Mayors' Institute on City Design

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Special Session Hosts

2027-2028

The Mayors' Institute on City Design (MICD) invites institutions to submit proposals to host a Special Session during the 2027-2028 program cycle.

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THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

Mayors' Institute on City Design

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

An Invitation to Partner with MICD

For 40 years, the Mayors' Institute on City Design (MICD) has brought mayors and design professionals together to address challenges facing American cities. Founded in 1986 by former Charleston, SC Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., MICD has helped more than 1,300 mayors lead with design and envision new possibilities for their communities. The MICD is a leadership initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors.

The world has changed considerably over those four decades, but the MICD model has endured: bring mayors together with accomplished design professionals, encourage candid conversation about real challenges, and help local leaders shape better outcomes for their cities.

We invite universities and nonprofit design organizations to partner with us in continuing that work.

MICD seeks up to four institutional partners to host Special Sessions in 2027 and 2028. Special Sessions follow the same established Institute format but are organized in partnership with universities and nonprofit design organizations and generally serve mayors of smaller cities. Each host will work closely with MICD staff to deliver a two-and-one-half-day session bringing together seven mayors and seven nationally recognized design professionals.

Hosting offers an opportunity to connect design education and professional expertise with the challenges of city leadership, engage with a national network of mayors and design professionals, and bring conversations about the future of cities to your community.

Hosting is also a substantial undertaking. Successful partners commit significant professional time, institutional resources, and expertise over approximately eight months. MICD provides guidance, resources, and financial support, while relying on its partners for the preparation, organization, and attention to detail that have defined the Institute experience for 40 years.

We look forward to working with partners who share our commitment to leading with design.

Trinity Simons Wagner

Executive Director
Mayors' Institute on City Design

OPPORTUNITY AT A GLANCE

WHO
Eligible applicants include universities with accredited programs in architecture, landscape architecture, and/or urban planning, and nonprofit design organizations. Applications from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, Tribal Colleges, and other minority-serving institutions are encouraged.

WHAT
Awardees organize and host one MICD Special Session, primarily serving mayors of small and mid-sized cities.

WHEN
Sessions will take place between summer 2027 and fall 2028, with dates established in consultation with MICD.

FUNDING
Up to $60,000 from MICD for approved direct session expenses, supplemented by host institutional support.

COMMITMENT
Approximately eight months of planning, execution, and follow-up, led by a dedicated Project Director and Project Coordinator from host institution.

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RFP ISSUED
October 30, 2026

PROPOSALS DUE
January 28, 2027 at 4pm ET

HOST SELECTIONS ANNOUNCED
March 2027

Mayors' Institute on City Design

OUR APPROACH

Inside an MICD Institute Session

MICD was founded on a simple but powerful idea: mayors play a defining role in shaping their communities, and design professionals can help them recognize and act upon that responsibility.

An MICD Institute Session brings together seven mayors and a Resource Team of seven accomplished professionals representing architecture, landscape architecture, arts and culture, planning, real estate development, transportation, and related disciplines.

Each mayor presents a current design or development challenge from their city. Resource Team members and fellow mayors engage in candid discussion, exploring opportunities, offering perspectives, and identifying potential paths forward. Resource Team members also deliver short presentations introducing ideas and approaches that can strengthen the mayors' broader design leadership.

The sessions are intentionally small and highly interactive. Participation is limited to the mayors, Resource Team members, and MICD and host leadership. There are no outside observers, press, or additional city staff in the working sessions.

This confidential, collegial environment is central to the MICD experience. Mayors are encouraged to discuss challenges openly, consider unfamiliar perspectives, and learn from one another without the pressures of their day-to-day responsibilities.

WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL MICD SESSION?

THOUGHTFUL PREPARATION
Every participating mayor receives an advance site visit, and each city challenge is developed into a carefully researched, visually compelling case study. Comprehensive briefing materials allow the Resource Team to arrive prepared for substantive discussion.

EXCEPTIONAL EXPERTISE
Resource Team members are selected for their professional distinction, interdisciplinary perspectives, and ability to engage constructively with the challenges of city governance.

A CAREFULLY CURATED EXPERIENCE
From meeting spaces and site tours to accommodations, meals, and transportation, every element should support productive conversation, professional exchange, and a memorable experience for participants.

COMMITMENT TO THE MICD MODEL
Host institutions work closely with MICD staff to maintain the program's established structure, standards, and objectives. MICD retains approval authority over participants, Resource Team members, case studies, briefing materials, and session programming.

