



2023 Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC)

Catalyst Program (SEID and IIJA)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q: Is the Catalyst Program different from the SEID Program?

A: The Catalyst Program incorporates the SEID Program (core appropriation) with some of the funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to create one competitive grant program.

2. Q: Who is eligible to apply for Catalyst Program funding?

A: The NBRC Economic and Infrastructure funding is available to:

- *State governments of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York*
- *Local governments (village, town, city, and county)*
- *Other political subdivisions of States (regional planning commissions, authorities of the state)*
- *Indian Tribes; § 200.54 [Indian tribe](#) (or “federally recognized Indian tribe”). Indian tribe means any [Indian tribe](#), band, nation, or other organized group or community, including any Alaska Native village or regional or village corporation as defined in or established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act ([43 U.S.C. Chapter 33](#)), which is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians ([25 U.S.C. 450b\(e\)](#)). See annually published Bureau of Indian Affairs list of Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services*
- *Non-profit entities. The term ‘nonprofit entity’ means any organization described in section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt from taxation under 501(a) of that Code. The non-profit entity must be able to demonstrate they have federal grant experience related to economic development.*

Ineligible applicants include for-profit entities, LLCs and other entities that are not a 501(c), [40 U.S.C. §15101\(c\)](#). Ineligible entities are also those entities normally deemed eligible but, due to prior federal or state funding history have been identified as ineligible for future investments. Additionally, a non-profit identified by a state that does not have a federally recognized 501(c) status is not an eligible applicant.

3. Q: What are the agency investment priorities for the Catalyst Program?

A: The Catalyst Program will prioritize funding for projects that demonstrate both readiness and projected direct impacts on the region’s economy and communities. All projects must be consistent with the economic development goals of the region and advance a combination of NBRC and member state [strategic investment principles](#). NBRC investment priorities include:

- *Projects that provide benefits to or demonstrate meaningful engagement with communities who have been under-represented in past NBRC investments. Underinvested communities include rural communities (population less than 5,000), communities of color, and tribal communities.*
- *Projects that address multiple needs and cross multiple investment categories.*
- *Projects that adapt to changing climate conditions and extreme weather events.*

4. Q: I have a proposed project and am unclear about how best to determine if my project is eligible and/or if it aligns with the investment and scoring priorities of NBRC and the four states. I want to be best prepared for an LOI submission so what steps should I take?

A: NBRC suggest an interested entity follow these steps to ensure they maximize the information sessions we will be hosting and are best prepared to submit a competitive LOI by the April 21, 2023 deadline.

- *Questions regarding eligibility (entity and use of money) must be directed to admin@nbc.gov as NBRC makes the final determination of eligibility.*
- *Review the detailed Catalyst Program Materials, specifically the application manual that provides guidance on what entities are eligible, appropriate use of funds, categories NBRC can fund under this program, and the investment priorities. These are all key pieces of information an applicant should familiarize themselves with if they are intending to submit a LOI. Telling someone they are eligible, and the use of money is eligible is truly step 1 in the process. There are a lot more pieces that need to align and applicants need to be reminded how competitive this program is and do some due diligence on their own.*
- *The Catalyst Program FAQ document as well as the Grant Administration and Compliance Manual also are great resources. The Compliance Manual specifically provides detailed guidance on procurement processes, which often applies to many of our projects who may have already started their project and now want to insert NBRC into the mix. It isn't that clean.*
- *Review the LOI form (fillable PDF) in which applicants need to walk through self-identifying their type of project, which category it aligns with as well as helps them frame out their project and budget.*
- *Compare their project overview/information compiled for the LOI to the scoring priorities (NBRC and the State) in the manual. How does it align? Where does it align and where does it not align?*
- *Attend the information session after following the above steps so they are better prepared and have a general understanding of the programmatic materials, investment priorities, scoring priorities, etc. during the discussions. Reviewing the program materials, in detail, will help them frame up specific questions they need to raise during the information sessions.*
- *If it remains unclear if the project aligns with NBRC priorities following completion of each of the above steps, follow up with NBRC.*
- *If it remains unclear if the project aligns with State priorities following completion of each of the above steps, follow up with the State Program Manager from the State(s) where the project will occur.*

5. **Q: What is the amount of money available under the 2023 Catalyst Program?**

A: The total amount of funds available for the Catalyst Program in 2023 is approximately \$44MM; approximately \$11MM/State. The Commission may, at its discretion, choose to make available an additional \$5.8MM in total funds (across all four NBRC states) via the U.S. Economic Development Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These will be made available dependent on the overall strength of project applications, and those applications' adherence to NBRC's strategic priorities as outlined in our strategic plan (available via NBRC's website).

