BLOOMBERG CENTER FOR CITIES
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

OPEN CALL FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Local Government Responses to Housing Challenges in the United States

With support from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard University invites proposals for research on the effectiveness of local government responses to housing challenges and the organizational conditions that shape whether those responses work in practice.

Housing challenges take different forms across places and households. In some communities, the most visible problem is the scarcity and cost of homes. In others, it is whether existing homes remain affordable, safe, and habitable. High costs put homeownership or stable long-term rental housing out of reach for many households. Others face the risk of eviction, foreclosure, or displacement; still others are navigating homelessness or trying to secure stable housing after losing it. These challenges are connected, but they do not require identical responses. They also affect outcomes beyond housing itself, including health, employment, family stability, access to care, wealth accumulation, and the ability to remain connected to community.

Local governments play an important part in how these challenges are addressed. They influence the development of new housing through land-use and permitting systems. They use public funds, public land, and partnerships to produce or preserve housing. They administer assistance, enforce housing standards, and work with other organizations to help residents remain housed. City leaders also help determine which housing problems receive public attention and can make housing a shared civic priority by bringing public, private, and civic actors into common work focused on local housing needs.

Local governments operate within a broader system they do not control. Federal and state policies shape their authority and resources, while public, private, and nonprofit actors also influence housing outcomes. Cities must therefore act through arrangements in which authority, responsibility, information, and resources are shared.

City leaders across the nation want to do more to address housing challenges and are looking for new ideas to inform their responses. This includes new policies and programs aimed at improving the availability and quality of housing, for example by supporting new development or the repair and adaptation of existing homes. It also includes efforts to support residents' housing stability, helping them manage housing costs or secure a suitable

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home when their needs and circumstances change. The search for new ideas extends to how cities organize and lead their work on housing. Some are establishing dedicated teams that bring staff from different departments and partner organizations together around shared goals, with clear responsibility for advancing the work. Cities are also reconsidering how leaders set priorities and how managers deploy staff expertise, review progress, and resolve problems across departments and organizational boundaries.

To help cities make these choices about which housing responses to pursue and how to organize, manage, and lead this work, the call has two goals:

1. **To support research on the effectiveness of local government responses to housing problems, including specific policies, programs, and interventions; and**

2. **To support research on the conditions that shape how local government responses work in practice, including how cities select, implement, adapt, and assess those responses.**

With these aims in mind, the call invites proposals addressing four priority areas: regulatory systems; strategies for housing finance; targeting and delivering assistance; and building support for local housing action.

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RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Regulatory systems

Local governments shape the development and preservation of housing through requirements that extend beyond land-use rules. Building codes, for example, influence how housing is designed and constructed, while infrastructure obligations can affect whether development is financially feasible. Rules governing environmental assessment or appeals can further affect whether a proposed development proceeds.

For existing housing, local governments also establish and enforce standards for maintenance and repair. Compliance can impose substantial costs, raising questions about how to secure necessary improvements while keeping homes affordable and residents housed. Other requirements govern alterations to existing buildings. Historic-preservation rules, for example, may limit changes intended to accommodate additional housing or enable adaptation to climate risks.

Each requirement can affect housing outcomes on its own, whether by changing what can be built or the cost of maintaining existing homes. Some effects, however, can only be understood by examining how requirements interact. Allowing more housing on a site may have little effect if the cost of meeting infrastructure obligations is prohibitive. Efforts to improve an existing building can likewise become difficult when satisfying one standard may entail alterations restricted by another. Costs can also accumulate across requirements that appear manageable in isolation.

Local governments do not control all of the rules and requirements that they may be required to enforce. State and federal law constrains what cities can change, even when they are responsible for implementation. Whether requirements originate locally or elsewhere, their effects depend on how local governments administer them in practice. When departments interpret overlapping requirements differently, applicants may face repeated revisions without a clear route to approval. The division of responsibilities across departments, together with the expertise and information available to staff, shapes how cities make decisions and respond to housing problems. To achieve the intended outcomes of regulation, local governments may need to coordinate with other agencies and service providers.

