

# Reconnecting Communities: Highways to Boulevards Pilot Program Frequently Asked Questions

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## Award Process and Administrative Requirements

### **Q1: Is it possible for the same agency to be awarded multiple grants if they submit multiple competitive applications?**

A. Due to the number of available awards, an applicant will only receive one award. It is recommended for applicants to combine multiple elements or components into one application package assuming it can be benefitting the community within the eligible project area.

### **Q2: Will there be future rounds for this grant?**

A. \$149 million has been established in the FY 22/23 State Budget for the RC:H2B, which is a pilot program. There currently are no identified funds for future rounds or cycles of funding as pilot programs can be used to establish need and success of future opportunities.

## Competitive Projects

### **Q3: How can I make my application competitive?**

A. Please see the "Eligibility Information" and "Evaluation" sections of the program guidelines on our website. Projects that substantively meet many of the program goals will be more competitive.

**Q4: Is a project more competitive if it involves the State Highway?**

A. The RC: H2B program is intended to plan for and fund the conversion of key underutilized highways in the State into multi-modal corridors to reconnect communities divided by transportation infrastructure that meet the program's goals and objectives. The transportation infrastructure creating the barrier is not limited to State Highway System (SHS) facilities. If an application meets the program's goals and objectives it is an eligible project regardless of its relation to the SHS.

**Q5: Do we have to align with every single Program Goal?**

A. Projects are not required to meet each of the program goals. Projects that meet the majority of the program goals and have transformative benefits to the community will be the most competitive.

**Eligible Applicants**

**Q6: Should Caltrans be the Lead applicant if it involves the State Highway?**

A. Caltrans may not be the lead applicant on an RC:H2B application. If the project involves the SHS, Caltrans must then be a co-applicant.

**Q7: Will only 3 communities will be awarded?**

A. Awards will be granted to one urban community, one rural, and one corridor. A corridor can be either urban or rural dependent on the community that corridor serves.

**Q8: Can you provide a sample agreement that would be acceptable if there's a partnership between agency and partner?**

A. Partnership agreements are between the lead agency, or their co-applicants, and their partners. The specifics of that partnerships is unique to the proposed project and is up to the applicants to determine how they will work together. Caltrans will only contract with the lead applicant or the implementing agencies. We will not be able to provide an example of an agreement.

**Q9: Can a nonprofit be the lead applicant alone or partner with a local government organization?**

A. A nonprofit cannot be the lead applicant. The lead applicant must have formal ability to perform the requirements of the grant. A nonprofit may be a listed partner.

**Q10: Are lead applicants required to compensate partners?**

A. The form of partnership and their relationship to the lead applicant may differ for each application. Partnerships are separate from third party contracts where an entity provides a paid service or work for hire.

**Q11: Can RC:H2B funds be used as match towards other state funded grant opportunities?**

A. RC:H2B funds may be used as matching funds for other grant opportunities assuming all the requirements of both grants can be met, and that the proposed project fits in and supports the Reconnecting Communities Plan.

**Q12: To what extent will consideration be given to applicants who were unsuccessful in receiving an award under USDOT's reconnecting communities program? Does an unsuccessful application help or hurt an applicant? Or would it have no bearing on Caltrans' evaluation of their application?**

A. The success of an applicant in another grant program including that for cycle 1 of the federal Reconnecting Communities program will not impact the evaluation of the application for this RC:H2B program.

**Q13: Is there a limit to the number of co-applicants or partners that can be included in an application?**

A. No limit.

**Q14: Are partnerships encouraged or scored higher?**

A. Yes, partnerships are encouraged. See *Evaluation Criteria: Capacity/Deliverability (Qualitative)* section of the program guidelines.

## Eligible Expenditures and Activities

**Q15: Can RC:H2B funds be used for the purchase or acquisition of property that is creating the barrier?**

A. If acquisition or purchase of land is necessary for the development for the proposed project, it may be considered an eligible expense dependent on Caltrans' evaluation assessment. Factors to consider may be the complexity and timing of the request, as well as what other alternatives may be available.

**Q16: Is a project required to have multiple components or can it be a single element?**

A. A project with a single element may be eligible if it meets the requirements of the program, including removing a barrier to benefit an underserved community. Projects that substantively meet the majority of the program goals will be more competitive regardless to the number of elements included. A project may need more than one element to substantially meet all or most of the program goals.

