

CALL FOR LIVABLE CENTERS PLANNING STUDY SPONSORS

Guidance Document

FY2025-2028 Livable Centers Studies

Two-Step Application Process Due Dates:

1. Intent to Apply: May 9, 2024
2. Full Application: July 8, 2024

(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 project sponsors to conduct Livable Centers planning studies. Study Types include Livable Centers and Focused Livable Centers.

The goals of the Livable Centers Program are to facilitate the creation of walkable, mixed-use places by promoting economic generators and housing diversity, encouraging multi-modal transportation options, and promoting equitable and resilient infrastructure. Study recommendations will ideally lead to locally sponsored Livable Centers projects for potential inclusion in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and future Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP).

In 2021, the Livable Centers conducted a 12 Year Evaluation of the Program where 90% of studies and \$543 million in study recommendations are on-track to full implementation. This is a 16% or \$76 million increase from \$467 million reported in 2019. To learn more about the 42 Livable Centers planning studies completed within the 8-county Transportation Management Area (TMA), visit <http://www.h-gac.com/livable-centers/>.

Call Study Types

The Livable Centers FY2025-2028 Call for Sponsors seeks to identify and fund Livable Centers studies and Focused Livable Centers studies. This blended call allows sponsors to scale their study's scope to best meet their communities' needs. Sponsors are encouraged to submit study locations that demonstrate strong consideration of the region's vulnerable populations. Study types are described below.

Livable Centers Studies (LC): Serve as small area plans and fulfill all four Livable Centers Program goals which include **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 (FLC): Serve as targeted, community-node studies that must meet **two** Livable Centers Program goals, to **create multi-modal travel choices, resilient quality places, and one additional Livable Centers goal that best fits the needs of the study sponsor**. Goals include evaluation of equitable infrastructure, promotion of economic generators, or housing choice. Examples include last-mile connection system planning, safe routes to school, transit-oriented planning, and housing feasibility analysis.

Eligibility

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 identifying several locations for new Livable Centers studies to recommend for funding during fiscal years 2025-2028. We anticipate funding six to eight studies, however, the total funding level available will be determined by H-GAC's Transportation Policy Council (TPC). As such, **a successful recommendation from this application process does not guarantee funding and may be altered based on TPC's direction.**

Project sponsors must indicate their estimated costs for completing the study. Project 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 levels.

Local Funding Contribution

Sponsoring agencies must demonstrate their financial commitment to the contribution fund level required for the proposed study.

Local contribution 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 the 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 contribution requirements will be defined by a percentage of the total study cost and are defined as:

- LCNI Score > 75: 0% Cash Contribution
- LCNI Score < 75: 10% Cash Contribution
- LCNI Score < 50: 20% Cash Contribution

For more detail, sponsors are encouraged to attend the Pre-submittal Q&A Meeting on Thursday, March 14, 2024, detailed under the Application Assistance section Opportunities of this guidance document.

If contribution funds are required, the chief elected official or chief executive of the sponsoring entity must explicitly commit to providing the contribution fund amount (this can be included in the letter of support). The contribution fund amount will be allocated to H-GAC's Regional Strategic Fund and will not be factored into the total study cost. H-GAC reserves the right to negotiate the final funding amount depending on the specifics of the study and available funding.

Project Evaluation and Selection

Proposals will be evaluated by a project selection committee comprised of H-GAC staff and representatives from the Texas Department of Transportation and former study partners. The selection committee recommendations will be submitted to the Transportation Policy Council for a potential funding award. Upon identification of funding levels, the recommendations will be submitted to the H-GAC Board of Directors for approval. H-GAC reserves the right to make all final decisions and to withdraw this call for planning study partners.

Application Deadline

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

1. Notice of Intent to Apply: Applicants *are required* to notify H-GAC of their intent to apply no later than **May 9, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.** Intent to apply must include proposed study area location. Intent to apply should be submitted online at www.h-gac.com/livablecenters. Please note you must complete the Notice of Intent to apply before you can access the Application. Application link will be provided through the Notice of Intent to apply confirmation email.
2. Application Submittal: Project applications must be submitted directly to H-GAC via the online application website: www.h-gac.com/livablecenters. Submit your completed online application by **5:00 p.m., July 8, 2024**. No late applications will be accepted.

