

A program of the Architects Foundation and administered by Communities by Design, Design Assistance Teams (DATs) bring together architects and other multi-disciplinary experts to work alongside the residents and stakeholders of host communities on key local issues. Every project is community-driven and includes meaningful public participation in an intensive process that matches professional expertise with public values and aspirations for a place. The DAT program is based on the goal of helping communities achieve a sustainable balance between equitable opportunities, environmental sustainability, and the built environment. The DAT program methodology is based on three primary tenets: utilizing a multidisciplinary team approach; ensuring the objectivity of all participating team members; and requiring broad, inclusive public participation and support. The design assistance team process first began in the 1960s with the American Institute of Architect's Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program and continued with the 2005 creation of the Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT) program. These two programs, which collectively represent one of the AIA's longest running success stories, were merged into the present-day DAT program and transferred to the Architects Foundation in 2023.

DAT team members donate their time and expertise to the community as pro bono services, and the Architects Foundation provides staff and support to the team. Each community is expected to fundraise to cover the overall project budget, including team member travel expenses and project necessities. Each project will occur over a limited span of 4-5 days, and as such the scope of your proposed project should be as focused as possible.

Your application will be used by program staff to determine whether the proposed project is an appropriate fit for the DAT program. Please include as much relevant information and background supporting materials as possible with your submission. Proposals are reviewed as they are received. Upon conditional acceptance into the DAT program, a team leader will be appointed to the project, and preparations for a preliminary assessment visit will begin. The preliminary visit timeline and full-team project scheduling is determined on current program capacity. The preliminary visit will allow the team leader and program staff to determine if a DAT is appropriate for the community and if local resources and support are sufficient to sustain the process. Final determination of the community's suitability will be determined by the conclusion of the preliminary visit, and logistical planning for the full team visit will then commence as appropriate.

## **PROJECT SUMMARY (1-2 PAGES)**

This section of your application response should include a project title, the primary contact information, and a brief community description. The community description should include information pertaining to:

- History
- Population figures
- Demographics
- Economic information
- Form of local government
- Important project or contextual information
- Regional setting and influences
- Past and/or ongoing planning efforts

Necessary graphic materials include maps, study-area site plans, photos (especially aerial views), and diagrammatic maps showing locations and concentrations of specific community features and needs.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT & ISSUES ANALYSIS (2-4 PAGES, PLUS MAPS)**

Each application submission must include a problem statement and issues analysis. We encourage you to include images and maps to define the study area and highlight the key issues. The statement should include the following elements:

**Study area:** The statement should define and describe the proposed study area.

**Barriers to success:** Each submission should identify the existing barriers (physical, social, economic, political) that have limited the community's ability to address its concerns or agree on solutions. Include an assessment of your community's most significant needs (e.g., water supply concerns or public health issues). Describe any past attempts that have failed to resolve community issues. Include as much graphic material as needed to describe existing conditions.

**Scope of issues:** Applications should identify the scope of issues the DAT will address, including an explanation for why they should be considered critical to the community. The statement should describe how the issues relate to development concerns at the regional, municipal, and neighborhood scales. Be sure to include information on the surrounding county if the proposed study area is a municipality.

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE DAT PROCESS (300-500 words)**

State what measurable results you hope the DAT process will help you achieve and how this process fits within other community planning and development efforts. Try to avoid repeating the problem statement.

## **PROPOSED PROJECT BUDGET**

The community applicant is responsible for the costs associated with hosting a DAT. DATs are estimated to run between \$20,000-\$30,000, but many of the hard costs can be defrayed through the encouragement of in-kind donations. In-kind contributions could include gifted meals, comped hotel rooms, free meeting spaces, and donated supplies. Experience shows that the best way to create broad community support is to ask everyone to contribute rather than relying on one single major funding source. Funding should come from a variety of public and private sources, which might include businesses, local government, nonprofits, foundations, community groups, and individuals. In addition to the hard costs of the project, there is a \$5,000.00 administrative fee to help cover programmatic expenses. All of the team's time is donated.

Each DAT consists of two community visits: a preliminary visit in which AIA staff accompany the designated Team Leader for a 1-2 day scoping visit, and the full-team visit, which consists of a team of 5-7 volunteer professionals plus AIA Staff visiting the community for 4-5 days. Each community budget may vary depending on local conditions, funding and sponsorship partners, and the degree of local contributions or in-kind services. The Project Budget should identify expected expenditures and illustrate a line-item distribution for each program area. It may include some of the following elements:

- Supplies
- Team member air & ground transportation
- Team member room & board
- Advertising & publicity costs
- Media & Communications
- Local transportation
- Meeting facilities & team workspace
- Catering

Identify specific potential donors and amounts where possible, cash to be raised (and potential sources), and possible sources of in-kind contributions. All sources do not need to be identified by name at the time of application, but try to convey a reasonable sense of funding feasibility. Applicants should also demonstrate the capacity to raise the necessary funds for the implementation of DAT recommendations following the conclusion of the team visit.

