Are you facing challenges posed by vacant, abandoned, and blighted properties in your community? Could you use some help?

The National Vacant Properties Campaign, a partnership of Smart Growth America, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and the International City/County Management Association, is offering a new service to localities to assist in defining the practices, policies, and legislation that can help them address problems associated with vacant, blighted, and abandoned properties.

With a generous grant from the Surdna Foundation, we will provide 4-6 selected communities with significant technical assistance from an experienced team of policy, legal, planning, and development professionals. Communities will be selected to receive technical assistance based on criteria such as the existence of a serious vacant properties problem; and the presence of a local partnership of key stakeholders committed to tackling the problem, with significant financial and human resources to contribute. We have received support from Surdna to underwrite at least 50% of the cost of technical assistance in each selected city and will expect a local match, at least part of which should be cash. The value of our time in each selected city will range from about $30,000 to $70,000. Applicants can include a partnership of one or more of these types of institutions: local governments, nonprofits, foundations, corporations, and intermediaries.

National Vacant Properties Campaign Overview

The National Vacant Properties Campaign was founded in 2002 to create a national movement to support the reclamation of vacant and abandoned properties nationwide. The goals of the Campaign include: building a national network; giving communities the tools they need to address the issue; making the case for reclamation efforts; and providing technical assistance and training to local and national stakeholders. We are cultivating leaders and developing a national network of experts, practitioners and consultants with extensive experience and interest in reclamation efforts. The Campaign is also disseminating cutting-edge research, identifying and analyzing policy innovations and best practices, presenting model legislation, and informing people about the latest policy developments in the field. We are also providing several forms of expert assistance to help a wide range of communities jump start their vacant property efforts, including that which is described in this RFP.

For more information about the National Vacant Properties Campaign, please visit the Campaign website at: www.vacantproperties.org.
Vacant Property Revitalization Pilot Program

To address the fourth goal of technical assistance provision, LISC and the National Vacant Properties Campaign have been funded by the Surdna Foundation to implement a two-year technical assistance demonstration program through which we will assist four to six localities in creating and implementing effective vacant property revitalization strategies. This technical assistance program builds on two years of success. In our first year, campaign partners have conducted individual and/or team technical assistance on a fee-for-service basis in localities such as Las Vegas, Cleveland, Dayton and New Orleans. Our in-depth assessments in these cities have been extremely informative for our technical assistance program. Last year, we also held a vacant properties roundtable in Las Vegas and a one day workshop on information systems in conjunction with our annual vacant properties forum in Washington, D.C. Proceedings, summaries, and presentations from the technical assistance and training activities will soon be posted on our website. We will ensure that such general documents do not compromise the confidentiality or integrity of the actual technical assistance activities.

The primary objectives of the Vacant Property Revitalization Pilot Program are to: 1) help localities to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their policies and practices regarding vacant properties, and how they are currently implemented; 2) facilitate local collaboration around defining the problem and possible solutions; 3) provide knowledge of effective strategies from other cities or states, and in some cases help implement new policies, legislation and practices; 4) gain insights that can shape the Campaign’s research and policy agenda and build its repertoire of effective strategies that can serve additional communities. This technical assistance can focus on particular issues or provide a multi-issue analysis and system design review, together with longer-term support to ensure reform measures are implemented.

Implementation will be phased, so that we will work with 2-3 cities at one time. We have received support from Surdna to underwrite at least 50% of the cost of technical assistance and will expect a local match for funds, a significant part of which should be financial. The value of our time in each selected city will range from about $30,000 to $70,000. Applicants can include a partnership of one or more of these types of institutions: local governments, nonprofits, foundations, corporations, and intermediaries. Selected cities must agree to documentation of the assessment process and reforms undertaken.

Our goal is to help communities implement effective vacant property strategies by overcoming obstacles, and we can offer guidance in the following ways:

1. **Vacant Property Systems Assessment:** The Campaign’s technical assistance team—composed of LISC and Smart Growth America staff, an attorney, a public official from another jurisdiction, an urban planner, and/or other land use experts—will conduct thorough assessments of the cities’ vacant property policies, practices, inventory, challenges, and goals to identify the appropriate technical assistance approaches. We will obtain this information by reviewing existing legislation and reports, and through in-person interviews with critical local stakeholders, including: city officials from a range of offices (planning, municipal attorney, police, tax collectors, city manager, community development, and mayor); funders; community development practitioners; and business owners and civic organizations. This essential first task will help document current systems and processes, and is often the foundation for each of the following assistance options. Follow-up from an assessment could lead to providing an expert to help with one or more strategies or action steps identified in the assessment. The assessments typically require between 250 and 500 hours of the Campaign team’s time.
2. **Vacant Property Prevention Roundtables:** One technical assistance option is one-to-two-day facilitated workshop led by a team of national experts and experienced practitioners to educate local leaders and practitioners about effective prevention models and identify potentially appropriate revitalization strategies and tools. The roundtables will generate an action plan for local leaders to pursue based on potential solutions identified. An example might be a discussion among city staff who have implemented successful receivership programs or information systems and a city seeking to implement one or the other. Roundtables typically require between 150 and 300 hours of the Campaign team’s time.

