



2014 Request for Letters of Interest

Overview

The Office of Sustainable Communities in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Policy is seeking letters of interest from state capital cities that want to develop in ways that use smart growth and green infrastructure. Through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, a collaboration with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), EPA provides design assistance to help support sustainable communities that protect the environment, economy, and public health and to inspire state leaders to expand this work elsewhere. EPA administers this Partnership project. EPA will provide design assistance to successful applicants as described below. **Letters of interest are due on July 21, 2014.** For details on how to apply, see page four.

The goal of Greening America's Capitals is to help state capital cities create a clear, implementable vision of distinctive, environmentally friendly neighborhoods that incorporate innovative smart growth strategies and green infrastructure systems. EPA will fund a team of designers to visit the city for up to three days to produce schematic designs and exciting illustrations intended to catalyze or complement a larger planning process for the pilot neighborhood. Additionally, this project could be the testing ground for broader, citywide actions the city might wish to undertake, such as changes to local codes and ordinances to better support smart growth and green infrastructure approaches. The design team and EPA, HUD, and DOT staff will also assist the city staff in developing specific implementation strategies.

EPA is providing this design assistance to help state capitals create stronger neighborhoods that protect the environment. Effective strategies for protecting environmental resources, such as street and public space design that use innovative stormwater practices, can also create a strong sense of place and help revitalize neighborhoods, spurring additional economic and social benefits. This year, EPA is particularly interested in supporting projects that build resilience to disasters and help cities prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

A state capital serves, or has the potential to serve, as a symbol for the identity and values of the state. As the home of the governor and state lawmakers, capital cities are prime locations for this assistance because they have the power to demonstrate how a



sustainable approach to community design enhances quality of life for residents and visitors; addresses local, state, and federal regulatory requirements; and invests public funds in ways that reap multiple benefits. The selected city's staff will be required to bring representatives from the governor's office and/or the general assembly into the Greening America's Capitals project. The EPA-HUD-DOT team will work with these state partners to explore how the state's policies, funding, and other resources could better support sustainable communities

Design Assistance Opportunity

Greening America's Capitals will work with state capital cities to foster a strong sense of place by incorporating sustainable design techniques into streets, parks, waterfronts, town squares, and civic buildings. This place-based design assistance will help selected state capitals envision ways to clean up and reuse vacant lands, provide more housing and transportation choices, reduce infrastructure and energy costs, build resilience to climate change and natural disasters, and foster civic pride in neighborhoods and the city as a whole. The proposed project area should be no larger than a neighborhood but should consider the connections with sites outside of the focus area. The project area should serve as a catalyst for adjacent sites and neighborhoods and, at a larger scale, the city and state.

EPA will provide this assistance through an Agency contract vehicle, not a grant. EPA will select consultants who are experts in landscape architecture and urban design. Upon completion, the applicant will receive a set of illustrations depicting a sustainable civic vision for the selected project area, which the city can use to either kick-start a public involvement and planning process or complement a process currently underway. EPA will also provide a brief report that includes a compilation of the resources developed throughout the visit, including options for near-term implementation actions.

We hope that the design assistance will provide the city with materials that it could use to educate the public about the benefits of sustainable communities. The city could use these designs and resources in press releases, presentations at public meetings, websites, and integration with other city efforts, such as public health campaigns or annual city events. Though no in-kind funding is required, EPA expects the city to provide in-kind services in the form of logistics support for the workshop and outreach and communications.

What Is Smart Growth?

The principles of smart growth help communities create a vision of how and where to grow and ensure that development supports local character. Smart growth strategies consider how new development fits with existing neighborhoods, building upon the community fabric and enhancing the connections between buildings and the surrounding



sites and landscapes. Smart growth approaches help create high-quality buildings, infrastructure, natural resources, and whole neighborhoods that are distinctive, equitable, economically viable, and environmentally friendly.