6. **Q: What is the maximum grant amount under the Catalyst Program?**

*A: **Infrastructure projects** will have an award size ranging up to \$1,000,000 with consideration of awards up to \$3,000,000 for projects that demonstrate their ability to meet the eligibility criteria and address priorities identified by NBRC and member states. To be eligible for the higher maximum, projects must either include multiple infrastructure categories* or serve multiple jurisdictions**. Eligibility will be determined in the LOI review process conducted by both NBRC and the member States (New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine). **Non-infrastructure projects** will have an award size up to \$500,000.*

Projects involving construction in support of **multiple categories of infrastructure, must clearly identify the categories of infrastructure the construction project will include. Multiple categories of infrastructure may include, for example, construction in support of water/sewer expansion (Basic Public Infrastructure) and also construction of EV Charging stations (Transportation). The project narrative must clearly identify the categories of infrastructure and the budget and budget narrative must clearly identify the budget categories and corresponding budget amounts specific to each of the categories of infrastructure. A project that states it is in support of multiple categories of infrastructure with no supporting documentation that clearly provides that information will not meet the multiple categories of infrastructure and will not be considered eligible for an award of more than \$1MM.*

*****Multi-jurisdictional** can be multiple municipalities (including unorganized townships), counties, or states. In order for a project to qualify as multi-jurisdictional, the project narrative, must clearly identify the specific jurisdictions that are part of the project and the budget and budget narrative must clearly identify the budget categories and corresponding budget amounts specific to each jurisdiction. A project that states it involves multiple jurisdictions with no supporting documentation clearly providing that information, will not meet the multi-jurisdictional criteria and will not be considered eligible for an award of more than \$1MM.*

7. **Q: If I have previously received an NBRC SEID investment am I eligible to apply again?**

*A: If an applicant has an outstanding SEID investment with NBRC, they cannot receive additional NBRC Catalyst Program investments until their current project has both: submitted reimbursement requests totaling 75% or more of the project and demonstrated that 75% of the cost share has been expended by **April 15, 2023**. If the 75% expenditure cannot be met, the entity can apply for a waiver.*

*The waiver must be submitted together with the Letter of Interest (LOI), which is due by April 21, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. The waiver request will not be considered complete if it does not contain a fully executed Affidavit **and** supporting documentation. If a 75% expenditure waiver is required and is not submitted, the LOI will be deemed ineligible. The waiver must be approved by the State(s) where the prior award(s) were made and NBRC for the applicant to be eligible to seek 2023 Catalyst Program funding. Please see NBRC's 2023 Catalyst Program Application Manual for additional information on this requirement.*

8. Q: When is Catalyst Program information available?

A: NBRC typically announces funding for the Catalyst Program in February/March of each year. Program materials, including the Catalyst Program application manual, are typically available via NBRC's website by mid-March.

9. Q: Can NBRC funds match other federal funds?

*A: If a project uses funds from multiple federal sources (including the NBRC), no more than 80% of a total project cost can be comprised of federal grant funds. **It is equally important for applicants to check with other federal sources, as each federal agency may have its own restrictions.***

10. Q: Are ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds considered federal or non-federal funds?

A: ARPA money is considered Federal money. It cannot be used as non-Federal match.

11. Q: What is the Commission's Service Area?

A: Only projects funded within the NBRC's service area, within the States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York are eligible for funding under 40 U.S.C §15733. Please see NBRC's Distress Criteria, which is updated annually, for more information <https://www.nbrc.gov/content/distressed-counties>.

12. Q: Is the planning and engineering for a potential telecommunications project considered infrastructure?

A: No, this would be considered a planning or study not the physical construction in support of a category of infrastructure. If the project is planning and engineering only, the project will be defined as non-infrastructure. If the planning is part of a grant that also includes construction in support of telecommunications infrastructure, which is an eligible category of infrastructure, then yes.

11. Q: If my project is approved by NBRC, can the grant agreement be signed before I have evidence of full funding (match/cost share) for the project?

