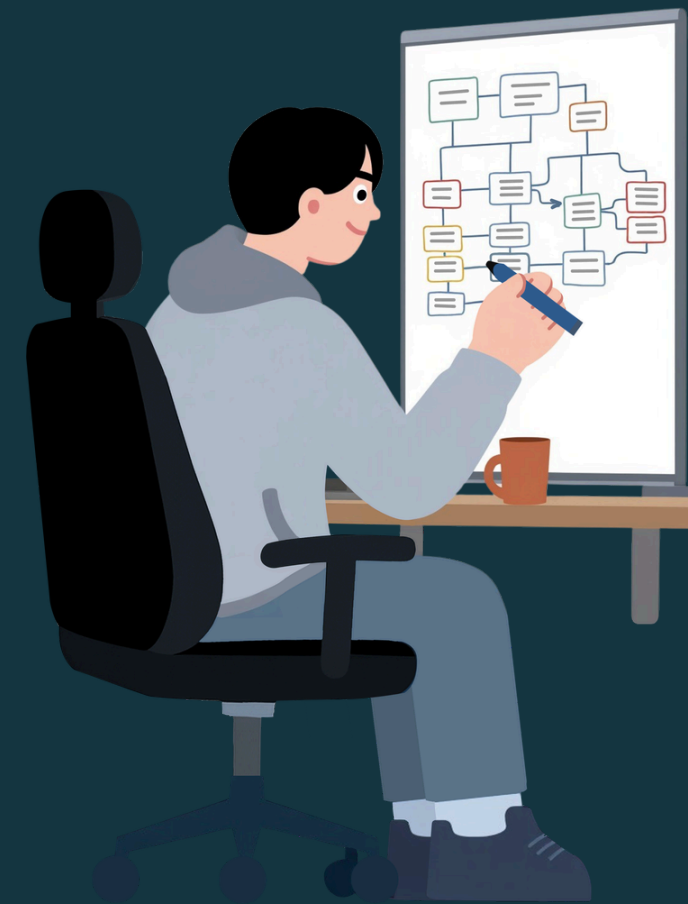
## Building Your Organization's Capital Project Team:

*In addition to the development team that Jessica described, you'll want to begin to **build your organization's capital project team:***

- Capital Campaign Consultant
- Board of Directors
  - *Do you have everyone you need on your board?*
- Capital Campaign Committee
  - *Does not need to consist only of board members*
- Key advisors
- Peer institutions that have completed similar scale projects
- Potential Major Donors
- Longstanding funders
- Political advocates

## Creating an Integrated Strategy for Predevelopment:

*To navigate the complexity of predevelopment, start with an integrated strategy created by and shared across your board, staff, real estate team and capital campaign teams that will serve as a roadmap and time-line from here to breaking ground.*



**BTS**



## An integrated predevelopment strategy should balance the needs and challenges of:

- Acquisition
- Holding costs
- Design
- Funding
  - Capital Grants and public funding
  - Capital Campaign
  - Board giving
- Political approvals
- Cash flow management
- Ongoing operations
- Community engagement





## Community engagement and communication are key

*There will be times when....*

- Your project gets stalled
- Your community won't be able to see the progress you are making

Creating ongoing touchpoints with the community is vital to ***maintaining excitement and confidence*** for the project's viability and momentum

Ongoing community engagement will make it much easier to ***raise both capital and annual fund contributions*** over the entire lifespan of the project

## What does relationship building throughout predevelopment look like?



### Political support:

- Alderman
- DPD Regional Planner
- Your state representatives



### Finance Support:

- Your banker
- IFF



### Real Estate Support:

- Commercial developers
- Architects
- General Contractor
- Engineers
- IFF



### Peer support:

- Other institutions
- Colleagues and friends
- Your shrink



## Building/Expanding Your Organization's Fundraising Culture

- Fundraising is a shared responsibility ***across the organization***, not a siloed function
- It is vital for donors to ***support both*** capital and annual campaigns
- Share educational resources ***across the organization and its stakeholders*** about complexity of capital funding:
  - Reimbursement grants
  - Readiness requirements
- Provide ***clear, realistic communication*** about the length and complexity of this process



## A Couple of Fundraising Hacks:

During predevelopment, *in-kind contributions* can be as meaningful as cash gifts:

- Architecture firms
- Engineering firms
- GCs

If you have board members or major donors who will consider making a *favorable term loan*, that can greatly speed up the predevelopment process.

At the very least, *secure a line of credit.*



# Want more info?



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- Follow @bustlingspacesllc on IG
- Email us at [admin@bustlingspaces.com](mailto:admin@bustlingspaces.com)
- Check out our site: [www.bustlingspaces.com](http://www.bustlingspaces.com)



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