



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
THE DEPUTY SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, DC 20410-0050**

**Frequently Asked Questions about HUD's Sustainable Communities
Regional Planning Grants**

UPDATED AUGUST 6, 2010

1. How are regional boundaries established under the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant program?

HUD has received a number of questions on this issue and has created a specific guidance document to help potential applications. This document can be found on the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Information Site at <http://www.hud.gov/sustainability>

2. Where can I get data information to complete Factor 2: Data Inputs?

The NOFA requires applicants to use the Rating Factor 2 OSHC Form, to provide quantitative and qualitative data for the 10 specified, readily collectible data points. The form is a part of the grant application package that each applicant should download from www.grants.gov. HUD has collected as much of the data as was reasonable and posted it at http://www.huduser.org/xsocds/NOFA/nofa_home.html. To help address specific questions that applicants may have on data issues, HUD has developed a data FAQ that can be found at <http://www.huduser.org/xsocds/NOFA/Frequently%20Asked%20Questions.pdf>. As discussed in the NOFA, if an applicant finds that data is not available for a particular data point in their region, the narrative can be used to discuss why this data was unavailable and provide a qualitative description of the factor. The narrative can also introduce additional information that further delineates regional conditions in the target area.

3. Can pre-existing planning funds be counted towards leveraged match?

Yes, as long as the funds are used solely for the purpose of the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grant program. *Leveraged resources* are additional cash and in-kind contributions that can be combined with funds awarded by HUD under this NOFA to increase the effectiveness of the proposed program activities. Leveraged resources may be in the form of cash and/or the cash equivalent of verified in-kind contributions. Leveraged resources may be secured from one source or a combination of sources, including governmental entities, public and private entities, and the community. The applicant must provide evidence of a firm commitment for each source of the leveraged resources. The leveraged resources committed to the program will need to be spent for the purpose of the program and during the period of performance stated in the grant agreement.

Cash contributions may come from any combination of local, state and/or federal funds, and/or private and philanthropic contributions dedicated to the express purposes of this proposal. As noted in the NOFA, applicants securing leveraged resources from other HUD programs, Sustainability Partnership agencies, and other federal agencies will receive a greater rating.

In-kind contributions can include physical items such as office supplies, computer equipment and supplies, materials for projects, and flyers and other marketing materials. They can also be in the form of office and meeting space, including allowed use of computers, phones, fax and copy machine, or the use of a vehicle, construction equipment and other project related items. In-kind contributions can also be contributions of professional time. When an individual donates his/her time in a professional capacity to supervise members, train or engage in member development, provide technical assistance on a project, evaluate a project, oversee project quality, or provide pro bono work as a member of the non-profit organization on a permanent or

temporary basis, the time involved is an in-kind contribution. The dollar equivalent of all assistance provided to meet this requirement must be based upon accepted salary or regional dollar values.

4. My region has multiple letters of commitment from regional partners. How can we include these without exceeding the appendix page limit?

The NOFA sets a 15-page limit for the grant appendix to include supporting documentation and letters of commitment. If the number of partners in the consortium providing letters of commitment would make your application exceed this limit HUD requests that you include at least 3 of the original letters, a listing of additional partners with the dates of their letters and the key contacts. HUD may contact the lead applicant to verify these listed supplemental letters of commitment.

5. Who exactly is eligible for the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants?

An eligible applicant under the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program is a consortium of units of government, regional planning agencies, non-profit organizations, and allied public and private sector partners that seek to develop a regional plan. Except in rural areas, the consortium must include the local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). While not explicitly specified, Councils of Governments are eligible if they meet the requirements described in the NOFA.

6. Why is HUD requiring the application for its Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grants to come from a consortium?

HUD believes that in order to develop a comprehensive sustainability plan that will guide a region's transportation, housing, development, and other investment decisions over a period of decades, it is necessary to not only bring all of the key governmental entities to the table, but also educational institutions and non-profit organizations which can provide a non-governmental perspective on regional needs. An important role for the Consortium will be to ensure that all key actors in a region are engaged in the process of developing the plan and assurance that the plans will be implemented. HUD will be awarding points, described in the rating factors listed in the NOFA, to evaluate the governance, management, and process proposed by the Consortium to develop comprehensive and inclusive sustainability plans.

