



2025 USER MANUAL FOREST ECONOMY PROGRAM

All 2025 dates are subject to change.

Pre-application (Required) Deadlines

March 7, 2025 (Spring Round)

August 29, 2025 (Fall Round)

Application by Invitation Only Deadlines

April 18, 2025 (Spring Round)

October 10, 2025 (Fall Round)

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INTRODUCTION

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. NBRC investment funds originate from the Federal Government but are approved by the Federal Government's NBRC representative (Federal Co-Chair) and the Governors of the four States. The mission of the Northern Border Regional Commission is to catalyze community vitality and economic prosperity in the northern border region with flexible funding and strategic support.

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 4-state NBRC region.

The Forest Economy Program will prioritize funding for projects that demonstrate both readiness and projected direct impacts on the region's forest economy and communities. Projects must be consistent with the Program investment priorities of the Forest Economy Program, and where applicable, advance local forest economy initiatives.

PROGRAM INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

- Invest in the development and commercialization of technologies that create and grow needed markets for low-grade forest harvest residuals.
- Invest in workforce recruitment, development, and training to increase job placement across the forest product continuum.
- Help to sustain and grow existing forest industry businesses and operations, such as through technical assistance.
- 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.
- Leverage new or existing partnerships that positively impact either a portion or all of the NBRC region, and/or have the potential to do so.

LOCAL FOREST ECONOMY INITIATIVES

[Forest Opportunity Roadmap Maine \(FOR/Maine\)](#)

[Maine Tech Hub](#)

[New Hampshire Forest Action Plan](#) (with special attention to the goals and strategies listed under Focus Area – Forest Based Economy, starting on page 149)

[Vermont Forest Future Strategic Roadmap](#)

New York State Forest Action Plan (with special attention to the focus areas and strategies within Goal #3: Increase Forest Benefits for Humans and All Living Creatures)

PART I. PROGRAM INFORMATION

SECTION A. GENERAL INFORMATION

I. AVAILABLE FUNDING

Fiscal Year 2025 federal appropriations have not been finalized. An estimated \$5 million may be made available for awards under this Forest Economy Program subject to the availability of future appropriations. Any selection and award under this Forest Economy Program are subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

II. PROJECT CATEGORIES

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 to impact the forest-based economy 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 industry.*

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

Full descriptions and examples of the above project categories can be found in section C of this document.

III. AWARD SIZE

Forest Economy projects are eligible for an award up to \$1,000,000.

IV. PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

Projects funded under the 2025 Forest Economy Program will have a three-year period of performance. Projects should consider time needed to complete NEPA review, permitting, and procurement. If your project will take longer than three years from the time of award, the project should apply in a future round when it can be finished within the three-year period.

V. COMMISSION SERVICE AREA

Only projects within the NBRC's service area are eligible for funding under 40 U.S.C. §15733. 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, Wyoming and Yates counties.

Vermont: all counties within the State

*With active awards in Schoharie County from another federal commission, the county is not currently eligible for NBRC funding in FY 2025 per NBRC's statute and has not been included in distress calculations.

VI. ANNUAL DISTRESS CRITERIA

By statute, the NBRC is required to annually assess the level of economic and demographic distress within its region. Levels of economic and demographic distress are defined in 40 U.S.C. Subtitle V, §15702. Assessing distress is important as the resulting designations reflect whether the Commission can provide grants within a county as well as what level of match is required of Commission funded projects. For more details on the Annual Distress Criteria, county designations, and matching requirements, visit the NBRC's [Assessing Distress Criteria webpage](#).

NBRC funds may not be awarded to projects located within a designated Attainment County. There are three exceptions to this:

1. **Isolated Areas of Distress**

When a county is designated as Attainment, the Commission will 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. For a listing of the Isolated Areas of Distress see the Distress Criteria on the NBRC website.

If a project is located within an Isolated Area of Distress, an application may be submitted, but the applicant must indicate the location of the isolated area in the application. The match ratio for Isolated Areas of Distress projects is 50%.

2. **Multi-County Projects**

Projects within an Attainment County may be funded if the project is part of a multi-county project that includes at least one other Distressed or Transitional County. Match for multi-county projects will be the average of the counties that make up the project.

3. **Significant Benefit Waiver:**

There are two exceptions that **require** a Significant Benefit Waiver to allow those projects, applicants or co-applicants that fall outside of the areas that meet the Commission's annual distress criteria to apply for NBRC funds. Those exceptions are:

- An exception exists for **projects** located within an Attainment County but outside of one of the identified "Isolated Areas of Distress" that will bring significant economic benefits to NBRC Distressed or Transitional counties. See significant benefit waiver requirements detailed below and within **Appendix E**.
- An exception exists for **applicants or co-applicants** with established operations located outside of the NBRC service area but within a member state when the project that will bring significant economic benefits to NBRC Distressed or Transitional counties. See significant benefit waiver requirements detailed below and within **Appendix E**.

If an exception applies, the applicant must request Significant Benefit Waiver to be eligible to receive NBRC funds. To be considered, the Significant Benefit Waiver must:

- **Be submitted with the pre-application before 5:00pm EST on due date. See Appendix B – Forest Economy Program Timeline.**
- **Include a fully executed waiver request**

- **Include narrative and supporting documents** showing clear and convincing evidence of a project’s economic impact to NBRC Distressed or Transitional counties
- **Include description of costs and activities** that will take place in distressed counties, transitional counties, attainment counties, or outside the NBRC service area. This information will be used in the waiver review process to determine the eligible reimbursement/match ratio.

Be approved by the Federal Co-Chair and the Governor’s Alternates of the four NBRC States

See **Appendix E** for waiver details and affidavit. **Any applicant or co-applicant that is required to submit a Significant Benefit Waiver and does not submit the required waiver request and required documentation will have their pre-application marked as **ineligible for further review**.**

The match ratio for projects with an approved Significant Benefits Waiver is based on the amount of funds invested in distressed or transitional counties.

- A project with more than 50% of requested NBRC funds invested in a distressed county is eligible for the 80% reimbursement, **20% match ratio**.
- A project with more than 50% of requested NBRC funds invested in a transitional county is eligible for the 50% reimbursement, **50% match ratio**.
- A project with more than 50% of requested NBRC funds being invested in both distressed and transitional counties is eligible for an **averaged match ratio**.
- A project with more than 50% of requested funds invested in an Attainment County, outside of an Areas of Isolated Distress is eligible for the 50% reimbursement, **50% match ratio**.
- If more than 50% of requested funds will be used by the applicant/co-applicant entity to support administration of the project outside of a distressed or transitional county, the project is eligible for the 50% reimbursement, **50% match ratio**.

SECTION B. PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AND INELIGIBILITY

I. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

The NBRC Forest Economy funding is available to:

- **State governments** of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York
- **Local governments** (village, town, city, and county)
- **Secondary and career technical centers**
- **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). 501(c) non-profit entities must be able to demonstrate they have established operations in a member state and they have federal grant experience related to economic development.
- **Federally recognized Indian Tribes** (2 CFR § 200.54 Indian tribe) (or “federally recognized Indian tribe”). See annually published [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#) list of Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services

II. INELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Ineligible applicants include for-profit entities, LLCs and other entities that are not a 501(c) organization under [40 U.S.C. §15101\(c\)](#). Entities that are normally eligible but have an unsatisfactory federal or state funding history are also not eligible. A non-profit entity identified by a state that does not have a federally recognized 501(c) status is also not eligible.

III. INELIGIBLE PURPOSES

No pass-through funding will be awarded. Eligible entities cannot act as channels for ineligible entities like private businesses or other entities that are not listed as Co-Applicants. Property purchased with NBRC funding cannot, in turn, be sold or donated to the private entity beneficiary.

- No financial assistance will be authorized to assist any relocation from one area of the region to another.
- NBRC investment funds cannot be used to “supplant” existing federal programs.
- 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. [40 USC §15506\(e\)](#). An exception exists for projects where NBRC is neither the sole nor primary federal source of funding. See [Section D, Part III: Federal Funding Ceiling](#).
- Projects that promote unfair competition between businesses with the same immediate service area are not eligible.

III. ELIGIBLE COSTS

After receiving a Notice to Proceed from NBRC, Forest Economy Program funds may be used for:

- Reasonable fees to contractors (but not any fee or profit to the recipient or sub-recipient)
- Construction and pre-construction costs such as engineering
- Costs for bid, performance, or payment bonds
- Indirect costs for work performed by the recipient’s staff. Indirect cost must be documented by a Federal Cognizant Agent or an entity acting on their behalf and documented by a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, submitted with the

application. If you do not have a federally approved indirect cost rate (like many non-profits), the de minimis rate of 15% can be used as the indirect cost rate for the application.

- Costs outlined in the Federal Cost Principles (Uniform Guidance 2CFR 200).
- All project-related costs must be included in the project budget (SF-424cbw)

IV. INELIGIBLE COSTS

- Application preparation
- Food and beverages*
- Meals and lodging
- Alcohol
- Entertainment
- Appraisals of property to be purchased or used as match
- Allowance or payment of debts
- Maintenance, including routine, deferred, and short-term operational needs
- Any costs committed or spent before receiving a Notice to Proceed. This includes both NBRC funds and any funds documented as match for the project
- Project costs committed or spent before receiving a Notice to Proceed from NBRC

*NBRC will only cover the cost of food and beverages when being purchased for the express purpose of a conference or forum held in support of the project and is clearly outlined in the project budget. NBRC will not cover the costs of alcoholic beverages, or tips associated with the purchase of food or beverages.

V. NBRC PRIOR AWARD RECIPIENTS

An applicant or co-applicant with an open NBRC award under any NBRC program is not eligible for additional NBRC funding until the open project has both requested reimbursement for 75% or more of the awarded funds and demonstrated that 75% or more of the cost share has been **spent by February 1, 2025 [Spring round] or August 1, 2025 [Fall round]**.

If the 75% expenditure requirement has not been met, the entity can apply for a waiver. To be eligible for additional NBRC funding, the 75% Expenditure Waiver request must:

- **Be submitted with the pre-application before 5:00pm EST on due date. See Appendix B – Forest Economy Program Timeline.**
- **Include a fully executed Affidavit**
- **Include supporting narrative and documentation** describing the status of the open project, delays encountered (if applicable), expected completion date of the previous NBRC award(s), capacity to complete previous award(s) and take on a new project.
- **Be approved by NBRC and the State(s) where the prior award(s) were made.**

Any applicant or co-applicant with an open NBRC award that does not meet the 75% expenditure requirement **and** does not submit the required 75% Expenditure Waiver request will have their pre-application marked as **ineligible for further review**.

Please see Appendix D of this manual for the 75% expenditure requirement and waiver policy, including documentation needed to support the waiver request.

SECTION C. PROGRAM FUNDING CATEGORIES

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 to impact the forest-based economy 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 industry. Infrastructure categories are further described below.

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:

I. Community Development

Projects that support the diversified use of forests within the Northern Border Regional Commission's service area for economic activity to include wood products and advanced materials manufacturing, as well as for other economic activity that utilizes northern border forests sustainably and demonstrates planning for extreme weather readiness.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Utilization of wood-based heating technologies and/or "Mass Timber" products (e.g., Cross-laminated timber) in public use projects (prioritizing locally sourced* wood products where possible)
- Collaborative efforts to support communities negatively impacted by the decline in the forest-based economy to attract new wood-utilizing enterprises

*For the purposes of this program, "locally sourced" means sourced, where possible, within the four state NBRC region.

