



Northern Border  
Regional Commission

# 2024 FOREST ECONOMY PROGRAM

## Program Information Session

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# Agenda Items:

## Forest Economy Program Overview

- Purpose and example projects
- Available Funds

## Determining Eligibility

- Eligible Locations: NBRC Service Area, 2024 Distress Criteria, Determining Eligibility & Match/Reimbursement Ratios
- Eligible Applicants and Co-Applicants
- Eligible Purposes: Project Categories, Investment Priorities and Award Sizes



# Agenda Items:

## Pre-Application (formerly referred to as LOI)

- Timeline, Process & Requirements
- Evaluation of pre-applications

## What's Next

- Project Development
- NBRC Office Hours
- Grants Management System Training

## Q&A





# Forest Economy Program Overview

The Forest Economy Program is designed ***to support the forest-based economy, and to assist in the industry's evolution to include new technologies and viable business models*** across the four-state NBRC region.



# Forest Economy Program Overview

For those potential applicants familiar with the NBRC's core "Catalyst" funding opportunity, the Forest Economy Program is distinct in two important ways:

- The Forest Economy Program emphasizes the potential for impact across the entire NBRC region.
- Infrastructure projects (defined by Congress in NBRC's authorizing language to be inclusive of transportation, water and wastewater, telecommunications, and energy) must directly support the forest economy.



# 2024 Forest Economy Program

At the time of this announcement, Fiscal Year 2024 federal appropriations have not been finalized. **An estimated \$4 million may be made available for awards under the two funding rounds of the Fiscal Year 2024 Forest Economy Program**, subject to the availability of future appropriations. NBRC may elect to award additional funds to applications received under this funding announcement.

## **Forest Economy funding to be competitively awarded in two funding rounds**

- The estimated \$4 million spans across two funding rounds
- All awards are subject to the availability of funds



# 2024 Forest Economy Program

## **NEW!** Pre-application process will replace the former Letters of Interest process

- Required to receive an invitation to apply
- Due by 5:00pm on March 15 for spring round and September 6 for fall round
- Must be submitted using NBRC's **NEW!!** online grants management system
- **NEW!!** All waiver requests must be submitted with pre-applications
- Reviewed by NBRC for eligibility and by state programs for alignment with program priorities
- Invitations to apply are issued by the states

**All pre-application details will be covered in this session!**





# Determining Eligibility

## **Eligible Locations:**

- NBRC Service Area
- 2024 Distress Criteria
- Determining Eligibility & Match/Reimbursement Ratios

## **Eligible Applicants & Co-Applicants**

## **Eligible Purposes:**

- Project Categories & Award Sizes
- Project Investment Priorities





# NBRC Service Area

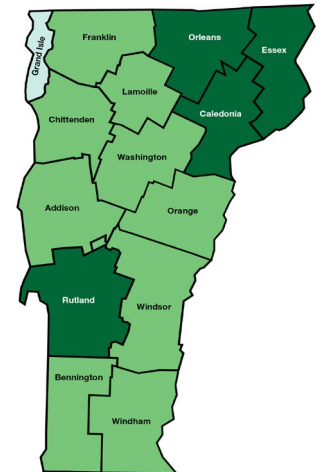
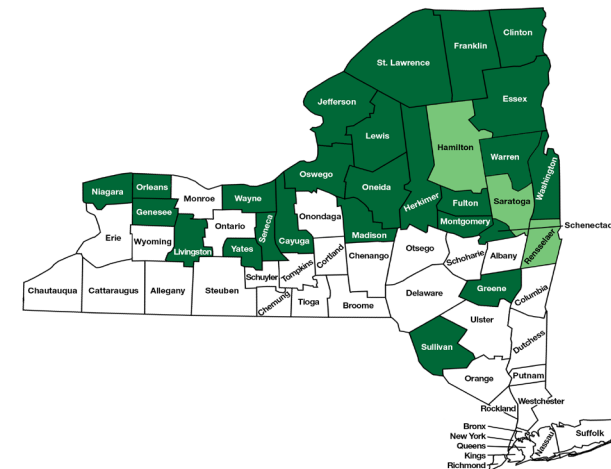
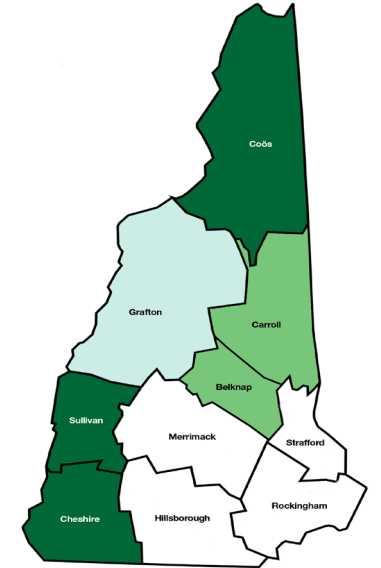
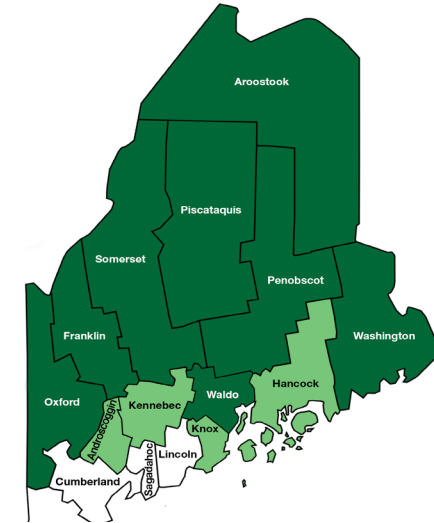
**Commission Service Area** - Only projects within the NBRC's service area are eligible for funding

