

# Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities 2019 Request for Letters of Interest



## Overview

Communities across the United States are exploring smart growth and other environmentally sustainable approaches to revitalize their economies, create jobs, protect clean air and water, prepare for climate change-related impacts, and improve quality of life. However, when trying to implement these approaches many communities run into barriers such as outdated zoning codes and other regulations, polluted sites that deter investment, and deteriorating public infrastructure. Moreover, many communities lack the technical expertise to implement smart growth strategies and the resources to educate local stakeholders about the environmental, economic, health, and quality of life benefits these approaches can bring.

The Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program provides quick, targeted technical assistance to selected communities using a variety of tools that have demonstrated results and widespread application. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) delivers the assistance using teams of experts who conduct workshops in the selected communities. The program is geared toward communities that are relatively new to environmentally sustainable approaches but have a basic understanding of smart growth principles and how they apply locally.

EPA is offering two (2) tools this year to select communities.

- Communities with Superfund and/or Brownfield properties are invited to apply for our **Strategies for Neighborhood Reinvestment** tool. The tool will help them identify and implement policies to increase the redevelopment potential of contaminated properties by creating better conditions for real estate investment in the neighborhoods surrounding them.
- Communities embarking on street infrastructure projects, and thus digging up and reconstructing streets, are invited to apply for our **Green and Complete Streets** tool. The tool will help them capitalize on water infrastructure upgrades as an opportunity to rebuild more pedestrian and bike-friendly streets that better manage stormwater on-site.

## Key Information

- **Eligibility:** The applicant can be a local, county, or tribal government, or a nonprofit organization that has the support of the local government on whose behalf they are applying.
- **Deadline:** 5:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on November 16, 2018.
- **How to apply:** Submit a two-page letter of interest signed by a mayor, city manager, elected official, or other representative of the community (see “How to Apply”)
- **Tools offered:**
  - Tool 1: Strategies for Neighborhood Reinvestment
  - Tool 2: Green and Complete Streets
- **Timeframe:** EPA expects to select recipients by the end of November and intends to provide all technical assistance by September 2019.

## How the Program Works

1. Interested communities submit a letter of interest, in which they select one of the tools being offered (see “How to Apply”) and specifically outline how the tool is relevant to their development challenge.
2. EPA reviews the letters of interest and selects the communities that will receive assistance.

3. EPA contacts the selected communities to schedule a workshop, discuss mutual expectations as well as roles and responsibilities, and review details about the program. During at least two conference calls before the workshop, direct consultation occurs between EPA staff and technical experts and local decision-makers whose work relates to the specific challenge for which the community is seeking assistance. The relevant decision-makers will vary by community and depend on the tool being delivered but might include planning, transportation, environmental, and economic development department heads; commissioners; senior municipal staff; community leaders; and elected officials.
4. EPA’s contractors, along with EPA headquarters and/or regional office staff, conduct a one-and-a-half-day workshop in the community, including a public meeting, through which a collaborative process will yield a set of short- to mid-term actions the community can take to address their challenges.
5. A “Next Steps Memo” detailing the engagement and outlining the collaboratively identified actions is delivered to the community

### **How to Apply**

Submit a letter of interest—**no longer than two (2) pages**—that contains the following information. Applicants may select only one type of assistance per letter of interest. Communities can submit multiple letters of interest, but the nature of the challenge should correspond with each tool requested. (Please **do not** submit letters of support, maps, or other supplemental information.)

