



# Building a Better Future

## **Building Better Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Small Business**

Grant Guidelines | Update March 2025



Erie County Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Fund

2.10 Aid to Nonprofit Organizations

# Section I. Introduction & Purpose of the Program

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## Introduction

### About Building a Better Future

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 is a federal relief package providing \$1.9 trillion in funding, program changes, and tax policies aimed at mitigating the continuing effects of the COVID-19 public health crisis.

The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) is a subrecipient of Erie County's grant award and was awarded \$4 million in funding by Erie County Council in 2021 to fund transformative projects throughout Erie County. Erie County and its subgrantees must spend all grant funding by December 31, 2026. Grant funds are being deployed over a five-year period to help Erie County recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

### About ECGRA

In 2008, ECGRA was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the purpose of creating and administering economic development grants with local share gaming revenue. ECGRA's mission is to elevate Erie County by galvanizing nonprofits and small business toward economic and community development and this is done through impact investing. This type of investing takes into account the social, cultural, and environmental effects of investments to both communities and municipalities.

## Purpose of the Building a Better Future Program

The purpose of the federal Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) Program is to:

- Fight the pandemic and support families and businesses struggling with its public health and economic impacts.
- Maintain vital public services, even amid declines in revenue resulting from the crisis
- Build a strong, resilient, and equitable recovery by making investments that support long-term growth and opportunity.

In support of the goals of the SLFRF and Erie County's Build a Better Future Program, ECGRA will deploy grant funds as part of a county-wide Transformative Grant Program to meet immediate needs and make investments in long-term growth and economic opportunity.

Applicants will be required to demonstrate a public health or economic impact as a result of the pandemic and design a related and reasonable proportional response. ECGRA has identified three areas that the SLFRF and Erie County considers eligible and align with ECGRA's existing community revitalization programs.

### **1. Building Better Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Small Business**

Also known as economic gardening, entrepreneurship is a relatively low cost, high yield activity that creates jobs, fills vacant storefronts, and builds wealth. ECGRA specifically will support projects and programs designed to provide technical assistance for entrepreneurs and small businesses with an emphasis on those groups which were severely impacted by the pandemic to build a stronger, more equitable economy.

### **2. Building Better Quality of Place**

All existing community plans (Emerge 2040, Erie Refocused, Embrace Millcreek, et.al) include goals for promoting the reduction blight, improving public spaces, strengthening neighborhoods and commercial corridors, and providing support for parks and recreation. Investments in these places in Erie County have been successful when they are driven by strong, inclusive grassroots efforts and nonprofits with missions focused on community and neighborhood revitalization.

### **3. Building Better Community Facilities**

Using a modified U.S. Department of the Treasury definition of community facilities projects (for the Capital Project Fund), this category will support "improvements to buildings and programs that are designed to jointly and directly enable work, education, and health monitoring." Community facilities will include community centers, family support centers, missions and food pantries, job training facilities, youth development and/or after-school programs, etc. These facilities not only improve the basic quality of life but assist in the development and sustainability of Erie County.

## **Priority Areas**

The Erie County Building a Better Future Grant Program requires that grant-funded activities take place within Erie County with priority given to geographic areas and populations that have faced long-term economic challenges, disinvestment, and poverty.

Proposals or work elements with an emphasis on federally protected classes that were disproportionately impacted during the pandemic are acceptable regardless of location.