**Maine:** Androscoggin, Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington counties.

**New Hampshire:** Belknap, Carroll, Cheshire, Coös, Grafton, 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, Seneca, Sullivan, Warren, Washington, Wayne, and Yates counties.

**Vermont:** all counties within the State





## NBRC Distress Criteria

NBRC is required to annually assess the level of economic and demographic distress in its service area. The resulting designations reflect whether the NBRC can provide grants within a county.

**Distressed:** Eligible for 80% funding and require a 20% match

**Transitional:** Eligible for 50% funding and require a 50% match

**Attainment:** Ineligible for funding, unless exceptions apply:

- Isolated Areas of Distress: specific municipality designated distressed
- Significant Benefits: benefits to surrounding distressed and transitional counties (waiver required)
- Multi-county or multi-state project that includes at least one distressed or transitional county. Requires an averaged match



# Determining Eligibility & Match

1. Determine if project location is in NBRC Service Area
2. Determine if project location is in distressed, transitional or attainment county. If in attainment county, determine if exceptions apply or a Significant Benefits Waiver is required.
3. Identify reimbursement and match rate associated with location.

## Resources:

- Program User Manual
- [2024 Distress Criteria](#) on NBRC website

The screenshot displays the Northern Border Regional Commission website. The header includes the logo and navigation links: Northern Border Region, Program Areas, Impact & Reporting, and Resources. The main content area is titled 'Assessing Distress in NBRC Counties' and explains the Commission's annual assessment of economic and demographic distress. It includes a link to 'Distress Criteria for 2024' and defines three categories of counties: Distressed, Transitional, and Attainment. Each category has a brief description and the required match rate for Commission grants. A section titled 'Exceptions to Attainment County Eligibility' notes that while funding is generally not provided to attainment counties, there are exceptions for isolated areas of distress.

**Northern Border Regional Commission** | Northern Border Region | Program Areas | Impact & Reporting | Resources

### Assessing Distress in NBRC Counties

By statute, the Commission is required to annually assess the level of economic and demographic distress among the counties in its service area. Assessing distress is important as the resulting designations reflect whether or not the Commission can provide grants within a county as well as what level of match is required of Commission funded projects.

[Distress Criteria for 2024](#)

Counties are designated as Distressed, Transitional, or Attainment.

#### Distressed Counties

40 U.S.C., Subtitle V states that "distressed" counties are those that "have high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration" and "are the most severely and persistently economic distressed and underdeveloped." The NBRC is required to allocate 50% of its total Appropriations to projects in counties falling within this designation. Commission grants within Distressed Counties only require a 20% match.

#### Transitional Counties

Counties that are "transitional" counties "have recently suffered high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration" or "are economically distressed and underdeveloped." Commission grants within Transitional Counties require a 50% match.

#### Attainment Counties

Finally, "attainment" counties are those that are neither "distressed" or "transitional." The Commission is not allowed to fund projects within an attainment county.