II. Workforce [re] training and development

Projects with a focus on building the skills and recruiting and retaining the workforce needed for forest businesses.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Development and marketing of targeted workforce programs to support identified employers' needs for a skilled workforce (i.e., new technology, safety, apprenticeship, etc.)
- Training and recruitment programs that prepare participants for careers in logging, forestry, and related businesses

III. Business planning and technical assistance

Projects that enhance the viability and sustainability of new and existing forest businesses.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Technical assistance, training in business skills, and access to financing to local forest industry businesses

IV. Marketing/communication and education

This category must be paired with one or more of the above project priorities (#'s 1-3).

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Marketing and communications that promote the benefits of northern border forests
- Marketing to promote forest products and management in ways that strengthen markets for wood products.
- Forest resource planning and industry supply chain analysis projects.
- Life cycle analysis projects for wood products

Research: Basic research projects will not be considered. Preference will be given to applied research and demonstration projects that demonstrate a strong connection to industry.

V. Infrastructure in direct support of the forest economy

Infrastructure projects (defined by Congress in NBRC's authorizing language to be inclusive of "transportation", "basic public", "telecommunications, and "energy") must directly support the forest industry. Projects with a renewable energy component will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis for consistency with the "Unleashing American Energy" Executive Order.

Transportation Infrastructure:

Construction, alteration, or repair of physical transport facilities, systems and structures, including fixed installations and rights of way necessary for transporting from one point to another, that:

- are open to the general public for use,
- facilitate reliable movement of people and goods, and
- influence local and regional economies.

Transportation Infrastructure may include: runways, taxiways, aircraft parking areas, passenger and cargo terminals, ground transportation interchanges, roads, bridges, tunnels, sidewalks, bike paths, bike lanes, bus stations, parking, refueling depots, freight and passenger rail lines or tracks, rail yards, railway stations, special rail systems such as trams and light rail, canals, seaports, harbors, waterways, cargo and ferry terminals, commercial wharves, docking areas, and port services. Transportation infrastructure projects that can incorporate the use of innovative wood products should consider NBRC's [Timber for Transit Program](#).

Basic Public Infrastructure:

Construction, alteration or repair of assets, facilities, systems and structures that are:

- open to the general public for use,
- crucial to the functioning of an economy, and
- provide the foundation for economic growth in the community and region.

Basic Public Infrastructure may include: drinking water and wastewater systems including collection and distribution systems, treatment plants and other infrastructure that collects, treats and delivers drinking water and wastewater; flood control systems such as water retention, slow flow, and diversion strategies. Solid waste to include recycling, composting, disposal, and waste-to-energy via incineration; heat generation systems including cogeneration, biomass, geothermal heating, heat pumps, and central solar heating; childcare facilities; and healthcare facilities. Outdoor recreation trails and facilities that demonstrate increased health and social benefits, support resident attraction and retention goals and increase sustainable outdoor recreation tourism as part of a coordinated effort. In measuring eligibility of outdoor recreation infrastructure, NBRC defines these projects as recreational activities undertaken for pleasure that generally involve some level of intentional physical exertion and occur in nature-based environments outdoors. Public meeting spaces must include a focus on increasing community connectedness. Public meeting spaces such as town halls or community centers must also meet the general basic public infrastructure requirements.

Telecommunications Infrastructure:

Construction, alteration, or repair to the systems, networks and components that:

- aid in the transmission of information or signals,
- are crucial to running a modern, industrialized economy, and
- provide the foundation for communication services.

Telecommunications Infrastructure may include: Passive infrastructure or non-electronic infrastructure such as lines, equipment, apparatus, towers, and antennas; cyber infrastructure such as routing and switching software, operational support systems; wired, wireless, and hybrid network infrastructure such as network nodes, network services, telecom services, and satellite systems; Communication networks in support of remote outdoor recreation search and rescue operations and capabilities.

SECTION D. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

I. MATCH and COST SHARE*

Match is the minimum amount of funds or contributions needed from other sources to complete the NBRC-funded project.

Cost share is the total amount of all other funds needed to complete the project. To calculate the required match, multiply the NBRC award amount by the designated match ratio for the project location. Refer to Section XV (above) of this Manual to determine the applicable match ratio for your project.

The recipient will be required to document that funds necessary to complete the project are committed to receive a Notice to Proceed.

Match and cost share identified in an application must be committed within one year of grant award. This date allows for extraordinary situations that may occur. If an applicant will have difficulty securing match and cost share necessary within one year of grant award, the applicant should consider postponing the application until a later date.

With the following qualifications and exceptions, matching or cost sharing requirements may be satisfied by any of the following:

- **Applicant is providing match and/or cost share:** Letter from the appropriate authority stating that the entity will provide the cost share. Letter is required to have the following elements:
 1. state the amount of the commitment;
 2. the dates the commitment will cover, consistent with the period of performance;
 3. that the funds are for the purpose outlined in the application; and
 4. document hours dedicated to project as differentiated from their “normal employment” responsibilities.

If the funds will be used for paying staff within the applicant's organization, the letter should also state the following:

1. the # of hours staff are anticipated for work on the project;
 2. the pay of those staff (hourly rate); and
 3. the indirect cost rate that will be used (if applicable).
- **Municipal lending:** NBRC requires proof of authorization to spend. This may be different for different states, and may take the form of city council approval, Town or City manager approval, or demonstration of town meeting approval. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that they have the appropriate authority to loan/bond funds for the project, but there must be some sort of authorization documented.
 - **Commitment from project partner:** A letter is required to have the following elements:
 1. state the amount of the commitment;
 2. the date that the award was made; and
 3. the purpose of the funds must match the scope outlined in the application.

Please note - A letter of submission, or status notification of 'application received' or 'pending' is NOT a letter of commitment.

- **Volunteer Services:** Provide a written plan of how the volunteer donation amount will be calculated. (Ex: 4 meetings a year, taking place quarterly that are expected to last 1.5 hours and 5 volunteers will participate. $4 \times 1.5 \times 5 = 30$ hours \times $24.14 = \$723.60$.) The volunteer rate may be used as cost share and should be consistent with the national average 0, or consist of the professional fee charged in any situation. Volunteers may not be: a) counted for the same activity in a different project (counted twice), or b) be federal employees. Additionally, their time must be recorded and be submitted as an invoice. You may include any Indirect Cost Rate in addition to the volunteer rate. Note: the rate that is calculated at the time of the grant agreement will be the rate for the remaining project period until project completion. While the national rates may fluctuate, it is not feasible to renegotiate these rates during the project period. In-kind services in the form of volunteers on a construction site are highly discouraged.
- **Municipal Force Accounts:** Applicants must document that they have experienced staff. Force account work is limited to work that the municipality can demonstrate is within the technical skill and managerial ability of the applicant and its forces. The applicant must provide an accounting of time and costs and provide appropriate documentation of indirect costs, if being used. Both salaries of staff and cost of mobilization and fees for vehicles may be counted as cost share when those costs are appropriately documented.
- **Land or other donated real property or equipment:** 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 prior to issuing a Notice to Proceed if the project is

being donated. RE EQUIPMENT: The entity that is donating equipment must provide a letter with the following elements: 1. Date that the equipment will be transferred to the grantee; 2. market value of the equipment; 3. a description of the equipment, and 4. A statement that the donation is for the purpose of the project as detailed in the grant agreement. [NOTE: 2 CFR 200.306(i)(1) does not address the timing of the donation of property]

Cost sharing or matching requirements may be met by other Federal grants when authorized by those other agencies, but only up to 80% of the total project cost. An exception exists for projects where NBRC is neither the sole nor primary federal source of funding. See Section D, Part III: Federal Funding Ceiling.

Neither costs, nor the value of third-party in-kind contributions, may count towards satisfying a cost sharing requirement of a grant agreement if they have been or will be counted towards satisfying a cost sharing requirement of another Federal grant agreement, a federal procurement contract, or any other award of Federal funds in another project.

Costs and third-party in-kind contributions counting towards satisfying a cost sharing requirement must be verifiable from the records of the applicant. These records must show how the value placed on third party in-kind contributions was derived. To the extent feasible, volunteer services will be supported by the same methods that the organization uses to support the allocability of regular personnel costs.

It is required to treat program income under the deductive method as outlined in 2CFR 200.307(e)(1). This means that if program income is received it will reduce the NBRC award amount. Program income can be treated under the additive alternate contained in 2 CFR 200.307(e)(2) or the cost share alternative in 2 CFR 200.307(e)(3) if the applicant has received approval from the NBRC. This does not apply to Revolving Loan Fund projects. See the Appendix I of this manual for how program income is treated under a RLF project.

II. MULTI-STATE PROJECTS

Applications that cover multiple states are acceptable. Applications that cover multiple states should connect with the state program managers from each state in which proposed project is located. If yours is a multi-state or multi county application, please make sure to include within your application a comprehensive list of the counties and states in which the project will occur.

III. FEDERAL FUNDING CEILING

Cost sharing or matching requirements may be met by other Federal grants where authorized for up to 80% of the total project cost, so as not to exceed the maximum federal contribution allowed as outlined in 40 U.S.C. Subtitle V §15506: Supplements to

Federal grant programs. NBRC funds can however be used to satisfy *the non-federal cost sharing or match requirements* for a project under another Federal grant program for which NBRC is not the sole or primary funding source as outlined in 40 USC 15507. *In these instances, NBRC funds would not count towards the federal share of the total project cost.*

SECTION E. PROGRAM INVESTMENT PRIORITIES AND SCORING

I. 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.

II. PROGRAM SCORING

Projects are scored based on how fully and thoroughly the applicant addresses each item listed in the Program Scoring Criteria. NBRC and the Program Managers from the states of Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont will coordinate application scoring for each of the rating criteria and present results to the Commission. The Governor's Alternates and the Federal Co-Chair will vote on the projects selected for funding.

With review and sector specific feedback from the Forest Economy Program Advisory Board, NBRC and State Program Managers review and score project proposals based on six categories: Agency Investment Priorities, Project Budget, Approach and

Methodology, Forest Economy Sector Impacts, Project Readiness, and Capacity and Qualifications. **See Appendix K for the full scoring criteria matrix.**

The NBRC and member states can award up to a total of 100 points based on the criteria below. Final scores will be calculated based on an average of NBRC and member state project scores. ***Projects that fall short of an 80-point threshold will not be considered for funding.***

- 1. Agency Investment Priorities.** This category reviews how project fits within the Forest Economy Program purpose and investment goals and program priorities. The applicant describes how the project meets program priorities in the project summary. Projects will receive a higher score based on completeness of addressing relevant investment priorities and project categories outlined in the program materials. (25 points)
- 2. Project Budget.** Budgets and costs, including contingency for construction projects, are clear and reasonable. Projects have identified secured match and are leveraging non-federal funds. (15 points)
- 3. Approach and Methodology.** Applicants clearly explain the approach and methodology that will be used to undertake the project including major tasks, partnerships and other necessary details to describe what is necessary to complete the project in a timely manner. Where possible, projects should address the sustainability of the project beyond the grant. (10 points)
- 4. Forest Economy Sector Impacts.** Projects will be reviewed for anticipated forest sector impact. Economic impacts should be consistent and, where possible, supported by feasibility studies, and/or local, state, or regional data. Where possible, projects should make connections to local forest economy initiatives. (25 points)
- 5. 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 award date. (10 points)
- 6. Capacity and Qualifications.** Applicants should demonstrate they have sufficient organizational capacity to successfully meet NBRC program requirements (ability to complete project on time, staff qualifications, partnerships, etc). If an applicant has received prior NBRC awards, their performance in administering those awards will also be considered. (15 points)

In addition to the above scoring categories, 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, the NBRC and the States will also consider the costs and expected benefits associated with the requested NBRC investment, projects identified as a state priority, as well as the benefits provided to the broader community and region. When selecting projects for

funding, NBRC and the States will also consider a balanced geographic distribution of investments, state prioritization, as well as state, community, or regionally supported need for the project.

