



PROGRAM PURPOSE

The Catalyst Program is designed to stimulate economic growth and inspire partnerships that improve rural economic vitality across the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) four-state region. The Catalyst Program supports a broad range of economic development initiatives that will: modernize and expand water and wastewater systems; revitalize transportation infrastructure; establish workforce development programs and facilities; grow outdoor recreation infrastructure and economies; and construct new childcare and healthcare facilities.

Established by Congress in 2008, the NBRC is a partnership between the federal government and the states of Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont. The NBRC provides investments to job-creating projects that help reduce poverty, unemployment, and outmigration.

AVAILABLE FUNDS

NBRC anticipates making up to \$50 million in federal funding available to be competitively awarded through the Catalyst Program in 2024. The Catalyst Program will run two funding rounds with a minimum of \$30MM available in Round 1 and a minimum of \$20MM available in Round 2.

The Commission initially plans to make up to \$50 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding available and upon completion of the Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations process, anticipates issuing a revised program announcement to make additional funds available. 2024 Catalyst Program funding is subject to the availability of funds, the quantity and quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations.

AWARD SIZE

Projects will be classified as either non-infrastructure or infrastructure during the pre-application review process conducted by both NBRC and the member states (New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine). This classification determines the maximum potential award size for the project. For detailed explanations of the non-infrastructure and infrastructure categories, please see below and the [2024 Catalyst Program User Manual](#).

Infrastructure Projects: Projects classified as construction in support of infrastructure are eligible for awards of up to \$1,000,000. Infrastructure projects may be eligible for up to an additional \$2,000,000 in funding, for a total maximum award of \$3,000,000, if the project meets one of the following criteria: 1) construction takes place in two or more eligible communities/counties/states; or 2) construction involves two or more infrastructure categories (basic public, transportation, renewable energy, or telecommunications).

Non-infrastructure Projects: Projects classified as non-infrastructure projects are eligible for awards of up to \$500,000.

Applicants may propose projects with a federal funding request for less than these amounts. There will be no preference given to larger funding requests and proposals for all award sizes will be considered.

NON-INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING PURPOSE & DESCRIPTION

Program funding will be used to support non-infrastructure projects including: assistance in obtaining job skills training, skills development and employment-related education, entrepreneurship, technology, and business development. Non-infrastructure projects may also include improving basic health care, enhancing nutrition and food security, particularly on issues of equity, access and disparities, and other public services, as well as the promotion of resource conservation, tourism, recreation, and preservation of open space consistent with economic development goals.

- **Business and Workforce Development** shall mean those areas of business development which include entrepreneurship, the creation of new businesses or the retention or expansion of existing businesses in the local communities and are deemed eligible. Projects shall document job-creation or job-retention. Funding of start-up projects, such as business incubators or industrial parks, must have committed business tenants. Expansion of existing business incubators and industrial parks are also allowed. Business Incubation shall mean a business support process that accelerates the successful development of start-up and early-stage companies by providing entrepreneurs with an array of targeted resources and services. Workforce Development shall mean job training or employment-related education for a specific employer to fill immediate job openings or retain current jobs which are documented as such by that specific employer. Such training shall be delivered using existing public educational facilities (EPEFs) located in the region. However, if, the applicant demonstrates (1) sufficient information demonstrating an EPEF's inability (e.g., insufficient capacity, curriculum, and/or accessibility) to satisfy the defined need, and the applicant (2) demonstrates a compelling need to use a non-EPEF for such training, then a project may be eligible. Projects whose primary focus is supporting participation in the workforce, or those designed to direct general operating support for educational institutions, early education, childcare and related programs are not considered to be workforce development for the purposes of this grant program and are not eligible. Revolving loan funds may be used for the purpose of making loans to create and/or retain jobs.
- **Basic Health Care** Basic health care projects shall include structural and technological improvements to non-profit medical facilities such as hospitals, clinics, community health and mental health centers, public health centers, rehabilitation facilities, etc., with a focus on medically underserved areas. Projects will also include health education services and those actively addressing health inequities and social determinants of health, initiatives that expand remote clinical services through telehealth, provide technical assistance to health care facilities/networks, focus on provider training and advancement opportunities as well as recruitment and retention services and health education services.

