The National Center for Smart Growth conducts and disseminates research with the intent to inform public policy and advance knowledge on topics related to Smart Growth. The NCSG disseminates its work in a variety of ways, including publication in scholarly journals, professional reports, and policy briefs. It has organized conferences around the world, including the Netherlands, Croatia, Italy, and China. Land development, property taxation, and agricultural policy in China are also areas of extensive activity.

The NCSG works closely with, and serves as the administrative home for, the Environmental Finance Center, the Transportation Policy Research Group, the Housing Strategies Group, and the Center for the Use of Sustainable Practices. The NCSG dissemination activities are supported by U.S. HUD, DOT, and EPA; the Maryland Departments of Planning, Transportation, Housing and Community Development, and Natural Resources; the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission; and many local and national foundations.

The Environmental Finance Center is a regional center that provides communities with capacity-building and technical support to realize their resource protection goals.

The Environmental Finance Center (EFC) is a multi-state, regional center that assists local jurisdictions and non-profit organizations in building organizational capacity, identifying and accessing financial resources, and implementing sustainable resource protection initiatives. Among EFC strengths is its ability to bring together diverse stakeholders to develop innovative and sustainable solutions to address a variety of environmental challenges. EFC has expertise in stormwater, septic system and solid waste management; low-impact development techniques; open space preservation; green infrastructure planning; air quality; energy conservation; and community outreach and education.

Examples of recent and on-going projects include: “Sustainable Maryland Certified,” a voluntary sustainability certification program by which municipalities earn points for devising and implementing sustainable best practices; Port of Baltimore emissions reduction programs; local feasibility studies for stormwater management, biomass energy and watershed protection; technical assistance to land trusts in Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia and Pennsylvania; Car Care Clinics to improve air quality and improve automobile fuel efficiency; and AgTrader and FoodTrader websites to provide a marketplace for local agricultural products and equipment.

The Center for the Use of Sustainable Practices was founded as an inter-disciplinary center for the design and research of sustainable practices for buildings, communities and cities.

The Center for the Use of Sustainable Practices (CUSP) was founded in 2008 at University of Maryland’s School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation as an inter-disciplinary center for the design and research of sustainable practices. It began operating under the umbrella provided by the National Center for Smart Growth a year later. Conducting research and engaging in design, education and public outreach activities, CUSP focuses on sustainable practices at multiple scales: the building, the community and the city.

CUSP serves to foster the integrated practice necessary for current and future practitioners who are charged with creating built environments and who must cross generational and academic-industry boundaries to do so. Encouraging inter-disciplinary collaboration, joining with other Schools and Colleges within the University and with affiliated professional colleagues, CUSP provides an unusual venue for design, research, and outreach through its integrated activities. It assists clients in achieving economic, equitable and sustainable design, while educating students and the public-at-large on sustainable design best practices.

CUSP competes regularly in the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Decathlon, placing nationally and internationally in the top standings.
Housing Strategies Group (HSG) is the most recent addition to the NCSG. It was established in 2010 to conduct housing policy research, while making connections to smart growth and sustainability.

The State of Maryland and the United States are experiencing significant demographic changes that will transform housing market demand and supply as the 21st century unfolds. Housing affordability, matching workforce housing with employment opportunities and expanding housing choices to meet changing lifestyles promise to remain important public policy issues with regional dimensions in the foreseeable future.

The "great recession" of this century's first decade dramatized the importance of housing market issues. Rising foreclosure rates have had impacts on urban neighborhoods, redefining the meaning of housing affordability and raising social equity concerns. Smart growth and sustainability also require an increased emphasis on mixed-use, transit-oriented and more compact development, while matching housing choices with employment opportunity locations.

HSG is engaged in research, teaching and public education with respect to these issues, working with public agencies and non-profit organizations.

The Transportation Policy Research Group (TPRG) investigates solutions to complex problems raised by the interactions of transportation and land use. Working with state and local officials, the TPRG develops and applies analytic methods to better understand the ways that land use and transportation affect each other. Issues which the TPRG typically addresses include exploring methods of congestion relief, the use of multi-modal alternatives to reduce automobile dependency, and the impact of alternative land use patterns on the transportation system. The TPRG also examines land use and transportation impacts on the environment. With respect to these wide-ranging activities, the TPRG not only engages in analytical modeling and the development of policy alternatives, but also works with public officials and other stakeholders on policy implementation, ensuring that procedures developed in TPRG’s academic laboratory move smoothly from analysis to policy development and into practice. Most recently, TPRG has worked closely with the Maryland State Highway Administration and the Maryland Department of Transportation as well as relevant Federal government agencies on these and related issues.

For more information please visit: www.smartgrowth.umd.edu