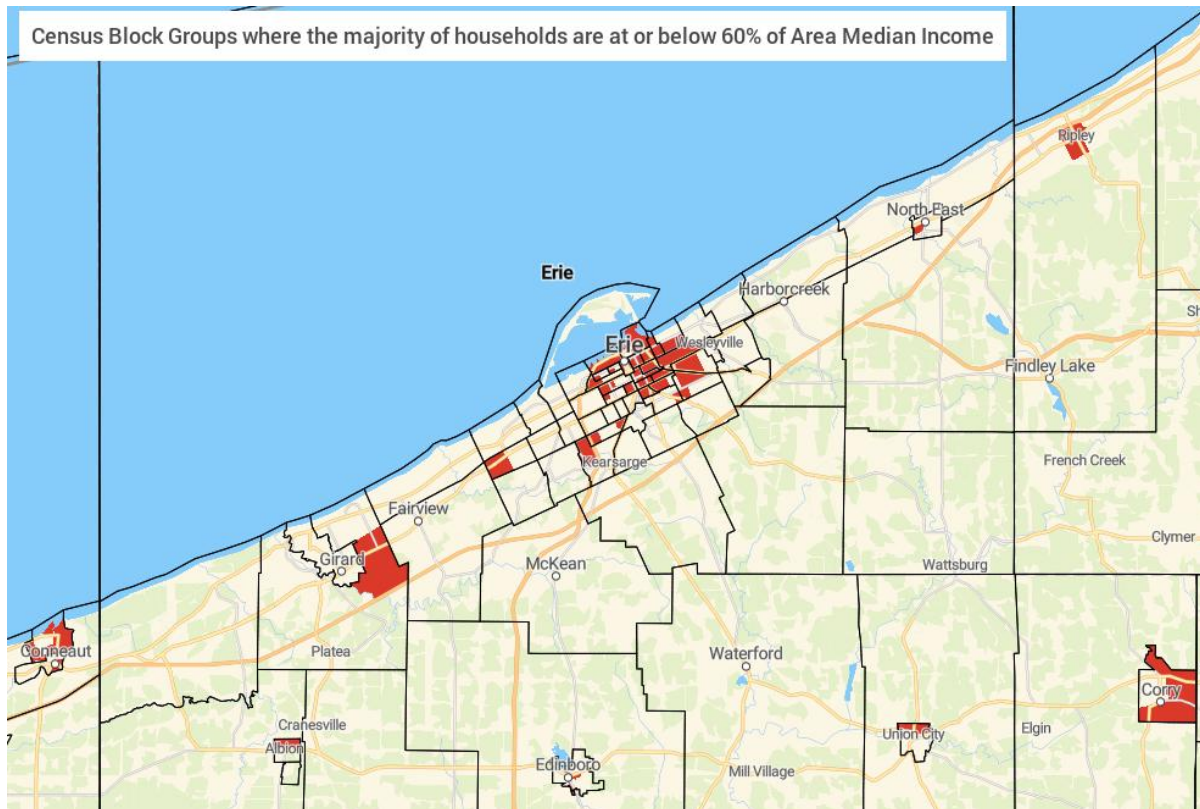
There are three criteria to determine if projects will be considered targeting economically disadvantaged communities. Projects taking place in these geographic areas do not need justification in terms of reaching disadvantaged populations.

1. In HUD Qualified Census Tracts (QCT);
2. Where primary beneficiaries earn less than 60% of median income for Erie County; or
3. Where 25% of the primary beneficiaries are below the federal poverty level.

When proposing the use of BBF funds in census tracts where the majority of residents may not fall within the target income levels, applicants should be prepared to discuss how their proposals will target the population which falls within the recommended income range as well as members of any protected class.

The following maps generally illustrate the location of the Census Tracts or Census Block Groups which fall into the county parameters. Projects and programs are not restricted to these locations.

**Erie County Census Block Groups where the majority of households have incomes less than 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI).**