We seek proposals for research examining how regulatory requirements beyond land use shape housing outcomes, including the effects of individual requirements and those that arise from interactions among them. Proposals on land-use regulation are also welcome where they address questions that have received limited research attention or for which existing evidence is inconsistent. We welcome studies of longstanding regulatory arrangements alongside research on recent reforms. Research proposals focused on the production of new housing could examine how regulatory requirements affect development costs and expected returns. This includes whether projects that are legally permissible and technically feasible offer sufficient returns for developers to proceed without subsidy. Studies might assess how these requirements influence whether development occurs, the scale and types of housing built, and the amount of funding needed to make projects financially viable. For existing housing, proposals might explore how requirements affect maintenance and rehabilitation, or the scope to adapt buildings to changing needs and climate risks. Research could examine whether these requirements improve housing conditions, how they affect the costs of keeping homes habitable, and what those costs mean for affordability and residents' ability to remain housed.

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We also welcome research examining how organizational conditions shape the effective implementation of regulatory requirements. This includes established administrative practices as well as new approaches that cities are developing or adopting. Proposals might explore reforms to permitting and development review, including whether changes in how departments coordinate decisions with one another and with organizations outside city government reduce delays and uncertainty, and what those changes mean for the housing ultimately delivered. Studies could also examine how the balance between standardized approval criteria and case-by-case judgment affects the timing and predictability of decisions, and in turn the housing that results. For proposals focused on existing housing, research might examine whether sharing information across departments, agencies, and partner organizations, or connecting enforcement with assistance, improves housing conditions and helps residents remain housed. Research could also examine how differences in enforcement across properties and neighborhoods affect who bears compliance costs, whose housing conditions improve, and whether residents can remain in their homes.

ILLUSTRATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **How do regulatory requirements beyond land use affect the cost and feasibility of housing production, and which kinds of housing are most affected?**
- **How does the scope for discretion in permitting and development review affect the cost, timing, and predictability of approvals and the housing ultimately delivered?**
- **How do requirements governing the maintenance, rehabilitation, and adaptation of existing housing, and the practices used to enforce them, affect housing conditions and continued affordability?**
- **When do regulatory requirements compound or offset one another, and what are the consequences for housing production or preservation?**
- **How do organizational conditions, including coordination across departments and with partner organizations, shape the implementation and effectiveness of housing regulation?**

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Strategies for housing finance

Local governments can address local housing needs both by committing resources of their own and by shaping how funding from other sources is assembled and used. A city may use its own funds alongside federal subsidies to make new homes affordable to lower-income households, or work with a housing authority to finance rehabilitation that preserves existing affordable housing. This gives cities a say in investment decisions that would otherwise rest with other public bodies and lenders, and a means of connecting those decisions to local housing priorities.

The scope for municipal action depends on the powers cities have and the resources available to them. State law may authorize certain financing tools, but a city may lack the resources to use them, particularly where housing competes with other demands on its budget. Property taxation and tax incentives can also shape the costs and returns of housing investment, although local governments' authority over these tools varies. Where funding is limited, publicly owned land offers an alternative, with long-term leases reducing upfront development costs while keeping the land in public hands. What cities can achieve is also bounded by the money they must raise from other institutions alongside their own. Federal tax credits and rental assistance can extend the reach of municipal funds, but cities must work within the requirements of those programs. The availability of lenders and investment partners, including banks and community development financial institutions, further affects which financing strategies cities can pursue. Climate-related risks and insurance costs can also affect the feasibility of housing investments and the financing available to support them.

Some cities are experimenting with new ways of financing housing, often by adapting existing tools and institutions. Through revolving funds, they can lend money for housing and use repayments to finance further investment. Cities may also bring public, private, and nonprofit partners together to establish housing investment funds or other financing arrangements. Their role may include contributing capital, securing commitments from other investors, or coordinating the terms on which different organizations participate. Others are creating or adapting public entities that develop housing and keep an ownership stake in it. As an owner, local government can continue to influence rents and the use of a property long after the initial investment. The choice of institution can also expand the financing tools available to a city. Working through a housing-authority affiliate, for example, may provide access to borrowing powers or tax exemptions unavailable to a municipal department. In establishing these tools, cities must decide which investment decisions to delegate and how they will ensure that commitments to affordability are upheld over time. More broadly, financing and ownership arrangements distribute financial risks, returns, and decision-making authority among local governments and their partners. How these are allocated can affect both the housing delivered and the city's continuing financial exposure.

