



**Smart Growth America**  
Making Neighborhoods Great Together

---

# **Visiting Your Members of Congress**

An advocacy toolkit

June 2011

# Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	3
About the Partnership for Sustainable Communities	
Background. . . . .	4
Status . . . . .	4
How to Schedule a Visit with Your Members of Congress . . . . .	5
Sample Scheduling Request Email . . . . .	6
Tips for Successful Legislative Meetings . . . . .	7
Meeting Talking Points . . . . .	8
Frequently Asked Questions . . . . .	9
Post-Meeting Checklist . . . . .	10
Legislative Meeting Report Form . . . . .	11
Sample Thank You Email . . . . .	12

## Introduction

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities, a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is fundamentally about getting more out of every tax-payer dollar. When cities, towns and suburbs plan their future transportation, housing, water and sewer infrastructure and public services strategically, they save money and so does the federal government.

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities was formed in June 2009. This effort helps communities use proven cost-saving practices, coordinate federal investments in infrastructure, facilities, and services, and meet multiple community objectives with every dollar spent.

When contacting your members of Congress or their staff, you will be asking them to:

- Support funding for the Partnership for Sustainable Communities in Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies appropriations.

And specifically to:

- Support continued funding for HUD's Sustainable Communities Initiative, which provides Regional Planning Grants and Community Challenge Grants.
- Support the DOT's Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program.

Each voice heard and each story shared is another step in the right direction toward creating communities that offer better choices for where and how people work and live.

More information on the Partnership for Sustainable Communities is included in this toolkit. If you have questions, please contact Katy Hartnett, Director of Government Affairs at Smart Growth America: [khartnett@smartgrowthamerica.org](mailto:khartnett@smartgrowthamerica.org) or 202.207.3355 x125.

## About the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

### Background

Two years ago, HUD, DOT, and EPA came together to form an interagency partnership in order to foster sustainability through better coordination of federal housing, transportation, and environmental programs. The partnership has worked to define core principles of livability, enabling communities to achieve economic growth by spurring private sector investment, removing barriers and creating jobs at a time when we need them most. The initiative is working to integrate existing planning requirements and focus research and technical assistance programs on joint sustainability priorities.

### Status

Through a number of federal grant programs, the Partnership agencies help communities across the country plan for and implement strategic growth. Thus far the three agencies have received applications for much more funding than they had available to award:

- For TIGER II grants, DOT received nearly 1,000 applications for more than \$19 billion from all 50 states, U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.
- HUD received almost 1,000 applications totaling more than \$1.7 billion for the \$140 million available for Regional Planning Grants and Community Challenge Grants.
- 45 U.S. regions representing 80 million Americans in rural, suburban and urban communities are already benefiting from the Partnership programs.
- Another 29 regions are slated for support in the next round of grants and were awarded “preferred sustainability status” due to local leadership and excellence.

Although it faced serious threat in the FY2011 appropriations process, funding was eventually preserved in the final FY2011 continuing resolution for the Partnership for Sustainable Communities.

As Congress begins work on the budget for FY2012, it is even more critical for us to advocate for continued funding for the Partnership for Sustainable Communities.

## Supporting the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

### How to Schedule a Visit with Your Members of Congress

*Not sure of your Congressional representatives? Go to [BeAVoter.com](http://BeAVoter.com) to find out.*

**1. Find the name of the office scheduler.** This is the only person in the office who will be able to take your request for a meeting and this is whom you ask for by name when you call. When you send your letter of request, you should put it to the attention of this person to ensure that it gets to the appropriate desk for review. Call the DC office and ask for the name of the district scheduler, and confirm the spelling.

**2. Fax or email a request to the scheduler.** This correspondence should provide a brief background of why you want to meet with the official and when. It is important to mention that you are a constituent, and while it is okay and usually helpful to state the issue you'd like to discuss, you should not be too opinionated on that issue in your letter. A sample email is included on the next page.

**3. It helps to be brief.** Most officials have very busy schedules, so it is recommended that you ask to meet with them for only a 15-30 minute time slot.

