



5 winning strategies for building strong Thriving Communities Program proposals

Top recommendations for cities and towns seeking technical assistance and organizational capacity support through the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT)'s [Thriving Communities Program](#) to scope, fund, and develop infrastructure projects that create more equitable, accessible, and resilient cities. Letter of Interest is due to DOT by COB on December 6, 2022.

#1 Focus on a systemic problem in your community in your approach and application.

USDOT is looking for proposals that tackle systemic issues and take a localized, holistic approach to infrastructure projects that benefit communities in historically underserved areas. Projects that expand access to transportation, housing, and economic development or address land use, policy, zoning, and environmental justice concerns – among other goals – will be eligible for funding and are aligned with the intended purpose of this program. In addition to the strategies listed below, you may find this [National League of Cities' article](#) on what steps to take to apply for the Thriving Communities Program helpful.

#2 Categorize your project clearly in your Letter of Interest (LOI).

USDOT requires cities and towns to select a “community of practice” in the LOI. These are simply categories that reflect the size, location, needs, and priorities of your community. You must choose one of the following:

- ❖ **Main streets** – for tribal and rural communities focused on road safety, rural transit and intercity travel, improving basic infrastructure conditions, and climate resilience.
- ❖ **Complete neighborhoods** – for urban and suburban communities focused on expanding access to safe and reliable transportation options, developing complete transportation networks, and updating plans and zoning for housing, land use, and economic development.
- ❖ **Networked communities** – for communities located near ports, airports, freight, and rail facilities focused on addressing environmental justice, safety and design improvements, and decarbonizing transportation.

#3 Build your coalition – and include them in your LOI.

Community coalitions of key stakeholders are required for USDOT's LOI. Applicants are encouraged to build coalitions of government entities, nonprofits, non-governmental and community-based organizations, labor unions, advocacy groups, chambers of commerce, and others to grow local capacity and generate deeper community engagement – particularly from historically underrepresented populations and environmental justice stakeholders.

#4 Center equity in your LOI and your broader planning efforts.

The LOI should focus on serving underserved communities. Thriving Communities is explicitly designed to address longstanding inequities – so starting with these considerations will make the application more competitive. USDOT's mapping tool for historically disadvantaged communities or defined federal areas of persistent poverty can assist in identifying the geographic region within your community with the most need. Centering equity in the LOI will help applicants define their project boundaries clearly, and work to address transportation cost burden, lack of mobility options, safety concerns, and sustained disinvestment.

#5 Formalize your vision.

It's worth noting that the LOI requires a vision statement – and it should articulate the community and/or organizational goals you want to advance through Thriving Communities, why you chose your community partners, and how your team will work together to meet your community's needs. Additionally, you should highlight your plan to engage historically underrepresented voices throughout the process. As you work to develop your vision, you may find helpful models in [these success stories from the Mayors' Institute on City Design](#). Applicants who focus their vision, weigh equity and inclusion considerations, and identify purpose for the project will be prepared to create stronger applications.

About Thriving Communities

USDOT's Thriving Communities Program equips local leaders with resources, support, and funding to modernize their infrastructure and improve quality of life and accessibility.

State, local, or tribal governments; territories; metropolitan or rural transportation planning agencies; and transit agencies or other political subdivisions must apply via a [letter of interest](#) by: December 6, 2022