#### Exceptions to Attainment County Eligibility

In general, NBRC funds may not be provided to projects located within a designated "Attainment County." However, there are opportunities to provide funding to projects within these counties if **any one** of the following exceptions below is met.

- **Isolated Areas of Distress:** When a county is first designated as "Attainment" the Commission will automatically collect economic and demographic data within that county to identify "Isolated Areas of Distress." Isolated areas of distress are municipalities that have high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration.





# Eligible Applicants & Co-Applicants

- **State governments:** Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont & New York
- **Local governments:** Village, town, city and county
- Other political **subdivisions of States:** regional planning commissions, authorities of the state
- **Indian Tribes:** See annually published Bureau of Indian Affairs list of Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services
- **Non-profit entities.** All 501(c) organizations

## Ineligible Applicants & Co-Applicants:

- For-profit entities, LLCs and other entities that are not a 501(c) are **NOT** eligible to apply for NBRC funds.
- Applicants from outside NBRC member states are ineligible

Applicants  
will identify  
entity type in  
registration  
process!



This  
requirement  
applies  
across  
programs!

# Previous Award Recipients

- NEW!** An eligible applicant with an open or active NBRC award cannot receive an additional NBRC investment until the current award has both
- submitted reimbursement requests totaling 75% or more of the project and
  - demonstrated that 75% of the cost share has been expended before the pre-application deadline

If the 75% expenditure requirement cannot be met, the applicant can apply for a waiver. The **75% Expenditure Waiver** must be submitted together with the pre-application.

Resources:

- Forest Economy Program User Manual



# Project Categories

Whether funded directly or through partnerships, funds will be awarded to support projects in the forest economy, which may include one (or multiple) of the following project categories:

1. Community development projects
2. Workforce training and development projects
3. Business planning and technical assistance projects
4. Marketing/communication and education work (must be paired with one or more of the other project categories (#1-3 or 5))
5. Infrastructure in direct support of the forest economy

Resources: Forest Economy Program User Manual





# Program Investment Priorities

1. Invest in the development and commercialization of technologies that create and grow needed markets for low-grade forest harvest residuals.
2. Invest in workforce recruitment, development, and training to increase job placement across the forest product continuum.
3. Help to sustain and grow existing forest industry businesses and operations, such as through technical assistance.
4. Aid in the revitalization of rural communities through the diversified use of northern border forests for economic activity to include wood products and advanced materials manufacturing, as well as for other economic activity that utilizes northern border forests sustainably for the production of wood products and advanced materials manufacturing.
5. Leverage existing (or, in some cases, new) partnerships to impact multiple counties, states and/or the entire NBRC region, and/or have the potential to do so.

Resources: Forest Economy Program User Manual



## For Example...

The following are examples of projects that were successfully funded in the past:

- The project: In 2019, the Town of East Millinocket was funded to redevelop the East Millinocket paper mill site into a multi-industrial complex.
- The resulting impact on the forest economy: The Town of East Millinocket was able to successfully purchase the mill property and prepare the site for industrial use by new businesses, including forest product companies. This project is a good example of a community development project as described in the Forest Economy Program materials.





## For Example...

The following are examples of projects that were successfully funded in the past:

- *The project:* In 2020, the Northern Vermont University was funded to establish the NVU Forestry Accelerator & Workforce Development program to address the economic shift produced by the chronic and consistent decline of the forest products industry across the tri- county region.
- *The resulting impact on the forest economy:* the Forestry Accelerator Program provides technical assistance to companies looking to develop markets in northern New England and works to solve regional challenges in the forest economy.
- This project is a good example of a business planning and technical assistance project that directly supports the forest industry.

<https://forestaccelerator.org/>





## For Example...

The following are examples of projects that were successfully funded in the past:

- *The project:* In 2021, the University of Maine was funded to evaluate wood sources and treatments for their suitability in fiber thermoforming (plant-based replacement for plastic packaging), and to develop a training course to develop the workforce needed to operate new machinery.
- *The resulting impact on the forest economy:* The project helps to position the region to “become a resource – both in knowledge and skills – as fiber thermoforming continues to grow”. – University of Maine 2021 NBRC RFEP application. This project represents an investment in the development and commercialization of technologies that create new markets for forest product residuals, as well as a forest economy workforce training project.



