



Livable Communities Initiative

Technical Assistance Program Guidance

Rockford Metropolitan Planning Organization
August 2024

Call for Projects: August 5 – September 13, 2024

Introduction

Region 1 Planning Council (R1), is a special-purpose, regional government agency designated to coordinate intergovernmental collaboration. This regional model provides an efficient means to promoting a well-informed, comprehensive dialogue that holistically addresses regional issues by fulfilling the needs of government entities for long-range planning, securing funding, and analyzing and providing data in support of regional projects and initiatives.

Under this capacity, R1 has developed a Livable Communities Initiative (LCI) that provides technical assistance hours to neighborhoods and nonprofits in the development of a subarea study. The goal is that these subarea studies will spur reinvestment in this middle neighborhoods. These studies will reimagine auto-focused infrastructure, increase multi-modal travel choices, improve environmental quality, promote economic and workforce development, and address housing needs.

This document provides information on the process Region 1 Planning Council (R1) will use to solicit, select, and award the LCI Technical Assistance Program.

About the Livable Communities Initiative

Over the past decade, the region has identified lofty long-range goals through various plans aimed at enhancing the livability of the region as a whole. However, these large-scale plans will take years of piecemealed implementation activities and investments before any dramatic improvements will be seen.

To truly move the needle, the region needs to focus on conducting coordinated subarea plans with clearly defined implementation strategies instead relying solely on large regional plans with broad goals. The subarea studies should focus on stabilizing and strengthening tipping point neighborhoods through the integration of quality transportation facilities and services with housing choice, vibrant communities, robust economic development, and inclusive growth that spurs strategic reinvestment from both the public and private sector.

Livable Communities Initiative (LCI) Programs are operated by regional planning councils and metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) across the nation. Regional planning councils are utilizing the technical expertise of staff and are committing funds to capital projects and planning efforts that address community-scale livability challenges. These programs offer meaningful assistance and incentives for

localities to make land use and transportation decisions that are beneficial to neighborhoods and the region as a whole. Each program has been developed to address the unique needs and opportunities within their region and localities.

Neighborhood Focus

A unique aspect of this program is that it is focused on improving middle neighborhoods. Middle neighborhoods, or tipping point neighborhoods, are stable places for middle and working class families but may be teetering on the edge between growth and decline. These neighborhoods are also essential to a region's tax base, identity, and economic mobility and security.

"Middle" neighborhoods in the Rockford Region were identified using the following considerations:

- Impact Indicators: population density and job proximity;
- Housing Quality Indicators: vacancy rates;
- Socio-Economic Indicators: educational attainment and low-moderate income households;
- Health Indicators: high blood pressure; and
- Livable Wage.

By providing support at neighborhood level, the LCI will:

- Provide interventions aimed to stabilize and reinvigorate these neighborhoods for overall regional prosperity.
- Provide dedicated resources that leads to job growth, updated housing, and growing home markets.
- Incentivize an educated and career-ready workforce to move to or stay in the region.

Purpose & Intent

The purpose of the LCI program is to provide support to communities wanting to conduct action plans in key neighborhoods within the Rockford Region. There is no set number of projects that will be selected in a given solicitation round, as project scopes can vary in size and complexity. Instead, R1 staff capacity and resources will determine the final number of projects selected once all requests have been received. The size and complexity of each project will also determine the number of technical assistance hours provided to the neighborhood. Applicants are not limited to applying for one study but must submit a separate complete application for each proposed study and provide a ranking of their priorities.

Ultimately, these studies provide a blueprint for creating vibrant, walkable places that improves the quality of life for those who live and work in the community by offering increased mobility options and access to resources, such as healthy food, affordable housing, and employment opportunities.

The final deliverable will be a sub-area comprehensive action plan for that outlines specific strategies and recommendations contributing to an improved quality of life for residents in the Rockford Region.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants are nonprofit organizations, public universities/colleges, religious organizations, public schools, units of government, charitable organizations, or neighborhood associations.

To be eligible, applicants agree to align the goals of their study with the Livable Communities Framework.

Studies completed through the LCI technical assistance program are conceptual in nature and any award to applicants is for planning assistance only. Program funds cannot be used to cover the costs expended by the grantee. Additionally, the following activities are not eligible for TA program funds:

- Right-of-way acquisition
- Detailed engineering
- Surveying
- Storm water/sewer system design
- Construction of transportation system facilities
- Capital projects

Applicant Commitments & Expectations

Applicants to the LCI Technical Assistance Program are expected to fulfill the following commitments:

- **Complete Application:** Prepare and submit an application that will be available starting August 5 with a deadline of September 13, 2024.
- **Neighborhood Presentation:** Your neighborhood will give presentations for decision makers to learn more about specific needs, challenges, and opportunities.
- **Neighborhood Input:** If your neighborhood is selected, neighborhood input will be essential to complete the study and gain residents' perspectives.

Project Selection & Programming Process

Annual Programming Process

A solicitation of eligible TA projects will occur on an annual or biennial schedule through a competitive application process. The following process will be used for the LCI Technical Assistance project selection.

Step 1. The competitive application process will begin with a formal announcement. The announcement will include information on the current cycle's eligibility and evaluation criteria, funding preferences and priorities, how to obtain application packets, and the submission deadline.

Step 2. The application period will typically begin the first full week of August and last approximately six (6) to eight (8) weeks. An optional project abstract can be submitted to R1 staff within the first 21 days of the solicitation period. R1 staff will provide preliminary feedback on the abstracts approximately five (5) business days after their submittal.

Step 3. Upon receipt of applications, R1 staff will review submission materials to determine eligibility and completeness. Applicants with ineligible projects will be notified by R1 staff of this determination. If an application is determined to be incomplete, R1 staff will inform the applicant and request additional information or materials be submitted within five (5) business days.

Step 4. Eligible projects will be reviewed independently by a selection panel, comprised of members of the Livable Communities Steering Committee, and scored based on criteria published in the formal announcement. The Steering Committee will release a prioritized recommendations of projects to R1.

Step 5. Preliminary project recommendations will be announced and released for a 30-day public comment period. During the 30-day comment period, finalists will be asked to present their projects to R1's Citizens Advisory Forum (CAF) and the Steering Committee. The RPC Governing Board will also be

presented with the project recommendations for consideration. Once the committee(s) has determined the proposals to award, successful applicants will be notified.

2024 Schedule

The application and selection process for the LCI Program spans approximately six months and involves several critical steps.

Milestone	Description
April 30, 2024:	LCI Stakeholders Initial Presentation & Meeting
June 27, 2024	Community Advisory Forum (CAF) Presentation & Meeting
August 5, 2024	Application Opens
September 13, 2024	Application Closes
September 16-20, 2024	R1 Staff Conducts Initial Review of Applications
Early October 2024	LCI Stakeholders Meet to Discuss and Score Applications
October 24, 2024	CAF Meets to Discuss and Score Applications
November 14, 2024	R1 Governing Board Votes on Recommended Neighborhood Project

Application Process

Completed applications should be submitted electronically to the Region 1 Planning Council contact information provided below no later than 5:00 PM on September 13, 2024.

Applications and questions may be submitted to:

Marc Hooks
Region 1 Planning Council
127 N Wyman, Suite 100
Rockford, IL 61101
mhooks@r1planning.org