



2026-2029 New District Full Application

Call for Districts Guidelines & Instructions

Please read the instructions fully and carefully, as the process, eligibility, and requirements have changed from previous rounds. This is the first step in the process to establish TDI Districts in FY27 (beginning July 1, 2026)-, which will now involve an initial Partnership Development Stage in FY26 (March – June, 2026). See further description below.

MassDevelopment is launching its fourth round of locally-nominated strategic redevelopment districts in the Gateway Cities. This round will include opportunities for districts in new cities and for new districts in cities where we have previously worked. Applicants can find additional information on the program website and Instagram.

Program Overview

The Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) is a comprehensive place-based accelerator designed to implement locally initiated strategic revitalization activities and catalyze community co-investment. The program is based on enhanced community engagement (people), a district focus (place), and local collaborative partnerships (networks), and supported by real estate, economic, and small business development. TDI places particular emphasis on the role that diversity, equity, and inclusion must play in a local economic development practice that actually builds wealth and opportunity for the communities in which we work.

This “people, place and networks” framework is based on the idea that communities hold the keys to their own transformation. By activating the people most responsible for the development and upkeep of a commercial district, and aligning them across shared visions and priorities, TDI can make strategic, community-driven investments that leverage other resources, financial and otherwise, that advance specific projects and ideas. This place-based, project-driven approach is inherently creative, and TDI leans heavily on the creative community in the places we work to build on the cultural assets and local identities that make them unique.

Program Structure

The TDI Program has three basic components: 1) A Partnership Development Stage, 2) The Full TDI District Development Stage, and 3) The TDI Gateway Network.

Partnership Development Stage. These resources will be limited, but this stage is now required for all incoming TDI Districts. For the third round of TDI Districts, we offered partnership development assistance in multiple districts prior to hiring a fellow and bringing on the full suite of TDI resources. This is now a feature of the program, and we found that partnerships were more ready to receive a fellow and start progress on day one when significant partnership development work was done in advance. This stage will include:

- A mandatory four-month curriculum of learning modules to prepare partners on how to make the most of the program and its resources. Currently, it is expected to include four in-person sessions and four shorter virtual sessions with all community Partners across all districts.
- Assistance from MassDevelopment staff to help establish the partnership, and understand a long term vision and work plan, and a partnership growth strategy.
- Financial resources for a “quick win” project to galvanize local support and demonstrate ability to collaborate.

Full TDI District in Development Stage. Once each District has completed the Partnership Development stage it will be designated a Full TDI District. Districts that advance will receive:

- A three-year program commitment and access to the full suite of TDI resources.
- A TDI Fellow: a midcareer economic development professional who will serve as a local facilitator for the duration of the TDI commitment, fully paid for by MassDevelopment.
- Custom technical assistance from MassDevelopment and its “House Doctor” consultants throughout the three-year program.
- Access to small grants, which are new financial and capacity-building tools developed to promote local market growth.
- Eligibility for TDI Equity, MassDevelopment’s grant and loan program to support the capital needs of catalytic real estate projects in TDI Districts.
- Other opportunities, financial and otherwise, to be developed specifically for TDI Districts.

TDI Gateway Network. The TDI Gateway Network is a peer learning and engagement platform designed for both current and graduated TDI districts across Massachusetts’ 28

Gateway Cities. The Network uses tools like the TDI Playbook, Learning Tracks, Knowledge Cafe, and events across the region to accelerate organizational impact and sustainability.

Participating districts benefit from growing connections, shared knowledge, problem-solving frameworks, and scalable strategies rooted in real-world experience, allowing local leaders to deepen impact, build capacity, and contribute to a statewide ecosystem of practice.

Membership to the TDI Gateway Network will be offered to current district partners, TDI district alumni, and an extended network of industry partners. This can include previous TDI Partners, City Mayors, developers, practitioners, and state leaders.

Eligibility

Eligibility for TDI is limited to Gateway Cities as defined by M.G.L. ch. 23A, Section 3A. These include **Everett, Leominster, Malden, Methuen, Peabody, Quincy, Salem, Westfield**, Attleboro, Barnstable (Hyannis), Brockton, Chelsea, Chicopee, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Revere, Springfield, Taunton, and Worcester. *Bold are communities that have never hosted a TDI Fellow.

There are two eligibility paths:

Path 1: New Cities

Gateway Cities that have not previously hosted a TDI Fellow are eligible to apply for a district in any part of the city.

