



## 2026 CATALYST GRANT PROGRAM

### Part 1: Overview

The **Catalyst Grant Program**, administered by the Northern Border Regional Commission makes awards in the form of Grant Agreements. The Program stimulates economic growth and inspires partnerships that improve rural economic vitality across the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) four-state region.

**Important Application Dates:** The Catalyst Program will run two funding rounds in 2026. Pre-applications are required for funding consideration. Pre-applications are reviewed by both NBRC and states. NBRC is responsible for determining eligibility and States are responsible for issuing an invitation to apply. Pre-applications determine the final maximum award size eligibility. Full applications will only be accepted from those entities expressly invited to apply and must be submitted using NBRC's online application system. Only projects within the NBRC's service area are eligible for funding under [40 U.S.C. §15733](#).

Spring funding round:

- Pre-applications due before 5:00pm EST on February 27
- Applications due before 5:00pm EST on April 17
- Approximate Grant Award date: June

Fall funding round:

- Pre-applications due before 5:00pm EST on August 18
- Applications due before 5:00pm EST October 16
- Approximate Grant Award date: December

**Executive Summary:** In alignment with state economic development priorities, the Catalyst Program supports a broad range of economic development initiatives that will modernize and expand the region's basic infrastructure and revitalize communities to support and attract the region's workforce.

**Funding Information:** NBRC anticipates making up to \$30 million available for competitive awards. Funds will be available in both spring and fall rounds. Upon completion of the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations process, additional funds may be made available through a revised Catalyst Program announcement. Catalyst Program funding is subject to the availability of funds, the quantity and quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations. Eligible purposes include transportation infrastructure, basic public infrastructure, telecommunication infrastructure, business and workforce development, basic healthcare, and resource conservation, tourism and recreation. Detailed definitions, requirements, and examples for eligible categories are available in the Catalyst Program User Manual. **Projects will be classified as feasibility or implementation during pre-application:**

- **Implementation Award** – Construction or non-construction projects—such as assets,

facilities, and programs—that align with an eligible purpose, program priorities and economic development goals will be classified as an implementation award. Projects that meet criteria for an infrastructure category are eligible for up to \$1,000,000. Projects that meet criteria for multi-infrastructure or multi-jurisdiction infrastructure are eligible for up to \$3,000,000. All other projects that meet implementation award criteria and align with an eligible purpose are eligible for up to \$500,000.

- **Feasibility Award** – Early-stage activities—such as planning, engineering, design, cost benefit analysis, permitting, site assessments, and environmental assessments—that align with an eligible purpose, engage community stakeholders, and produce actionable deliverables that support future implementation of projects will be classified as a feasibility award. All projects that meet feasibility award criteria and align with an eligible purpose are eligible for up to \$100,000.

**Cost-sharing Requirements:** NBRC defines match as the minimum required by law to receive NBRC funds. Match is calculated on the Total Project Costs. Prospective applicants should refer to the NBRC distress criteria to determine the level of required match for the project location, which is updated annually as mandated by Congress.

## Part 2: Full Text

**Program Description:** Projects with a primary purpose to support the following categories are considered eligible for Catalyst Program investments under 40 USC Subtitle V:

- **Transportation Infrastructure** – Construction of publicly accessible systems and facilities—such as roads, bridges, transit hubs, railways, airports, and ports—that enable the reliable movement of people and goods, strengthen regional economies, and expand access to essential services and opportunities.
- **Basic Public Infrastructure** – Construction of publicly accessible systems and facilities—such as water and wastewater infrastructure, solid waste and heat generation systems, childcare and healthcare infrastructure, outdoor recreation infrastructure, and community meeting infrastructure—that are essential to economic vitality, public health, and regional resilience.
- **Telecommunications Infrastructure** – Construction of physical and digital systems—such as broadband networks, fiber optics, towers, antennas, and cyber infrastructure—that enable the transmission of information, support modern economic activity, expand access to communication services, and connect rural and underserved communities to opportunity.
- **Business and Workforce Development** – Systems, services, programs and facilities that create, retain or expand businesses, meet critical workforce needs and in-demand skills of emerging industries and companies, align with the current and future needs of regional employers. Projects will be evaluated for alignment with EO 14278 including connections to registered apprenticeships, new industries and occupations, and high-growth and emerging sectors.
- **Basic Healthcare** - Systems, services, programs, and facilities that improve physical and mental well-being—especially in medically underserved communities—by addressing

public health challenges, expanding access to affordable care, strengthening the healthcare workforce, and promoting nutrition, education, and preventative health practices.