7. What is the responsibility of the Lead Applicant? Are they in charge of the consortium?

The Lead Applicant is the entity that is responsible for being the primary administrative point of contact with HUD throughout the application and (if successful) implementation phases of the grant. This includes assembly and submission of application materials and being the consistent interface with HUD during the negotiation of the cooperative agreement. It does not, however, mean that the Lead Applicant has to be in charge of the consortium. Recognizing the diverse array of partnership structures that could work in different regions, HUD has intentionally left the leadership and governance framework open to the determination of the consortium that is coming together to submit the grant. In fact, HUD is hoping to see innovative partnership structures that align the traditional planning capacities of public agencies with the experience and important perspectives of community and business voices. We encourage partners to utilize their strengths in making the most effective collaborative possible.

8. How does our consortium know which of the two funding categories is appropriate for its application?

HUD recognizes that regions are in different stages of readiness and capacity to engage in efforts to plan for a sustainable and inclusive future. Consequently, the NOFA creates two distinct funding categories. Applicants for **Funding Category Two** are those regions that already have an existing regional plan that integrates transportation, housing, and land use planning that guide transportation, housing, and other investment decisions. Such regions may submit an application to support initiatives to fine-tune their existing regional plans so that they address the full complement of Livability Principles in an integrated fashion, the preparation of more detailed execution plans for an adopted Regional Plan for Sustainable Development, and limited pre-development planning activities for a catalytic project/projects that are a significant aspect of the approved regional plan. All other regions, i.e., those that do not have an existing regional plan that meet the requirements listed above, must submit an application under **Funding Category One**. Please see Section II.B. for a more detailed description of the two funding categories.

9. What are the principle outcomes HUD is looking for from successful applications?

This grant program is a centerpiece of the Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities, an initiative jointly implemented by HUD, the US Department of Transportation (DOT), and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Partnership is committed to advancing six overarching Livability Principles as a framework to help American families gain better access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs, while protecting the environment and reducing our energy dependence. The Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program will support metropolitan and multijurisdictional planning efforts that integrate housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation and infrastructure investments in a manner that empowers jurisdictions to consider the interdependent challenges of these issues specific to their region. The anticipated outcomes of the grant program will be a generation of regional plans that address these integrated issues and illustrate how federal resources will be aligned to mirror local and regional strategies for achieving inclusive, sustainable communities. The specific Program Outcomes are discussed in Section I.E. of the NOFA.

10. Will there be a minimum or maximum grant amount?

The NOFA establishes grant thresholds sensitive to the range of communities that may apply for grant resources.

For large metropolitan areas with a population of 500,000 or more, the minimum grant amount is \$500,000 and the maximum is \$5,000,000.

For medium sized metropolitan areas with a population between 200,000 and 499,999, the minimum grant amount is \$200,000 and the maximum is \$2,000,000.

For rural and small town areas with a population below 200,000, the minimum grant amount is \$100,000 and the maximum is \$1,000,000.

11. What role can State governments play in the advancement of Sustainable Regional Planning Grants?

HUD recognizes the important role that State government can play in regional planning practices and implementation strategies. Often, the State will need to be a vital partner in the array of organizations helping to develop a long-term regional plan. In other cases, it may not. For this reason, States are not a required component in the applicant consortium, but they are encouraged to be an active partner wherever appropriate. In some states, there may be more than one region that is prepared to apply for the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant. In such cases, a State can be part of multiple applications. As applying consortia can build the roles and governance as they see fit, there is no limit to what planning or implementation roles States can play in making the strongest possible regional applications. The principal administrative role of the Lead Applicant, however, must be played by one of the required components of the consortium: the MPO, a participating jurisdiction, or a non-profit partner.

12. What elements will weigh most heavily in ranking the applications?

Applicants should review the two Program Goals and the five Rating Factors listed in the NOFA for guidance. The NOFA provides information on what will be evaluated, the relative weight of each of the Factors. The Fifth Rating Factor: Achieving Results and Program Evaluation, recognizes that not all of the identified benefits or outcomes proposed by the applicant will be realized during the grant period. HUD will work with those applicants selected for a grant award, to incorporate benchmarks for measuring progress into its Logic Model. Unless otherwise stated in the NOFA, the requirements of HUD's FY10 General Section apply.

