



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

**Frequently Asked Questions about HUD's FY2011 Sustainable Communities
Regional Planning Grants
UPDATED SEPTEMBER 12, 2011**

MOST Frequently Asked Questions:

Q. I am trying to understand the chart that accompanied the letter inviting us to submit a full application to the competition. What does the 'X' represent?

A. The chart at the bottom of the letter was guide to let you know if your pre-application as submitted failed any of the initial threshold tests. If you received an 'X' in the first box (Grantee met all threshold requirements required...) then all preliminary criteria were met and your previously submitted responses met the criteria. An 'X' in any subsequent box indicates that you should review the NOFA and determine how to address this threshold requirement more effectively before your full submission. Remember that all of these requirements must also be met in the full application, along with the additional threshold requirements introduced in the full application.

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

A. 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.

If a data point is from a year other than that requested on the form, either because you have access to newer data (e.g. census data from your area has been published) or because data is not available for the given year, please note the difference in the <Date Documented> field below the particular data point.

Q. When you click on the link in the row of 3.1

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/ohpi/hss/hsspubs.cfm>, it brings you to an Office Outlook Web Access page and requests a username and a password. What to do?

A. Try this link instead: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2008/index.cfm>.

Q. Can federal funds be used for match or leverage?

A. No. Federal dollars will not count towards match or leverage unless otherwise permitted by that program's authorizing statute, but applicants that demonstrate that they will integrate activities

supported by other HUD programs, Partnership agencies (EPA and DOT), and other federal agencies for the specific planning efforts supported by this grant will receive a greater rating.

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

A. 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.

Q. Can a Council of Governments (COG) be the consortium of local governments and the lead agency? Is it necessary to form another consortium or can a COG act as the consortium and bring in other partners?

A. A new consortium must be established. Individual jurisdictions who are participants in the COG can opt in as individual members.

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

A. 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 \$1,000,000 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 \$600,000 and the maximum is \$3,000,000.
- For rural and small town areas with a population below 200,000, the minimum grant amount is \$400,000 and the maximum is \$1,500,000.

Q: For successful applicants who had more than 20 or 30 partners within their proposals, how were they able to convey the many letters of commitment to HUD within the application page limit requirements?

A. Please follow the instructions within the NOFA pertaining to letters of commitment and other attachment requirements.

Q. How many characters are allowed in the description of the project narrative in the SF-424 for the pre-application?

A. 150. However, if the descriptive title of applicant's project (Box 15) is more than 150 characters, the applicant has the option of creating a document and attaching it to the 424.

Q. We understand from the General Section that there is a 150 MB limit for the entire application? Is this true?

A. Yes.

Q. Can you clarify when the required match will be due if the application is successful in meeting the pre-application requirements and the applicant has been notified to submit a full application? The NOFA notes that the match is required upon signing of the cooperative agreement (p. 20). In essence – at time of full application submittal? And does this match need to be “in-hand” or just committed?

A. The match must be committed by the lead applicant at the time of the full application submittal. When the cooperative agreement is signed, it becomes a binding document for all members of the consortium to contribute their match during the life of the grant, in accordance with the workplan developed to execute the project.

Q. Does the list of intended core consortium partners in the pre-application exactly have to match the partners listed in the final application?

A. No. However, please note that if an applicant alters an approved consortium list and the new list is found to not meet threshold, the applicant will be ruled ineligible and there will be no ability to appeal the decision.

Q. On page 43 of the NOFA for the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant, it says “the applicant must use Rating Factor 2 Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities (OSHC) Form 2010 to provide quantitative and qualitative data for the ten (10) specified, readily-collectible data points.” Is the 2010 a typo? Is it supposed to be 2011? Or can I go ahead and start looking for the data points listed on last year’s form?

A. Not a typo. It is just a coincidence that the form is numbered 2010. The data points will be posted on the hud.gov/sustainability website shortly.

And plenty of additional legitimate Frequently Asked Questions...

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

A. 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>

Q. Can pre-existing planning funds be counted towards match or leverage?

A. Only funds that are expended during the effective period of the grant can count towards match or leverage.

Q. Who exactly is eligible for the HUD FY2011 Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants?

A. An eligible applicant under the FY2011 Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program is a consortium of units of government, regional planning agencies, and non-profit organizations. Allied public and private sector partners can join the consortium as participants in order to develop a regional plan. If a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) exists within a region, it must be a part of the consortium. Councils of Governments are eligible if they meet the requirements described in the NOFA.