The roles that cities assume in housing finance place different demands on municipal staff and on their relationships with other institutions. Some cities may rely on the financial expertise of staff inside city hall, while others may draw more heavily on advisers or the know-how of partner institutions. Where different bodies control land and funding, city staff may need to negotiate terms that each institution can accept while preserving local housing priorities, and coordinate decisions across institutions with different approval processes and timelines. Taking on new lending or ownership responsibilities requires cities to decide who will oversee agreements after the initial investment and how to maintain that oversight as staff and administrations change. Whether cities assign these responsibilities internally or rely on partner institutions raises questions about the expertise they need in-house and how those arrangements affect housing outcomes over time.

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We seek research on how local governments mobilize and direct financing to address housing needs, and on the housing outcomes they achieve. We welcome studies of established financing practices alongside research on innovations, including how cities combine their own resources with federal and state support. Our interests include whether municipal action enables additional housing and how it affects who can afford the homes produced or preserved. Research could compare the housing outcomes achieved through different financing and ownership arrangements, taking account of public costs, financial risks, and the control local governments retain over the use and affordability of housing. Studies could also examine whether municipal contributions of funding, land, or other support attract additional private investment or substitute for financing that would otherwise be available, and what difference this makes to the amount and affordability of housing produced or preserved.

We also welcome research examining how organizational conditions shape municipal housing finance strategies and their effectiveness. Studies might explore how cities use financial expertise and local information to select approaches suited to their housing needs, and how that judgment informs the agreements they negotiate. We are interested in what cities choose to retain in-house when they rely on outside advisers or separate public entities, including how the division of responsibilities among city departments and partner organizations affects investment decisions and oversight. This could include how organizations share information, resolve disagreements, and sustain commitments over time. Research could also examine whether coordination among city departments, housing authorities, economic and community development corporations, lenders, and other partners helps cities secure financing for needs that existing programs leave unmet, or how cities use evidence from earlier investments to revise financing terms or decide where to direct future support.

ILLUSTRATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **When do local government financing strategies attract additional capital for housing, and when do they substitute for financing that would otherwise be available? And what difference do they make to the amount and affordability of housing produced or preserved?**
- **What are the different ways in which city governments combine local resources with federal or state financing, and what consequences do these arrangements have for the housing supported?**
- **How do different financing and ownership arrangements compare in the amount and affordability of housing they produce or preserve relative to their public costs and financial risks, and to how control is shared among participating organizations?**
- **How do municipal capabilities and organizational arrangements among city departments and partner organizations shape the financing strategies cities adopt, the terms they are able to negotiate, and the housing outcomes achieved?**

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Targeting and delivering assistance

Local governments play an important role in helping residents secure stable housing and remain in their homes when their housing is at risk. Rental assistance may help a household meet ongoing costs or resolve arrears, while legal support can help tenants facing eviction. Cities may also help homeowners pay for urgent repairs, such as fixing a leaking roof or replacing a failed boiler. For people who have already lost their housing, local governments can work with providers to offer shelter and help residents secure stable accommodation. With some residents needing help to stay in their homes and others needing help to find housing, cities must decide which forms of assistance to support and whom to prioritize within each program.

Allocating limited resources across assistance programs requires local governments to assess their likely benefits and costs under local conditions. Their choices may be constrained by state and federal funding requirements that restrict which programs or households they can support. Where cities have discretion, funding one approach may leave fewer resources for another, making evidence about their relative effectiveness especially relevant. A program with substantial benefits may, however, require staff expertise or delivery arrangements that a city cannot readily provide. An alternative with more modest effects may cost less or allow assistance to reach residents sooner. The value of additional municipal spending also depends on what other organizations already provide and where needs remain unmet. Expanding a program may address a gap in provision, but its effectiveness may depend on complementary support available through another provider.

