

Sustainable Communities Mini-Grant Program

Metroplan is seeking to develop partnerships with academicians in Central Arkansas to provide research, disseminate information about best practices, and evaluate local programs focused around sustainability. Through funding from a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant, Metroplan will fund up to 10 mini-grants of \$3,000-5,000 for research, workshops, and evaluation in order to encourage these partnerships.

Background:

Metroplan is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization for the Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway metropolitan area, and has operated as a council of local governments, representing cities and counties in the metropolitan statistical area since 1955. Metroplan has led the preparation, dissemination, and implementation of the long-range transportation plan for Central Arkansas for over five decades. In addition to transportation planning, Metroplan has taken the lead role in key regional issues through the years, starting with the recruitment of the Little Rock Air Force Base, leadership in determining a long-range water source through the Mid-Arkansas Water Alliance, and more recently with the development and adoption of the Central Arkansas Green Agenda.

Metroplan is the lead partner and fiscal agent for a three year \$1.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to develop a regional plan for sustainability for the Central Arkansas region (Pulaski, Saline, Faulkner and Lonoke counties). Plan activities are directed by Metroplan staff, assisted by a consortium of key stakeholders known as Imagine Central Arkansas Partners.

The Plan will address local priorities (transportation, housing, economic development, energy/environment and health), through the lens of the Livability Principles (below) adopted by HUD, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:

1. Provide more transportation choices.

Develop safe, reliable and economical transportation choices to decrease household transportation costs, reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote public health.

2. Promote equitable, affordable housing.

Expand location- and energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.

3. Enhance economic competitiveness.

Improve economic competitiveness through reliable and timely access to employment centers, educational opportunities, services and other basic needs by workers as well as expanded business access to markets.

4. Support existing communities.

Target federal funding toward existing communities—through such strategies as transit-oriented, mixed-use development and land recycling—to increase community revitalization, improve the efficiency of public works investments, and safeguard rural landscapes.

5. Coordinate policies and leverage investment.

Align federal policies and funding to remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding and increase the accountability and effectiveness of all levels of government to plan for future growth, including making smart energy choices such as locally generated renewable energy.

6. Value communities and neighborhoods.

Enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe, and walkable neighborhoods—rural, urban, or suburban.

In addition to meeting local and regional needs, grant programs will fulfill HUD Departmental Priorities related to Capacity Building, Knowledge Sharing, and Expanding Cross-cutting Policy Knowledge. This is where we need the assistance of faculty and student researchers, to:

- disseminate best practices
- encourage peer learning
- publish data analysis and research
- help incubate and test new ideas

We are looking for studies with a local/regional focus that are relevant to the broader national conversation on sustainability.

Disciplines That May Want to Participate/Types of Studies:

We anticipate that a wide range of disciplines can be involved in this process, doing a wide range of projects, but here are a few examples.

- Economics--hedonic price analysis of livable communities, economic impact studies
- Economic Development--strategic planning, business retention studies, retail analyses, job training programs
- Environmental Science--stormwater demonstration projects, water quality testing, solid waste and waste water planning
- Health--health benefits of active transportation, evaluation of Safe Route to School program on health
- Business--new finance models for mixed use development, cost-benefit analysis of adoption of energy codes
- Evaluation research on a variety of livable innovations
- Public policy--impact of local policy on housing affordability
- Education--impact of school siting decisions on sustainability, evaluation of work force training programs
- Planning/GIS--impact of local mixed use development or access management plans on traffic, demand estimations for public transit

Budget and Amount of Funding: \$30,000 is available to fund up to 10 mini-grants of \$3,000-5,000.

Funding will be provided on a cost reimbursement basis.

Anticipated Uses of Funding: Funding may be used to purchase data sets, equipment necessary for data collection, buy-out of faculty time, stipend to pay student assistants, etc.

Selection Process:

Preference in selection will be given to applicants from universities with the ability to waive collection of indirect costs, in order to maximize the amount that goes directly to research or other program activities. Preference will also be given to projects that can be completed within the HUD grant's three year time frame.