1. **Identify the ONE tool for which you are seeking assistance.** Select one (1) of the two (2) tools described on pages 4-5.
2. **Describe the nature of the smart growth or sustainable communities-related challenge(s) facing your community,** including any relevant data to demonstrate the challenge. If applicable, describe how this challenge affects low-income, minority, tribal, and/or other communities facing disproportionate environmental or health risks.
3. **Explain the relevance of the selected tool to the challenge(s), being as specific as possible.** Applicants must describe how the community’s issues can be addressed through the technical assistance workshop, focusing on why the requested tool will help with a specific challenge. Specifically:
  - For **Strategies for Neighborhood Reinvestment** indicate what, if any, economic development is occurring in your community and what steps your community has already taken to encourage infill development, including policies, code changes, partnerships, or other strategies.
  - For **Green and Complete Streets**, preference will be given to communities that already have a Complete Streets policy in place and want to add the “green” element, so indicate how familiar your community is with Complete Streets practices as well as green infrastructure for stormwater management. Include local examples, if any.
4. **Describe your plan for engaging traditionally underrepresented communities,** including low-income, minority, tribal, and/or overburdened<sup>1</sup> communities, in the technical assistance workshop.

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<sup>1</sup> An overburdened community is defined as a community with “minority, low-income, tribal, and indigenous populations and communities in the United States that experience disproportionate environmental harms and risks as a result of greater vulnerability to environmental hazards. This increased vulnerability may be attributable to an accumulation of negative and a lack of positive environmental, health, economic, or social conditions within these populations or communities.”

5. **Identify your preferred timing for the workshop.** The proposed timeframe for these workshops is between March and September 2019. Please provide a preliminary idea of the best dates for your community.
6. **Describe the community's expected capacity for implementation,** e.g., local policy change, additional consideration for physical improvements, new incentives, etc. EPA generally looks to assist communities that are ready for implementation once the Building Blocks workshop and next steps memo are complete.
7. If applicable, **describe how this assistance would complement work being done in the community using other federal funding** (e.g., EPA brownfields grants, U.S. HUD Community Development Block Grants, U.S. DOT TIGER/BUILD grants) and/or how this workshop would align with a local or regional planning process.
8. **Affirm that the community can provide the information or materials listed in the "What the Community Provides" section of each tool description.**
9. **List the primary point of contact and other key stakeholders who would be involved in the technical assistance work, including title, address, email, and phone number of the primary contact.**

The letter must be signed by a mayor, city manager, elected official, or other representative of the community. **This signature represents the community's support and commitment to this program and assistance.**

The letter of interest must be submitted in an attachment (Microsoft Word or PDF file) by email to Chip Gurkin (BuildingBlocks@epa.gov) no later than **November 16, 2018, at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.**

**Please save your file using the following format:** Name of Jurisdiction Name of State and corresponding tool number (#x) based on the following list. For example: Catonsville Maryland #1.

Tool #1: Neighborhood Reinvestment

Tool #2: Green and Complete Streets

If you have questions about this request for letters of interest, please see our Frequently Asked Questions webpage at <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/frequently-asked-questions-faqs-about-building-blocks-sustainable-communities>. If your question is not answered there, please contact Mr. Gurkin at Gurkin.Charles@epa.gov or 202-564-2778.

## TOOL 1: Strategies for Neighborhood Reinvestment

This tool will help local governments identify obstacles to infill development and strategies for overcoming those obstacles in their communities.

### Community Benefits

During the post-World War II era, many communities in the United States developed into the outer parts of the region, leaving older neighborhoods, traditional downtowns, and central business districts abandoned or underserved. However, more recently, some communities revitalized their central neighborhoods through infill development—redevelopment of vacant land or properties in neighborhoods with existing infrastructure and development. Economically distressed communities, however, have been less able to attract infill development and attain the accompanying economic, health, and quality of life benefits.

### Areas of Focus

This tool will help communities that have **already identified a Superfund or Brownfield site as a priority infill development area and are experiencing some economic growth at the regional level** to determine their readiness to pursue infill development and identify strategies to better position themselves to attract infill development. Each community will conduct a self-assessment questionnaire prior to the workshop to determine which set of strategies are most appropriate to focus on in their context. This self-assessment will be structured around one or more components, which will also provide the framework for the workshop:

- **Policies:** New policies that might be adopted or existing policies that could be amended to remove obstacles to infill development.
- **Partnerships:** Public and private partnerships that could leverage resources, build capacity, and coordinate efforts.
- **Perception:** Improving perceptions of an area to strengthen demand and reduce the perceived risk for lenders.
- **Funding:** Standard and innovative funding options to support development and fund infrastructure.

