Request for Proposals to Partner with PALS for 2015-2016

The Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability (PALS), administered by the National Center for Smart Growth (NCSG) at the University of Maryland College Park (UMD), invites proposals from Maryland jurisdictions interested in partnering with the University in a program that pairs the sustainability-related projects of a local government with experienced faculty and courses from across the University of Maryland campus. The successful applicant will benefit from between 40,000 and 60,000 hours of work by UMD students and faculty from a variety of disciplines. The core of this request for proposals is the development of an annotated list of projects by the jurisdiction that aim to enhance a community’s quality of life, protect is resources and develop sustainable practices.

RFP Issue Date: October 20th, 2014
Pre-bid Meeting (call-ins allowed): November 5th, 10AM–11AM @ NCSG
Proposal Due Date 3:00 PM, November 24th, 2014 via e-mail (Electronic submission only): to uavin@umd.edu
Notification of Interviews: December 1st, 2014
Interviews with top candidates: December 8th, 2014
Selection and notification: December 15th, 2014
Start of PALS process: January 5th, 2015
Beginning of Fall PALS courses: August 31st, 2015
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1.0 PALS Overview

The Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability (PALS) at the University of Maryland (UMD) is a new, campus-wide initiative that enlists faculty expertise and student ingenuity to offer fresh solutions to challenges facing Maryland communities. Administered by the National Center for Smart Growth at UMD, PALS is one of the largest action learning initiatives in the country. The mission is to provide high-quality, low-cost assistance to local governments while creating an active and valuable real-world learning experience for UMD graduate and undergraduate students.

As a land grant institution, the University of Maryland has a special relationship and obligation to Maryland communities. The University’s leadership sees the realization of this relationship as a high priority. Translating research-based knowledge into practical, useful assistance to local governments is one way of fulfilling this land grant mission. Additionally, providing its students with valuable and unique learning experiences is paramount to UMD’s education philosophy; PALS partnerships are a ground-breaking way to improve retention and crystalize course concepts while improving a partner community’s sustainable practices.

To respond to this request for proposals, a local jurisdiction must develop an initial list of projects for PALS courses. If that jurisdiction is selected, these projects will be refined and elaborated through discussions between the jurisdiction and the University. Projects should reflect local needs and challenges and could include urban revitalization, storm water or solid waste management; childhood asthma and lead poisoning prevention; healthy food and healthcare availability and other public health improvements; economic development; social service management; communications and social media; financial management; public health; environmental protection; culture and arts; and more.

PALS staff will pair these sustainability-related projects with faculty from across campus who are willing to focus their existing course or course project/case studies on these projects. In addition, faculty may generate ideas for projects that the jurisdiction may wish to support. Unanticipated synergies often emerge from hundreds of students and faculty focused on enhancing sustainability in one place.

The PALS partnership with Frederick, MD – PALS’ inaugural partner city – and the experience of the 18 similar programs across the country show that these action learning initiatives have outstanding benefits for participating jurisdictions. For a relatively modest cost, jurisdictions get a flood of fresh ideas and information. Additionally, partner communities in PALS-like programs benefit from significant positive exposure in the media—regionally and sometimes nationally—and have found
their ability to pursue state grants and other funding resources enhanced by the PALS infusion of data, analyses and ideas.

Additional information about PALS is available on the PALS website [www.smartgrowth.umd.edu/pals] and includes:

- PALS Informational Flyer
- Trifold with capsule description of Frederick projects
- Letter of Intent between UMD and Jurisdiction
- MOU with City of Frederick and course syllabi appendix
- Faculty/PALS internal agreement template reflecting internal commitments
- PALS blog

2.0 Eligibility

All towns, cities and counties in Maryland are eligible for PALS. Jurisdictions are encouraged to include major institutions, community organizations or non-profits within their jurisdictions that wish to have their needs addressed via PALS as well. Such collaborations should be identified in the proposal, and will be viewed favorably in evaluating proposals.

