



Northern Border  
Regional Commission

# Catalyst Grant Program Information Session

*Adrienne Harrison,  
Program Manager  
Presented 2/4/2026*



FOSTERING VIBRANT FUTURES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES



# AGENDA

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- Program Purpose
- Key Dates
- Available Funds
- Eligible Purpose Categories
- Project Classification
- NBRC Service Area
- Eligible Applicants, Co-Applicants and NBRC Service Area



The graphic features a dark blue background with a faint image of industrial buildings. At the top left is the NBRC logo, a white maple leaf inside a circle with three stars. To the right of the logo, a white text box describes the program. Below this, two orange boxes show grant ranges: 'Implementation Grants ≤ \$500,000-\$3M' and 'Feasibility Grants ≤ \$100,000', with a blue circle indicating a '20% to 50% match'. Below these are four categories with images: 'Basic Public Infrastructure' (water tower), 'Transportation' (worker with equipment), 'Tourism and Recreation' (snowcat), and 'Business & Workforce Development' (people in a shop). A plus sign and 'more!' are next to the last category. At the bottom, two columns list 'Eligible Applicants' and 'Investment Priorities'. A footer bar at the very bottom provides a website link.

**CATALYST**

NBRC's flagship grant program designed to invest in state economic development priorities to support a broad range of initiatives that modernize and expand the region's basic infrastructure and revitalize communities to support and attract the region's workforce.

**Implementation Grants**  
≤ \$500,000-\$3M

**Feasibility Grants**  
≤ \$100,000

20% to 50% match

**Basic Public Infrastructure**

**Transportation**

**Tourism and Recreation**

**Business & Workforce Development** + more!

**Eligible Applicants**

- State and Local Governments
- Career Technical Centers & Universities
- Other Political Subdivisions
- Non-Profit Entities
- Federally Recognized Indian Tribes

**Investment Priorities**

- ME, NH, NY, VT state level priorities
- Rural communities (populations less than 5,000) and communities impacted by distress criteria
- Address multiple needs and demonstrate efficiencies

For more information on eligibility, grant compliance, and application deadlines please visit [www.nbrc.gov](http://www.nbrc.gov).



# Program Overview Series

- **Part 1:** Funding Rounds, Timeline & Milestones, Next Steps and Contact information
- **Part 2:** Eligibility, Waivers and Match
- **Part 2A:** Determining Required Match
- **Part 3:** Funding Policies and Requirements
- **Part 4:** Local Development Districts
- **Part 5:** Catalyst Program Overview
- **Part 6:** Forest Economy Program Overview
- **Part 7:** Timber for Transit Program Overview



**[Review the  
Program  
Overview  
Series!](#)**

**Resources:** Pre-Application Support webpage

# AGENDA

## PREPARING A PRE-APPLICATION

- Determining Match Requirement
- Waivers – 75% Expenditure, Significant Benefit and LDD
- Creating a Pre-application in the GMS
- Pre-application Process & Requirements
- Evaluation of Pre-applications
- NBRC & State Program Priorities
- Submitting a Pre-application
- What to Expect After the Pre-application
- Next Steps



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# 2026 Catalyst Grant Program

The purpose of this program is ***to stimulate economic growth and inspire partnerships that improve rural economic vitality*** across the four-state NBRC region.



# Available Funding

## NBRC anticipates making a minimum of \$30MM available in 2026

- Funds will be available in both spring and fall rounds
- Funds are distributed equally across 4 states
- All awards are subject to availability of funds
- Additional funds may be made available through a revised Catalyst Grant Program announcement.



Available funding for the Catalyst grant *program* is further explained in the **Program Overview**.



# Key Dates

## Spring Round

- Pre-applications AND Waivers  
Due: **February 27, 2026**  
(before 5:00pm EST)
- Full Applications Due: **April 17, 2026 (before 5:00pm EST)**
- Grant Awards Announced:  
**June 2026**

## Fall Round

- Pre-applications & Waivers  
Due: **August 28, 2026 (before 5:00pm EST)**
- Full Applications Due:  
**October 16, 2026 (before 5:00pm EST)**
- Grant Awards Announced:  
**December 2026**

Key Dates for the Catalyst grant *program* are further explained in the ***Program Timeline***.



# Eligible Purpose Categories

**Proposed projects must focus on one of six project categories:**

- Basic Public Infrastructure
- Transportation Infrastructure
- Telecommunications Infrastructure
- Business and Workforce Development
- Basic Healthcare
- Resource Conservation, Tourism and Recreation

Proposed projects that do not align with an eligible purpose may be reclassified or deemed ineligible during pre-application review.