Within programs, cities must also decide which eligible individuals and households to prioritize. Those facing the greatest hardship may differ from those for whom a particular intervention is most likely to prevent housing loss. Cities may also need to weigh continued support for existing recipients against extending assistance to households not yet served. How these choices are made affects the distribution of assistance and the outcomes a program achieves.

Eligibility alone does not ensure that residents receive assistance. Some may be unaware that help is available or unable to complete the documentation required to apply. Others may receive approval but still struggle to use the benefit, particularly where assistance depends on landlord participation or finding a suitable home. Local governments can influence these processes through outreach and the requirements they set, although their scope to simplify access may be limited by the rules of the programs they administer. Research on how assistance reaches residents therefore needs to consider where difficulties arise and how they affect who ultimately benefits.

The timing of assistance can also affect whether it prevents housing loss. Residents may have fewer options for remaining in their homes as they wait for assistance, particularly if eviction proceedings are underway. Cities therefore need to consider how long decisions and payments take, as well as when residents first become eligible for help. Timing also matters when individuals or households need more than one form of assistance. Financial support and legal advice may be administered separately, with delays in one limiting the effectiveness of the other. For people experiencing homelessness, securing housing may depend on support continuing through the transition from temporary accommodation to a settled home.

Providing assistance in time often requires local governments to work with other public agencies and nongovernmental organizations. A city may fund a program while relying on outside providers to process applications or deliver support. When responsibilities are divided, staff in one organization may recognize a problem without having the authority or information to resolve it. Whether residents receive timely assistance can depend on how local governments establish shared priorities with these organizations and ensure that responsibilities are understood and carried out.

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We seek research on whether housing assistance reduces housing cost burdens and prevents housing loss, and on the durability of those effects. Studies could examine how outcomes differ for residents experiencing a temporary financial setback and those facing persistent housing insecurity, with implications for the form and duration of support. Research on targeting could assess whether prioritizing those at greatest risk produces different outcomes from directing assistance toward those most likely to benefit from a particular intervention. Studies could also examine whether changes to application requirements improve access for residents whose circumstances make existing procedures difficult to navigate. Comparisons across programs could clarify how the benefits achieved relate to public costs, while research on timing could establish when assistance is most effective and whether complementary support improves its results. For people experiencing homelessness, research could assess whether assistance enables a sustained transition to stable housing.

We also invite research on how local governments make decisions about allocating limited resources across assistance programs, including how they use evidence to set priorities and revise funding decisions over time. Findings from other jurisdictions do not always travel, and we welcome studies of how officials weigh such evidence against local needs and their own capacity to deliver. Research could examine how collaboration across departments and with providers and other organizations, together with knowledge of residents' experiences, informs funding decisions or changes to administrative practice, particularly by revealing unmet needs or barriers to assistance. Studies could compare arrangements for shared case review, referrals, and responsibility for resolving delays among departments, housing authorities, and other public or nonprofit providers, examining whether these arrangements help residents receive assistance in time to prevent housing loss. Where responsibilities are shared, research could examine how local governments build and sustain agreement across these organizations.

ILLUSTRATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **Which forms of housing assistance help residents secure and maintain stable, affordable housing, and how durable are those effects?**
- **How do the benefits of different programs compare with their public costs, and where does additional municipal spending make the most difference given what other organizations already provide?**
- **When available funding is insufficient to assist all eligible households, how do prioritization rules shape who receives assistance and what programs achieve, including the choice between those in greatest hardship and those most likely to be helped?**
- **What keeps eligible residents from receiving or using assistance, and how far can outreach and administrative requirements change that?**
- **How much does the timing of assistance matter, including how quickly decisions and payments are made, when residents first become eligible, and how separate forms of support are sequenced?**
- **How does the organization of shared responsibilities among local government departments, housing authorities, and other public or nonprofit providers affect who receives assistance, how quickly it reaches them, and whether it improves housing stability?**

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Building support for local housing action

City leaders often need support from individuals, groups, and organizations outside municipal government to address local housing challenges. Residents have different concerns, preferences, and expectations about how policies will affect their homes and neighborhoods. Tenant organizations and environmental groups may press for measures that protect existing residents or limit the environmental impact of development. Landlords, developers, nonprofit housing providers, and lenders make decisions that affect what gets built or preserved. Housing authorities and state agencies often control resources or approvals needed to put local plans into effect, while city leaders can work with federal agencies to secure funding and other support. Some of these actors may have a history of working together; others may have had limited contact or even experienced tensions and conflict.

