METRO CITIES
Association of Metropolitan Municipalities

Livable Communities Survey Summary (Oct 2016)

1. **Is your city aware of the Livable Communities program timelines and funding cycles? Does the Met Council adequately advertise the application timeline and requirements for LCA funding opportunities? Does your city generally monitor the timelines or only when you have a potential project or project in the pipeline?**

- The City is aware of the Livable Communities program and submits applications frequently as potential projects come forward. The city monitors the timelines whether or not there is a project. Additionally, when we do have a prospective development in the pipeline, we are always thinking of how the LCA funding might be utilized. (inner ring suburb)
- The Met Council could probably do a better time advertising the timeline through professional organizations (EDAM, ULIMN, APAMN, etc) if the organizations are open to it. (inner ring suburb)
- Meet with MCL staff when determining eligibility. Working with property owners and developers can trigger convos and pre-app meetings. Council staff guides how a project will meet its goals. (outer ring suburb)
- More advertising is good. E-mails to more city staff would be helpful. It seems to only go to one or two people who may or may not share the information. (outer ring suburb)

2. **How could the Livable Communities Act staff better help assist you in applying for grants? If your city has applied for an LCA grant, have you participated in technical assistance, project review or pre-application opportunities?**

- Staff at the Metropolitan Council has always been very helpful in assisting the city to apply for grants. The city has taken advantage of the design assistance and project review meetings. In addition Metropolitan Council staff has provided assistance to the city anytime a question arose during the application process. (inner ring suburb)
- Don't make it so complicated (5 meetings during the preapp) with no coordination with your schedule. (outer ring suburb)
- It would be more helpful if there were either more than one application per year or if the process didn't take so long. It seems like there's a pre-app, then a July app, but the awards aren't until December.... too long! (outer ring suburb)

- The part of the process that involved architectural review was a little intimidating. It felt like a peer review jury panel. While we had the developer's architect there to present and answer questions, I thought the process was a little over the top. (outer ring suburb)
- Meet with staff to discuss program details and provide packet of materials covering the basics of the program, contacts and other relevant information. (developing edge)
- On the front end, there could be more clarity regarding eligible and ineligible costs. This is particularly true of the LCDA vs LCDA-TOD grant products. (inner ring)

3. **Is the Livable Communities Advisory Committee (LCAC) able to adequately review applications? Does the application process allow your city to tell its story and accurately convey the unique aspects of your project? Have you attended an LCAC meeting to observe its review process?**

- The application and process is very long, and the application itself is quite extensive. It seems like some aspects of the LCAC meetings could be condensed (there are a lot of meetings). While we understand the application is designed for scoring purposes, there are several areas where questions are repetitive. In addition there is not a place in the application to describe the project and what is being requested together in one location. It might be beneficial to combine some portions of the grant not only to simplify but to make it easier for the reviewers to find the information they need. The application also limits the response to each question (number of characters) which can be frustrating. We've had to get creative abbreviating words and using symbols to adequately respond to the question. The presentations are limited to 5 minutes which is insufficient to adequately present the project as a whole, the demonstration aspects of the project, and the positive impacts (catalyst) of the project. (inner ring suburb)
- You only have a certain amount of time and committee often acts as if they are the local planning commission. (outer ring suburb)
- I have heard that sometimes the LCAC suggests changes that fly in the face of local zoning ordinances. (inner ring)
- The process is lengthy, and the application itself is long. These factors are especially onerous for small and less affluent communities (perhaps offering more technical assistance would help with this imbalance). Several of the application questions seem repetitive. There's no place to discuss the overall project in the application. The character limit is very constraining and makes it difficult to tell your story. The five-minute limit on presentations to the Advisory Committee makes it very difficult to cover all that they want you to cover, especially if you're from a community the committee members aren't familiar with. (inner ring suburb)

- I thought the meeting and process was fine. Too formal, but I liked that everyone is given the same amount of time. (outer ring suburb)