*For additional information and examples of eligible activities that fit under each of the program eligible purposes, see the **Program User Manual Part 2A***





# Project Classification

**Part 5 of  
Program  
Overview  
Series!**

**Step 1. Identify Eligible Purpose Category based on definitions and examples.**

**Step 2. Select applicable Grant Type based on definitions and requirements**

- Grant Types: Feasibility and Implementation

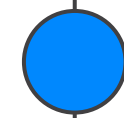
**Step 3. Identify maximum award size based on Category and Grant Type**

- Implementation Maximum: \$500,000 to \$3,000,000
- Feasibility Maximum: \$100,000



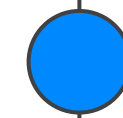


# Applicant Eligibility

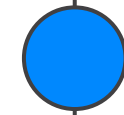


## STATE GOVERNMENTS

*Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont*

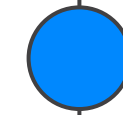


## SECONDARY AND CAREER TECHNICAL CENTERS



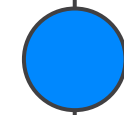
## LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

*VILLAGE, TOWN, CITY AND COUNTY*



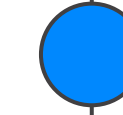
## NON-PROFITS

*501(C) ORGANIZATIONS*



## OTHER POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS OF STATE

*REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS,  
AUTHORITIES OF THE STATE*



## FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED INDIAN TRIBES

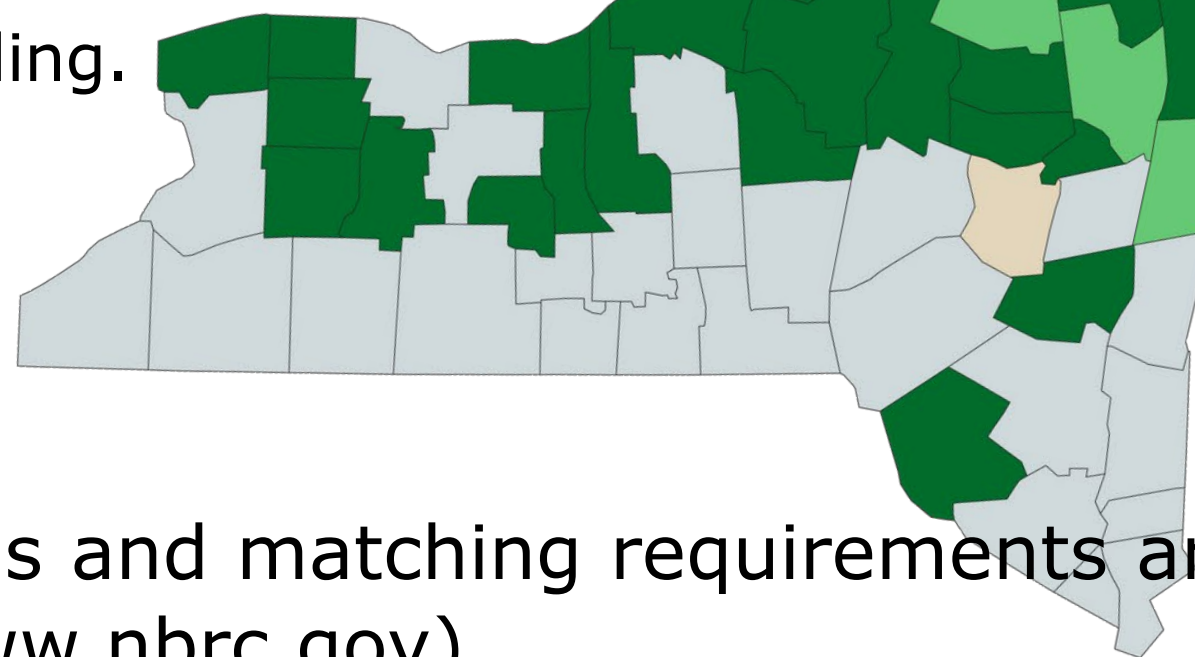
**For-profit entities, LLCs and other entities that are not a 501(c) are not eligible for funding.**



# Geographic Eligibility

Your project may be eligible for NBRC funds if it is located within one of the 64 counties in our service area. NBRC assesses the level of economic and demographic distress annually within our service region. This helps determine whether the Commission can provide grants within a county as well as what level of match is required of Commission-funded projects.

