



## **Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities**

Now accepting letters of interest for 2025! See [Applying for Assistance](#) to learn more.

Local land use decisions – such as transportation options, housing type and location, stormwater management and issues of equity – all have direct impacts on the health and environment of our communities. Founded in 2011, the Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities program works with local communities across the United States, including tribes and territories, to develop smart growth solutions and strategies in ways that benefit human health and the environment. The program uses an inclusive and locally-led process that strengthens local capacity, facilitates partnerships and creates a path forward to achieve community-identified goals.

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## **Background**

The Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities technical assistance program is delivered by EPA staff and EPA-hired consultant teams. Each technical assistance project spans a period of roughly eight months, including inclusive public engagement through a two-day workshop, the involvement of relevant decision-makers and potential public and private sector partners, and a report outlining the workshop process and specific next steps generated that the community could take to achieve its goals. The workshop focuses on the issues and priorities determined by the community.

The benefits each community gets from the process vary by project and are specific to the community. Some common benefits include:

- Engagement with residents and stakeholders around a specific topic, which yields valuable feedback and ideas as well as creating buy-in and community spirit around proposed initiatives.
- Creation of key partnerships and relationships both within the community and with state and federal staff and programs.
- The creation of a locally driven and expert-guided action plan that is both attainable and ambitious.

In past rounds of technical assistance, EPA has focused on topic areas such as infill development, equitable development and green and complete streets, as well as special topic areas like emerging mobility and regional disaster resilience. The tools typically consist of:

1. Agendas, presentations and exercises to help facilitate discussion around a given topic.
2. A targeted self-assessment, which helps the community and EPA team delve deeper into local issues to identify the most promising areas for progress.
3. An action-oriented and inclusive process that leads to an achievable next steps and partnerships.

Once EPA has used a tool in several communities, it may be refined to create a product that any community can use with limited outside assistance. Many of these products are highlighted below.

#### Building Blocks Toolkits and Strategies

- [Regional Resilience Toolkit](#) is a resource for multiple jurisdictions to coordinate on common disaster risks.
- [Flood Resilience Checklist](#) helps to prepare for flooding and plan for disaster resilience.
- [Attracting Infill Development in Distressed Cities](#) provides strategies to identify and overcome obstacles to downtown development.
- [Parking Spaces/Community Places](#) provides strategies and case studies for successful parking management.
- [Smart Growth Guidelines for Sustainable Design and Development](#) provides key principles for sustainable decisions at the location, site and building levels.
- [Creating Equitable, Healthy, and Sustainable Communities](#) provides strategies to manage neighborhood change and support local housing, culture, and economic goals.
- [Smart Growth Self-Assessment for Rural Communities](#) helps small cities and towns achieve their goals for sustainable development patterns and economic growth.

## Applying for Assistance

The Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities program is now accepting letters of interest! Interested parties can learn more about the current round of assistance and find instructions on how to submit a letter of interest here:

[Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities 2025 Request for Letters of Interest \(pdf\)](#) (718.57 KB, 10/30/2024)

The deadline to submit letters of interest is December 12, 2024 by 5:00 pm Eastern Time.

The program will provide planning assistance to local governments working in partnership with community organizations to help mitigate the effects of urban heat islands in overburdened communities. Research shows that neighborhoods with populations that are low-income and/or people of color often experience higher temperatures relative to adjacent neighborhoods in the same city.

Selected local governments will work with neighborhood residents alongside federal and state agency partners and consultants to participate in a planning process that helps identify the community's vision, goals and actions to:

- Incorporate smart growth principles.
- Increase green space and improve infrastructure to reduce the heat island effect.
- Improve livability.

As part of this round, OCR will also pilot a related effort to engage area youth in up to three of the five communities. OCR will work with school or neighborhood groups to meaningfully include youth voices in the planning process, introduce them to planning and sustainability career paths, and to ensure they have an active role in implementing the resulting action plan.

If you have questions about the program, please read the [Frequently Asked Questions About Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities](#).