

iConnect Hartford – FULL APPLICATION

iConnect Project Storefronts: Reimagining Retail.

Location: City of Hartford, Connecticut
Call type: Artists, Artists teams, Small Start-Up Creative Industry entrepreneurs and businesses
Deadline: April 15th, 2013
Proposals accepted in person, through mail or email to:
iConnect Project c/o
City of Hartford, Department of Development Services
Marketing, Events and Cultural Affairs Division
ATTN: Kristina Newman-Scott
250 Constitution Plaza, 4th Floor
Hartford, CT 06103
Newmk001@hartford.gov

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I. OPPORTUNITY SUMMARY

The City of Hartford's Department of Development Services, Marketing Events and Cultural Affairs Division seeks proposals from individual artists/artist teams, for-profit entrepreneurs/start-up enterprises and existing entrepreneurs with missions and interests to the arts and the creative industries, to occupy and utilize empty retail space in imaginative and innovative ways with the ultimate goal of creating new for-profit businesses.

The program is a collaboration between prospective entrepreneurs, property owners, and the City of Hartford.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hartford: Connecticut's Capital City

Hartford is the third-largest city in Connecticut, with a population of approximately 124,775. The city consists of seventeen diverse and historic neighborhoods; the Downtown containing the majority of the city's entertainment and cultural destinations. Currently, the Downtown is home to approximately 1,900 residents. These residents, and those from surrounding areas, enjoy the proximity to such attractions as the Wadsworth Atheneum, the nation's oldest public art museum, and Bushnell Park, the oldest public park, as well as many others.

Hartford is proud to be Connecticut's Capital City and is proud of its industrial heritage. Almost 400 years old, Hartford is one of the oldest cities in the United States. We seek to take advantage of our unique architecture and heritage, our civic and cultural assets, and the vitality of our residents and businesses that places Hartford on the map as a regional destination. Last year, the total arts and culture industry expenditures in the Greater Hartford Area totaled over \$230 million, with the total number of attendees to such events at over \$4 million. The City alone is known for its vibrant music and art scene, hosting public concerts and jazz festivals as well as movie nights, skating in the park, holiday parades, and other events.

The city is poised to take advantage of our creative spirit; our artists and our cultural organizations help us to define our community, celebrate our unique character and make our city a more attractive place for everyone to enjoy.

National Trends & the Benefits of Using Empty Commercial Spaces for Art

The current economic recession has resulted in more empty storefronts in every city. Innovative communities are turning the recession into creative opportunities and Hartford has taken note. Across the nation, empty storefronts are being transformed for new uses. From

Los Angeles' Phantom Gallery to New York's well-established Swing Space Program, artists, arts organizations and entrepreneurs are temporarily transforming empty spaces into experimental laboratories and incubators for innovative retail, performance, exhibition, education and countless entrepreneurial outlets. Many of these projects are spurring economic growth through new start-up businesses while fostering new creative communities.

Hartford's Success to Date

Similar to Hartford's iConnect program, New Haven's own Project Storefronts program has already proven its value of providing creative entrepreneurs an opportunity to test market products and their business acumen before making permanent investments and commitments. New Haven's program has exposed rental properties to potential long-term tenants and increased foot traffic in the area tremendously. The well-lit storefronts also enliven the street even when closed.

The city's Marketing, Events and Cultural Affairs Division is working hard to promote Hartford as a regional destination. MECA has helped the city successfully host large scale events such as Winterfest, Envisionfest and First Night as well as numerous projects and programs across the City of Hartford all year long. The mission of the Marketing, Events & Cultural Affairs Division (MECA) is to enhance the quality of life in Hartford and to support the cultural development of the City by assisting, promoting and encouraging artists, arts and cultural organizations and events in Hartford.

III. PROJECT GOALS:

Hartford's project goals for the project are:

1. To create visitor destinations in formerly empty spaces to drive new consumers into underutilized areas, increasing foot traffic and business to not only these spaces but neighboring ones as well.
2. To enliven Hartford's downtown by expanding commercial activity, making the City more attractive to potential residents, businesses, students and the creative industry.
3. To facilitate and inspire new artistic, creative and/or entrepreneurial start-up businesses.
4. Successful projects must use the arts and creative industry to design active, dynamic places.

IV. ELIGIBILITY

Priority will be given to existing Hartford-based artists and organizations, however, proposals from CT, NY, MA and RI are also encouraged. Applicants do not need to be CT based, but during the project duration they should reside in or within commuting distance of Hartford.

V. CONSIDERATIONS & REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICANTS

The iConnect Project Storefronts has been seen as an important new initiative for Hartford. We are now accepting applications for 2013.

iConnect Project Storefronts presents a unique opportunity for participants to realize projects, refine marketing and business plans with support from the City's Economic Development Division and the Business for Downtown Hartford organization. This program enables start up creative businesses to test their product and potential neighborhood for developing their business. Considerations:

- Project ideas that compete with - instead of complement - neighboring businesses may not be considered or may only be considered for a non-competitive location.
- Applicants must be flexible, recognizing the uncertain nature of operating under temporary leasing arrangements and be prepared to move to a new location if or when long-term paying tenants are identified. iConnect seeks to negotiate with commercial landlords for six month no-rent leases. All retail establishments will undergo a three month review.
- Marketing assistance may be provided of up to \$1000 to selected applicants for space build out including signage, lighting and other needs, based on final application, drawings and other submissions.
- Applicants must develop a formal Business Plan as part of the process. City of Hartford Small Business staff and Hartford Business Industry District (Hartford BID) is available to assist with this and other small business questions.
- Successful applicants will be required to track visitors, sales and expenses and submit a monthly report as provided to the State Department of Revenue Services.
- Successful applicants must provide short-term general liability insurance and may be required to cover or share the cost of utilities depending on the project proposal and location. (City staff has information on insurance options.)