3.0 Benefits of Program

PALS provides considerable and long-lasting benefits for the partner community such as:

- The influx of innovative thinking and the wealth of faculty expertise can provide novel solutions and a path to improved sustainability.
- Over 50,000 hours of student work focused on the partner community can provide high-caliber yet inexpensive assistance to complete on-going projects or tackle new sustainability challenges.
- Positive publicity through taking meaningful steps toward improved sustainability and acknowledgement as a leader in sustainable practices in Maryland; PALS initiatives elsewhere have garnered much statewide attention and have been useful in grant proposals for follow-on work.
- Positive resident perception as their city/county works to develop a roadmap towards enhanced sustainability while becoming a year-long living laboratory for eager and enthusiastic UMD students.
4.0 Identifying Projects for PALS

For the purposes of the RFP, sustainability is defined broadly and according to the classic three-legged stool – i.e., economic, social and environmental elements. We encourage a diverse and varied list of proposed projects. UMD-College Park has an extraordinary range of schools and programs and can provide highly specialized expertise in the sciences, engineering, public health, planning, architecture, landscape architecture, and the arts and humanities. Proposers are urged to familiarize themselves with UMD capabilities and may choose to target some of their projects to specific programs or even courses. Proposers are encouraged to think creatively; projects with an implementation orientation are of particular interest to PALS.

Proposers should note that projects are a function of a jurisdiction’s own needs as adapted through collaboration and consultation with UMD faculty. Past projects have been strong on the design and planning disciplines, but a more varied and balanced menu which takes advantage of a larger breadth of disciplines, and is strongly encouraged. An example of the format for project descriptions is included as Attachment A.

The majority of courses offered through PALS are from graduate programs, however senior undergraduate students or special undergraduates programs like the Scholars program are also candidates for inclusion. Jurisdictions can expect professionally edited, clear products, often offering novel perspectives, analyses and recommendations.

5.0 Costs and the MOU

Costs are established on a per course basis. For 2015-2016, the cost per course is projected to range between $5,000 and $7,500. Courses may also include independent studies and theses which would be provided at a reduced rate. Assuming a range of between 15 and 30 courses, a jurisdiction should expect to budget between $75,000 and $225,000 for the PALS effort. These monies go towards course development and delivery costs, travel related expenses, publication and editing and PALS overhead for management and staffing of the process. Local funding can be allocated from departmental and state and federal programs (e.g. CDBG). To respond to this RFP, jurisdictions should identify a range of project interests and an estimate of total funding available. All reasonable proposals will be considered.

There is no standard UMD “contract” for this kind of venture. The MOU with Frederick is a good example of the MOU likely to be drafted for this cycle of PALS. It will be customized to reflect the particular conditions and expectations of this effort as it
evolves. The MOU will specify costs and a reimbursement schedule (usually in thirds - at the outset, midway and at end) and include the courses to be offered as an appendix. The MOU is a legally binding document, much like a contract, unless it specifies that it is non-binding. A non-binding MOU can be used to set forth the expectations of each party. The final terms of the agreement will be negotiated between the jurisdiction and the University.

6.0 PALS Timeline, Commitments and Management Expectations

A commitment to participate in the PALS program must come from the highest level in the jurisdiction. Programs around the country have demonstrated that unless the jurisdiction is committed to the PALS experience at the highest levels, it will not yield its full benefits.

The graphic below depicts the timeline for PALS activities prior to the fall course launch. Upon selection of the jurisdiction, a Letter of Intent (LOI) is signed by the jurisdiction so that the process of expending large amounts of preparation time can proceed in good faith. Weekly phone calls lasting a half-hour to an hour between the PALS Team (PT) and Jurisdiction Team (JT) are usually needed to discuss projects and courses throughout the nine-month period covered in the graph below.