13. What steps should potential applicants take to get started on preparing an application for funding?

Potential applicants should read through the entire NOFA for detailed information on the rating factors, program goals and outcomes that will be evaluated in the scoring of applications. Four steps can strengthen a potential regional application.

a. Do the reconnaissance to surface all of the parties in the region interested in applying for the grant. Potential applicants should make sure that their region will submit only one application to HUD and to identify the consortium members very early in the process.

- b. Commit to the broadest possible participation in the applicant consortium. The rules of the NOFA are designed to prevent multiple applications from a single region while ensuring that a diverse range of stakeholders are participating in the consortium.
- c. Collect the relevant regional plans and visions that may comprise the Sustainable Communities Regional Plan.
- d. Participate in HUD-sponsored webinars and training opportunities to sharpen your consortium's insights as it begins its planning and grant-writing process. Throughout the 60-day application window, HUD's Office of Sustainable Communities and Housing will post to its website (www.hud.gov/sustainability) updated information responding to Frequently Asked Questions and information on webinar dates and materials.

14. What consideration will be given to ensure that rural areas are competitive for funding with larger metropolitan areas?

First, Congress requires that a minimum of \$25 million of the grant funds be awarded to regions with a population of less than 500,000. Second, HUD has created a special funding category for regions with a population less than 200,000. This will ensure that small town and rural areas will compete effectively under this program.

15. How does HUD's Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants NOFA relate to the TIGER II/Community Challenge Planning Grants NOFA that was recently released?

On June 21, 2010, HUD and the US Department of Transportation (DOT) announced a joint notice of funding availability for both HUD's \$40 Million Community Challenge Planning Grant program and up to \$35 million of the FY10 funds available for DOT's TIGER II Planning Grants. The Community Challenge Planning Grants are targeted towards more localized planning efforts to improve and update land use and zoning. The TIGER II Planning Grant Program will fund the planning, preparation or design of surface transportation projects that would be eligible for funding under the TIGER II Discretionary Capital Grant program. The list of eligible applicants is limited to include State and local governments, transit agencies, port authorities, MPOs, other political subdivisions of State or local governments, and multi-State or multijurisdictional groupings. Applicants seeking funding through the joint DOT/HUD NOFA must meet a July 26, 2010 pre-application deadline. For more information on the TIGER II/Community Challenge Planning Grant Program and how to apply, please visit <http://www.hud.gov/offices/adm/grants/nofa10/huddotnofa.cfm>.

16. How does HUD plan to apply the Preferred Sustainability Status discussed in the NOFA?

HUD recognizes the commitment of regions to advance the Livability Principles and that demand for these funds will likely outstrip the number of grants that can be provided. In anticipation of this, HUD has created a Preferred Sustainability Status for all applicants who achieve a specified threshold score in their submission for the 2010 round of Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program. Applicants that meet this criterion will qualify for access to capacity building resources and preserve certain aspects of their application for next year's competition, among other benefits. For further information contact sustainablecommunities@HUD.gov or leave a message at (202) 402-7683 (this is not a toll-free number). If you are a hearing- or speech-impaired person, you may reach the above telephone number via TTY by calling the toll-free Federal Information Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

17. Is the logic model required?

No, it is not a required form the applicant completes in the application. It is only required from those who receive funding, which will be announced at a later time.

18. Are Factor Forms included in the 15 page appendix limit?

No, since Factor Forms are mandatory forms they do not count towards any page limit.

19. What is the award timeline?

Awardees will be evaluated over the course of 36 months after the awards are announced. Funds will be given out at once after awards are announced, the date awards are announced is not going to be released at this time.

20. Are there instructions for the SF-424?

Yes, there are instructions available on the [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) website and also through the following link:
<http://www.grants.gov/techlib/SF424Instructions.pdf>

21. When it comes to the letter of commitment establishing the Consortium, are electronic signatures acceptable or do you require original signatures?

We have not stated this in the NOFA; it has been left open to be decided by the applicant.

22. What if my planning document is too large to fit in the appendix?

The planning document for Category 2 applicants should be an executive summary of up to 3 pages included in the 15 page appendix limit.