Path 2: Returning Cities

Gateway Cities that have previously hosted a TDI Fellow may apply for a new district if:

- The proposed district is different from the original TDI District(s).
- The partnership is designed specifically for the new district and may look substantially different from the original.

Across both paths, applicants should demonstrate local readiness and co-investment to strengthen long-term sustainability. This may include contributions from a municipality, foundation, educational institution, nonprofit, or private business. Co-investment does not need to be capital, it can be staff time, space, or programmatic support, but it must represent a new, intentional investment in the district partnership, not an existing activity. These commitments will be requested during the Full TDI District stage, not during the Partnership Development stage, and help ensure lasting progress after the district “graduates.”

District Criteria

Our program tools are most suited to downtowns or major neighborhood commercial nodes. To be successful, districts must be significantly comprised of commercial real estate with a mix of uses, which can include retail/commercial, office, industrial, and housing. Districts should be walkable for residents and others and should predominantly contain independent businesses, as opposed to chain retail establishments. There should be enough existing commercial or institutional activity in or near the district on which to build additional efforts and on which to garner support and co-investment from local organizations. A concentration of historic infrastructure and legacy institutions can be a boon to revitalization, but not a requirement. Good design, district identity and thoughtful, concentrated development are more important.

We recognize that district boundaries are fluid and can be difficult to define. Commercial districts and downtowns have complex relationships with adjacent neighborhoods and the larger community and region. While program resources will be concentrated within the district proper, we do acknowledge that special relationships may exist with certain sites, institutions, amenities, and organizations outside of the area. We account for this in two ways. The first is the idea of “fuzzy boundaries,” which we define as a zone extending one quarter mile from the edges of the selected district. The second is the idea of special influence, where another entity or amenity is important, but may not be geographically contiguous. These types of locations are typically represented by a major cultural or educational institution or employer and are best included by representation on the Partnership rather than the district itself.

Please refer to the criteria below as a guide to selecting your district boundaries.

Within the application, the partnership will define a specific area that will serve as the city's District for consideration. The best way to conceive of a district is to consider what area is generally regarded by the community as possessing both a distinct identity and economic significance. If the area under consideration has been previously defined, for instance as the subject of past planning studies or Cultural District, you may want to consider using these same boundaries. In summary, a district should meet the following criteria:

1. Be a concentrated area with a roughly five- to ten-minute walking radius.
2. Be generally accepted by the larger community as possessing a unique and established identity.
3. Be of unique economic, cultural, and social importance to the city and the region.
4. Have suffered from disinvestment in the past.

5. Be ripe for organizational support work and catalytic investments to create momentum.

Partnership Requirements

Applicants must apply as a local collaborative partnership with defined roles to be selected for TDI District designation. The partnership will work with MassDevelopment to make substantive progress toward a set of district priorities. The partnership must identify a lead contact, and each Gateway City can submit no more than one application, though multiple are welcome and encouraged to submit the additional partner questionnaire. All information submitted will become the property of MassDevelopment, and will be reviewed by staff and an appointed review committee during the Call for Districts process.

Effective partnerships should include people who can help make informed decisions, build consensus, communicate with the community and move projects into action with the appropriate resources. TDI Partnerships have both formal and informal components. Formally, there is a core group of Partners that sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which is the legal mechanism for TDI deploy resources to the district. These core partners always include the municipality, the primary fiscal agent responsible for disbursing and tracking funds in the community, and people and organizations that can make decisions and provide key resources to advance shared priorities and projects. Typically, there are subcommittees and working groups that are formed to advance projects or initiatives which contain other community leaders and organizations that may not be signatories on the MOA, but are instrumental to the work. Outside of this, there is a constellation of informal partners that are involved, from small businesses and community leaders to artists and developers. When you think about putting together an effective core partnership, we recommend that you consider a mix of executive level decision makers and others that will be instrumental in decision making and building consensus in the community.

A helpful framework has been developed by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff around the concept of “getting the whole system into the room.” In this model, having people that represent the following attributes in partnership can greatly influence what you are able to achieve.

- Authority to act: People with the power to make decisions.
- Resources: People who can provide access to contacts, time, or money.
- Expertise: People who have specialized knowledge on the topic or issues you are trying to address.
- Information: People that possess relevant, factual data that others may not have.

- Need to be involved: People who will be affected by the outcome or can speak to the consequences of decisions.