How local governments work with this wider set of actors can shape which housing responses they pursue and what those responses achieve. Cities may engage residents to understand their housing needs or seek developers' views on how proposed rules would affect construction. They may also seek support for a contested policy, including from groups that might expect to bear some of its costs. Other efforts may aim to persuade organizations to contribute land or financing that they might not otherwise provide. The purpose of engagement can inform how a city approaches it. A mayor might convene a cross-sector task force, while in other cases the city may join or support a coalition led by outside organizations. Staff may seek targeted input or undertake broader outreach. Officials need to consider whose views established organizations represent and how best to reach people and groups who lack organized representation. Local governments also face choices about whom to involve, when and how to engage them, which issues to open to participation, and how much influence participants should have over decisions. These choices affect not only how well cities understand local housing challenges but also how much buy-in and backlash their responses generate.

We seek research on how local governments build support for housing action among residents and organizations with a stake in local housing decisions. Support may mean public backing for a proposal, an organization's willingness to change how it operates, or the resources that actors are willing to contribute to addressing local housing challenges. Studies could examine how cities engage different groups of residents to inform housing decisions and build support for proposed responses, including ballot measures to fund housing through local taxes or bonds. They could also explore how city leaders make the case for action to organizations with different priorities and persuade them to work together toward shared housing goals. Research might examine how expertise and relationships with outside actors are distributed across city departments, whose priorities may differ. It could explore how city leaders and staff draw on these connections while managing internal disagreements, and how this shapes their ability to build and maintain support for housing action. Research could also examine how local governments work with existing coalitions or form new ones and sustain cooperation to advance housing goals even as local conditions change or new leaders take office.

ILLUSTRATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **How can local governments engage renters, homeowners, and other residents to inform housing decisions and build public support for proposed responses?**
- **What helps local governments persuade developers, landlords, and lenders to support housing proposals that require them to accept new obligations or commit resources?**
- **Which organizational arrangements help local governments draw on expertise and external relationships across departments to build and maintain support for housing action when departmental priorities differ?**
- **What roles can local governments play in working with existing coalitions or helping new ones form, and how does their involvement affect cooperation and progress toward housing goals over time?**

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CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITIES AND SCOPE

This call aims to support rigorous research that advances scholarly understanding and helps city leaders and local governments choose and implement responses to the housing challenges they face. We welcome a broad range of perspectives on housing policy and practice as well as the roles local governments play, including how they work with other organizations. Proposed research may examine longstanding policies, programs, and organizational arrangements, or recent innovations. In either case, we will prioritize proposals with the potential to produce new evidence and knowledge that deepen or revise what is known about the effectiveness of different approaches and the conditions that shape how and why they work in practice.

We invite researchers across disciplines and fields to bring their ideas and expertise to the issues and questions outlined in this call, and we especially encourage applications from early-career researchers. Proposals may draw on observational, experimental, or quasi-experimental designs and use quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods.

The focus of this call is on local governments in urban areas of the United States. Studies may focus on individual jurisdictions or compare multiple jurisdictions, including those within the same metropolitan area or state and across states, but we will prioritize proposals for research with a high likelihood of producing insights that are relevant to more cities than the ones studied. City leaders commonly draw on research from other places when deciding how to act, even though a response that succeeds in one setting may produce different results in another. Across all four priority areas, we welcome research on how local governments assess and use evidence from other places when choosing and adapting housing responses. Studies could examine how officials weigh the available evidence alongside local needs and their capacity to put a response into practice.

In selecting projects, we will also prioritize building a portfolio of research on how local governments address housing challenges in varied contexts. Applicants will be asked to explain why they selected their research setting(s) and how conditions in those settings may affect the relevance of their findings to other jurisdictions. The circumstances that warrant attention will depend on the study: they may concern the housing needs, market conditions, and policies surrounding a response, or the authority, resources, and organizational practices involved in carrying it out. Taken together, the funded studies aim to give city leaders a stronger basis for judging what they can learn from other jurisdictions and what acting on those lessons would require. We therefore seek research that examines both what works and what it takes to make it work in a given local context.

