

## Maine's Quality of Place Investment Strategy (QPIS)

### Grants Criteria and Process

#### Maine State Planning Office September 2008

##### I. Definitions

1. **Economic Development Districts** – Maine's six regional councils of governments that have been federally-designated as economic development districts namely, the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, Mid-coast Economic Development District, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments, Northern Maine Development Corporation, Eastern Maine Development Corporation, and Southern Maine Economic Development District, who develop their region's asset-based development plan.
2. **Maine Quality of Place Council** – An 11-member council created by Executive Order 13 FY0809 that comprises five public members, five state executives, and one representative of regional councils appointed by the Governor to provide overall direction and support for the state's Quality of Place Investment Strategy (QPIS).
3. **Quality of Place Investment Strategy** is one that builds on exceptional and marketable, local and regional strengths, resources, and opportunities, to create new high-value jobs, products, and services. In practice, Quality of Place investment is market-based, locally-driven, regionally-organized, and strategic from both a regional and statewide perspective, involves broad cross-sections of people in decision-making, and engages the private, public, and nonprofit sectors in its planning, financing, and implementation. At a minimum, it includes the five sequential steps of: 1) asset-mapping, 2) strategic planning, 3) education and training, 4) financing, and 5) marketing.
4. **Smart Growth Principles<sup>1</sup>** - Principles of community design that foster quality of place, including:
  - A. Reinvest in and strengthen *existing neighborhoods and communities*.
  - B. Mix *land uses*.
  - C. Foster distinctive neighborhoods with a strong *sense of place* and a *civic core*.
  - D. Create *housing opportunities* for a range of household types, family size, and incomes.

---

<sup>1</sup> from ACSP, U.S. EPA, Lincoln Institute

- E. Take advantage of *compact building design*.
- F. Create *walkable* neighborhoods.
- G. Provide a variety of *transportation choices*.
- H. Preserve *critical open space*, farmland, and natural resources.
- I. Promote *balanced regional development*.
- J. Make *development decisions* fair, predictable, and cost-effective.
- K. Engage *stakeholders* early and on-going in decision-making for development.
- L. Reduce/remove public *subsidies* for dispersed development

## **II. Purpose Statement**

Maine’s quality of place investment grants are intended to enhance existing, authentic, place-based assets to strengthen the state and regional economies.

These grants focus on enhancing quality of place assets in the state or a region by developing and marketing untapped resources. Successful strategies strengthen and conserve the assets themselves. They then support initiatives designed to build upon these assets by enhancing them, combining them in new and productive ways, and marketing them effectively to ensure sustained, long-term benefit to the community and region.

The State Quality of Place Council will award quality of place investment grants to projects that implement asset-based development plans prepared by Maine’s federally-designated Economic Development Districts.

## **III. Quality of Place Assets**

Quality of place assets are those distinctive assets that will retain and attract people to support and strengthen our 21<sup>st</sup> Century knowledge-based economy. Research shows that creative or skilled workers, entrepreneurs, visitors, and retirees are attracted to authentic places rich in cultural diversity and accessible natural amenities. These place-based assets, if preserved and enhanced for their economic value, will keep Maine’s youth in Maine, bolster Maine’s slow-growing workforce, be a focus for new entrepreneurs, and attract visitors.

Three categories of assets provide the greatest opportunity for Maine to enhance its prosperity – 1) natural, 2) cultural, and 3) structural.

Natural assets include our woods, rivers, lakes, coastline, mountains, wildlife, and scenic landscapes. Strategies include preserving the beauty and wildness of these assets, opening them to public access, or adding value through the development of nature tourism products, amenities and services.

Cultural assets represent what is best—and often most unique—about the region. Downtowns and recreational, historic or cultural traditions provide an authentic foundation from which to build. A sense of connectedness between people in the community and designs and facilities that facilitate community building can also be a part of a region’s cultural assets. Strategies include capitalizing on traditional arts, culture, community and heritage, preserving our history and architecture, or showcasing Maine’s authentic brand.

Structural resources are finding new uses for old structures and leveraging what a community has to build or expand economic vitality. Strategies include converting historic structures to new uses, creating an arts or community center, leveraging community infrastructure for gateways, heritage events, or starting points for tourist excursions, or converting abandoned railbeds into trails.

#### **IV. Project Requirements**

To receive funding, the project will possess the best combination of the following attributes:

- 1. *Projects must demonstrate the potential for generating new economic opportunity for the region.*** The central role of the project must be to improve the economic opportunity and viability of the region. Activities funded by investment grants must have economic impact that result in the direct creation or attraction of new jobs or businesses.
- 2. *Projects must be planned and implemented with strong community engagement and leadership.*** Projects must be started and supported by local people and local people must be actively involved in delivery.
- 3. *Projects must build collaborative relationships and partnerships in planning and implementation.*** Projects must demonstrate partnerships involving public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Specific contributions of time, resources, funding and/or expertise from various partners should be identified. .
- 4. *Projects must be assessed with care for their quality and authenticity.*** Maine has an appealing diversity of historic downtowns, small villages, and community culture. Projects should be designed to enhance a region’s authenticity and local distinctiveness.
- 5. *Projects must have realistic and promising market opportunities.*** If quality of place assets are to translate into good job opportunities, they must not be merely good, but recognized as better than anything else in the regional marketplace. Applicants need to have carried out extensive research to understand market realities. Such research must be robust and current.

