Northern Border Regional Commission

2025 FOREST ECONOMY PROGRAM
Program Information Session

Marina Bowie, Program Manager: mbowie@nbrc.gov
Andrea Smith, Program Director: asmith@nbrc.gov

NBRC Program Overview Series

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

Review the Program Overview Series!

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

Agenda Items:

Determining Eligibility and Waiver Requirements

- Eligible Locations: NBRC Service Area, 2025 Distress Criteria, Determining

  Eligibility & Match/Reimbursement Ratios

- Eligible Applicants and Co-Applicants

Forest Economy Program Overview

- Purpose and example projects

- Available Funds

- Eligible Purposes: Project Categories, Investment Priorities and Award Sizes

Agenda Items:

Pre-Application

- Timeline, Process & Requirements

- Evaluation of pre-applications

What's Next

- Project Development

- NBRC Office Hours

- Grants Management System Training

Q&A

**Northern Border
Regional Commission**

Determining Eligibility

Review the Program Overview Series!

Eligible Applicants & Co-Applicants

Eligible Locations:

- NBRC Service Area
- 2025 Distress Criteria
- Determining Eligibility & Match/Reimbursement Ratios

Waivers (if applicable, due with pre-application):

- 75% Expenditure Waiver
- Significant Benefits Waiver

![Northern Border Regional Commission logo]

Determining Eligibility & Match

1. Determine organization eligibility
2. Determine if project location and applicant/co-applicant are in NBRC Service Area. Determine if your project will require waiver submission at pre-application.
3. Identify reimbursement and match rate associated with location.

Resources:
- Program User Manual –FEP
- Distress Criteria on NBRC website
- Significant Benefit Waiver (Found in Appendix E of Program User Manual)

Assessing Distress in NBRC Counties

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

Distress Criteria for 2024

Counties are designated as Distressed, Transitional, or Attainment.

Distressed Counties

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

Transitional Counties

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

Attainment Counties

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

Exceptions to Attainment County Eligibility

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

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

Eligible Applicants & Co-Applicants

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

Ineligible Applicants & Co-Applicants:
- For-profit entities, LLCs and other entities that are
not a 501(c) are <u>NOT</u> eligible to apply for NBRC funds.
- Applicants from outside NBRC member states are ineligible

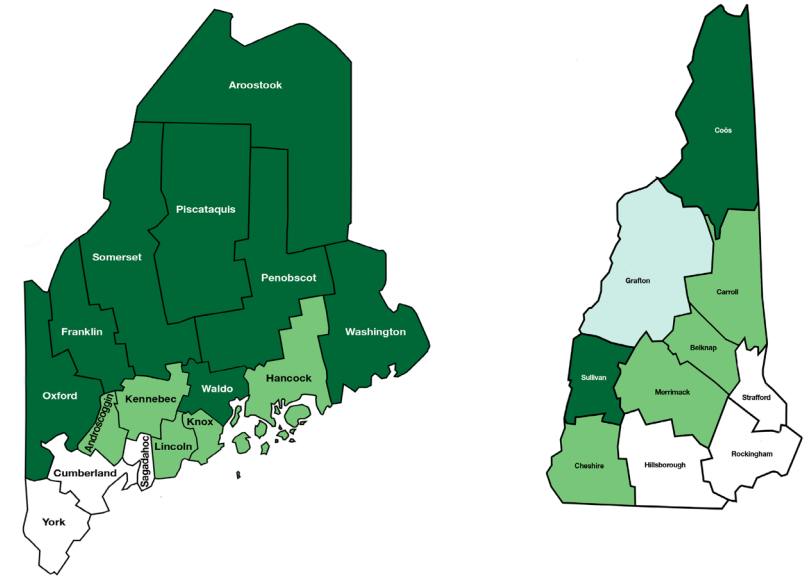Applicants will identify entity type in registration process!

NBRC Service Area (2025)

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

Maine: Androscoggin, Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, <u>Lincoln</u>, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington counties.