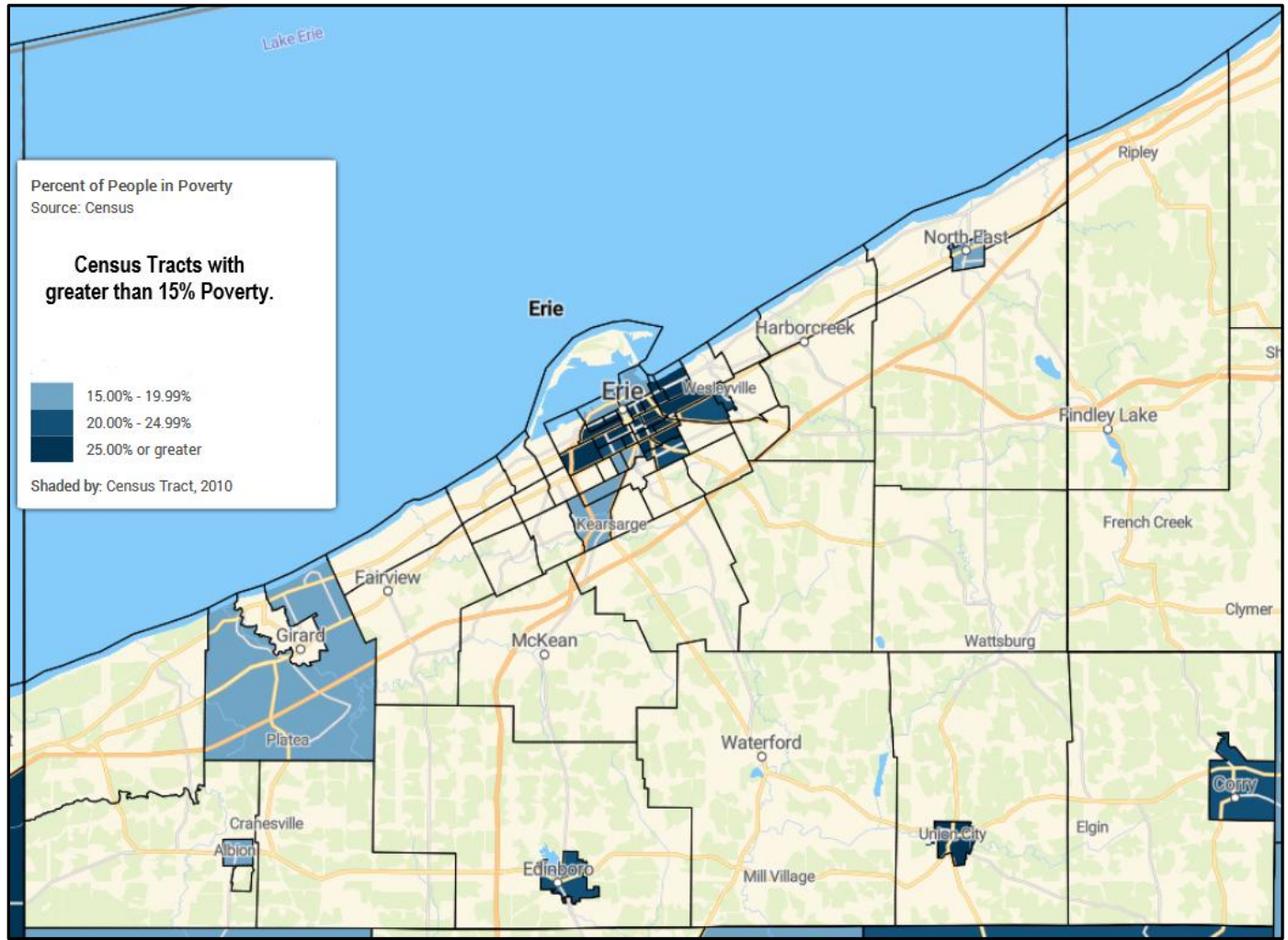


# HUD Qualified Census Tracts (QCT) in Erie County





# Erie County Census Tracts with over 15% Poverty



## **Section II. Program Specific Eligibility Criteria and Guidelines**

### **Building Better Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Small Business**

**\$400,000 available**

The pandemic created significant hardship for small businesses and magnified the difficulties many businesses have in terms of securing financing and other support necessary to succeed. This program provides funding to continue that work and enhance and expand services to reach even more small businesses and potential businesses.

- Applicants must be 501 (c)(3) organizations. Universities are eligible to apply.
- The maximum request is \$50,000.
- The grant period is 12 months.
- Emphasis should be on classes that were disproportionately impacted during the pandemic should be central to proposals.
- Activities must take place within Erie County with priority given to geographic areas and populations that have faced long-term economic challenges, disinvestment, and poverty.
- Entrepreneurial support activities include training, research, coaching, financial literacy, assistance with preparation of business plans, marketing, product development, and legal guidance.
- Proposals will be reviewed and ranked based on the experience of the teams, approach to reach and serve classes and populations which have historically not had access to such services, and a holistic approach to fostering entrepreneurship.

**Eligible Use of Funds:** Staff time, equipment, supplies, rental of office space, materials, software and software licenses, consultants and professional services, and utilities.

*See Section III for more details on eligible and ineligible grant expenses*



## Section III. Eligibility for All Programs

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### Eligibility Criteria

- 🌳 Applicant must be an IRS-designated 501(c)(3) organization. No other entities may apply for the Building a Better Future Transformative Grant Program per Erie County rules.
- 🌳 Organizations must be headquartered in Erie County.
- 🌳 Applicant must provide a cash match of 25%. In-kind donations cannot serve as match.
- 🌳 Other American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funding may not match the ECGRA BFF Program.
- 🌳 Applicant must adhere to contemporary practices/policies with regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion and reflect the spirit and intent of Erie County's Diversity Commitment Statement (Appendix A.)
- 🌳 Applicant must identify a negative economic impact as a result of or aggravated by the pandemic and design a related and reasonably proportional response.
- 🌳 All applicants must be in good standing with the IRS and state and local taxing bodies.
- 🌳 All applicants must be good standing with ECGRA's reporting requirements to date.

### Ineligible Grant Recipients

- 🌳 A public safety organization or facility, including volunteer fire departments.

### Eligible Uses of Funds

- |                                         |                         |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 🌳 Staff time (Up to 15% of grant award) | 🌳 Marketing/Promotion   |
| 🌳 Equipment/Supplies                    | 🌳 Professional Services |
| 🌳 Utilities                             | 🌳 Outcomes Measurement  |
| 🌳 Office space rental                   | 🌳 Contracted Services   |
| 🌳 Construction*                         |                         |
- \*Not available for the Building Better Entrepreneurial Opportunities Program*