*A: Yes. A Catalyst Program grantee has until September 30th of the year following award, to secure all match/cost share funds to complete their project. While NBRC issues grant agreements in September/October each year to get federal funds obligated as promptly as possible, a grantee does not have authorization to begin their project until they are issued a Notice to Proceed. **A Notice to Proceed will not be issued until all match/cost share (i.e., all funds to complete the project) is secured and documented and all other items that are listed in the grant agreement are completed.***

12. **Q: What happens if I am approved for NBRC funding but am unable to secure matching funds?**
*A: If match/cost share is not secured and documented by September 30th following the year of the award, unless there are extraordinary circumstances, the Federal Co-Chair may de-obligate the funds and award them to other projects. **A project should be able to put its funding together within a year, if this is not the case, the project is considered premature for funding.***
13. **Q. In completing the SF424cbw (Budget) form, where should I note NBRC funds?**
*A. The SF424cbw is a federal form that has fields which cannot be modified. The NBRC share of funds should be noted in the column entitled **HUD share**. The budget form should be completed referencing all project related costs in the appropriate category with corresponding amounts in the appropriate columns. The template is available from the Resources tab of NBRC's website.*
14. **Q: If approved for an NBRC grant how will I receive the funds?**
*A: After evidence of all match/cost share funds has been provided and an agreement between the recipient and NBRC has been signed, and the project has received a Notice to Proceed, they can begin to commit and expend eligible project costs. **NBRC funds are reimbursement only.** Following the Notice to Proceed, a grantee may request reimbursement of NBRC funds for eligible project costs. Demonstration of required match/cost share must also occur in alignment with requesting NBRC funds. Note: Any NBRC funds or match/cost share funds committed or expended prior to the issuance of a Notice to Proceed are not eligible to be reimbursed nor counted as match/cost share. Please see NBRC's Grant Administration and Compliance Manual available to download from <http://www.nbrc.gov/content/resources> for more information.*
15. **Q: What is the difference between startup funds and cost of operations?**
A: NBRC will not provide funding for ongoing operations of organizations. The rationale is that NBRC funds cannot be relied upon from year to year and sustaining organizations is not in the mission of the NBRC, nor is it in the interest of efficient use of public dollars. NBRC will however provide startup costs for projects and/or facilities. For example: if a nonprofit were to create a program that trained individuals to be ready with new skill sets for potential businesses in the area NBRC could provide funds in the following ways. NBRC could cover the costs associated with the development of training courses, development of programmatic initiatives to complete training and even potentially pay for training of individuals if there was a specific end goal that could demonstrate that jobs were waiting for those individuals. NBRC could also pay instructors for a specified time period as a pilot or to get the program off the ground. NBRC would not, however, pay for the instructors for a course that has already been developed and up and running for the past few years. If these types of applications are submitted the applicant should clearly outline how continued funding of the program will be sustainable in the future, absent NBRC funds.
16. **Q: What is the maximum timeframe for an NBRC funded project?**
A: The investment period (time that the project shall be completed) shall be 3 years, beginning on October 1st of the year award funded through September 30th, three years later. As a reminder, Catalyst Program award announcements are not typically made until mid-late August of each year.

17. **Q: If staff time is included in the cost of the project, what is the rate that our organization can charge; can we charge our Indirect Cost Rate?**
A: Entities that have a Federal Cognizant Agent can submit with their application the letter from such entity demonstrating their Indirect Cost Rate and budget their project accordingly. Those entities without an Indirect Cost Rate determination may use the regular pay of staff plus 10% as their Indirect Cost Rate for purposes of budgeting for the project. The federally approved indirect cost rate, in place at time of application, will be the indirect cost rate for the entirety of the project, and will be referenced in the grant agreement issued for the project. A range of indirect cost rates is not allowed, nor will the indirect cost rate be adjusted, up or down, during the lifecycle of the project.
18. **Q: What is an Indirect Rate?**
A: Indirect rates are the 'overhead' that is incurred for employees of the entity applying for funds or volunteers for the project. Typically, an indirect rate is a % of the wages and fringe.
19. **Q: Can we use indirect costs as part of staff time for projects?**
A: You may use indirect cost rate from an approved Federal Cognizant Agent with the submission of those documented amounts. If you do not have a Federal Cognizant Agent (generally most non-profits) you may use 10% as your indirect (overhead) costs.
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22. **Q: Does use of NBRC funds require compliance with Davis-Bacon re: prevailing wage rates?**
A: No, not for funds Congress has appropriated to NBRC. However, if the project is also using funds from another federal agency that do require Davis-Bacon compliance, the entire project will be subject to those rates.
23. **Q: Can funds be used to purchase a conservation easement?**
A: Yes, however, a case must be made for how it is an economic development driver for the region. Each State may prioritize this differently, and it will be up to the States to determine how competitive this type of application is compared to applications that produce jobs. You are strongly encouraged to speak with your state Program Manager within your state. See www.nbrc.gov
24. **Q: Do I submit the Catalyst Program investment application online via Grant.gov?**
A: No. Once the Catalyst Program is announced each year, NBRC will post the date on our website that the NBRC application portal will be available for access. NBRC's application portal address will be provided to entities invited to apply. Catalyst Program applications must be made through NBRC's portal to be eligible for review and scoring.