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APPLICATION AND AWARD DETAILS

Who may apply

- This call is open to both individuals holding appointments at Harvard University and individuals not affiliated with Harvard University.
- Eligible Principal Investigators (PIs), who may be based anywhere in the world, include:
  - faculty or research staff holding a full-time position at an institution of higher education;
  - individuals working at a research center or institute, think tank, or nonprofit organization.[1]
- Submitted proposals must include at least one PI with a Ph.D. or equivalent terminal research degree.
- Proposals may include collaborators from multiple organizations. One eligible organization must serve as the applicant of record and, if selected, will receive and administer the award. More than one application per institution is permitted, but an individual may serve as a PI on only one application.
- Local governments may participate as project partners and receive funds through a subaward, but they may not serve as the applicant organization.
- Laboratories or programs supported through funding from the Bloomberg Center for Cities are not eligible to receive an award through this call. Researchers affiliated with those laboratories or programs may participate as collaborators; however, individuals currently receiving such funding may not serve as PIs.

Application process

Stage 1 — Letter of Interest

The Letter of Interest (LOI) should describe the focus and aims of the proposed research, how it will build on existing work, and its contribution to scholarship. It should explain which housing challenge(s) the research addresses, the choice of data sources and geographic scope, and how the findings could help city leaders and local governments respond more effectively in the places studied or elsewhere.

The letter should also outline the research approach and the data the study will draw on. For any data access or partnerships essential to carrying out the work, applicants should describe what has been arranged and what remains to be secured. The letter should include the expected project duration and funding range and disclose any other funding for the proposed research, whether secured or under consideration.

Letters of Interest are submitted through this application form. Submissions must be received by 11:59 PM (ET) on December 8, 2026. You will receive confirmation of receipt upon submission. If you need an accommodation to apply, please contact opencalls@cities.harvard.edu at least three working days before the submission deadline.

[1]Eligibility of applicant organizations may be subject to final approval by Harvard University, in keeping with its standard policies and procedures.

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Stage 2 — Invited Full Proposal

Applicants invited to submit a full proposal will be asked to develop the research approach outlined in the LOI into a detailed design and make a fuller case for the study's contribution to scholarship and practice. The proposal should elaborate on the housing challenges the research addresses, the methods, and the data the study will require. It should also describe what city leaders and local governments in different contexts could learn from the findings. This includes explaining how the study's scope and design support drawing lessons across cities, and where they may limit the conclusions that can be drawn or the settings in which those lessons apply.

The full proposal should include information about the research team's relevant experience, each member's role, and the time they will commit to the project. It should also include a work plan, timetable, and detailed budget, along with publication and dissemination plans.

At this stage, applicants will be asked to provide supporting documentation of essential data access and partnership arrangements, where relevant. Applicants must also confirm that an Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) at their organization has approved the application materials and budget for submission.

Timeline

Letters of Interest due	December 8, 2026, 11:59 PM EST
Invitations to submit full proposals issued	December 21, 2026
Full proposals due	February 1, 2027
Awards announced	Early March 2027
Award setup, including institutional and financial registration	March 31, 2027
Projects begin	From spring 2027, with individual start dates agreed with funded teams

Applicants are encouraged to notify their research administration or sponsored programs office when submitting the LOI and include the office's contact information in the LOI. Early notice will help institutional offices plan for the approvals and budget sign-off required at the full-proposal stage, taking year-end holiday schedules into account.

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Award conditions

Institutional, ethics, and compliance requirements

Applicants must comply with applicable policies and regulations of their home organization. Applicants who are invited to submit full proposals must provide proof of review by an authorized organizational representative of their home organization. For more information, see the FAQ.

Applicants must meet all ethical and legal requirements that apply to their proposed research. Research involving human subjects must receive approval or a determination of exemption, as applicable, from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or equivalent ethics review body. Applicants from organizations without their own review board may arrange review through an external IRB or equivalent body. Approval or an exemption determination is not required at the Letter of Interest stage, but full proposals should identify the reviewing body and include the anticipated timing of ethics review in the project timeline. Funding cannot be disbursed until the required documentation of ethics review has been provided.