- **Distressed:** Eligible for 80% funding.  
Requires a 20% match.
- **Transitional:** Eligible for 50% funding.  
Requires a 50% match.
- **Attainment:** Ineligible for funding.  
(Some exceptions apply.)



More details on county designations and matching requirements are available in NBRC's Annual Distress Criteria report ([www.nbrc.gov](http://www.nbrc.gov))



DISTRESS LEVEL	Eligible for NBRC Funding?	NBRC Funding Percentage	Grantee Match Rate Requirement
<p><b>Distressed</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	YES	80%	20%
<p><b>Transitional</b></p> <p><i>“Transitional” counties “have recently suffered high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration” or “are economically distressed and underdeveloped.”</i></p>	YES	50%	50%
<p><b>Attainment</b></p> <p><i>“Attainment” counties are those that are neither “distressed” or “transitional.” The Commission is not allowed to fund projects within an attainment county.</i></p>	NO	N/A	N/A
<p><b>*Isolated Area of Distress</b></p> <p><i>The Commission will automatically collect economic and demographic data within “Attainment” counties to identify communities that qualify as “Isolated Areas of Distress.” Isolated Areas of Distress are areas that have high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration and are therefore designated as either Distressed or Transitional. These Isolated Areas within Attainment counties are eligible for funding. For more information, please view our Match Rate FAQ.</i></p>	YES	80% (Distressed Communities)	20%(Distressed Communities)
		50% (Transitional Communities)	50% (Transitional Communities)



# Determining Match Rate

**Review  
Part 2A of  
Program  
Overview  
Series!**

## 2026: NEW Match Rate Determination

**Background:** Match rate (as mandated by Congress) is determined by the socio-economic indicators of your geography. Each assessment level has a corresponding match rate requirement.

**Simplifying Terms:** From “match and cost share” to just “match”. Large and complex projects may choose to phase the work.

