Partners for Places General Grants Program
Request for Proposals - Round 14

Introduction

Partners for Places is a respected and established matching grant program hosted by The Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities (TFN). In partnership with the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), this fund creates opportunities for cities and counties in the United States and Canada to improve communities by building partnerships between local government leaders and local place-based foundations. Through these partnerships, national funders invest in sustainable projects through a one-to-one match developed to promote social equity, a healthy environment, and a strong economy for all residents.

Through these bi-annual investments, Partners for Places fosters the creation and maintenance of long-term local government and philanthropic relationships that can work to advance urban sustainability in North American communities over time. Since 2012, the Partners for Places program has funded 1111 projects. Lessons learned from awarded projects are posted on these pages by topic.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) will promote equitable and sustainable communities by supporting planning processes or project implementation to advance stated community sustainability priority areas. This RFP also contains dedicated funding to support green stormwater infrastructure projects. Partners for Places partners with the Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange (GILE) to assess the merit of any received green stormwater infrastructure proposals. National funders and fund partners are described in the Appendix.

Funding Opportunity Timeline

Table 1 shows the Round 14 timeline. If a team is not quite ready to apply, Round 15 will open in June, 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 5, 2018</td>
<td>RFP released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 11, 2018 at 2 pm EST, register <a href="#">here</a></td>
<td>Informational webinar for interested applicants</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 31, 2019 by 11:59 p.m., any time zone</td>
<td>Proposals due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 6, 2019</td>
<td>Awards announced</td>
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RFP Design Supports New Fund Strategy

In 2018, Partners for Places adopted a [2018-2023 strategic plan](#). This RFP is designed to award projects that advance the vision, mission, theory of change, and goals of this new fund strategy:

**Vision:** strong local government and philanthropic partnerships result in equitable, sustainable communities.

**Mission:** to enhance local capacity that can create equitable and sustainable communities by building local government, local foundation, and national foundation partnerships to fund and implement priority projects.

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1 This total is through Round 13 and includes the Partners for Places Equity Pilot projects.

2 Successful proposals can be shared only with permission from the grantee. Reach out directly to the lead listed in the posted lessons learned document for that project, or contact Ashley Quintana with a request to reach out to them.
Theory of Change: Achieving equitable and sustainable communities can be accelerated by increasing local funding and implementation capacity; therefore, Partners for Places strives to:

1. foster relationships between local sustainability practitioners, local foundations, and national funders;
2. align local and national sustainability priorities, and;
3. enhance national funding capacity to invest in urban sustainability practices with local partners.

Fund Goals

1. Continuous improvement through flexible, responsive, and adaptive program management.
2. Align local and national sustainability priorities.
3. Build relationships between local practitioners, local funders, and national funders.
4. Align local government, local funder, and national funder priorities around urban sustainability.
5. Coordinate collaboration and collective action at the local level to advance the sustainability field.

Cross-Network Shared Funding Priorities

The Big Picture. Networks like TFN, USDN and GILE collaborate to identify and develop high-impact solutions\(^3\) that advance urban sustainability. The Innovation Pathway in Figure 1. shows how ideas and practices evolve to advance the field of urban sustainability. Project ideas proceed through a set of stages divided roughly into two categories:

- **Identifying / Developing** (01-03).
  Identifying, researching, and conceptualizing an idea for prototyping, testing, and refining. The USDN and Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance Innovation Funds specialize here.

- **Scaling** (04-05). Spreading a proven practice to other communities through standardization and adoption. Partners for Places, GILE's annual RFP, and the USDN Peer Learning Exchange specialize here.

High-impact practices.\(^4\) Partners for Places RFPs have traditionally supported USDN member-identified priority areas. In 2018, USDN members are focusing on greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction, climate resilience, and equity as over-arching network priorities, and the need to address all three of these themes in an integrated manner whenever possible. Partners for Places proposals are encouraged but not required to align with these priorities.

Near-term GHG high-impact practices are classed into 4 topics: **transportation, energy supply, building energy use, and consumption/waste reduction.** GHG reduction high-impact practices represent:

- practices with high aggregate impact potential across U.S. and Canadian cities and counties;
- practices where communities are ready to make on-the-ground change in the next three years; and

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\(^3\) “High impact solutions” are defined as innovations that allow urban sustainability directors to change established governance and operational structures by finding new and better ways for local governments to improve community social, environmental, and economic wellbeing.

