INCLUDING SUSTAINABILITY IN REQUESTS FOR PROPOSAL

A case study featuring Iowa City, IA and Las Vegas, NV

A Request For Proposal (RFP) is a contracting tool used by local governments to solicit ideas and bids for projects that will be completed either exclusively by a vendor or in collaboration with staff. These projects tend to have a limited duration with clearly articulated deliverables. They may require specialized skill sets or increases in workers to supplement staff.

The content of proposals are often guided by needs and evaluation criteria defined by the local government. Herein lies the opportunity to address local sustainability efforts and desired outcomes. Given the many interpretations of sustainability in the marketplace, adding a phrase like "How does your proposal support local sustainability efforts?" may not be sufficient. This type of generalized question does not provide enough guidance to contractors on the desired outcomes.

The framework and evaluation measures in the STAR Community Rating System can be used as tools to hone in on the sustainability components of primary focus for any RFP. Below are a few examples of how certified STAR communities have integrated sustainability into local RFP processes.

Iowa City, IA

After Iowa City achieved a certified 4-STAR Community Rating in March of 2016, the city held a one-day sustainability workshop for staff members to discuss gaps and lessons learned from the certification results and to develop a list of priority actions for the coming years. Since then, city staff members have been working to embed sustainability into municipal operations and implementing projects to address gaps identified through certification. To ensure that all new projects measurably contribute to communitywide sustainability, the city has been including knowledge of STAR as a requirement in their RFPs.

During the workshop, Iowa City identified metrics and best practices from STAR's Climate Adaptation and Biodiversity & Invasive Species categories as priorities to incorporate into city operations. To ensure that these metrics were included in the Natural Areas Management Plan and Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, the city issued RFPs requiring alignment with STAR.

"While not all consultants are familiar with STAR yet, we want to make sure that STAR parameters are considered as we move forward," said Brenda Nations, Iowa City's sustainability coordinator. "In the scope of the RFP, we included that our plan must utilize, align, and conform with the STAR Community Rating System."
At first there was a learning curve for consultants. "If [consultants] weren't [familiar with STAR], we worked with them during the planning process to provide information and to ensure that STAR measures we would like to be included are added," described Nations. "With consultants, we hope that more will become familiar with the STAR framework so that the process will be easier in the future. They have been open to the idea and it's been a learning experience on both sides."

Las Vegas, NV

In the summer of 2017, the Las Vegas City Council passed a resolution to align the city’s new master plan, slated to be developed in 2018, with the STAR framework. To carry out this directive, when putting together the RFP for the master plan, city staff included a specification that the plan’s goals should align with the STAR framework wherever possible.

The City of Las Vegas has used STAR to measure sustainability progress since achieving a 4-STAR Community Rating in late 2015. By including alignment with STAR in the master plan RFP, the city ensures that the data gathered through certification and the Leading Indicators program will be utilized in the planning process.

Directing that STAR data be used upfront in the RFP provides consultants a foundation from which to build. Consultants will develop the “overall goals and targets for the community from a wealth of STAR information,” said Marco Velotta, a planner with the city’s Office of Sustainability. “Their efforts and scope of work will inform the city's master plan team on goal setting and hopefully display it in an interactive format that is user-friendly and accessible for a wide range of users and the general public.”

The inclusion of STAR metrics in specific chapters of the master plan will help guide future planning processes. Describing how this will work, Velotta said, “In our parks and open space chapter, we may have a series of goals that tie directly into the STAR Built Environment outcomes, for example, for acreage, proximity, and connectivity.” The baseline for these goals will be based upon data from Las Vegas’ STAR certification and performance targets can be tied to the national thresholds contained in the rating system.

Velotta also described how adopting metrics from STAR’s Greening the Energy Supply category could drive the city to increase their renewable energy supply and state-owned utilities to improve their renewable portfolio standard (RPS). “We have the trend data [from our STAR certification], and we know that there are efforts to expand the state RPS – why not incorporate a future renewable energy target? The inclusion of this target will ultimately be vetted and determined through the public planning and outreach process as a part of this RFP."
ABOUT STAR

The STAR Community Rating System (STAR) is the nation’s leading comprehensive framework and certification program for evaluating local sustainability, encompassing economic, environmental, and social performance measures. Local leaders use the rating system’s evaluation measures to assess their current level of sustainability, set targets for moving ahead, and measure progress along the way.

For more information on how to use the STAR Community Rating System in your city or county’s operations, please contact:

- Aaron Lande, Member Relations Manager
- Email: aaron@starcommunities.org
- Phone: (202) 742-3232