



Frequently Asked Questions

<https://rvcdf.org/>

Q: What is the Rainier Valley Community Development Fund (RVCDF)?

A: The Rainier Valley Community Development Fund is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). As a certified CDFI, The Rainier Valley Community Development Fund (RVCDF) can identify and create financial solutions for small businesses who are overlooked by traditional banks. They work with low-to-moderate income communities to protect and create sustainable culture that reflects the people of King County. The RVCDF also provides technical assistance to businesses and business owners, helping to strengthen the financial prowess of typically overlooked communities.

Q: When was the RVCDF founded?

A: The RVCDF was founded in 2000, after the Puget Sound Light Rail was built in Rainier Valley.

Q: Who is the current leadership for the RVCDF?

A: The current executives at RVCDF are as such:

- Chief executive officer, Alvertis Brooks, Jr.
- Director of Community Planning & Development, Bob Luciano
- Loan Portfolio Manager, Andrea Sherwood
- Regional Community Development and Planning Manager, Robert Williams
- Director of Fund Development, Paul Pitkin
- Office Coordinator, Tonieh Thompson
- Business Operations and Technical Assistance Program Manager, Christine Buckley
- Commercial Underwriter, Paul Pwang

The current Board is as follows:

- Board President, Richard Cassell
- Board Vice President, Mandy Landa
- Treasurer, Rudy Castillo
- Roxanne Christian
- Lara Mae D Chollette
- Riley Corr
- Dr. Tarra Mitchell

- Cleodis Floyd
- Ibijoke Idowu
- Marlon Turner

Q: What is their purpose? (What is their mission statement?)

A: The RVCDF is a self-sustaining, community-controlled financial institution dedicated to promoting community development and economic opportunity through responsible lending to low-to-moderate income populations. The RVCDF helps grow a vibrant community through funding. The RVCDF works with communities under duress to protect and create a sustainable community that reflects the people of King County and places where all are welcome and able to thrive. They aim to grow a vibrant community through funding, provide access to capital, and to help build financial muscle and generational wealth.

Q: What is a CDFI?

A: A CDFI is a Community Development Financial Institution that specifically provides financial services to low-to-moderate income communities that are typically overlooked by traditional banking institutions.

Q: How is a CDFI different from a traditional bank?

A: Unlike traditional banks, CDFIs specialize in lending to businesses typically considered unbankable by traditional lending institutions that are often denied access to capital. One of their biggest strengths is their flexibility in their underwriting criteria. They offer low-interest rate loans, small business loans, operating lines of credit, nonprofit financing, and commercial real estate loans. CDFIs also provide financial education and advisement. Additionally, CDFIs are not regulated by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) - although they do comply with the oversight of its stakeholders- meaning that their credit boxes are larger than traditional banks.

Q: What types of loans does RVCDF offer?

A: The RVCDF offers a variety of lending options aimed at small businesses to help them succeed. Loan amount, interest rate and fees vary. We offer Working Capital Lines of Credit, Term Loans, Nonprofit financing and Commercial Real Estate Loans. The RVCDF makes it their priority to meet small businesses where they are at, and support them however they can.

Q: Does someone have to be considered low-to-medium income in order to qualify for a loan from the RVCDF?

A: No! The RVCDF works with businesses and organizations of all kinds.

Q: If a borrower is curious about the RVCDF, but is unsure of their eligibility to receive funding- how impactful is their credit score/ collateral? What does the RVCDF look at to determine their capacity to repay a loan?

A: The RVCDF approaches each new client with the goal of finding ways to make the loan, not how to decline the request. They look at where the business owners are now and where they are going. Credit scores are not the primary factor in determining a loan request. A well vetted business plan is the roadmap to determine the capacity to repay the loan. The RVCDF encourages prospective borrowers to submit an inquiry or contact us directly to discuss their needs.

Q: What has the RVCDF done for their local community?

A: Since its founding, the RVCDF has been a vital force in the Rainier Valley, helping small businesses grow and establishing new businesses through small business loans and technical assistance, and mitigation funding to the community. Additionally, the RVCDF is dedicated to supporting local businesses that are facing disruption due to projects such as the Link Light Rail construction. Between 2003 and 2009, 181 businesses received mitigation payments from the RVCDF summing to over \$15.1 million. Of these 181 businesses, 88% of them remained open despite the construction occurring.

Q: In what other ways does the Fund help the community?

A: The RVCDF also spotlights the businesses it works with, amplifying their clients' voices and success. Across their website, social media platforms, and quarterly newsletters, the RVCDF works to ensure their clients' businesses continue to grow in both funding and attention.

Q: What kind of businesses does the RVCDF tend to support?

A: The RVCDF makes it their mission to support small businesses that are traditionally overlooked. Southeast Seattle boasts immense cultural variety, and the RVCDF works to support businesses led by people who have not been able to get credit, working to grow generational wealth. In 2023, one in three of the loans the RVCDF allocated went to women-owned businesses, and 80% of the loans went to businesses owned by low-to-moderate income communities.