**Q17: What if our proposed project is only for Planning work and we are not ready for Construction yet? Can we still apply?**

A. The intent of the program is to work collaboratively between Caltrans and the grantee to achieve a deliverable outcome that can benefit the awarded community. Applications are not required to have a detailed scope, schedule and budget for all phases of work, nor are they required to have a defined roadmap to project deliverability at time of application. If awarded, Caltrans will work with the grantee at each phase of the project with the intent to bring each award past the planning phase and deliver an improvement to the community.

**Q18: We have already done some preliminary studies/investigation and think we could skip the first few phases. Would we not be eligible because we would not be starting from concept?**

A. Prior work or efforts performed on preliminary phases does not affect the project's eligibility. Applicants must demonstrate that all prior efforts are in line with the goals of the program. If awarded, grantee will work in collaboration with Caltrans to outline the scope, schedule, and budget of each phase. Any prior efforts will be taken into consideration when determining what efforts are still needed, if any, at each project phase.

**Q19: Is the project required to have a direct physical impact or material change to the eligible barrier facility? Or do projects that mitigate the impact of those barrier facilities also qualify?**

A. Projects may not necessarily have a direct physical or material change to the eligible facility, for example pedestrian over or undercrossing or alternate routes established for the community to access opportunities and resources, which may circumvent the barrier and provide new points of access.

**Q20: Will the program consider Utility Relocation & Utility Upgrades?**

A. Relocation and utility upgrades that are deemed necessary to complete the other eligible components of a project will be considered. For example, if a transportation barrier is removed and replaced with complete street improvements, and the project area needs broadband internet access or more streetlights in the area, it would therefore need utility relocation.

**Q21: Could this include pop-up or temporary demonstration/pilot projects?**

A. The goal of the program is to produce permanent solutions. Temporary or pop-up activities may be included in the project award if it adds value to the Planning phase of the project.

## Funding

### **Q22: Will there be both planning and implementation grant awardees?**

A. There will not be a sperate planning and implementation grant. RC:H2B grants will be awarded to a project from concept to completion. RC:H2B funds may be used on both planning and implementation phases of the awarded projects as applicable.

### **Q23: Can a project that has already received funding from another program apply for additional funding with this grant?**

A. RC:H2B funds cannot be used to supplant existing or other committed funds. However, if the other project is adding scope, that portion of the project may be eligible for RC:H2B funds. Applicant shall ensure that it is complying with all the laws, regulations, and guidelines from the other grant program in addition to the RC:H2B requirements.

### **Q24: Do projects require California Transportation Commission (CTC) allocation of funds?**

A. Funds for the RC:H2B are not allocated through the CTC.

### **Q25: Can you confirm that federal requirements won't apply to grant implementation?**

A: The RC:H2B program is 100% State funded; however, we have a goal of leveraging the state funds with the Federal Reconnecting Communities Program or other Federal programs as applicable. If federal funds are awarded to any phase of the project the project becomes federalized and all federal requirements will apply.

### **Q26: If a highway exceeds its original carrying capacity and therein brings many more impacts to the community, and the community sees opportunities for "right-sizing" the facility, is that project eligible under this program?**

A. This grant aims to reconnect communities caused by transportation and/or other barriers to opportunities. The project must address the reconnection or historical harm to a community. If the community has established that this is a necessary corrective action, this may be an eligible activity, but must take into consideration feasibility studies, alignment with CAPTI, and any other available alternatives. Right sizing a facility alone will not be eligible or competitive under this grant but may be a component of the bigger project.

### **Q27: If a project receives State RC:H2B funds and Federal RCP funds, will those Federal funds come through Local Assistance or the Feds separately?**

A. The federal funds will be subject to CTC action and the E-76 approval process.

## Community Engagement / Community Involvement

### **Q28: Can you clarify the differences of Community Involvement and Community Engagement and how it relates to the RC:H2B Program?**

A. Community Engagement primarily focuses on the initial engagement of the community at the start of the project. This engagement may occur before or after the applications are submitted and is used to identify the preliminary needs and support of the community. The application narrative will describe the community involvement efforts, whether done online, virtual, or in-person, that went into identifying the proposed elements as a priority for the community. Previous public engagement efforts are encouraged but not a requirement at time of application.

Community Involvement is the continuous involvement of the community members through each phase of the project. Involvement can either be through formal partnerships and/or various involvement opportunities with the community members. The community will provide valuable input on identifying the barriers facing their community, the needs and wants of that community, and is actively involved in the potential solutions. This involvement will occur at all phases of the project.

### **Q29: What is the expectation for public engagement for this program considering COVID-19?**

A. In-person engagement events are not required. Online engagement activities such as online workshops and surveys that follow locally approved community engagement polices are acceptable forms of community engagement.

