

2026 NEW JERSEY FUTURE SMART GROWTH AWARDS

GUIDELINES AND NOMINATION INSTRUCTIONS

All submissions must be uploaded by **March 31, 2026**.

Submit via [online portal](#).

New Jersey Future's Smart Growth Awards honor projects, plans, and policies across the state that demonstrate smart growth principles in action. The awards shine a spotlight on organizations, businesses, and individuals with the vision to encourage smart growth values and designs.

The projects and their primary partner teams will be recognized at our annual in-person Smart Growth Awards event in 2026.

Questions? For more information, please contact New Jersey Future at comms@njfuture.org.



GUIDELINES AND ELIGIBILITY

General

Winning projects adhere to—as closely as possible—the smart growth principles outlined below. Development plans and projects that are based on the concept of “redevelopment” will be prioritized.

- Positively impacts the broader community.
- Near existing development and infrastructure, ideally “redevelopment.”
- Creates or enhances connections to existing developments or plans.
- Creates or enhances a vibrant mix of uses (residential, retail, office).
- Demonstrates a commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Increases the range of housing options available (affordability, size, type). If residential, it should contain designated affordable housing units.
- Engages and involves the community throughout the planning, decision-making, and implementation processes.
- Protects, enhances, or connects to open space and natural features.
- Employs historic features of the community.
- Creates or enhances transportation choices that reduce the need to drive.
- Fosters walkability and activities at the street level that encourage personal interaction.
- Improves resilience to climate change and natural hazards.
- Utilizes green infrastructure or regenerative planning concepts.

Location

All projects must be located in New Jersey. The Smart Growth Awards highlight the impressive array of activities in progress statewide—urban, suburban, and center-based rural.

Entry Types

Projects and adopted plans or policies of all sizes are eligible for consideration.

- Projects must have been completed within the **past five years**. Projects still under construction should be complete by May.
- Adopted plans or policies must have been approved by resolution by the governing body and, where necessary, any regional planning authority, within the **past three years**. Specific and targeted redevelopment-oriented plans and policies tend to score better than more general land use or master plans.

On occasion, a special initiative that is not technically approved, built, or adopted will be recognized; however, the nominator should explain how such an initiative has been or will be implemented and/or institutionalized.

SELECTION PROCESS

The 2026 Smart Growth Awards will be selected by the Awards Jury, an independent committee that includes representatives of New Jersey Future's Board of Trustees, as well as other respected professionals in development and planning. All nominations will receive careful consideration by the Awards Jury. A smaller group of finalists will be visited by at least one member of the jury prior to the final selection of the winning projects.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Anyone may submit an entry, including an organization involved with the project being submitted.

Nominations will be accepted via Submittable, the online submission portal used for this program: <https://njfuture.submittable.com/submit>.

To submit a nomination, you will be asked to establish a Submittable account (if you have submitted before, you may use the same login information), and you will then be able to enter information about your nomination and upload all relevant files, as listed below. You may pause your submission process at any time. Your work will be saved, and you may resume later.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS

Contact information

Nominator name, organization, and contact information, as well as relationship to the project being nominated. The nominator will be the primary point of contact for the entry.

Primary Partner Project Team

Organizations that made up the primary partner project team, including each organization's name and full address, role with the nominated project, a primary contact name, email, and phone number. The Primary Partner Project team is **limited to five organizations**. Types of partner organizations may include, but are not limited to, developers, builders, architects, community or nonprofit organizations, financing entities, and government agencies.

Project Basics

This includes the name and location of the project, as well as the project type and specifications, including overall acreage, the number and type of any housing units, the square footage and type of any commercial space, and details about any public space.

Brief Project Description

Project summary in 150 words or less.

Project Narrative

The questions on the next two pages should be used as a guide for the project narrative. Questions should be answered **using their respective headings**. Narratives are to be uploaded (PDF preferred) to the Smart Growth Awards submission site when complete. Include the project name and respond to as many of the criteria questions as possible as they relate to your nominated project or plan. The entire narrative document should not exceed 3,000 words.

Plans, Images, and Supporting Materials

You will have the opportunity to either upload a digital version of any plans or provide a link to an external site where jurors can view them. In addition, you may upload up to 20 files of contextual maps, photos ("before" and "after" photos for built projects are encouraged!), and any other supporting materials that highlight the relevant smart growth features of your project. Feel free to submit media coverage and any other independent documentation of the project's impact. Note: Include the project name as part of the filename of all uploaded files.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

All submissions must be fully completed and received by midnight on March 31, 2026. Incomplete nominations will not be accepted. It is strongly recommended that you submit your completed nomination **as soon as possible** so that it may be reviewed for completeness prior to the jury review.

