



## **Cities Forward External FAQ**

### **What is the objective of the *Cities Forward* program?**

The *Cities Forward* program, a collaborative partnership of the [U.S. Department of State](#), [ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability](#), [Resilient Cities Catalyst](#), and [The Institute of the Americas](#), provides capacity building, investment-ready project preparation, and city-to-city knowledge sharing all focused on designing and preparing projects that solve critical urban challenges around sustainability, inclusivity, and resiliency.

### **Who is eligible to apply?**

Small, medium and large local governments may apply from the **United States (U.S.)** and from the following **Latin America and Caribbean (LAC)** countries:

Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Martin, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Canadian cities are eligible to participate, but must self-fund.

### **Are you looking primarily for larger cities or will smaller cities be considered?**

We are looking for a variety of sizes and a balanced distribution of city sizes. Please don't let geographic location or city size inhibit you from applying.

### **What are the program elements of the *Cities Forward* program?**

*Cities Forward* focuses on solving key sustainability, inclusion, and resilience issues through interconnected activities:

#### Months 3-4

- 12 large, medium, and small Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) cities will be matched with 12 cities in the U.S. for peer-to-peer learning.

#### Months 6-12

- LAC cities will participate in a series of supported assessments of their existing municipal plans in order to identify standing priorities for sustainability, inclusion, and resilience. On this basis, the program will support a review of the current enabling conditions for implementing different aspects of those plan priorities, sharing knowledge with the U.S. cities. On this basis they will select one or more priority projects and measures for accelerated implementation action.

#### Months 12-24

- Building upon the earlier assessments and prioritization of opportunities, the LAC cities will be supported through a series of multi-stakeholder charrettes, executive advisory



sessions, and thematic workshops to prepare projects and measures to implement their plans, addressing relevant technical and resilience issues including climate change hazards and risks, financing, and procurement issues. They will be supported to prepare high-impact, financeable projects that will increase sustainability and resilience for the city's vulnerable populations. Cities will then develop detailed concept notes for their projects to be presented to a range of finance providers.

- LAC cities will connect with sustainable technology solution providers, the research and academic community, philanthropies, NGOs, development finance entities, multilateral organizations, and U.S. government agencies.

#### Months 12+

- All selected LAC and US cities will participate in two “Hemispheric Urban Dialogues,” including one focused on climate adaptation and one on sustainable solutions and technologies.

#### Months 24+

- All selected LAC and U.S. cities will attend a “Marketplace” event in Washington, D.C. and each LAC city will present its prepared city projects to finance providers.
- An additional 50 cities will be invited to participate in the online “Cities Forward Academy” to share outcomes and best practices and sustain momentum of the program.
- Post project, LAC cities will continue to receive 2 years of complimentary ICLEI membership. ICLEI members benefit from ongoing sustainability technical assistance delivered by ICLEI staff based in their region; peer-network engagement, including through global thematic groups, such as the Circular Cities Coalition, CitiesWithNature, The EcoMobility Alliance, and more; and access to industry-leading templates, guidebooks and other resources.

### **Is the pairing of cities (between the U.S. and LAC) a process that cities must do prior to applying, or does that come later?**

The pairing process is established by the *Cities Forward* team. As the applicant, you should work to apply with a focus on your own sustainability and resilience priorities. The pairing between Latin America, Caribbean and U.S. cities will be based on a combination of characteristics, including city size, major industries and priority thematic areas that cities are working to address in their respective communities, with the goal of maximizing two-way knowledge sharing.

### **Can I apply on behalf of a US or LAC city as a nonprofit, NGO or partner organization?**

No, at this time we will only accept applications that are submitted directly from local government representatives, which have been officially endorsed by the chief executive (e.g., Mayor) and/or the city council or similar legislative body. Nonprofits and NGOs are NOT eligible to apply for this program but can be a partner with local government entities.



### **Who will be reviewing and selecting applicants for the *Cities Forward* program?**

The selection committee will consist of members from the *Cities Forward* Partnership: Department of State, ICLEI, Resilient Cities Catalyst, and The Institute of the Americas.

### **What type of projects will this program focus on?**

Only public sector sustainability, climate, and equity-focused capital and green infrastructure projects (along with project-related services and community amenities) will be selected in the project preparation process. Priority will be given to projects that place focus on improving conditions for historically vulnerable communities.