III. PROGRAM SCORING CRITERIA

NBRC and each State scores all eligible applications received independently, utilizing the scoring criteria provided within this manual. Final scores are calculated based on an average of NBRC and State scores. **The maximum point value is 100. A project's final score must meet the minimum 80-point threshold to be considered for funding.**

NBRC reviews projects and determines eligibility of the applicant, co-applicant and use of funds

Please see **Appendix K** for the Forest Economy Program scoring matrix.

PART II. APPLYING FOR NBRC FUNDS

All applicants are now required to submit their pre-application and application through NBRC's [web-based Grants Management System](#). Paper and e-mailed submissions will not be considered for funding.

SECTION A. REGISTRATION

The first step in preparing for a submission through NBRC's grants management system (GMS) is to register your organization. Registration can be done at any time. We have prepared guidance documents and resources to help you complete this process. Please visit the [NBRC Resources page](#) where you will find the [Grants Management System – Registration Guidance Document](#) and two recorded videos specifically focused on the Registration process.

You will need the following information on hand to successfully complete your registration:

- Your Employer Identification Number (EIN);
- Your Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number. You can obtain a UEI for free by registering with [SAM.gov](#);
- The County where your entity is organized to do business;
- The name and contact information of your Authorized Official (limited to one individual). The **Authorized Official** is the executive that has been granted permission to sign all NBRC investment documents that bind the applicant. When submitting an application, you will be required to submit an official resolution from the applicant's legal authority documenting the name and title of the person authorized to act on behalf of the entity. **Only Authorized Officials may sign NBRC documents that bind the applicant, including Registering the applicant in the GMS.**
- The name and contact information of 1 other individual authorized to work on your pre-application and application. There is a limit of 2 project contacts. Associating an LDD contact does not count toward project contact total.

After you submit your registration, NBRC will review it for completeness and eligibility. This process may take 1 to 2 business days. NBRC will either Approve or Reject the registration. If approved, the organization's Authorized Official will get an email about the approval and another email to set up their account's username and password. If rejected, the organization's Authorized Official will receive an explanation.

SECTION B. PRE-APPLICATION

A pre-application is **required** for the FOREST ECONOMY PROGRAM. **Pre-applications must be submitted with the pre-application before 5:00pm EST on due date. See [Appendix B – Forest Economy Program Timeline](#).**

Pre-applications must be submitted using the NBRC Grants Management System. Detailed instructions are available on the NBRC website in the [Pre-application Guidance Document](#) on the [Resources](#) page.

- Applicants must register for an account with the NBRC Grants Management System **before** submitting a pre-application. See [Section A. Registration](#) above for details.
- Many resources are available on the [Resources](#) page of the NBRC website to help you with your pre-application. Click on “**Grant Administration Information and Grants Management System (GMS) Guidance Documents**” to find a library of helpful resources and forms.
- All waiver requests **must** be submitted with the pre-application. See the **Forms and Files Tab** section below for details.
 - **The pre-application will be marked as ineligible if a 75% Expenditure Waiver and/or a Significant Benefits Waiver is required and NOT submitted.**

EARLY PRE-APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT STEPS:

Before the GMS opens for pre-application submissions, applicants can start preparing their pre-applications. Some helpful first steps include:

- Review program materials, focusing on eligibility and funding priorities for this program.
- Watch a recorded Program Information Session. For details, visit t <https://www.nbrc.gov/content/FEP>.
- Contact NBRC with questions regarding eligibility and NBRC funding priorities (found in Part I Section E of this manual).
- Discuss projects with your State Program Manager to ensure they align with relevant [Local Forest Economy Initiatives](#).
- Discuss projects with Advisory Board members to strengthen connections to local initiatives and identified regional forest economy needs.
- Check eligibility requirements to see if your project needs a waiver with the pre-application. Waiver details are available in the Appendices of this Manual.
- Review NBRC’s [NEPA page](#). All applicants **must** include NEPA in their project budget and timeline regardless of project type and other state or federal funder requirements.

PRE-APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT:

Detailed instructions for using the online GMS to submit a pre-application and two recorded videos are available on the NBRC website on the [Program Areas page](#).

Please review these instructions before starting your pre-application in the GMS. The information provided below is intended to supplement those resources.

After reviewing all support materials, you may want to write your narrative responses in a word processing document to then copy and paste into the GMS pre-application text boxes.

Here are some recommendations to ensure your pre-application is complete and competitive:

- **Project title** – Please give your project a unique title that provides a brief description of your project. Example: Smithville Wastewater Expansion Project
- **Co-applicant** – List any co-applicants that will play a role in the completion of your project. Co-applicants **must** meet all the same eligibility requirements as an applicant and must be included in your pre-application in order to directly benefit from NBRC funds without going through an open and competitive bid process. An entity that owns a property receiving the benefit of an NBRC investment must be included as a co-applicant.

OVERVIEW TAB - Project Information

Responses in this section should be concise but give enough information so that someone who is not familiar with your community, region and organization will understand your project.

Competitive projects will show how they support the NBRC and your State's funding priorities, what specific activities will be completed with NBRC funding, and the expected outcomes.

Each narrative text box has limited formatting, so keep your responses simple. Do not paste tables, bullets or text with extensive formatting into the text box. Do not attach lengthy reports to your pre-application. Please provide weblinks to studies and reports that support your project.

PROJECT ABSTRACT narrative guidance: The Project Abstract should explain the basic idea of the project and how it fits with the Forest Economy Program. It should be more than 2-3 paragraphs long and include the following information:

- **Primary purpose:** State the main goal, project location, beneficiaries, and expected economic impacts.
- **Funding Category:** List which NBRC Program Funding Category(ies) your project fits into and briefly explain why.
- **Project Scope:** Describe what planning has been done, if parts of the project are already underway, what will be done with NBRC funding, and the project's timeline.

PROJECT GOALS AND OUTCOMES narrative guidance: NBRC and State programs both place a strong emphasis on direct and indirect economic impacts of a project. The project goals and outcomes should clearly describe how the project meets an economic

need or opportunity in the region, alleviates economic distress, and contributes to economic growth. The goals and outcomes narrative should be 1-2 paragraphs long and include the following information:

- Provide a robust but realistic description of the expected direct economic outcomes (e.g. impacts on jobs, employment, business opportunity, wage growth) of this project. Appendix G lists examples of Economic Outcomes and Outputs. Choose those that best apply to your project. Competitive proposals will include supporting documentation such as letters of support, relevant studies or plans that back up your claims.
- Describe how the project aligns with your State’s economic development strategies and other community economic development plans.
- Describe the scale of expected *direct* economic impacts on the community, county, or region.
- Consider project sustainability. Explain if and how the proposed work/program/infrastructure will be sustained beyond the life of the grant.

PROJECT BENEFICIARIES AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT narrative guidance: The Project Beneficiaries and Community Context narrative should be 1-2 paragraphs long and include the following information: Describe who will benefit from your project and why this project matters to the community, region and/or State.

STATEMENT OF NEED narrative guidance: The statement of need narrative should be 1-2 paragraphs long and include the following information:

- Describe why the project is important, the challenge or problem the project seeks to address and how it relates to NBRC and State investment priorities.
- Describe the proposed solution and the opportunity gained by funding this project now and why NBRC funding is important for this project.

PROGRAM INVESTMENT PRIORITIES narrative guidance: Refer to the NBRC Agency Investment Priorities and State Scoring Criteria in this Program User Manual to help you answer this section. The program investment priorities narrative should be 2-3 paragraphs long and include the following information:

- Describe how your project will address NBRC Agency Investment Priorities. You may choose to provide additional details and documentation regarding your project’s alignment with NBRC Agency Investment Priorities in the **Project Beneficiaries and Community Context** section.
- If applicable, describe how your project helps the community prevent, reduce, withstand, and/or improve recovery from extreme weather impacts and disasters. Highly competitive projects will include supporting documentation from reports, articles and letters of support.
- Describe and document how your project will address state priorities. If you’re unsure about alignment with state priorities, consider connecting with your State Program Manager. NBRC recommends interested applicants in Maine, New York and Vermont complete the [Project Interest Form](#) *before* meeting with their State Program Manager. Interested applicants in New Hampshire are encouraged to

sign up for the [technical assistance program](#) that is available in eligible New Hampshire counties and communities.

Have you previously received NBRC funds? If yes, please provide NBRC grant number. If you believe you have received an NBRC grant in the past, but are not sure of the NBRC grant number, please email admin@nbrc.gov and we will provide you with that information.

Does this project serve a rural community with a population of less than 5,000?

Please include a simple yes or no response. If yes, provide documentation (census data, municipal or planning reports, etc...) that your project is located within a community of <5,000 people. Proposals that do not include documentation will not receive points for this scoring category.

Does this project benefit an underserved community? NBRC has statutory authority to define areas within the region as distressed, according to 40 USC 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 or conditions, such as sub-standard housing, medical and educational facilities, and civil rights concerns are communities which may be most applicable. See **Appendix H** for additional resources on identifying underserved communities in the NBRC region.

Please provide documentation only for the town(s) where NBRC funds will be spent or target population(s) to be served. You may also discuss the scale of the impact to the region or population to be impacted. Proposals that do not include documentation will not receive points for this scoring criteria. If applicable, provide documentation (census data, municipal or planning reports, etc...) that your project benefits an underserved community.

Overview Tab - Project Contacts:

There is a limit of two project contacts for each application. One must be the Authorized Official with designated signing authority in the GMS and you may add one other project contact who will be responsible for working on your NBRC grant submission. Please include their contact information and role in the project. Detailed instructions for [Adding Users in the GMS](#) is available on the [Resources Page](#).

In addition to the 2 project contacts, you may also associate the contact of your Local Development District (LDD). Your LDD may be a resource for developing your proposal or able to connect you to technical assistance services.

Locations Tab:

List only the County(ies) and State(s) where project activities will occur. Do not include County(ies) and State(s) that may be impacted as a result of your project.

Budget Tab:

All information provided within the Budget section should be consistent and align with information provided in the Overview section of your pre-application. NBRC has prepared a variety of supplemental resources to assist you with budget development and common budget related errors in the GMS, which are located on the [Resources page](#) of our website.

If you are invited to submit a full application, the information you provide in this section will carry over to your application. Budget details provided in your pre-application may be preliminary and based on the information available at the time. If you are invited to submit an application, you will need to update any budget details that have changed.

Budget Tab – Budget Periods Table:

Use the Budget Periods table to map out expected project costs by category and funding source. These budget categories align with the SF-424cbw budget form which will be required for those invited to submit a full application.

Helpful Tips:

- Your Budget Periods table must include costs for NEPA in the Consultants budget line.
- If you choose to utilize LDD assistance, costs must be included in the Consultants budget line. Note: LDDs are compensated for their grant administration services through a reimbursement process with the grantee. The grant administration fee for all NBRC awards of \$400,000 or less is \$8,000. The grant administration fee for all NBRC awards above \$400,000 is based on the formula of 2% of the NBRC requested amount.
- The match must meet or exceed the minimum required match amount based on your project location. If you do not enter an adequate match amount, you will receive an error message. Detailed online GMS guidance is available to navigate error messages and submitting the pre-application.
- Identify how project costs will be allocated between the NBRC share and matching funds.
- No more than 80% of total project costs can come from federal funds (including NBRC share). 40 USC §15506(e). An exception exists for projects where NBRC is neither the sole nor primary federal source of funding. See [Section D, Part III: Federal Funding Ceiling](#).
- Information in this section must be consistent with information provided in the **Budget Narrative** and **Funding Sources Table**.