\(^4\) **Catalyzing Sustainability Impact: A City-Led Process to Invest in High Impact Practices**
• practices with high GHG reduction potential that also have the potential to create other important benefits, such as increased resilience, social equity, and job creation.

**Climate resiliency priorities are as follows:**

• accelerate effective action on climate resilience and advance local climate-related initiatives through peer learning and deeper collaboration;
• make the process of integrating climate resilience into existing plans and processes and taking action to enhance climate resilience easier;
• help stakeholders and partners more effectively support local climate resilience progress; and
• position local governments as a leading partner in the climate adaptation/resilience field of practice.

**Embedding social equity into all project work means that there is a recognition of the need to:**

• deconstruct dysfunctional and inequitable systems;
• shift the way decisions are made to ensure more equitable plans, projects, policies, and programs; and
• break down barriers to influence for disenfranchised or vulnerable populations within a community in a manner that provides resiliency in the face of climate change.

**Green infrastructure includes soil-water-plant systems that intercept stormwater by:**

• infiltrating a portion of it into the ground;
• evaporating a portion of it into the air; and
• in some cases, release a portion of it slowly back into the sewer system.

Partners for Places encourages project alignment with GHG reduction, climate resilience, green infrastructure, and equity priorities. Projects at the nexus of these topics are also encouraged. Points are awarded to proposals that show this alignment. Reference Table 2 for the scoring criteria.

**Key Points to Make in the Application Form**

This RFP’s Proposal Form, located here, is designed to help applicants structure a strong proposal that speaks directly to the scoring criteria. When writing the application, there are three key things to remember:

**Partners for Places wants applicants to show that they are building lasting working relationships:**

• Creating vibrant communities is a group effort. Place-based foundations offer unique knowledge of their communities and the ability to provide seed money for important projects. Local governments offer the power to move projects through planning and development.5

• Local governments are natural allies for community-based foundations. By combining forces, they can become a powerful partnership promoting more equitable, healthy, and resilient places.
  
  o USDN and GILE encourages members to reach out to their local, place-based foundations to develop project ideas and jointly apply for matching funds from this grant pool.
  
  o TFN and investors in Partners for Places encourage local, place-based foundations to develop relationships with local governments and apply to this RFP.

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5 Local government and local foundations work closely together in Baltimore, Cleveland, Dubuque, St. Louis, Vancouver and other communities, but this is still the exception, rather than the rule. Partners for Places would like to change this dynamic.
Partners for Places projects have resulted in: (1) follow-on projects, (2) strong and robust working relationships between local sustainability directors and place-based funders, (3) new sustainability practices, and (4) new local sources of financial support for sustainability work.

- Applicants must show throughout the narrative that by combining forces, proposal partners can become a powerful force to promote more equitable, healthy, and resilient places.

**Partners for Places wants applicants to show thoughtful strategy by highlighting prioritization:**

- Urban sustainability is all encompassing, so achieving it happens by goal setting and prioritization.
- Applicants must link to the specific stated community goal the project or planning process supports and make the case for why the project they are proposing directly supports this goal.

**Partners for Places wants applicants to embed social equity into project design and decision making:**

- Community sustainability cannot be achieved if one people group is impacted by chronic stressors like population growth and climate change impacts more than another people group.
- The social equity dimension of sustainability seeks: (1) fair distribution of burdens and benefits of actions among current and future stakeholders; (2) access to resources in a way that is not reliant on position or group; and (3) inclusion for all stakeholders in decision-making processes.
- Applicants must show that proposed planning processes and projects engage and benefit people of color, people with low incomes, residents of immigrant and refugee communities, and any other historically disenfranchised local people group by incorporating the following four design elements:
  - **Distributional access.** Programs and policies result in fair distributions of benefits and burdens across all segments of a community, prioritizing those with highest need;
  - **Procedural inclusion.** Inclusive, accessible, authentic engagement and representation in the process occurs to develop or implement plans, programs, and/or policies;
  - **Structural accountability.** Decision-makers institutionalize accountability; decisions are made with a recognition of the historical, cultural, and institutional dynamics and structures that have routinely advantaged privileged groups in society and resulted in chronic, cumulative disadvantage for subordinated groups; and
  - **Transgenerational impact.** Decisions consider generational impacts and do not result in unfair burdens on future generations.