During the Refinement of Projects, Match Faculty and Develop Syllabi phases, it is critical to ensure that the JT and PT both define the project, responsibilities and final products.
These phases should also include the following:

- Discussion and refinement of project candidates.
- JT attendance at one presentation sessions of the current PALS effort in Frederick.
- PT trip to the jurisdiction to meet with departments and elected officials to discuss projects and the program.
- JT trip to UMD to meet with candidate faculty over candidate projects.
- Points of contact within the jurisdiction are identified for each project.
- Faculty develop syllabi for review by PALS and the JT.
- Budgets are solidified by the JT and UMD.
  - UMD may choose to financially support some additional courses if the jurisdiction agrees to support their data and guidance requests.
- PALS and the jurisdiction collaborate over PALS-developed press releases and a communications plan.
- PALS launch event at the beginning of the semester, jointly arranged by the PT and the JT.
- Transfer of relevant data and GIS files to PALS for dissemination to faculty as needed. Use of existing data is assumed for PALS courses.
- At the end of the syllabi development phase, the MOU is finalized and signed by the jurisdiction’s Chief Executive and the University (Office of Research Administration).

Jurisdictions should be aware that participation in the PALS program will require a significant commitment of staff time. The lead staff person and the amount of time that person is able to commit to the PALS program should be specified in the proposal.

During the actual implementation of courses the jurisdiction should expect to:

- Assist PALS staff with organizing tours or class visits (UMD typically provides for group transportation to the jurisdiction) and make presentations to the class(es) as appropriate.
- Make a mid-semester visit to class(es) to present information or perspectives, or respond to interim products or student presentations and discussions.
- Review final draft reports for submission to the jurisdiction.
- Participate and help arrange an end-of-semester presentation to the jurisdiction from students for selected projects.
- Participate in an end of the year symposium on the PALS experience at UMD with students and faculty.
- Participate in a PALS program evaluation
7.0 Proposal Contents

Proposals are limited to 15 pages. We expect that between 20 and 50 potential projects per jurisdiction will be proposed. The development of the proposal typically requires extensive inter-departmental communication and coordination and we understand that refining the annotated project lists will take time and iteration. Ultimately, final projects will be adapted through collaboration with PALS and faculty.

The partnership will also require the approval and sign-off by elected and senior administration officials. Clear evidence of such support is an explicit component of the proposal evaluation criteria.

The proposal must be organized according to the following numbered sections. The page numbers shown in parentheses are only suggestive, not mandatory.

1. Cover Page [does not count towards page limit]
2. Table of Contents [does not count towards page limit]
   References page numbers of proposal
3. Cover letter [1-2 pages]
   Summary of proposal highlights and making the case; to be signed by Chief Executive of jurisdiction
4. Projects proposed [5-8 pages]
   Summary paragraphs of projects organized by categories of economic, social and environmental. Both the range and quality of the projects are criteria used in proposal evaluation. Projects which can support multiple studies from different angles or disciplines are of particular value since they also meet University interdisciplinary learning goals. Projects proposed must include the relevant jurisdiction’s point of contact and other pertinent information (e.g. status of project, prior work, resources available etc.); at the end of this section there must be a summary table of numbered projects by title and category. Appendix A to this RFP includes an example of the initial project list as developed by the City of Frederick as a guide to appropriate detail. Areas of study that may be “off the table” for reasons of sensitivity should also be noted.
5. Commitment [1-2 pages]
   Demonstration of commitment from administration of jurisdiction and elected leadership in form of statements and priority to be given effort and time commitment acknowledged for the work by staff. Commitment in terms of funding is also part of this section. Funding sources and predictability should be specified here.
6. Capacity and organizational structure [2-3 pages]
Includes how jurisdiction will organize to manage the work and who key point(s) of contact will be and brief bio of these individual(s). Contingency and fallback plans should be provided (i.e. bench strength). Any examples of having managed comparable collaborative effort should be cited.