Budget Tab - Budget Narrative:

The Budget Narrative is used to describe and justify the costs listed in the Budget Periods table and should provide enough information to understand how NBRC funds will be spent. All expenses over \$5,000 must be listed with a description of the cost and an explanation of how the cost was determined. Please clarify which parts of your budget are estimates, based on quotes or fixed price.

Budget Tab-Funding Sources Table:

In the Funding Sources table, you will list the source (name and federal or non-federal), type (loan, grant, other), amount, date of commitment or anticipated date of commitment, and status (secured/committed, pending/anticipated). Total amounts in this table must align with total amounts in the Budget Periods Table.

Helpful Tips:

- Do not enter funds requested from NBRC in this table.
- No more than 80% of total project costs can come from federal funds (including NBRC share). 40 USC §15506(e). An exception exists for projects where NBRC is neither the sole nor primary federal source of funding. See Section D, Part III: Federal Funding Ceiling.
- NBRC funds may be used to match other federally funded projects (when both federal agencies allow).
- NBRC funds may not be used to “supplant” existing federal programs.

Forms & Files Tab:

At the time of pre-application, there are three waiver documents to consider in the Forms and Files section. **If you intend to submit a waiver, it must be done during the pre-application phase.**

- **75% Expenditure Waiver:** This waiver is applicable for those organizations that have an open NBRC grant with a remaining balance of more than 25% of the original grant award. See Appendix D for more details.
- **Significant Benefit Waiver:** This waiver is applicable in two instances which are described below. See Appendix E for more details.
 1. An exception exists for **projects** located within an Attainment County but outside of one of the identified “Isolated Areas of Distress” that will bring significant economic benefits to NBRC Distressed or Transitional counties.
 2. An exception exists for **applicants or co-applicants** with established operations located outside of the NBRC service area but within a member state when the project that will bring significant economic benefits to NBRC Distressed or Transitional counties.

EVALUATION OF PRE-APPLICATIONS:

The evaluation of pre-applications includes three factors:

1. NBRC reviews pre-applications for eligibility, including eligible project locations, eligible applicant and co-applicant criteria, and waiver completion.
 - Pre-applications that are found to be eligible will receive further review.
 - Pre-applications that are found to be ineligible will receive a response from NBRC that includes a description of the ineligible determination.
2. With sector specific feedback from the Forest Economy Program Advisory Board, NBRC and States review pre-applications for alignment with the Forest Economy Program priorities. The priorities are highlighted in the Forest Economy Program

scoring criteria, available in [Appendix K](#). Eligible pre-applications will be prioritized based on alignment with NBRC priorities.

3. NBRC and State Programs will also consider a) the costs and expected benefits associated with the requested NBRC investment, and b) the benefits provided to the broader community and region.

NBRC and States will consider the apparent sustainability of the project beyond the life of the grant. Pre-applications that are invited to submit a full application will receive a response from NBRC in the GMS with information on the application process, access to application information sessions and (in some cases) feedback that was noted by the State Program Manager or NBRC on the proposed project. Determination on waivers and eligibility will be made at this time.

Pre-applications that do not receive an invitation to apply for the current funding round will receive information about submitting a pre-application for future funding rounds and any feedback that was noted by the State Program Manager or NBRC on the proposed project.

SECTION C. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

All applications for NBRC funding are by invitation only. An applicant must submit a pre-application and have been issued an invitation to submit a Forest Economy Program application to be eligible for funding. Applications will be required to be submitted via NBRC's [Grants Management System](#).

Applications must be submitted before 5:00pm EST on due date. See Appendix B – Forest Economy Program Timeline.

Visit the [Program Areas page](#) of the NBRC website for more details, including pre-recorded programmatic information sessions.

A multitude of resources including step by step instructions on how to complete and submit an application are available on the [Resources](#) page of the NBRC website. Once there, click on “Grant Administration Information and Grants Management System (GMS) Guidance Documents” to find a library of helpful resources and forms.

EARLY APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT STEPS:

Applicants are strongly encouraged to:

- Review your invitation to apply for any feedback or requested revisions from NBRC, States, and/or Advisory Board members! The invitation to apply can be found by logging into the GMS and viewing the **Collab Tab** in your pre-application. The feedback is specific to each project to help fill information gaps and improve the application. Addressing this feedback in your application will strengthen your proposal.

- Contact NBRC with questions regarding NBRC funding priorities. NBRC will consider a project's alignment with funding priorities when scoring applications.
- Discuss your project with a State Program Manager to strengthen alignment with the State's priorities. States will consider a project's alignment with their funding priorities when scoring and selecting finalists.
- Discuss your project with an Advisory Board member to strengthen connections with the identified needs of the regional forest economy and industry ecosystem.
- Attend an application information session. Visit the Forest Economy Program page for more details. **Application information sessions provide guidance and helpful hints for common challenges.**
- When selecting projects for funding awards at the application phase NBRC and the States will consider:
 - Balanced geographic distribution of investments.
 - Well-documented community or regionally supported need for the project.
 - Projects deemed a priority by the State where the project is located.

REQUESTED APPLICANT INFORMATION:

Detailed instructions for using the online grants management system to submit an application ([Creating and Submitting an Application – Guidance Document](#)) and recorded videos are available on the [Resources](#) page of the NBRC website. Please review these detailed instructions prior to beginning your application in the GMS.

Each narrative text box supports limited formatting – please keep your responses simple and do not paste tables, bullets or text with extensive formatting into the text box. Please provide weblinks to studies and reports that support the need for your project – please do not attach lengthy reports to your application.

Complete the application by entering the required information for each of the following tabs and remember to **save often!**

Overview Tab:

The applicant's registration and all applicant information entered at the pre-application stage will be carried over into the application stage.

Overview Tab – Information:

If the UEI field is not populated, please enter your organization's **Unique Entity ID** (UEI). The UEI is required to receive an award. If an applicant does not have an UEI, please visit [SAM.gov](#). Submitting a registration and getting a Unique Entity ID from SAM.gov is FREE. This process can take some time to complete with SAM.gov so please plan ahead. See the available guidance [How to Update UEI](#) on the [NBRC Resources page](#).

Overview Tab - Announcement Overview:

No edits to this section are required.

Overview Tab-Application Overview:

No edits to this section are required. Changes will be automatically updated from other sections of your application.

Overview Tab-Project Information:

Responses provided at the time of pre-application will carry over to your application. At this time, you should edit your responses to include new information and/or revisions in response to NBRC and State feedback.

The information provided in this section should provide a robust overview of your project. Highly competitive projects will demonstrate how your project supports NBRC and your State's funding priorities, the specific activities to be undertaken with NBRC funding and the expected outcomes. Provide documentation supporting your responses whenever possible in the form of links to relevant studies, data and reports. You will have the opportunity to elaborate further on the details of your project in the Proposal Tab which is described further in this section of the User Manual.

Overview Tab – Contacts:

Your organization's Authorized Representative will be listed under Project Role as the "Project Director/Manager". This contact also needs to be designated as a key contact.

It is extremely important that the person designated in the GMS as your Authorized Representative matches the person identified as your Authorized Official in the Authorized Official Resolution which is a document required as part of your application submission. More details can be found in the Forms and Files section of this document.

In this section you may add one other contact to your application, and you can associate your LDD. See the available guidance for "Adding Users in the GMS" on the [NBRC Resources webpage](#).

Overview Tab-Acknowledgement:

Check "I Agree"

Locations Tab:

Locations Tab - Application Match:

Confirm that the match amount is correct based on your project location(s) by reviewing NBRC's Distress Criteria described in Part 1, Section A of this document. If there is a discrepancy with the match listed in the application, please contact NBRC.

Locations Tab-Investment Locations:

Enter the street, city, state and zip code of the location(s) where the project will have investments. The location(s) chosen should represent where work funded by NBRC will occur. There is a validation function associated with investment locations. Enter all locations associated with the investment of project funds and attempt to validate using the Census tool. Leave in all locations, including those determined "invalid" by Census, as we also need to associate locations with key performance indicators in the next

section. If the investment location returns an “Invalid” Status, we encourage applicants to enter the latitude/longitude coordinates in the address bar.

Locations Tab-Key Performance Indicators:

Edit and enter the Target value for each Key Performance Indicator (KPI). If the KPI does not apply to your project, enter 0. Competitive projects will provide detailed justification and support for the KPIs selected in the **Proposal Tab** of the application. Scoring is based on the quality of information provided, rather than the quantity of KPIs selected.

Budget Tab:

NBRC has prepared a variety of supplemental resources to assist you with budget development and common budget related errors in the GMS, which are located on the [Resources page](#) of our website.

Budget Tab - Budget Periods table:

Budget information will be carried over from your pre-application. Please revise each section of the budget based on new estimates, more detailed data, or corrections requested by NBRC or State Program Managers in your invitation to apply.

It is critical that the totals from your SF-424cbw detailed budget (found in the Forms and Files Tab), Budget table and Funding Sources and Commitments table match.

Helpful Tips:

- The totals in this table must match the SF-424cbw detailed budget, required as an attached document under the “Forms and Files” tab. The budget categories are not in the same order but do correspond with the high-level categories 1-10 on the 424cbw.
- 80% Federal Funding Ceiling – this is calculated on total project costs. There is an GMS validation process in place to verify that the NBRC Share + Other Federal Share must be less than or equal to 80% of the amount under Total Project Costs. An exception exists for projects where NBRC is neither the sole nor primary federal source of funding. See [Section D, Part III: Federal Funding Ceiling](#).
- Applicant match is calculated based on the NBRC requested amount. The GMS includes a validation process that will verify that the Other Federal Share + Applicant Match + Other is greater than or equal to the required minimum match based on your project location.

Some projects with an 80/20 match ratio may exceed the federal funding ceiling without additional non-federal funds.

Budget Tab-Budget Narrative:

Update the Budget Narrative to reflect any changes in your budget. All expenses over \$5,000 must be listed with a description of the cost and an explanation of how the cost was determined. Please clarify which parts of your budget are estimates, based on

quotes or fixed price. The budget narrative should provide sufficient information to understand how NBRC funds will be spent.

Budget Tab-Funding Sources and Commitments:

In the Funding Sources table, you will list the source (name and federal or non-federal), type (loan, grant, other), amount, date of commitment or anticipated date of commitment, and status (secured/committed, pending/anticipated). Total amounts in this table must align with total amounts in the Budget Periods Table and the SF-424cbw.

Helpful Tips:

- Do not enter funds requested from NBRC in this table. Only include non-NBRC funding sources.
- No more than 80% of total project costs can come from federal funds (including NBRC share). 40 USC §15506(e). An exception exists for projects where NBRC is neither the sole nor primary federal source of funding. See Section D, Part III: Federal Funding Ceiling.
- NBRC funds may be used to match other federally funded projects (when both federal agencies allow).
- NBRC funds may not be used to “supplant” existing federal programs.
- ARPA *is* considered a federal source.
- CDBG and federal loans *are not* considered a federal source.

Proposal Tab:

This section should be used to build and expand on information provided in the Overview Tab. **Do not copy and paste from the project narrative you developed in the Overview Tab.** Responses in this section should be concise but provide enough information so that someone unfamiliar with your community, region and organization will understand your project.

