

Talking Points: EPA Smart Growth Program

ASK: Ensure continued support for the EPA Smart Growth office in FY2009 appropriations. Support \$7 million for the EPA Smart Growth office in the FY2009 appropriations bill.

Legislative Status

Despite its proven track record of supporting local innovation and leveraging local and regional investment, last year EPA attempted to dramatically cut staff and funding for the smart growth program. Congress intervened and prevented the cut through a provision in last year's omnibus spending bill. The program remains particularly vulnerable to budget cuts because it lacks a formal authorization. The program also faces far greater demand for service than current resources can provide.

As Congress begins work on the FY2009 budget and appropriations legislation, it is important that the Smart Growth office be shielded from EPA cuts. Supporters of the program on Capitol Hill will be pushing for increased funding of \$7 million to meet current demand. Sen. Mary Landrieu is also considering legislation to formally authorize the program.

The Problem

- We're facing many challenges in our state right now that smart growth is helping to solve—environmental concerns, economic development, traffic congestion, affordable housing, open space and farmland preservation, etc. (Pick 1-2 examples most relevant to your state/district).
- Smart growth is about helping to concentrate development, putting stores, schools, and other services within walking distance in a community, and giving people more choices about their communities and their travel options. Smart growth helps create more livable communities for people.
- Unfortunately, there are some real regulatory barriers to smart growth – outdated zoning and land use laws, for example – as well as the need for more research on issues like how best to design energy-efficient communities and what policies are most successful.

The Smart Growth Solution

- The EPA Smart Growth program has been enormously successful in providing the cutting edge research and technical assistance that communities need to strengthen their economies, and protect their environment and public health. The problem is that demand for their services outpaces their current funding and staff; for example, they had more than 60 requests for smart growth technical assistance last year, but their budget allowed for only 6 of those requests to be met.

- The Smart Growth program leverages a small investment into large local results. However, overall program funding for research and technical assistance still lags demand. Congress should allocate \$7 million for the smart growth program in the FY 2009 appropriations legislation now under consideration. As in the FY 2008 omnibus appropriations bill, EPA should be prohibited from cutting the program without congressional approval.

Use relevant state/local examples to discuss the problem and solution

- Provide examples of any of the work that the EPA Smart Growth program has done in your state/area (see spreadsheet for examples).
- Provide examples of how the EPA Smart Growth program work is needed in your state/area.

Additional Background

The EPA's Smart Growth program helps communities across the country face and meet development challenges, enabling communities to strengthen their economies, and protect their environment and public health.

- The Smart Growth program is one of the EPA's most popular with local and state government officials and groups around the country.
- The office has several strategies that help transform communities, including:
 - Providing technical assistance to help communities overcome development challenges and better meet their development goals.
 - Performing and publishing cutting edge planning research. Their published documents include two books of 200 policies that communities can enact to promote better, smarter development.
 - Sponsoring a conference each year that brings more than 1,500 planners, groups, and government officials to DC to share best practices in meeting development challenges.
- Despite its success and popularity, the program has been funded at the same level for the past three years and currently lacks the funding to meet the demand for its services.
- Several other government agencies currently run smart growth projects that are not coordinated with each other, including NOAA, the Department of Health and Human Services, HUD, Department of Energy, and the Department of Transportation. This bill would encourage staff at those agencies to work together to pursue common strategies on smart growth.