Project duration, reporting, and deliverables

The Center welcomes proposals for projects lasting up to 24 months. Applicants should scope their research to be completed within this period. No-cost extensions may be approved. The award agreement will confirm the project period and research outputs and specify the requirements and deadlines for narrative and financial reporting, along with the payment schedule. Awardees must also give the Center advance notice of the planned release of research outputs and notify it of any additional funding received from other sources for the project after the award is made.

Convenings

Accepting an award requires at least one PI from each funded research team to participate in convenings and shared-learning activities. Awardees will have opportunities to share and receive feedback on their funded projects, learn about other projects, and work with practitioners to examine how emerging findings relate to the challenges city leaders and local governments face. These exchanges aim to help awardees build connections with researchers and practitioners beyond their own teams. Some convenings will bring all funded research teams together; others will gather smaller groups around common questions or topics. Activities will take place virtually and in person over the award period. These activities will be planned with attention to researchers' interests and the stages of their projects, and meeting dates and expected time commitments will be shared with sufficient notice to help participants plan. We anticipate up to two required in-person convenings, with PI travel costs covered by the Bloomberg Center for Cities. Additional team members may be invited; applicants may budget for up to two additional team members to attend each convening.

Open access and data sharing

Publications arising from funded research, including journal articles, books, and book chapters, must be made openly available through the publisher or an institutional or disciplinary repository. Repository copies may be the version of record or the final accepted manuscript, subject to the publishing agreement or rights retained by the author. Awardees must ensure their publishing arrangements permit compliance. Any anticipated open-access publication fees can be included in the proposed budget. Awardees are expected to make the primary data generated or collected through the funded research available to other researchers, where permitted and within

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a reasonable timeframe after publication of the associated findings. Proposals seeking support to develop or expand a dataset must describe how others will be able to access and use the funded data, including any licensing restrictions, eligibility conditions, or charges. These arrangements will be considered in the funding decision. Where an award specifically supports a dataset for free public access and reuse, the funded data must be made publicly available as early as possible, in a form that others can readily use. Proposed data-sharing arrangements and timelines must be described at the full-proposal stage, including any restrictions arising from data-use agreements, confidentiality obligations, or the protection of participants. Final arrangements will be established during contracting and set out in the award agreement.

Communicating research and informing practice

Awardees retain control of their research at all times and decide when and where to publish their own work. In addition, the Center will work with awardees, practitioners, and other collaborators to make published evidence and lessons from funded research available to and usable by city leaders and local governments. The Center will take a leading role in connecting the research funded through this call with practitioner audiences, drawing on its existing relationships with mayors and city leaders and practitioner networks. This includes both sharing findings from individual projects and synthesizing evidence and insights from the full portfolio of funded projects. The Center will develop resources, including written and multimedia materials, and in-person and online events that share findings and discuss their implications for different practitioner audiences. These resources will be freely and openly available. The Center will work with awardees to ensure conclusions, recommendations, implications, and limitations of their research are reflected accurately in summaries, syntheses, events, and communications. Before sharing any materials based on funded research, the Center will give researchers whose work is included a four-week review period. Awardees are also encouraged to pursue their own opportunities to share findings with practitioner audiences, and the Center will support those efforts where possible and relevant.

Project changes

Material changes to a funded project require prior approval from the Center. These may include changes to the project's scope, methods, data sources, research sites, timeline, budget, or team. Awardees should raise proposed changes as early as possible. The award agreement will set out the process for requesting approval.

Acknowledgment

Publications, presentations, and public materials arising from the award must acknowledge the support of the Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard University. The award agreement will provide additional information on acknowledgment requirements.

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Funding and costs

Award amounts

The Center welcomes research with a range of scopes and timelines. Awards are available in two funding bands, based on direct costs (i.e., excluding applicable indirect costs):

- Less than $75,000.
- $75,000 or more, with no set upper limit.