Proposal Tab-Technical Proposal:

Highly competitive projects will demonstrate how your project supports NBRC and your State’s funding priorities, how and when your project will be implemented, the expected economic impacts of your project, and who will be responsible for implementing each part of the project and their qualifications. Additional guidance on each section is provided below.

Prep in a word document, then copy and paste your responses into the GMS. Keep the formatting simple, e.g. bullet points rather than tables and cells to avoid potential errors when saving complicated formatting. **Save Often!**

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY narrative guidance: Provide a detailed explanation of the approach and methodology that will be used to implement your

project. Include an explanation and documentation of how the project addresses State and program objectives and investment priorities. See [NBRC Program Scoring #3](#).

ECONOMIC IMPACTS narrative guidance: Referencing the KPIs you selected earlier in your application, describe the anticipated economic outcomes and outputs of the project. Highly competitive projects will provide justification and documentation supporting the expected economic impacts in the form of letters of support, business commitments, relevant studies, data and other forms of supporting documentation. See [NBRC Program Scoring #4](#).

PROJECT READINESS narrative guidance: Describe if the project is ready for implementation or will require additional planning tasks to begin. Provide a detailed timeline and milestone schedule for completion of the project, along with an explanation of the applicant's ability to complete the proposed work within the 3-year period of performance. See [NBRC Program Scoring #5](#).

CAPACITY & QUALIFICATIONS narrative guidance: Provide an explanation of the capacity of the organization to meet the project objectives, including any partnerships with other entities to support the project. Provide an explanation of the qualifications of personnel. Contractors, volunteers, partner organizations, etc. as they relate to project objectives, and workplan. See [NBRC Program Scoring #6](#).

Forms and Files Tab:

Prior to beginning this section of your application, we strongly encourage you to review the [Application Support Document Checklist](#) which can be found on the [NBRC Resources page](#) under the Additional GMS Guidance Documents section.

Forms and Files Tab - Application Files:

Applicants who received approval for a Significant Benefit or 75% expenditure waiver need to upload the waiver approval file to the application record. Approval was attached to your Invitation to Apply letter, found in your pre-application in the GMS.

You can also upload supplemental information that supports your application such as reports, commitments from other funders, a detailed workplan, spreadsheets, surveys, architectural or engineering plans, or other graphic information that cannot be uploaded to the text sections of your application.

Forms and Files Tab - Supporting Documents Checklist:

Mandatory documents for all applicants must be completed and uploaded in the GMS at the time you submit your application. Some documents are applicable only for specific grantees – these have been noted below.

Late documents will not be accepted and may result in your application being deemed ineligible.

Where applicable, documents MUST be signed by the Authorized Official designated in your Authorized Official Resolution.

- **Authorized Official Resolution (AOR)** - A template is available on the [Resources page](#). The NBRC template is not required, however your organization's resolution must include all the information in the template. The completed file is uploaded to the GMS and must be submitted with your application. Please plan accordingly to ensure you have sufficient time to obtain your AOR.
- **Certificate of Good Standing – only applicable for 501c organizations.** Your certificate of good standing must be current through the year of your application. Please plan accordingly to ensure you have sufficient time to obtain your Certificate of Good Standing.
- **Form 1001 Debarment Suspension Certification**
- **Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)** – only applicable if your organization has a NICRA. For those without a NICRA, the de minimis rate of 15% will be applied.
- **IRS Determination Letter-only applicable for 501c organizations**
- **Letters of Support** – Encouraged but not required. Form letters are acceptable, but often do not have the same impact as individual letters. Support letters should be combined and uploaded as a single PDF.
- **NEPA Intake Form**
- **Project Map - [FEMA flood map](#) and/or map of project location of your choice.**
- **Revolving Loan Fund Documentation** - applicants who are utilizing NBRC funds to create a new or supplement an existing Revolving Loan Fund are required to submit supplemental documentation. RLF documentation must be developed by the applicant and must be uploaded to the GMS (see NBRC RLF Policy and required documentation in the [Appendix I](#) of the Program User Manual).
- **SF-424cbw** – please complete the details tab only.
- **SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance**
- **SF-424B** (non-construction) **or** **SF-424D** (construction) - One or the other (not both) must be completed depending on the project type.
- **SF-LLL Disclosure of Lobbying Activities**



APPENDIX A – PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION

Northern Border Regional Commission

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mcaceres@nbrc.gov

NBRC State Program Managers

Maine

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Forest Economy Program Advisory Board Members

Commission

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APPENDIX B –FOREST ECONOMY PROGRAM TIMELINE

Spring Round Key Dates

Online Grants Management System for pre-applications February 10, 2025
Pre-applications due (Required) before 5:00 pm EST March 7, 2025

Waivers due with pre-application:

- Local Development District (LDD) Waiver (if applicable)
- Significant Benefit Waiver (if applicable)
- 75% Prior Award Expenditure Waiver (if applicable)

GMS reopens for Invited Applicants Only by March 31, 2025
 Application Information Sessions March 31-April 11, 2025

Applications due (By invitation only) before 5:00 pm EST April 18, 2025

NBRC Commission Meeting (Virtual) late May 2025
 Notification of awards & notice to unsuccessful applicants June 12, 2025

Fall Round Key Dates **Dates Tentative and subject to change**

GMS opens to applicants for pre-applications August 4, 2025
Pre-applications due (Required) August 29, 2025 before 5:00 pm EST

GMS opens for Invited Applicants Only by September 22, 2025
 Application Information Sessions September/October 2025
Applications due (By invitation only) October 10, 2025 before 5:00 pm EST

Notification of awards & notice to unsuccessful applicants December 19, 2025
 New Grantee Training January 2026



APPENDIX C – NBRC NEPA INTAKE FORM

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that federal agencies consider potential environmental impacts of their actions before implementation or spending funds on the proposed action. You must complete this initial NEPA Intake Form as part of your NBRC application to provide NBRC Staff with project information relevant to the NEPA process. NBRC will use this information to determine the appropriate level of NEPA analysis that will be required if your proposed project is funded.

Note: Completion of this form does not satisfy NEPA, but it does help NBRC to determine what NEPA analysis will be required. If your project is funded, the NEPA process must be complete before NBRC will issue a Notice to Proceed.

Please complete the NBRC NEPA intake form in PDF format and provide attachments to support the information provided on this form, as needed. The NEPA intake form and supporting documentation should be combined and submitted as one PDF and labeled NEPA INTAKE.

The NEPA INTAKE FORM in fillable PDF Format is available for download in the Grants Management System



APPENDIX D - 75% NBRC PRIOR INVESTMENT EXPENDITURE POLICY & WAIVER

An applicant or co-applicant with an open NBRC award under any NBRC program is not eligible for additional NBRC funding until the current project has both requested reimbursement for 75% or more of the award funds and demonstrated that 75% or more of the cost share has been spent by **February 1, 2025 [Spring round] or August 1, 2025 [Fall round]**.

If the 75% expenditure requirement has not been met, the entity can apply for a waiver. To be eligible for additional NBRC funding, the 75% Expenditure Waiver request must:

- **Be submitted with the pre-application before 5:00pm EST on due date. See appendix B – Forest Economy Program Timeline.**
- **Include a fully executed Affidavit**
- **Include supporting narrative and documentation** for the current status of the open project, delays encountered (if applicable), expected completion date of the previous NBRC award(s), capacity to complete previous award(s) and take on a new project.
- **Include supporting narrative** for the economic impacts of the proposed new project and how a delay in applying for funding will be a detriment. Economic impact support documentation should include specific information and not be speculative.
- **Be approved by the State(s) where the prior award(s) were made and by NBRC**

Any applicant or co-applicant with an open award that does not meet the 75% expenditure requirement and does not submit the required and complete 75% Expenditure Waiver request will have their pre-application marked as **ineligible for further review**.

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 NBRC program funding.

The 75% NBRC Prior Investment Expenditure Waiver in fillable PDF format is available for download in the Grants Management System



APPENDIX E – SIGNIFICANT BENEFIT WAIVER

Requesting a significant benefit waiver for funding consideration eligibility.

There are two exceptions that **require** a Significant Benefit Waiver to allow those projects, applicants and/or co-applicants that fall outside of the areas that meet the Commission's **annual distress criteria** to apply for NBRC funds. Those exceptions are:

- An exception exists for **projects** located within an Attainment County but outside of one of the identified “Isolated Areas of Distress” that will bring significant economic benefits to NBRC Distressed or Transitional counties.
- An exception exists for **applicants or co-applicants** located outside of the NBRC service area but has established operations within a member state when the project that will bring significant economic benefits to NBRC Distressed or Transitional counties.

If an exception applies, the applicant and/or co-applicant must submit a Significant Benefit Waiver request with the pre-application to be eligible to receive NBRC funds.

Process: If an applicant and/or co-applicant meet the above requirements they can request a Significant Benefit Waiver. To be considered, the Significant Benefit Waiver request must:

- **Be submitted with the pre-application before 5:00pm EST on due date. See appendix B – Forest Economy Program Timeline.**
- **Include a fully executed waiver request**
- **Include narrative and supporting documents** showing clear and convincing evidence of a project's economic impact to NBRC Distressed or Transitional counties
- **Include description of costs and activities** that will take place in distressed counties, transitional counties, attainment counties, or outside the NBRC service area. This information will be used in the waiver review process to determine the eligible reimbursement/match ratio.

A Significant Benefit Waiver request requires approval by the Federal Co-Chair and the Governor's Alternates of the four NBRC States. The significant benefit waiver must be approved for the entity to be considered eligible to be issued an invitation to apply for funding. **Any applicant or co-applicant that is required to submit a Significant Benefit Waiver and does not submit the required waiver request and required documentation will have their pre-application marked as **ineligible for further review**.**

The Significant Benefit Waiver Affidavit in fillable PDF format is available for download in the Grants Management System



APPENDIX F – LDD ASSISTANCE

The NBRC Federal-State partnership is aided by a group of regional organizations called **Local Development Districts (LDDs)** that assist the NBRC in its outreach activities and administer NBRC investments for grantees.

LDDs are either an already existing federally designated Economic Development District, as certified by the US Economic Development Administration, or an organization similar in nature to a regional planning commission.

Each FOREST ECONOMY PROGRAM awardee is given the option to utilize an LDD for grant administration assistance. Should a Forest Economy Program awardee choose to utilize LDD assistance, the LDD contract executed with the grantee should specify the type of scope of services/grant administration activity that will be provided. A grantee is required to provide a copy of the executed LDD contract as part of the documentation necessary to receive a Partial or Full Notice to Proceed.

LDDs are compensated for their grant administration services through a reimbursement process with the grantee. The grant administration fee for all NBRC awards of \$400,000 or less is \$8,000. The grant administration fee for all NBRC awards above \$400,000 is based on the formula of 2% of the NBRC requested amount. LDD grant administration costs are an eligible NBRC cost for an amount not to exceed the formula. If grant administration assistance beyond the total available under the formula, those must be paid for with matching funds. If used, LDD grant administration costs must be reflected as a line item within the project budget submitted in support of a FOREST ECONOMY Program application for funding.

See [Role of the LDD](#) or visit www.nbrc.gov/content/administration for more information.



APPENDIX G- OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Examples of Outcomes

Communities Improved: The number of communities negatively impacted by the decline in the forest-based economy with a measurable improvement as a result of an NBRC project, including projects that attract new wood-utilizing enterprises, infrastructure to support the forest-based industry, utilization of wood-based heating technologies in public use projects, and educational opportunities. This measure should also be used for technical assistance grants. The “communities improved” number will generally be the same as, or a subset of, the “communities served” output measure.