**5. Next, call the scheduler.** Introduce yourself, mention that you are a constituent of Representative/Senator X, and let him/her know that you are following up on a request to meet with X in the district office. Let the scheduler know precisely when you faxed your request so s/he is more easily able to locate it.

**6. Follow up.** Sometimes requests are lost in the chaos that typifies an elected official's office. If the scheduler says that s/he did not receive your fax or cannot find it, don't panic. Offer to re-fax the same document or send it via e-mail if that is most convenient.

**7. Be persistent.** If the scheduler tells you that the office needs more time to assess your representative's availability on that day, let him/her know that you will follow up by calling back in another few days. Keep on them! Schedulers have many, many requests coming through the office, so in order to ensure that you are not forgotten or your request hidden under a stack of other papers, follow up and call again.

**8. Finally, thank the scheduler for her time and effort.** Be sure to say you appreciate this opportunity to meet with your official.

## Supporting the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

### Sample Scheduling Request Email

*Items in brackets should be customized as appropriate.*

[DATE]

The Honorable [XX]  
Attention: Scheduler

Dear [Senator/Representative XX],

As a constituent and employee of [your organization], I am writing to request an appointment with [Senator/Representative XX] in [name of town where nearest district office is] on [insert date and times available] to discuss the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and appropriations for FY2012.

Please contact me to let me know when the [Senator/Representative] or the relevant staffer might be available to meet. I will follow up with you in the next week by phone.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

[Name]  
[Contact information]

## Supporting the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

### Tips for Successful Legislative Meetings

- **Arrive on time.** If meeting with a staff member, be sure you have the correct contact name. Do not underestimate the power of the staff person in helping to shape the policymaker's opinions and positions on issues or a particular piece of legislation.
- **Bring one or two colleagues with you.** Prior to the meeting, you should agree on what points will be made and which one each of you will discuss.
- **Try to deliver your message in three minutes.** Be sure to introduce yourself and your colleagues and explain why you are concerned about the issue and your expertise. Be concise, polite and professional.
- **Be prepared to answer questions.** When asked what you want, clearly explain.
- **Be a resource for the policy-maker and his/her staff.** Offer your time and assistance if s/he wants to talk about your areas of interest and expertise in the future.
- **Provide material to support your position.** Leave behind a business card and one or more fact sheets summarizing your position. (See SGA's website for resources.)
- **Follow up with a thank you letter.** Be sure to include any additional information you may have promised or that may be relevant to the issue. Contact SGA for consultation and help.

## Supporting the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

### District Meeting Talking Points

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities is an investment in more efficient and effective government. It helps communities break down barriers in existing federal housing, transportation and infrastructure programs while providing an incentive to improve regional collaboration among public, private and non-profit stakeholders. Projects supported by these grants are the product of local leadership driven by the vision and values of local residents; they save households and municipalities money and help to build a 21st century economy.

### Key Reasons to Support the Partnership

- When cities, towns and suburbs plan their future transportation, housing, water and sewer infrastructure and public services strategically, they save money and so does the federal government.
- When communities are working with numerous federal programs at once, inconsistencies and contradictions arise. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities has worked to eliminate these conflicts and reconcile different federal program requirements.
- The Partnership for Sustainable Communities encourages grant recipients to work with various local stakeholders to reflect the unique economic needs of the community.
- Rebuilding the economy and creating jobs are the most pressing issues facing the nation's communities. The grant programs included in the Partnership for Sustainable Communities provide direct support for job creation and leverage significant private sector investment.

## Supporting the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

### Frequently Asked Questions about the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

- **What is a ‘sustainable community?’**

Sustainable communities are urban, suburban or rural communities with more housing and transportation choices near jobs, shops and schools to support thriving local economies and protect the environment.

- **How does the Partnership help communities save money?**

Coordinating strategic decisions allows communities to save money and realize fiscal benefits from better capital investment decisions that link housing, transportation and economic development.

