

Sustainable Cities Institute Pilot Cities Program

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the mission of the Sustainable Cities Institute Pilot Cities program?

The mission of the Sustainable Cities Institute is to be a valuable, trusted resource for local governments and communities working to create lasting, meaningful change toward sustainability. SCI achieves its mission by providing web-based information, technical support, and facilitation of collaborative sustainability planning and implementation projects that enhance the long-term health, efficiency, affordability and livability of communities.

The Pilot Cities Program, beginning with two pilot cities, is set for launch in early 2010. This will be composed of sustainability-related experts who will serve as a multi-year resource to a limited number of cities in developing and implementing sustainable community development plans around specific projects and partnerships

What cities are eligible to participate?

The terms “city” and “cities” are used for simplicity. However, the program is open to all forms of local government, i.e. government entities defined by geographical areas that are less than a state (typically town, city, county, or region) and characterized by officials elected by local residents.

Populations of 25,000 to 500,000 will be evaluated, though the chosen cities will be different in size.

The chosen city will need to hold a significant share of regional population and/or economic activity.

The city should not be expecting a change in its top administration levels during the two years of program implementation.

The city is required to partner with a non-profit partner (501c-3). Importantly, the non-profit partner must have a minimum 5-year organizational history and a record of sound fiscal practice as they will receive and manage all SCI grant funds. Funding will be disbursed quarterly based upon the achievement of pre-identified project milestones.

What are the criteria for selecting cities to participate?

The most important evaluation criterion is a policy environment that incorporates or is moving to incorporate sustainability as a significant assessment by which programs are evaluated.

The next most important evaluation criterion is a robust civic infrastructure that has embraced sustainability. Civic infrastructure is defined as the city-county-community-business-NGO-foundation interactions that occur around municipal issues.

Other criteria in order of importance include:

- Existing relationships between government and a non-profit or university
- Demonstrated success in the sustainability realm
- An organized and well considered, proposed sustainability initiative and housing related project

Our local government does not have a full-time Environmental Officer. Can we still apply?

A full-time Environmental Officer can provide the necessary leadership for a successful municipal environmental sustainability program. However, cities with dedicated staff that can coordinate inter-agency activities, spearhead planning, identify needed resources, and promote and advocate for sustainability goals are encouraged to apply.

What types of projects are eligible for the Pilot Cities program?

The primary emphasis of the SCI Pilot Cities program is on transformation through the process of implementation. As such, program participants will identify:

- 1) An initiative to model environmentally sustainable best practices and principles. Initiatives will promote environmental sustainability goals in any of a wide range of topic areas. For example, the initiative could be related to the development of a general sustainability plan, greening government operations and facilities, sustainability legislation or policy development, a transportation alternative project, alternate energy source, wetlands recovery, or any other environmental sustainability topic.
- 2) Housing related project with an affordable green component. The project need not be a “sticks and bricks” project. Housing related policy projects will be equally considered.

How long should sustainability initiatives and projects last (project timeline) under the Pilot Cities program?

Sustainability initiatives should be completed within two years. The housing related project should be initiated within the two-year timeframe of the program. We acknowledge that the timeframe for such a project may go well beyond two years.

Why is a non-profit or non-governmental organization (NGO) project partner required?

The non-profit sector is one of the most valuable tools which a city has for building institutional capacity to advance sustainability goals. Such organizations are strategically positioned to be strong allies and advocates for many key environmental issues.

Non-profits also allow for more flexibility in the allocation of staff and other resources than local governments. Additionally, non-profits can work both inside and outside of political arenas and often advocate in situations and in ways government agencies cannot.

Is it required to include other city departments and agencies?

It is imperative that other city departments and agencies are included in projects and initiatives supported by the Pilot Cities program. A city must work to overcome departmental silos and integrate an environmental focus within all departments if we are to attain sustainability.

Will the Institute provide any funding to selected cities?

The Institute will provide funding in the amount of **\$500,000** over the two-year program to the non-profit in each selected city.

Do selected cities have to provide matching funds?

Direct funding needs to be clearly marked for the program/initiative that was submitted under the SCI Pilot City application. The direct funding sources can include other local non-profits, NGOs, foundations, the private sector, universities or the city itself.

Funding Commitment:

City population of > 100,000 people Funding requirement = \$100,000

City population of < 100,000 people Funding requirement = \$50,000

Beyond the direct funding of the program/initiative, additional direct or indirect commitments will be looked upon favorably in the selection process.

Will the Institute funding go directly to the local government or to the non-profit partner?

Funding provided by the Institute will go directly to the non-profit partner. The non-profit will be required to budget, manage and report on the use of the funds.

What other resources will the Institute provide to selected cities?

In addition to providing funding, the Sustainable Cities Institute will serve as:

- a user-friendly, content-rich web-based clearinghouse of tools, policies, best practices and case studies to help cities align their policies and practices with sustainability principles
- a convener, facilitator and educator bringing experts into Pilot Cities to assist in developing and implementing sustainability initiatives over the two-year program period
- a facilitator for the definition and implementation of a housing related project within the Pilot Cities with the intent of exposing, clarifying, and overcoming obstacles to sustainability. Additionally, follow-on funding may be available for the housing related project.

What are the reporting requirements?

At a minimum, the non-profit will be expected to give a weekly report on progress along the schedule and quarterly budget reports. Additional reporting requirements will be determined as the cities are engaged, but SCI will expect a robust intentional learning conference or meeting where program participants regularly review developments within the program for lessons to be implemented in the future.

Added 4/26/10

We have a city manager form of government. Does the limitation on elections during the period of the program apply to us?

If the city manager's contract does not expire during the period of the program and the city's sustainability initiative resides in the managers office SCI will consider a variance on the election limitation. SCI reserves the right to evaluate the responsibilities of the various components of the city government and enforce the limitation.

Our city population is expected to be over 500,000 in the next census. Is this a strict limitation?

The population within city limits is a general guideline and meant to align with the SCI intent to help small and medium sized cities.

For the housing related project (with an affordable green component), how does SCI define "affordable?"

The criteria for the affordable housing component of the housing related project is very flexible in the range of 50 - 70% area medium income (AMI). Again, the housing related project need not be a "sticks and bricks" project. Housing related policy projects will be equally considered.

Added 8/2/10

What are the Pilot Cities program milestone dates?

The criteria for the affordable housing component of the housing related project is very flexible in the range of 50 - 70% area medium income (AMI). Again, the housing related project need not be a "sticks and bricks" project. Housing related policy projects will be equally considered.

A two-year project timeline is expected, with the housing-related project commencing in that timeframe but not necessarily being completed.

Letters of Intent opened to target cities	April 1, 2010
Deadline for cities invited to apply (LOI)	April 30, 2010
Full application open to selected cities	May 17, 2010
Full application due	June 15, 2010
Notification to four program finalists	July 1, 2010
Deadline for Sustainability Scan & CAPP information	July 30, 2010
Sustainability scans/ site visits	Scheduled with city
Final selection of Pilot Cities	Oct. 15 - Oct. 22, 2010
Announcement of Pilot Cities	Oct. 27, 2010

Dates for the following project milestones will be set based on the needs of the specific projects:

Project engagement/announcement (official start date)	Approx. Nov. 1, 2010
Weekly project updates (1-page max.)	
Monthly learning reports (2-pages max.)	
Quarterly project report	SCI template
Final report	SCI template