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. March 14, 2024**. Staff will be available to answer questions, including clarifying questions regarding Livable Center studies and Focused Livable Centers studies. All interested parties are encouraged to attend. [Registration is requested](#), but not required, to attend in person. [Registration is required](#) to attend online.
2. **Sponsor Application Meeting:** H-GAC staff are 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. You can request an application meeting on the Intent to Apply portal or you can contact [Sarai Osorio](#) to schedule a meeting time.

Application Guide

Part I: Application Account Creation and Notice of Intent to Apply

1. *Application Account Creation*

The notice of intent to apply requires the applicant to create an application account with H-GAC.

2. *Notice of Intent to Apply*

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. 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. You can request an application meeting on the Intent to Apply portal or you can contact [Sarai Osorio](#) to schedule a meeting time. Please submit the following:

- **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.
- **Study Type:** Indicate if study is a Livable Centers Study (LC) or Focused Livable Centers Study (FLC). If Focused: Indicate if study is targeted to promote Equitable Infrastructure, Economic Development, or Diversity in Housing.

- **Area of Interest:** Indicate the area of interest that best describes the Livable Centers or Focused Livable Centers project study area:
 - High density area with mixed land uses and a traditional street grid system, such as Urban Core areas.
 - Regional Centers: areas of concentrated employment or other major trip generators.
 - Town or Village Centers: concentration of housing, retail/office, and civic destinations within walking distance of a community gathering place and a good pedestrian network.
 - Transit-Oriented Development: high density mix of uses within walking distance of, and with good access to, a transit facility.
 - Corridor: roadways classified as major collectors or higher that increase multi-modal accessibility and connectivity to major centers or transit facilities and communities that would be significantly impacted by planned roadway expansions.
 - Emerging Centers or Corridors: those areas that are experiencing rapid growth and could develop as regional centers.

- **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.

- **Information Only Questions:** Answer questions related to community engagement practices, leadership approach, and strategies for addressing potential challenges. This will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of your organization and enable a tailored support strategy aligned with sponsor's specific needs and Livable Center goals throughout the study process.

- **Requested Meeting Date:** Schedule a meeting with H-GAC staff to review draft Application (Part II) and answer study-specific questions. Meetings are not mandatory, but strongly encouraged. A meeting request may be made through the Intent to Apply portal, or you can contact [Sarai Osorio](#) to schedule a meeting time

Part II: Application Submittal

1. *Confirm You Received Application Link:* After creating the application account and submitting the Notice of Intent to Apply, you should have received an application link in a confirmation email. If you did not receive the link, please contact [Sarai Osorio](#).
2. *Confirm/Update Notice of Intent to Apply Information:* For the sponsor's convenience, information collected in the Notice of Intent to Apply is pre-populated in the online application. Sponsors can change this information, if necessary, to ensure accurate application information. Please confirm or update the information provided in Notice of

Intent to Apply. This includes the contact information, study area boundary, study type, and proposed study cost.

3. *Application Narrative:* The application requires a narrative using the general outline provided below. Exhibits such as maps, charts, and photographs are not required, but may be included as separate attachments, or, preferably for large files, as links. Applications must contain all elements listed in the following sections of this guidance document. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

- **Description/Scope (900 words or less; 20% of total score):**

The potential impact of the study will be determined based on the project description. The area of interest, project scale, study impact, and regional significance of the study will also be considered. The project description should describe the:

- Need and purpose of the study and the desired outcomes.
- 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.
- How study sponsor envisions vulnerable populations and community-based organizations (CBOs) being involved in study throughout the project's lifecycle, encompassing the study period, the advancement of study recommendations, and the ongoing progress of implementation.
- 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.
- Local significance and potential for the study to serve as a model for others in the region. This includes connection between proposed study area as it relates to other local and other regional planning efforts.

- **Fulfilling Program Goals (900-1,200 words or less; 60% of total score):**

Sponsor must describe how the proposed study will help fulfill the Livable Centers program goals and objectives below.

- **Livable Centers Goal Criteria:** Livable Centers goals and associated criteria are defined below. All goals shall be addressed to be eligible as a Livable Centers study (LC).

Goal 1: Create multi-modal travel choices by facilitating a range of transportation mode opportunities (300 words or less; 30%):

- Project has the potential for air quality improvements from mode shift.
- Project will improve connectivity with existing neighborhoods and developments.
- Project will improve pedestrian/bicyclist safety.
- Project will strengthen accessibility to transit.