*Partners for Places applicants and grantees are strongly encouraged to take the USDN Equity Foundations training, publicly available here. Points are awarded for doing so if completed worksheets are provided with the proposal packet. Membership is not required to take this training.*

**Selection Process**

Proposals are TFN staff-vetted and peer-reviewed. Award decisions are made through point compilation from a Selection Committee comprised of foundation officers and local government leaders. A subcommittee of funders and local government staff reviews and scores the green stormwater infrastructure projects, recommending proposals to award to the Selection Committee. Committee scores matter. Reference Table 2.

**Available Funding and Project Lifespan**

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6 Planning processes and project implementation can be scaled to neighborhoods, city limits, or county-wide.
All Partners for Places grants are made in U.S. dollars (USD). They require a one-to-one match required by one or more local, place-based foundations. The Round 14 grant pool will likely support 6-12 projects:

- **One-year awards** are typically between $25,000 - $75,000 USD, executed over 12 months.
- **Two-year projects** are typically between $50,000 - $150,000 USD, executed over 24 months.
  - An application requesting two years of project support requires an up-front two-year matching commitment from local funder(s).
  - The applicant must delineate milestones over 24 months, so the Selection Committee can see cash flow requirements over the life of the project
  - An explanation of the importance of 2 years versus one for project lifespan, investment, and outcomes is also needed.
- The Selection Committee also considers proposals that advance projects funded in earlier rounds.
  - Two-year and renewal proposals must demonstrate how an additional award/funds will bring appreciable and quantifiable outcomes beyond the first year or initial award.

**Letters of Commitment and Support**

The Selection Committee must know that a local government sustainability director or water manager and the funding partner(s) have worked together to develop the proposal. It should be clear that the funder is intending to support this project financially, subject to board review and approval.

- A letter(s) of commitment or intent to commit is sufficient to make an application eligible for review.
  - However, in order for TFN to release the matching grant, the grant letter or grant agreement must be received from the local partnering funder(s) showing proof of the match within three months of the award date.
- Green stormwater infrastructure proposal packets should also include a letter of support from any water departments named in the application form.

**Eligibility Requirements**

**Project Eligibility.** Successful proposals are for planning processes or projects that local government sustainability leaders or water managers, and local, place-based funder(s) consider important to advancing sustainability goals in their communities. The project must either:

1. advance a key aspect of one of the plans listed below;
2. support creation of one of the plans listed below; or
3. address an area identified for improvement/implementation for certified STAR Communities.  

Eligible plans include:

1. a community-focused sustainability, climate action, adaptation/resilience, equity, water, or comprehensive plan provision that specifically addresses sustainability; or
2. any multi-issue plan endorsed by the mayor or manager that explicitly states and pursues the goal of integrating and/or balancing economic development, environmental quality, and social equity.

Green stormwater infrastructure projects should advance stated water-related sustainability goals. While the Selection Committee will consider a wide range of projects for support, there are key attributes that the

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7 In 2018, the STAR Communities nonprofit organization merged with the U.S. Green Building Council. Partners for Places is actively observing the impacts of this transition on the STAR rating system and community interactions. Currently, Partners for Places continues to use STAR classifications to track investments by topic and continues to support communities trying to meet their STAR objectives.
committee looks for when reviewing the proposals, detailed in the selection criteria in Table 2. Partners for Places will not support existing local government staff salaries, major capital projects, or endowments.

Eligible Applicants. The proposal must consist of a team of these partners:

(1) the sustainability director of a city or a county for general applicants, OR a water director of a city, county, or utility (for green infrastructure applicants); and

(2) the local, place-based foundation(s).

The proposal can be submitted via email by either partner.

A sustainability director may include a USDN core or associate member,8 a member of a USDN-affiliated partner network, or any person who leads a multi-department and community-wide urban sustainability initiative from within a city or a county government in the United States or Canada.