These approaches are described by the ten smart growth principles:

- Mix land uses.
- Take advantage of compact building design.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Resources

For information on past Greening America's Capitals projects, please visit www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/greencapitals.htm.

For more information on smart growth and green infrastructure, please visit EPA's websites: www.epa.gov/smartgrowth, www.epa.gov/greeninfrastructure.

For more information on the Partnership for Sustainable Communities: www.sustainablecommunities.gov.

For more information on HUD's Office of Housing and Sustainable Communities: portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities.

For more information on the Federal Highway Administration's Livability Initiative: www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability, and the Federal Transit Administration's Livable and Sustainable Communities: fta.dot.gov/publications/publications_10935.html.



APPLICATION PROCESS

EPA is sending this Request for Letters of Interest to mayors of state capitals, but any city department, office, or agency may submit the letter of interest. Only one proposal should be submitted on a city's behalf. Cross-departmental coordination across city government will be an important part of the process of implementing sustainable designs developed through this project. Successful proposals will also show support from state officials, including those representing the governor's office and/or the state general assembly.

Based on the written proposals and possible subsequent phone calls with applicants, EPA, HUD, and DOT staff will choose three to five cities to receive technical assistance.

Preparing the Letter of Interest

The review team will evaluate letters of interest based on the criteria listed below. Letters should be no more than 4 pages. Supplemental materials such as maps and site plans can also be submitted, but are not to exceed 4 pages. The total application should be no more than 8 pages. This application will serve as an initial screen of projects. A small number of applicants will then be asked to participate in a follow-up phone call with the interagency review team. EPA will make final selections following the completion of the interviews by fall 2014.

Letters of interest must include the following:

1. Project Contact. List name, title, phone, email, and address of the person who will be the main project contact. This person will be responsible for working with EPA staff to answer questions and provide additional information as the application process progresses. This person should have a comprehensive understanding of the work that would be done as part of the assistance.

2. Description of the Design Challenge and Project Area. Applicants need to articulate the design challenge and propose a specific project area in the community to focus on. Please see the list below for some ideas on design challenges to address, but do not feel limited by this list. The project area must be no larger than the neighborhood scale and should be chosen based on the needs of the area and the potential for implementation of the designs created through this assistance. Include information about how the project can engage overburdened, underserved, and/or historically underrepresented communities. What are the key challenges facing residents and users of this space? Why does this challenge exist? How has it been addressed in the past (if at all), and what do you hope to accomplish by addressing this challenge?



The following issues are of particular interest to reviewers this year:

- Green infrastructure for multiple community benefits.
- Planning and design for disaster resilience.
- Preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change.
- Brownfield, infill, or corridor redevelopment.
- Aligning transportation and housing planning.
- Public art and civic design strategies.

3. Potential Impact of the Project. Describe how the anticipated results of the project will help your community, as well as how the results could be replicated in other communities across your state. The proposal should include realistic, achievable goals for project implementation following the completion of the design assistance. Understandably, the expected results might not be known, but successful applicants will have some sense of how this investment will benefit the city and the state's potential support for sustainable communities.

4. Leveraging Other Federal Investments. If your community has received Partnership for Sustainable Communities grants or technical assistance projects in the past, please describe how this project aligns with the Partnership principles and relates to past or ongoing grants or leverages Partnership-supported projects.

5. Support from Elected Officials and the Public. Applicants need to identify persons and/or organizations that support the project and will work toward its implementation. Please include a list of references for each of the following:

- Local Elected Officials Support: can include mayors, city council members, and representatives from either or both the governor's office and the state general assembly.
- Public or Community Support: can include neighborhood coalitions, community development groups, local business organizations, and community-based organizations from disadvantaged communities.

Letters of interest must be submitted via email to Abby Hall at hall.abby@epa.gov no later than July 21, 2014 by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time. If you have questions about this solicitation, please contact Abby Hall via email or at 415-972-3384.