Goal 2: Create resilient quality places (300 words or less;10%):

- Project has the potential to positively transform a project area.
- Project will promote better utilization of existing and/or planned community infrastructure (i.e., infill development).
- Project seeks to integrate green space and preserves natural resources.
- Project will incorporate flood recovery, mitigation, and other resiliency elements.

Goal 3: Promote safe and equitable infrastructure (300 words or less; 10%):

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

Goal 4: Promote economic development and housing diversity (300 words or less; 10%):

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

- **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 (FLC), plus one additional Livable Centers goal** that best fits the sponsor’s need. 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%):

- Project has the potential for air quality improvements from mode shift.

- Project will improve connectivity with existing neighborhoods and developments.
- Project will improve pedestrian/bicyclist safety.
- Project will strengthen accessibility to transit.

Goal 2: Create resilient quality places (300 words or less; 10%):

- Project has the potential to positively transform a project area.
- Project will promote better utilization of existing and/or planned community infrastructure (e.g., infill development).
- Project will integrate green space and preserves natural resources
- Project will incorporate flood recovery, mitigation, and other resiliency elements.

AND

Goal 3: Promote equitable infrastructure (300 words or less; 20%):

- Project will create or improve connectivity, “last mile” connections, and amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Project will reduce or eliminate negative impacts of defined barriers (e.g., intersections, highways, railroads, bayous, network gaps, etc.)
- Project will promote access between the public right-of-way and adjacent land use for non-vehicular traffic.
- Project will explore strategies for vehicular parking that complement a high-quality pedestrian bicyclist environment.

OR

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

- Project will connect to existing infrastructure of an unrealized community asset.
- Project will serve as a catalyst for investment/development.
- Project will increase walkability/bikeability of a 1/2-mile radius of job and/or activity centers within the proposed study area.
- Project demonstrates appropriateness for need of job and/or activity centers in study’s area market.

OR

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

- Project will incentivize an improvement in the range of housing options.

- Project will serve as a catalyst for investment/development.
 - Study will increase walkability/bikeability of a 1/2-mile radius of job and/or activity centers within the proposed study area.
 - Project demonstrates appropriateness for need of housing and/or activity center in study's area market.
- **Ability to Implement (500 words or less; 20% of total score):** The ability to implement the project will be measured by the level of commitment demonstrated, including: the sponsor's ability to successfully complete the project 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. The commitment statement should describe the:
- Staff and/or departments of the sponsoring agency that will be involved in coordinating the study effort.
 - Level of support from key sponsor officials (such as city council, management district board, agency head, etc.). Please include a list of names, titles, and entities.
 - Sponsor's commitment to be an active sponsor throughout the study. This includes sponsor's commitment to advancing study recommendations and to ongoing implementation progress (sponsor commits to providing a progress update every two years with Livable Centers staff).
 - Sponsor's high-level plan for implementation of recommendations after the completion of study. This could include how the sponsor will integrate the study into other plans (e.g., comprehensive plan).
 - Level of support from the local community and potential project partners. Demonstration of local/community support may include but is not limited to:
 - Letters of support from community or neighborhood groups, partner agencies, local businesses, or other stakeholders (please include in Attachments).
 - Local plans or other studies that have identified livable center program goals as a community or neighborhood priority (i.e., local visioning exercise, comprehensive plan, or other study).

- 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 contribution (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.

Application Checklist

Use the checklist below to ensure you have completed all steps of your application.

	Task
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create Application Account
<input type="checkbox"/>	Submit Notice of Intent to Apply Include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact Information of Applicant• Proposed Livable Centers Study Name• Study Area Boundary• Area of Interest• Statement of Need• Proposed Cost of Study• Information Only Questions• Requested Meeting Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	Confirm You Received Application Link in Confirmation Email
<input type="checkbox"/>	Confirm/Update Notice of Intent to Apply Information
<input type="checkbox"/>	Submit Application Narrative Include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Description/Scope• Fulfilling Program Goals<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Livable Centers Goal Criteria or,○ Focused Livable Center Goal Criteria• Ability to Implement
<input type="checkbox"/>	Upload Letter/s of Support