



SURDNA FOUNDATION

SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTS

The Sustainable Environments Program is working to overhaul our country's outdated and crumbling infrastructure with a new approach that will foster healthier, sustainable, and just communities. We believe in the potential of what we call "next generation infrastructure" to improve transit systems, make buildings more energy efficient, better manage our water systems and rebuild regional food systems. Focusing on urban areas and their surrounding suburbs, we seek solutions that connect and improve these infrastructure systems in ways that maximize positive impacts and minimize negative environmental, economic and social consequences.

Our infrastructure systems are overburdened by increased demand, extreme weather, and shrinking public budgets. The urgency and opportunity behind this challenge is driving us to look at our past grantmaking efforts around smart growth, climate and energy, and green economies through a lens of next generation infrastructure. Currently, many decisions about infrastructure repair and replacement are disjointed, short on authentic community engagement, and limited to traditional engineering approaches that waste money, restrict opportunity and damage the environment. By taking a systems-based approach, we can deliver better services to more people to the benefit of the environment and economy.

The Sustainable Environments Program seeks to create just and sustainable economies in four ways:

- **[Sustainable Transportation Networks & Equitable Development Patterns](#)**
We support clean, affordable, equitable, high-quality and efficient transportation and land use development that better connects critical services, jobs, schools, housing and other regional destinations.
[View guidelines below.](#)
- **[Energy Efficiency in the Built Environment](#)**
We support efforts to help people make homes, businesses and other buildings more energy efficient.
[View guidelines below.](#)
- **[Urban Water Management](#)**
We support efforts to capture storm water and slowly release it into the existing network of drains, pipes and sewers, or reuse it where it falls to cultivate natural green spaces.
[View guidelines below.](#)
- **[Regional Food Supply](#)**
We support ways to make it easier to get local, sustainably produced food from our farms to the markets closest to where it's grown, and to better connect food producers and consumers.
[View guidelines below.](#)

We seek organizations that:

- Promote meaningful collaborations and an integrated approach to infrastructure solutions (i.e., ways in which transportation, energy, water, and food systems can be combined);
- Focus on infrastructure decisions that better meet the needs of historically underserved communities including low-income communities and people of color;
- Promote long-term solutions and leverage strategic infrastructure investments;
- Highlight, especially through communications, the multiple benefits of next generation infrastructure.
- We also believe that the Foundation's three programs are strongly interrelated and necessary to create just and sustainable communities. We therefore encourage cross-cutting proposals that connect to the work of the Foundation's Strong Local Economies and Thriving Cultures programs.

The Surdna Foundation is committed to continuous learning through our grantmaking. We view grant guidelines as living documents and will update them periodically to better target resources and increase our impact.

Generally, the Sustainable Environments Program does not fund:

- Infrastructure solutions related to the waste and telecommunications sectors;
- Programs related to toxics or hazardous waste;
- Land and habitat conservation;
- Animal welfare;
- Biodiversity, natural resource or ocean management;
- Capital campaigns or investments;
- Individuals or academic fellowships.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS & EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Historically, our public transit systems have been underfunded, with a majority of public and private funds dedicated to building roads and highways. While the US highway system catalyzed economic growth, this pattern of development also physically fragmented many communities along socio-economic and racial lines, limited people's access to economic opportunity, and damaged the environment. The Sustainable Environments Program supports transportation systems and transit solutions that give people affordable and reliable options to get to work, school, and home while minimizing impacts on the environment and maximizing equitable economic opportunities.

From our current vantage point, we believe that signs of next generation transportation networks will include the following:

- Good jobs are accessible within communities or via public transit with reasonable commute times and costs for transit dependent households;
- Planning of major infrastructure projects account for costs, local economic benefits, environmental impacts, and connections with other infrastructure systems;
- Residents prefer to take transit because it is efficient, convenient, and affordable;
- Vehicle miles and emissions in metro areas are reduced;
- Transit patterns connect cities and their surrounding communities;
- Meeting the needs of communities most dependent on public transportation drives planning and transportation policy decisions;
- Investment in transit surges, spurring jobs and economic opportunities for local residents and reviving the U.S. transportation manufacturing sector;
- Robust transit options exist, especially for underserved populations across cities and metros;
- Investments in transit systems catalyze community redevelopment and leverage public and private sector reinvestments.

