BLOOMBERG CENTER FOR CITIES
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Open Call for Research Proposals: Local Government Responses to Housing Challenges in the United States

Please read this FAQ alongside the full call for proposals

Last updated: November 10, 2026

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Fit & Scope

1. Do proposals have to address a specific priority area?

Proposals should address one or more of the four priority areas: regulatory systems; strategies for housing finance; targeting and delivering assistance; and building support for local housing action. Proposals may address more than one priority area.

Within each area, we welcome research on the effectiveness of housing responses and on the organizational conditions that shape how those responses work in practice, including how cities organize, manage, and lead their housing work. Proposals may examine either or both.

2. Can researchers outside the United States apply, or study places outside the United States?

Eligible Principal Investigators (PIs) may be based anywhere in the world. The research must focus on local governments in urban areas of the United States. Proposals focused on local governments outside the United States are ineligible for funding.

3. What does the call mean by local government?

The call focuses on local governments in urban areas of the United States. For the purposes of this call, eligible local governments are general-purpose, elected units of government, namely cities and other municipalities (such as towns, villages, and boroughs) and townships, that serve predominantly urban or suburban populations, such as those located within a Metropolitan Statistical Area or a Census-designated urban area. Proposals may examine local housing organizations, such as housing authorities, community development financial institutions, and nonprofit providers, provided the research sheds light on the choices, actions, or responses of eligible local governments.

4. Can research examine state or federal policies or programs?

Proposals may focus on state and/or federal policies or programs but must do so in ways that inform local government responses to housing challenges. For example, studies could examine how cities implement state regulatory requirements, combine local resources with federal or state financing, or administer federally funded housing assistance. Proposals should make clear how the research findings could inform local governments' choices and decisions about which housing responses to pursue and how to implement them.

5. Can a project focus on a single city?

Studies may focus on individual jurisdictions or compare multiple, including those within the same metro area. The call prioritizes proposals that will produce insights relevant to more cities than the one(s) studied, and applicants will be asked to explain their choice of research setting(s) and how conditions in those settings may affect the relevance of their findings to other jurisdictions.

Eligibility & Partnerships

6. What is the difference between a PI and a collaborator?

PIs take overall responsibility for the intellectual direction and delivery of the funded research, including overseeing the work, coordinating the team, and ensuring that the project meets its agreed commitments. Where a project has more than one PI, these responsibilities are shared, and the PIs may be based at different organizations.

Collaborators contribute to the research without taking on the PI's overall responsibilities for the project. Their involvement may include helping develop the research questions and design, contributing methodological or substantive

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expertise, conducting research and analysis, co-authoring publications, or interpreting and communicating findings. Collaborators may make important contributions throughout the project or take responsibility for particular components.

These role descriptions do not alter the eligibility requirements in the RFP or applicable requirements of participating organizations.

7. What is considered an equivalent terminal research degree?

Equivalent terminal research degrees include qualifications such as a Doctor of Philosophy (D.Phil.) or a nationally recognized doctoral degree comparable to a Ph.D.

A qualifying degree does not, by itself, establish PI eligibility. Individuals must also meet the applicable institutional or employment criteria set out in the RFP.

8. Are postdoctoral researchers, doctoral students, or adjunct faculty eligible to serve as PIs?

Eligibility depends on the PI criteria laid out in the RFP. Individuals who do not meet these criteria may participate as collaborators on a proposal led by an eligible PI.

9. Are early-career researchers eligible?

Early-career researchers are encouraged to apply. The same PI eligibility requirements apply, and each proposal must include at least one PI with a Ph.D. or equivalent terminal research degree. All proposals will be assessed using the same criteria.

10. Are partnerships allowed?

Partnerships are allowed and encouraged where they strengthen the research design, feasibility, or potential relevance of findings. Applicants should describe each partner's role and contribution in the Letter of Interest (LOI). For partnerships that provide access to data essential for carrying out the proposed work, applicants should describe what has been arranged and what remains to be secured. Funds may support work undertaken by project partners, including local governments, through subawards.