## For Example...

The following are examples of projects that were successfully funded in the past:

- The project: In spring 2023, the NBRC funded the Jesup Memorial Library's Mass Timber Expansion Project, which will build an 11,400 square foot addition to the existing building in Bar Harbor, Maine, using cross laminated timber made from locally sourced eastern hemlock.
- The resulting impact on the forest economy: This project will showcase the use of our local species in an increasingly popular and climate smart forest product, mass timber. This project is a good example of a community development project that supports the diversified use of forests within our region for economic activity that utilizes northern border forests sustainably.



# NBRC Policies & Requirements

- Match and Cost Share
- Period of Performance
- Ineligible Purpose
- Program Income
- Use of Funds
- Notice to Proceed
- NEPA
- Federal Funding Ceiling
- BABAA/Buy American Preference

Applicants are encouraged to review the **Program User Manual** and **NBRC Compliance Manual** to confirm all requirements will be met in the project.





# Match and Cost Share

This will be  
calculated  
automatically  
in the pre-  
application!

## Reimbursement / Match ratio

- 80/20 or 50/50 depending on location
- Reimbursement requires that the Match & Cost Share be spent at the applicable ratio

## Calculating Match and Cost Share

- Required minimum match = NBRC Requested Funds x match rate
- Cost Share = Total Project Costs – (NBRC requested funds)
- Status of match sources will be requested at the time of pre-application.
- Neither the NBRC award nor the match can be expended prior to receiving a Notice to Proceed



# NBRC Funding Requirements Cont'd

## **Period of Performance:**

- NBRC awards have a 3-year Performance Period
- NBRC suggests delaying the pre-application to a future funding round if the proposed project cannot be completed within the 3-year performance period

## **Ineligible Purpose:**

- Funds cannot go to a for-profit entity, no pass throughs to for-profits
- See Program User Manual for full list of ineligible purposes

## **Program Income:**

- Costs financed by 'program income' are treated through the deductive method as outlined in 2 CFR 200.307(e)(1)



# NBRC Funding Requirements Cont'd

## **Use of Funds:**

- NBRC funds may be used to match other federally funded projects (when both federal agencies allow) only when the total grant funds from NBRC and other federal funders does not exceed 80% of the total project budget.
- NBRC funds used to purchase or construct real property requires the federal government to maintain an interest in that property for 20 years

## **Ineligible Costs:**

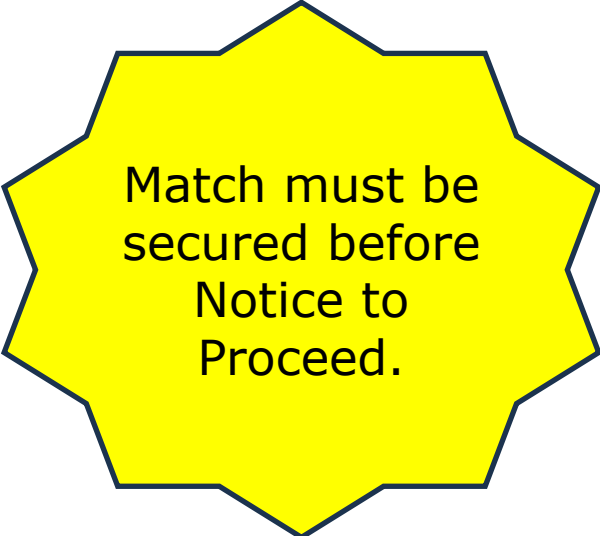
- Maintenance (routine or deferred)
- Allowance or payment of debts
- See Program User Manual for full list of ineligible costs



# NBRC Funding Requirements Cont'd

## **Notice to Proceed:**

- NBRC funds and match cannot be committed or expended before receiving the Notice to Proceed
- NEPA environmental review of project required before receiving Notice to Proceed



Match must be secured before Notice to Proceed.