6. ***Projects must leverage indigenous community assets.*** Quality of place investments build on exceptional community assets, as opposed to efforts designed only to fill gaps, address deficiencies, or provide new amenities. For example, support for a local swimming pool or industrial park – things that are not unique to the region – would not fit this initiative; while support for projects like the development of a unique heritage trail, the renovation of an historic mill building, or the protection of an outstanding scenic view or open space are compelling, place-based activities.
7. ***Projects must balance preservation with promotion of the asset.*** Many of our natural and cultural assets are be fragile. Since every visitor or user has an impact no matter how lightly they tread, project promoters must understand the effect of that impact with increased marketing and use. This includes identifying the desired condition of the asset, determining the level of acceptable change or alteration, devising marketing strategies based on use limitations, and implementing management strategies and mitigation tactics to ensure sustainability.
8. ***Projects must accrue benefits to the region as a whole.*** Projects are most successful when they harness the resources, ideas, and energy of a region of communities. Likewise, a lack of support among individual communities within a region may hinder the efforts of their neighbors. Projects must enhance the region as a quality place to live, work, visit, and socialize. Priority will be given to projects that are identified in regional asset-based development plans.
9. ***Projects must build on or enhance the regional or the state brand.*** Maine’s world-famous brand depicts the sort of authenticity and quality of place that sets a place apart. Projects should enhance and maintain the region and state’s identity and bolster the unique reasons for living in or visiting Maine.
10. ***Projects must leverage multiple sources of funds.*** At least 50% of the total project cost will be sourced elsewhere. This should be actual match funding (as opposed to “in-kind”). Applicants are encouraged to seek out complementary state or federal grant funds or philanthropic gifts as match.
11. ***Projects must advance the principles and practice of “smart growth” in Maine.*** A central goal of the QPIS is to help Maine communities and regions to “grow smarter.” Applicants must demonstrate that the project will yield concrete, practical results in terms of one or more of the principles defined in Section I (4) and will thereby contribute to our “growing smarter.”

## V. Project Focus Areas

The State Quality of Place Council will focus grant-making in eight project focus areas: Eligible activities include projects that:

1. promote traditional arts, culture, heritage as a source of economic activity

2. leverage natural assets
3. enhance public access to natural resources and traditional recreational resources
4. make vital downtowns and community centers
5. enhance and promote cultural identities of regions facing standardization
6. help build Maine brand and quality
7. use Maine’s assets in new and sustainable ways
8. make Maine more attractive to visitors, new residents, and entrepreneurs

Projects typically will be comprehensive and multifaceted. For example, the establishment of an interpretative center for a tourism site that is part of an itinerary of sites; or the renovation of an historic building to complement an overall downtown or community development strategy, or for an interconnected heritage tourism project; or land acquisition that is part of a regional landscape conservation project.

So long as they are embedded within a regional development strategy, the types of individual projects eligible for funding are varied. Projects may include, but are not limited to:

- Development of heritage tourism trails, recreational trails, or cultural corridors
- Development of related facilities in “gateway” communities that link to cultural centers or natural resource destinations
- Connecting downtowns and community centers with river- or ocean-fronts
- Revitalization of historic neighborhoods or downtowns
- Development of tourism itineraries, heritage trails or parks, or thematic, experiential natural resource tourism experiences
- Development of craft guilds or craft trails, with branding and marketing schemes
- Development of heritage festivals or events
- Protecting or enhancing public access to recreational lands and waters
- Development of land or water trails or land or water access sites as part of a trail system
- Development of sports, arts, or activity centers that fit with Maine’s natural assets
- Development of regional landscape conservation projects that incorporate economic and cultural as well as natural resource objectives
- Development of innovative, place-based products for new markets
- Development of a statewide or regional brand for existing quality of place assets with a common message and shared marketing materials
- Development and marketing of higher education degree and certificate programs designed specifically to strengthen state or regional quality of place assets.

## **VI. Eligibility Requirements**

Eligible applicants:

- Proposals will be accepted from Maine communities, counties, regions, land trusts, not-for-profit groups with similar markets or related projects, or other collaborators interested in tourism or economic or community development.
- Organizations located outside of Maine must demonstrate that they are working with an eligible Maine-based applicant to develop and implement the proposed project.

- While private businesses are not eligible to apply, they may be a partner in a project. As an example, a commercial mill redeveloper might be a partner in a project to create a walking trail, pocket park, or museum associated with the mill.

Proposal requirements:

- Proposals may come from a single community, organization, or governmental unit, but proof must be given that the project has regional economic impact and was developed in collaboration with other partners. Weight will be given to those projects representing a broad base of support within the region or among multiple regions.
- Projects must be sponsored by one or more of the regional quality of place councils in a federally-designated economic development region and be identified as a unique asset or part of a unique asset in the region's asset-based development plan and part of the vision and implementation strategy of that plan.
- Projects must describe how they advance the principles and practices of the State's Quality of Place Investment Strategy.
- The applicant must demonstrate the capacity to: 1) successfully complete the project based on the work plan, timeline, personnel involved, partnerships, and collaboration as well as past results, and 2) manage the project beyond the term of the grant award as evidenced by a business plan; demonstrated organizational capacity (governance, staff capacity), and financial plan (expense/revenue projects, level of debt, fundraising ability).

The above requirements will be the basis for developing scoring criteria.

## **VII. Grant Evaluation Process**

Grants will be reviewed, scored, and awarded by the State Quality of Place Council. Specific proposal requirements, application materials, eligible expenses, weighted scoring criteria, reporting requirements, and terms of payment shall be developed by the State Quality of Place Council.

## **VIII. Outcome Evaluation**

Successful grant applicants shall be responsible for providing data for specific, quantifiable performance measures as identified by the State Quality of Place Council.