



## Smart Growth Implementation Assistance 2013 Request for Letters of Interest (RFLI)

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE: Approximately \$75,000 per recipient in contractor support

COMMUNITIES SELECTED THIS YEAR: 3 to 4

### OVERVIEW

The Office of Sustainable Communities in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Policy is seeking letters of interest from tribes, states, regions, and communities that want to develop in ways that protect the environment, use resources efficiently, create economic opportunities, and provide a high quality of life. The Smart Growth Implementation Assistance (SGIA) program provides assistance from national experts to help communities explore barriers to smart growth implementation and pilot innovative ideas that create more sustainable communities. EPA will provide technical assistance to successful applicants as described below. Eligible entities are tribal, state, regional, and local governments, as well as nonprofit organizations that have a demonstrated partnership with a governmental entity.

EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities offers a variety of technical assistance that ranges from longer-term, in-depth assistance to more streamlined assistance for common development challenges. SGIA and Building Blocks are two of the primary opportunities. Applicants should determine which technical assistance program is right for their community. The SGIA program focuses on complex or cutting-edge issues, and projects can take about 18 months to complete. These projects explore innovative ideas to overcome barriers that are preventing communities from getting the kind of development they want. Since 2005, the SGIA program has allowed the Office of Sustainable Communities to work with a diverse array of communities from across the country on issues such as stormwater management, code revision, transit-oriented development, affordable housing, infill development, corridor planning, green building, and climate change.<sup>1</sup>

The technical assistance offered by EPA is a critical element of the combined federal resources offered through the HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities.<sup>2</sup> Since 2009, through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, EPA began involving the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) in the program. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities is a collaboration among the three agencies to offer communities technical assistance that advances the Partnership's six Livability Principles and ensures better environmental outcomes from land use decisions. The three agencies have committed to supporting each other's investments, both through direct staff

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete list of the types of technical assistance provided by the Office of Sustainable Communities, please visit [http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sg\\_implementation.htm](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sg_implementation.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Learn more about the HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities and the Livability Principles at [www.sustainablecommunities.gov](http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov).

involvement in grants and technical assistance efforts, as well as through use of a common set of selection criteria in grantmaking, which emphasizes the importance of the Livability Principles, regional planning, and community involvement (see Letter of Interest content sections 4, 5, and 6 below). For SGIA, it is expected that HUD and DOT will serve on the technical assistance teams, bringing relevant resources from their agencies and helping to ensure that SGIA projects can complement existing or planned federal investments.

In addition, EPA collaborates with other key federal agencies. EPA has a Memorandum of Agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to assist regional government entities, states, tribes, territories, and local governments in becoming sustainable and resilient coastal and waterfront communities, protecting healthy coastal ecosystems, restoring degraded coastal ecosystems, and adapting to climate change. EPA also has a Memorandum of Agreement with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help communities reduce vulnerability to natural hazard events, recover from disasters that do occur, and achieve economic, environmental, and public health outcomes as part of redevelopment and recovery efforts. NOAA and FEMA staff may be part of the technical assistance teams as well, depending on the project topic.

Communities selected for the SGIA program will receive assistance in the form of a multi-day visit by a team of experts organized by EPA to work with local leaders. Staff from EPA and other federal agencies will participate in these site visits. EPA will provide this assistance through an Agency contract, **not a grant**. Communities will not receive any funding directly; the assistance is entirely in the form of work from contractors paid by EPA. Team members will be experts in disciplines to be determined by the community's specific needs. Typically the teams include some combination of planners, urban designers, economists, landscape architects, engineers, and other experts. The contractor team will work with the applicant to study the context and the specific project and meet with elected officials, business leaders, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders. Upon completion, the applicant will receive a final report that discusses the challenge with which the community requested assistance; the goals and desires of community leaders, residents, businesses, and other stakeholders as gathered in the team's site visit; specific options the community could consider to address the challenge; and additional resources. Since one goal of the SGIA program is to develop replicable models from which other tribes, states, regions, and communities can learn, EPA may use the final product as the basis for other, more general publications intended for a national audience.

## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITY**

Communities and states around the country are interested in fostering economic growth, protecting their environmental and cultural resources, enhancing public health, extending the benefits of community redevelopment to all citizens equitably, and planning for development, but they may lack the tools, resources, or information to achieve these goals. In response to these needs, EPA, along with other federal partners, is offering direct technical assistance from national experts to tribes, states, regions, and communities that want to incorporate smart growth techniques in their development. EPA is also interested in identifying and documenting innovative solutions to complex problems that communities face as they seek to incorporate

smart growth practices. The findings from SGIA projects inform EPA's work. As such, the potential solutions to smart growth challenges that come from these projects can be disseminated and replicated across the country.

For information about previous SGIA projects, see [www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sgia\\_communities.htm](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sgia_communities.htm).

EPA is soliciting letters of interest from tribal, state, regional, and local governments, as well as nonprofit organizations that have a demonstrated partnership with a governmental entity. The requested assistance can incorporate policy analysis and review, planning and visioning processes, development and assessment of scorecards or ranking criteria, or other work that addresses the applicant's specific challenge. The type of work, however, should enable the community to better implement smart growth development practices.

Applicants are asked to propose development challenges or emerging issues they would like to address through assistance from the SGIA program. EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities has identified some issues that are of greater interest for this round of SGIA, and those issues are listed in the "Preparing the Letter of Interest" section.

Based on the written proposals and possible subsequent phone calls with applicants, EPA, HUD, and DOT staff will choose up to four tribes, states, regions, communities, or nonprofits to receive technical assistance.

## **PREPARING THE LETTER OF INTEREST**

EPA, HUD, and DOT 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 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, which will then choose up to four applicants to work with.

Letters of interest must include the following:

**1. Project Contact.** List the 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 content and work of the assistance.

**2. Description of the Smart Growth Challenge.** Applicants need to articulate the smart growth challenge or policy issue. A list of the topics in which EPA is most interested is below, including some examples of potential types of projects. Please provide a focused description of a single, specific challenge that falls into one of these categories.

1. Community Resilience to Disasters and Climate Change

- Adaptation planning for heat island, drought, wildfires, water supply impacts, or other natural hazards which are often hard to plan for given the lack of data and tools for predicting near- and long-term risk to buildings, infrastructure, and natural areas.
- Implementing planning strategies and building design guidelines for vulnerable neighborhoods in order to protect people and development from flooding and other natural hazards.
- Developing pre-disaster recovery plans that anticipate opportunities to relocate development to safe places.
- Developing regional green infrastructure approaches, land use policies, and funding mechanisms that protect and enhance floodplains and natural buffers such as wetlands in order to mitigate flood impacts to built infrastructure.

## 2. Redevelopment for Job Creation

- Redevelopment strategies to support job creation, including a diversity of quality jobs at different skill levels. Identify strong and growing industries and support them with land use policies that direct infill to key neighborhoods that have transit connections, are walkable, and are near to supportive businesses and government functions.
- Developing institutional and programmatic support for key industries or economic drivers, including land use strategies and permitting processes that encourage public-private partnerships, planning and marketing for priority infill areas, and education and training to support and retain a skilled workforce.
- Land use policies that allow manufacturing and other commercial uses that create quality jobs for residents while protecting public health and quality of life.
- Planning for the modernization of manufacturing and changing needs for building size, type, and access, including redevelopment and reuse of existing industrial building stock. Planning and zoning approaches might consider how large footprint businesses and industries can be sited and designed to be walkable and to serve as alternatives to single-use, auto-oriented business and industrial parks.

## 3. The Role of Manufactured and Modular Homes in Sustainable Neighborhood Design

- Identifying codes and standards for siting and design of greener modular or manufactured homes within “boomtowns” that experience sudden population and economic growth, as well in communities recovering from disasters. Appropriate policies may include codes, subdivision regulations, and other local development policies.
- Developing pattern and orientation guidance for neighborhoods of modular or manufactured homes that ensures street and infrastructure connections, creates community gathering spaces, and allows for walkability.
- Creating policies and plans for small scale renewable energy generation and on-site infrastructure that can increase energy and water efficiency for modular or manufactured home neighborhoods.
- Developing approaches to extend infrastructure and utilities to large new developments of temporary homes in a cost-effective way that preserves options

for future development on the site.