4. **If you have applied for and not received an LCA grant, were the reasons clear? Did you reapply using feedback from the Met Council/LCAC?**

- The reasons for not receiving an LCA grant have typically been clearly explained. This is especially true for grantees who attend all the LCAC meetings. (inner ring suburb
- Inconsistent feedback (outer ring suburb)
- I think the reasons for approval don't always match up with application guidelines. If the grant funding only seeks affordable housing (by scoring them higher vs redevelopment) then the application should require that. (outer ring suburb)
- There is very little staff to staff communication around the LHIA program candidates, which is exacerbated by the fact that applications are submitted through the MHFA Super NOFA process, rather than a direct application to Met Council. (inner ring)

5. **If you have not applied for a Livable Communities grant recently (since 2012), please list reasons why:**
   - **No developer has come in with a proposal for a project**
   - **No current City redevelopment or development initiative proposed**
   - **Other**

   - The best response is it requires a significant amount of staff time. There are a number of requirements and paperwork that needs to be completed and monitored. (inner ring)
   - No developer has come in with a proposal for a project (several responses)

6. **Minnesota Statutes set broad guidelines for the Livable Communities Demonstration Account (LCDA), which funds development and redevelopment projects that link housing, jobs, services, and transit. Grants are available to fund basic public infrastructure and site assembly. Met Council guidelines call for innovative projects that help demonstrate better examples of mixed-use, mixed-income, equitable and integrated neighborhoods and communities.**

How does or how would your city identify projects that are innovative and have demonstration value? How can the Met Council best set expectations for LCDA applications? Where in the process can the Met Council be most helpful to cities?

- We identify projects that are innovative/demonstrative by those that incorporate elements that go above and beyond the typical or standard project. They use new technology (i.e., innovative storm water treatment, consideration of future use, etc.), add sustainable elements, incorporate TOD elements, innovative/unique design, addresses the city's goals and policies.
Clearly explain and define the criteria and how it is prioritized so applicants understand fully what the Metropolitan Councils is looking for, and equally as important, what they are not looking for.
Upfront at the beginning of the process. Clearly express what is most important during that application process because it changes from year to year.   Give concrete examples of the types of innovations they are looking for. (inner ring suburb)
- The city is always looking for quality development that links housing, jobs, services, and transit. Be available to meet when a development proposal comes forward. (inner ring suburb)
- Understand that suburbs are trying to transition and its evolution is slow. What is innovative in SLP is not necessarily going to work in a small town, even though it may be in the metro area. (outer ring suburb)
- Tough question. "Innovative" is a very subjective term but the best way to help Cities identify qualifying projects would be a best practices/past awards kind of thing (i believe they already do this). I think it's probably incumbent upon the cities to engage Met Council during planning processes, to identify whether the project should include elements that would make it a competitive LCDA app. (inner ring suburb)
- To me, the funds are important as a source or regional gap funds that other regions don't have... especially helpful for affordable housing. The problem with the "innovative" requirement is that affordable housing development already has a math problem to solve. Adding costs to make it innovative and then requesting grant funds seems a little too circular to me. (outer ring)
- We haven't developed a formal process. There should be some recognition that works in one setting, might not work in others. We have struggled to find interested developers for vertically integrated, mixed-use projects (housing over retail). We've had more success with mixed income projects. There really needs to be flexibility in the application of these criteria. It might work in one situation, but market forces make it more challenging. (outer ring suburb)
- Providing examples and showcasing projects that received awards is most helpful. (inner ring suburb)

- I do not believe that the LCDA programs funds innovative projects. The projects that have been funded are similar projects. The program does not fund projects that are innovative and they do not show other communities how to replicate the funded projects. This application review should look at innovation in the context of the community in which the project is based. Creative ways to involve partners, funding strategies and tools should be a stronger consideration. (developing edge)
- The fact that the grant won't pay for soft costs is especially challenging for projects in smaller and less affluent communities where the financing is tight (ie, how do soft costs get paid for?). (inner ring suburb)
- What is a "better mixed use". The examples and guidelines should be more clear on this. The suburbs differ greatly from inner cities on opportunities and development potential on any given site. Perhaps the program should be split from the beginning so inner city application are compared to each other and suburban applications are compared to each other with different criteria and points spread. What is innovative in one environment may not be in another. (outer ring suburb)