Q. Why is HUD requiring the application for its FY2011 Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grants to come from a consortium?

A. 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.

Q. How does our consortium know which of the two funding categories is appropriate?

A. 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.

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

A. 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 FY2011 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.

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

A. 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. This year's NOFA recognizes the important roles that states can play by reserving points for applications that align their planning efforts with state efforts that reinforce the Federal Partnership's Livability Principles. 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.

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

- A.** 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.

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

- A.** First, Congress requires that a minimum of \$17.5 million of the FY2011 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.

Q. What is the Community Challenge grant? I could not locate any information about that grant; only the Sustainable Regional Community grant.

- A.** HUD's \$28 million Community Challenge Planning Grant Program will foster reform and reduce barriers to achieving affordable, economically vital, and sustainable communities. Such efforts may include amending or replacing local master plans, zoning codes, and building codes on a jurisdiction wide basis or in a specific neighborhood, district, corridor, or sector to promote mixed-use development, affordable housing, the reuse of older buildings and structures for new purposes, and similar activities with the goal of promoting sustainability at the local or neighborhood level. Please visit www.hud.gov/sustainability for more details.

Q. Is there a geographic distribution set for the 2011?

- A.** No. We do not even know yet who will apply!

Q: Is only the lead applicant required to do either a letter of intent and or a pre- app ?

- A.** The Lead Applicant is responsible for submitting the Pre-Application to the Regional Planning Grant NOFA on behalf of the consortium.

Q. For category 2 eligibility, will it be acceptable to reference multiple adopted plans for the region that work together to create an overall sustainability plan (i.e. long range transportation plan, comprehensive plans for jurisdictions, regional planning council's regional plan)?

- A.** Yes, but HUD reserves the right to determine whether the plans submitted represent a comprehensive commitment that has been adopted by the appropriate entities to constitute an overall sustainability plan that is prepared to be implemented.

Q: In reference to Category 2 funding - it sounds like we are being discouraged from applying if we do not have a RPSD in place. It says in the NOFA that Category 2 funding is for "fine-tuning existing regional plans so that they address the full complement of Livability Principles..."?

A. The NOFA contains a litmus test that you can use to determine whether you should submit for Category 1 or 2. During the Pre-Application, HUD will inform those who choose to apply as Category 2 whether they should do so or whether they should submit a Category 1 application.

Q. Could you talk more about what the “Preferred Sustainability Status” is and how these are selected, etc.?

A. HUD will recognize the commitment of regions to advance the Livability Principles. All applicants selected for funding or achieving a minimum threshold score in their submission for the 2011 round of the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program will qualify for Preferred Sustainability Status, which signifies that the region is ready to advance planning that prioritizes sustainability and inclusion as core outcomes of community development. Applicants that meet this criterion will qualify for several benefits, including access to capacity building resources and potential points in a number of funding opportunities managed by HUD and potential future opportunities from other federal agencies such as DOT and EPA. 74 regions achieved this status in FY2010.

Q: If a consortium received Preferred Sustainability Status for the 2010 application to develop a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development, will the consortium still retain its status if it pursues grant funding under category 2?

A. The status will be retained. The consortium will still need to meet all requirements for being permitted to pursue a Category 2 application.

Q. If your consortium received Preferred Sustainability Status in the 2010 application, what happens if one or more consortium members drop out and are replaced with others? Does the consortium still retain the Preferred Sustainability Status?

A. HUD will determine whether the Status is retained based on the degree of change in the composition of the consortium, but the agency understands that some shifts in participation are inevitable.

Q. Can a consortium or subset of partners of these consortiums apply to BOTH a Category 1 and Category 2 grant?

A. No.

Q. Is there a minimum geographical area limit on for this grant (i.e. number of local municipalities)

A. Please follow the instructions within the NOFA pertaining to geographic requirements for application.

Q. If the consortia in the region plans to go after a category 2 grant, how likely that a separate regional consortia might receive a category 1 grant (assuming it is a highly rated grant)?

A. Only one application is allowable per region.

Q. How should we consider the Sustainable Communities Capacity Building NOPI in developing applications for the Regional Planning Grants?

A. There was not a Capacity Building NOPI, but there was a NOFA for entities seeking to provide grant assistance to grantees of this program. This should not influence your application.