QUESTIONS

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PROJECT NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

All submissions must be uploaded by **March 31, 2026**.

Submit via [online portal](#).

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Include the nominated project name in the file name of the document as well as at the top of the first page of the narrative.

In detail, please tell us about the project you are nominating by answering the questions below. **Please respond to as many questions as applicable, using their respective headings**, and upload the narrative when complete as a PDF. Sections designated with a * are required for all entries. The entire narrative document should not exceed 3,000 words.

1. CONTEXT*

How does the project fit into its community or neighborhood, municipality, and/or region in terms of geography, design, culture, function, and any other relevant ways? Please also highlight any ways in which the project aligns with or improves existing community and/or regional plans.

2. IMPLEMENTATION*

For projects: When did construction begin? When was it finished, or, if it is still under construction, what percentage has been completed and what is the timeline for full completion? For projects, at least 50% of the project must be completed to be nominated.

For adopted plans and policies: How will the plan or policy be implemented, and over what time period?

3. PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS*

What individuals and entities were essential to shaping and/or implementing the project? What partnerships were you able to form, including across municipalities, governments, and local communities? What made the partnerships effective (or ineffective)?

4. COMMUNITY IMPACT*

Please identify the communities (racial and/or ethnic, socio-economic, geographic, etc.) that will be impacted by the project. How will the project impact these communities? Please include factors that benefit the built environment, public health, and/or social equity, including physical space, cultural connections, property values, increase in activity, better walkability and biking, improved water quality, access to transit and amenities, additions to open or recreational space, and any other impacts. You may provide news articles or other independent documentation of your project to demonstrate its impact beyond its own footprint.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT*

Which stakeholder groups were or will be affected by this project, and how have you engaged them in guiding it? How did you ensure that all groups and voices had meaningful input? How did you keep them informed? How did the plan or project change as a result of outreach?

6. JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION (JEDI)*

Does the project directly respond to or prioritize the needs and interests of historically excluded communities, including—but not limited to—communities of color and low-income communities? If so, how have the individuals and organizations involved in the project ensured the promotion of equitable housing, employment, commercial, health, and/or educational outcomes? How do the individuals and organizations involved in the project anticipate mitigating any unintended consequences of redevelopment (e.g., displacement)?

7. CHALLENGES*

What challenges did you anticipate at the outset? What unexpected problems or setbacks arose as the project progressed? How did you plan for, address, and overcome these challenges? Based on these experiences, what advice can you offer that would help other jurisdictions avoid similar pitfalls?

8. LESSONS LEARNED*

What did you learn from the success of this project that you can share with others who might want to attempt something similar? What examples or innovations can the project provide to improve planning, design, public involvement, and smart growth in New Jersey?

9. PRIMARY PARTNER PROJECT TEAM*

Please provide a list of the organizations that made up the primary partner project team for this submission, including each organization's name and full address, role with the nominated project, a primary contact name, email, and phone number. The Primary Partner Project team is **limited to five organizations**. Types of partner organizations may include, but are not limited to, developers, builders, architects, community or nonprofit organizations, financing entities, and government agencies.

10. PROJECT COMPONENTS (IF APPLICABLE)

Climate Resilience

Does the project adapt to known climate change risks and severe weather impacts, such as flooding? If so, please provide details of measures taken, features incorporated, etc., and include some method to evaluate success against projected reduction in vulnerability to these hazards.

Expanded Housing Choices

In what ways does your project expand available housing choices? What elements of any housing shortage will your project address? If your project is in a higher-income community, how many affordable units are included? Are there new housing types (apartments, townhouses, etc.) to meet the needs of older residents and/or young adults? Are you bringing non-income-restricted market-rate housing to a traditionally lower-income neighborhood?

Mix of Uses and Accessibility

In what ways does your project bring different types of uses—housing, commercial, retail, transportation, and/or public spaces—closer together? Is there an emphasis on mobility via means other than cars, as demonstrated by the availability of safe, accessible bike and pedestrian transportation options and innovative approaches to parking?

Green Stormwater Infrastructure

Does the project make use of green infrastructure techniques to help manage stormwater and mitigate urban heat island effects? If so, please provide relevant details, such as the relative quantity of stormwater the project is designed to handle and some of the community benefits (beyond stormwater management) that the project provides.

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