



## USDOT Discretionary Grants Opportunity

# Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program

The Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) Program jointly implements the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program and the Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Program.

- RCP provides technical assistance and grant funding for planning and capital construction to address infrastructure barriers, restore community connectivity, and improve people's lives. The program offers \$198 million, including \$50 million for Community Planning Grants and \$148 million for Capital Construction Grants.
- NAE provides technical assistance and grant funding to improve walkability, safety, and affordable transportation access through context-sensitive strategies for improving community connectivity; mitigating or remediating negative impacts on the human or natural environment; and assisting economically disadvantaged or underserved communities with planning and capacity building activities. The program offers \$3.155 billion, including \$135 million for Community Planning Grants, up to \$2.57 billion to Capital Construction Grants, and up to \$450 million to Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants.

The RCN Program welcomes applications from eligible applicants from diverse local, Tribal, and regional communities regardless of size, location, and experience administering federal funding awards.



### **APPLICATION DEADLINE**

Applications are due  
**September 28, 2023**  
by **11:59 PM EDT**

## Changes from the FY 2022 RCP NOFO

The FY 2023 RCN Program includes an updated definition of an economically disadvantaged community, with applicants encouraged to use Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) as part of the Justice40 initiative to accomplish the goal that 40% of overall benefits from certain federal investment flow to disadvantaged communities.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to use the USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer to understand how their community or project area is disadvantaged related to lack of transportation investments or opportunities.

FY 2023 RCN Program applications will be evaluated under common project outcome criteria. The common project outcome criteria are similar in concept to the FY 2022 RCP merit criteria but are organized into specific criteria and include additional considerations for the NAE Program. [Please refer to the NOFO for more information about the new RCP Program.](#)

## Eligible Projects

### RCP Eligible Facilities – Community Planning and Capital Construction Grants

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, rail lines, gas pipelines, and airports.

### NAE Eligible Facilities – Community Planning, Capital Construction, and Regional Partnership Challenge Grants

- **A dividing facility:** Surface transportation facility that creates an obstacle to community connectivity by high speeds, grade separation, or other design factors
- **A burdening facility:** Surface transportation facility that is a source of air pollution, noise, stormwater, heat, or other burden to a disadvantaged or underserved community.

## Funding Categories

The program establishes three categories of funding, Community Planning Grants, Capital Construction Grants, and Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants.

### Community Planning Grants

\$50 million of RCP funds and \$135 million of NAE funding to support:

- Public engagement activities, including community visioning or other place-based strategies for public input into projects plans
- Planning studies to assess the feasibility of removing, retrofitting, or mitigating an existing eligible dividing 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

\$148 million of RCP funds and \$2.57 billion of NAE funding to support:

- 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
- Delivering community benefits and mitigation of impacts

### NAE Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants

\$450 million of NAE funds support regional collaboration activities:

- Community Planning and Capital Construction Grants through partnerships of at least two entities from eligible entities
- Tackle persistent, regional equitable access and mobility challenges
- Must address a regional challenge such as land use, zoning, and transportation challenges
- Other transportation activities or associated needs under the proposed project



## Award Size

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

### Community Planning Grants:

At least \$185 million is available to support eligible public engagement, feasibility studies, and other planning activities. The maximum Community Planning Grant award funded with RCP funds is \$2 million. There is no maximum award amount for a Community Planning Grant award funded with NAE funds.

### Capital Construction Grants:

Up to \$2.72 billion is available to support eligible construction activities. The minimum Capital Construction Grant award funded with RCP funds is \$5 million. There is no minimum award amount for a Capital Construction Grant award funded with NAE funds. If a project is partially funded, project components funded by the RCN Program must demonstrate independent utility.

### NAE Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants:

Up to \$450 million is available to support regional collaboration and innovation on the eligible activities under Community Planning or Capital Construction Grants. USDOT anticipates awarding three to five Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants.

## Matching Requirements

### Eligible Applicants

#### RCP - Community Planning Grants

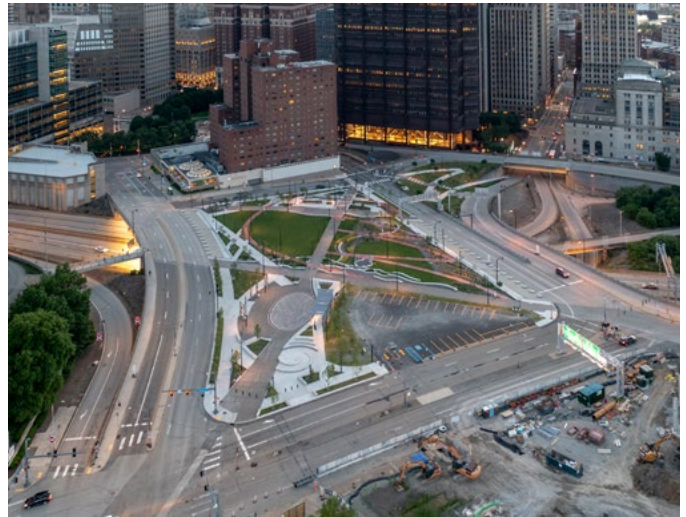
- 80% RCP funds
- 20% local match

#### RCP - Capital Construction Grants

- 50% RCP funds
- 50% local match
- Other federal funds may be used to bring the total federal share up to a maximum of 80% of the total cost of the project.

#### NAE - Planning, Construction, and Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants

- 80% NAE funds
- 20% local match
- Projects in a disadvantaged or underserved community do not require a local match.



## Eligible Recipients

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

### RCP - Community Planning Grants:

State; unit of local government; Tribal government; Metropolitan Planning Organization; or a non-profit organization.

### RCP - Capital Construction Grants:

(1) Owner(s) of the eligible facility proposed in the project for which all necessary feasibility studies and other planning activities have been completed or (2) a partnership between a facility owner and any eligible RCP Community Planning Grant applicant.

### NAE - Community Planning, Capital Construction, and Regional Partnership Challenge Grants:

State or territory; unit of local government; political subdivision of a state; Tribal government; special purpose district or public authority with a transportation function; Metropolitan Planning Organization; or a non-profit organization or institution of higher education that has entered into a partnership with an eligible entity and is applying for a grant for planning and capacity building activities in disadvantaged or underserved communities.

USDOT encourages Community Planning Grants and Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants with planning activities, and requires for Capital Construction Grants and Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants with construction activities, that all lead applicants be the owner of the facility proposed in the project or, if the lead applicant is another eligible entity, to demonstrate a partnership with the facility owner.



## Statutory Evaluation Requirements

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

### Merit Criteria

- Equity and Environmental Justice
- Access
- Facility Suitability
- Community Engagement and Community-Based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships
- Equitable Development
- Climate and Environment
- Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity

### Project Readiness

#### Benefit-Cost Analysis for RCP Capital Construction Grants

- Community Planning Grant applicants and NAE Program applicants do not need to submit the results of a benefit-cost analysis, although NAE Program applicants may choose to submit a benefit-cost analysis.

## Merit Criteria Ratings

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

- Highly Recommended if four or more of the seven 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 “none-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.
- Not Recommended if there are three or more “non-responsive” ratings.

## Application Requirements

Applications require standard forms, required key information, narrative, and a budget. Planning grant narratives are limited to 10 pages in length, and capital construction grant narratives are limited to 20 pages.

Capital construction grants require a benefit-cost assessment for RCP and must meet project readiness requirements. The benefit-cost analysis may apply a qualitative allowance for benefits that cannot be quantified. Eligible applicants may submit up to three grant applications for Community Planning Grants, two applications for Capital Construction Grants, and one application for NAE Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants.

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

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

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