Q. What role if any can a private sector company play in the application process and/or development process? I'm familiar with the follow up RFQ and RFP development. Yet, are there opportunities in the coalitions/consortiums?

A. Private entities may be participants in the consortium and should work with the consortium to determine how best they might contribute to the application.

Q. Is it true that the state cannot be the lead applicant, but can only be a partner in the consortium?

A. The issue for a state is not that it cannot be a lead applicant, but that no entity can be a lead applicant in more than one application. For all but the smallest of states, it is difficult for the state to choose one region with which it would perform the lead applicant role, and in those same places the scale of the grant would seem to make the state taking the lead on a statewide approach prohibitive. But the state could have as active a role as it could manage in as many grants in its jurisdiction as it desires.

Q. Will the required forms (e.g. Rating Factor 2 form) only be available when the Pre-Application comes down from grants.gov and the full application is posted, or are they available now?

A. The forms required for the full application will be posted online when HUD posts the final NOFA for the program shortly after the pre-application deadline.

Q. On page 16 of the NOFA, the table with the medium sized unit makes no reference to type of region, while the FAQ (updated 8/5/11) calls the medium size units medium sized metropolitan areas". In order to qualify for the medium sized designation, does the consortium area have to be a "metropolitan" area?

A. Follow the language of the NOFA. The appropriate grant request range is based on the population of the region that the selected geography contains.

Q. We are trying to submit a pre-application to the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant in Category 2. To qualify for Category 2, the NOFA requires applicants to submit a Regional Plan. We are assuming that the Regional Plan may have to be provided through 'Question 15. Descriptive Title of the Applicants' under SF-424 of the pre-application. Should the Regional Plan be submitted as an attachment to this question 15 of SF-424?

A. Yes. Please attach the document using the attachment button located beneath Question 15 of the SF-424.

Q. For the SF424 Form: What is the Competition Identification No.?

A. FR-5500-N-30.

Q. Do you know which federal agencies/programs allow you to count federal funds as allowable match for the HUD grant?. Under Cost Sharing/Matching, the NOFA states that a 20% match is required and that Federal funds aren't eligible unless a program's authorizing statute allows it. Can you provide an example of a program whose statute allows for this?

A. For the most clear information on this question, you should contact your program officer for the federal program in question to determine if their authorizing statute allows the funding to be used as match in another grant program.

Q. What guidelines are there regarding what can/cannot count as match?

A. Guidelines for what counts as match are clearly set forth on p.28 of the Program NOFA, as well as in the General Section.

Q. In describing the content for the pre-application, the NOFA says "A narrative statement identifying the amount of HUD funds requested". Do you have any additional guidance on creating that narrative statement, such as a page (or word/character) limit, font/margins requirements, or outline for narrative components?

A. A simple statement describing the specific amount of the HUD request is all that is required.

Q. In the case of a state grant program that is partially federally funded and partially state funded, can we claim any portion of those grant funds/activities as match for the Sustainable Communities Regional Grant?

A. The state dollars that are supporting the effort and are specifically committed to the activities pertaining to the development of the Sustainable Communities Regional Plan can be counted as match.

Q. For consortium members (not the lead applicant) that will be providing in-kind services in the form of staff time, do we need to list each of their contributing staff individually, or just the organization, on the budget worksheet?

A. Any key staff whom the consortium knows will be working on the project should be identified in the SF424CBW. If the staff is not yet identified, but the position is committed, then the position should be listed.

Q. Can the amount in the pre-application be modified for the full application? Do we need to include the amount of match/leveraged resources we will be using?

A. The request amount can be adjusted between the pre-application and final application deadlines. Please note that if an applicant alters an approved request amount and the new request is found to not meet threshold, the applicant will be ruled ineligible and there will be no ability to appeal the decision. The pre-application does not require a statement of the anticipated match, but the full application requires a fully documented match declaration as described in the NOFA.

Q. Does the final application's 424 have to exactly match in amount and categories the figures presented in the preapplication?

A. See the previous Q&A regarding amounts. Applicants must apply in the grant category for which they are approved during the pre-application process.

Q. We are currently applying for the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grant and I have a question about the pre-application. The pre-application calls for a list of intended core consortium partners. In order to supply that information do letters of participation need to be included in the pre-application or just a list?

A. Letters of commitment are not required for the pre-application but will be required when the full application is submitted.