7. **Other features** [1-2 pages]

*Information not covered in above and worthy of special mention; may include unique projects, innovative ideas, special needs, commitments, implementation ideas, dissemination efforts, etc.*

The proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Range and quality of projects [50%]
2. Commitment of jurisdiction to initiative and funding [15%]
3. Capacity and organization of Jurisdiction to manage work [20%]
4. Other features [15%]

### 8.0 Selection Process and Criteria

PALS is genuinely interested in what different jurisdictions can bring to the table in this partnership. Questions about the RFP should be addressed to Uri Avin (uavin@umd.edu) and will be accepted until a week before proposals are due (i.e. November 20, 2014).

We expect to receive between five and ten proposals for the 2015-16 academic year. Proposals will be reviewed and ranked by the Review Committee: Gerrit Knaap, Director of the NCSG; Uri Avin, PALS Program Director; Kiel Edson, PALS Coordinator; Maggie Haslam, PALS Communications Director.

Partnership recommendations will be brought to the PAC, which is comprised of 17 University administrators (e.g. Associate deans, Department heads etc.) and faculty. The PAC will select jurisdictions for interview from the ranked list. Up to three interviewees are assumed. The Interview Committee will include the members of the review Committee plus one member of the PAC.

Interviews will be scheduled a week after candidates are notified. All proposers are requested to reserve Monday, December 8th for possible interviews. The interview invitation will include questions to be asked of the proposers at the interview. Interviewees should assume the Review Committee is thoroughly conversant with their proposal. A formal presentation is not expected during the interview. Interviews will last up to 1 ½ hours. Three to five key players from the jurisdiction’s PALS Team should attend, led by the JT’s Point of Contact.
The purpose of the interview is to discuss project specifics and to gauge levels of comfort and commitment. Interviews will also help refine or revise the proposal-based rankings. Shortly thereafter, the selected jurisdiction will be announced and a LOI developed within two weeks. If initial discussions are unsuccessful, the next-ranked jurisdiction will be contacted.

9.0 Contact Information for Frederick

The PALS coordinator from the City of Frederick, MD has offered to answer questions about the PALS experience over the past year:

Joe Adkins
Deputy Director for Planning
City of Frederick
jadkins@cityoffrederick.com
301-600-1655
10.0 Attachment A

**ENVIROMENTAL CATEGORY**

**Project Title:** Afforestation Plan / Urban Canopy Plan  
**Point of Contact:** Jenny Willoughby, Sustainability Manager  
Tom Rippeon, City Arborist  
**Partnering Groups:** Parks and Recreation Commission, Green Initiative Team, Friends of Baker Park, Watershed Ad Hoc Committee

The City of Frederick has conducted two urban canopy assessments and the City has the current coverage of about 14%. With a large amount of money in the fee-in-lieu of forest fund, the City needs to develop a plan to increase the canopy cover and meet the requirements of Maryland’s afforestation requirements. This would include evaluating the City’s forest conservation stands, health and compliance with approved plans, in addition to, creating a City comprehensive forest planting plan on public property. Identify private critical land areas not yet developed that the City may want to retain for conservation, through development or comprehensive designation.

**Project Title:** City Recycling Program  
**Point of Contact:** Jenny Willoughby, Sustainability Manager  
Marc Stachowski, Director of Operations DPW  
**Partnering Groups:** Green Initiative Team

The City of Frederick is currently served by the Frederick County recycling program. This program serves all single and townhouses in the City. Study the value of creating a Frederick City recycling program separate from the County’s program that will provide weekly recycling throughout the entire city.

**Project Title:** Organics Recovery Program  
**Point of Contact:** Marc Stachowski, Director of Operations DPW  
Jenny Willoughby, Sustainability Manager  
**Partnering Groups:** Green Initiative Team, Downtown Frederick Partnership

The City of Frederick has currently scheduled in the 2014 CIP to install an organics digester at the Waste Water Treatment Plant. Downtown Frederick is home to over 30 restaurants. This project would create a pilot program (promotions, incentives, operational aspects) in the downtown to determine how to encourage restaurants to separate their organic waste. The program should be designed to be transferable to other parts of the City.