

CALL FOR LIVABLE CENTERS PLANNING STUDY SPONSORS

Guidance Document

FY2021-2024 Livable Centers Studies

Two-Step Application Process Due Dates:

1. Intent to Apply: May 27, 2021
2. Application: July 29, 2021

(This is not a request for proposals from consulting firms.)

Background

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) is seeking proposals from local governments or other eligible study sponsors to conduct Livable Centers planning studies. Types of studies included in this call are Full Livable Centers studies and Focused Livable Centers studies.

The objective of the Livable Centers Program is to reimagine auto-focused infrastructure and to help create quality, walkable, mixed-use places with various travel choices that reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality and transportation safety, promote economic development and housing choice. Recommendations from each study will ideally inform locally sponsored Livable Centers projects that can be considered for inclusion in H-GAC's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and future Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP).

In 2019, the Livable Centers Program published a *10 Year Evaluation of the Program* showing 75% of studies' recommendations are on-track to implementation, including \$467 million in locally sponsored capital improvements and \$491 million in planned projects. To learn more about the 35 Livable Centers planning studies completed within the 8-county Transportation Management Area (TMA), visit <http://www.h-gac.com/livable-centers/> and click on "H-GAC Livable Centers Planning Studies."

Call Study Types

The Livable Centers FY2021-2024 Call for Sponsors seeks to identify and fund Full Livable Centers studies and, for the first time, Focused Livable Centers studies. This blended call provides an opportunity for sponsors to scale the scope of their study to best meet the needs of their communities. Sponsors are encouraged to submit study locations that demonstrate strong consideration of the region's vulnerable populations. Study types are described below.

- Full Livable Centers Studies: Serve as small area plans and fulfill all Livable Centers Program goals (see page 6) including creating multi-modal travel choices, resilient quality places, and equitable infrastructure investments while promoting economic generators and housing choice with complementary transportation planning. Programmatic goals are evaluated on a community-wide scale as defined by study sponsors and may span a larger neighborhood or series of neighborhoods in a single service area, such as a district or other sponsor-defined boundary. A study area may define multiple locations or nodes of interest, including identified areas for future land use improvements.

- Focused Livable Centers Studies: Serve as targeted, community-node or small-area studies that must meet Livable Centers Program goals to create multi-modal travel choices and resilient quality places with complementary transportation planning, plus one additional Livable Centers goal. Goals include evaluation of equitable infrastructure, promotion of economic generators, or housing choice. Examples include, but are not limited to, last-mile connection system planning, safe routes to school, transit-oriented planning, and housing feasibility analysis.

Eligibility

1. This call for planning study sponsors is limited to city or county governments, transit agencies, management districts, municipal utility districts, Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZ), and other entities that can receive federal transportation funding and implement transportation study recommendations.
2. The proposed study must be located within H-GAC's 8-county TMA, which includes Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery, and Waller counties.
3. If the applicant is not the primary owner of the streets, sidewalks, or public right-of-way in the study area, the applicant must provide a letter of support from the owning agency (i.e., the city or county that owns and maintains the streets, sidewalks, etc.).

Funding Availability

H-GAC anticipates making recommendations for funding for new Livable Centers studies during fiscal years 2021-2024.

Study sponsors must indicate their estimated costs for completing the study. Study sponsors are not limited to applying for one study but must submit a separate complete application for each proposed study.

H-GAC reserves the right to negotiate the final budget amount for each study based on the study scope and available funding.

Local Sponsor Matching Fund Requirements

Livable Centers: Sponsoring agencies must demonstrate their financial commitment to the matching fund level required for the proposed study.

Local match requirements will be based on the level of community need in the study area boundary. Need will be determined through a Livable Centers Need Index (LCNI) created by H-GAC. Sponsors can calculate level of need for their study area online through the Livable Centers Activity-Connectivity Explorer (ACE), [here](#). This mapping tool does not require

Geographic Information System (GIS) experience. Refer to the ACE user guide to see LCNI attributes and explore steps to create a study area boundary and determine LCNI [here](#).

Based on LCNI for the proposed study area, sponsor's cash match requirements will be defined by a percentage of the total study cost and are defined as:

- LCNI Score \geq 75: 0% Cash Match
- LCNI Score $<$ 75: 10% Cash Match

For more detail, sponsors are encouraged to attend the Pre-submittal Q&A Meeting on April 15, 2021, detailed under the Application Assistance section Opportunities of this guidance document.

If matching funds are required, the chief elected official or chief executive of the sponsoring entity must explicitly commit to providing the matching fund amount (this can be included in the letter of support). H-GAC reserves the right to negotiate the final funding amount depending on the specifics of the study and available funding.

Study Evaluation and Selection

Proposals will be evaluated by a selection committee composed of H-GAC staff, representatives from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and former Livable Centers study sponsors. The recommendations of this committee will be submitted to the H-GAC Board of Directors for approval. H-GAC reserves the right to reject any and all proposals as deemed in its interest.