### **The application asks for the top three urban challenges your city is focused on now - should those be related to sustainability and climate change, or should it be top challenges overall?**

We are most interested in addressing urban Sustainability, Resilience, and Inclusion. There could be other challenges, such as housing affordability for example, that are related to those other aspects. Please let us know how your top challenges are related to the aspects of Sustainability, Resilience and Inclusion.

### **What is a high-impact financeable project?**

High-impact projects are considered to be those projects that do not simply perpetuate the status quo but that also systematically advance the cities' priorities to be more equitable, sustainable and resilient.

### **Will translation support be provided if not all parties are bilingual?**

Yes, that is a critical element of the program. Translation and interpretation will be provided at the Agenda Setting Workshop in LAC and during the virtual calls.

### **If your City is not chosen, will there be an opportunity for knowledge sharing about the initiatives born out of the partnerships?**

The final component of the program is *Cities Forward* Academy. The cities that were not selected are eligible to participate in the virtual *Cities Forward* Academy to learn about the outcomes and best practices. The *Cities Forward* team will consider additional applications for the Academy on a case by case basis.

### **What are the important upcoming dates and deadlines?**

- May 25: FAQ Webinar - US Cities
- June 1: FAQ Webinar - LAC Cities (Spanish & Portuguese)
- June 2: FAQ Webinar - LAC Cities (English)



- June 15: Applications Due for ALL Cities
- July 15: LAC Cities Selection
- July 31: US Cities Selection
- August 15: Announcement of 12 City Pairs
- September 26-28 in México City, México: Agenda-Setting Workshop / *Cities Forward* Program Kickoff

### Who should I reach out to for any questions?

- For U.S. cities, please email [citiesforwardUSA@iclei.org](mailto:citiesforwardUSA@iclei.org)
- For LAC cities, please email [citiesforwardLAC@iclei.org](mailto:citiesforwardLAC@iclei.org)

## **FAQ for U.S Applicants**

### **What are the city requirements and selection criteria for U.S. cities?**

#### Existing Plans for Sustainability/Resilience

- Strong applications will show a proven track record for designing, financing, and implementing projects that support sustainability, environmental action, resilience, risk reduction, infrastructure, economic development, and inclusion efforts.

#### Dedication to Inclusion

- *Cities Forward* projects must include underserved populations. U.S. cities must demonstrate integration of underserved, historically underinvested, and vulnerable groups in your communities and in current planning efforts.

#### Commitment to Participation

- U.S. cities must commit to participating in the *Cities Forward* project for a one-year period, extendable by mutual consent to three years.
- **Estimated total number of hours:** Minimum 100 hours as estimated per the activities below.
  - **15 hours** for interacting with a LAC city paired with your community every other month over three years via 60-minute virtual meetings.
  - **30-35 hours** - Travel to Agenda-Setting Workshop
    - Will be in a LAC city (location TBD) end of September 2023
    - A travel budget of \$1,900 is allocated per city for this event
  - **15 hours** to participate in of virtual thematic cohort convenings over 3 years
  - **15 hours** dedicated to ongoing US policy dialogue surrounding Resilience, Inclusion and Sustainability over 3 years
  - **20 hours** of participation in the Cities Forward Academy in year 3
    - Opportunity to learn from the project-preparation activities of the 12 selected pairs +50 additional “Academy” cities.
  - **VOLUNTARY & SELF-FUNDED:** Travel to and participation in the ICLEI World Congress June 2024 in Sao Paulo, Brazil
    - Includes participation in the first Hemispheric Urban Dialogue on Climate Change Adaptation



- **VOLUNTARY** - Invited to work with ICLEI USA Communications Department around social media, raising visibility of leadership in the Western Hemisphere and participation in the *Cities Forward* program
- **VOLUNTARY** – opportunity for city work to be showcased in case studies/fact sheets developed during and after the program.
- **VOLUNTARY & SELF-FUNDED:** Travel to and participation in the culminating “Marketplace” in Washington DC.
  - Exclusive event for the 12 city pairs, featuring the U.S. State Department, sustainable tech solution providers, and finance institutions.
  - Includes 1.5 days of content + travel
  - Includes participation in the 2nd Hemispheric Urban Dialogue on Sustainability Technologies & Solutions
- Future Cities Summit of the Americas convenings
  - Participate in sessions to highlight U.S. participation and be recognized as part of the *Cities Forward* program

**Is this primarily targeted at cities that have not yet developed climate action plans?**

We are looking for U.S. cities that can demonstrate that they have some elements of Sustainability, Resilience, and Inclusion in existing plans. That might be a comprehensive plan or a general sustainability plan.