New Hampshire: Belknap, Carroll, Cheshire, Coös, Grafton, <u>Merrimack</u> and Sullivan counties
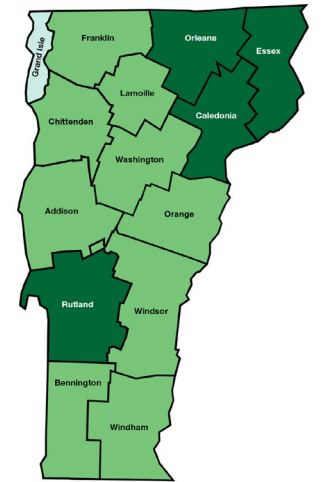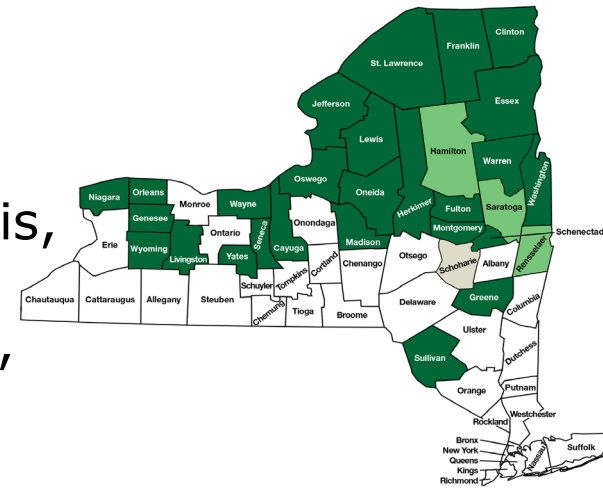
NBRC Service Area (2025)

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

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.

NBRC Distress Criteria

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

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

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

Attainment: Ineligible for funding, unless exceptions apply:

- Isolated Areas of Distress: specific municipality designated distressed
- Significant Benefits: benefits to surrounding distressed and transitional counties, requires **Significant Benefit Waiver**
- Multi-county or multi-state project that includes at least one distressed or transitional county (match is calculated based on an average of county match rates).

This requirement applies across programs!

Previous Award Recipients

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

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

Resources:
- Forest Economy Program User Manual
- 75% Expenditure Waiver

Forest Economy Program

- **Purpose**
- **Funds Available**
- **Program Eligible Purposes & Priorities**
- **Pre-Application Process & Evaluation**

Forest Economy Program Purpose

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

[Forest Economy Program award history](#)

Forest Economy Program Overview

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

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

2025 Forest Economy Program

At this time, Fiscal Year 2025 federal appropriations have not been finalized. **An estimated $5 million may be made available for awards under the two funding rounds of the Fiscal Year 2025 Forest Economy Program**, subject to the availability of future appropriations. NBRC may elect to award additional funds to applications received under this funding announcement.

Forest Economy funding to be competitively awarded in two funding rounds

- The estimated $5 million spans across two funding rounds
- All awards are subject to the availability of funds

**Northern Border
Regional Commission**

2025 Forest Economy Program

Pre-applications

- Required to receive an invitation to apply
- Due before 5:00pm on March 7 for spring round and August 29 for fall round
- Must be submitted using NBRC's online grants management system
- All waiver requests must be submitted with pre-applications
- Reviewed by NBRC for eligibility and by state programs for alignment with program priorities
- Invitations to apply are issued by the states

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

Northern Border Regional Commission

Program Eligibility and Priorities

Eligible Purposes:

- Program Categories & Award Sizes
- Program Investment Priorities
- **NEW!** Local Forest Initiatives

Eligible Project Categories

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

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

Resources: Forest Economy Program User Manual

Program Investment Priorities

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

Resources: Forest Economy Program User Manual

Local Forest Initiatives and Project Relevance

NEW! Projects must be consistent with the Program investment priorities of the Forest Economy Program, and where applicable, advance local forest economy initiatives, including but not limited to the following:

- 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)

*At time of application (by invite only), projects that support local initiatives will receive additional points.

