Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities  
2019 Request for Letters of Interest  

In partnership with the St. Louis Vacancy Collaborative’s Anti-Displacement Working Group

Key Information

- **Eligibility**: We are looking for neighborhood organizations or other place-based groups in St. Louis City interested in exploring equitable development issues and developing policy recommendations for preventing displacement, in partnership with the EPA Building Blocks Program and the Vacancy Collaborative’s Anti-Displacement Working Group.
- **Deadline**: 5:00 p.m. Central Standard Time on January 24, 2020.
- **How to apply**: Submit a two-page letter of interest (see “How to Apply”)
- **Timeframe**: EPA expects to select one or two recipients by February 2020 and provide all technical assistance by July 2020.

Overview

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is helping communities plan for more equitable development using data and policy discussions facilitated by EPA resources. In 2020, the EPA plans to convene a workshop in a St. Louis community to discuss concerns and challenges around development. This Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities program is geared toward communities that are relatively new to equitable development planning, but that have capacity to implement some policy recommendations tailored to their circumstances.

For this workshop, the EPA is partnering with the Anti-Displacement Working Group (ADWG) of the St. Louis Vacancy Collaborative (VC). The ADWG identifies ways to help St. Louisans stay in the homes and neighborhoods of their choice. The group is concerned with equitable development, preventing displacement, and the quantity and quality of affordable housing in St. Louis. The St. Louis Vacancy Collaborative (VC) is a coalition of community members, private and non-profit stakeholders, and City agencies committed to reducing vacant property in St. Louis. The VC helps to coordinate existing vacancy efforts under one umbrella and empowers the public and private sectors to work together toward solutions.

Through the Building Blocks program, EPA and the ADWG hope to assist a St. Louis neighborhood (or set of neighborhoods) with exploring these issues and potential solutions. Communities most appropriate for Building Blocks recognize they have concerns or challenges around development and are trying to kick-start efforts to address a specific local issue. Specifically, this program is best-suited for groups that (1) have sufficient organizational capacity and (2) are in the early planning stages of addressing a particular issue related to equitable development.
How the Program Works

1. Participants submit a letter of interest, in which they specifically outline how the Equitable Development tool is relevant to their development challenge.

2. EPA reviews the letters of interest and selects one to two neighborhood-based organizations or groups for assistance. Reviewers will include staff from EPA’s Office of Sustainable Communities, and the Vacancy Collaborative’s Anti-Displacement Working Group. We expect to select recipients by February 2020 and will notify those who were not selected.

3. EPA contacts the selected organization or group to schedule a workshop, discuss mutual expectations as well as roles and responsibilities, and review details about the program. During at least two conference calls before the workshop, direct consultation occurs between EPA staff and technical experts and local decision-makers whose work relates to the specific challenge for which the community is seeking assistance. The relevant decision-makers will vary by community but might include planning, transportation, environmental, and economic development department heads; commissioners; senior municipal staff; community leaders, elected officials, and residents.

4. EPA’s contractors, along with EPA headquarters and/or regional office staff, conduct a one-to two-day workshop in the selected neighborhood(s) to deliver the technical assistance, which includes a community meeting. Workshops will occur between April and June 2020. A “Next Steps” memo identifying options for specific next steps the community could follow to implement the ideas generated during the technical assistance workshop is delivered to the community. A site visit by EPA may also be conducted before the workshop as needed.

How to Apply
Submit a letter of interest—no longer than two (2) pages—that contains the following information.

1. Describe the nature of a challenge related to equitable development facing your neighborhood(s), including any relevant data to demonstrate the challenge and describe how this challenge affects low-income, minority, tribal, and/or other communities facing disproportionate environmental or health risks.

2. Explain how the proposed workshop would address the above-mentioned challenge, being as specific as possible about the challenge to be addressed and a location or site of interest. (See p. 4 for details)

3. Describe your plan for including traditionally underrepresented communities, including low-income, minority, and other communities that may experience disproportionate environmental harms and risks.

4. Identify your preferred timing for the workshop. The proposed timeframe for these workshops is between April and June 2020. Please provide a preliminary idea of the best dates for your group or organization.
5. **Describe the group or organization’s expected capacity for implementation**, e.g., local policy change, physical improvements to the neighborhood, new incentives, etc. EPA generally looks to assist communities that are ready to pursue implementation once the Building Blocks workshop and next steps memo are complete.