**Will U.S. location be part of the selection process?**

We are looking for balanced geographic distribution, including topographical factors such as a wet coastal location, or a high or very dry location.

**Was the selection of U.S. cities contingent on the LAC cities that were selected (announced 08/15)? Meaning were U.S. cities selected based on their potential to match with LAC cities?**

We made a selection of U.S. cities first and foremost on the elements of Sustainability, Resilience and Inclusion. We matched U.S. cities with LAC cities in a way that will maximize the 2-way knowledge sharing based on what we saw included in both U.S. and LAC city applications.

**Will there be additional funding for U.S. cities to lead the initiatives provided?**

The only funding available to U.S. cities is the travel stipend to attend the Agenda Setting Workshop in the selected LAC city. There are a number of other funding opportunities available through [IRA grants](#), [IJA grants](#), and other Federal Grants to support the work involving Sustainability, Resilience, and Inclusion, so we hope that Cities Forward can help you leverage your other funding streams to fully participate if that is a challenge for your city.



## What are the positive outcomes associated with the participation of U.S. cities in the *Cities Forward* program?

U.S. cities will:

- Enhance your city's reputation as a destination for tourism and investment.
- Engage in subnational diplomacy to help to build stronger international relations, promote local interests, address global issues, and enhance cultural and commercial ties.
- Learn from strategies implemented by LAC cities in the areas of sustainability, environmental action, resilience, risk reduction, infrastructure, economic development, and inclusion efforts.
- Strengthen connections with providers of sustainable technology solutions.

## Does my city have to join ICLEI to participate in Cities Forward?

- It is not necessary to be an existing member of ICLEI. All U.S. cities may apply.

## **FAQ for Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Applicants**

### What are the desired city attributes and selection criteria for LAC cities?

Capacity of City Government and Stakeholders and Commitment to Participation

- Commitment letter from the mayor or highest-ranking official, which states that the city will commit to participating for a three-year period
- Ability for stakeholders and city officials to engage in the *Cities Forward* Project
  - **Estimated required number of staff expected to participate:** 2-4 city staff members
  - **Estimated required number of hours:** 325 hours per staff member, over a three-year period, as estimated per the activities below. Select workshops may require multiple staff members across city agencies.

LAC city staff must commit to participating in the *Cities Forward* project in the following ways:

- **60 hours** participating in program kick-off and local-to-local partnership facilitation, which include an Agenda Setting Workshop finalizing cooperation charters, virtual thematic cohort convenings, interacting with a city pair in the U.S bi-monthly, and participating in facilitated bi-lateral calls
- **90 hours** participating in action plan preparation with technical and resilience experts, which include the following designed workshops to prepare cities in project development: Issues and Opportunities, Finance, and Action Enabling Environment
- **90 hours** in project preparation, which include participation in developing a project definition brief and project concept notes, attending workshops on Climate Change Hazard & Risk Assessments, and Thematic Project Design "Accelerator"
- **20 hours** attending 2 Hemispheric Urban Dialogues on Sustainable Technology Solutions and Climate Change Adaptation
- **30-35 hours** Trip to Washington DC for the culminating Marketplace event.



- Exclusive event for the 12 city pairs, the US State Department, finance institutions, and sustainable tech solution providers
- **30 hours** of participation in the Cities Forward Academy in year 3
  - Opportunity to learn from the project-preparation activities of the 12 selected pairs +50 additional “Academy” cities.

#### Dedication to Inclusivity

- *Cities Forward* projects must include underserved, historically underinvested, and vulnerable populations. If selected, you will need to demonstrate integration of these groups into your sustainability/resilience project
- At a minimum, cities will aim to positively impact no less than 1,000 very poor beneficiaries, with gender equity, per city

#### Geographic Distribution

- *Cities Forward* is looking for a balanced distribution of coastal and inland cities across LAC

#### Thematic Areas

- Cities must already have a selected focus on thematic areas such as (but not limited to): development of critical infrastructure and urban services systems, implications of extreme weather events, air and water quality, solid waste management (including plastics), lack of green space and tree canopy, etc.