**Northern Border
Regional Commission**

Examples Projects

For Example…

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

- _The project:_ In 2019, the Town of East Millinocket, Maine was funded to redevelop the East Millinocket paper mill site into a multi-industrial complex.

- _How it aligns with the FEP:_ The Town of East Millinocket was able to successfully purchase the mill property and prepare the site for industrial use by new businesses, including forest product companies. This project is a good example of a community development project as described in the Forest Economy Program materials.

For Example...

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

- _The project:_ In 2020, the Northern Vermont University was funded to establish the NVU Forestry Accelerator & Workforce Development program to address the economic shift produced by the chronic and consistent decline of the forest products industry across the tri- county region.

- _How it aligns with the FEP :_ the Forestry Accelerator Program provides technical assistance to companies looking to develop markets in northern New England and works to solve regional challenges in the forest economy. This project is a good example of a business planning and technical assistance project that directly supports the forest industry.

    https://forestaccelerator.org/

For Example…

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

- _The project:_ In 2021, the University of Maine was funded to evaluate wood sources and treatments for their suitability in fiber thermoforming (plant-based replacement for plastic packaging), and to develop a training course to develop the workforce needed to operate new machinery.

- _How it aligns with the FEP :_ The project helps to position the region to "become a resource – both in knowledge and skills – as fiber thermoforming continues to grow". – University of Maine 2021 NBRC RFEP application. This project represents an investment in the development and commercialization of technologies that create new markets for forest product residuals, as well as a forest economy workforce training project.

For Example…

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

- _The project_: In spring 2023, the NBRC funded the Jesup Memorial Library's Mass Timber Expansion Project, which will build an 11,400 square foot addition to the existing building in Bar Harbor, Maine, using cross laminated timber made from locally sourced eastern hemlock.

- _How it aligns with the FEP_ : This project will showcase the use of our local species in an increasingly popular and climate smart forest product, mass timber. This project is a good example of a community development project that supports the diversified use of forests within our region for economic activity that utilizes northern border forests sustainably.

For Example…

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

- _The project:_ In the Fall, 2024 grant round, NBRC funded the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to expand its forest initiative to address Vermont's forest economy workforce needs, and to increase the viability of long-term quality harvest in VT's forests.

- _How it aligns with the FEP :_ The project involves collaboration among many of Vermont's forest industry stakeholders and addresses the FEP investment priorities as well as state and regionally identified needs, by helping to implement the Vermont Forest Future Roadmap. The project represents workforce development to prepare workers for careers in logging, forestry, and related fields.

Connecting to state and regional investment priorities will strengthen your proposal!

Pre-Applications

- **Pre-Application Details:**
  - Timeline, Process & Requirements, Evaluation

- **State Role in Pre-Applications**

- **Advisory Board Role in Pre-Applications**

- **What to Expect After the Pre-application**

Refer to the Program User Manual and GMS Resources!

Pre-Application: Timeline & Key Dates

- Program Information Sessions: February 11th

- Online pre-application system opens: February 10th

- Round 1 Pre-applications Due: **March 7ᵗʰ before 5:00pm EST**
  - All applicable waivers are due with pre-application:
  - ✓ 75% Waiver Request for Prior Award Recipients (all programs)
  - ✓ Significant Benefit Waiver Request (all programs)

- Round 1 Forest Economy Program Pre-Application Review:
- Responses – feedback/invitations to apply: **Week of March 31**

Pre-applications are required

Pre-Application: Process

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

- Requires registration (establishing a new user account, if not already established). Registration guidance document is available.
- You must "Qualify" for a funding opportunity to create your pre-application. Pre-application guidance document is available.

- Resources: [Forms & Other Grant Administration Materials: | Northern Border Regional Commission](#)

Pre-Application: Requirements

Applicant and Co-Applicant Information

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

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

This information will be collected during the registration process.