Application Deadlines

This application is a two-step process and must be submitted online at www.h-gac.com/livablecenters.

1) Notice of Intent to Apply

Sponsors *are required* to notify H-GAC of their intent to apply no later than **5:00 p.m. May 27, 2021**. This notice must include the proposed study area location. After submitting their notice, applicants will receive an email notification and access to the application submittal portal. See subsequent pages of this guidance document for more information about the Notice of Intent to Apply.

2) Application Submittal

Applications must be submitted online to H-GAC no later than **5:00 p.m. July 29, 2021**. Technological issues with the online submittal must be communicated to H-GAC no later than 5:00 p.m. July 27, 2021. **No late applications will be accepted.** See subsequent pages of this guidance document for more information about the Application Submittal.

Application Assistance Opportunities

1) Pre-Submittal Q&A Meeting

H-GAC staff will provide a presentation on the application process and required steps at **9:30 a.m. April 15, 2021**. Staff will be available to answer questions, including clarifying questions regarding Full and Focused Livable Centers studies. All interested parties are encouraged to attend. Register [here](#).

2) Sponsor Application Meeting

H-GAC staff is available for one-on-one meetings to address sponsor questions after the Notice of Intent to Apply is submitted. Meetings will be scheduled with the primary sponsor contact only as specified through the Notice of Intent to Apply. All Sponsor Application meetings will be held virtually through Microsoft Teams.

Application Guide for Online Submission

Step 1: Notice of Intent to Apply & Application Account Creation: The notice of intent to apply requires the applicant to create an application account with H-GAC. Once the Notice of Intent to Apply is complete and submitted, applicants may schedule an appointment with H-GAC staff to discuss study specifications prior to the final application submission date. Please see guidance details, below.

Contact Information of Applicant: Sponsoring Agency Name; Name of Primary Contact; Email of Primary Contact; Phone Number of Primary Contact; Address of Sponsoring Agency. Secondary Contact Information (optional).

Proposed Livable Centers Study Name: Name of Proposed Study Area.

Study Area Boundary: Upload PDF or JPEG of study area. No GIS required. Applicants may use Google Earth and draw boundary via PowerPoint or use H-GAC's ACE tool [here](#).

Call Study Type: Indicate if study is a Full or Focused Livable Centers Study.

If Focused: Indicate if study is targeted to promote Equitable Infrastructure, Economic Development, or Diversity in Housing.

Statement of Need (300 Words or less): Include a brief statement of need for this study, including size and boundaries of the proposed study area. Consider how this study meets Livable Centers Program goals, including how this study relates to the vulnerable population and the greater community.

Proposed Cost of Study: Determine LCNI and associated match requirement. Establish proposed cost of study and be prepared to populate the following fields in the online portal: Proposed Study Cost and LCNI.

Requested Meeting Date: Schedule a meeting with H-GAC staff to review draft Application (Step 2) and answer study-specific questions. **Meetings are not mandatory, but strongly encouraged.** A meeting request may be made through the Intent to Apply portal.

Step 2: Application: Application link will be provided through the Notice of Intent to apply confirmation email. You must complete the Notice of Intent to apply before you can access the Application. For the sponsor's convenience, information collected in the Notice of Intent to Apply will be pre-populated in the online application. Sponsors will be able to change this information if necessary, to ensure accurate application information. Applications must contain all elements listed in the following sections of this guidance document. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

A. Confirm/Update Notice of Intent to Apply Information: Contact Information, Study Name, Study Area Boundary, Call Study Type; Proposed Study Cost.

B. Description/Scope (800 Words or less; 20% of total score): The potential impact of the study will be determined based on the study description. The study description should describe the goals and vision of the study and how these goals relate to local/regional planning efforts. This description should discuss:

- Need and purpose of the study and the desired outcomes.
- Define positive impact on vulnerable populations including but not limited to minority and low-income populations, populations with limited English proficiency, senior citizens, limited educational attainment, carless households, and female headed households, etc.
- Description of the proposed study area location and street name boundaries that complements the submitted map. Scale or size of study area should be appropriate and fit the scope and study impact description.
- Potential for the study to serve as a model for others in the region.

C. Fulfilling Program Goals (60% of total score):

Sponsors must describe how the proposed study will help fulfill Livable Centers Program goals and criteria.

C.1: Full Livable Center Goal Criteria: Livable Centers goals and associated criteria are defined below. **All goals shall be addressed** to be eligible as a Full Livable Centers study.

Goal 1: Create multi-modal travel choices by facilitating a range of transportation mode opportunities (300 Words or less; 30%). The study aims to:

- Reduce congestion and make air quality improvements from mode shift.
- Improve multimodal connectivity with existing neighborhoods and developments.
- Provide an accessible pedestrian/bicyclist environment.
- Strengthen accessibility to transit.
- Improve pedestrian/bicyclist safety.

Goal 2: Create resilient quality places (300 Words or less; 10%). The study aims to:

- Positively transform a study area.
- Promote better utilization of existing and/or planned community infrastructure (i.e., infill development).
- Integrate green space and preserve natural resources.
- Incorporate flood recovery, mitigation, and other resiliency elements.