Indirect costs

Applicants may request indirect costs of up to 15% of total direct costs, regardless of their organization's negotiated rate. For projects administered by Harvard University, the indirect cost rate is based on the applicable Harvard school's financial policies.

Project partners and subawards
Funds may support work undertaken by project partners, including local governments, through subawards.

Allowable costs

Award funds may cover reasonable costs needed to carry out the proposed research and meet the award's requirements. These include personnel costs, including salary support and teaching release for time devoted to the project; data collection, acquisition, access, cleaning, and documentation; participant compensation; research-related travel; and open-access publication fees.

Equipment and technology

Equipment, software, and computing services may be included where they are needed for the proposed research and suitable resources are not reasonably available through the participating organizations. Routine office equipment and general institutional technology provision are not eligible.

Conference attendance

Award funds may support attendance at conferences to present findings from the funded research. Total conference-related costs, including registration, travel, accommodation, and meals, may not exceed $5,000 per project over the award period.

Excluded costs

Award funds may not cover expenses unrelated to the project, lobbying or political activity, general operating support unrelated to the research, or the purchase, construction, or renovation of buildings.

Other funding

Co-funded projects are eligible. Applicants must disclose other funding secured or under consideration for the proposed research and identify the costs this award would support. Costs covered by another funder may not be charged to this award.

At the LOI stage, applicants provide an expected funding range. At the full-proposal stage, applicants submit a detailed budget and explain how the costs support the research. Where applicable, include the work and costs assigned to each subaward; for teaching release, the amount of release time, the research time it provides, and how its cost was calculated; and for equipment, software, or computing services, the intended research use and why suitable resources are not reasonably available through the participating organizations.

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Review and selection

Letters of Interest will be assessed to determine which applicants are invited to submit a full proposal. Full proposals will undergo blind external review. The four criteria below guide assessment at both stages, with the depth of review reflecting the information available.

Assessment criteria

- **Research design.** Proposals will be assessed on whether the design is suited to the research question(s) under investigation and whether the choice of methods, data, and research settings is well justified. Assessment will also consider the rigor of the methods and analysis in terms appropriate to the approach, along with the proposal's treatment of the design's main limitations and their implications for interpreting findings.
- **Contribution to scholarship.** Proposals will be assessed on the significance of the research question in light of existing scholarship and the contribution the proposed research could make to it. Assessment will consider what prior work has established, what remains uncertain or contested, and how the research could deepen or revise current understanding. That contribution might come from new findings about a housing response, a clearer account of why results differ across settings, or research into organizational and institutional arrangements that shape what local governments can achieve.
- **Value to city leaders and local governments.** Proposals will be assessed on the significance of the housing problem or choice they address and how the research could help local governments respond. Findings might inform which policies and programs cities pursue, how they adapt them, or how they assess their results. They might also help city leaders decide how to organize and manage the work of addressing housing challenges, including how they assign responsibilities, draw on staff expertise, review progress, resolve problems, and engage with partner organizations. Assessment will consider how clearly the proposal connects its research question(s) to choices local governments can make, and how differences in authority, resources, and local conditions may affect what other cities can learn from the findings.
- **Feasibility.** Proposals will be assessed on whether the research can be completed within the proposed timeline and budget, and whether the amount requested is proportionate to the work. Assessment will consider the scope and work plan, the team's relevant expertise and responsibilities, and whether access to essential data, research sites, and partners is in place or can reasonably be secured.

Final selection

Final selection will be guided by the strength of individual proposals across the four criteria and the aim of supporting a coherent portfolio that advances the goals of the call. In assembling the portfolio, the Center will consider connections among projects within and across the priority areas, and whether the funded studies collectively examine a range of housing challenges, market and policy contexts, and the organizational and institutional conditions that shape how local governments work. Together, the studies should give city leaders and local governments across the country a stronger basis for assessing housing responses, improving how they are carried out, and judging how findings from other settings bear on the housing challenges and choices they face.

The Center recognizes the time and effort involved in preparing an application but is unable to share individualized feedback or reviewer assessments.

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Questions

For questions about the call or application process, please consult the FAQ.
Additional questions may be directed to opencalls@cities.harvard.edu.

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