## **National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)**

- Categorical Exclusions (a few weeks; no to low \$)
- Categorical Exclusions plus section 106 consultation (a few months; \$1,500-\$3,000)
- Environmental Assessment (6-12 months; \$5,000-\$10,000)





# Federal Funding Ceiling

## **NBRC awards have a federal funding ceiling of 80%**

- If a project is utilizing multiple federal sources (including NBRC), no more than 80% of the total project costs can be comprised of federal funds.
- HUD's Community Development Block Grant Program funding from your state does not count toward the federal cap
- Loans do not count towards the federal cap
- It is important for applicants to check with other federal sources, as each federal agency may have its own restrictions



# Buy American Preference

Build American, Buy American Act (BABAA) was enacted on November 15, 2021, and sets forth a domestic content procurement preference (“Buy American Preference”) for ***iron and steel, manufactured products, and construction materials used for infrastructure projects.***

Resources: NBRC’s website for [BABAA guidance](#).




# Pre-Applications

- **Pre-Application Details:**
  - Timeline, Process & Requirements, Evaluation
- **State Role in Pre-Applications**
- **Advisory Board Role in Pre-Applications**
- **What to Expect After the Pre-application**



# Pre-Application: Timeline & Key Dates

- Program Information Sessions: February 12-13 
- Online pre-application system opens: February/March
- Round 1 Pre-applications Due: **March 15 by 5:00pm EST**
  - **NEW!** All applicable waivers are due with pre-application:
    - ✓ 75% Waiver Request for Prior Award Recipients (all programs)
    - ✓ Significant Benefit Waiver Request (all programs)
- Round 1 Forest Economy Program Pre-Application Review: March 19-30
- Responses – feedback/invitations to apply: **Week of April 1**

**Pre-applications are required**





# Pre-Application: Process

**All pre-applications must be submitted using NBRC's online grants management system.**

- Detailed guidance will be made available for accessing system
- Requires registration (establishing a new user account)
- Requires responses to pre-application questions



# Pre-Application: Requirements

## **Applicant and Co-Applicant Information**

- Applicant Organization
- Organization Type (eligible applicant type)
- Address
- EIN
- Unique Entity ID - Applicant should enter UEI if one is available. UEI is not required to submit a pre-application but will be required to receive an award.

This information will be collected during the registration process.

*This information will be requested as part of the registration process and transferred to the pre-application.*



# Pre-Application: Requirements

## **Applicant characteristics**

- Previous award recipient (If yes, enter NBRC award #)
- Rural community (defined as population less than 5,000)

## **Primary Place of Performance** – where will the project take place?:

- Address including zip code
- County

## **Project Title**

*This information will be requested as part of the pre-application.*



# Pre-Application: Requirements

## Budget Narrative

- Description of expenses over \$5,000 by category
- Table describing match sources: source, federal v non-federal, and status of match

## Budget Details

- Requested NBRC funds
- Match and Cost Share funds
- Total Project Costs

This information is submitted in the GMS. There are no additional budget documents to upload for pre-application.

**Funds will need to be allocated across budget categories**





# Pre-Application: Requirements

## Pre-application budget categories

- Personnel
  - Fringe Benefits
  - Travel and Transportation
  - Equipment
  - Supplies and Materials
  - Consultants
  - Contracts and Sub-Grantees
  - Construction
  - Other Direct Costs
  - Indirect Costs
- These budget categories align with the SF-424cbw.
  - **NEW!!** Pre-applications DO NOT require the SF-424cbw form, but full applications (by invitation only) will.



# Pre-Application: Requirements

## Narrative Questions:

- Project Abstract
  - Project Goals, Outcomes and Outputs
  - Program Investment Priorities
  - Project Beneficiaries and Community Context
  - Statement of Need
- 
- All narrative text boxes have a 10,000-character limit and formatting/editing capabilities.
  - Applicants encouraged to have narrative responses available in a word processing document to easily copy and paste into the pre-application.

Guidance in  
Part II of Forest  
Economy  
Program User  
Manual.



# Pre-Application: Requirements

## Project Abstract – Narrative

- Provide a summary of the proposed project.
- What NBRC eligible purpose and project category does this project address?
- Describe the status of the project – ready for implementation, planning tasks ongoing, early stages.
- What is the project scope? Over what period of time will this project be completed?



# Pre-Application: Requirements

## **Project goals, outcomes, and outputs - Narrative**

- What are the expected economic outcomes (e.g. impacts on jobs, employment and wage growth) of this project
- Describe the scale of expected economic impacts on the community, county, or region?

**Appendix G lists examples of Economic Outcomes and Outputs**



# **Pre-Application: Requirements**

## **Program Investment Priorities - Narrative**

- Which NBRC Agency Investment Priorities best apply to this project?
- Which state program priorities best apply to this project?