#### 4. Medical and Social Service Facilities Siting

- Siting, orientation, and design of medical and social service centers to serve a range of populations and to ensure easy access for all users including those who walk, bike, drive, or take transit, as well as those who have disabilities.
- Planning for high quality community facilities, including not just health care centers but social services centers, in a way that supports neighborhood economic development and healthy communities.

Reviewers will consider compelling cases of smart growth challenges that do not fall into one of these categories. **Examples of other smart growth challenges might include innovative approaches to workforce housing; supporting quality neighborhood schools; using technology for community planning; and others.**

If you are requesting assistance with a policy issue, consider how that policy challenge is manifested in a geographical area of your community or how a solution to the challenge could be applied in a specific place. The project area could be a neighborhood within a community, a region within a state, or some other geographically defined area that reflects the challenge or issue in question. The project area should be chosen based on the need of the area and the potential for implementation of the policies or designs created through this assistance. Include demographic information that supports why this area is targeted and the benefits to the community. 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? Please be sure to describe a project area as it relates to the policy challenge. Area planning exercises are not the focus of the SGIA program.

**3. Role of EPA-led Team.** Provide a brief, specific description of the expected role of the EPA-led team. For instance, what will the national experts do—will they hold a workshop, conduct research, analyze data, etc.? How could the team’s involvement help resolve the challenge? What value would the team add that your community cannot provide on its own? Clearly demonstrating your ideas here will provide our team with a sense of what value we might add and how you see the project progressing.

**4. Potential Impact of the Project.** Describe how the anticipated results of the project could help your community. The proposal should include realistic, achievable goals for project implementation following the completion of the technical assistance. Understandably, the expected results may not be known, but successful projects will have some sense of how this investment will benefit the community and build support for future economically and environmentally sustainable growth. In addition, EPA wants to find projects that have replicable outcomes. Does this project have the potential to provide lessons learned or transferable results that could be applied elsewhere in the state, region, or country? Also, please explain why now is the time to focus on this challenge. Please identify links between the proposed project and any planning processes or local/regional plans that are currently being implemented.

**5. Leveraging Other Federal Investments.** If your community has received Partnership for Sustainable Community grants or technical assistance projects in the past, please describe how

this project aligns with the Partnership's Livability Principles and relates to past or ongoing grants or leverages Partnership-supported projects.

**6. Community Need and Engagement.** Clearly describe how the project will help to address the challenges faced by low-income, minority, tribal, and/or overburdened communities that face a disproportionate level of environmental problems, historic underrepresentation, lack of access to infrastructure, and/or economic decline. Describe how the project is expected to provide environmental, health, and/or economic benefits to such communities and also address unequal distribution of benefits. Additionally, describe how you have engaged low-income, minority, tribal, and/or overburdened communities and/or community leaders in related efforts to date and your plan for partnering with them in this project.

**7. Political and Public Support.** Identify persons and/or organizations that support the project and will work toward its implementation. For instance, applicants need to address whether this project is a priority to the mayor, tribal council, or elected officials. Identify persons and/or organizations that support the project and will work toward its implementation. Please include a list of references (full letters of support are welcome, but not necessary) for each of the following:

- Political Support: can include mayors, city or tribal council members, representatives from the governor's office or state legislature, or other elected officials.
- Public or Community Support: can include neighborhood coalitions, community development groups, local business organizations, and community-based organizations from disadvantaged communities.

Letters of interest will be evaluated based on how well the proposed project describes the challenge, potential impact, and political and public support. A small group of applicants will be asked to participate in a follow-up phone interview with EPA and its federal partners. These calls will further evaluate how well the applicant meets the criteria. EPA will make final selections in May 2013.

Letters of interest must be submitted via email to [Abby Hall](mailto:hall.abby@epa.gov) (hall.abby@epa.gov) no later than March 1, 2013, by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time. If you have questions about this solicitation, please contact [Abby Hall](mailto:hall.abby@epa.gov) (hall.abby@epa.gov, 415-972-3384) or see the frequently asked questions for SGIA: [http://epa.gov/smartgrowth/sgia\\_faq.htm](http://epa.gov/smartgrowth/sgia_faq.htm).