

Request for Proposals

Building for the Future: Research on Modernizing Building Codes to Advance Housing Affordability and Climate Resilience

Summary

The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy invites proposals for applied research on how modernizing, aligning, and improving the adoption and enforcement of building codes and standards can address two of the nation's most pressing challenges: the shortage of affordable housing and the growing risks of climate change and natural hazards. Building codes are a critical lever for shaping housing supply, safety, and resilience. Yet they remain less studied than other land use and housing policies. We seek research that examines how codes and standards influence housing production and rehabilitation, resilience to climate-related risks, governance and enforcement, and equity for vulnerable communities. This request for proposals (RFP) will support short-term projects that produce actionable evidence for policymakers, practitioners, and advocates. Awards will range from \$20,000 to \$50,000 for one year.

Background and Rationale

Building codes and standards play a key role in shaping the supply, quality, affordability, and resilience of housing in the United States. Yet compared to zoning, land use regulation, and other areas of housing policy, codes and standards remain less studied as tools for addressing today's most pressing housing and climate challenges.

On the housing supply side, outdated, inconsistent, and fragmented codes can constrain production by discouraging innovation, complicating the adoption of new building technologies such as modular and off-site construction, and imposing uneven requirements across jurisdictions. Inefficient and inconsistent enforcement can add costs and delays that ultimately reduce affordability and exacerbate inequalities, especially for low- and moderate-income households.

On the climate side, building codes and standards are a frontline defense against the risks posed by natural hazards and extreme weather. When codes lag behind current science or are unevenly enforced, they leave homes and communities exposed to costly and often devastating climate risks. Weak or outdated standards can lock households into energy-inefficient homes, raising utility costs and straining household budgets. These challenges also contribute to insurance and financing difficulties, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities.

Despite the importance of building codes and standards, the evidence is limited on how modernizing, aligning, and improving their adoption and enforcement could expand affordable housing supply and strengthen climate resilience. Much of the existing research focuses narrowly on energy efficiency or specific hazard-resistant technologies, or has been generated by

interested trade groups and do not focus on how codes are developed, adopted, and enforced, or on how these processes affect affordability, equity, and innovation in practice.

Through this RFP, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy seeks to catalyze new applied research that addresses these knowledge gaps. We aim to generate actionable evidence on how reforms to building codes and standards can:

- support housing innovation and increase the supply of safe, affordable homes;
- enhance resilience to climate change, natural hazards, and extreme weather; and
- advance equity by reducing costs and risks borne by vulnerable and historically marginalized communities.

By funding this work, we hope to inform policymakers, practitioners, and advocates as they consider reforms to the ways building codes and standards are designed, adopted, and enforced.

Research Themes and Questions

The Lincoln Institute invites research proposals that expand on the four themes outlined below. We recognize that updating building codes to address climate risks and natural hazards without increasing housing supply and improving housing affordability could have negative distributional and equity impacts. Similarly, updating building codes to increase housing supply and improve affordability without considering climate risks and natural hazards could lead to inequitable outcomes if new housing leaves residents more exposed to risks. Therefore, **we encourage proposals that address housing supply, affordability, equity, and resilience challenges simultaneously and consider how they are interconnected.**

The scope of this RFP also extends beyond studying international model codes focused on new housing construction (e.g., the International Residential Code and International Building Code) to include how building codes interact with local design and development standards; zoning and land use regulations; rehabilitation and retrofit codes and standards; fire codes; energy codes; and other state and local codes and standards. Proposals can also address the themes and questions below as they relate to manufactured housing and the Federal Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards (“HUD Code”).

Theme 1: Building Codes and Housing Supply

How do building codes and standards affect the production, rehabilitation, and affordability of housing? Potential questions to consider include:

- How do variations in state and local building codes influence housing supply, costs, and time to completion?

- What role do codes and enforcement practices play in shaping the feasibility of innovative construction methods (e.g., modular and 3D-printed housing) and materials (e.g., mass timber and bio-based materials)?
- What reforms to code design, adoption, or enforcement could reduce unnecessary costs and delays without compromising safety and performance, including (for example) reducing redundancies or applying technology-based tools for more efficient code development and enforcement?
- How do code-related barriers or opportunities differ between market-rate and affordable housing projects?

Theme 2: Building Codes and Climate Resilience

How can codes and standards better protect homes and communities from climate-related risks? Potential questions to consider include:

- How effectively do codes mitigate risks from climate change and natural hazards such as flooding, wildfires, hurricanes, extreme heat, or earthquakes?
- What performance metrics are most useful to measure and assess and benchmark resilience in the context of building codes and standards?
- How do homes built under newer codes perform compared with those constructed under older codes during disasters and extreme weather events? How can insurers, lenders, and investors price any measurable performance improvements and risk reduction resulting from code modernization?
- Are there gaps between scientific evidence on resilience and the requirements embedded in building codes and, if so, how can policymakers better align the evidence with code development?
- How do outdated codes contribute to rising costs of insurance, housing finance, disaster recovery, or long-term maintenance of housing?
- How do insurers account for code modernization, enforcement, and “above-code” resilience measures when pricing policies or determining market participation?
- What evidence exists on the cost savings of stronger or standardized codes for insurers, governments, and households, and how are these savings reflected in insurance premiums or availability?
- What reforms could balance resilience requirements with affordability, particularly in vulnerable communities?