Q: How does the RVCDF receive funding?

A: The RVCDF receives capital through its self-sustainability funding sources. These funding sources include grants from the city and state, foundations that align with the RVCDF mission, traditional banks, the Opportunity Finance Network (OFN), and other financial institutions. The Fund also welcomes funding from individuals and foundations.

Q: What is the competitive advantage to being a self-sustaining institution?

A: The competitive advantage of being a self-sustaining institution lies in financial independence and stability. Due to the RVCDF's foundational source of funding, they are able to self-sustain their operations with their internal resources. This makes them less susceptible to political claims and economic factors, allowing the RVCDF to maintain consistency in their mission, make long-term strategic decisions without external pressures, and build trust with stakeholders who value reliability and autonomy.

Q: What is the application process for a business that wants to partner with the RVCDF?

A: The RVCDF website offers a portal to contact them, allowing for potential clients to get in touch and begin the process of working with the RVCDF. In the portal, applicants can expect to begin the application process by providing basic business information such as business physical address, business mailing address, business physical operating location, date the business was established, business contact information (email website etc.), business legal structure, business federal tax ID number. Once the initial inquiry is completed RVCDF communicates next steps with the applicant.

Q: What is the process for an organization that is interested in funding/donating to the RVCDF?

A: The RVCDF is thrilled to meet with and share information with people who are interested in supporting their work and helping them advance their mission. They encourage people to reach out to the head of their development team, Paul Pitkin at ppitkin@rvcdf.org. You can also call their general number 206-722-1729, and the RVCDF will work to connect you to Paul or another part of their team who can help you.

Q: What is a standout moment of success from a business partnered with the RVCDF?

A: The Tiny Tots Development Center, founded by Helen Hicks, has been serving low-to-moderate-income families since 1969. However, they were in need of a new preschool facility and office and had been continually turned away by traditional banking institutions. After partnering with the RVCDF, Tiny Tots was able to realize their goal of reconstruction and expansion. Since then, there have been 235 children served, 36 full-time and four part-time jobs retained, six full-time jobs created, and an overall revenue increase of 15%. The RVCDF documents other moments of success on their website's Success Stories page <https://rvcdf.org/success-stories/>

Q: The RVCDF is expanding into West Seattle, how are you planning on connecting with/supporting this new community?

A: Our mission applies to people and communities across King County, and we are eager to be of service wherever the need exists. In West Seattle, as in the Rainier Valley, the RVCDF will continue its work of funding and assisting businesses and organizations that are often not given economic development funding by traditional banks. The RVCDF is exploring opportunities to provide services to residents and businesses in West Seattle and Ballard moving forward. Due to their status as a CDFI, the RVCDF is able to supply loans that other organizations may deem "too risky." This, in conjunction with their technical assistance and community network, will help support businesses in an expanded footprint of neighborhoods. Further, the RVCDF has provided mitigation funds to small businesses in Rainier Valley impacted by city-led construction and is hopeful to deploy the same strategy in other areas.

Q: How will the new extension of the Sound Transit Light Rail impact West Seattle businesses?

A: The upcoming construction in West Seattle will bring increased economic development and transportation, but it will also present challenges. Construction will ultimately create congestion, impact foot traffic, and cause disruptions. The West Seattle Line Extension (WSLE) will impact traffic corridors and the businesses who exist there, requiring relocation for some, and impacting the livelihood of others who don't have to move, but who will be affected nonetheless. The RVCDF is prepared to support these businesses and communities who may face hardship during this time of growth and change.

Q: How has the RVCDF expanded over the years?

A: Since its founding in 2000, the RVCDF has grown considerably. They made their first loans in 2006, lending \$1.1 million in support of affordable housing in Rainier Valley, and became fully self-sustaining by 2014. In 2017, the RVCDF secured its status as a CDFI, allowing them access to greater funds and more wide-ranging investments. In 2023, the RVCDF provided funding to 27 businesses in the Southeast Seattle area. In all the Fund provided over \$100 Million in loans to over 200 businesses

Q: What is the RVCDF's plan for future expansion?

A: Looking forward, the RVCDF is planning on expanding beyond Southeast Seattle, beginning in West Seattle and Ballard. They are looking to support these new communities and provide their services to any residents and businesses impacted by the upcoming Sound Transit construction. The RVCDF will be moving into a new Mount Baker office and will be establishing community hubs- centers where potential clients can receive technical assistance and seek financial advising. Additionally, RVCDF will offer targeted loans to overlooked communities, specifically low-to-moderate income borrowers in the West Seattle area. RVCDF will also deploy mitigation funds to support businesses that are affected by the Sound Transit Light Rail construction.

Q: How can you contact the RVCDF?

A: To reach the RVCDF you can call (206) 722-5280 or submit any questions or comments on their website.