*(Grant expenses must relate to the delivery of approved grant activities.)*

### Ineligible Uses of Funds

- |                                                    |                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 🌳 Advocacy/lobbying                                | 🌳 Personal cell phones          |
| 🌳 Conference attendance                            | 🌳 Personal awards/gifts         |
| 🌳 Memberships/subscriptions                        | 🌳 Executive/Board Insurance     |
| 🌳 Meals/food/drink                                 | 🌳 Property Acquisition          |
| 🌳 Any other cost that ECGRA deems to be ineligible | 🌳 Travel outside of Erie County |

## Section IV. Application, Approval Process, & Terms

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### Application Assistance

Application for ECGRA grants shall be completed online at: [ecgra.org/BBF](http://ecgra.org/BBF)





Program inquiries should be directed to:

Tom Maggio, AICP  
ECGRA Grants Manager  
(814) 897-2694  
[tmaggio@ecgra.org](mailto:tmaggio@ecgra.org)

### Contracting Process

Following formal approval by the board of directors, ECGRA will issue a letter of agreement to the grantee, which must be signed by an officer of the organization and returned within 30 days. The agreement may detail additional requirements with which the grantee must comply, including but not limited to: project audit, financial grant closeout report, maintenance of records, public relations, and any other information the board or staff deem relevant.





The grant contract agreement and any subsequent amendments will not be executed until all of the following have been resolved to the satisfaction of the executive director:

-  The grantee must provide all supplemental documentation requested by ECGRA.
-  The grantee must be in compliance with IRS reporting standards.
-  The grantee must be current in payment of all federal, state, and local taxes unless it has entered into an agreement satisfactory to the respective taxing authority and is fully in compliance with the terms thereof.
-  The grantee must not discriminate against any employee or against any applicant for employment because of race, religion, color, handicap, national origin, age, or sex.






After the grant agreement has been fully executed and the proper documentation provided to ECGRA, the payment to the grantee will be made by an electronic funds transfer. Some grants may be paid in installments at the discretion of ECGRA.

ECGRA will monitor the activities of the applicant and the grant contract agreement to ensure that the grantee fulfills the conditions of the grant. This may include a site visit or random audit of income and expenses. Upon request and as required by the agreement, the grantee must furnish ECGRA with all data, reports, contracts, documents, and other information relevant to the activities of the applicant.

## Contract Terms

-  Grant contracts for BBF Transformative Grant funding shall be for a maximum period of 12 months. No extensions will be granted.
-  Applicants must incur costs by 7/31/2026
-  Any funds not obligated by 7/31/2026 must be returned.
-  If the funds allocated to the applicant are not expended on or before the expiration of the grant contract, the unused portion of funds shall be returned to ECGRA.


## Reporting and Closeout Requirements

-  All recipients of funds will be required to submit an online closeout report quantifying the progress toward accomplishing approved deliverables.
-  Closeout reports are due no later than 30 days after the grant agreement expires.
-  All grant recipients will be required to submit financial documentation as part of the online closeout report.
-  Non-compliance with these requirements may prevent the grantee from obtaining funding or payment from any ECGRA grant program and/or funding from ECGRA's programmatic partners.
-  If it is determined that the grantee provided any material misrepresentations or that funds were used for activities not permitted under the terms of the grant contract agreement, the grant contract agreement will be considered in default and immediate repayment will be demanded. In addition, the matter may be referred to the appropriate authorities for investigation.

## Section V. 2025 Grant Schedule

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 **April 2025** – ECGRA releases the **Building a Better Future Transformative Grant Program** Grant Application and Guidelines and posts to [ecgra.org/BBF](https://ecgra.org/BBF)

 **June 30, 2025** – Full Applications must be submitted by midnight

 **July 17, 2025** – ECGRA’s board of directors will make the final review and approve funding recommendations. \*

 **July 31, 2026** – last day to submit a closeout report online

**\*Subject to change without notice.**

*January 20, 2022*

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## Appendix A. Erie County Statement Regarding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

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### **Erie County Diversity Commitment Statement**

Erie County government values the power of diversity. Our goal is to develop an inclusive workforce that will uphold racial equity, support the diversity of employee experiences, and include unique perspectives. Through our commitment to inclusion and diversity, Erie County will provide repeated opportunities for training and professional development that will support on-going positive change. We affirm a zero-tolerance attitude toward any form of discrimination. We pledge to maintain our mission to promote justice and equity in the community we serve.

### **Defined Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Erie County**

**Diversity** is simply the presence of differences. Diversity is achieved when we ensure that the county employs and engages individuals at a level that reflects the population it serves.

**Equity** is promoting fairness (not a one size fits all approach) providing as much as possible to support individual needs. Equity exists when current and future employees have access to opportunities necessary to satisfy essential needs and advance their well-being and achieve their full potential as a county employee.

**Inclusion** is creating a space where all diversities are empowered to contribute to decision making. Inclusion occurs when the structures and practices that support employees make them feel welcomed, affirmed, and respected across the county system.