7. **The Met Council's transit oriented development (TOD) grants aim to promote moderate to high density development projects located within walking distance of a major transit stop that typically include a mix of uses such as housing, jobs, restaurants, shops, and entertainment.**

   How does your city identify projects that could be considered transit oriented development? Are the Council's goals clearly outlined? Do the Council's TOD guidelines allow enough flexibility in this category?

- This requirement assumes every place in the metro has reliable, recurrent and predictable transit. Understanding that this is only going to occur in a small number of places would just make it more genuine. (outer ring suburb)
- The guidelines could provide more flexibility and examples for outer ring suburbs and out-state cities. (inner ring suburb)
- We are comfortable with the TOD offerings and process. We have identified a few sites by working with Met Council staff- that is a very helpful and valuable resource for us. The challenge is that TOD grants will be looked at on a project by project basis, when in fact if you look at all of the area amenities and affordable housing, the larger redevelopment area meets Met Council objectives when while an individual project does not. Credit is not given for what is existing whether recently redeveloped or existing housing stock. Also- if the funding is weighted for affordable housing, then the application should just require it from the on-set if that is how the funding has been working out. Being flexible and allowing for a broad range of project types and fund

uses should have a scoring system that gives weight to a range of factors to get a more broad outcome of project types. (outer ring suburb)

8. Please provide any other thoughts, feedback, or suggestions on the LCA programs.

- The TOD grant only allows 2 projects to be awarded per city. This should also be the limit on the number of applications that can be submitted per city. This would ensure the applications reflect the cities prioritizations.
- The LCA grant process is a long, rigorous process that may deter small and/or less-affluent cities, as well as outstate cities from applying due to limited staff, inexperience, and lack of funding to hire a consultant to assist. To encourage more suburbs, smaller/less affluent cities and outstate cities to apply, Met Council may want to consider condensing the application and/or process and then specifically marketing this grant to those groups, or providing some sort of grant writing assistance to qualifying communities.
- Another consideration is that less-affluent suburbs often struggle to get development projects off the ground due to large gaps in financing related to lower valuations. The LCA grants typically cover the costs of the innovative design feature, but do not cover soft costs such as architectural design and engineering. These projects are running so thin that it is often impossible for them to cover the soft costs. (inner ring suburb)
- With limited transit, it is difficult to obtain funds for projects. (outer ring suburb)
- The projects we contemplate bring high density market rate housing to our community which is my Met Council measures, 92.8% affordable already. Since the new housing will help achieve household growth projections, and we are already affordable, we should not be penalized because it is market-rate. (inner ring suburb)
- Not every city will meet the Met Council's goals based on its development. It may not have the density needed to access funds. There may be value in having an LCA account that's not as reliant on transit. Greenfield development should be able to access money. What funds work for them? Is this a new account? Innovation in one community may not work in other communities. (outer ring suburb)
- Having a developer ready is a big challenge. Often, the developer's timelines are different than the funding timelines. Or, a city may want to apply for funds for a project that would entice or create the opportunity for a developer to come forward. This is our biggest challenge and why we have not applied recently- having a project that has a developer at the ready has not usually worked for us. (outer ring)
- LCA grants are vitally important to our work. The LCDA and LCDA-TOD grants are tremendously challenging to administer properly. Expectations often do not match the reality of how redevelopment proceeds. LCDA funds are often awarded early in the process of a developer securing numerous funding sources for affordable housing projects. Met Council staff has become frustrated with the number and frequency of these changes, which are a normal part of
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the development process. Also, the level of detail to which each funded line item needs to be documented for reimbursement purposes is onerous. (inner ring)