- **How does the Partnership for Sustainable Communities help rural areas or small towns?**

HUD’s inaugural grants under this program will benefit diverse areas across the U.S. including \$25.6 million split evenly between regions with populations under 500,000 and rural places (fewer than 200,000 people). HUD is also reserving \$2 million to help all of these areas build the needed capacity to execute their plans. Additionally, not less than \$140 million (20%) of the funds provided for TIGER II Discretionary Grants, including TIGER II Planning Grants, is to be used for projects located in rural areas.

- **Why is this the proper role for the federal government?**

The federal government is heavily involved in transportation, housing and environmental infrastructure spending with various programs and requirements that directly impact local decisions. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities coordinates these programs and requirements so decisions are more efficient and effective. The Partnership cuts red tape for communities working with multiple agencies and eliminates duplicative or conflicting federal decisions, ensuring taxpayer dollars are used more effectively.

## Supporting the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

### Post-Meeting Checklist

Follow the steps outlined below when your meeting is complete. This checklist will help ensure that there is successful follow-up from your meeting. If you have any questions or need assistance, contact Katy Hartnett, Government Affairs Director at SGA via email at [khartnett@smartgrowthamerica.org](mailto:khartnett@smartgrowthamerica.org) or by phone at 202.207.3355 x125.

- **Report back.** Complete and return your legislative meeting report form (page 11) to SGA staff or fill out online at [www.smartgrowthamerica.org/partnership/legislative-call-report-form](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/partnership/legislative-call-report-form). Send SGA any digital photos from your visit for use on the SGA website.
- **Follow up.** Send a thank you email (page 12). Be sure to follow-up with any information or other items promised at the meeting. Use SGA staff to assist you with any follow-up. Offer SGA's DC staff as a resource in providing more detailed information or research.
- **Monitor progress.** Keep track of the issue and make sure that you monitor your legislator's actions. If they follow through on a promised action, be sure to thank them. If not, encourage them to do so.
- **Stay connected.** Continue to build a relationship with your Congressional delegation by inviting them to attend or speak at events, taking them to visit local projects, and keeping them informed about activities in the state.
- **Keep informed.** Work with the SGA's Government Affairs and Outreach staff to monitor legislative activity and continue advocacy on behalf of our federal legislative agenda. Stay active in grassroots advocacy activities by signing up to receive action alerts from SGA; just visit our website at <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/> and click on 'Take Action'.

## Legislative Meeting Report Form

We want to hear how your meeting went! Fill out the form below and return to Katy Hartnett, Government Affairs Director at SGA via email at [khartnett@smartgrowthamerica.org](mailto:khartnett@smartgrowthamerica.org) or fax at 202.207.3349 or fill out the form online at [www.smartgrowthamerica.org/partnership/legislative-call-report-form](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/partnership/legislative-call-report-form). Complete a separate form for each meeting you conducted.

Name and Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Meeting Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

Congressional Office: \_\_\_\_\_

Congressional Staff Present at Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Please describe the reaction of the Senator/Representative/staff person to the conversation on the Partnership for Sustainable Communities FY2011 appropriations.

\_\_\_\_\_

Please note any other issues that were discussed.

\_\_\_\_\_

Did the office make commitments regarding your requests?

\_\_\_\_\_

Did the office request any additional information or further follow-up (please describe)?

\_\_\_\_\_

Is any contact or follow-up required with the office by SGA staff?

\_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments / Other Issues Discussed (including any commitments made):

\_\_\_\_\_

## Sample Thank You Email

*Items in brackets should be customized as appropriate.*

[DATE]

The Honorable [XX]

Attention: [Staffer]

Dear [Senator/Representative XX, or staffer name],

Thank you for meeting with me in [name of town where meeting took place] on [insert date and time of meeting] to discuss the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and appropriations for FY2012.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss these issues with you, and hope you will view the appropriations process as an opportunity to support the joint program between HUD, DOT and the EPA that helps communities achieve economic growth and create jobs at a time when we need it most. Please contact me if you would like any additional information or have any questions.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Contact information]