The first round of applications will be received through October 15, 2012. They will be reviewed by a committee of Imagine Central Arkansas Partners, with funding to be announced by November 1, 2012. If all funds are not expended in the first round, a follow-up round will be announced early in 2013.

Applications:

Applications of 3-5 pages containing the following information should be submitted to Marsha Guffey at mguffey@metroplan.org.

1. Name of researcher(s) and contact information (be sure to include email and phone number)
2. Description of proposed research
3. Description of researcher's previous background in proposed research area
4. Total budget for project
5. Amount requested, plus narrative to describe how the funds will be spent
6. Timeframe for research
7. Plan for dissemination of research, including publication in peer reviewed journals and other forums that could include *Arkansas Business*, local newspapers, etc. or, local workshops

Appendix

HUD Departmental Priorities

(1) Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing

HUD recognizes that successful program implementation can only occur in partnership with effectively prepared grantees. It is therefore critical to strengthen the capacity of each consortium by developing partnerships that will advance the objectives of proposed programs. HUD's Strategic Plan emphasizes the importance of strengthening the capacity of state and local partners to implement HUD programs, participate in decision-making and planning processes, and coordinate on cross-programmatic, place-based approaches through grantmaking and technical assistance. To receive policy priority points, applicants are expected to describe how they will achieve the following outcomes:

(a) Increase the skills and technical expertise of partner organizations to integrate regional transportation, housing, water, and other infrastructure plans, align federal planning and investment, increase participation and decision-making in developing and implementing a long-range planning vision, and reduce social and economic disparities for the low-income and communities of color within the target region. The applicant must describe the methods that will be used to achieve this outcome. Examples include in-service training, online information provision (e.g., webinars, podcasts, etc.), and structured observation of best practices. According to the proposed methods, the applicant should identify the anticipated outputs (e.g., number of people trained, number of training events, number of agencies equipped to engage in sustainable regional planning, volume of easily accessible training materials for targeted capacities, etc.) during the 3-year period of performance.

(b) Share knowledge among partners so that key personnel responsible for grant implementation coordinate cross-programmatic, place-based approaches. The applicant must describe the outreach methods that will be used to achieve this outcome. Examples include establishing regular partner dialogues, conducting occasional cross-regional briefings, and structured peer exchange. According to the proposed methods, the applicant should establish and specify the anticipated outputs (e.g., number of meetings, web postings, number of participating partners, total staff exposed to new learning and promising practice, number of briefings, issuance of monthly fact sheets) during the 3-year period of performance. HUD will work with grantees to support knowledge sharing and innovation by disseminating best practices, encouraging peer learning, publishing data analysis and research, and helping to incubate and test new ideas.

(2) Expand Cross-Cutting Policy Knowledge

Broadening the use of successful models to other communities requires definitive evidence of which policies work and how, and a plan for public dissemination of this information. To achieve full points, the applicant must indicate what data they and/or partner organizations will collect on outcomes for the

defined target area (e.g., changes in commuting time, improved health outcomes, VMT measures - for a more comprehensive listing of outcomes that could be measured for cross-cutting policy knowledge, see Section I.E). The grantee must document a plan to engage credible policy researchers to assist in the analysis of that data in order to measure policy impact, and clarify the extent of data that will be made available to those researchers through a data-sharing agreement.

(a) For household-level data, this may be an agreement with a university or other policy research group that regularly produces peer-reviewed research publications.

(b) For parcel-related data, this agreement may be with a regional planning, nonprofit, or government agency that provides consolidated local data on a regular basis to the public for free. The applicant should specifically describe how they intend to disseminate policy lessons learned during the planning process to a diverse range of potential audience, including policymakers, other regional consortia, and interested community leadership. The collection method and specific data elements will not be prescribed by HUD, but may be determined by the applicant.

The applicant must establish and provide the anticipated outputs within the period of performance. Examples include number of policy publications, number of research studies, anticipated distribution of findings, etc.