Workers/Trainees/Students Improved: The number of workers/trainees with improved skills that enable them to obtain employment or to enhance their current employment. For example, the number of workers or trainees obtaining a new job; getting higher pay or a better position; or receiving a certification, degree or other career credential, measured during the project period when possible. When outcomes occur after the project period, the number of workers, trainees or students improved may be counted up to three years beyond the project end date. For programs where outcomes are achieved after three or more years, the number of individuals improved may be counted by an alternative benchmark, such as completion of a skill, level/course, or continued enrollment for the project period. This number is generally the same as, or a subset of, the “workers/trainees served” output measure.

Jobs Created: The projected number of jobs (direct hires, excluding construction jobs) that will result from an NBRC project, measured during the project period and up to three years after the project end date. Part-time and seasonal jobs should be converted to full-time equivalents and rounded up to whole numbers. Note: for infrastructure projects in support of the forest-based industry, employers should provide letters stating their intention to create a specific number of new jobs; for non-infrastructure jobs, applicants should estimate the number of jobs that will be created by the organizations expected to benefit from the project.

Jobs Retained: The number of jobs that would be lost or relocated without the NBRC project, measured during the project period and up to three years after the project end date. Note: for infrastructure projects, in support of the forest-based industry, employers must provide letters explicitly stating the number of jobs at risk, due to loss of competitiveness or relocation, without the project. For non-infrastructure projects, applicants should estimate the number of existing jobs that would be at risk, due to loss of competitiveness or relocation, without the NBRC-funded project.

Leveraged Private Investment (LPI): The dollar amount of private-sector financial commitments, outside of project costs, that result from a project, measured during the project period and up to three years after the project end date. Note: for infrastructure projects in support of the forest-based industry, businesses should provide letters stating their intention to make a specific level of investment if the project is funded; for non-infrastructure jobs, applicants should estimate the dollar value of investments that will be made by the company or companies that will benefit from the project.

Organizations Improved: The number of organizations with a measurable improvement as a result of an NBRC project. This may apply to workforce training and development projects, and business planning and technical assistance projects, for example. The number should be substantiated by participating or impacted organizations as a result of the project, and measured within the period of performance and/or up to three years following the period of performance end date. This number is generally the same as, or a subset of, the “organizations served” output measure.

Participants Improved: The number of participants with a measurable improvement as a result of the project (use when patients, students, or worker/trainee measures do not apply). A plan and a method for measuring the degree of improvement must be provided. This number is generally the same as, or a subset of, the “participants served” output measure.

Programs Implemented: The number of new programs, or the number of ongoing activities related to a defined goal, that are implemented as a result of an NBRC project. If possible, use with other measures that indicate the results of the project, such as students, workers, participants, etc.

Revenues Increased: Export Sales: The increase in revenue in export sales that a business or businesses realize as a result of an NBRC project, within three years of the project end date.

Revenues Increased: Non-Export Sales: The increase in revenue in domestic (non-export) sales that a business or businesses realize as a result of an NBRC project, within three years of the project end date.

Examples of Outputs

Access Road Miles: The length of the access roads constructed as part of the project, in miles or decimals of miles (not linear feet).

Acreage: The number of acres impacted by an NBRC site-development or reclamation project, such as the number of acres graded and prepared for development at an emerging industrial park, the number of acres open to future development, the number of acres permanently preserved for farmland, or other preservation efforts that improve the local economy, or the number of acres remediated in a reclamation project.

Businesses Served: The number of businesses served by an NBRC project, including entrepreneurship projects, business technical assistance, and infrastructure projects.

Communities Served: The number of communities served by an NBRC project, including projects that improve planning, civic participation, infrastructure, and educational opportunities. For consolidated technical assistance grants, the number of communities served is the number of projects submitted by state NBRC program offices.

Energy Capacity (KWh/KW): The number of kilowatt hours saved by energy efficiency projects, or kilowatts produced by renewable energy projects within one year of project implementation.

Organizations Served: The number of organizations served by an NBRC project, including hospitals, schools, churches, non-profits, non-governmental organizations.

Participants Served: The number of individual participants that can be served or are targeted by an NBRC project (use when patients, students, or worker/trainee measures do not apply). This can include the number of attendees at a meeting, workshop, or conference. For example, the number of individuals participating in a planning process; or the number of individuals attending health promotion activities.

Plans/Reports: The number of plans or reports developed as a result of a NBRC project. This could include strategic plans, master plans, concept plans, or plans for infrastructure improvements or new programs, as well as research reports, feasibility studies, etc. This measure is often paired with the outcome “Programs Implemented,” since a program or specific activity is often implemented as a result of a planning process.

Square Feet: The number of square feet constructed or improved by a NBRC project, such as the square footage of a renovated community center, a newly constructed parking lot, a reconfigured interior space, etc.

Students Served: The number of students that an NBRC education project will be able to serve, measured during the project period, when possible (e.g., the number of students served by a science and technology program in a given semester or year). For projects that are not fully operational during the project period, the measurement time period may be extended up to three years after the project end date. Projects that expand existing programs count only the additional number of students served.

Workers/Trainees Served: The number of worker/trainees that an NBRC training project will be able to serve, measured during the project period when possible. For example, the number of worker/trainees the project will be able to enroll in a new workforce education program. For projects that are not fully operational during the project period, the measurement time period may be extended up to three years after the project end date. Projects that expand existing programs count only the additional number of workers/trainees that the project will be able to serve.



APPENDIX H – APPLICATION RESOURCES

Census data and Community Demographics data from public sources:

- **The American Community Survey (ACS)** releases new data every year through a variety of data tables that you can access with different data tools. Data Profiles contain the most popular social, economic, housing, and demographic data for a single geographic area. The Data Profiles summarize the data, providing both estimates and percentages, to cover the most basic data on all ACS topics. These profiles are available at data.census.gov.
- **Bureau of Indian Affairs US Domestic Sovereign Nations:** Land Areas of Federally Recognized Tribes. The [U.S. Domestic Sovereign Nations: Land Areas of Federally-recognized Tribes map](#) (commonly referred to as Indian lands) gives the user the ability to zoom, change base maps, and identify tribal lands with the BIA Land Area Representation (LAR). The LAR depicts the external extent of Federal Indian reservations, land held in “trust” by the United States, “restricted fee” or “mixed ownership” tracts for Federally recognized tribes and individual Indians.



APPENDIX I - REVOLVING LOAN FUND PROGRAM

Definitions

- “RLF” is an acronym for Revolving Loan Fund
- Indian tribe—The term "Indian tribe" has the meaning given the term in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 45 (b)).
- Nonprofit organization—The term "nonprofit organization" 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 that has been formed for the purpose of economic development.

Overview

A revolving loan fund is a pool of money used by an eligible applicant for the purpose of making loans to create and/or save jobs. As loans are repaid by the borrowers, the money is returned to the RLF to make other loans. In that manner, the RLF fund becomes an ongoing or "revolving" financial tool. An applicant's primary business does not have to be lending to receive RLF grant funding.

The major difference between the Northern Border Regional Commission's RLF program and conventional lending is the lending goal. For conventional lending institutions, the goal is profit. For an NBRC RLF, the goal is saving and creating private-sector jobs. Revolving loan funds are not a substitute for conventional lending sources. Given the small size of the RLF program and the limited resources of each project, revolving loan funds are not intended to match or replace the capacity of banks or other lending organizations. RLFs are designed to fill gaps in existing local financial markets and to provide or attract capital which otherwise would not be available for economic development. As part of the grant agreement, NBRC requires that RLF projects be administered in accordance with a revolving loan fund plan developed by the grant applicant and approved by the NBRC.

An applicant's RLF plan defines specific objectives and operating procedures, including standards and selection criteria for loans in the portfolio. NBRC does not review or approve individual loans made by the RLF. Instead, NBRC monitors RLF project activities for conformance with the NBRC's statute ([40 USC, Subtitle V](#)), these guidelines, the RLF plan, and other conditions of the grant agreement.

Objectives and Strategies

The primary objective of the NBRC RLF program is saving and creating private-sector jobs. Projects are expected to support specific types of economic activities planned or underway in the area. These may include, depending on local needs and conditions, one or more of the following:

- Small business development, including the start-up or expansion of locally owned businesses as measured by job creation.
- Existing business and saving jobs.
- Redevelopment of blighted land and vacant facilities for productive use.
- Modernization and rehabilitation of existing industrial or manufacturing facilities; and/or
- Support for the use of new technologies, growth industries, high-tech firms.

The effectiveness of a revolving loan fund project as a development tool will depend on its lending policies and financing techniques. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Modifications in repayment terms, such as deferral of initial principal or interest payments.
- Taking greater risks than banks are traditionally prepared to take when substantial economic development benefits will result if the borrower succeeds.
- Providing below market interest rates.
- Short turn-around time in processing applications; and/or
- Reducing the risk of commercial lenders by providing subordinate financing.

RLF Grantees

- Applicants must have robust staff capacity in any of the following areas of expertise: finance, law, credit analysis, loan packaging, loan processing and servicing. Applicants must have enough resources to cover the administrative costs of RLF operations. Capacity to administer the RLF should be detailed in the Capacity and Qualifications section of the application.
- Grantees may request changes to their RLF operating plan that improve RLF administration and/or enhance the ability of the grantee to meet the original objectives of the RLF project. All revisions to a grantee's RLF operating plan must be approved by NBRC in advance, in accordance with the NBRC's amendment policies.
- Applicants must have a strong and established loan review committee.
- As lending organizations, RLF grantees must recognize their obligations to federal and state law including but not limited to the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA), 15 U.S.C. 1691-1691f, as implemented by Federal Reserve Board Regulation B and the Internal Revenue Code requirements for lender cancellation of debt (Form 1099C, Cancellation of Debt).

Application Requirements:

Revolving Loan Fund Documentation

A written work plan that demonstrates the need and capacity for a NBRC RLF grant is required as part of an RLF application. The work plan should be uploaded as a separate document in the Supporting Documents Checklist and include the following information:

1. A complete listing of all staff and loan review committee members responsible for administering the RLF along with a statement of their qualifications and experience. Provide a brief history of the organization's lending experience.

2. Describe the use of funds and demonstrate the need for loan funds. At a minimum, applicants should:
 - Provide a set of goals, strategies, and anticipated outcomes for the applicant's program.
 - Identify a sufficient number of proposed and known ultimate recipients it has on hand to justify NBRC funding of its RLF grant request or include well developed targeting criteria for borrowers consistent with the applicant's mission.

3. Include the applicant's plan for loaning the grant funds. The plan, which may be in the form of an existing RLF policy, must be of sufficient detail to provide the NBRC with a complete understanding of what the applicant will accomplish by lending the funds and the complete mechanics of how the funds will get from the applicant to the borrower. The RLF plan or policy should include:
 - service area,
 - eligibility criteria,
 - loan purposes,
 - fees,
 - rates,
 - terms,
 - collateral requirements,
 - limits,
 - priorities,
 - application process,
 - method of disposition of the funds to the borrower,
 - monitoring of the borrower's accomplishments,
 - reporting requirements by the borrowers, and
 - the actions that an applicant plans to take to deal with a delinquency

4. Provide a brief explanation of how the administration of the RLF will be funded. If applicable, include a list of proposed fees and other charges it will assess borrowers.

As a lending and/ or equity organization, grantees must recognize and comply with their obligations under federal and state law, including but not limited to the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA), 15 U.S.C. 1691-1691f, as implemented by Federal Reserve Board Regulation B, and the Internal Revenue Code requirements for lender cancellation of debt (Form 1099C, Cancellation of Debt). It is essential to note that NBRC funds used for loans will always be considered federal funds and therefore bound by the requirements imposed by the Commission and the U.S. government.