25. **Q: If a Municipality/Applicant is being given land to use as match/cost share for a project, can the value of the land be used as match/cost share?**
*A: For land or other donated real property, a Letter of Intent from the current property owner stating that they will provide the land to the project stating the sale and 'appraised' value of the land, the anticipated date of transaction, and identification of the property. Even if the property is being donated, a professional appraisal is required. **NOTE: A municipal assessment is NOT an appraisal.** An appraisal of the property must have been completed within the past 18 months, or an appraisal must be made, and documentation of same provided to NBRC, prior to issuing a Notice to Proceed if the project is being donated.*
26. **Q: Can staff time be used as part of a match or cost share requirement?**
A: Yes, with the following exceptions: time that is used as match/cost share to other programs cannot be used (counted twice, etc.); time must be recorded; cannot use federal employees' time; are not included in any other federal grants; are part of the project budget.
27. **Q: If volunteers are being used, and their time is being tracked as in-kind match/cost share for the NBRC project, what rate do we use to budget the project?**
*A: Volunteer rate should be consistent with the national average.
http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time. Volunteers may not be counted for the same activity in a different project (counted twice) or be federal employees.*
28. **Q: We already have funds available for the project that we are proposing. Can these funds be part of our match/cost share if we start and/or complete the work before a NBRC grant is awarded?**
A: If the available funds have already been committed or expended for project related activities, including entities for whom you have secured a contract to provide a service, such as an architect or engineer, those are not eligible to be counted as match/cost share. They are also not reimbursable from the NBRC award. If project funds have been secured, but have not been committed or expended, such as a secured line of credit that has not been utilized, those would be considered as eligible match/cost share to the NBRC award, provided they are not committed or expended until the project has secured a Notice to Proceed from NBRC.
29. **Q: Can we submit our Catalyst Program application via e-mail or in hard copy vs through the NBRC application portal?**
A: No. Applications submitted via hard copy or via email will not be eligible to be reviewed and scored. Catalyst Program applications must be submitted through NBRC's portal.
30. **Q: Who should I contact if I will need assistance in administering this grant, should the project be awarded funding?**
A: Each NBRC award recipient is required to utilize a local development district (LDD) in its region to administer the grant, unless they are a department of State government or have requested and been approved for an LDD waiver. LDD's are compensated, through reimbursement for their administrative work, based on a maximum of 2% of the grant award. Grant administration may not be sole sourced to an entity other than an LDD, is an allowable grant expense, and must be reflected in the project

budget. Please see the Resources tab of NBRC's website for a complete list of Local Development Districts as well as detailed information on the Local Development District requirement.

31. Q: Who reviews and scores my Catalyst Program application?

A: Catalyst Program applications are reviewed and scored by NBRC and the State(s) where the project will occur. If the project is a multi-state project, it will be reviewed and scored by each State where the project will occur. It is possible for a multi-state project to be funded in some states and not in others. In that scenario, the grantee would be requested to provide a revised project scope and project budget to align with the reduced funding.

32. Q: Who makes the final determination of which projects are awarded Catalyst Program funding?

A: States put forth a slate of the projects they have been selected for funding. Once all States have put forth their slate of selected projects, they are brought to the Commission for a full vote. Voting members consist of the Federal Co-Chair and the Governor's Alternates for each State. For the Catalyst Program, the Commission meeting to vote is typically held in August.

33. Q: When will I be notified as to whether my application has been approved for NBRC funding?

A: It is planned that all recipients will be notified if their project has been selected for funding, or not, each year by August 31st.

