

Legacy Project Program Overview

In June 2027, the Twin Cities will host the 35th annual gathering of Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU)—an interdisciplinary group of planners, designers, civic leaders, developers, and community advocates focused on building stronger, more resilient places. As part of CNU’s commitment to be a catalyst for lasting change in the region that hosts its event, the organization provides on-the-ground pro bono urban design assistance in select communities each year. Through this **Legacy Project Program**, CNU recruits national design firms to work directly with local partners to leverage over \$150,000 in professional design assistance per project.

Legacy Projects bring the power of urban design solutions to communities that would otherwise not have access to this kind of professional expertise. Selected projects will prioritize neighborhoods that have experienced historic disinvestment, urban challenges that have been overlooked by existing planning practice, or needed change that has remained unfulfilled by conventional community investment strategies. These Projects bring real solutions to neighborhoods in a way that values and incorporates the lived experience of residents. They facilitate engagement, discussion, problem-solving, and ultimately community buy-in for the final plans.

Legacy Projects center around an intense, hands-on way of problem solving called the *charrette*. After weeks of research and planning, design teams gather for a 3 to 4-day active workshop where they interview community members, walk the streets, and draw solutions in real time. Each project is designed with a “start now” mentality, including implementation strategies that allow for change to be seen on-the-ground within 6 to 18 months of the workshop.

Focusing on the Building Blocks of Community: CNU35 and the fundamental role of the public realm to foster community connection and democratic values.

Minnesotans take pride in their investment in mobility, streets, parks, public spaces—and the Twin Cities routinely score highly in national rankings on our parks and livability. In addition to providing spaces for gathering, recreating, moving, and commerce, the public realm is where people celebrate their history and culture, express their identity, and collaborate through engagement with their community.

CNU35 will offer Legacy Project participants the chance to celebrate the promise of the public realm to express community, further equity, and give underrepresented people a voice in the future of their communities. The outcomes of these projects will underscore how governments, institutions, community members, and the private sector can collaborate in planning for expanded accessibility, opportunity, and community building through the design of shared spaces and places, making the lives of everyone better.

What Is A Legacy Project?

The 2027 Legacy Projects will take place in the Twin Cities, a region that has long been at the center of critical national conversations about public space, equity, safety, and belonging. Projects will be selected in the fall of 2026 with the neighborhood design workshops taking place in spring of 2027. Final products from this process will be presented at CNU 35 in Minneapolis, June 15–18, 2027.

The appropriate scale for a legacy project varies. Past selected projects include a downtown vision plan for a small town, a concept study for a commercial corridor redesign, an incremental revitalization strategy for a historic neighborhood, a connectivity plan to help a city improve its walk/bikeability, a design for a social impact-focused mixed-use community hub, a phasing strategy for a complex mixed-use development through institutional partnership, and a master plan for a neighborhood center in a structurally-disinvested community.

Legacy Projects aim to:

- Help local partners advance a clearly defined need or opportunity in the areas of planning and design.
- Deliver usable products such as conceptual site plans, design strategies, or policy recommendations.
- Highlight effective approaches to land use, development, or infrastructure.
- Reflect CNU values such as walkability, housing choice, local identity, and responsible growth.

For more information on the types of outcomes, check out some [recent past reports](#).

Congress Legacy Project | Invitation to Apply

The Twin Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis will host the 35th annual meeting of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) in 2027. The annual Congress celebrates and supports the work of thousands of practitioners who dedicate themselves to the planning, design, and delivery of sustainable, diverse and walkable regions, communities and neighborhoods. Each year's Congress is also a chance to bring attention to issues that local communities confront—and to help communities address them directly.

CNU and the Twin Cities' Local Host Committee (LHC) invite **municipalities, community-based non-profits, neighborhood organizations and other interested parties** to apply for low-cost technical assistance from leading national urban design firms. Each three-day neighborhood design workshop will bring over \$150,000 in pro-bono design assistance to address local issues related to the mission of CNU. The final participants will be selected based on need and readiness to implement short-term strategies from the workshop.

Legacy Project workshops will occur in early Spring 2027.

Legacy Project applications will be reviewed by the Local Host Committee and staff at the CNU National office. **Up to four projects will be selected for design assistance.** Successful Legacy Projects have a well-defined scope, strong community support, engaged public sector partners, and an enthusiastic local champion.

Once the Legacy Projects are selected, CNU will work with its membership to build a design team of experts. Each team will work directly with a Legacy Project sponsor to determine the scope of the project, and to plan and execute the design workshop in the spring of 2027. The final product of each Legacy Project will be presented to community representatives and Congress attendees at CNU 35 Twin Cities, June 15-18, 2027.

Important Program Dates

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| • July 10, 2026 | Call for Applications Distributed |
| • Week of July 20, 2026 | Pre-Submittal Meeting |
| • September 10, 2026 (5:00pm CST) | Applications Due |
| • October 2, 2026 | Notification of Selection |
| • Week of October 26, 2026 | Participant Kick-Off Call |
| • November 2026 – March 2027 | Bi-Weekly Organizing Calls |
| • December 2, 2026 | Agreements/Matching Funds Due |
| • Early Spring 2027 | Legacy Project Workshops |
| • June 15-18, 2027 | CNU 35.Twin Cities and Public Presentations |

Program Goals

- Address important neighborhood, city, or regional development issues.
- Increase participation of historically underrepresented or underserved communities in the planning and design process.
- Bring a level of placemaking and urban design expertise typically not accessible to local communities.
- Overcome the barriers to building great places and advance implementation.
- Create replicable, sustainable, and model community solutions.