What we fund:

We seek funding opportunities that:

- Strengthen and expand the use of transportation project performance standards that improve transportation options, increase access and mobility, reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions, and advance climate resilient strategies;
- Strengthen procurement and other policies so that the public funds spent on transportation help create quality jobs and deliver the broadest possible public benefits to nearby communities;
- Support innovative revenue models to build out sustainable transportation networks and ensure public benefits;
- Promote regional transportation and land use practices that integrate light rail, transit, and urban-suburban connections.

We give preference to efforts that:

- Improve conditions and opportunities for communities that rely on public transportation;
- Integrate transportation system improvements with other infrastructure needs (for example, transportation solutions that provide for stormwater management and/or help with regional food supply distribution and delivery);
- Build next generation infrastructure capacity and expertise among state and local leaders;
- Collect and distribute success stories and lessons learned to key leaders.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

In 2050, approximately half of the U.S. building stock will consist of buildings that exist today. Considering that buildings contribute to nearly 40% of our country's carbon emissions, which runs up costs and compounds environmental problems, we know that improving the efficiency of the existing building stock is critical. We also know that bringing energy efficiency practices into more homes, businesses and communities can reap rewards such as local jobs that can't be outsourced or increased property values and lower energy bills. The Sustainable Environments Program supports efforts to promote retrofitting, which is the practice of updating existing buildings and structures with energy efficient measures and innovations. We also believe that businesses and communities need increased knowledge about how to do this, and financing options to make it affordable.

From our current vantage point, we believe that signs of next generation energy efficiency in the built environment will include the following:

- A mature and trusted energy services sector with job ladder opportunities;
- Energy financing is mainstream and regional capital markets support rapid energy retrofit market growth;
- Easy access to capital enables large numbers of low income individuals to take advantage of energy retrofit projects, thereby making home and business operations more affordable;
- Large scale reduction in energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

What we fund:

We seek funding opportunities that:

- Advance policy, market, and program performance standards and community organizing strategies that stimulate supply and demand for retrofitting services. We are especially interested in efforts that spur enterprise development and job creation, and provide energy efficiency gains for low income communities and people of color;
- Create innovative financing models to increase funding for retrofits. More specifically, we are interested in models that will expand effective local and state incentive and financing programs and promote viable public private partnership financing agreements. In addition, we seek efforts that ensure affordability and participation across a wide range of home and building owners, and create financial intermediaries that connect public and private entities to infrastructure projects.

We give preference to efforts that:

- Ensure that retrofit programs benefit those most in need of economic opportunity and advance community-based anti-poverty strategies and high quality job creation;
- Connect retrofit programs with other infrastructure needs (e.g., a building retrofit that incorporates a green roof which provides stormwater management benefits);
- Build market and policy support through networking and partnerships;
- Emphasize the public benefits of public private partnerships.

URBAN WATER MANAGEMENT

Water is essential for life, yet most people know little about its sources, uses and management. Many water and sewer pipes are more than half a century old and unable to handle rising stormwater levels. The result? Wasted resources, greater health risks, and the potential for flooding and polluted waterways. The Sustainable Environments Program supports innovative stormwater run-off practices that capture and slowly release water into existing drains, pipes and sewers, or reuse rain water where it falls (sometimes called “green infrastructure”) instead of building expensive pipes and sewer tunnels.

From our current vantage point, we believe that signs of next generation urban water systems will include the following:

- A large percentage of municipalities across the country embrace green infrastructure as the primary way to control storm water;
- Combined water retrofits (installation of green infrastructure on individual properties) and energy retrofits become common practice;
- Green infrastructure helps communities address urban flooding and vacant land issues;
- Communities embrace green infrastructure as ways to beautify and improve local outdoor opportunities from recreation and tourism to urban farming;
- Storm water reforms spur new thinking on how we manage and treat storm, waste, and drinking water.