THE VALUE OF HOSTING

Bring MICD to your city

Each host brings its own strengths to the partnership. Sessions generally take place in the host institution's home city or another city with which it has a strong relationship. While participating mayors typically represent smaller communities, host cities may be of any size.

Hosts are encouraged to draw upon local design accomplishments, civic leadership, cultural resources, and institutional expertise to create a distinctive experience. The host city's mayor generally welcomes participants but does not participate as one of the seven case-study mayors.

Institutions may propose a thematic focus, such as affordable housing, public health, infrastructure, or arts and culture, in consultation with MICD. A theme is not required and should complement the established MICD model.

Hosting offers an opportunity to strengthen connections between education, professional practice, and city governance. Faculty, students, and practitioners may gain valuable insight into the real-world implications of design and the role of public leadership in shaping communities, while respecting the confidentiality of the session.

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PARTNERSHIP AND STAFFING

What it Takes to Host

Hosting an MICD Special Session is a significant institutional commitment, requiring sustained professional attention over approximately eight months. While the session itself takes place over two-and-one-half days, the majority of the work occurs well before participants arrive.

The host institution is responsible for managing the planning process, coordinating participants, developing substantive case-study materials, producing the session, and completing all required follow-up and reporting.

MICD staff provide ongoing guidance, templates, planning resources, and review of major programmatic decisions. The host institution supplies the dedicated personnel, institutional support, and organizational capacity to carry out the work.

DEDICATED PROJECT LEADERSHIP

The host must identify two distinct project leadership roles:

PROJECT DIRECTOR

The Project Director provides programmatic and intellectual leadership for the session. Responsibilities include site visits to all seven participating cities, developing case study briefing materials, coordinating with MICD staff, supervising project personnel, and serving as a liaison to institutional leadership and financial staff. This person is often a senior faculty member at a university or an executive at a nonprofit.

This is a substantial professional commitment. The role may be shared by two qualified individuals with clearly defined responsibilities.

Estimated commitment: 300-500 total hours over eight months

PROJECT COORDINATOR

The Project Coordinator manages the extensive logistical and administrative responsibilities of hosting, including participant communications, travel arrangements, hotel and venue contracts, local transportation, and on-site event management.

The Coordinator must be an experienced professional staff member with sufficient availability and event-planning capacity. Student assistants may support the work but may not serve as Project Coordinator.

Estimated commitment: 400-600 total hours over eight months

INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

MICD will provide **up to $60,000** for approved direct session expenses, including travel and accommodations for participating mayors and Resource Team members, meals, Resource Team honoraria, materials, and other eligible costs.

There is no required financial match. However, MICD funding may not be used for institutional overhead or the salaries and benefits of faculty, staff, project managers, or student assistants. These expenses are the responsibility of the host institution.

The total cost of hosting a session is expected to exceed the MICD funding allocation. Additional institutional and community support, whether cash or in-kind, is encouraged. Such contributions may include meeting facilities, audiovisual services, transportation, photography, catering, and other resources that contribute to a high-quality session. See sample budget in appendix.

WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MICD

The host institution leads the day-to-day planning and execution of the session, while MICD provides programmatic direction and works collaboratively with the host on major decisions. MICD approves the list of potential participating mayors, Resource Team invitations, case-study selections, briefing materials, and session programming. The host coordinates invitations and confirmations, city site visits, research and production of materials, participant travel, venues, staffing, and other logistical arrangements. MICD and the host jointly develop the work plan, Resource Team composition, session agenda, participant preparation, and any proposed thematic focus.

The selected institution will enter into an agreement with the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM), which administers MICD through a cooperative agreement with the National Endowment for the Arts.

Prospective hosts should carefully review the Scope of Work on the following page and the supporting appendices before preparing a proposal. Together, these materials describe the responsibilities, schedule, and institutional resources required to deliver an MICD Special Session.

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HOST RESPONSIBILITIES AND DELIVERABLES

Scope of Work

Selected hosts, working in close consultation with MICD staff, are responsible for the following tasks. The responsibilities below reflect the full planning, execution, and follow-up process, with the 2.5 day session taking place in Summer 2027 or later.