11. Can researchers from multiple organizations apply together?

Proposals may include PIs and collaborators from multiple organizations.

PIs lead the proposed research, but one eligible organization must serve as the organizational applicant of record. If selected, that organization will receive and administer the award and enter into the relevant award agreement.

Other participating organizations may contribute to the research and, where appropriate, receive subaward funding through the primary applicant organization.

12. Can researchers participate in more than one application, and can the same institution serve as the organizational applicant of record for more than one proposal?

An individual may serve as a PI on only one application. However, a researcher serving as a PI on one proposal may participate as a collaborator on other proposals.

More than one application per institution is permitted, provided the PI eligibility requirements are met for each application.

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Submission Requirements

13. What is not required at the LOI stage?

Applicants do not need to submit a detailed work plan, detailed line-item budget, ethics review approval or an exemption determination, supporting documentation of data access and partnership arrangements, or finalized data-sharing agreements at the LOI stage.

Supporting documentation of essential data access and partnership arrangements, where relevant, will be requested at the full-proposal stage. Full proposals should also identify the ethics reviewing body and anticipated timing of review, where applicable. Required ethics review documentation must be provided before funding can be disbursed.

14. Who qualifies as an Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR)?

The Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) must have the legal or institutional authority to approve the application materials and budget for submission, review the contract template, and, if the proposal is selected, officially accept the proposal and budget so that Harvard University can process an award. For higher-education applicants, this usually means the office of sponsored projects, sponsored research, or a similar institutional office. Department heads, college deans, and college administrative officers do not ordinarily qualify as AORs for this requirement.

Applicants are encouraged to notify their research administration or sponsored programs office when submitting an 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.

15. What constitutes proof of organizational review?

At the full-proposal stage, applicants must provide a signed and dated letter from an AOR confirming review of the application materials and budget.

Budget & Allowable Costs

16. Can the funding band or requested amount change between the LOI and full-proposal stages?

A change between bands is not permitted after submitting an LOI. The detailed budget in the full proposal should fall within the estimated funding range given in the LOI. We recognize that costs may change as the research design is developed for applicants selected to submit a full proposal. Where the requested amount differs meaningfully from the LOI range, the budget justification should explain the change and how it relates to the proposed work.

17. Are indirect costs allowed?

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.

18. Does the 15% indirect cost cap apply to all direct costs, including subawards and equipment? Can subrecipients charge indirect costs?

The 15% cap is calculated on total direct costs (TDC), including subawards. Subrecipients may also charge indirect costs, capped at 15%. For projects administered by Harvard University, the indirect cost rate is based on the applicable Harvard school's financial policies.

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Timeline & Review Process

19. How long can projects run, and when will they start?

Projects may last up to 24 months. Awardees must complete the funded research and submit an end-of-project narrative report by the end of the agreed project period. The report should summarize the findings and discuss their implications for city leaders and local governments, including the scope and limits of any lessons for practice. Acceptance or publication of academic outputs is not required within this period. The award agreement will specify the academic work to be completed by project end, such as proof of completion of a full first draft or of submission of a manuscript for publication, alongside reporting requirements and deadlines. Projects begin from spring 2027, with individual start dates agreed with funded teams. No-cost extensions may be approved.

20. Will all LOI applicants be invited to submit a full proposal?

LOIs will be reviewed, and a subset of applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal.

21. Will applicants receive feedback on their LOI?

We are unable to share individualized feedback or reviewer assessments.

Research Design, Data, & Ethics

22. Are projects using existing data eligible?

Proposals may draw on existing or newly collected data. Projects using existing data should describe the data source, access status, permissions, quality, limitations, and relevance to the research question, and, for any data access essential for the work, what has been arranged and what remains to be secured. Proposals seeking support to develop or expand a dataset should describe how others will be able to access and use the data.