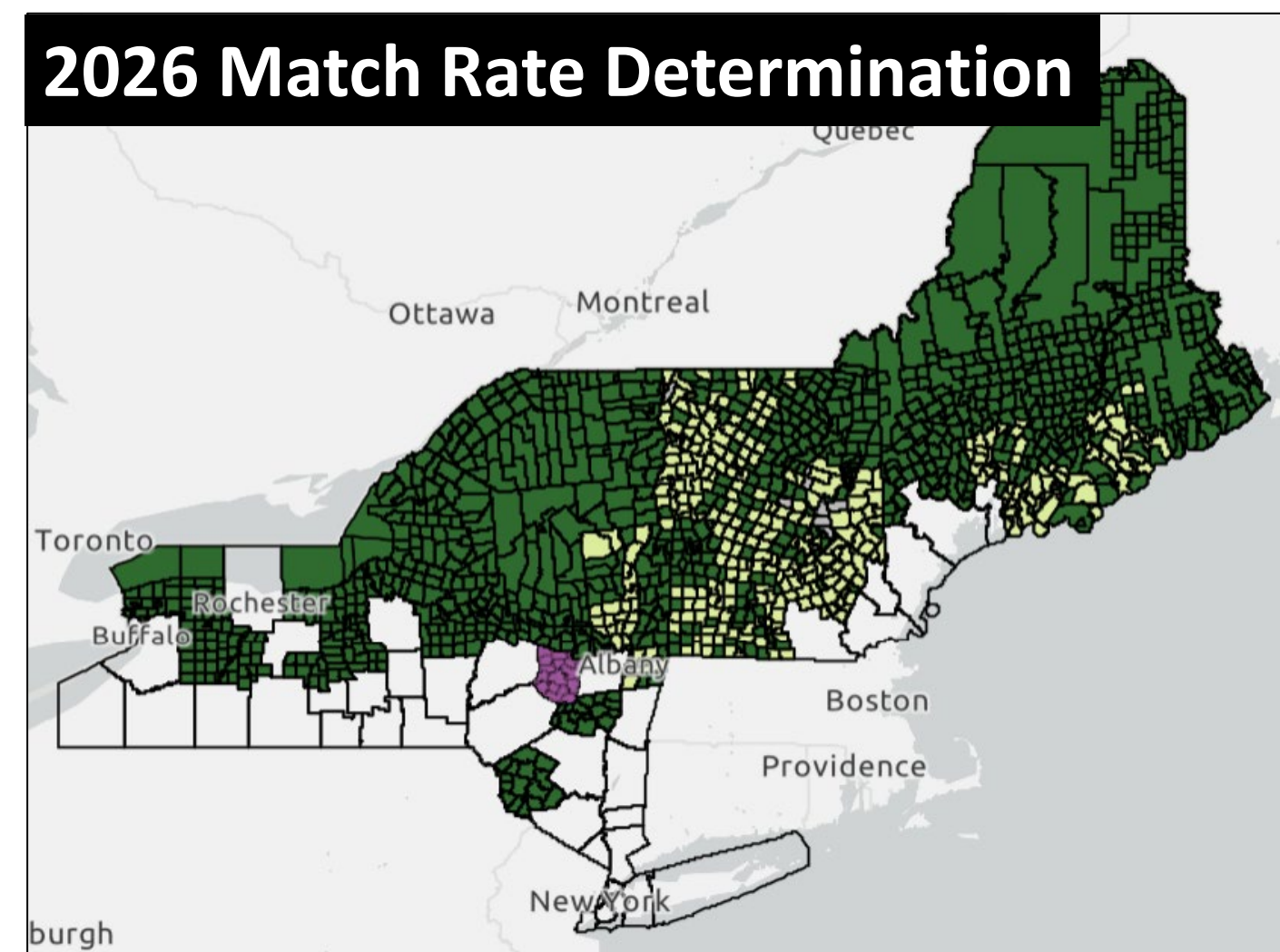
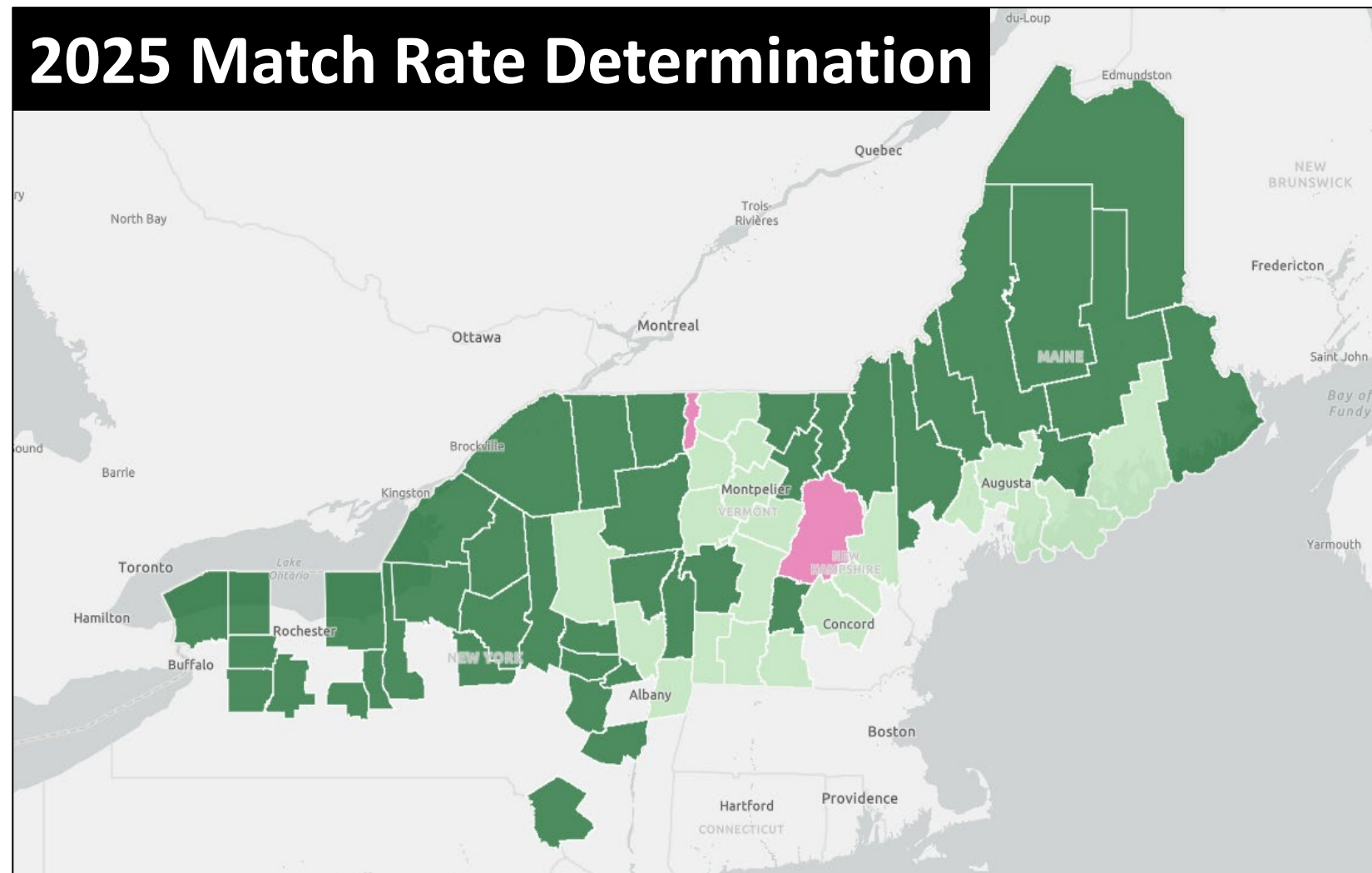
**Getting More Granular:** Beginning in 2026, NBRC evaluates distress in the region at both a county *and* community level, providing applicants with the option to choose the match rate that is most beneficial based on their project location(s).