Key components of basic health care include the capacity to assess, evaluate, monitor, and respond to both acute (emergency) threats and chronic (ongoing) challenges to public health as well as addressing systemic inequities and incorporating preventative health practices. This includes but is not limited to prioritizing the role of nutrition and food security in overall health, including disease prevention and management, recruiting, training, and retaining a capable and qualified workforce, up-to-date data, and information systems, developing policies and plans that support community health efforts, link people to needed personal health care services, and research for innovative solutions to solve community health problems. Basic health care services shall also mean treatment of mental illness and substance use disorder. Operating costs of facilities are

ineligible.

- **Resource Conservation, Tourism, Recreation** projects that promote resource conservation, tourism, recreation, including those that foster an awareness of the benefits of physical activity, in part by ensuring that everyone has access to safe places to be active, and preservation of open space, such as access roads, bridges, signage, etc., are eligible projects. Programs that prepare individuals to plan, develop, and manage tourism in a natural resource setting, with an emphasis on applying environmentally sound, culturally sensitive, and economically sustainable principles, as well as projects in support of sustainable tourism that can potentially mitigate the harmful impacts of visitation to natural areas while supporting the conservation of the ecosystem are also eligible under this category of funding. While easements and land purchases are eligible under the federal criteria, an economic development case needs to be made to substantiate the use of funds. All projects must also be consistent with the economic development goals of the region. Projects in this category that do not include construction in support of basic public infrastructure are eligible for a maximum award of \$500,000. Projects that include construction in support of basic public infrastructure are eligible for a maximum award of \$1,000,000. Projects classified as construction in support of infrastructure may be eligible for up to an additional \$2,000,000 in funding (for a total maximum award of \$3,000,000) if the project meets one of the following criteria: 1) construction takes place in 2 or more eligible communities/counties/states, OR 2) construction involves 2 or more infrastructure categories (basic public, transportation, renewable energy, or telecommunications). The maximum award amount eligibility will be determined in the pre-application review process conducted by both NBRC and the member states.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING PURPOSE & DESCRIPTION

Catalyst Program funding will be used to support the economic revitalization of Northern Border communities within member states by investing in projects that construct and modernize public infrastructure. With the historic investment of BIL funding, the Catalyst Program has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address the region's infrastructure needs and priorities. The infrastructure funding is a component of the core Catalyst Program and will complement the available economic development project funding.

Congress defines public infrastructure projects in NBRC's authorizing language as "transportation," "basic public," "telecommunications," and "energy." NBRC has defined the eligible infrastructure projects for this competition as follows:

- **Transportation infrastructure** shall mean construction, alteration, or repair, for the purpose of transporting people and goods, including fixed installations and rights of way necessary for transporting from one point to another, including infrastructure that improves economic mobility for individuals, and may include roads, bike lanes, pedestrian ways, multi-use facilities, railways, airways, waterways, canals, and terminals such as airports, railway stations, bus stations, parking, refueling depots (including fueling docks and fuel stations), EV charging stations, EV Make Ready infrastructure, and seaports.
- **Basic public infrastructure** shall mean construction, alteration, or repair, including those services that are generally necessary to conduct business. Public infrastructure are facilities, systems, and structures that are owned or available for use by the public to catalyze economic development, and includes core infrastructure (such as water, wastewater, and energy), critical infrastructure (such as those required to maintain public health and economic vitality), and community infrastructure (such as those

required to improve health outcomes and increase community connectedness). This definition includes specific projects such as: collection and distribution systems, treatment plants and other infrastructure that collects, treats and delivers drinking water and wastewater-related services; electric power generation and transmission to include renewable energy and storage; solid waste to include, recycling, composting, disposal, and waste-to-energy via incineration; systems for heat distribution through sources such as co-generation, biomass, geothermal heating, heat pumps and central solar heating; childcare facilities, outdoor recreation infrastructure and public meeting spaces such as community centers; facilitate and improve health outcomes and physical activity; and increase community connectedness. For the purposes of this program, public safety facilities and equipment are not eligible.

- **Telecommunications infrastructure** shall mean construction, alteration, or repair to accommodate any part of the infrastructure of a telecommunications network, including lines, equipment, apparatus, towers, antennas, etc., and/or cyber infrastructure (routing and switching software, operational support systems, etc.) necessary to transmit information from one location to another, for use, or in connection with, a telecommunications network. Investments in telecommunications infrastructure support reliable and affordable broadband to provide local businesses and entrepreneurs access to the digital marketplace, facilitate online learning and workforce development, and connect communities.
- **Renewable energy** shall mean construction, alteration, or repair of energy infrastructure involving what is generally defined as any naturally occurring, theoretically inexhaustible source of energy, such as biomass, solar, wind, tidal, wave, and hydroelectric power that is not derived from fossil or nuclear fuel. Publicly owned and non-profit entities are eligible. Facilities that are owned by a for-profit entity or who will serve to benefit as a pass-through from an eligible entity will NOT be eligible.

