

Commercial District Assessment (CDA) Initiative

Program Overview

The CDA Initiative aims to ground the City's neighborhood economic development strategy in a data-based analysis of local commercial districts. In conjunction with community partners, The Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC) will combine on-the-ground research with innovative data collection to create a suite of tools and visualizations that can guide economic development policy, programming, and funding. Working from a common set of facts and measurements, the Initiative will enable the city to:

- Present a data-driven assessment of commercial district health and priorities
- Identify district-specific interventions and priorities for investment
- Understand key factors that contribute to healthy commercial districts in Baltimore City
- Track the long-term impact of district investments and strategies

Need Statement

A vibrant commercial district serves not only as a hub for commerce and employment but also as a nexus for community building, resilience, and cultural celebration. Commercial districts generate wealth and jobs, provide residents with needed goods and services, and serve as civic centers, bringing neighborhoods together and fostering community pride and identity.

As economic development professionals and local stakeholders, we know what a strong commercial district *feels* like. Intrinsicly, we all can point to similar factors when closing our eyes and picturing this type of corridor. It likely has lots of foot traffic, with well-maintained public and private spaces and buildings, an appropriate mix of retail opportunities, supported by strong local organizations and events.

However, public policy decisions are driven by data, not feelings. For a variety of reasons, existing data sources paint an imperfect picture of commercial district health. Many demographic datasets have geographic limitations that do not align with district boundaries. Most retail analyses either miss key data points or cannot be validated by field-based observations. A new toolkit is needed to better understand the factors influencing the health and resilience of commercial districts in Baltimore City.

Goals and Deliverables

- Better understanding of Commercial District Typologies within Baltimore City
- Creation of 10-12 district-specific Commercial Corridor Profiles
- Data set including on-the-ground survey findings combined with third-party sources to better direct resources, investment, and funding.

Core Values

- **Data-Driven:** assessments start with a common set of facts and measurements about commercial districts
- **On-The-Ground:** assessments should be grounded in local perceptions and ideas
- **General Truths:** assessments should identify issues that transcend individual districts
- **Targeted Solutions:** assessments should generate specific opportunities for district-level improvement
- **Long-Term Outlook:** assessments should look long-term to understand what interventions are most impactful
- **Collaboration:** this initiative should be implemented in collaboration with key district partners

Partner Commitment

- Participate in the kick-off meeting with BDC staff
- Attend cohort field training session
- Engage staff, volunteer, and/or other community members in the surveying process
- Maintain communication with BDC throughout the cycle of the CDA initiative
- Participate in an initiative debriefing to provide input
- Provide any necessary district materials upon request

BDC Commitment

- Schedule kick-off meeting after confirming partner selection
- Schedule and deliver a training session to all selected partners
- Support the surveying process as capacity and schedules allow
- Communicate expectations and deadlines in a timely manner
- Creating and publishing custom District Profiles for each corridor

Timeline

Phase One:

Application – June & July

- Application opens: June 1
 - Link to application: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/g/Sy5mmkeVhT>
- Optional info session: June 15 at 2 pm
 - Register [here](#)
- Application closes: July 6 at 5 pm
- Communication is sent to selected partners: Mid-July

Survey Preparation – August through October

- Partner one-on-one meetings & community mapping
- Cohort field training session
- District surveying
- Post-survey debriefs

Data Collection & Profiles - November & December

- Data analysis commences
- District profile completed
- Findings used to direct resources, funding, and investment

Phase Two

Analysis & Investment - 2027

CDA Initiative Application Frequently Asked Questions

1. What organizations are eligible to apply?

Any place-based community organization supporting commercial corridors and its economic development health are encouraged to apply. This can include Community Development Organizations, Main Streets, Business Improvement Districts, Neighborhood Associations or other types of organizations.

2. Can an organization that participated in 2025 apply again?

Partners that participated in the 2025 cohort are eligible to apply again if they are interested in surveying a separate commercial district from last year.

3. What does BDC considered a commercial corridor in the context of CDA?

For the purposes of this initiative, BDC considers commercial corridors as contiguous, walkable areas that are predominantly comprised of retail or commercial activity and storefronts. We are open to studying corridors of various sizes and makeup, including those with a mix of property types.

4. How long does the surveying portion take?

Surveying takes about 45 minutes to an hour per one side of a block, (around 1.5 – 2 hours total per block). Total surveying time depends on the size of the corridor being studied and the number of people assisting your organization.

5. What does the project include in terms of outcomes?

CDA includes two main outcomes: A district profile containing the on-the-ground data collected through our Real Estate and Windshield surveys combined with third-party data sources; and an analysis of the data. Those findings are then used to direct services and investments, including BDC capital funds.

6. When will organizations find out if they are selected?

Decisions around the 2026 CDA cohort are expected by mid-July.

7. Who conducts the surveying?

The partner organization is responsible for ensuring they have adequate capacity to survey their district based on the boundaries agreed upon with BDC. Organization can use paid staff, board members, volunteers, business owners, interns, students or others to conduct the surveying.

8. What meetings are mandatory as part of CDA?

One-on-one meeting w BDC; cohort field training; post survey meeting; periodic check-ins as needed throughout the project