What we fund:

We seek funding opportunities that:

- Create pilot projects or expand promising projects in cities and metro areas that demonstrate innovative stormwater management practices. We are particularly interested in cities that are responding to federal regulatory action regarding stormwater management. We also seek green infrastructure solutions that create quality jobs, businesses, and other equitable economic benefits, as well as those that engage the community in design decisions;
- Inform and build capacity of community organizers, public leaders, practitioners, private investors and others in the water field. We are particularly interested in new stormwater fee structures, public private partnerships, and the development of small scale, distributed (neighborhood level) water retrofit projects. In addition, we seek design and implementation practices that focus on equity issues and that engage and benefit the communities served. We are also interested in research that will fill critical policy and innovative finance information gaps and support the development of best practices.

We give preference to efforts that:

- Prioritize efforts that benefit low-income communities and people of color, such as affordable utility bills, increased property values, etc.;
- Connect anti-poverty strategies and economic benefits (jobs and business opportunities) to nearby communities;
- Integrate urban water system improvements with other infrastructure needs (e.g., green infrastructure that complements the build out of transportation networks or is done in parallel with building energy retrofits);
- Engage the community in design and policy considerations;
- Bring together networks and collaborations in order to share best practices and learning in this emerging field;
- Seek innovative ways to create lasting systems that leverage public and private investments.

REGIONAL FOOD SUPPLY

Most of us do not know where our food comes from. Nor do we understand that its current path from farm to market generates enormous amounts of pollution and consumes massive amounts of energy. Behind this phenomenon is a system of global food business conglomeration that has choked off local supply chains, making it difficult to buy fresh, healthy, sustainably produced local food. The rise in farmers markets shows that demand for a trusted local and regional food supply is growing, but we need a better food supply system. The Sustainable Environments Program supports efforts to restore regional aggregation and distribution of food that will strengthen urban and rural connections and provide environmental, economic, and community benefits.

From our current vantage point, we believe that signs of next generation regional food supply will include the following:

- Regional food growers are profitable because they have access to nearby urban markets that use innovative aggregation and distribution systems;
- Regional food supply is common in regional planning;
- Large numbers of food hubs and other regional food supply chains bring fresh, sustainably produced, and affordable food to surrounding communities. In addition, food hubs bolster local economies by providing high quality jobs and food supply business opportunities;
- A significant percentage of food is sourced from the region in which it is grown or produced, increasing food quality, safety, access and justice;
- Local food supply helps lower regional carbon footprints.

What we fund:

We are seeking funding opportunities that:

- Create pilot projects or expand promising projects to spur the growth of regional food infrastructure (e.g., food hubs, vertical food supply chains, regional food shed planning initiatives linked to regional transportation and economic development). In addition, we want to support best practices on regional food supply business models and innovative regional, state and local policies. We're also looking to highlight and help replicate food supply programs that contribute to anti-poverty strategies and build strong local economies;
- Support the development of innovative financing strategies for regional food infrastructure development;
- Develop incentives and remove barriers to creating shorter food supply routes. These activities might include advocacy at the federal, state and local levels around food storage, processing, land-use restrictions, etc.;
- Build capacity and collaboration among planners, economic development officials, investors, community based organizations and other key community leaders to integrate local food supply into regional land use and economic decisions, projects and practices, and to better understand the drivers for regional food system change.

We give preference to efforts that:

- Engage low-income communities and communities of color in the creation of regional food supplies and ensure they benefit from resulting job creation or economic benefits;
- Integrate regional food supply chain improvements with other infrastructure needs (e.g., combined transportation and food supply networks, combined green infrastructure and food supply, etc.);
- Elevate the discussion around food supply and safety, framing it as an infrastructure issue on par with the delivery of water or energy;
- Engage local communities in the design and implementation of regional food systems;
- Link food infrastructure development to social enterprise development, procurement policies and purchasing power of anchor institutions (for example, universities and hospitals that purchase food produced regionally);
- Build learning networks related to regional food supply chain development and food justice.