34. Q: What are the rules on funding religious activity with Federal money?

A. The United States Supreme Court has said that faith-based organizations may not use direct government support to support "inherently religious" activities. Basically, it means you cannot use any part of a direct Federal grant to fund religious worship, instruction, or proselytization. Instead, organizations may use government money only to support the non-religious social services that they provide. Therefore, faith-based organizations that receive direct governmental funds should take steps to separate, in time or location, their inherently religious activities from the government-funded services that they offer.

Such organizations should also carefully account for their use of all government money. This does not mean your organization can't have religious activities. It simply means you can't use taxpayer dollars to fund them. Some faith-based organizations set up separate charitable organizations (so-called "501(c)(3) corporations") to keep programs that receive government money separate from those that engage in inherently religious activities.

35. Q: My project is located in an Attainment County and not in an Isolated Area of Distress. Can I still apply for NBRC funding?

A: Yes, if the project is part of a multi-county project that includes at least one other Distressed or Transitional County or the project is in an Attainment County and could bring significant economic benefits to NBRC Distressed or Transitional counties. Match for multi-county projects will be the average of the counties that make up the project. If the applicant and/or co-applicant is located within an Attainment County, but outside of one of the identified "Isolated Areas of Distress" in the NBRC's 2023 Distress Criteria, an exception to allow for an application is possible for projects that could bring

significant economic benefits to distressed area through the significant Benefit Waiver process. The significant benefit waiver request, together with supporting documentation, must be submitted together with the Letter of Interest and must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. EST April 21, 2023. This exception requires a Waiver approved by the Federal Co-Chair and the Governor's Alternates of the four NBRC States.

36. Q: Am I required to have a UEI # to apply for federal funding?

*A. All applicant organizations need an identifier for federal awards processes. On April 4, 2022, that identifier **changed from the Data Universal Number System Number DUNS number to the Unique Entity ID (UEI), issued by SAM.gov.** The Unique Entity ID is a 12-character alphanumeric ID assigned to an entity by SAM.gov. As part of this transition, the DUNS Number has been removed from SAM.gov. Entity registration, searching, and data entry in SAM.gov now require use of the new Unique Entity ID. Existing registered entities can find their Unique Entity ID by visiting [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) and following the steps outlined. New entities can get their Unique Entity ID at SAM.gov and, if required, complete an entity registration. If you do not have a UEI at time of application, the application can still be submitted. If the project is selected for funding, the entity will need a UEI # in order for NBRC to issue the project a grant agreement.*

37. Q: Is a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) the same as DUNS?

A: No. The Unique Entity Identifier, or the UEI, is the official name of the “new, non-proprietary identifier” that replaced the DUNS number. The UEI will be requested in, and assigned by, the System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

38. Q: Is my project required to complete an environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act?

*A: Yes. Federal agencies are required to consider potential impacts of their actions before implementation or spending funds on the proposed action. Applications for NBRC funding are required to complete a NEPA Intake Form as part of their NBRC application. If the project is selected for funding, this information will be utilized to determine the appropriate level of NEPA analysis that will be required. **All applicants are encouraged to review the NEPA guidance, which can be found on NBRC's website at <https://www.nbrc.gov/content/administration>.** Applicants should include in their project budget (SF424cbw) costs related to the completion of NEPA. The project timeline must also reflect completion of NEPA as it is significant step in the process. Completion of NEPA is required for a project to receive a Notice to Proceed.*

39. Q: If my project is not selected for Catalyst Program funding, who should I contact to receive feedback on our application?

A: If your project is not selected for funding, you may contact the State Program Manager to receive feedback on your application. If your project is a multi-state project, you will want to contact each State Program Manager for feedback specific to each state.

40. **Q: I have programmatic questions regarding the Catalyst Program, who should I contact?**
A: Programmatic questions, such as eligibility of entity, use of funds, etc. should be directed to NBRC via our admin@nbrc.gov
41. **Q: What is NBRC's CFDA #?**
A: NBRC's Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number is 90.601. The Title is: Northern Border Regional Development.
42. **Q: Where can I find more information on NBRC?**
A: www.nbrc.gov for information about NBRC, including contact information for staff, Governor's Alternates and State Program Managers as well as prior projects funded by NBRC, by state.
www.nbrc.gov/content/impact-reporting to view NBRC's Annual Reports
www.nbrc.gov/content/catalyst for detailed Catalyst Program information
www.nbrc.gov/content/resources for more information on NBRC, program materials LDD resource list, etc.
www.nbrc.gov/content/administration to view and download NBRC's Grant Administration and Compliance Manual and various federal form templates