



2011 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 reflect the principles of smart growth, green building, and the Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities is an interagency effort of EPA, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to protect the environment, promote equitable development, and help address the challenges of climate change. Greening America's Capitals provides state capitals with an opportunity to implement this partnership effort on the ground. EPA will provide design assistance to successful applicants as described below. Letters of interest are due on June 20, 2011. For details on how to apply, see page four.

EPA is providing this design assistance to help create stronger communities that protect the environment. Effective strategies for creating a strong sense of place, such as street and public space design that uses innovative stormwater practices and sustainable green building techniques, can also protect environmental resources and help revitalize neighborhoods, spurring additional economic and social benefits.

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 puts public investment to its best and highest use. Greening America's Capitals will work with state partners to explore how state policies, funding, and other resources can better support local sustainability. The city staff will be required to bring representatives from both the governor's office and the general assembly into the process.

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 green building 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, these pilots could be the testing ground for broader, citywide actions such as changes to local codes and ordinances to better support sustainable growth and green building. The design team and EPA, HUD, and DOT staff will also assist the city staff in developing specific implementation strategies.

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 greater housing and transportation choices, reduce infrastructure and energy costs, and build 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 between different sites and 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. The EPA-HUD-DOT team expects to see implementation based on the design assistance.

EPA will provide this assistance through an Agency contract vehicle, not a grant. Team members will be 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 to 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.

The cities chosen to be part of Greening America's Capitals will be asked to use the design resources produced to promote better public understanding of sustainable communities. This promotion and outreach could come in the form of 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 will be required, EPA expects the city to provide in-kind services in the form of logistics support for the workshop and outreach and communications.

What Are Smart Growth and Green Building?

The principles of smart growth help communities create a vision of how and where to grow and ensure that development supports local character. Unlike conventional development patterns, smart growth strategies consider the role of new development within the existing community fabric, including the connections between buildings and with surrounding sites, landscapes, and the larger neighborhood context. 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:

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

EPA defines green building as “the practice of maximizing the efficiency with which buildings and their sites use resources—energy, water, and materials—while minimizing building impacts on human health and the environment, throughout the complete building life cycle—from siting, design, and construction to operation, renovation, and reuse.”

Resources:

For information on the 2010 Greening America’s Capitals recipients, please visit www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/greencapitals.htm.

For more information on smart growth and green building, please visit EPA’s web sites: www.epa.gov/smartgrowth, www.epa.gov/greenbuilding.

More on the Partnership for Sustainable Communities:
<http://epa.gov/smartgrowth/partnership/>.

HUD’s Office of Housing and Sustainable Communities:
http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities.

Federal Highway Administration’s Livability Initiative:
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/>, Federal Transit Administration’s Livable and Sustainable Communities: http://fta.dot.gov/publications/publications_10935.html.



APPLICATION PROCESS

EPA is sending notice of 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 engagement from the city government will be an important part of the process of implementing sustainable designs developed through this project. Successful proposals will also be able to show support from the governor's office and a member of 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, which will then choose three to five state capitals to work with.

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 content and work of the assistance.
2. **Description of the Design Challenge and Area of Need.** 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 need of the area and the potential for real implementation of the designs created through this assistance. Include demographic information that supports why this area is targeted and the benefits to the community in light of the specific demographic needs and community challenges. 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 assistance may include, but is not limited to, the following issues:

- Green infrastructure for multiple community benefits.
- Brownfield or infill redevelopment.
- Aligning transportation and housing choice.



- Climate change response planning.
- Engaging disadvantaged communities.
- Public art and civic design strategies.
- Green and energy-efficient building 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 may not be known, but successful projects will have some sense of how this investment will benefit the city and the state's potential support for sustainable communities.

4. Political and Public Support. 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:

- **Political Support:** can include mayors, city council members, and representative 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 other similar citizens' organizations.

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 be used to further evaluate how well the applicant meets the criteria. EPA will make final selections following the completion of the interviews by early fall 2011.

Letters of interest must be submitted via email to Abby Hall at hall.abby@epa.gov no later than Monday, June 20, 2011 by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time. If you have questions about this solicitation, please contact Abby Hall via email or at 202-566-2086.