Selection Criteria

Applications must be implementation-focused. They will be evaluated by a selection panel of CNU staff and LHC members according to the degree to which an application meets the following program goals:

1. The project invites model solutions to difficult local or regional (or even national) development issues.
2. The project supports historically underrepresented or underserved communities.
3. Support is demonstrated by local government and local organizations, including their intent to provide organizational assistance such as publicity, venues, public engagement; and to

provide project team support such as background materials, information, mapping resources etc.

4. There is evidence of a clear and comprehensive approach to community engagement ahead of, during and after the workshop.
5. The project provides opportunities to improve the public realm in a way that benefits the local community in an equitable and representational manner.
6. The project will be implemented in some way within 18 months following the Legacy Project.
7. There is a project champion, e.g., someone/organization who is able to organize and advance the Legacy Project before and during the event, and is committed to assist with implementation afterward.

In addition to addressing the selection criteria, applicants must identify:

- **A Legacy Project Champion** to serve as the community's point of contact, participate in all organizing calls, staff the project weekend, and address implementation barriers.
- **Community Stakeholders** impacted by the project.
- **The Range of Design and Planning Expertise** that may be needed.
- **The Desired Outcome(s)** of the workshop.

Project Team Selection

Upon selection, CNU will assign each community or organization a custom project team led by a nationally recognized consultant design firm with inter-disciplinary expertise, and matched to identified needs and desired outcomes. Each project team will be managed by the lead firm, with logistics support from CNU. The project team will likely be a mixture of local and national specialists.

Expectations of Selected Communities/Organizations

The Legacy Program leverages an average of \$150,000 in pro bono technical assistance per project. As a recipient of these services, the Local Partner agrees to the following:

- Fundraise \$7500 to match the investment that CNU will make to cover direct costs associated with the charrette week. These funds should be received by CNU no later than December 2, 2026.
- Assist in the execution of a successful neighborhood design workshop (or charrette) to be held in early Spring 2027.
- Identify and coordinate with key stakeholders in partnership with the *Design Team*.
- Secure a venue for the charrette, in coordination with the *Design Team* to ensure it has the appropriate space. This venue should:
 - o Accommodate all workshop activities in a single room, including larger community presentations and smaller stakeholder information gathering.
 - o Be within the project focus area to maximize public involvement and be accessible to community members.
 - o Have access to reliable Wi-Fi.

- o Have the capability to display the work produced by the Design Team (i.e., ability to post drawings on the walls, easels, etc.).
- Conduct public outreach to engage community stakeholders throughout the Legacy Project process, including but not limited to ensuring public understanding of the approach, goals, and outcomes, and encouraging public participation in the charrette.
- Secure A/V Equipment in coordination with the Design Team for any presentations.
- Collect Data & Materials in coordination with the Design Team in advance of the charrette to ensure they have the right information, data, map layers, etc. to prepare.
- Work with CNU staff to develop and execute a communications and outreach plan that promotes the scope of work undertaken in this project, the goals of the Legacy Program, the work of the Design Team, and the annual Congress.
- Participate in the annual Congress presentation of the Legacy Program results, including attending some portion of the event on June 15-18, 2027.

Application Requirements

Send completed applications no later than **September 10, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. CST** via email to Lauren Mayer at lmayer@cnu.org. Please ensure the subject line includes the words "CNU 35 Legacy Project RFP Response".

While Legacy Project partners may include other entities, the lead entity should be a local government or a non-profit organization working with the local government(s). If a non-profit organization is the lead entity, it must provide a letter of support from the local government(s).

Proposals should be no more than 5 pages and must include:

1. **Project Title and Community**
Name the project and the city, town, or area where it is located.
2. **Problem Statement & Vision**
Describe the challenge or opportunity and your vision for improvement.
3. **Connection to CNU Goals**
Briefly explain how the project aligns with principles such as walkability, housing choice, infill development, placemaking, or responsible growth.
4. **Community Impact**
Who will benefit from this project? What local plans, goals, or partnerships does it support?
5. **Stakeholders and Partners**
Identify the lead applicant and any other organizations, agencies, or community groups involved. Who will lead local coordination?
6. **Site or Area Details**
Provide a description of the physical location, including historic and current context if relevant to the proposal. Maps, photos, or supporting visuals may be submitted as attachments.

7. Readiness

What groundwork has been laid? Why is now the right time for this project?

8. Community Engagement

How would you involve local residents, business owners, or civic partners in the process?

9. Anticipated Outcomes

What deliverables or next steps would help move this project forward after the charrette?

Who will be responsible for implementation?

10. Local Match

Professional services of a Legacy Project are valued at \$150,000 in average donated time and work. Each selected organization or community is expected to contribute \$7,500 for direct travel expenses of the firms and to demonstrate the capacity to implement the recommendations. Assistance with funding may be available from the Local Host Committee. Any combination of municipal, foundation, corporate, or individual sponsorship can be the source of the funds.

***Note: Communities are encouraged to apply even if they cannot secure the required letters of endorsement and commitment by the submission deadline. If selected, communities will be required to provide both letters prior to signing the required participation agreement and payment of local match, which are due by December 2, 2026.*

Review and Notification

- CNU staff and members of the CNU 35 LHC will review all complete applications.
- Communities/organizations will be notified regarding their section status by October 2, 2026.
- Communities/organizations must sign participation agreements and pay the required cash match by December 2, 2026.
- All the selected Legacy Project workshops will take place in early Spring 2027.

For more information, contact Lauren Mayer, Associate Director of Resources, lmayer@cnu.org.