

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities 2019 Request for Letters of Interest



Overview

Cities, regions, and states across the United States are facing natural disasters that can have devastating effects on life, property, the economy, and ecosystems. As more and more communities face the effects of natural disasters, decision makers and community members need tools and guidance to help them take action that can both protect them from natural disasters while also revitalizing economies, creating jobs, protecting clean air and water, and improving quality of life.

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. This round of Building Blocks will focus on helping regions that need assistance to build large-scale resilience to natural disasters and is intended to help them align resilience priorities across different federal, state, and local planning requirements and funding sources.

EPA is offering assistance to regional partnerships based on the new EPA and FEMA [*Regional Resilience Toolkit*](#). Regional partners are considered multiple jurisdictions that are working together, as well as entities that operate at a large geographic scale, such as county or tribal governments, regional planning organizations, watershed coalitions, councils of governments, or other partnerships that work at the multi-state, multi-county, or multi-city/town scale. This assistance is not intended for a single community.

Key Information

- **Eligibility:** The applicant can include multiple jurisdictions that are working together, as well regional organizations that operate at a multi-state, multi-county, or multi-city/town scale. The letter of interest can come from state, tribal, regional, and local governments, as well as nonprofit organizations that have a demonstrated partnership with a governmental entity.
- **Deadline:** 5:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on November 8, 2019.
- **How to apply:** Submit a two-page letter of interest.
- **Timeframe:** EPA expects to select three (3) recipients by the end of November and intends to provide all technical assistance by Fall 2020.

How the Program Works

1. Interested communities submit a letter of interest, in which they specifically outline how the *Regional Resilience Toolkit* is relevant to their region.
2. EPA reviews the letters of interest and selects three (3) recipient for assistance.
3. EPA contacts the selected recipient to schedule a workshop, discuss mutual expectations, roles and responsibilities, and review details about the program. During at least two conference calls before the workshop, direct consultation occurs between EPA staff, technical experts, and local decision-makers whose work relates to the project. The relevant decision-makers will vary by region and depend on the hazards and assets being delivered, but might include planning,

public safety, transportation, environmental, and economic development department heads; commissioners; senior municipal or regional staff; nonprofit and 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 build regional disaster resilience.
5. A “Next Steps Memo” detailing the engagement and outlining identified follow-up 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. (Please **do not** submit maps, letters of support, or other supplemental information.)

1. **Regional geography and partnership.** Define the geographic bounds of your regional partnership. Please describe who your key partners are and the history of the partnership, if any. Describe how you will work across departments, scales of government, and with other organizations in your region. If there is a clear lead for your partnership, please explain how this leadership role came about.
2. **Description of the disaster risk.** Applicants need to articulate the disaster risks facing the region and likely actions needed to address those risks. Disaster types might include hurricanes, earthquakes, sea level rise, wildfire, drought, extreme heat, tornadoes, volcanoes, winter storms, and flooding. Please include information about how this assistance would align with and support related efforts, including recovery from a recent natural disaster, planned updates to a local or multi-jurisdiction hazard mitigation plan, or other pre-disaster mitigation efforts, such as planing for strategic retreat.
3. **Support from elected officials and the public.** 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 (formal letters of support are not necessary):
 - Elected Officials Support: can include mayors, city council members, and representatives from other decision-making bodies with appropriate local, regional, or state governments.
 - Public or Community Support: can include neighborhood coalitions, community development groups, local business organizations, and community-based organizations from underrepresented communities.
4. **Describe your plan for engaging traditionally underrepresented communities**, including low-income, minority, tribal, and/or overburdened¹ communities, in the technical assistance

¹ 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.”

workshop. What are the key challenges facing overburdened communities and residents in hazardous areas?

5. **Describe the region’s expected capacity for implementation**, e.g., regional or local policy change, infrastructure or capital improvement projects, new incentives, etc. EPA generally looks to assist communities that are ready for implementation after the Building Blocks workshop is complete.
6. If applicable, **describe how this assistance would complement work being done in the region using other federal funding** (e.g., EPA brownfields grants or water infrastructure funds, U.S. HUD Community Development Block Grants, FEMA funds (Pre-disaster Mitigation, Flood Mitigation Assistance, or Hazard Mitigation Grant Program dollars), Economic Development Administration funds, Opportunity Zone designation, etc.
7. **Affirm that the community can provide the information or materials listed in the “What the Community Provides” section of the tool description** (below).
8. **List the primary point of contact including title, address, email, and phone number.**

The letter must be signed by an elected official or other representative of the region, which might include one or more local elected officials, a regional decision maker, or a nonprofit leader. **This signature represents the region’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 Abby Hall (hall.abby@epa.gov) no later than **November 8, 2019, at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.**

Please save your file using the following format: Name of Regional Partnership, Name of State. For example: Mid-America Regional Council, Kansas.

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 Abby Hall at hall.abby@epa.gov or 202-631-5915.

BUILDING BLOCKS TOOL FOR REGIONAL DISASTER RESILIENCE

As natural disasters impact more communities, decision-makers and community members can benefit from tools and guidance to develop regional disaster resilience action plans.

Bringing together partners from multiple cities, from public agencies and private businesses, and from community groups and nonprofits can result in the integration of disaster resilience into various planning processes – including hazard mitigation, land use planning, economic development, and equity – and cooperation at the local and regional scale.

Community Benefits

This tool will support multiple jurisdictions coming together to identify common disaster risks, important assets to protect, and a shared action plan for the larger region. Over the course of several months, EPA will support communities and their partners as they set resilience goals; identify natural hazards and prioritize assets to protect; and develop resilience strategies and implementation plans.

Areas of Focus for Planning and Workshop Technical Assistance

Disaster resilience is not specific to any single natural hazard and can address risks from wildfires, drought, extreme heat, flooding, earthquakes, hurricanes, landslides, sea level rise, winter storms, and more. Resilience can include actions that tackle immediate, pressing needs as well as protect long-term investments. Through this process, *each community will select a limited number of hazards and key assets to focus on.* Selected communities will be asked to demonstrate their commitment to implementation through a regulation or plan requirement, such as a land use, hazard mitigation, or economic development plan. Selected communities will also be expected to complete worksheets prior to the workshop to engage key partners and examine priority hazards and assets.

Who Should Attend:

- / Regional leaders and residents
- / City/county/regional staff, including emergency services, public works, and planning staff
- / Environmental justice advocates and community-based organizations
- / Elected officials, as appropriate
- / Nonprofits and philanthropies
- / State and federal agency staff

How It Works:

- / EPA will hold four workshop planning calls, plus a site visit by EPA staff.
- / Region will host a two-day in-person session with EPA to include:
 - *Public workshop to develop resilience goals.*
 - *In-depth technical session to do a rapid vulnerability assessment, prioritize resilience strategies, and develop an implementation plan.*
- / EPA will provide a final summary of the workshop and list of next steps.

What the Region Provides:

- / Lead organization to provide point of contact with time and effort to ensure inclusive participation and completion of worksheets before in-person workshop.
- / Local logistics, including organization of workshop and tour.
- / Marketing of public workshop.
- / Invitations to key stakeholders to attend technical session.
- / Attendance of appropriate local and regional officials and staff.
- / Decision-makers' commitment to attend the workshop, as relevant.

Outcomes:

- / Experience conducting meaningful participation for regional disaster resilience.
- / Enhanced understanding of vulnerabilities and assets.
- / Knowledge of steps to write a more in-depth vulnerability assessment.
- / Connection with new local, regional, state, and federal partners.
- / Identification of strategies and concrete next steps to take action for disaster resilience.