ESTABLISHING THE PARTNERSHIP AND PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT STAFFING AND SUPERVISION

Appoint a qualified Project Director and Project Coordinator with sufficient dedicated time to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in this RFP. If the Project Director has not previously participated in an MICD session, MICD will arrange for them to attend one before planning their own. The host is also responsible for supervising paid staff and volunteers and coordinating the involvement of faculty, students, administrators, and other institutional representatives.

WORK PLAN AND SCHEDULE

Develop a written work plan and timeline for MICD review and approval, addressing participant selection, city site visits, venues, programming, logistics, briefing materials, and pre- and post-session activities. Maintain the schedule and coordinate regularly with MICD staff throughout the project.

MAYOR INVITATIONS

Work with MICD to invite seven participating mayors. MICD will provide an approved list of prospective mayors; the host will coordinate invitations, follow-up communications, and confirmation of attendance.

RESOURCE TEAM INVITATIONS

Collaborate with MICD to assemble an interdisciplinary Resource Team of seven accomplished professionals. Obtain MICD approval before issuing invitations, coordinate participation, and ensure that each Resource Team member signs an agreement acknowledging the MICD Standards of Conduct.

DEVELOPING THE CONTENT

CITY SITE VISITS AND CASE STUDIES
Visit each confirmed participating city to meet with the mayor and city staff, understand the city's design or development challenges, and prepare the mayor for participation. Gather maps, photographs, data, and other materials needed to develop substantive case studies.

BRIEFING MATERIALS
Research, write, design, and produce comprehensive briefing materials, including participant profiles and summaries of all seven mayoral case studies. Materials must meet MICD's content and graphic standards. Distribute a digital briefing book at least one week before the session and provide a printed copy to each participant on site.

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT
Where appropriate, use the session's themes and lessons to enrich design education and professional exchange while preserving the confidentiality of participating mayors and the closed-session format.

PRODUCING AND HOSTING THE SESSION

VENUES AND PROGRAM LOGISTICS
Plan and coordinate the opening reception, working sessions, meals, site tours, and other activities. Secure appropriate venues and supporting services, including audiovisual equipment, catering, photography, administrative assistance, and local transportation.

PARTICIPANT TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATIONS
Arrange and coordinate travel and hotel accommodations for participating mayors and Resource Team members, along with necessary local transportation. Participation is provided at no cost to mayors and Resource Team members.

HOSTING THE SESSION
The Project Director co-moderates the Institute session alongside the MICD Executive Director. The host provides sufficient professional and supporting staff to manage the participant experience, coordinate vendors and services, maintain the session schedule, and oversee all logistical arrangements throughout the event.

DOCUMENTING AND CLOSING OUT THE WORK

SESSION DOCUMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Record session activities in high-quality audio format and prepare a written meeting summary documenting recommendations made during the session. Provide these materials to MICD within one month of the session's conclusion and distribute to participating mayors.

FOLLOW-UP AND FINAL REPORTING
Complete participant correspondence, appropriate communications and archival activities, and other follow-up work. Submit a final report to MICD within two months of the session, including the meeting summary, session evaluation, accounting of expenses, and report on follow-up activities.

FINANCIAL RECORDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
Submit complete documentation of financial obligations and transactions in accordance with MICD's final invoice instructions. Records must be safeguarded and made available to USCM upon request for three years after submission of the final report.

SUPPORTING APPENDICES
The following documents are incorporated by reference and should be reviewed by all applicants:

A: Sample MICD Session Agenda
B: Sample Session Budget
C: Sample Project Timeline and Key Deliverables
D: MICD Standards of Conduct

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PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS AND SELECTION CONSIDERATIONS

Submitting a Proposal

MICD seeks partners with the expertise, commitment, and capacity to deliver an exceptional Institute experience. Applicants should organize proposals into the five sections below, outlining what to submit and what the panel will consider. Successful proposals are typically 15–20 pages, with polished, visually compelling materials reflecting the quality expected of an MICD host.

REVIEW AND SELECTION

An advisory panel of qualified outside experts will review all proposals based on the considerations below.

HOW TO APPLY

Submit a single PDF containing all required materials to trinity@micd.org by **January 28, 2027 at 4:00 pm ET.**

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to contact MICD before preparing a proposal and to participate in an informational webinar to learn more about the expectations and responsibilities of hosting.

QUESTIONS AND SUBMISSIONS

Trinity Simons Wagner, Executive Director
Mayors' Institute on City Design
trinity@micd.org | micd.org

Institutional Interest and Alignment

Submit: A brief statement explaining your institution's interest in hosting, its understanding of MICD's mission and methodology, and the strengths it would bring to the partnership.