Measures of Success

TDI defines success through both quantitative and qualitative outcomes, grounded in best practices for place-based development. The program considers success to be defined locally but here is a general framework for program success:

1. Economic vitality: growth in small businesses, investment, and job opportunities.
2. Physical transformation: visible improvements in public spaces and real estate activation.
3. Partnership strength: active, representative collaboration and shared leadership.
4. Community trust & Inclusion: meaningful engagement of residents and underrepresented voices.
5. Sustainability: continued local commitment and co-investment beyond the program.

Co-Investment Expectation

TDI is a co-investment program. The staff capacity, expertise, grants, and capital investments the program makes are expected to be leveraged by similar contributions from the public and private sectors. Some of these contributions are essential to the function of the program. Some of these expectations include:

1. A commitment from core TDI partners to fully engage with the program, including the participation of staff with decision-making authority in regular meetings and projects, and providing resources, whether staff, financial, physical space or other in-kind support.
2. The good-faith participation of the municipality and coordination with other departments including regular briefings with the Mayor or City Manager, staff participation from relevant departments, and the alignment with and deployment of city resources and investments.
3. At a minimum the core Partnership must consist of the municipality, an economic development entity or other aligned organization, and a private sector partner. Partnerships and those responsible for carrying the work forward may be broad and diverse, but the core partners will be required to sign a memorandum of agreement that articulates their roles and responsibilities.
4. The designation of a fiscal agent that will be responsible for accepting and properly managing TDI funds for local projects and initiatives, including disbursements, recordkeeping, and reporting. Generally, there is one non-profit fiscal agent per

partnership, but this is not a requirement. There can be more than one depending on the nature of the investment and the mission of the organization(s).

5. A commitment to shared learning, data, and storytelling - Partners agree to actively participate in TDI and Gateway Network learning activities and events, contributing to a culture of reflection, accountability, and celebration at the local and regional level. This includes engaging in shared data collection and analysis to understand local impact, documenting lessons learned, and co-creating stories that elevate local voices and lived experience. Through this commitment, partners help shape and tell the evolving story of their district's transformation, using narrative together to inspire investment, strengthen relationships, and amplify the collective work taking place across the network.

Evaluation Criteria

MassDevelopment will review applications primarily based on the following criteria:

1. Alignment with TDI's mission and place-based principles
2. Strength and diversity of the local partnership
3. District readiness and potential for transformation
4. Demonstrated local support and co-investment
5. Commitment to equity, inclusion, and community engagement

Anticipated Timeline

- Application Available: Friday, October 24
- District Zoom Webinar: Monday, November 3 *[Click here to register.](#)
- Application Due: Friday, November 21
- New District Notification: February 2026
- TDI Fellow Matching: March 2026
- 2026-2029 Cohort Dates: July 1, 2026, thru July 1, 2029

Application Components

- Primary application form
- [Partner questionnaire \(for each partner organization\)](#)
- District map and data (boundary, key assets, assessor's data)
- Mayor/City manager letter of support

- Optional materials: photos, maps, planning documents, or social media links

How to Apply and Tips

- Visit the [MassDevelopment TDI program website](#) for all forms and resources.
- Designate a lead applicant to coordinate responses.
- Discuss all questions as a team before completing the application.
- Submit all materials by Friday, November 21, 2025, at 11:59 PM.
- Questions? Contact Jim McKeag at jmckeag@massdevelopment.com

Best practice tip: what makes a strong application

Community leaders often ask what makes a TDI application stand out. While factors like district typology and market conditions matter, what makes an application competitive is the people, partnerships and alignment to get things done. We're looking for signs that your community can align around a shared vision, move projects forward, and leverage resources effectively. This is essentially the Capital Absorption Framework from the Center for Community Investment.

Here's what a strong application shows:

- Commitment and collaboration - The municipality and its partners are fully engaged, ready to invest time, staff, and funds. They work together or are willing to work openly, even when it requires compromise or tough conversations.
- A strong "backbone" partner - There's a trusted local organization ready to manage funds, coordinate efforts, and help keep the partnership and its workplan on track.
- Capacity to deliver - The team and proposed partnership has the organizational capacity, skills and relationships to advance the vision while working effectively with small businesses, developers, and creatives to make projects happen.
- Honesty and self-awareness - Tell the real story of your district, the good, the challenging and the potential. The program is not looking for perfection, but for clarity about where support is most needed.
- A compelling vision for the future - Share an inspiring, forward-looking vision that reflects your community's energy and creativity. Show that people are ready to take some risks, try new ideas, and work together to make it happen.

Application: This form contains links to other forms, which collectively represent the entire application--the process is only one round. The application is due on **Friday, November 21 by 11:59 P.M.** Late applications will not be considered.