



USDOT Discretionary Grants Opportunity

Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program

The Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program provides funding and technical assistance to projects that advance community-centered transportation connection projects, with a priority for projects that benefit disadvantaged communities. This includes projects that improve access to daily needs such as jobs, education, healthcare, food, nature and recreation, and foster equitable development and restoration.

RCP provides technical assistance and grant funding for planning and capital construction to address infrastructure barriers, restore community connectivity and improve people's lives. A total of \$607 million is available through this opportunity:

- **Planning Grants and Technical Assistance Funding:** \$150 million
- **Capital Construction Funding:** \$457 million

The [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) (NOFO) is available from USDOT.

Changes from the FY2023 RCP NOFO

The FY2023 RCP NOFO included funding for the Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Program. This new NOFO for FY2024 through FY2026 **does not** include funding for the NAE Program.



APPLICATION DEADLINE

Monday
September 30, 2024
11:59 PM EDT

Grant Program Summaries:





Eligible Projects

Highway or other transportation facility that creates a barrier, including barriers to mobility, access, or economic development, due to high speeds, grade separations, or other design factors. Facilities may also include limited access highways, viaducts, any other principal arterial facilities, and other facilities such as transit lines and rail lines.

Community Planning Projects

Projects that perform the study of removing, retrofitting, or mitigating an existing facility to restore community connectivity, public engagement and other transportation planning activities.

Capital Construction Projects

Projects that remove, retrofit, mitigate, or replace an existing eligible facility with a new facility that reconnects communities.

Funding Categories

The program establishes two categories of funding: Community Planning Grants and Capital Construction Grants.

Community Planning Grants

- Public engagement activities, including community visioning or other place-based strategies for public input and meaningful involvement into project plans
- Planning studies to assess the feasibility of removing, retrofitting, or mitigating an existing eligible facility to reconnect communities
- Conceptual and preliminary engineering, or design and planning studies that support the environmental review for a construction project
- Technical assistance for sponsor support and capacity building
- Other transportation planning activities or associated needs in advance of the project

Capital Construction Grants

- Preliminary and detailed design activities and associated environmental studies
- Predevelopment/preconstruction
- Permitting activities including completion of the NEPA process
- Removal, retrofit, or mitigation of an eligible facility
- Replacement of an eligible facility with new facility that restores community connectivity
- Delivering community benefits and mitigation of impacts identified through the NEPA process or other planning and project development for the capital construction project

Award Size

The program establishes the following minimum and maximum grant award sizes by funding category below:

Community Planning Grants:

USDOT may award up to \$150 million for eligible public engagement, feasibility studies and other planning activities. BIL specifies that the maximum RCP Community Planning Grant award is \$2 million.

Capital Construction Grants:

USDOT may award up to \$457 million for eligible construction activities necessary to carry out a project to remove, retrofit, or mitigate an existing eligible facility or replace an existing eligible facility with a new facility that reconnects communities. BIL specifies that the minimum Capital Construction Grant award is \$5 million. USDOT anticipates that Capital Construction Grants may range from \$5 million to \$100 million. If a project is partially funded, project components executed through the RCP award must demonstrate independent utility.

Matching Requirements

Community Planning Grants

- 80% RCP funds
- 20% local match
- Local matching share may consist partially or entirely of in-kind contributions, as well as contributions from the private sector and/or philanthropic organizations.

Capital Construction Grants

- 50% RCP funds
- 50% local match
- Other federal funds (USDOT formula funds, Tribal Transportation Program funds, or other federal grants) may be used to bring the total federal share up to a maximum of 80% of the total cost of the project. Recipients are required to contribute a local matching share of no less than 20% of eligible activity costs. The local matching share may consist partially or entirely of in-kind contributions as well as contributions from the private sector and/or philanthropic organizations.

Eligible Recipients

The following entities are eligible to receive funding through this program.

Community Planning Grants:

- State
- Unit of local government
- Tribal government
- Metropolitan planning organization
- Non-profit organization

Capital Construction Grants:

- Owner(s) of the eligible facility proposed in the project for which all necessary feasibility studies and other planning activities have been completed.
- Eligible Community Planning Grant applicant may submit the application in partnership with the facility owner to carry out the proposed project.

Statutory Evaluation Requirements

FHWA will evaluate applications on the basis of the following factors.

Merit Criteria

- Equity and Justice40
- Access
- Facility Suitability
- Community Engagement and Community-Based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships



- Equitable Development
- Climate Change Mitigation and/or Adaptation and Resilience
- Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity

Project Readiness

There is no narrative requirement for Project Readiness for Community Planning Grants, but USDOT will evaluate these grants for the following:

- **Technical Assessment:** Based on information contained throughout the application and does not require an additional submission. Technical Assessment should address the applicant's capacity to successfully deliver the project in compliance with the federal requirements, previous experience with USDOT discretionary grant awards, and the technical experience and resources dedicated to the project.
- **Financial Completeness:** Based on information contained throughout the application and does not require an additional submission. Financial Completeness Assessment reviews the availability of matching funds and whether the applicant presented a complete funding package. All applicants should describe a plan to address potential cost overruns.



Capital Construction Grant

There are narrative requirements for the Environmental Risk element of Project Readiness for Capital Construction Grants. This section should include sufficient information for USDOT to assess the project's likelihood of being included in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) or equivalent by the time of award obligation, and in the Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan for transit projects, and can be reasonably expected to begin construction in a timely manner.

Applicants should provide a project schedule and address required approvals and permits, NEPA class of action and status, public involvement, right-of-way acquisition plans, risk assessment, and risk mitigation strategies.

The Environmental Risk Assessment requires additional information from the Capital Construction Grant applicant. It analyzes the project's environmental approvals and the likelihood of outstanding, necessary approvals affecting project obligation.

Benefit-Cost Analysis for RCP Capital Construction Grants

To be eligible for RCP Capital Construction funds, applicants must submit the results of a BCA and should briefly summarize in the narrative. Applicants should also provide the technical basis of the BCA sufficient to allow USDOT to reproduce the analysis.

Merit Criteria Ratings

The combination of individual criterion ratings will inform one overall Merit Rating: Highly Recommended, Recommended, Acceptable, or Not Recommended.

- Highly Recommended if four or more of the six merit criteria ratings are "high" and none of the merit criteria ratings are "non-responsive."
- Recommended if at least two of the merit criteria ratings are "high," no more than three of the merit criteria ratings are "low," and no more than one is "non-responsive," and it does not fit within the definition of Highly Recommended.
- Acceptable if there is a combination of "high," "medium," "low," or "non-responsive" ratings that do not fit within the definitions of Highly Recommended, Recommended, or Not Recommended.

Application Requirements

Applications require standard forms, required key information, narrative, budget and project location file. Planning grant narratives are limited to 12 pages in length, and Capital Construction Grant narratives are limited to 20 pages.

Capital Construction Grants require a benefit-cost analysis for RCP and must meet project readiness requirements. The BCA may apply a qualitative allowance for benefits that cannot be quantified. USDOT encourages joint applicants from place-based partnerships headed by a lead applicant. A lead applicant may submit no more than three applications. If a lead applicant submits more applications, only the last three received will be reviewed.

Your Infrastructure Finance, Economics, and grant writing professionals stand by ready to support project sponsors applying for funding from the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program.

If you need any assistance or have questions, please contact:

Nathan Macek | nathan.macek@hdrinc.com | Elena Wilken | elena.wilken@hdrinc.com | Jessica Hekter | jessica.hekter@hdrinc.com

hdrinc.com

We practice increased use of sustainable materials and reduction of material use.

© HDR, all rights reserved.