Eligible Borrowers

- The borrowing firm or any of its owners cannot have a delinquent debt to the federal government.
- A borrower is eligible for RLF financing only when credit is not otherwise available on terms and conditions that would permit accomplishment of the borrower's project. RLF participation in a project must not displace local commercial lenders. The grantee is responsible for determining that a borrower meets this requirement and for maintaining documentation in the loan file describing, in each case, the basis for the determination. A borrower eligibility determination must be supported by either:
 - A loan commitment letter from the commercial lender participating in the project,
 - A commercial lender letter declining participation, or
 - A memorandum documenting discussion with commercial lenders about the limits of their participation in a borrower's project.

Eligible Loans

RLF grants may be used for debt financing through direct loans for:

- Machinery, equipment, and other fixed asset acquisition including transportation/delivery and installation costs.
- New construction, alteration, modification, repair, and renovation of existing facilities, demolition, and site preparation.
- Land acquisition that is an integral part of a project where the dominant funding requirement is for building acquisition or construction.
- Working capital, which can include but is not limited to loans for the interest obligation of interim construction loans, not to exceed a term of three years, and for reasonable fees of loan packaging, environmental data collection,

- consultants, and fees of licensed professionals (engineers, architects, lawyers, accountants, and appraisers); and
- Refinancing existing debt only when the Grantee can document that the project is viable and necessary and that jobs will be lost or not created.

Loan Projects Not Eligible for NBRC Funds

- Grantees may not make loans to themselves or to a subsidiary (Where *subsidiaries* are organizations under common control through common officers, directors, members, or employees).
- Loans only for land acquisition are not permitted.
- Loans which assist the relocation of businesses are prohibited under 40 USC §15501(f).
- Loans to acquire an equity position for the RLF in private businesses.
- Loans to subsidize interest payments on existing loans except for interim construction financing.
- Loans that provide the mandatory equity contribution required of borrowers for other federal loan programs.
- Loans that refinance existing debt solely for the purpose of reducing the risk to existing lenders.
- Loans that establish revolving lines of credit for borrowers.
- Loans that create a potential conflict-of-interest or the appearance of a conflict-of-interest
- All borrower loan activities and economic benefits resulting from loan activities must be located within the NBRC Service Area, as identified in Part 1, Section V and Section VI of this User Manual. NBRC RLF loan assistance must be withdrawn if for any reason the activity financed, or the economic benefit occurs outside of the NBRC Service Area.
- A Grantee's operating plan must articulate that the maximum percentage of costs of any loan project that may be financed from Federal sources, including NBRC originated RLF funds, is 80%. An exception exists for projects where NBRC is neither the sole nor primary federal source of funding. See Section D, Part III: Federal Funding Ceiling.

NBRC RLF Lending Policies

- The responsibility for approving loans and setting terms and conditions consistent with these guidelines resides fully with the Grantee. NBRC reserves the right to review the grantee's lending policies.

RLF Administration/Grant Funds

- RLF grant principal may be used only to fund loans. It is the grantee's responsibility to provide for the administrative costs of staffing and operating the RLF. These costs may not be charged against grant principal unless specifically authorized in the grant.

- All repayments of RLF grant principal must be returned to the RLF for subsequent lending. Proceeds from the sale, collection or liquidation of loan collateral must also be returned to the RLF for lending. The reasonable costs of collection or action to recover a loan are treated as administrative expenses. Any proceeds from the sales of collateral assets above the original unpaid amount of the loan are treated as program income.
- Selling NBRC RLF loans on a secondary market is not permitted.



APPENDIX J – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Administrative Requirements: The general practices that are common to the administration of grants, such as financial accountability, reporting, equipment management, and retention of records.

Allocable Cost: A cost that is allocable to a particular cost objective (i.e., a specific function, grant project, service, department, or other activity) in accordance with the relative benefits received. A cost is allocable to a federal award where it is treated consistently with other costs incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances and (1) is incurred specifically for the award, (2) benefits both the award and other work and can be distributed in reasonable proportion to the benefits received, or (3) is necessary for the overall operation of the organization.

Allowable Cost: A cost incurred by a recipient that is: (1) reasonable for the performance of the award; (2) allocable; (3) in conformance with any limitations or exclusions set forth in the Federal cost principles applicable to the organization incurring the cost as to the type or amount of cost; (4) consistent with regulations, policies, and procedures of the recipient that are applied uniformly to both federally supported and other activities of the organization; (5) accorded consistent treatment as a direct or indirect cost; (6) determined in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles; and (7) not included as a cost in any other federally supported award (unless specifically authorized by statute).

Approved Budget: The financial expenditure plan for a grant-supported project, program, or activity, including revisions approved by the NBRC and permissible revisions made by the recipient. The approved budget consists of Federal (grant) funds. The approved project consists of an SF424cbw, Budget Narrative and a SF424a and SF424c for non-infrastructure projects or a SF424cbw, Budget Narrative and a SF424c and SF424d for construction projects. The approved budget is a contractual obligation that can only be changed by NBRC in writing through a Grant Agreement Amendment.

Build America, Buy America Act (BABAA): BABAA was enacted on November 15, 2021, and sets forth a domestic content procurement preference (“Buy American Preference” referred to as “BAP”) for iron and steel, manufactured products, and construction materials used for infrastructure projects. Infrastructure programs funded with Federal dollars, IJA §70914(a) of Pub. L. 117-58, instructs Federal agencies to ensure that “none of the funds made available for a Federal financial assistance program for infrastructure, including each deficient program, may be obligated for a project unless all of the iron, steel, manufactured product, and construction materials used in the project are produced in the United States. As the NBRC routinely funds infrastructure projects BABAA governs future Northern Border Regional Commission

(NBRC) infrastructure investments. See NBRC's website for additional BABAA guidance.

Closeout: The process by which NBRC determines whether all applicable administrative actions and all work required under the award have been completed by the recipient and the awarding office.

Construction: "Construction" means construction in support of infrastructure, alteration, or repair (including dredging, excavating, and painting) of buildings, structures, or other real property. For purposes of this definition, the terms "buildings, structures, or other real property" include, but are not limited to, improvements of all types, such as bridges, dams, plants, highways, parkways, streets, subways, tunnels, sewers, mains, power lines, cemeteries, pumping stations, railways, airport facilities, terminals, docks, piers, wharves, ways, lighthouses, buoys, jetties, breakwaters, levees, canals, and channels. A project that includes planning and engineering when part of a larger construction implementation will be considered 'construction'; a project solely made up of planning and/or engineering will not be considered 'construction'.

Cooperative Agreement: A financial assistance support mechanism used when there will be substantial Federal programmatic involvement. Substantial involvement means that NBRC program staff will collaborate or participate in project or program activities as specified in the Notice of Award.

Cost Share: All other funds (other than NBRC award) that are necessary to complete the project.

Direct Costs: Costs that can be identified specifically with a particular project, an instructional activity, or any other institutional activity, or that can be directly assigned to such activities relatively easily with a high degree of accuracy.

Ecotourism: Focused on environmental protection, ecological conservation, poverty alleviation and educating on local environments and natural surroundings, creating minimal impact on people and the environment.

Entity Identification Number (EIN): A three-part coding scheme of 12 characters used to identify organizations and individuals. The first character identifies the recipient as an organization or an individual. The next 9 characters are the Internal Revenue Service tax number identification (TIN) for organizations or the social security number (SSN) for individuals. The last 2 characters are a suffix to provide distinction between organizational entities that are assigned a single EIN and those that have more than one EIN. The entities could be subsidiaries, divisions, branches, subdivisions, or other organizational groupings of a major organizational entity.

Equipment: An article of tangible nonexpendable personal property that has a useful life of more than 1 year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit or the capitalization threshold established by the recipient, whichever is less.

Federal Funds Authorized: The total amount of Federal funds obligated by the NBRC for use by the recipient.

Federal Share: The amount, generally expressed as a percentage of total project costs, of financial, property, and other direct assistance provided by the NBRC.

Funding Opportunity Announcement: NBRC's formally issued announcement of the availability of funding through its website and outreach efforts.

Indirect Costs: Costs that are incurred by a recipient for common or joint objectives and cannot be identified specifically with a particular project or program. These costs also are known as "facilities and administrative costs." The federally approved indirect cost rate, in place at time of application, will be the indirect cost rate for the entirety of 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.

Local Development District (LDDs): LDDs are either an already existing federally designated Economic Development District, as certified by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, or an established regional development organization, often established as a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) entity that is organized and operated in a manner that ensures broad-based community participation to contribute to the development and implementation of programs in the region. LDDs are utilized in the administration of NBRC investments for grantees.

Match: The minimum amount of funds or contributions that needs to come from other sources to complete the NBRC funded project.

Non Federal Share: The portion of allowable project costs not borne by the NBRC.

Obligations: The amounts of orders placed, contracts and subawards, goods and services received, and similar transactions by a recipient during a budget period that will require payment during the same or a future budget period.

Outlays or Expenditures: The charges made to the federally sponsored project or program.

Program Income: Gross income earned by a recipient that is directly generated by the grant-supported project, program, or activity or earned as a result of the award **and must be authorized by the grant agreement. Grantees must keep complete records to**

document program income.

Project Period: The total time for which support of a project has been programmatically approved. The total project period comprises the initial competitive segment, any subsequent competitive segments resulting from a competing continuation award, and any non-competing extensions.

Real Property: Land, including land improvements, structures, and appurtenances, but not movable machinery and equipment.

Reasonable Cost: A cost whose nature or amount does not exceed that which would be incurred by a prudent person under the circumstances prevailing when the decision was made to incur the cost.

Recipient: The organization or individual that receives a grant or cooperative agreement award from NBRC and is responsible and accountable for the use of the funds provided and for the performance of the grant-supported project or activity. The recipient is the entire legal entity even if a particular component is designated in the Grant Agreement. The term includes "**grantee.**"

Significant Rebudgeting: A threshold that is reached when expenditures in a single direct cost budget category deviate (increase or decrease) from the approved budget amount for that budget category for that budget period by a specified amount. Significant rebudgeting is one indicator of change in scope.

Subaward: Financial assistance in the form of money or property in lieu of money provided under an award by a recipient to an eligible subrecipient (or by an eligible subrecipient to a lower tier subrecipient). The term includes financial assistance when provided by any legal agreement, even if the agreement is called a contract, but does not include either procurement of goods or services or, for purposes of this policy statement, any form of assistance other than grants and cooperative agreements. The term includes consortium agreements.

Subrecipient: An entity that receives a subaward from a recipient or another subrecipient under an award of financial assistance and is accountable to the recipient or other subrecipient for the use of the Federal funds provided by the subaward.

Supplies: Personal property other than equipment, intangible property, and debt instruments. The category of "supplies" includes items that could be considered equipment, but do not meet the threshold definition.

Sustainable Tourism: The aim of sustainable tourism is to increase the benefits while also minimizing negative impacts on the environmental and local communities caused

by tourism for destinations. This can be achieved by: Protecting natural environments, wildlife and natural resources when developing and managing tourism activities.

Terms and Conditions: All legal requirements imposed on a grant by the NBRC, whether based on statute, regulation, policy, or other document referenced. In addition to general terms and conditions, the grant agreement may include other conditions that are considered necessary to attain the award's objectives, facilitate post-award administration, conserve grant funds, or otherwise protect the Federal government's interests.

Underserved Communities: NBRC has statutory authority to define areas within the region as distressed, according to 40 USC 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 or conditions, such as sub-standard housing, medical and educational facilities, and civil rights concerns are communities which may be most applicable. See **Appendix H** for additional resources on identifying underserved communities in the NBRC region.

