



**Application form:
Community Planning Program and
Local Technical Assistance Program**

DEADLINE: Noon on Thursday, June 26, 2014

This application form is online at www.rtachicago.com/applications. You may submit the form by email to applications@rtachicago.com.

Upon receipt of application, you will receive an e-mail verifying that your application has been received.

1. Name of Applicant:

City of Aurora

2. Main Contact for Application (please include name, phone number and email):

John Russell John Russell, Grant Writer
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3. Type of Applicant (please check any that apply):

Local government

Multijurisdictional group* \longrightarrow Please list the members of the group (including government and nongovernmental organizations):

Nongovernmental organization* \longrightarrow Name of local government partner(s):

*Applications submitted by multijurisdictional groups and nongovernmental organizations must include a letter indicating support from each relevant local government. See the FAQs for more information. Nongovernmental applicants are strongly encouraged to contact CMAP or the RTA prior to submitting their application to discuss their project and the demonstration of local support.

4. Project Type (please check any that apply):

Please check all statements below that describe characteristics of your project. (This will help us determine whether your project is best handled by CMAP or RTA.)

- My project involves preparation of a plan.
- My project helps to implement a past plan.
- My project links land use, transportation, and housing.
- My project has direct relevance to public transit and supports the use of the existing transit system.
- My project is not directly related to transportation or land use, but implements GO TO 2040 in other ways.

5. Project Location:

Aurora is the second largest city in the State of Illinois with approximately 200,000 residents and the plan would have City Wide Implementation.

6. Project Description:

Aurora and the Arts

The City of Aurora is seeking CMAP's assistance in creating an Arts and Culture Plan for Aurora and a Downtown Arts District based on the CMAP Arts and Culture Planning Toolkit.

Over the past few years, Aurora has seen huge/significant growth in its arts community. With CMAP's assistance, the City hopes to cultivate and encourage this emerging community by establishing guidelines and ways to evaluate proposals for live-work spaces, affordable housing for artists, and studio, display, rehearsal, and performance spaces.

Each month, local artists perform or display their works at downtown shops, restaurants, and public spaces for the City's First Friday celebration. Local artwork is featured in the annual Art in City Hall display and at Aurora's downtown Sculpture Garden. The summertime Louche Puce monthly flea market includes local crafts-makers. The Alley Art Festival, a grassroots community event each August, brings together more than 150 local artists and musicians and features hands-on activities.

The Aurora Public Art Commission Gallery has multiple exhibits each year featuring the works of local artists. The Public Art Commission, part of the City's Community Services Division, has had its gallery in downtown Aurora for 18 years. The Public Art Commission also oversees the downtown Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Museum, which is undergoing a multi-million-dollar renovation, and this month received a \$750,000 grant from the Illinois Public Museum Capital Grants Program. The Civil War-era Museum will reopen to the public in early 2016.

Besides the Aurora Public Art Commission, there are six other galleries where the works of local artists are displayed in the downtown area. And there are about a half-dozen downtown restaurants and businesses where local musicians regularly perform.

In past years, "Aurora Downtown" ([website link](#)), a group of more than 200 downtown property and business owners, has sponsored the Aurora Artwalk, which encouraged artists, poets, musicians, photographers, sculptors and other local creatives to get connected with each other.

For its 2014-15 season, the Paramount Theatre expects to host nearly 300 performances, bringing 300,000 patrons downtown. (This is a major increase from the 55,000 patrons the Paramount saw in 2010.) At RiverEdge Park, an estimated 100,000 people turned out for concerts in the park's inaugural season of 2013. And even more concerts, movies and cultural events are planned for RiverEdge Park this year.

The Aurora Area Convention and Tourism Bureau estimates that \$147 million is spent each year on tourism activities in downtown Aurora.

With the successful increase in the number of visitors attending arts activities in the downtown, we are also looking for ways to become more visitor-friendly, and increase the number of visitors walking, biking and utilizing public transit.

The Aurora Transportation Center is right in downtown Aurora, providing easy accessibility to Chicago. With developers proposing plans for housing along the Fox River downtown, the City is poised to become a mecca for creatives throughout the Chicago region.

There are recent concrete signs of growing interest in organizing and improving Aurora's resident arts scene. In recent years the City has been in dialog with both private developers and local non-profits on creating live/work space for artists in Aurora's Historic Downtown. There has also been discussions of a cultural center which would feature dance, theater, visual art, vocal and instrumental music, and literature classes. There are several unique buildings in the downtown which would be ideal for such a development including a former, large downtown retail space, which most recently housed offices and classrooms for Waubensee Community College and the historic Elks Lodge which is owned by the City. This dialog while productive is a new avenue for the City of Aurora and the establishment of guidelines as proposed in this project would help advance those conversations and foster new interest from others.

There is grass roots local support for developing such an Arts and Culture Plan from both the Aurora Downtown property owner's organization and the local arts non-profit, Cultural Creatives ([Facebook link](#)). The City would intend on working closely with these stakeholders in developing the plan and presenting it to the City Council for support and approval.

At the very beginning of its Arts and Culture Planning: A Toolkit for Communities, CMAP notes that a community's arts and culture sector serves as "an economic engine for investments and employment opportunities, a magnet for cultural tourism, and a key component in improving quality of life in the region."

The City of Aurora is seeking CMAP's expertise to help us take full advantage of these opportunities.