**Sample Budget**

**Preliminary Visit (2 nights, 3 people): Visit by the team leader and AIA Staff**

Flights: \$600/flight for 3 people = \$1,800.00

Hotel: \$200/night for 3 people = \$1,200.00

Meals: 3 days @ \$85/day for 3 people = \$765.00

Ground Transportation = \$300.00

Misc. Travel expenses & reimbursements = \$200.00

**Preliminary Visit Total: \$4,265.00**

**Team Visit (4 nights, 7 people): Full Team Project**

Flights: 7 team members @ \$600 each = \$4,200.00

Hotel: \$200/night for 7 people = \$5,600.00

Meals: 7 people, 5 days @ \$85/day = \$2,975.00

Car rental for team, 5 days @ \$85/day, for two cars = \$850.00

Misc. Travel expenses, team reimbursements, & contingency = \$1,500.00

Administrative Fee = \$5000.00

**Full Team Visit Total: \$20,125.00**

**Estimated Grand Total \$24,390.00**

**PROPOSED TIMETABLE FOR THE PROJECT**

Each application submission should identify a general implementation timeline for the DAT process. The timeline will serve as the basis for scheduling each phase of the DAT. The timeline should include target date ranges for each stage of the DAT process, including the preliminary assessment visit (1-1.5 full days) and the full DAT Team Visit (4-5 days; exact duration determined following the assessment visit).

In addition to the timeline, each submittal should include a contextual rationale and information regarding events that may affect the timing of any part of the DAT process (e.g., six months before scheduled comprehensive plan revisions). Typically, a successful DAT project requires a period of at least 8-10 weeks between the preliminary visit and the full team visit. Program staff will work with communities to schedule DAT implementation in a manner that complements ongoing planning activities, but dates may be adjusted based upon program capacity and availability of team members.

**LETTERS OF SUPPORT**

The key to DAT success is diversity of community participation. The DAT process includes not only the national team but also government agencies and officials, private businesses, schools and students, community members, and other parties as appropriate. The process encourages the active participation of all sectors of the community. The visiting team members will seek the opinions and comments of the public as well as community leaders and interested groups. Applicants should demonstrate interest and participation by including letters of support from a broad base of community members. Applications may include letters from the following sources, among others:

- The local and/or state AIA component
- Public officials (Mayor and/or Town Manager)
- Public agencies
- Neighborhood & Civic groups
- Community leaders
- Churches
- Businesses
- Educational institutions

**STEERING COMMITTEE INFORMATION**

The DAT process requires local partners to form a Steering Committee to guide and implement the process. There is no limit or minimum number of members to be included in the Steering Committee. However, the Steering Committee should include a broad range of community leaders including representatives from the public and private sector. Members could include representatives from the local AIA component, government officials, the arts community, and business owners, among others. All application submissions must include the contact information for the chair(s) of the Steering Committee. Naming co-chairs of the steering committee is recommended, but at least one chair should be designated as the primary contact.

## ATTACHMENTS

The DAT Application Review Panel welcomes additional relevant information that may be deemed appropriate and necessary to help understand community needs, existing conditions, and prevailing issues. Supplemental documents might include:

- Current and past planning documents, such as comprehensive plans, revitalization plans, and past charrette reports.
- Graphic illustrations such as maps, study area site plans, photos and aerial views.
- Information on the community such as newspaper articles covering key issues, tourism materials, Chamber of Commerce brochures, and local economic development agency materials.

Please include any materials that will help the review committee understand your community and the issues that need to be addressed.

## EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation process will be conducted by the DAT Application Review Panel. Applications will be reviewed as they are received, and recipient communities will be notified shortly thereafter. Upon conditional acceptance into the DAT program, a team leader will be appointed to the project, and preparations for a preliminary assessment visit will begin. During the preliminary visit, the team leader and AIA staff will meet with representative stakeholders to determine whether a DAT is appropriate for the community. If the AIA representatives determine that local resources and support are sufficient to support the DAT process, logistical planning for the full team visit will then commence.

### Evaluation Criteria

- Commitment and ability to attract diverse stakeholders and community turnout.
- Commitment and support for the project by political leadership, municipal staff, and key stakeholders.
- Comprehensive application clearly portraying the community.
- Self-evaluation and assessment of relevant issues.
- Clarity of problem statement and project objective.
- Ability to provide necessary logistical support.
- Funding and logistical support available for the project.

## SUBMISSION

Applications can be submitted electronically by emailing Communities by Design at [communitiesbydesign@aia.org](mailto:communitiesbydesign@aia.org). All application materials should be compiled into a single PDF file. Applicants seeking additional information about the DAT program, the application, or the review process should consult the [Architects Foundation Website](#). Additionally, video resources describing the DAT program are available on our [YouTube channel](#). Technical questions about the DAT program or the application process are welcome. Inquiries about the application process should be directed to Communities by Design staff:

Erin Simmons, Senior Director, Design Assistance: [esimmons@aia.org](mailto:esimmons@aia.org) (202) 626 7492

Joel Mills, Senior Director, Communities by Design: [joelmills@aia.org](mailto:joelmills@aia.org) (202) 626 7405

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