A water department or water utility director may include decision-makers from local governments or local water utilities. They must be based in a city or county in the United States or Canada.

A local, place-based foundation may include a community foundation or a private/corporate foundation that focuses on a greater metropolitan area. The local match may not be provided by a national investor in the Partners for Places fund. Each city or county may only submit one application per Partners for Places investment cycle and are ineligible to apply if they already have an open Partners for Places award.

The guidance document here expands on eligibility. It answers frequently asked questions.

Eligible Grant Recipients. Local, place-based foundation, a public charity (501c3) created by a city or county government to accept grants, or a partnering nonprofit organization may receive funding post-award.

Selection Criteria

During the Partners for Places award selection process, proposals are evaluated by the Selection Committee and awarded points. Please note that there is often less than a one-point difference between a project that is awarded a matching grant and one that is not. For this reason, applicants are strongly encouraged to closely review and write to the scoring criteria in Table 2, to maximize scores in each category. General and Green Stormwater Infrastructure projects will be scored against the same criteria, showing goal alignment with the Partners for Places vision.

Table 2. Selection Criteria for General and Green Stormwater Infrastructure Proposals.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>This project will <strong>foster a new and/or strengthen an existing collaborative relationship</strong> between a local government(s) and a local foundation(s)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>This proposal succinctly <strong>outlines the roles and responsibilities</strong> of local government(s) and local foundation(s) in (1) proposal development, and (2) in implementation process</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>This project will <strong>advance qualified community plan goal(s), create a qualified plan, or improve/implement an area identified in the Certified STAR Communities process</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>This project is <strong>strategically designed</strong> so that outputs help to produce desired outcomes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The proposal shows how <strong>success will be measured</strong>, including equity progress</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The project will engage the community and <strong>create or enhance local community</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
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8 At least fifty percent of annual Partners for Places investments will go to projects involving members of USDN.

9 Each scoring criteria is represented in the application form as a question to answer. More detail and guidance is provided to each in that form.
This proposal embeds social equity into project outreach and design and will work to reduce disparities for the most marginalized local communities.

At least one of the application partners has completed the Equity Foundations training.

This project builds on previous work and the team possesses the right topical knowledge.

This project has the potential to produce field-building impact(s); it aligns with the shared network priorities of high impact practices, social equity, and/or climate resiliency.

Proposal Packet Requirements

A complete proposal packet includes four components: (1) a Partners for Places proposal form (here), which is a Word file not exceeding 10 pages; (2) a Partners for Places project budget form (here), which is an Excel file that highlights projected revenue and expenses; (3) a grant recipient’s IRS Form 990 (here); and (4) a letter stating commitment of the local match or intention to provide a local match.

Proposal Form. This Word document must not exceed 10 pages, including the cover sheet. This form explains requirements in detail. Applicants should not modify order or format. The form contains:

1. Cover sheet:
   a. Names of partnering local government director and local foundation(s)
   b. Primary contact person and contact information
   c. Grant recipient, which can be a local foundation, 501c3 created by city or county government, or a partner nonprofit
   d. Amount requested from Partners for Places
   e. Amount and sources of local match
   f. Total project budget
   g. Project Title
   h. Purpose of project in 25 words or less

2. Proposal Narrative:
   a. Project background and overview of goals, strategies, and activities.
   b. Leave this section blank if the proposal is to create a plan. If proposing a project, include a URL link to or PDF attachment for one of the following plans:
      i. An officially adopted local sustainability, climate action, adaptation/resilience, or comprehensive plan provision that explicitly addresses all three pillars of sustainability (social, environmental, and economic health);
      ii. A plan endorsed by the mayor or manager that states the goal of balancing economic development, environmental quality, and equity;
      iii. The Certified STAR Communities’ plan.
   c. Green stormwater infrastructure projects should include one of the following plans:
      i. An officially adopted local sustainability, climate action, water or comprehensive planning provision that explicitly includes green infrastructure;
      ii. A plan endorsed by mayor or manager that includes green infrastructure as a strategy to balancing environmental quality, equity, and economic development; or
      iii. A Certified STAR Communities’ plan.