**Refer to the NBRC Agency Investment Priorities and Scoring Criteria in the Forest Economy Program User Manual.**





# Pre-Application: Requirements

## **Project Beneficiaries and Community Context - Narrative**

- Who will benefit?
- Why does this project matter to the community?
- If applicable, how does this project serve or benefit rural communities with populations of less than 5,000 or disadvantaged communities?
- If applicable, how does this project help communities prevent, reduce, withstand, and/or improve recovery from climate related impacts and disasters?



# Pre-Application: Requirements

## Statement of Need - Narrative

- What is the challenge or problem the project seeks to address?
- What is the proposed solution?
- Why is this project important?
- Describe the opportunity gained by funding this project now.
- Why is NBRC funding important for this project?



# Evaluation of Pre-Applications

NBRC and the States will consider a project's alignment with the funding priorities for these program dollars when both issuing invitations to apply at the pre-application phase and in scoring projects at the application phase.

## Resources:

- Forest Economy Program User Manual – Investment Priorities
- Forest Economy Program User Manual – Scoring Criteria



# Evaluation of Pre-Applications

When issuing invitations to apply at the pre-application phase, NBRC and the States will also consider:

- the costs and expected benefits associated with the requested NBRC investment;
- the projects identified as a state priority;
- the benefits provided to the broader community and region.



# State Program Manager Role

- Project Development
- Review and assess pre-applications for alignment with Forest Economy Program priorities
- Issue invitations to apply





# Advisory Board Role

- Consists of one member representing the Federal Co-Chair and two members from each of the four states
- Markets the program and serves as a resource for project development
- Evaluates pre-applications and provides sector expertise to State Program Managers for application evaluation
- Serves as a resource to projects invited to submit a full application
- DOES NOT score applications.
- A full list of AB members can be found in online FEP program materials.



# What to Expect After Pre-Applications

**During the week of April 1, applicants will receive notification of pre-application status along with information from NBRC.**

- Invitation to Apply (if available, will include feedback)
- Recommendation to resubmit in future with feedback
- Ineligibility determination



# What's Next

## Project Development

- Determine eligibility
- Self classify project according to project categories and investment priorities
- Self evaluate project against NBRC scoring criteria
- Meet with State Program Manager if further discussion needed



# What's Next

## Grants Management System Information

- Information about the System will be available and technical support resources will be made available

### A few notes:

- Registration required for pre-application
- Pre-application required
- Pre-application can only be associated with one funding program at a time



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# QUESTIONS?

Send future questions to  
[admin@nbrc.gov](mailto:admin@nbrc.gov)



# NBRC Contacts

## **NBRC Staff:**

- Andrea Smith, NBRC Program Director, [asmith@nbrc.gov](mailto:asmith@nbrc.gov)
- Sarah Demers, NBRC Program Coordinator, [sdemers@nbrc.gov](mailto:sdemers@nbrc.gov)
- Marina Bowie, Forest Economy Program Manager, [mbowie@nbrc.gov](mailto:mbowie@nbrc.gov)

## **State Program Managers:**

- Each State has a Program Manager, who are employees of State government appointed to the role by the Governor's Alternate:
- Maine: Charlotte Mace, [charlotte.mace@maine.gov](mailto:charlotte.mace@maine.gov)
- New Hampshire: Steve Fortier, [steven.j.fortier@livefree.nh.gov](mailto:steven.j.fortier@livefree.nh.gov)
- Vermont: Kristie Farnham, [Kristie.Farnham@vermont.gov](mailto:Kristie.Farnham@vermont.gov)
- New York: Kyle Wilber, [kyle.wilber@dos.ny.gov](mailto:kyle.wilber@dos.ny.gov)





# Resources

## **NBRC Forest Economy Program Website:**

- <https://www.nbrc.gov/content/FEP>

## **NBRC Distress Criteria:**

- <https://www.nbrc.gov/content/distressed-counties>

## **Local Development Districts (LDDs):**

Forest Economy Program awardees are not required to utilize an LDD for grant administration, however If an entity is awarded funding and deemed to not have sufficient internal capacity to self-administer

their project, NBRC may require the entity to contract with a Local Development District (LDD) who has opted in to NBRC's LDD Partnership Program.

- A complete list of LDDs can be found at <https://www.nbrc.gov/content/local-development-districts>