

FHWA Grants Opportunity

Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Grant Program

PROTECT is a competitive discretionary grant program authorized under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. It funds projects that make transportation infrastructure more resilient to natural hazards and the effects of climate change, including severe storms, flooding, drought, levee and dam failures, wildfire, rockslides, mudslides, sea level rise, extreme temperatures, and earthquakes. The program will award up to \$576 million in a solicitation combining funds from FY 2024 and FY 2025. An additional \$300 million will be available in FY 2026. The program is administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

An October 25, 2024 [Notice of Funding Opportunity \(NOFO\)](#) for this program addresses funds available, qualifications and application requirements.

Grant Program Categories

The PROTECT competitive grant program is divided into four sub-categories: planning grants and three categories of implementation grants. Applicants must select which category they are applying to, but FHWA may choose to award funds from a different category. The approximate funding by category available for FY 2024 and FY 2025 is summarized below.

- **Planning Grants** provide funding for various transportation resilience planning activities, including vulnerability assessments and evacuation planning. Up to \$56 million is available.

The three implementation grant categories include the following:

- **Resilience Improvement Grants** are the largest category, with up to \$408 million of total funding available. These grants are for improving the resilience of existing surface transportation assets to natural disasters and changing conditions.
- **Community Resilience and Evacuation Route Grants** focus on strengthening and protecting evacuation routes for emergency events, including improving evacuation route resilience, acquiring evacuation route equipment or signage, and constructing new evacuation routes. Up to \$56 million is available.
- **At-Risk Coastal Infrastructure Grants** provide funding to enhance the resilience of coastal infrastructure such as bridges, roads, pedestrian walkways and bicycle lanes against weather events and natural disasters caused by coastal flooding, erosion and sea level rise. Up to \$56 million is available.

October 31, 2024



APPLICATION DEADLINE:

February 24, 2025
11:59 p.m. EST

Grant Program Summaries:





Changes from the FY 2022-2023 NOFO

This is the second NOFO for the PROTECT Discretionary Grant Program. The NOFO is similar to the last opportunity. Changes include updates to the application period timeframes, merit criteria, and rating criteria. Applicants should read the NOFO in its entirety when applying for this funding opportunity.

Eligible Projects

Planning Grants

Planning grants are focused on assessment of hazard risk and response planning. Generally, this does not include specific capital project development activities. Eligible planning project categories are defined by statute and include the following:

- Development of a Resilience Improvement Plan, for states or metropolitan planning organizations
- Resilience planning, predesign, design, or data tools to simulate transportation disruption scenarios, including vulnerability assessments
- Technical capacity building to facilitate the ability of the eligible entity to assess the vulnerabilities of the surface transportation assets and community response strategies
- Evacuation planning and preparation

The three implementation grant categories can fund all project phases, from project development through construction/implementation, including public engagement, property acquisition and environmental mitigation. However, no more than 10% of any PROTECT implementation grant can be applied to pre-construction activities.

Eligible project types for the three implementation grants include a wide range of mitigation measures designed to create more resilient transportation infrastructure and respond to the effects of climate change. One way to evaluate whether a given project is a good fit with the program is to consider the following questions, which are adapted from the NOFO's Design Elements Merit Criterion:

- Can the facility be sited or relocated outside of an area with a current or projected future hazard or climate impact (100-year flood, increasing flood return intervals)? Where relevant, does the project reduce impacts to floodplain function? If applicable, is the project sized to accommodate increases in sea level? If yes, what sea level rise projection will be used and how will this be incorporated into project design?
- Does this project take into account increased future stormwater flows, e.g., the need for additional drainage infrastructure or upsized culverts, elevated bridges and approaches?
- Will certain design elements increase the ability of the asset to continue to serve its primary function, and/or support emergency evacuation and post disaster relief, during and after weather events and natural disasters? How?
- Does the project add redundancy to the transportation system? And does this redundancy enhance emergency evacuations?
- Will the project use a nature-based solution? Or explain why a nature-based solution would not be a solution (wetland buffers, marsh breakwaters, reefs, sea grass plantings, dune restoration, adding stream sinuosity, etc.)
- Does the project employ the use of innovative or novel technologies, such as improved roadway subgrades, heat-resistant pavement mixes, natural infrastructure, or permeable pavement?

