

Buffalo

East Side Avenues

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- **DURATION**

Ongoing Since 2019

- **POPULATION 2024**

Over **108.000**

- **URA SCOPE**

ECONOMY Urban Prosperity Beyond GDP

- **TOPICS**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT,
STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS, CAPACITY
BUILDING, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

- **MAIN ACTORS**

Center for Regional Strategies
Regional Institute at the University Buffalo
Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo



The Regional Revitalization Partnership (RRP) is a groundbreaking \$300M collaboration between public and private entities, including the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, KeyBank, and Empire State Development, aimed at accelerating community-driven revitalization in Buffalo's East Side, Rochester, and Niagara Falls. Born from East Side Avenues' foundational efforts, RRP dedicates \$180M to the East Side, scaling up investments in small business growth, mixed-use redevelopment, historic preservation, and nonprofit capacity building.

Transitioning to RRP funding has sparked a thorough assessment of program structures, identifying ways to scale initiatives and enhance partnerships. A major focus is on empowering East Side organizations to manage large-scale projects through capacity building. Over the past four years, nonprofits have strengthened their governance, fundraising, and operational capacity, with dedicated staff hired to implement \$65M in capital improvements. Now, with RRP's additional resources, efforts are intensifying to ensure nonprofits grow sustainably without losing focus on their core missions.

Access to capital remains crucial. Addressing contractor shortages and streamlining processes has been pivotal, including innovative solutions like a contractor matchmaking event. These efforts ensure small businesses can thrive in revitalized spaces while contributing to vibrant commercial corridors.

Storytelling has been at the heart of East Side Avenues' mission. Engaging community voices through videos, interviews, and photography, the initiative has captured over 56 unique stories, amplifying the impact of investments. A growing online presence, highlighted by a dynamic story map of 88 funded properties, continues to connect the public with progress.

Four years in, the interplay between investments, organizations, and people underscores the power of collaboration. By linking nonprofits, small businesses, and renovated spaces with technical assistance, RRP aims to create lasting change. Despite challenges like rising construction demands, the East Side's transformation exemplifies resilience, shared purpose, and a collective vision for sustainable growth.



Impact

This year, East Side Avenues entered its implementation phase after three years of strategic planning and capacity building based on community and stakeholder needs. Workforce development remains central to its efforts, exemplified by the creation of the Northland Workforce Training Center. This facility equips East Side residents with skills for quality jobs in the manufacturing sector. Additionally, East Side Avenues continues its successful real estate development training program.

Significant progress has been made, including:

- Advancements in the Central Terminal restoration, aiming for limited reopening in 2025.
- Economic strategy development in the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor, including the acquisition of 136 Broadway for its headquarters.
- Stabilization of 24 buildings through \$3.5M in funding, coupled with outreach, project selection, and construction monitoring.
- Renovations on 36 buildings across four corridors, supported by \$3.9M in awards.

Since 2019, 88 East Side buildings have received capital improvement funds, impacting over 2M square feet of space. Media campaigns have reached over 800,000 people, sharing stories and project updates.

Despite challenges such as labour shortages, supply chain delays, and rising costs, East Side Avenues achieved remarkable progress. Minority and women-owned small businesses faced growth obstacles, but community resilience prevailed. Local organizations received tailored support, including HR, financial, diversity, and legal training, as well as master planning and marketing assistance. These collective efforts, though often unseen, are laying the foundation for unprecedented capital investments and long-term sustainability on Buffalo's East Side.

With its success, the model is now being replicated in Rochester and Niagara Falls, showcasing its transformative potential.

The Challenge

Buffalo's East Side faced significant challenges rooted in decades of economic decline and urban disinvestment.

Once a thriving area, struggled with limited economic opportunities and an absence of cohesive, walkable commercial corridors to encourage local business and community interactions. The region's layout, dominated by wide, vehicle-focused axes, was poorly scaled for pedestrians, stifling initiatives and entrepreneurship that could foster economic vitality.

Key historical and natural assets, which could serve as cultural and economic anchors, suffered from neglect and underutilization. The lack of preservation efforts diminished their regional importance and potential as community rallying points. Additionally, minimal public and private investment left the area without the infrastructure or resources needed to stimulate growth.

Compounding these issues there was a fractured sense of community. The absence of spaces designed for human connection undermines collective identity and engagement. Addressing these challenges requires strategic revitalization to create vibrant, human-scaled spaces, preserve key assets, and attract investments to support entrepreneurship and community cohesion.

Solution Proposed

East Side Avenues is a community-driven initiative designed to revitalize Buffalo's East Side, fostering economic growth and empowering local organizations to sustain and expand these efforts. The project focuses on funding and planning strategies to address economic disparities, enhance infrastructure, and improve community assets while building the capacity of local nonprofits to lead future development.

Key components of the project include:

Community Engagement: Engaged over 250 residents to define six key investment goals, focusing on walkable commercial corridors, workforce development, historic preservation, business growth, and public-private partnerships.

Strategic Investments: Targets transformative, short-term projects at iconic sites, including the Broadway Market, Central Terminal, Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor, and Buffalo Olmsted Parks System.

Capacity Building: Empowers local organizations to lead sustainable development by enhancing their ability to manage projects, secure funding, and grow strategically.

Collaborative Approach: Leverages cross-sector partnerships, with UBRI coordinating resources and funding to implement comprehensive, community-driven solutions