Unique Entity ID (UEI) number: The UEI is a 12-character alphanumeric ID assigned to an entity by SAM.gov. Entity registration, searching, and data entry in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) now require use of the new Unique Entity ID. Effective April 4, 2022, the identifier for the federal awards processes changed from the Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number to UEI.

Unallowable Cost: A cost specified by law or regulation, Federal cost principles, or term and condition of award that may not be reimbursed under a grant and may not be counted as cost share.

APPENDIX K –SCORING CRITERIA

Forest Economy Program Scoring Criteria			
Agency Investment Priorities	<p>High scoring proposals provide a clear explanation for project/program fit, clearly articulate how the project will address program investment priorities and provide a compelling statement of need.</p> <p>Typical range: 20-25</p>	<p>Medium scoring proposals provide a connection to investment priorities but could have made a more compelling case for how project activities feed into program investment priorities.</p> <p>Typical range: 10-19</p>	<p>Low scoring proposals may have referenced program investment priorities but failed to make clear and/or convincing connections between project activities and FEP investment priorities.</p> <p>Typical range: 0-9</p>
Agency Investment Priorities Evaluation Criteria (0-25 points)	<p>This category reviews how project fits within the Forest Economy Program purpose and investment goals and program priorities. The applicant describes how the project meets program priorities in the Overview section. Projects will receive a higher score based on completeness of addressing relevant investment priorities and project categories outlined in the program materials. Consideration of projects identified by the State where the project is located as a priority or that represent a wide geographical distribution of NBRC funds will also result in a higher score.</p> <p>Project Abstract (Overview section):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project abstract identifies the relevant <u>project category</u> and describes how the project fits the project category. Beyond the first project category identified, projects will receive one additional point for clearly addressing how the scope of work meets each additional project category. Note – applicants must list and describe how the project scope <i>directly</i> addresses each specified project category. (0-8 points) <p>Program Investment Priorities Narrative (Overview section):</p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project describes how it meets one or more of the <u>Forest Economy Program investment priorities</u>. Points are awarded based on details provided, state prioritization and geographical distribution of NBRC funding. (0-8 points) • Projects will receive up to two points for each investment priority met. (0-4 points) • Consideration of projects identified by the State where the project is located as a priority or that represent a wide geographical distribution of NBRC funds will also result in a higher score. (0-1 points) <p>Responses to Overview Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st Time Applicants - Applicants who have not received a past NBRC award will be awarded 1 point. (0-1 points) • Rural Communities – Projects that serve a rural community with a population of less than 5,000. (0-1 points) • Underserved Communities - Describe who will benefit from your project and why this project matters to the community, region and/or State. Describe benefits to underrepresented and/or underserved communities, including rural communities (population less than 5,000). Projects that articulate strategies to reach these communities, including making project activities fully accessible will receive a higher score. (0-1 points) • Points will be awarded for including letters of support that directly cites benefits to underrepresented communities. (0-1 points) 		
Project Budget	High scoring proposals provide consistent budget figures across all budget sections. The applicant provides significant detail related to project costs and it's clear how NBRC funds will be utilized and how the budget supports project activities described. All funding sources are clearly identified and a plan to secure pending match is	Medium scoring proposals may have minor inconsistencies in budget figures across budget sections. Applicant provides some detail related to project costs, which generally align with the proposed project activities. Funding to complete the project is identified but plans to secure pending or planned funding may be missing.	Low scoring proposals have inconsistent budget figures across budget sections. Applicant did not provide enough detail related to project costs and it's difficult to understand how NBRC funds will be utilized or how costs support project activities. Funding sources to complete the project may be missing.

	described. NEPA costs are included. Typical Range: 11-15	Typical range: 6-10	Typical range: 0-5
Project Budget Evaluation Criteria (0-15 points)	<p>Details should be provided in the Budget section including Budget Categories Table, Budget Narrative, Funding Sources and Commitments Table, and the required SF-424cbw Detailed Project Budget in the Supporting Documents Checklist.</p> <p>Detailed Budget SF424cbw, Budget Categories Table:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project costs, including contingency for construction projects, are detailed, align with project description and reasonable. Detailed Project Budget includes NEPA costs. If applicable, Detailed Project Budget includes LDD grant administration costs in the amount of 2% of the NBRC requested amount. Applicant clearly demonstrates how NBRC requested funds will be used. Applicant demonstrates no project costs or match have been committed or expended prior to the award. (0-7 points) <p>Budget Narrative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget Narrative section: Budget narrative should be aligned with the project description, provide brief justification for expenses over \$10,000, describe how the cost estimate was determined, provide a breakdown of expenses that make up the total and overall clarify the connection between the costs and the proposed project. (0-5 points) <p>Funding Sources and Commitments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Match is clearly outlined in the Funding Sources and Commitments table including the source, type of funding, and status. Applicants may provide or be asked to provide letters of commitment/support to confirm stated match contributions. If applicable, leveraged funds in addition to required match should be described in Budget Narrative. (0-3 points) 		

Approach & Methodology	<p>High scoring proposals clearly explain the chosen approach and provide an explanation for how the approach and methods will feed the project’s success and timely completion. Major tasks and key partnerships are identified and described, and the project makes clear connections to state or sector-wide planning efforts.</p> <p>Typical range: 8-10</p>	<p>Medium scoring proposals explain the chosen approach and provide some explanation for how the chosen methods will enable the project’s success and timely completion. A milestone schedule is provided but may lack detail. Partnerships are identified but not well described, and some connection to state or sector wide planning efforts is made.</p> <p>Typical range: 4-7</p>	<p>Low scoring proposals lack detail or missed key components. It’s unclear what activities the applicant will undertake to meet stated goals and objectives. A milestone schedule lacks detail or isn’t provided, and the applicant makes little or no connection to state/sector-wide planning efforts.</p> <p>Typical range: 0-3</p>
Approach & Methodology Evaluation Criteria (0-10 points)	<p>Details should be provided in the Approach & Methodology Narrative and optional milestone schedule attachment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants clearly explain the approach and methodology that will be used to undertake the project including major tasks, partnerships and other necessary details to describe what is necessary to complete the project in a timely manner. Applications with a detailed milestone schedule for completion of award outcomes will have a higher score than those that do not. Milestone schedules should identify major project events or tasks including environmental review and their scheduled completion dates. (0-7 points) • Projects that support related regional, state, or local forest economy planning efforts will be awarded (0-3 points). <u>Example plans</u> include the Vermont Forest Future Strategic Roadmap, Forest Opportunity Roadmap Maine, state resiliency and economic plans, etc. 		
Forest Economy Sector Impacts	<p>High scoring proposals make a clear connection to the challenge the project seeks to address and</p>	<p>Medium scoring proposals make some connection to the challenge or statement of need. The proposal</p>	<p>Low scoring proposals make little or no connection to an identified challenge or statement of need.</p>

	<p>provide a compelling case for why the project should be funded now, with details on the scale of impact. Economic impacts are well described, and the applicant clearly explains how identified KPIs will be accomplished. Compelling letters of support are provided.</p> <p>Typical range: 20-25</p>	<p>provides some explanation for why the project should be funded now. The scale of impact is identified but may be unclear. Economic impacts align with identified KPIs but may lack detail. Some letters of support are provided.</p> <p>Typical range: 10-19</p>	<p>The proposal does not provide a compelling case for why the project should be funded now, and little to no detail is provided regarding the scale of impact. Key performance indicators are not described or not substantiated within the application. No compelling letters of support are provided.</p> <p>Typical range: 0-9</p>
<p>Forest Economy Sector Impacts Evaluation Criteria (0-25 points)</p>	<p>Details should be provided in the Economic Impacts Narrative, Project Goals & Outcomes Narrative, Key Performance Indicators within the Locations Tab, and optional Letters of Support. Projects will be reviewed for anticipated impact on the region’s forest economy.</p> <p>Overview section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant identifies the challenge the project seeks to address (0-5 points) • Applicants describe the project need and the opportunity gained by funding this project now and/or lost by not funding it now. Projects of greater immediacy are given a higher score. (0-2 points) • Applicant describes the scale of impact for community, county or region. (0-3 points) <p>Economic impacts narrative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project demonstrates it will have impacts such as job retention, job creation and/or wage growth within an identified timeframe. Selected Key Performance Indicators are further described. (0-5 points) • Economic impacts should be consistent and, where possible, supported by feasibility studies, and/or local, state, or regional data. Applicants include supporting narratives from local businesses, leaders, and government officials regarding anticipated economic impacts and the importance to larger economic development strategies. Applicants provide clear documentation of expected impacts with 		

	<p>priority consideration given to documentation of expected growth in jobs and wages. Applicant describes how KPIs will be tracked and reported on at project close. (0-5 points)</p> <p>Forms and Files</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants are encouraged to include letters of support from local businesses, leaders, and government officials regarding anticipated economic impacts and the importance to larger economic development strategies. (0-5 points) 		
Project Readiness	<p>High scoring proposals are complete and detailed. All required supporting documentation is provided and responses to narrative questions are clear and concise. Timelines are reasonable and demonstrate an understanding for the grant life cycle. The project's status/standing at application is clear.</p> <p>Typical range: 8-10</p>	<p>Medium scoring proposals are complete but may lack sufficient detail. Narrative responses could have provided additional information. Timelines may be missing important milestones.</p> <p>Typical range: 4-7</p>	<p>Low scoring proposals are missing key details. Required documentation may be missing or incomplete.</p> <p>Typical range: 0-3</p>
Project Readiness Evaluation Criteria (0-10 points)	<p>Details should be provided in the Project Readiness Narrative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The applicant shows attention to detail and provides a complete application. All required supporting documents are submitted and complete. Responses to narrative questions are complete. (0-4 points) Applicant accounts for feasible timelines for completion and includes a short summary of processes in progress or completed. Timeline includes NEPA. Applicant demonstrates the project can be completed 		

	<p>within the 3-year project period. Timeline shows a Notice to Proceed can be secured within 1 year of award. (0-3 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The applicant clearly demonstrates how far along the project is in the necessary planning, design, engineering, and state and local permitting processes, and describes expected NEPA activities or otherwise demonstrates the project has considered NEPA. (0-3 points) 		
<p>Capacity & Qualifications</p>	<p>High scoring proposals clearly describe the organizational capacity including key partnerships. The role and qualifications for each collaborator are well described.</p> <p>Typical range: 11-15</p>	<p>Medium scoring proposals provide some explanation for organizational capacity and identify key partners. The role and qualifications for each collaborator may lack sufficient detail.</p> <p>Typical range: 6-10</p>	<p>Low scoring proposals provide little to no explanation for organizational capacity and may lack partnerships needed to successfully complete the project. Lack of sufficient detail.</p> <p>Typical range: 0-5</p>
<p>Capacity & Qualifications Evaluation Criteria (0-15 points)</p>	<p>Details should be provided in the Capacity & Qualifications Narrative. Project Contacts section of the Overview tab should list a LDD Contact role unless applicant received a LDD Waiver at pre-application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes organizational capacity including any partnerships with other entities to fill out expertise (0-8 points) Applicants will be evaluated based on past performance for timely completion, collaboration, staff qualifications, and ability to meet program requirements. Applicant can identify specific grant-awarded projects they have completed or can demonstrate collaboration and relationships with other entities to ensure the project can meet program requirements and be completed in a timely manner. New applicants or applicants with no prior Federal award history will not be reviewed negatively. Provides assessment of past performance. (0-7 points) 		

	*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.
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