### **Q30: Would the public engagement portion of the project that occurred prior to the application submittal be considered an eligible expenditure?**

A. Any work performed prior to the execution of the grant agreement is ineligible for reimbursement.

## Timeline and Deadlines

### **Q31: Can the June 30, 2026, fund expenditure deadline be extended?**

A. Funding for this program will revert, therefore the fund expenditure deadline cannot be extended. Prior to the start of each Phase, or component, awardee will submit a fund disbursement request. Request shall include a scope, schedule, and budget for that proposed phase or component. RC:H2B funds may be used for any of the phases but still must be expended by June 30, 2026, before these funds revert. It is encouraged to seek approvals for disproportional spending between other funding sources on project phases to ensure RC:H2B

funds are expended first. Caltrans is also looking at all available options to extend the fund reversion deadline where possible.

## Underserved Communities

### **Q32: If our agency or organization is not underserved or directly located within an underserved community, can we still apply?**

A. Yes. Projects that are located within or directly adjacent to an underserved community are competitive, regardless of the applicant or applicants' geographical location or underserved designation.

### **Q33: Is the grant only for projects located in underserved communities?**

A. Eligible project sites must be partially or fully located in an underserved community. See the section "Baseline Metrics (Quantitative)": in the guidelines for information on the state and federal definitions of underserved communities.

### **Q34: Will Option 1, Area Medium Income, still be based on the 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data?**

A. Area Medium Income will be based on the most current adopted data sets available at time of application submission. Data is available at the [United States Census Bureau Website](#).

### **Q35: How do we approach/include anti-displacement strategies under this program? Does the community need to have related policies?**

A. Displacement Avoidance has been included as one of the five Transformative community efforts created to address the legislative goals. Proposals receive points for displacement avoidance based on their descriptions of displacement vulnerabilities within the community, existing policies or plans that address displacement avoidance and policies, programs or coordination that will come about because of the proposals, referred to as a Displacement Avoidance Plan. See "Evaluation Criteria" section of the RC:H2B guidelines posted on the website.

## Evaluation Criteria

### **Q36: Do we have to submit the question responses prior to an Open Office Hour?**

A. No but it would be good if the attendees have the answers prepared before the office hours to aid in the discussion with RC:H2B staff.

**Q37: What is the distinction between "Community involvement" under "transformative community efforts" (2nd category) and "community partnerships" under "capacity/deliverability (4th category)?**

A. Partnerships don't necessarily need to be with the community. They could be with consultants or other organizations who have the skillset to help you develop your projects or to help you engage with the community.

**Q38: Why would applicant need to identify two metrics to qualify using the state methods and only one federal?**

A. The RC:H2B program goals are focused on benefiting the communities in the most need. The selection of both State and Federal criteria assists the project's competitiveness when leveraging with other funding opportunities. By requiring alignment with multiple merit criteria definitions of underserved communities, we can focus the eligible applicants on those that are in the most need.

## Miscellaneous

**Q39: U.S. Department of Transportation has stated they will be integrating the new "Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Program" authorized by the Inflation Reduction Act, into the next NOFO for release in Spring 2023. How is this new federal program consolidation being incorporated into the Caltrans RC program and draft guidelines?**

A. Awardees will work in partnership with Caltrans to identify what other grant opportunities are available to leverage the RC:H2B funds, including any future cycles of the Federal RCP Program and the consolidation of the Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Program. Potential opportunities will be evaluated prior to the start of each phase of work.

**Q40: The legislative language calls out "converting underutilized highways". How is underutilized defined? And is it a requirement to convert a highway as part of this grant?**

A. Underutilized highways can be defined as highways that no longer function at its original design capacity or intention, or highways that never functioned as it was originally designed or intended. RC:H2B proposed projects are not required to include conversion of a highway to a local road to address the reconnection of the community in need.

**Q41: Is an agreement required between facility owner and implementing agency prior to applying?**

A. Both the facility owner and the implementing agencies will be listed as Lead or Co-Applicants on the Application. For future phases formal contracts or agreements between facility owners and implementing agencies may be



prepared prior to initiating work on each applicable phase or phase component. Agreements are not required to be in place at time of application.

**Q42: Will there be requirements for consultant/contractor selection regarding local/DBE/MBE/WBE firms?**

A. Award of RC:H2B funds does not relieve grantees of the responsibility of following all applicable state, federal, or local laws and regulations. Receipt of an RC:H2B award does not excuse awardees from performing all applicable procurement practices as required.