Panel will consider: Alignment with MICD's approach to design leadership, commitment to the established Institute model, and interest in connecting design expertise with the challenges of city governance.

Project Team and Organizational Capacity

Submit: Biographies of the proposed Project Director, Project Coordinator, and other key personnel. Include a staffing plan explaining how the institution will dedicate sufficient time and resources to the work, along with a **letter of commitment from institutional leadership (required).**

Panel will consider: Relevant professional qualifications, demonstrated project and event management experience, realistic staffing capacity, and specific institutional commitments.

Host City and Participant Experience

Submit: A description of the proposed host city, including potential meeting spaces, accommodations, opening reception and dinner venue for ~35 guests, dining venues with private rooms for at least 20 guests, site tours, and other elements of the participant experience. Include photographs where appropriate, address accessibility and transportation, and identify any proposed thematic focus. **Provide a letter of support from the host city's mayor (required).**

Panel will consider: Design quality, suitability and accessibility of proposed facilities, logistical feasibility, compelling local learning opportunities, and strength of host-city partnerships. Applicants proposing a theme should demonstrate relevant expertise; proposals without a theme will not be disadvantaged.

Resource Team Expertise

Submit: A preliminary roster of potential Resource Team members, including brief biographies and expertise. Demonstrate access to accomplished professionals across relevant design and development disciplines with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Represented professions must include architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, arts and culture, transportation, real estate development, and economic development.

Panel will consider: Professional distinction, interdisciplinary breadth, diversity of perspectives, and access to expertise beyond the host institution.

Applicants need not contact proposed Resource Team members before selection. All invitations require subsequent MICD approval.

Budget and Institutional Support

Submit: A preliminary budget identifying anticipated session expenses, proposed uses of MICD funding, and cash or in-kind contributions from the institution and community partners.

Panel will consider: A realistic understanding of session costs, institutional financial capacity, and the resources committed to delivering the work to MICD standards.

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APPENDIX A

Sample MICD Session Agenda

WEDNESDAY, DATE

4:30 PM	Meet in the hotel lobby for host city tour	
6:00 PM	Opening reception	
7:00 PM	Opening dinner	
	Opening remarks:	Trinity Simons Wagner, Mayors' Institute on City Design
		Representative, National Endowment of the Arts
		Representative, Host University or Organization
	Opening address:	**Host Mayor**
9:00 PM	Return to the hotel	

THURSDAY, DATE

8:30 AM	Depart from hotel to the meeting space
8:45 AM	Hot breakfast & coffee
9:00 AM	Introductions & overview: Trinity Simons Wagner
9:30 AM	***Presentation: Resource Team 1***
9:45 AM	***Presentation: Resource Team 2***
10:00 AM	Discussion
10:20 AM	Break
10:40 AM	***The Honorable Mayor 1***
11:40 AM	Break
11:50 AM	***The Honorable Mayor 2***
12:50 PM	Lunch at the meeting space
1:40 PM	***Presentation: Resource Team 3***
1:55 PM	***Presentation: Resource Team 4***
2:10 PM	Discussion
2:30 PM	Break
2:50 PM	***The Honorable Mayor 3***
3:50 PM	Break
4:00 PM	***The Honorable Mayor 4***
5:00 PM	Return to the hotel
6:45 PM	Meet in the hotel lobby for dinner
7:00 PM	Dinner
9:00 PM	Return to the hotel

FRIDAY, DATE

8:30 AM	Depart from hotel to the meeting space
8:45 AM	Hot breakfast & coffee
9:00 AM	***Presentation: Resource Team 5***
9:15 AM	***Presentation: Resource Team 6***
9:30 AM	Discussion
9:50 AM	Break + Group Photo
10:10 AM	***The Honorable Mayor 5***
11:10 AM	***Host City Tour***
12:30 PM	Lunch at the meeting space
1:10 PM	***Presentation: NEA***
1:25 PM	***Presentation: Resource Team 7***
1:40 PM	Discussion
2:00 PM	Break
2:20 PM	***The Honorable Mayor 6***
3:20 PM	Break
3:30 PM	***The Honorable Mayor 7***
4:30 PM	Closing Remarks: Trinity Simons Wagner
5:00 PM	Return to the hotel
6:45 PM	Meet in the hotel lobby for dinner
7:00 PM	Dinner
9:00 PM	Return to the hotel