In the workshop, participants will review the findings of the self-assessment, and national experts will lead participants in matching the appropriate strategies to advance the goals for a specific priority development area. Experts will also help identify options for next steps and provide relevant case studies.

### **Who Should Attend:**

- / Elected officials, city manager, mayor.
- / City/county staff, including economic development, transportation, and planning staff.
- / Local developers.
- / Community and neighborhood organizations.
- / Local environmental justice advocates.
- / Other stakeholders.

### **How It Works:**

- / Community will complete a self-assessment before the workshop.
- / One- to two-day session will begin with a site visit to the community's priority development area.
- / Consultants will conduct an in-depth session with decision-makers, staff, and key participants to review local goals, data on priority development area, and the self-assessment, and to discuss specific infill development strategies.

### **What the Community Provides:**

- / Local key contact.
- / Decision-makers' commitment to attend the workshop.
- / Self-assessment and background information on priority development area such as market conditions.
- / Local logistics, including organization of workshop and tour.
- / Marketing of public workshop
- / Invitations to key stakeholders (especially representatives of local developers) to attend work sessions.
- / Attendance of key officials and local government staff.

### **Outcomes:**

- / Knowledge of best practices and infill development strategies.
- / An understanding of the community's readiness to pursue infill development.
- / Identification of specific strategies to promote infill development.
- / Options for next steps and case studies.

## TOOL 2: GREEN AND COMPLETE STREETS

A green and complete street incorporates green infrastructure to manage stormwater while making the street more aesthetically appealing and safer for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers. This tool will help communities develop strategies for greening their streets based on national models and case studies.

### Community Benefits

This tool will showcase a range of national best practices for incorporating a green and complete streets strategy for public areas in the street right-of-way. Communities will learn about green infrastructure elements such as street trees, rain gardens, and permeable paving. Communities will also learn how to develop interdepartmental cooperation, maintenance strategies, and funding mechanisms to implement and maintain green streets. These actions could result in reduced pollution, reduced flooding, increased green space, improved air quality, and reduced demand on a community's sewer collection system. Beyond the environmental benefits, green and complete streets strategies can also make the streets more pleasant for pedestrians and bicyclists while still accommodating automobiles.

### Areas of Focus

The focus of this assistance will be an assessment of the existing conditions for four to six street locations in the community **where municipalities are planning street reconstruction**. Assistance will include options for incorporating a variety of green and complete street concepts and ideas into local practice and setting the policy and organizational framework to effectively implement green and complete street concepts. See EPA's webpage [Green Streets](#) webpage for more information.

### Who Should Attend:

- / Elected officials.
- / City/county staff, including public works and transportation staff.
- / Community and neighborhood leaders.
- / Other stakeholders.

### How It Works:

- / One- to two-day assistance includes a morning work session with local government officials and other key stakeholders, a tour of existing green infrastructure installations, an afternoon meeting with local government leaders, and an evening public workshop.

### What the Community Provides:

- / Local key contact.
- / Decision-makers' commitment to attend the workshop.
- / Self-assessment and background information on current and planned sustainability initiatives.
- / Local logistics, including organization of workshop and tour.
- / Marketing of public workshop.
- / Invitations to key stakeholders to attend work sessions.
- / Attendance of key officials and local government staff.

### Outcomes:

- / An understanding of the relationship between smart growth and green and complete streets.
- / An understanding of how green and complete streets help a community meet its environmental goals.
- / Identification of barriers to green and complete streets and how to address them.
- / A framework to guide the creation of a long-term green and complete streets strategy.