



Vibrant Places Program Fiscal Year 2026 Call for Applications

About the Program

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) is requesting letters of interest for the FY 2026 Vibrant Places Program. This program provides technical support for a range of creative placemaking projects that enable future place-based investments, complementing other local economic development initiatives in the NJTPA region. The NJTPA region includes Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union, and Warren counties.

This program leverages the power of placemaking to strengthen connections between people and places that enhance the social, physical, and economic fabric in communities across the region. Placemaking is the application of community planning that integrates arts, culture, and other community assets to attract new investment and strengthen the local economy. It is a sustainable form of economic development that links job creation to specific places by enhancing public spaces, streets, and other community amenities. The NJTPA supports and advances placemaking projects with a focus on disadvantaged communities and diverse stakeholders.

NJTPA has partnered with the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs to bring market analysis from the Local Planning Services/Main Street New Jersey team to the Vibrant Places Program. Projects selected for technical assistance may receive this additional support.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include municipal and county governments as well as non-profit, community-based, or non-governmental organizations in the NJTPA region. Special consideration is given to collaborations between municipalities, counties, and non-governmental organizations and to applications that address the needs of all community members.

How to Apply

Interested parties should prepare a two-page *letter of interest* and submit it via email to Miriam Salerno at miriam.salerno@ejb.rutgers.edu with a copy to Blythe Eaman at beaman@njtpa.org.

The Letter of Interest should be no longer than two pages and include the following information:

- Applicant name and contact information
- A summary statement that briefly describes who will do what. For example, “The City of Lambertville is requesting technical assistance to develop a virtual walking tour that highlights issues of flooding and resiliency in the Swan Creek flood plain.”
- Provide a brief description of the proposed project, including:
 - A statement of need:
 - Why this project is important to the community and
 - How placemaking strategies will improve the lives of people living and working in this community and strengthen the connections between people and places that enhance the social, physical, and/or economic fabric of the community
 - Project activity – the “What” and “Who” of the project:
 - An overview of the anticipated activities involved, including public involvement (details to the degree that space allows).
 - Indicate if there will be engagement and collaboration with other organizations, identify them, and state their role in the project, and state their role in the project.
 - Project outcomes - Please state the specific outcomes you hope to achieve and the anticipated final product.

Deadline: The deadline to submit *letters of interest* is **September 30, 2025**. Based on the information provided in the letters of interest, a selection committee will review applicants. If applicants are selected as finalists, the NJTPA will contact them by October 31, 2025, to let them know if additional information or support materials are needed.

Final decisions will be made by early December 2025. Projects are anticipated to begin in late 2025 and conclude by June 1, 2026.

Questions: Please email Miriam Salerno at miriam.salerno@ejb.rutgers.edu

Eligible Project Examples and Ideas

Projects funded by this program cover a wide range of types and topic areas. Examples of the types of projects funded in the past include:

- **[Springwood Avenue Heritage Walk](#):** This project created a virtual cultural heritage walk along Springwood Avenue on The West Side of the City of Asbury Park. The purpose of this project was to assist with enhancing and showcasing the West Side’s identity and cultural history, especially the local, vibrant Black History of the area.

Project partners include the nonprofit Interfaith Neighbors, the City of Asbury Park, Asbury Park African-American Music Project (AP-AMP), Westside Citizens United (WSCU), Asbury Park Museum, and the Asbury Park Historical Society.

