



DEVELOPING A 21ST CENTURY FEDERAL URBAN POLICY The White House Office of Urban Affairs

“We need to stop seeing our cities as the problem and start seeing them as the solution. Because strong cities are the building blocks of strong regions, and strong regions are essential for a strong America. That is the new metropolitan reality and we need a new strategy that reflects it...” – Barack Obama (Miami – June 21, 2008)

A WHITE HOUSE OFFICE TO ADDRESS THE NEW URBAN REALITY

For the first time in history, more than half the world’s population lives in cities. Today, our nation’s metropolitan areas house 83 percent of our people, 85 percent of our jobs, and generate 90 percent of our economic output. These trends will likely continue to increase over the next several decades as our Nation grapples with how best to accommodate the anticipated 40 percent population growth (120 million people) by mid-century.

In the past, federal programs often fostered fragmented—rather than integrated—approaches to urban and metropolitan development at the local and regional level. To break the federal government out of this siloed approach, President Obama created the White House Office of Urban Affairs (WHOUA) by Executive Order on February 19, 2009. The WHOUA has three missions: (1) to communicate the Administration’s vision and policy priorities for urban and metropolitan America; (2) to coordinate federal agencies that have policies or programs impacting urban and metropolitan areas; and (3) to reinvigorate the federal-local relationship. In essence, the Office of Urban Affairs was created to develop a National Urban and Metropolitan Strategy—based upon ground-up solutions—that meets cities where they are and better reflects the way people live.

NATIONAL URBAN POLICY GOALS

Over the last year and a half, the WHOUA laid the foundation to develop comprehensive federal strategies that support local efforts based upon three overarching goals: fostering urban and metropolitan areas that are economically competitive, environmentally sustainable, and socially inclusive.

- **Economic Competitiveness** fosters innovation and entrepreneurship, ensures investment in human capital, and attends to the quality of both physical and technological infrastructure.
- **Environmental Sustainability** connects neighborhoods, cities, and regions in a way that promotes energy-efficient and environmentally sensitive development patterns and ensures progress toward an energy-independent future.
- **Social Inclusiveness** promotes opportunity, supports a strong and sustained middle class, and reduces racial and ethnic disparities in education, income, and wealth that weaken the Nation. It demands that the question of who is left behind be asked as policies are designed and programs enacted.

GETTING THE WORK DONE

The work of the office has been carried out through the **Interagency Urban Policy Working Group**—Washington-based federal agency working groups that are laser focused on helping urban and metropolitan areas embrace opportunities— and the **National Urban Tour**, which allowed the WHOUA to see first-hand the innovative solutions communities large and small are creating across the country.

The Interagency Policy Working Group

The Interagency Urban Policy Working Group (UPWG) is comprised of 17 federal agencies and serves as the umbrella entity for all of our urban policy work. The UPWG's efforts are anchored in peer-to-peer learning and information sharing among agencies, knowledge building from external urban policy experts, and general coordination of the agencies' urban policy work.

This working group is also responsible for conducting an annual Office of Management and Budget (OMB) place-based policy review process that asks each federal agency to analyze the impact of their programs on people and the places they live. In 2009 and 2010, agencies' responses to this Administration-wide review process lead to numerous innovative proposals in the FY2011 Budget.

Interagency Working Groups and Participating Agencies

Urban Policy Interagency Initiative is the umbrella working group comprised of 17 agencies from throughout the Administration that impact urban communities.

Regional Innovation Clusters Initiative works to build upon the economic assets and competitive strengths of a region to boost job creation and economic growth.

Agencies: Commerce, Small Business, Education, Labor

Sustainable Communities Initiative is focused on promoting and supporting regional sustainable development in metros, cities, and rural areas with an emphasis on coordinating transportation, housing, and land use policies.

Agencies: Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Environmental Protection

Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative targets neighborhoods with high rates of poverty, crime, and unemployment with an eye towards reversing negative trends and restoring hope and opportunity.

Agencies: Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Justice, Education, Treasury

The National Urban Tour

President Obama knows that Washington does not have all of the answers, and therefore public engagement is a central part of the work of the Office of Urban Affairs. Local community and elected leaders have designed some of the best innovations to respond to the unique challenges and opportunities present in urban and metropolitan areas. Listening to what works and bringing those ideas back to Washington is an important part of the process in developing new urban strategies.

The WHOUA visited 8 cities and towns across the country in 2009 to see how real world challenges were being addressed on the ground and to examine how the federal government could more effectively contribute to these efforts. The communities and issues explored include:

- **Philadelphia, PA** – Eliminating food deserts and increasing access to fresh, healthy food in underserved communities
- **Kansas City, MO** - Developing sustainable, green communities in urban areas
- **Chicago, IL** -Building integrated housing that supports diverse communities
- **Denver, CO** -Creating communities based around strategic public transportation models
- **Flagstaff, AZ** -Harnessing natural resources to fuel economic development
- **Seattle, WA** -Bringing likeminded entities together to form regional hubs of innovation
- **Los Angeles, CA** –Investing in workforce development initiatives that prepare workers for current and future opportunities in the new economy
- **Atlanta, GA** -Embracing community-integrated neighborhood schools

The National Urban Tour furthered the Obama Administration's commitment to transparent and inclusive government. Each site on the Tour helped the WHOUA to determine which federal policies are integral to a new national urban strategy, which policies erect barriers to innovation, and which policies would be best aligned to achieve the greatest return on investment.

In the end, the success of the WHOUA will be measured by the long-term success of our cities and metropolitan areas, and by the quality of life and opportunity available to all regardless of whether they live in rural or urban America.

THE RESULTS ARE IN

The work of the Office of Urban Affairs has already directly impacted the work of our federal agencies and is reflected in the FY2011 budget. Here are a few examples:

National Goal: Economic Competitiveness

- *Regional Innovation Clusters* – \$86 million to support communities who are recruiting industries of the future in new energy, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics professions, and other fields based on the inherent natural resources in the area.

National Goal: Environmental Sustainability

- *Sustainable Communities Initiative* – \$709 million to stimulate comprehensive regional and community planning efforts that integrate transportation, housing, and other critical investments that will reduce greenhouse gases, improve mobility and transportation access to economic opportunity, and provide more housing choices.

National Goal: Social Inclusion

- *Healthy Food Financing Initiative*– \$400 million to provide and promote access to healthy foods and supermarkets in underserved communities with the goal of reducing health disparities, creating jobs, and stimulating local economic development.
- *Choice Neighborhoods Program* – \$250 million for physical and social revitalization grounded in promising, measurable, and evidence-based strategies targeted toward neighborhoods anchored by distressed public or assisted housing.
- *Promise Neighborhoods Program* – \$210 million aimed at improving college attainment rates by combining a rigorous K-12 education with a full network of supportive services.

For more information on the work of the White House Office of Urban Affairs, please visit our website at www.whitehouse.gov/urbanaffairs