- Storefront locations change according to availability. Site selection will be based on personal interviews between MECA, Economic Development staff, landlords and applicants according to space needs, project proposal and other considerations.
- Successful applicants will be selected for a six month period with a review after three months. Artists and entrepreneurs who demonstrate potential beyond the grant period may be eligible for discussion about establishing a long term sustainable small business
- Applicant(s) must be prepared to keep their project open at least five days and two evenings a week, including one weekend day/evening. A commitment of hosting one workshop or special event each month is also required with the Project Storefronts staff assisting with promotion and marketing. Applicant(s) also responsible for all cleaning, trash removal, etc. In shared storefront locations, applicants may choose to share responsibilities for maintaining store hours, cleaning and other.

VI. INFORMATION SESSIONS

Information sessions covering program details will be held periodically and applicants are encouraged to attend. Please contact iConnect Storefronts Project Consultant by email at mary@courseyco.com for more information or visit our website at www.Hartford.gov/meca.

VII. APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

A jury comprised of individuals from the City of Hartford's Economic Development, Marketing, Events and Cultural Affairs, Planning and Zoning Divisions as well as the Business for Downtown Hartford and the Greater Hartford Arts Council with input from appointed Committee members, will review qualifying applications and judge on the following:

Selection Criteria

- Overall concept and project feasibility as represented in the application, proposed budgets and other submitted materials.
- Quality of project Proposal: Innovative ideas/concepts, potential for creating excitement, increasing foot traffic, stimulating interest in the project and the neighborhood.
- How the applicant proposes to utilize, contemporize, innovate the space, including signage, store front display/interface, lighting, furnishings, etc. to create interest and excitement about the project.

- Professional record of achievement, previous successes.
- Appropriateness of project for a temporary space.
- How the project proposes to engage the neighborhood and increase/generate foot traffic.
- Credit reporting release form.

VIII. TIMELINE

Applications will be reviewed in an ongoing basis, but in order to expedite Storefront activation quick turnaround is anticipated (2-4wks) depending on applicant response numbers.

IX. SUBMISSION PROCESS

The following steps should be completed to be considered for a Storefront project.

- STEP ONE:** FAMILIARIZE yourself with the iConnect Project Storefronts goals, eligibility requirements and the selection criteria.
- STEP TWO:** INVEST the time to explore whether you have what it takes to be an entrepreneur. There are lots of good sites that have information about small business and retail, starting with the U.S. Small Business Administration, www.SBA.gov. There is also good information on sites such as www.about.com, www.businessonmain.msn.com, as well as current articles on the Wall Street Journal (www.wsj.com) and New York Times (www.nyt.com) sites.
- STEP THREE:** DEVELOP your project concept more fully and begin to clarify your ideas. CONSIDER your ideal space requirements and other physical/fit out needs of your project concept. IDENTIFY your target audience and ways you might best promote and market your idea.
- STEP FOUR:** ATTEND an information session (or meet with iConnect Storefronts and City of Hartford's Marketing, Events and Cultural Affairs Staff if info sessions are not immediately available) to get additional information, get questions answered, network with other potential applicants and learn more about possible location details.
- STEP FIVE:** COMPLETE and SUBMIT the application and required materials. Don't hesitate to contact us with questions as they arise.

X. SUBMISSION DOCUMENTS

Each applicant is required to supply the following documentation:

- Signed application form with sketches of proposed signage, storefront layout ideas,
- Resume/CV outlining experience
- Preliminary marketing plan and budgets
- DVDs/CDs of relevant images
- Entire Proposal should be no more than 10 pages
- Samples of products (if applicable)

All required application materials should be submitted in a folder (if submitting by mail or hand delivered). Folder and all contents should be labeled with applicant's business name (if applicable) and/or last name, first name, e-mail address, telephone and project concept title. Label each DVD/CD clearly with name and email address. If you are submitting your application by email, please be sure to include digital materials/images if applicable.

NOTE: There is no application fee, however, incomplete applications will not be considered. If you wish the return of any materials, please contact our office to arrange the return.

QUESTIONS?

Please submit questions in writing to iConnect Storefronts Project Manager at mary@courseyco.com

CONDITIONS FOR SUBMISSION

City's Rights Pertinent to this solicitation

The City reserves the right to reject any responses to this solicitation that do not meet the selection criteria. Failure to provide any of the required application materials may cause for the submission to be rejected as non-responsive.

The City reserves the right to cancel this solicitation, in whole or in part, at any time without prior notice and makes no representation that any applicant will be selected to perform the work solicited. Additionally, the City reserves the right to postpone the opening of responses to this solicitation for its own convenience, and to waive minor informalities or irregularities in any responses received.

The City accepts no financial responsibility for any costs or expenses incurred by any applicant in responding to this solicitation. All submissions may be kept by the City as public record and may be disclosed to third parties upon request therefore.