The specific project activities eligible under each of the three implementation grant categories are as described on the following page.

Resilience Improvement Grants

Including, but not limited to:

- Improvements or replacement of an existing surface transportation facility, including relocation to avoid future hazards
- Incorporation of natural infrastructure
- Upgrades to and installation of structural stormwater controls
- Installation of mitigation measures that prevent the intrusion of floodwaters
- Strengthening systems that remove rainwater
- Upgrades/installation of structural stormwater controls
- Resilience project that addresses identified vulnerabilities described in Resilience Improvement Plan
- Relocating roadways in a base floodplain to higher ground
- Stabilizing slide areas or slopes
- Installing riprap
- Lengthening/raising bridges to increase waterway openings
- Increase the size or number of drainage structures
- Installing seismic retrofits on bridges
- Adding scour, stream stability, coastal, and other hydraulic countermeasures
- Vegetation management practices
- Other resilience projects, especially those identified in a Resilience Improvement Plan

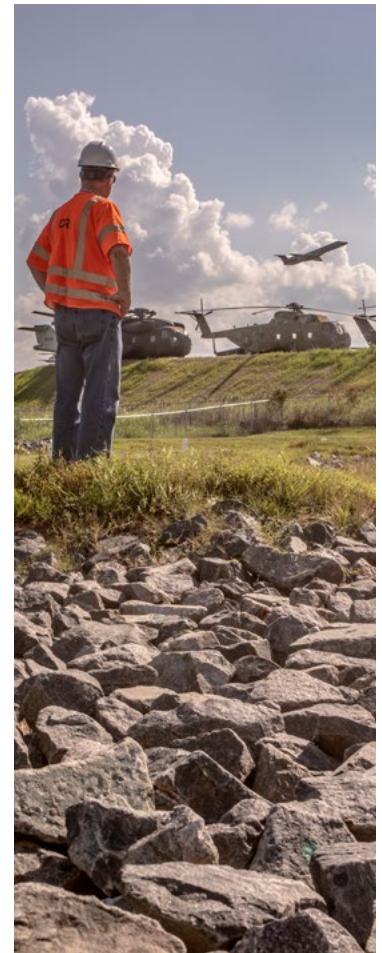
Community Resilience and Evacuation Route Grants

- Resilience Improvement Project
- Restoration or replacement of existing evacuation routes that are in poor condition or not designed to meet the anticipated demand during an emergency event
- Communications and intelligent transportation system equipment and infrastructure
- Counterflow measures
- Shoulders
- Construction of new or redundant evacuation routes
- Acquisition of evacuation route equipment or signage
- Ensuring access to critical destinations such as hospitals, ports, and federal facilities

At-Risk Coastal Infrastructure Grants

Includes any project to protect roadways that face hazards such as coastal flooding, coastal erosion, wave action, storm surge, or sea level rise.

This includes strengthening, stabilizing, hardening, elevating, relocating, or otherwise enhancing the resilience of roadway infrastructure itself, as well as other related or integrated facilities including bridges, roads, pedestrian walkways, bicycle lanes, culverts and tide gates. Rail infrastructure is not eligible under this category.





System Resilience

PROTECT grants in any of the three implementation categories may also be applied to system resilience projects that are functionally connected to an eligible transportation facility. Examples include:

- Increasing marsh health and total area adjacent to a highway right-of-way to promote additional flood storage
- Upgrades/installation of culverts designed to withstand 100-year flood events
- Upgrades/installation of tide gates to protect highways
- Upgrades/installation of flood gates to protect tunnel entrances

Eligible Facilities

The program funds projects serving a wide range of surface transportation infrastructure facilities. These include:

- Highway projects
- Public transportation facilities or services
- Intercity rail passenger transportation facilities or services
- Port facilities and connected infrastructure

PROTECT grants may fund projects that support or are functionally related to these facilities, in addition to improvements to the facilities themselves.