Theme 3: Governance, Adoption, and Enforcement of Codes

What institutional, legal, and political dynamics shape the development and implementation of building codes? Potential questions to consider include:

- How does the frequency of updates to building codes and standards impact the success and cost of implementation and enforcement?

- What are the effects of fragmented code adoption and enforcement across jurisdictions on housing markets and climate risk?
- When and why do local jurisdictions create their own variations to or overlays on basic model building codes (e.g., the IRC and IBC)? How might we measure these variations and their effect on housing production, affordability, and climate resilience?
- How do political, industry, and advocacy groups influence code-setting and enforcement decisions?
- What models of intergovernmental coordination or regional standardization have been most effective, and under what conditions?

Theme 4: Equity and Distributional Impacts of Codes

How do codes and standards affect vulnerable populations, affordable housing, and historically marginalized communities? Potential questions to consider include:

- To what extent do costs associated with outdated or inconsistent codes and standards disproportionately affect affordable housing development and rehabilitation? How do code updates and reforms affect affordable housing development and rehabilitation?
- How do outdated or poorly enforced codes leave certain populations more exposed to climate risks, unsafe housing, and increased operational costs?
- What reforms to code development, adoption, or enforcement could reduce inequities in housing costs, safety, and resilience?
- How can policymakers design codes that enhance resilience without pricing out low- and moderate-income households?

These themes are not exhaustive; applicants may propose additional research questions if they clearly align with the RFP's objectives to generate actionable evidence on how reforms to building codes and standards can:

- support housing innovation and increase the supply of safe, affordable homes;
- enhance resilience to climate change, natural hazards, and extreme weather; and
- advance equity by reducing costs and risks borne by vulnerable and historically marginalized communities.

Expected Cost and Duration

Awards for selected proposals will depend on the scope of the work, deliverable types, and the justification of the proposed budget. Similar project funding has ranged from \$20,000 to \$50,000, but applicants may propose budgets below or above this range if justified.

Proposals can include requests for support for new or ongoing research projects with larger budgets for which support from the Lincoln Institute is combined with either in-kind or other grant-funded support. If the request is for support for a larger project, the applicant should indicate the full project costs and what share the Lincoln Institute would fund, if successful.

Research with additional support must include deliverable(s) that will be owned by the Lincoln Institute and eligible for publication by the Lincoln Institute, as described below.

For proposals that include research that is already partially funded, applicants should confirm with any existing funders that they are eligible to apply for additional support from the Lincoln Institute and that the funder(s) would allow one or more deliverables to be owned and published by the Lincoln Institute. The Lincoln Institute may request written confirmation of this approval from successful applicants before executing a contract or making payments on the award.

Award recipients must complete the proposed project within one year of selection, although projects may be completed in less time (see schedule below). The Lincoln Institute cannot guarantee final payments for projects submitted after the final deadline.

Evaluation Criteria

The Lincoln Institute will evaluate proposals based on the following criteria:

Relevance to one or more research questions identified in this RFP and the potential to fill key knowledge gaps. <i>Note: Proposals that either address more than one theme or recognize the interconnectedness of these themes will receive higher scores.</i>	30%
Implications for policy and practice related to building codes and standards, and the likelihood of informing improvements in policy and practice.	25%
Quality of methodology and data sources	20%
Qualifications of the research team	15%
Feasibility of completing the project within the proposed timeline and budget	10%
Total Score	100%

Application Guidelines

This RFP is open to researchers and research teams based at universities or nonprofit organizations, including think tanks and advocacy organizations. A principal investigator (PI) must be identified for each submission. Only researchers based at universities or nonprofit organizations may serve as principal investigators; practitioners may participate but cannot serve as PIs.

Proposals should:

- clearly state the purpose and objectives of the research;
- identify the primary research theme(s) the project will address;
- present well-defined and coherent research questions that advance at least one of the four research themes outlined in this RFP;
- outline the approach to answering the identified research questions and anticipated deliverables; and

- highlight the project’s anticipated contributions to the evidence base and policy debates related to building codes and standards.