**NBRC's 3 Match Tools:** New tools have been developed to assist applicants in identifying their match rate.

# Determining Match Rate Based on Project Location

[Find your GEOID for pre-application!](#)

Drilling down to community level data **improves the match rate** for many communities.



New Tools to ID Project Match Rate: ➔

1. PDF List with Match Rate
2. Interactive Map
3. Match Rate Calculator



# *Determining Match Rate: The TOOLS*

## **Tools for Finding Your Project's Match Rate**

On NBRC's [Project Eligibility and Match Determination page](#) there are three tools to help determine match based on the project location(s).

**1. PDF List with Match Rate**

**2. Interactive Map**



Best for projects with a single location (one county or one community).

**1. Match Rate Calculator**



Best for projects that span more than one location (workforce development, technical assistance, infrastructure in more than one community, etc.)

Each tool provides users with a match rate percentage and GEOID. This should be entered in the pre-application locations tab.



# Determining Match Rate

1. Determine if project location is in NBRC Service Area.
2. Determine if project location is in distressed, transitional or attainment geography. If in attainment geography, determine if exceptions apply or Significant Benefits Waiver is required.
  - [2026 Distress Criteria](#) on NBRC website
3. Use match tools to identify reimbursement and match rate associated with location.
  - [Project Eligibility and Match Determination](#) webpage



## Project Eligibility and Match Determination

All NBRC pre-applications and applications require matching funds (funds contributed by the applicant and/or outside sources) for proposed projects. To determine the match rate, NBRC is required by statute to annually assess the socioeconomic distress of the region. Projects located within NBRC's service area are eligible to apply for funding.

### NBRC's Service Area

- **Maine:** Androscoggin, Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington.
- **New Hampshire:** Belknap, Carroll, Cheshire, Coos, Grafton, Merrimack, and Sullivan.
- **New York:** Cayuga, Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Genesee, Greene, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Livingston, Madison, Montgomery, Niagara, Oneida, Orleans, Oswego, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie\*, Seneca, St. Lawrence, Sullivan, Washington, Warren, Wayne, Wyoming, Yates.  
\*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:** Addison, Bennington, Caledonia, Chittenden, Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, Orange, Orleans, Rutland, Washington, Windham, Windsor.

### Service Area Distress Levels and Match Rates

Distress levels are evaluated for all locations within NBRC's service area on an annual basis and assigned a corresponding match rate requirement.

DISTRESS LEVEL	Eligible for NBRC Funding?	NBRC Funding Percentage	Grantee Match Rate Requirement
<b>Distressed</b> <small>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.</small>	YES	80%	20%
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<b>Attainment</b> <small>"Attainment" counties are those that are neither "distressed" or "transitional." The Commission is not allowed to fund projects within an attainment county.</small>	NO	N/A	N/A
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		50% (Transitional Communities)	50% (Transitional Communities)





# Previous Award Recipients

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.



# Applicants Outside NBRC Service Area

Entities eligible for a **Significant Benefit Waiver** are those who:

- Are located within an Attainment County but not within a Distressed or Transitional community, or
- Are located outside of the NBRC region but within a member state.

Entities eligible for a Significant Benefit Waiver must demonstrate the project will bring significant economic benefits to NBRC Distressed or Transitional communities or counties.

Reference NBRC's Grant Programs User Manual Part 3: Appendices for more information on the Significant Benefit Waiver and process to submit.





# Local Development Districts

All NBRC competitive program awards require the use of a Local Development District (LDD) for grant administration.