Previous work refers to anything the project is founded on, such as a plan, a project it gathers lessons from, research to understand the best approach, etc. It can be an earlier phase of Partners for Places funded work, work in the communities, or work in other communities.
3. Description of key staff, implementation partners, and stakeholders.
4. Detailed work plan describing project activities, deliverables, and timeline.
5. Information on how the project addresses key selection criteria:
   a. Address each of the key areas listed in order in the Proposal Form
   b. Reference Table 2, as points will be awarded based on the extent to which the proposal explains and addresses these criteria.

**Project Budget.** This Excel spreadsheet has a tab for one-year applications, and a tab for two-year applications. **Complete only one of these tabs.** The form prompts for information on:
1. Projected sources of revenue, including additional funds that partners will bring to the project.
   a. Line item details of project expenses, including personnel and other direct costs.
   b. If a two-year project is being proposed, describe how a two-year grant will significantly improve the proposed outcomes, more so than a one-year grant would, and complete only the two-year tab in the Excel spreadsheet.

**IRS Form 990, or Canadian annual information return.** One of these completed forms must be submitted with the rest of the proposal packet items.

**Matching Fund Commitment Letter or Letter of Intent.** Provide evidence of a one-to-one match by including either: (1) a signed grant letter or grant agreement from the local, place-based funder(s); or (2) a signed letter from the funder(s) showing a strong intention to approve the matching grant, should Partners for Places approve the proposal for funding. If proposing a two-year project, insure the letter(s) provide a commitment for both years of the project. The local match may not be provided by a national investor in the Partners for Places fund.

**Technical Assistance Opportunities and Submission Instructions**

Partners for Places wants all applications to be as strong and successful as possible. To that end, technical assistance is available to those who are considering an application. Technical assistance can help an applicant determine eligibility, work through the details of creating a proposed plan, or provide feedback on project implementation design. To request this service, first read the “Partners for Places Proposal and Award Guidance” document, here. If questions still remain, contact:

- **Ashley Quintana** with any RFP questions, including eligibility or submission requirements
- **Susanna Sutherland** for technical assistance in proposal development, such as troubleshooting or testing the applicability of a proposed planning process or project implementation design.

Proposal packets are submitted electronically to Ashley Quintana by January 31, 2019, according to the instructions in the Proposal Packet Requirements section in this RFP. TFN administers the grant program and works with selected applicants on award execution and reporting processes throughout the life of the grant.
Appendix – National Funder and Network Partner Descriptions

Investors in Partners for Places

Partners for Places general grant program is made possible by generous support from the JPB Foundation, Kendeda Fund, New York Community Trust, Summit Foundation, and the Surdna Foundation. Funding for Green Stormwater Infrastructure projects is generously supported by the JPB Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and the Pisces Foundation.

About the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities

Since 1999, the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities has worked with foundations, nonprofit organizations, and other partners to address the environmental, social, and economic problems created by sprawling patterns of development and urban disinvestment. This network believes that the suite of tools available to funders—investing, grantmaking, collaborating, convening, facilitating, and more—uniquely position philanthropy to play a leadership role in advancing smarter growth policies and practices that improve decision making about growth and development issues, leading to more prosperous, livable, and vibrant communities for all. From its inception, the Network has been committed to advancing not only triple-bottom-line returns for people, place, and prosperity, but also strategies that recognize the interconnected nature of the issues that grantmakers care about and outcomes they hope to achieve.

About the Urban Sustainability Directors Network

The Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) is a peer-to-peer network of local government professionals from cities across the United States and Canada dedicated to creating a healthier environment, economic prosperity, and increased social equity. This network enables sustainability directors and staff to share best practices and accelerate the application of good ideas across North America. USDN members work together in Collective Action Groups on select sustainability topics, such as how cities are preparing for a changing climate, district and neighborhood scale sustainability, GHG analysis and reporting, sustainability indicators, sustainable behavior, and fostering equity programming in all local government operations.

About Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange

The Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange is a peer-to-peer learning network designed to scale green stormwater infrastructure in communities. The Exchange allows decision-makers on the front lines of infrastructure implementation, primarily municipal GSI Program Managers and water utility leaders, to circulate ideas and assess information more quickly and efficiently, refine their decisions, and direct their investments toward informed solutions and on-the-ground results.