Complete applications must be submitted using the application form no later than **Wednesday, November 5, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time.**

Proposal Requirements and Formatting Guidelines

1. **Language:** Proposals must be submitted in English. All final deliverables produced under this RFP must also be in English.
2. **Proposal Abstract** (max. 1,500 characters): The abstract is a key component in the assessment of proposals. Abstracts must be clear, well-written, and compelling. The abstract should summarize the project’s description, purpose, research question(s), relevance, and data sources. Proposals with vague or poorly written abstracts may not advance beyond the first stage of review.
3. **Project Title, Contact Information, and Curriculum Vitae:** Provide a proposed project title and contact information for the principal investigator and all contributors (including name, title, organization, address, phone number, email, and website, if applicable). All correspondence from the Lincoln Institute will be directed to the principal investigator. Include a curriculum vitae or résumé (maximum three pages each) for the principal investigator and each key research team member, along with a list of key publications.
4. **Detailed Budget:** Outline anticipated costs (e.g., research assistance, data collection, fieldwork, travel) and attach the budget to the proposal form. Proposals can include requests for support for new or ongoing research projects with larger budgets for which support from the Lincoln Institute is combined with either in-kind or other grant-funded support. If the project has additional sources of funding (including in-kind support or cost shares) or requires cofinancing, specify the amount, source(s), and any conditions. See “Expected Cost and Duration” section for additional guidelines on cofunded projects.
5. **Calendar of Activities:** Attach a draft work plan that includes a projected schedule of activities. The project timeline must align with the RFP schedule described earlier in this document.
6. **Project Description** (max. 10,000 characters): The project description should include the following components:
 - a. **Objectives and Research Question(s):** Clearly state the purpose and objectives of the research, highlighting the primary question(s) and theme(s) to be addressed. Proposals that either address more than one theme or recognize the interconnectedness of these themes are encouraged and will receive higher scores. Proposals without a coherent research question will not be considered.

Specify the proposal's relevance to the priority issues outlined in this RFP and its anticipated contributions to the literature and/or policy debates.

- b. **Theoretical or Conceptual Framework and Main Hypotheses to be Tested:** Identify the conceptual framework guiding the research. Discuss up to three key works that situate the proposal within relevant academic and policy debates. Describe the subject of comparison, if applicable, and its relationship to the framework and hypotheses.
- c. **Methodology and Data:** Clearly describe the analytical methods to be used, their relationship to the conceptual framework, and the sources of empirical data. Provide evidence of access to data and describe any data collection strategy, as applicable. Please clearly state if the research relies on human subjects. If it does, provide a brief description of the procedures you plan to follow to comply with IRB standards. Selected research must also reflect the Lincoln Institute's commitment to [research integrity](#).
- d. **Expected Outcomes:** Identify the expected results of the research and explain their relevance for policy and knowledge production. Specify why these outcomes matter, and how they could be disseminated and used.
- e. **Roles and Partnerships:** If the project involves collaboration with academic institutions, government agencies, or other partners, specify the role of each participant and their responsibilities. Clearly identify the responsibilities of the principal investigator and each collaborator.

Submissions

Proposals must be submitted online via the web-based application form and must follow the guidelines that appear in the appendix of this RFP. Proposals submitted by email or mail will not be accepted. Incomplete proposals, proposals received after the due date, or proposals that do not respect the format defined in the guidelines will not be accepted.

Deliverables

The primary deliverable for all funded projects will be a research report suitable for development into a Lincoln Institute publication (working paper, Policy Download, or Policy Focus Report). For examples of publication types, please see the Lincoln Institute [publications library](#).

At the discretion of the Lincoln Institute, some research reports may be developed into other publication formats. Applicants do not need to specify the publication format in their proposals. Successful applicants will work with Lincoln Institute staff after selection to determine the most appropriate publication format and to identify any additional editorial steps that may be required to develop the research report accordingly. All research reports considered for publication must adhere to the Lincoln Institute's style and formatting guidelines, which will be provided during the contracting process.

Proposals may also include additional deliverables beyond the required research report, such as data visualizations, maps, toolkits, or other media products. Successful applicants will also be expected to produce interim deliverables according to the project schedule.

Publication and Dissemination

The Lincoln Institute is not required to publish the final product. Exceptional papers may be considered for inclusion in one of the Lincoln Institute's publication series. All published reports will be made freely available through the Lincoln Institute website. Selected researchers may also be invited to present their completed work through webinars, conferences, or other Lincoln Institute events.

Ownership and Third-Party Copyrights

The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy will own all work products in all forms, including print or electronic, eBooks, the web, and social media, together with all rights, titles, and interests therein, including copyrights. The Lincoln Institute's ownership and copyright conditions do not preclude the publication of commissioned works in other journals or media. Works commissioned by the Lincoln Institute may be published by a third party (e.g. a journal or publishing house), but only after securing the permission of the Lincoln Institute.

RFP Schedule

The application deadline for this RFP is November 5, 2025. Successful applicants will be notified by December 3, 2025.