- ✓ Exception for state government entities and LDDs

LDDs are compensated for grant administrative work. The fee structure is as follows:

- \$8,000 flat fee for awards of \$400,000 or less
- 2% of NBRC requested amount for awards above \$400,000.

A current list of participating LDDs can be found on the [About LDDs](#) page on NBRC's website



# Creating a Pre-Application

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

- Follow guidance for **Registering Your Organization's Account**
- Review guidance for **Creating and Submitting a Pre-Application**
- Find and **qualify for funding opportunities** in GMS
- **Create a Pre-Application**
  - **Write down the PR-NBRC-000 number** to help find the pre-application again and avoid creating multiple pre-applications
- Respond to all pre-application **narrative questions and budget**
- Enter **match rate percentage and GEOID** from match tools in Location tab
- Complete **applicable waivers** in Forms and Files tab





# Registration Requirements

## **Applicant Information**

- Applicant Organization
- Organization Type (eligible applicant type)
- Address
- EIN
- Unique Entity ID (UEI #)

**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)
- Underserved community (defined in Program User Manual)

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

- Address including zip code
- County

## **Project Title**

- Unique title





# Pre-Application Requirements

## **Budget Narrative**

- Description of expenses over \$5,000 by category

## **Match Table**

- Description of match sources (source, federal v non-federal, and status of match)

## **Budget Table**

- Requested NBRC funds
- Match and Cost Share funds
- Total Project Costs
- Funds allocated across budget categories



# Pre-Application Requirements

## Budget Categories

- Personnel
  - Fringe Benefits
  - Travel and Transportation
  - Equipment
  - Supplies and Materials
  - Consultants
  - Contracts and Sub-Grantees
  - Construction
  - Other Direct Costs
  - Indirect Costs
- Pre-application budget categories align with SF-424cbw
  - SF-424cbw is NOT required with pre-application, however it is required with the full application





# Pre-Application Requirements

**Save  
often!**

## **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 5,000-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.

Step by step guidance for creating a pre-application is available on the Resources webpage.



# Pre-Application Requirements

## **Project Abstract – Narrative**

- Provide a summary of the proposed project.
- Identify the relevant NBRC project category and describes how the project fits the project category. If the project is an infrastructure project, the proposal clearly describes how the project meets the threshold for an infrastructure project. If the project is requesting a higher maximum infrastructure award, the proposal clearly describes how the project meets the criteria for a higher maximum award.
- 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?

Use the NBRC and State Program Scoring Criteria as guidance for narrative responses.





# 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?



# Pre-Application Requirements

## **Program Investment Priorities - Narrative**

- Use this space to describe which NBRC Agency Investment Priorities best apply to this project. See guidance in NBRC Scoring Criteria – Alignment with Agency and Program Priorities.
- Which state program priorities best apply to this project?





# 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?
- Benefits to underserved communities should be included in priorities narrative



# 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?



# Submitting a Pre-Application

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

- Click the Submit Pre-Application button. Click Yes in the confirmation popup to complete the pre-application submission process.
- Once you submit the application, you will no longer have edit access.
- If you have entered all information correctly, you will receive a message indicating your application has been successfully submitted.
- If not, you will need to correct the errors before you can submit.
- Common error messages are highlighted at the end of the Creating and Submitting a Pre-Application document





# 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.

When issuing invitations to apply at the pre-application phase, State programs will also consider:

- the costs and expected benefits associated with the requested NBRC investment, and
- the benefits provided to the broader community and region

# Response to Pre-Application

**During the week of March 30th, 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

- Confirm eligibility and identify applicable waivers
- Register organization in the GMS – See resource
- Obtain UEI and SAM.gov account
- Review Appendix H - Project Classification Details to determine maximum award size
- Meet with State Program Manager if further discussion needed or if requesting more than \$1M. Share a [Project Interest Form](#).
- Create pre-application – See resource



# Resources

## **Program Areas webpage**

- Program Timeline
- Pre-Application Support webpage
- **Grant Programs User Manual**
  - Part 2A – Catalyst Program
  - Appendices B, C and D – Waiver Details
  - Appendix H – Project Classification Details
- **Catalyst Program webpage**
  - Project Interest Form

# Resources

## **Resources webpage**

- Project Match and Eligibility webpage with Match tools
- LDD webpage
- Annual Distress Criteria report

## **GMS Guidance on Resources webpage**

- Registering Your Organization's Account
- Creating and Submitting a Pre-Application





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Regional Commission

# Thank You!

# Questions?

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