2024 AGENCY INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

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:

- 1) Projects that provide direct benefits to communities that have been underrepresented in past NBRC investments. Priority will be given to projects that demonstrate direct benefits to rural communities with populations of less than 5,000 and disadvantaged communities. NBRC identifies a disadvantaged community as those who suffer from a combination of economic, health and environmental burdens, including high unemployment and poverty, basic resources, or conditions, such as standard housing, medical and educational facilities, and civil rights and vulnerable populations, including minority, low income, rural, tribal, indigenous, homeless, and limited English populations.
- 2) Projects that address multiple needs across eligible infrastructure and non-infrastructure categories. Priority will be given to projects that demonstrate efficiencies gained from including multiple categories in one project.
- 3) Projects that adapt to changing climate conditions and extreme weather events. Priority will be given to projects that demonstrate how they help communities prevent, reduce, withstand, and/or improve recovery from climate related impacts and disasters.

SCORING

NBRC reviews and scores project proposals based on 5 categories: Project Readiness, Alignment with Investment Goals and Program Priorities, Economic Impacts, Project Costs and Match, and Organizational Capacity. The NBRC can award up to a total of 50 points out of the available 100 points based on the following criteria:

- 1) **Project Readiness.** This category reflects an applicant's ability to perform the proposed work within the 3-year performance period and begin to draw down NBRC funds within 12 months of the award date. (10 points)
- 2) **Alignment with Agency Investment Priorities.** This category reviews how a project aligns with the NBRC strategic investment goals and program priorities. The applicant describes how the project meets NBRC investment priorities in the project summary. Projects will receive a higher score based on completeness of addressing relevant investment priorities outlined in the program materials. (15 points)
- 3) **Economic Impacts.** Projects will be reviewed for anticipated economic impact. Economic impacts should be consistent and, where possible, supported by feasibility studies, and/or local, state, or regional data. (10 points)
- 4) **Project Costs and Match.** Budgets and costs, including contingency for construction projects, are clear and reasonable. Projects have identified secured match and are leveraging non- federal funds. (10 points)
- 5) **Organizational Capacity.** Applicants will be evaluated based on past performance for timely completion, collaboration, staff qualifications, and ability to meet program requirements. (5 points)

The remaining 50 points will be awarded by the state program in which the project is proposed. States use a similar set of review criteria with an emphasis on state economic development and infrastructure priorities. State program scoring criteria is available in the Catalyst Program User Manual.

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)
- Federally recognized Indian Tribes; § 200.54 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 community and economic development.

INELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

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.

COMMISSION SERVICE AREA

Only projects within the NBRC's service area are eligible for funding under [40 U.S.C. §15733](#). For 2024, the NBRC service area is:

- 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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

The application submission process is the same for infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects. The Catalyst Program will run two funding rounds in 2024, with pre-application deadlines on March 15 and September 6, and full application deadlines on May 3 and October 18, respectively.

Pre-applications are required for funding consideration. Pre-applications will be reviewed for eligibility, maximum award amounts based on project classification as either infrastructure or non-infrastructure, and adherence to both NBRC agency priorities and state program priorities. Full applications will only be accepted from those entities expressly invited to apply at the pre-application phase and must be submitted using NBRC's online application system.

Interested and invited applicants should refer to the 2024 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 in January 2024.

CONTACTS

Please visit the NBRC Catalyst Program website for information on eligibility and project development. Questions related to eligibility and NBRC agency priorities can be directed to NBRC Catalyst Program Manager, Adrienne Harrison. Questions related to project development and state program priorities can be directed to the NBRC Program Manager in the state(s) where the proposed project will take place.

NBRC's Catalyst Program Manager: Adrienne Harrison, aharrison@nbrc.gov or 603.369.3001

NBRC State Program Managers

- Maine: Charlotte Mace, charlotte.mace@maine.gov or 207.624.7448
- New Hampshire: Steve Fortier, steven.j.fortier@livefree.nh.gov or 603.688.5918
- Vermont: Kristie Farnham, kristie.farnham@vermont.gov or 802.398.5268
- New York: Kyle Wilber, kyle.wilber@dos.ny.gov or 518.473.3694

Additional Catalyst Program information can be found on NBRC's website www.nbrc.gov