#### International Relations Capacity

- Cities must demonstrate interest in engaging in international relations through experience with international partnerships (including Sister Cities), participation in city networks, or with previous experience in international cooperation projects.

**We encourage you to apply even if your city does not meet all of the desired city attributes and criteria outlined above.**

#### **Does my city have to belong to ICLEI to apply for Cities Forward?**

- It is not necessary to be an existing member of ICLEI
- Post project, LAC cities will continue to receive 2 years of complimentary ICLEI membership. ICLEI members benefit from ongoing sustainability technical assistance delivered by ICLEI staff based in their region; peer-network engagement, including through global thematic groups, such as the Circular Cities Coalition, CitiesWithNature, The EcoMobility Alliance, and more; and access to industry-leading templates, guidebooks and other resources.

#### **How will the selected LAC cities benefit from the program?**

LAC cities will advance portfolios of implementation projects and measures (i.e. ‘action plans’) that aim to:

- Ignite job creation and innovation investment;
- Mitigate pollution;



- Strengthen climate resilience in the built environment; and
- Improve the health and welfare of underserved communities

As a result, LAC cities emerging from this program will create sustainable, inclusive, and resilient futures for their residents, with financeable projects and knowledge sharing between cities throughout the Western hemisphere.

### **What kind of funding will LAC cities receive for the *Cities Forward* Initiative?**

LAC cities will receive an allocation of up to \$10,000 USD to support their assignment of staff and/or to retain local consultant support to complete the following, using the methodology provided by the *Cities Forward* support team:

- Assessment and documentation of the goals, objective, and implementation priorities of established local plans, strategies, and policies;
- Assessment of the status of implementation of the identified local sustainability, inclusion and resilience plans and priorities;
- Assessment of the local conditions that are facilitating and/or hindering the implementation of local plans and priorities.

LAC cities will each receive an additional allocation of up to \$30,000 USD of indirect support services from local or regional Project Preparation Advisors and Consultants who will assist the cities to:

- implement specific preliminary assessments (including risk assessments) and studies associated with selected priority projects;
- provide project-relevant schemes and/or design renderings;
- evaluate the regulatory, permitting, and other legal requirements for implementation of project concepts and preliminary designs;
- document budgetary, finance, and procurement considerations to be addressed in the preparation of project business plans and financial scenarios, and to document alternative finance, procurement, and partnership scenarios;
- and assist in the preparation of detailed project concept notes of a nature required for serious consideration by national, regional, and international finance providers.

### **What are the priority areas of interest, deliverables, and thematic groups for the 2023 *Cities Forward* selected cities?**

Over the next two years, the 2023 *Cities Forward* selected cities will share successes and challenges in their priority areas of interest, including but not limited to:

- **Extreme Heat**
- **Flood Mitigation**
- **Greenhouse Gas Reduction**
- **Green Infrastructure**
- **Renewable Energy**
- **Mobility/Transportation Access**
- **Air Quality / Decarbonizing Transportation**





- **Greenspaces for Underserved Communities**
- **Watershed & Water Resource Management**
- **Circularity & Plastics Pollution Control**

After two years, LAC cities will have high-impact, financeable project action plans based on shared insights gained throughout their collaborations with the U.S. cities, regional consultants and the project team.

The 2023 *Cities Forward* participants will also be grouped thematically for efficient collaboration on systemic change approaches. They will share expertise and efforts in these areas, guided by Subject Matter Experts. As of August 15th, 2023, the current thematic groups are as follows, subject to potential changes upon further review and discovery:

- 1. Implementation of District or Neighborhood Level Plans**
- 2. Water Corridor Based Green Infrastructure with Climate Adaptation**
- 3. Land Based Green Infrastructure, Prioritizing Low-Income Populations & Areas**

For further information:

- For U.S. cities, please email [citiesforwardUSA@iclei.org](mailto:citiesforwardUSA@iclei.org)
- For LAC cities, please email [citiesforwardLAC@iclei.org](mailto:citiesforwardLAC@iclei.org)