23. What is an external ethics review committee?

Applicants from organizations without their own review board may arrange review through an external IRB or equivalent body. Reasonable costs associated with obtaining required external ethics review may be included in the proposed research budget. Full proposals should identify the reviewing body and include the anticipated timing of review in the project timeline.

24. Can research use data that cannot be made publicly available?

Research may use data subject to confidentiality obligations, data-use agreements, legal restrictions, or requirements to protect research participants.

Awardees are expected to make primary data generated or collected through funded research available to other researchers where permitted and within a reasonable timeframe after publication of the associated findings. This expectation does not override applicable legal, ethical, or contractual restrictions.

At the full-proposal stage, applicants should describe their proposed data-sharing arrangements, including any restrictions on access or reuse and the anticipated timing of data sharing.

Projects specifically funded to develop or expand datasets must explain how others will be able to access and use the data. Where an award specifically supports a dataset for free public access and reuse, the data must be made publicly available as early as possible, in a form that others can readily use.

Final data-sharing arrangements will be established during contracting and set out in the award agreement.

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Awardee Expectations

25. What deliverables will be required?

Deliverables will reflect the nature of each project and the publication plans described in the full proposal. The award agreement will confirm the agreed research outputs. We expect the main outputs of most projects to be scholarly publications, such as journal articles, books, or book chapters. Where a project is designed to develop or expand a dataset, the dataset itself may also be an agreed output, with access arrangements described in the full proposal. Awardees retain control of their research at all times and decide when and where to publish their own work. Publications must be made openly available, and primary data should be shared with other researchers where permitted.

Other deliverables include narrative and financial reports, with requirements and deadlines set out in the award agreement. Awardees may also be asked to prepare presentations or briefing materials on their projects and emerging findings for the Center's research exchange and engagement activities. These activities will be planned with attention to the stages of awardees' projects, and expected time commitments will be shared with sufficient notice to help awardees plan.

The Bloomberg Center for Cities will take the lead in translating findings for city leaders and local governments and in synthesizing evidence and findings from the full portfolio of funded projects. It will work with awardees to ensure their research is represented accurately, and researchers will have four weeks to review any materials based on their work before release. Awardees are also encouraged to pursue their own opportunities to share findings and insights with practitioners, and the Center will support those efforts where possible.

26. Will awardees be expected to participate in research exchange and engagement activities?

Accepting an award requires at least one PI from each funded research team to participate in research exchange and engagement activities (including convenings), which will take place virtually and in person over the award period. These activities provide opportunities for research teams to share and receive feedback on funded projects, learn about other projects, and work with practitioners to examine how emerging findings relate to the challenges and choices that city leaders and local governments face.

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. Meeting dates and expected time commitments will be shared with sufficient notice to help participants plan.

27. Can project plans change after award?

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

Application Support and Questions

28. Can applicants edit their LOI after submission?

Applicants who need to correct or update materials after submitting an LOI should contact opencalls@cities.harvard.edu before the application deadline. Requests received after the deadline may not be accepted.

29. What should applicants do if they experience technical issues?

Applicants experiencing technical issues should contact opencalls@cities.harvard.edu before the application deadline and include a description of the issue, screenshots if helpful, and any relevant details.

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30. What is the process for requesting an accommodation?

Applicants who would like to request an accommodation should contact opencalls@cities.harvard.edu at least three working days before the submission deadline.

31. Can LOI responses be uploaded as a document?

LOI responses must be entered directly into the online application form. Applicants may use this version of the LOI project information questions to prepare and refine their responses before transferring them into the corresponding fields in the online form.

32. Where should applicants direct their questions?

Additional questions about the call or application process should be directed to Bloomberg Center for Cities Open Calls team at opencalls@cities.harvard.edu

33. Will answers to applicant questions be shared publicly?

Responses to questions with broad applicability may be added to this FAQ so that all applicants have access to the same information.

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