- **Resource Conservation, Tourism and Recreation** - Systems, services, programs, facilities, and land acquisition that leverage natural, cultural, and recreational assets to promote sustainable economic development, enhance quality of life, and align with regional goals—through expanded access to outdoor spaces, tourism, and community-driven conservation efforts.

Activities that will not be considered under this program include deferred maintenance, general operating costs, municipal offices, public safety facilities, general recreation facilities, or workforce development programs focused on early education or without clear connections to employer needs.

All projects must be able to clearly identify the eligible category in pre-application and application materials. Detailed definitions, requirements, and examples for eligible categories are available in the Catalyst Program User Manual.

**Eligible Commission Service Area:** Only projects within the NBRC’s service area are eligible for funding under [40 U.S.C. §15733](#). For 2026, the NBRC service area is:

- **Maine:** Androscoggin, Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington counties
- **New Hampshire:** Belknap, Carroll, Cheshire, Coös, Grafton, Merrimack, and Sullivan counties
- **New York:** Cayuga, Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Genesee, Greene, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Livingston, Madison, Montgomery, Niagara, Oneida, Orleans, Oswego, Rensselaer, St. Lawrence, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie\*, Seneca, Sullivan, Warren, Washington, Wayne, and Yates counties *\*With active awards in Schoharie County from another federal commission, the county is not currently eligible for NBRC funding in FY 2026 per NBRC's statute and has not been included in distress calculations.*
- **Vermont:** all counties within the state

#### **Eligible Applicants:**

- **State governments** of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York
- **Local governments** and secondary and career technical centers (village, town, city and county)
- **Other political subdivisions of states** (regional planning commissions, authorities of the state)
- **Non-profit entities:** Designated 501(c) and exempt from taxation under 501(a). Non-profit entities must be able to demonstrate they have established operations in a member state.
- **Federally recognized Indian Tribes;** § 200.54 Indian tribe. See annually published [Bureau of Indian Affairs list of Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services](#).

**Ineligible Applicants:**

- For-profit entities
- Other entities that are not a 501(c), [40 U.S.C. §15101\(c\)](#)
- Non-profit entities that do not have a federally recognized 501(c) status
- Entities with prior federal or state funding history that have been identified as ineligible for future investments

**Submission Requirements:** Pre-applications are reviewed by both NBRC and states. NBRC is responsible for determining eligibility and States are responsible for issuing an invitation to apply. Pre-applications determine the final maximum award size eligibility. Full applications will only be accepted from those entities expressly invited to apply and must be submitted using NBRC's online application system. Interested and invited applicants should refer to the 2026 Catalyst Program User Manual for detailed pre-application and application submission instructions. The User Manual will be made available on NBRC's website at [www.nbrc.gov](http://www.nbrc.gov).

**Evaluation Priorities:** The NBRC Grant programs are awarded in partnership with the States of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. NBRC and state programs review and score proposals using the detailed scoring criteria available in the 2026 Catalyst Program User Manual. Proposals that advance a combination of state economic development priorities and NBRC agency priorities are given preference. NBRC Agency Priorities include:

- Demonstrate direct impacts on the local, state or region's economy and communities including job creation, retention or leveraged private funds.
- Directly benefit rural communities with populations of less than 5,000 people.
- Directly benefit underserved communities. NBRC has statutory authority to define areas within the region as distressed, according to [40 U.S.C. §15702](#), including high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration. Communities that suffer from a combination of socioeconomic and environmental burdens, including high unemployment and poverty, basic resources.
- Contribute to community resilience such as how project helps communities prevent, reduce, withstand, and/or improve recovery from extreme weather or strengthens physical, behavioral and social health of community to withstand and adapt to current and projected public health emergencies.