Eligible Applicants

- States or state agencies
- Metropolitan planning organizations
- Local governments, including cities and counties
- Special purpose districts or public authorities
- Native/Indigenous Tribes
- Federal land management agencies applying jointly with states
- A multi-state or multijurisdictional group of entities

At-Risk Coastal Infrastructure Grants are available to any of the above entities in states that border the Atlantic, Pacific, or Arctic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, Long Island Sound, or one or more of the Great Lakes.

Economic Analysis

For most implementation project types, the PROTECT program requires a benefit-cost analysis similar to other USDOT discretionary grant programs. However, FHWA has designed the economic analysis review to account for the difficulty of quantifying all potential resilience benefits (*such as those associated with nature-based design solutions or emergency evacuations*). For this reason, the evaluation process explicitly considers factors beyond the quantified benefit-cost ratio, as determined in the BCA. This includes detail provided in the narrative, especially as it relates to the Vulnerability and Risk and Criticality to Community merit categories.

The Economic Analysis Review Team will make a determination of the extent to which a project's benefits will exceed its costs. In order to receive a "High" rating, the benefit-cost ratio must be at least 2.0.

There is no BCA requirement for Planning grants. If a project is on the state's resilience improvement plan, there is also no BCA requirement.

Federal Award Information

For Planning Grants, the minimum award size is \$100,000, and there is no maximum award size. For Resilience Improvement, Community Resilience and Evacuation Routes, and At-Risk Coast Infrastructure Grants, the minimum award size is \$500,000 and there is no maximum award size. For FY 2024-2025, FHWA anticipates awarding between 30 to 40 grants across the three implementation project categories.

Cost Sharing or Matching

For planning grants, PROTECT covers 100% of project costs. For the three implementation grant categories, the program requires at least 20% matching funds. A unique statutory feature of the PROTECT program is that the matching funds can also be from a federal source. USDOT may elect to fund 100% of project costs for awards given to Native/Indigenous Tribes. The NOFO includes a cost sharing or matching equation recommended by USDOT to determine the cost share.



Match Reduction: For the three implementation grant programs, the non-federal match can be reduced by up to 10% (*allowing the grant to pay 90% of the project cost*) if the project is identified in a state or MPO Resilience Improvement Plan. To receive the full 10% match reduction, the plan must be included in the regional or statewide long-range transportation plan; if the resilience plan is a stand-alone plan, the match requirement is reduced by only 7%.

Merit Criteria

For Planning Grants, the merit criteria are:

- Program Alignment
- Planning Activity Approach
- Schedule and Budget
- Public Engagement, Partnerships and Collaboration
- Innovation

For the three implementation grant categories, the merit criteria are:

- Vulnerability and Risk
- Criticality to Community
- Design Elements
- Public Engagement, Partnerships and Collaboration
- Equity and Justice40
- Climate Change and Sustainability
- Schedule and Budget
- Innovation

FHWA FY 2022 and FY 2023 Grant Priority Considerations

FHWA will prioritize projects of similar merit that demonstrate the following:

Planning Grants:

- Exceptional benefits under merit criteria #4 (*Public Engagement, Partnerships and Collaboration*)
- Strong need for funding from the PROTECT program

Implementation Grants:

- Vulnerability and Risk
- Criticality to Community
- Design Elements
- Public Engagement, Partnerships and Collaboration
- Equity and Justice40
- Climate Change and Sustainability
- Schedule and Budget
- Innovation

Applications are due February 24, 2025, by 11:59 PM and February 24, 2026, by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on Grants.gov.

Your Infrastructure Finance, Sustainability and Resiliency, and grant writing professionals stand by ready to support project sponsors applying for funding from the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Grant Program.

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

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