The tentative deadlines for accepted proposals will be as follows:

- First progress report (with more detailed research plan): January 2, 2026
- Second progress report (with literature review or preliminary findings and outline of research paper): April 30, 2026
- First draft of research report and draft(s) of any other final deliverables: August 31, 2026
- Final deliverable(s): December 15, 2026

Note that these dates are subject to change. All changes will be communicated to successful applicants with sufficient notice.

Confidentiality

The information submitted during the application process will be treated as confidential between the Lincoln Institute, any third-party reviewers, the applicant, and any co-applicants listed in the submission.

The Lincoln Institute reserves the right to publicize information about successful proposals as appropriate.

Expectations Regarding Research

Applicants selected for research funding must adhere to the Lincoln Institute's [research integrity statement](#).

Questions About this RFP

Please direct questions regarding this request for proposals to Haegi Kwon, Associate Director of Equity and Opportunity: hkwon@lincolninst.edu.

About the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy seeks to improve quality of life through the effective use, taxation, and stewardship of land. A nonprofit private operating foundation whose origins date to 1946, the Lincoln Institute researches and recommends creative approaches to land as a solution to economic, social, and environmental challenges. Through education, training, publications, and events, we integrate theory and practice to inform public policy decisions worldwide.

APPENDIX A: PROPOSAL SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Applicants must ensure their submission includes the following:

- ☐ **Proposal Abstract** (max. 1,500 characters): Concise summary of project description, purpose, research question(s), relevance, and data sources
- ☐ **Contact Information and Curriculum Vitae**: Project title, principal investigator's contact information, and details for key research team members including a CV for each team member (max. 3 pages each) and list of key publications
- ☐ **Detailed Budget**: Itemized costs (e.g., research assistance, data collection, travel, fieldwork). Identify any cofinancing sources, amounts, and conditions. Direct/overhead costs of up to 15 percent of the total project cost are allowed; any additional amount must be approved by the Lincoln Institute.
- ☐ **Calendar of Activities**: Draft work plan and timeline aligned with the RFP schedule
- ☐ **Project Description** (max. 10,000 characters)
 - ☐ **Objectives and Research Question(s)**: Clear statement of purpose, research question(s), and relevance to at least one RFP theme
 - ☐ **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**: Key works (up to three) that situate the research, plus main hypotheses
 - ☐ **Methodology and Data**: Analytical approach, data sources, data collection strategy (if relevant), and evidence of access
 - ☐ **Expected Outcomes**: Anticipated results, policy relevance, and intended use/dissemination

- ☐ **Roles and Partnerships:** Responsibilities of principal investigator and all collaborators, including institutional partners

APPENDIX B: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Proposal Format

- **How detailed should the project description be?** Whatever best conveys the topic(s) and objective of your proposal in clear language. The entire project description should not exceed 10,000 characters in length.
- **Should the project description include a budget?** No. The online application contains a separate section to upload the budget.
- **How flexible is the character count for each section?** Applicants must adhere to the specified character count or their proposals will not be accepted.
- **What is the format for a Lincoln Institute publication?** All successful applicants will be sent formatting guidelines and a template for relevant Lincoln Institute publications.
- **Are references included in the character count within the project description section?** Yes.

Budget

- **Can the budget be changed during the research?** Yes, but only after prior consultation with and approval from the Lincoln Institute.
- **What does the award amount cover?** The award covers all direct research expenditures including personnel, research assistance, data, interviews, books, research-related travel and software, or other items deemed indispensable for the project's development.
- **Does the Lincoln Institute finance acquisition of equipment?** No.
- **Is there a maximum budget amount?** No. Total funding from the Lincoln Institute will be determined based on the scope of the project and the justification of the proposed budget.

Evaluation Criteria

- **Do I need to be a US citizen to apply?** No.
- **Do you fund only academics? What about practitioners and researchers who do not hold a master's degree or a PhD?** The RFP targets, but is not restricted to, academics and researchers holding an advanced degree. Practitioners may participate in proposed research but cannot serve as the principal investigator.
- **Can the paper be coauthored?** Yes. Contact details for all authors must be mentioned in the proposal, and a lead author must be designated as the person responsible for the project.

- **How many proposals do you expect to receive?** The number of responses to Lincoln Institute RFPs typically ranges from 20 to 200.
- **Can I get feedback on the substance of my proposal?** No. This is a competitive process, so all participants must have equal access to any relevant information. Thus, we will not respond to requests for individual consultations during the evaluation period or prior to the proposal due date.
- **Can I make changes to a section of my proposal after I send it in?** Only if you do so before the final date for submission of proposals and only if you submit a complete revised version that will replace the original one. You must notify the Lincoln Institute if you wish to submit a new proposal so that we can ensure the original one is discarded.
- **Can I submit more than one research proposal?** Yes, you may submit multiple proposals, but they must be submitted separately.