APPENDIX B

Sample Session Budget

7 Mayors		
Travel	$5,600	7 @ $800 per flight
Hotel	$6,300	21 room nights @ $300 per night, including taxes
Incidentals	$1,500	Incidentals such as taxis to / from airport, airport parking, and food on travel days for mayors
7 Resource Team Members		
Travel	$4,800	6 @ $800 per flight (1 local)
Hotel	$6,300	21 room nights @ $300 per night, including taxes
Incidentals	$1,500	Incidentals such as taxis to / from airport, airport parking, and food on travel days for Resource Team
Meals		
Opening dinner	$5,250	35 guests @ $150 per person, including beverages, service fees, and rentals
Second dinner	$2,640	22 participants @ $120 per person, including beverages, service fees, and rentals
Closing dinner	$2,640	22 participants @ $120 per person, including beverages, service fees, and rentals
Breakfast and snacks	$2,420	22 participants for 3 days @ $55 per day
Lunches and beverages	$3,740	22 participants for 2 days @ $85 per day
Honorarium	$3,500	7 @ $500 per Resource Team member
Printing and copying	$5,000	Printing for briefing books, post-session reports, signage, handouts, etc.
Shipping	$300	Shipping for post-session reports, etc.
Supplies	$500	Supplies and session materials
Audio / visual services	$4,000	Provided by the host institution as in-kind support
Local transportation	$3,000	Provided by the host institution as in-kind support
Miscellaneous Expenses	$2,500	
Meeting space	N/A	Provided by the host institution as in-kind support
Staff/faculty time	N/A	Provided by the host institution as in-kind support
Total	$70,940	
Reimbursable by MICD	**$ 60,000**	
Provided by the host instution	**$ 10,940**	Plus staff/faculty time

APPENDIX C

Sample Project Timeline and Key Deliverables

The following is an abbreviated schedule of planning an MICD session. From start to finish, MICD session planning and execution is typically an approximately 8-month process; session dates are determined by host organization, MICD staff, and MICD partners. Please note that MICD provides hosts with a detailed task list, timeline, templates, and other planning documents.

Task / Item	Due Date	Sample Date
Submit work plan and timeline	Within 14 days of contract signing (contractual deadline)	May 1
Begin biweekly meetings with MICD team		June 1
Secure all contracts for hotel, meeting space, meals, opening reception, transportation, AV, etc.		By July 1
Invitations made to mayors and resource team	As early as possible (at least 3 months before Institute Session)	By July 22
Site visits to participating mayors; drafting briefing book		July, August, September
Site visits complete	At least 21 days before session	By October 1
Submit draft briefing book to MICD staff for review and approval	At least 14 days before session (contractual deadline)	October 8
Briefing Book distributed to participants electronically	At least 7 days before session (contractual deadline)	October 15
Institute Session		October 22-24
Submit draft summary to MICD staff for review and approval prior to distribution	Within 21 days of Institute Session (contractual deadline)	November 14
Session summary distributed to participants	Within 30 days of Institute Session (contractual deadline)	November 23
Final Report and invoice to MICD Director	Within 45 days of Institute Session (contractual deadline)	December 8

APPENDIX D

MICD Standards of Conduct

Selected host institutions are required to ensure that all MICD activities and participants abide by the National Endowment for the Arts' Standards of Conduct:

1. Individuals serving as resource persons to the MICD may not take part in the discussion of any specific project or activity presented at the MICD in which the resource person has a material financial interest.

2. Those serving as resource persons to the MICD may not negotiate or enter into a consulting agreement or any other type of employment agreement with any participating city of the MICD with respect to any project or activity presented at the Institute, for a period of one year following such presentations at the MICD, except with the express written consent from the National Endowment of the Arts after consultation with the Endowment's General Counsel.

3. Specific information obtained by individuals serving as resource persons to the Institute, through the performance of their responsibilities, may not be used to solicit business with any participating city for a period of one year from the time of the resource person's participation at the Institute, except with the express written consent from the National Endowment of the Arts after consultation with the Endowment's General Counsel.

4. The selected host institution must incorporate these Standards of Conduct in its contracts or letters of agreement with resource persons. A sample letter of agreement will be provided by MICD.

5. Breach of the foregoing may result in the termination of the contract between the United States Conference of Mayors and the selected host institution.