Goal 3: Promotes equitable infrastructure (300 Words or less; 10%). The study aims to:

- Create or improve connectivity, “last-mile” infrastructure and amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Reduce negative impacts of defined barriers to pedestrian and bicyclists (i.e., intersections, highways, railroads, bayous, network gaps, etc.)
- Promote access between the public right-of-way and adjacent land use for non-vehicular traffic.
- Explore strategies for vehicular parking that complement a high-quality pedestrian-bicyclist environment.

Goal 4: Promote Economic Development and Housing (300 Words or less; 10%). The study aims to:

- Connect to existing infrastructure and/or serve as a catalyst for investment/development.
- Promote improvement in the range of housing options.
- Increase walkability/bikeability of a 1/2-mile radius of job and/or activity centers within the proposed study area.
- Promote development practices which emphasize pedestrian, transit, and non-vehicular access and connectivity within concept design considerations (i.e., Transit Oriented Development).

C.2: Focused Criteria: Livable Centers Program goals and associated criteria are defined below. **Goals 1 and 2 must be met to participate in a Focused Livable Centers study**, plus one additional Livable Centers goal. Goals include evaluation of equitable infrastructure, promotion of economic generators, or housing choice.

Goal 1: Create multi-modal travel choices by facilitating a range of transportation mode opportunities (300 Words or less; 30%). The study aims to:

- Reduce congestion and make air quality improvements from mode shift.
- Improve multimodal connectivity with existing neighborhoods and developments.
- Provide an accessible pedestrian/bicyclist environment.
- Strengthen accessibility to transit.

Goal 2: Create resilient quality places (300 Words or less; 10%). The study aims to:

- Positively transform a study area.
- Promote better utilization of existing and/or planned community infrastructure (i.e., infill development).
- Integrate green space and preserve natural resources.
- Incorporate flood recovery, mitigation, and other resiliency elements.

Goal 3: Promotes equitable infrastructure (300 Words or less; 20%). The study aims to:

- Create or improve connectivity, “last-mile” connections, and amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Reduce negative impacts of defined barriers to pedestrians and bicyclists (i.e., intersections, highways, railroads, bayous, network gaps, etc.)
- Promote access between the public right-of-way and adjacent land use for non-vehicular traffic.
- Explore strategies for vehicular parking that complement a high-quality pedestrian-bicyclist environment.

Goal 4: Promote Economic Development (300 Words or less; 20%). The study aims to:

- Connect to existing infrastructure of an unrealized community asset.
- Serve as a catalyst for investment/development.
- Increase walkability/bikeability of a 1/2-mile radius of job and/or activity centers within the proposed study area.
- Demonstrate appropriateness or need of job and/or activity centers in study’s area market.

Goal 5: Promote Diversity in Housing: (300 Words or less; 20%). The study aims to:

- Incentivize an improvement in the range of housing options.
- Serve as a catalyst for investment/development.
- Increase walkability/bikeability of a 1/2-mile radius of job and/or activity centers within the proposed study area.
- Demonstrate appropriateness or need of housing and/or activity center in study’s area market.

D. Capacity to Implement (500 Words or less; 20% of total score) Will be assessed based on the level of commitment demonstrated, including the sponsor’s ability to successfully complete the study in the allocated time, stakeholder involvement, and the ability of the sponsor to track the implementation of study recommendations by type and funding amount after the completion of the study.

Please describe or document the support of the sponsoring agency and potential study partners. Demonstration of local/community support may include, but is not limited to:

- Description of sponsor staff commitment during study development and post study publication to advance implementation of study’s recommendations including implementation updates to H-GAC every two years.
- Description of support from key elected officials, board members and staff of city, county management district, and/or other agencies and organizations. (Please list names, titles, and entity.)
- Local plans or other studies that have identified Livable Centers Program goals as a community or neighborhood priority (i.e., visioning exercise, comprehensive plan, or other study).

E. Letter of Support for Upload

Mandatory Letters of Support:

Texas House of Representatives

A letter of support from the State Representative for the proposed study area is **required**. If the study area encompasses multiple Texas House Districts, a letter is required from each Representative.

Sponsor Agency and other study partners

Please attach letters of support from the sponsoring agency and other study partners. *If the sponsoring agency is not the primary owner of the streets or sidewalks for study in the project area, the application must include a letter of support from the owning agency (i.e., the city or county that owns and maintains the streets and sidewalks). Application will not be considered eligible if this requirement is not met.*

Local Sponsor Matching Fund Commitment (if required)

The study sponsor must document its commitment to provide local match (if required). This consideration can be demonstrated by a letter from the chief elected official or chief executive of the sponsoring entity that has the authority to commit to the local cash contribution.

Optional Letter(s) of Support:

Letters of support from community or neighborhood groups, partner agencies, local businesses, or other stakeholders are strongly encouraged.