A program of the Architects Foundation (AF) and administered by Communities by Design (CxD), Design Assistance Teams (DATs) bring together architects and other multi-disciplinary experts to work alongside the residents and civic leaders 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 goal of the program is to help communities develop implementation strategies that build momentum for positive change.

The award-winning DAT program methodology is based on three primary tenets: utilizing a customized, multidisciplinary team approach; ensuring the objectivity of all participating team members; and requiring broad, inclusive public participation and support. The Design Assistance Team program has a six-decade track record of community impact that has generated billions of dollars in sustainable development and led to some of America's most celebrated places. Past projects have addressed a broad spectrum of community issues, including climate change and resilience, disaster recovery, affordable housing, downtown revitalization, neighborhoods, transportation, and other issues.

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. In 2027, the Architects Foundation will commit to covering all of the team member costs associated with the project, with communities asked to contribute in-kind donations to help defray overall project costs (see "Project Costs" for more info). Each project occurs over a limited span of 3-4 days, and as such the scope of your proposed project should be as focused as possible. Each process results in a final community presentation and a final report summarizing recommendations, strategies, and resources for implementation.

Your application will be used 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. The final deadline for submission is **December 4, 2026**. 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 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 design and logistical planning for the full team visit will then commence as appropriate.

PROJECT SUMMARY (500-word maximum)

Please provide a project title 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

Helpful graphic materials such as maps, study-area site plans, photos (especially aerial views), and diagrammatic maps showing locations and concentrations of specific community features and needs can be included to further illustrate the community description.

PROBLEM STATEMENT, ISSUES ANALYSIS, & PROJECT OBJECTIVE (1,200-word maximum)

Please provide a problem statement and issues analysis. Images and maps can be included to define the study area and highlight the key issues. Please 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. Describe any past attempts that have failed to resolve community issues.

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.

Project objective: 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.

PROJECT COSTS (300-word maximum)

The Design Assistance Team is not a traditional grant program. DAT communities receive pro bono services through the program, and the Architects Foundation commits to covering all team member expenses associated with bringing the team to the community. In-kind donations are critical to the process, both to ensure that hard project costs are kept as minimal as possible, as well as to encourage broad community support, participation, and commitment. The program does not provide any direct funding to communities. In-kind donations can include such elements as: discounted team member lodging; donated team & community event meals/catering; advertising & publicity; donated meeting facilities & team workspaces; team & meeting supplies.

Please 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.

PROPOSED TIMETABLE FOR THE PROJECT (300-word maximum)

Each DAT consists of two community visits: a preliminary visit where CxD staff accompany the designated Team Leader for a 1-2 day scoping visit, and the full-team visit, which consists of a public process with a team of 5-7 volunteer professionals plus CxD Staff visiting the community for 3-4 days. Please identify a general implementation timeline for your proposed project. This 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 and the full DAT Team Visit.

In addition to the timeline, please 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. CxD staff will work with communities to schedule the DAT project phases in a manner that complements ongoing planning activities, but dates may be adjusted based upon program capacity and availability of team members.

STEERING COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

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 non-profit community, neighborhood representatives, and business owners, among others. Please submit the names and affiliations/community roles of your steering committee members. Please also designate a Steering Committee chair, who will serve as the primary contact for the project.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

The key to DAT success is inclusive 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 participation of a broad spectrum of the public as well as community leaders and interested groups. Please include compiled 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.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation process will be conducted by the DAT Application Review Panel. Applications are due on **December 4, 2026**; communities will be notified of their application status by December 18, 2026. Upon conditional acceptance into the DAT program, a team leader will be appointed to the project, and preparations for a preliminary assessment visit in 2027 will begin. During the preliminary visit, the team leader and CxD staff will meet with representative stakeholders to determine whether a DAT is appropriate for the community. If the CxD representatives determine that local resources and support are sufficient to support the DAT process, design and logistical planning for the full team visit will then commence.

Evaluation Criteria

- Commitment and ability to attract diverse stakeholders and broad-based 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;
- In-kind contributions and logistical support available for the project.

SUBMISSION

Applications can either be submitted through our online Application Portal or by emailing a single compiled PDF application file to Communities by Design at communitiesbydesign@aia.org.

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 always welcome. Inquiries about the application process should be directed to Communities by Design staff:

Erin Simmons, Senior Director, Design Assistance: esimmons@aia.org | (202) 626-7492

Joel Mills, Senior Director, Communities by Design: joelmills@aia.org | (202) 626-7405