



RIZE Massachusetts Foundation

Request for Information – Mass. and Cass Reconciliation Initiative

Introduction and background

RIZE Massachusetts Foundation (RIZE) is dedicated to ending the opioid epidemic while reducing stigma and overdoses associated with drug use. Guided by those with lived experience and unafraid of new ideas, RIZE builds networks, designs programming, and supports community partners who are using novel approaches to preventing overdose.

One of RIZE's strategic priorities is to convene voices for action, align thinking and approaches to substance use disorder policy and services, and disrupt the status quo to collaborate to make social change. Through this initiative, RIZE aims to initiate a reconciliation process to bring lasting, positive changes at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard (Mass. and Cass) in the city of Boston.

Opportunity

The intersection known as Mass. and Cass. represents a crossroad in the heart of Boston, but it is also a symbolic crossroad for many of the city's most complex problems. Most notably, in the past several years, there has been a large influx of public drug use, unhoused individuals living in makeshift encampments, and violence. There are conflicting opinions about what needs to be done to improve the humanitarian crisis, and what does not. There is also an immense amount of pain and trauma which will not be recognized or healed without a new approach.

Mass. and Cass is situated at the border of four economically and racially diverse neighborhoods (Dorchester, Roxbury, South Boston, and the South End). Each of these neighborhoods has a complex history of poverty, racism, gentrification, and violence. The legacy of these long-standing social issues is ever present when people discuss solutions to the overdose crisis.

RIZE believes a road to meaningful change involves a comprehensive community-led mediation process, rooted in principles of reconciliation. By building (and rebuilding) relationships and trust, understanding perspectives, existing narratives, and patterns, creating space for healing and dialogue, and valuing all viewpoints, RIZE intends to develop a resourced, strategic reconciliation process for healing and lasting social change in collaboration and acceptance with all stakeholders – people who use drugs, people in recovery, those historically underrepresented, clinical, non-clinical, unhoused, housed, public and private entities, and advocates.

RIZE intends to partner with a reconciliation expert and Mass. and Cass community stakeholders to develop a lasting mediation process that is:

- Fueled by voices that have been historically underrepresented, those uninvited or unable to participate in community dialogues, or who have been discounted
- Rooted in trauma-informed approaches and led by reconciliation experts
- Focused on person-centered care for people with substance use disorders, and
- Centered in social and racial justice practices.

While the city of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts should be part of this undertaking, reconciliation experts recommend that these kinds of initiatives should not be solely driven by a government entity. RIZE's role as an impartial convener makes us uniquely capable to lead and participate in this effort.

Though the specific parameters of this initiative will be refined with the selected reconciliation expert, and Mass. and Cass community voices, some examples of the perspectives to be addressed are:

- Medical, public health, and social service workforce experiencing trauma, burnout, and fatigue.
- Black and brown community members' experiences of the historic and present manifestations of the United States' racist "war on drugs," including the inequitable response to the crack epidemic vs. the opioid epidemic.
- Unhoused people and public health professionals feeling resentment and distrust of law enforcement practices.
- Police officers and other public safety professionals' observations, perspectives, and concerns.
- Unhoused and drug user population – prioritizing safety, rights, and dignity.
- Businesses, homeowners, and renters' experiences and how the neighborhood's challenges have impacted their quality of life.

In addition to seeking a reconciliation consultant, or consultants, RIZE has engaged Brendan Little, the Founding Policy Director of the Mayor's Office of Recovery Services under Mayor Marty Walsh, who has lived experience with homelessness and substance use disorder, to lead the project. Little authored two recent opinion articles in the Boston Globe on Mass. & Cass which serve as foundational pieces for this effort. Please reference them [here](#) and [here](#).

Goals for the initiative

- Redress past injustices and redefine the narrative of the Mass. and Cass neighborhood
- Rebuild relationships and trust, creating space for stakeholders to meet from a place of compassion and resilience to chart a new path forward to:
 - Develop the structures and collaborative relationships necessary to drive lasting social change in the community
 - Address barriers, supporting people with substance use disorder, and the clinical and non-clinical workforce
 - Center the needs of historically underrepresented community members and voices
 - Identify gaps and advocate for changes to systems, regulations, policy, or practice
 - Develop structures for key stakeholders to continue to build trust, collaborate and coordinate
- Share knowledge and lessons learned with a focus on scaling or replicating successful components of the initiative
- Examine shared challenges and solutions from other communities locally, nationally, and internationally
- Facilitate meaningful cross-sector collaboration, incorporating promising practices from violence prevention, restorative justice, and other fields that directly address conflict