6. If applicable, **describe how this assistance would complement work being done in the neighborhood(s) using other federal funding** (e.g., EPA brownfields grants, U.S. HUD Community Development Block Grants, U.S. DOT TIGER/BUILD grants) and/or how this workshop would align with a local or regional planning process.

7. **Affirm that the group or organization can provide the information or materials listed in the “What the Community Provides” section of the tool description.**

8. List the **primary point of contact** and other key stakeholders who would be involved in the technical assistance work, including title, address, email, and phone number of the primary contact.

The letter must be signed by the executive director (or equivalent leader) of the neighborhood group or organization. **This signature represents the group or organization’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 Chip Gurkin (Gurkin.Charles@epa.gov) no later than **5:00 p.m. Central Standard Time on January 24, 2020.**

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](https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/frequently-asked-questions-faqs-about-building-blocks-sustainable-communities). If your question is not answered there, please contact Mr. Gurkin at Gurkin.Charles@epa.gov or 202-564-2778.

**EPA’s Role**
EPA bears full responsibility for contracting the services to be provided and distributing an appropriate number of hard-copy publications and/or tools to the community. EPA staff will be integrally involved in all planning, including planning the workshop, and reviewing all materials developed in association with the workshop.

**Anti-Displacement Working Group’s Role**
The Anti-Displacement Working Group of the Vacancy Collaborative serves as a local partner helping to convene this workshop. Members of the working group will help bring essential stakeholders and resources to the table. Members of the working group will strive to listen and respond to the needs of the successful applicant in planning the workshop.
CREATING EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

Equitable development provides residents of all incomes, races, and ethnicities real opportunities to participate in and benefit from decisions that shape the places where they live. Equitable development approaches integrate people-focused strategies (efforts that support community residents) with place-focused strategies (efforts that stabilize and improve the neighborhood environment). Learning to identify and apply equitable development strategies can prepare your community to get involved and guide local investments to deliver benefits that can be shared by all.

Community Benefits

This workshop will support community members in coming together to discuss where they have been, where they are today, and how they can play a role in shaping where they are going. Over the course of several months, EPA will support selected organizations and workshop participants as they implement new outreach and participatory strategies; create a digital community asset map; exchange best practices with community development experts; and develop actions for a local site or area that can serve as a starting point for inclusive progress.

Areas of Focus for Planning and Workshop Technical Assistance

Equitable development is about more than affordable housing—it also includes other factors that contribute to residents’ quality of life, such as access to high-quality employment; safe, walkable, and bike-friendly neighborhoods; transportation connections; environmentally-safe and healthy communities; support for local culture; and other amenities and community institutions. Through this process, each selected community will select one or two of these factors, along with a local site or area, to target for an initial action plan. Selected communities will be asked to demonstrate their commitment to meaningful and diverse participation. Selected communities will also be expected to complete a self-assessment and other tools to examine and document key local data related to these factors.

Who Should Attend:
/ Community and neighborhood leaders and residents
/ City/county staff, including economic development and planning staff
/ Local environmental justice and equitable development advocates
/ Elected officials, as appropriate
/ Other stakeholders with interest in selected site and/or area of focus

How It Works:
/ EPA, the applicant, and ADWG members will hold four workshop planning sessions, potentially including a site visit by EPA.
/ The Community will host two-day in-person session with EPA to include:
  - A public workshop to develop a digital community asset map
  - An in-depth strategy discussion to review opportunities, discuss equitable development strategies, and develop next steps
/ EPA will provide a report from the workshop and a next steps memo, in collaboration with the community.

What the Community Provides with support from the ADWG:
/ A lead organization and contact with adequate time and attention to ensure inclusive participation and program completion.
/ All local logistics, including organization of workshop and tour.
/ Marketing and invitations to key stakeholders to attend technical session.
/ Attendance of appropriate local government officials and staff.
/ Decision-makers’ commitment to attend the workshop, as relevant.
/ The ADWG will help perform these functions.

Outcomes:
/ Meaningful participation of interested parties, building a broader coalition.
/ Enhanced understanding of community assets and opportunities.
/ Knowledge of principles and best practices for equitable development.
/ Connection with new local, regional, and federal partners.
/ Concrete next steps to promote equitable growth.