3. **Technical Assistance to Implement Specific Strategies:** Another option is to work with one or two members of the technical assistance team to develop implementation strategies, such as reforming foreclosure procedures and legislation, creating land bank authorities, designing and implementing early warning and inventorying systems, reforming code enforcement procedures, drafting receivership legislation and establishing benchmarks to measure the impact of improvements over time. This is typically a limited engagement with a specific end product or outcome, but may involve two or more issues at a time. Implementation technical assistance typically requires between 250 and 500 hours of the Campaign team’s time.

4. **Leadership Consultations:** The Campaign will facilitate visits by officials from other cities implementing effective local programs or policies to cities seeking to improve their vacant property revitalization efforts, as a way of fostering peer-to-peer learning across local government leadership. The Smart Growth Leadership Institute (SGLI), part of SGA, will also offer leadership consultation on vacant properties with key elected officials involved in developing and implementing effective vacant property strategies. The typical consultation includes a meeting between staff and local and state elected officials; a keynote speech; vacant properties site visits; and in-depth technical assistance on policy issues with SGLI’s staff. Leadership consultations typically require between 75 and 200 hours of the Campaign team’s time.

**Project Team**

We will provide selected communities with significant technical assistance from a uniquely experienced team of policy, planning, legal and development professionals, including Joe Schilling, Associate Professor at Virginia Tech’s Metropolitan Institute; Frank S. Alexander, Professor of Law at Emory University; Alan Mallach, Senior Consultant, National Housing Institute; John Kromer, Associate Director of the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania; Daniel Kildee, Treasurer of Genesee County, Michigan; Don Chen, President and CEO of Smart Growth America; Jessica Cogan Millman, Deputy Director, Smart Growth Leadership Institute; Lisa Mueller, Knowledge Sharing Director at the Local Initiatives Support Corporation; and Renee Viers at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Each of the team members is either a founding partner or advisory committee member of the National Vacant Properties Campaign, due to his or her experience working with localities on one or more issues related to vacant and abandoned property revitalization.

**Criteria for Selecting Communities**

Communities will be selected based on how well they meet the following criteria:
• **Strong support from local government leadership** for improving vacant property strategies (should include one or more leaders, such as local elected and appointed officials, department heads, high level managers, and municipal attorneys);

• **A diverse coalition of public, private, and nonprofit organizations** involved in your communities’ vacant property activities that support the technical assistance application of one sponsoring organization that serves as the primary host/sponsor of the Campaign’s assistance;

• **The presence of a significant vacant property problem**, which is affecting quality of life in specific neighborhoods and/or is depressing markets citywide;

• **A commitment of matching funds, and staff time or other in-kind resources from the host city/community partners** (municipalities and/or local funders/nonprofits) **equal to the value of the technical assistance granted**, to defray costs and ensure local ownership in the analysis and reforms offered by the technical assistance.

Cities where there is an existing presence, interest, and/or network of relationships of Campaign partners will receive preference in the selection process.

**Application Requirements**

For all communities interested in having our team work with you to assess local obstacles to vacant property reclamation, and improve local policies, practices and strategies for returning vacant, abandoned properties to productive use, please respond to the following five questions. Note that the page limit is five pages (12 point font, Times New Roman), excluding attachments. **The final application is due by 5:00 pm on January 14, 2005.** Please email your application to llevy@lisc.org. We expect to announce our decisions by February 15, 2005.

If you have attachments that cannot be emailed, please email the application and mail two copies of the attachments to:

Lisa Mueller Levy  
National Vacant Properties Campaign  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
501 7th Avenue, 7th Floor  
New York, NY 10018

1. Describe the scope of your locality’s vacant property challenges. Discuss the particular obstacles and hurdles your community is facing in terms of addressing vacant and abandoned properties.

2. Of the four overarching types of assistance the Campaign offers, which do you think would be most beneficial in your community and why? Please indicate if the technical assistance is time sensitive and why. You may want to identify challenges in the following general components of revitalization strategies:

   • **Property Information Systems and GIS**

   • **Land Acquisition and Disposition Policies and Practices**
• Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Code Enforcement

• Planning (Neighborhood, Economic Development, Consolidated) and Zoning

3. Discuss your community’s vacant property reclamation actions to date, and how these issues have been or will be addressed in local policy documents, such as task force reports, land use plans, HUD consolidated plans, zoning ordinances and regulations, budget documents, and code and zoning reforms.

4. Please describe the level of commitment by local elected officials, state officials, business leaders, developers, non-profit or civic organizations (e.g., an organization with a community development mission) to implement vacant property revitalization systems improvements in your community, as well as the departments of local government involved (e.g., planning, public works, economic development, housing). If you are a non-governmental applicant, please provide evidence that the local government is supportive of this work.

5. Please explain the type, level, and also an estimate of the amount of local/community matching funds and in-kind support that you will be able to dedicate to this project. As noted above, a cash contribution is required.

A few more questions you may want to consider:
• How ready is the community to implement the recommendations made by the technical assistance team?
• How deep is the political commitment to implementation?
• Are there any events or opportunities to build momentum forthcoming that our team should know about?