Potential components for this initiative

1. **Partner** with RIZE, reconciliation experts, and community members to refine the program. Create a committee of community change makers to consult with on program design.
2. **Convene** the initial group of constituencies to begin the reconciliation process.
3. **Design an innovative grant program** to:
 - a. Value and sustain the voices of change makers
 - b. Develop a common vision and commitment to a shared social change agenda, through a public art, storytelling, or another creative component
 - c. Develop shared and measurable goals and metrics to track and evaluate over time. In the short term, demonstrate improvements such as people and key stakeholder groups:
 - Feel heard
 - Communicate more effectively
 - Participate at equitable rates
 - Feel more positive about their experience with one another
 - d. Build an infrastructure to sustain lasting improvements for people with substance use disorder, people who are unhoused, historically underrepresented community members, and other stakeholders.
4. **Inform public policy and make sustainable change** by exploring policy changes to promote best practices in substance use disorder treatment and harm reduction, housing, and other community needs identified in the reconciliation process.
5. **Create knowledge.** Boston is not the only U.S. city facing similar community issues related to substance use, homelessness, and quality of life. Findings from this reconciliation initiative could be replicable and scalable.

Request for information

RIZE is interested in engaging a consultant, or a consulting partnership, with expertise in trauma-informed, community reconciliation, with an ability to:

- Partner with RIZE to finalize the design for this initiative that recognizes the complexity and continuously evolving needs for this engagement
- Consider and appreciate the local political and community landscape
- Define methods for facilitation and reconciliation, with a focus on better serving people with substance use disorders and people experiencing homelessness
- Outline strategies for finding common ground, establishing shared understanding, reframing existing narratives and sharing truths, facilitating dialogue, or other tools
- Incorporate ideas from the community on an ongoing basis, potentially via RIZE's website
- Develop and implement a framework for evaluation that may be helpful for future scaling, while sensitive to the situation and related evaluation fatigue
- Create a self-sustaining or next level initiative to keep the momentum going beyond this engagement

Submission requirements

Responses should be no more than 3-5 pages, 11pt font, single spaced and include answers to the items below. This request for information is to gauge interest and expertise in an evolving field that is new to RIZE. Therefore, responses may be kept high-level at this time. Please do not attach resumes.

- Outline of design and approach, including specific evidence-based expertise to bring to this initiative, and community engagement framework and strategies
- Draft a scope, timeline, and staffing model, to achieve the goals of the initiative
- Expected outcomes and plans to measure the outcomes of this initiative
- Qualifications of the consultant or consultants, including expertise in trauma-informed reconciliation, substance use disorder and homelessness, with a focus on racial justice
- Related project experience
- Capacity of the consultant or consultants for project management, program development and evaluation
- Budget (12 months) with no more than 15 percent allocated to indirect costs
- Availability to begin work on this initiative
- References

We will accept submissions from either:

- A. Consultants with both expertise in the areas of interest and the necessary project management, evaluation, and program expertise to carry out an initiative at this complexity and scale, or
- B. A team of consultants, including reconciliation experts, with organizations with project management, evaluation, and program expertise, which combined, create the necessary capacity to carry out an initiative of this complexity and scale.

Budget and timeline

This request for information assumes a one-year time frame, with an interest in launching the reconciliation process as quickly as possible. At the same time, we are sensitive to the fact that for this initiative to be as impactful as possible, it cannot be seen as simply another set of convenings.

We would like to engage a consultant, or consultants, that see the urgency of this initiative, and can leverage relevant expertise to start quickly, while remaining open to community input to design a process with the potential to serve as a national model for community reconciliation.

The budget for this project is \$150,000. If there are aspects of your proposal that fall outside of the budget, yet have merit, please explain.

Submission process

Submissions are due on April 22, 2022, by 5:00pm. If you have any questions, please submit them in writing by April 6, 2022, to Sarah Merrefield, senior program officer, at sarah.merrefield@rizema.org. A frequently asked questions document will be shared with potential applicants [on our website](#).

As necessary, RIZE staff may contact applicants for additional information and may also request brief interviews by video conference. A decision will be made by late May and applicants will be notified thereafter.

Please note that RIZE will only fund projects that fit within our funding interests outlined above. If no project meets our criteria or interests, RIZE reserves the right to decline investment in this initiative.