Pre-Application: Requirements

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

Primary Place of Performance – where will the project take place?
- Address including zip code
- County

Project Title

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

Pre-Application: Requirements

Budget Narrative

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

Budget Details

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

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

Funds will need to be allocated across budget categories

Pre-Application: Requirements

Pre-application budget categories

- Personnel
- Fringe Benefits
- Travel and Transportation
- Equipment
- Supplies and Materials

- Consultants
- Contracts and Sub-Grantees
- Construction
- Other Direct Costs
- Indirect Costs

- These budget categories align with the SF-424cbw.
- Pre-applications DO NOT require the SF-424cbw form, but full applications (by invitation only) will.

Northern Border
Regional Commission

Pre-Application: Requirements

Narrative Questions:
- Project Abstract
- Project Goals, Outcomes and Outputs
- Program Investment Priorities
- Project Beneficiaries and Community Context
- Statement of Need

- All narrative text boxes have a 5,000-character limit and formatting/editing capabilities.
- Applicants encouraged to have narrative responses available in a word processing document to easily copy and paste into the pre-application.

Guidance in Part II of Forest Economy Program User Manual.

Pre-Application: Requirements

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

Pre-Application: Requirements

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

Appendix G lists examples of Economic Outcomes and Outputs

Northern Border Regional Commission

Pre-Application: Requirements

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

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

Northern Border Regional Commission

Pre-Application: Requirements

Project Beneficiaries and Community Context - Narrative

- Who will benefit?
- Why does this project matter to the community?
- If applicable, how does this project serve or benefit rural communities with populations of less than 5,000 or underrepresented communities?
- If applicable, how does this project help communities plan for extreme weather readiness?
- **NEW!** Address whether/how the project supports regional, state, or local forest economy planning efforts.

Pre-Application: Requirements

Statement of Need - Narrative

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

Evaluation of Pre-Applications

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

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

Evaluation of Pre-Applications

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

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

State Program Manager Role

- Project Development
- Review and assess pre-applications for alignment with Forest Economy Program priorities and local forest economy initiatives and planning efforts
- Issue invitations to apply

Resources: Complete the [Project Interest Form](#) prior to requesting a meeting with State Program Managers

Advisory Board Role

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

What to Expect After Pre-Applications

During the week March 31, applicants will receive notification of pre-application status along with information from NBRC.

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

**Northern Border
Regional Commission**

What's Next

Project Development

- Determine eligibility

- Register in the GMS!

- Self classify project according to project categories and investment priorities

- Self evaluate project against NBRC scoring criteria

- Meet with State Program Manager if further discussion needed

- Begin developing pre-application responses!

What's Next

Grants Management System Information

[Forms & Other Grant Administration Materials: | Northern Border Regional Commission](#)

A few notes:

- Registration required for pre-application

- Pre-application required

- Pre-application can only be associated with one funding program at a time

**Northern Border
Regional Commission**

QUESTIONS?

Send future questions to
admin@nbrc.gov

NBRC Contacts

NBRC Staff:
- Andrea Smith, NBRC Program Director, asmith@nbrc.gov
- Marina Caceres, Forest Economy Program Manager, mcaceres@nbrc.gov

State Program Managers:
- Each State has a Program Manager, who are employees of State government appointed to the role by the Governor's Alternate:
- Maine: Charlotte Mace, charlotte.mace@maine.gov
- New Hampshire: Ian Davis, ian.m.davis@livefree.nh.gov
- Vermont: Kristie Farnham, Kristie.Farnham@vermont.gov
- New York: Kyle Wilber, kyle.wilber@dos.ny.gov

Resources

NBRC Forest Economy Program Website:

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

NBRC Distress Criteria:

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

Local Development Districts (LDDs):

Forest Economy Program awardees are not required to utilize an LDD for grant administration, however If an entity is awarded funding and deemed to not have sufficient internal capacity to self-administer their project, NBRC may require the entity to contract with a Local Development District (LDD) who has opted in to NBRC's LDD Partnership Program.

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