- **Village of Asbury Strategic Community Vision Plan:** The Vibrant Places Program, with support from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, worked with the Musconetcong Watershed Association (MWA) to develop a strategic vision plan for the Village of Asbury. This plan includes community outreach and engagement strategies to help inform placemaking and transportation planning recommendations to improve the quality of life for residents. The vision plan guides the Village in creating a pedestrian-oriented sense of place that attracts visitors and businesses and leverages the watershed's many historic, cultural, and natural assets.
- **City of Lambertville Flowing Together Walking Tour:** This study developed a walking tour and ArcGIS StoryMap called *Flowing Together*. The walking tour includes visualizations to depict the impacts of climate change and flooding events on the City of Lambertville from a historic and future-oriented perspective. This project tells the story of the Lambertville community, its life in a flood plain, and its resiliency in the light of climate change. The content includes photographic renderings, videos, interviews, and other multimedia experiences brought to the participant via mobile phone integration or StoryMaps. This project aimed to raise awareness of local ecological connections and to activate community involvement in the process of resiliency planning.
- **Fink Park Vision Plan:** Working with the City of Perth Amboy, this project developed a vision plan for Fink Park, an underutilized pocket park centrally located in the Smith Street commercial district. To create a vision plan, the partners conducted local contextual research and drew on best practices from previous technical assistance projects, such as a recent arts vision plan for the Morris Canal Greenway in Passaic County. The team also conducted extensive public and stakeholder engagement and market analysis of the surrounding area. The vision plan contains two potential concepts for the park, including visual renderings.
- **Washington Avenue Strategic Placemaking Plan:** This project worked with Belleville to develop a strategic marketing plan for the Washington Avenue Commercial District from Mill Street (closest to Branch Brook Park) to Joralemon Street. This plan includes marketing and outreach strategies, community engagement projects, and placemaking techniques that could be implemented to attract business activity and economic investment to Washington Avenue.
- **Engaging Through the Arts for the Morris Canal Greenway:** This project developed an engagement plan for activating the Morris Canal Greenway through the arts. The plan included concepts and recommendations for both art installations and activities that will serve as a framework for engaging communities, artists, historians, and local officials to develop public art along the Morris Canal Greenway, enhancing each community's artistic connection to the greenway's recreational and historical attributes. Considering walkability and accessibility, scalability, cultural significance, and variety in place type, the project team selected five sites as pilot locations for the

arts engagement plan. The project team conducted public engagement via surveys, an open house, the Passaic Tourism Forum, and the Arts Advisory Group to generate ideas on how residents and visitors would like to interact with local public art and spaces.

- **[Dover Visitors Guide and Recovery](#)**: The purpose of this project was to create a Visitor's Guide. This guide included information about local restaurants, theaters, parks, and other attractions to help residents and visitors identify activities and attractions. As part of developing the Visitors Guide, the project team conducted outreach to restaurant and business owners to help them plan for economic recovery post-COVID-19. This project also included recommendations for strategies the town can undertake to help promote business and generate enthusiasm about the downtown.
- **[Demarest Place Community Vision Plan](#)**: This project supported the City of Hackensack and the Northern New Jersey Community Foundation in a creative placemaking endeavor to transform Demarest Place, a pedestrian walkway in the heart of the downtown, into an arts destination that reflects the community's character. Project partners conducted extensive public and stakeholder engagement activities to understand how to infuse arts and activation into a redesign of Demarest Place. The resulting vision for the walkways includes four seasonal concepts to enliven the downtown all year long.
- **[City of Passaic Market Street Area Technical Assistance and Promotion](#)**: This project in the City of Passaic advanced the Passaic Bistro District on Market Street by assisting business and restaurant owners in understanding the benefits and essential elements of parklets, formalizing the Market Street Task Force Committee, developing customized promotional material to brand the Passaic Bistro District and designing and producing the Passaic Bistro District Restaurant Guide. The project team also designed and launched a Passaic Bistro District Walking Tour to promote the shopping and dining establishments and created a marketing and promotion plan for the City to continue promoting the area.

See the **[NJTPA's Vibrant Communities Initiative](#)** for a link to the complete list of projects.

These examples are meant to be illustrative only and provide the applicant with a general sense of scale and scope. The NJTPA welcomes applicants to think creatively about how to use the Vibrant Places Program to advance community empowerment, local economies, and social and physical transformation of place. **The specific technical assistance package will be designed based on the individual needs of the selected applicants within the constraints of available resources.**