

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Pilot Project Grant Opportunity Evaluation Rubric

March 2023



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Project Eligibility

Projects must **demonstrate an emerging technology or a new approach** to connect communities to resources that will directly and **measurably** have a positive outcome on **two or more** areas:

- Equitable access to services such as broadband and digital literacy
- Equitable access to innovative, sustainable and connected technologies
- Energy burden or energy poverty
- Access to quality science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education
- Environmental health, including indoor environmental health/justice
- Enhanced resiliency for vulnerable populations
- Access to better employment, career or entrepreneurial opportunities

There is no limit on the number of applications the applicant may submit; however, **no more than one project per applicant will be selected across all rounds of funding**. The current round of funding aims to explore new topics rather than repeat prior pilot projects.



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Project Eligibility (CONTINUED)

Funding

A total of \$2,000,000 in funding is available, and TVA anticipates awarding it to approximately **four to eight projects**. TVA plans to provide **awards of up to a maximum of \$750,000**. Funding is intended for the Connected Communities portion of projects. For example, if a pilot project plans to install smart devices, the TVA Connected Communities funding could pay for sensors and connectivity but not for building renovations.

Funds from the award must go towards the pilot project idea and be spent within two years of the award date. Overhead costs to implement the pilot project may be included in the total project cost. Funding will be paid out based on the proposed milestones. Documented costs, such as paid invoices, are required for reimbursement. **All projects must be completed within two years of project kickoff.**

The applicant will need to be collaborative, willing to share lessons learned and contribute 30% of the total project costs either through direct financial contributions or in-kind services.

In-kind contributions may include staff hours, materials and equipment or other contributions subject to TVA approval.

Principle Organization

Each proposal must be led by a Principal Organization, which is an entity responsible for entering into an agreement with TVA for the purposes of receiving a funding Award. **The principal organization must be willing and able to receive federal funding in order to receive a funding Award.** Individuals may be part of a proposing team but are not eligible to apply as the principal organization. Registered lobbying organizations whose primary business is lobbying are not eligible to apply as part a principal organization or be part of a proposing team.

Community Partner Organization

All application teams must have a community partner organization to facilitate outreach and engagement with the community members impacted by the pilot project. If the principal organization is effectively representative of the community, has established ties with the community and can manage community outreach and engagement, no additional team members are required.

All proposed pilot projects must be conducted in the TVA service region. If applicable and available, please upload relevant maps or photos of the site. **A principal organization not located within the TVA service region can apply but must have a local community partner included in the proposal, and the benefits of the project must flow to a community located within the TVA service region.**

\$2M
in total
awards

\$750K
maximum
per project

4-8
projects
total



Evaluation Scoring Description

Evaluators will review proposals based on the following criteria:



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

- How closely do the idea and its benefits align with the initiative goals and Call for Pilots eligibility elements?
- Are the expected outcomes and lessons learned clear, relevant and repeatable?
- Is there a plan to engage community representatives in the project and/or does the applicant describe how community engagement informed the proposed project?
- Is the project aligned with community or regional needs and priorities?
- Does the project advance diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) in the community of focus?



FEASIBILITY

- Does the project plan demonstrate careful consideration of factors necessary to drive successful outcomes (e.g., sequence of activities, key stakeholders to involve, potential risks and mitigation strategies, etc.)?
- Is the proposed timeline achievable within two years of kickoff?
- Is the pilot project sustainable beyond the initial phase?
- Does the applicant have the authority to implement the pilot project, including a plan to address ordinances, permitting and owner permissions?
- Has this approach been demonstrated elsewhere?



IMPACT

- Are the scope and/or scale of the project benefits significant?
- Will the direct benefits extend beyond the duration of the pilot project?
- Are the benefits innovative or transformative?
- Will the project enable a community to better pursue data and technology-driven innovations in the future?
- Is the TVA funding likely to be impactful?

Evaluation Scoring Description (CONTINUED)

Category Points

Each category is evaluated based on Significantly Exceeds, Exceeds, Meets, Does Not Meet and Significantly Does Not Meet criteria:

- **Significantly Exceeds (5 points)** = Meets all criteria and the idea is ready to implement
- **Exceeds (4 points)** = Meets all criteria, but the idea needs a little feedback and support
- **Meets (3 points)** = Meets all criteria, but the idea needs a lot of feedback and support
- **Does Not Meet (2 points)** = Does not meet expectations in any one criterion
- **Significantly Does Not Meet (1 point)** = Does not meet expectations in more than one of the criteria

Bonus Points

Bonus points are available if projects meet one or more of the following criteria (one point each):

- Project located in a **rural or disadvantaged community** as defined under the Justice40 initiative (map can be seen here: [Link](#)) or other federal “Disadvantaged Community” criteria (e.g., EPA, DOE)
- Partnerships with **National Laboratories and regional universities**, with an additional bonus point for partnerships with **regional Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)**

- Partnerships with **minority rights organizations**, such as Urban League, Tennessee United, NOAH, MICAH and CALEB
- Pilot project teams that include small, minority-owned/led, woman-owned/led, veteran-owned/led, service-disabled veteran-owned/led businesses, nonprofit organizations and/or those located in historically underutilized business (HUB) zones as major contributors to the core pilot project activities
- Pilot project teams with specific plans to expand the reach of the project by **pursuing complementary funding opportunities or leveraging synergies with other initiatives**

Initial proposal screening criteria

Only proposals meeting the following criteria will be evaluated and scored:

- The topic is related to one or more Connected Communities focus areas
- The target community/ies identified is/are within TVA’s service region
- The proposed approach is different from those pursued in previously funded Connected Communities pilot projects
- Applicant acknowledges cost share requirement and describes sources of cost share in proposal
- A community partner or representative is included in the project team

15
category
points

6
bonus
points

21
total points
available



Submission Element Descriptions

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Idea

Summarize the idea, technology, tool or approach being tested.

Community Engagement

Describe the level of engagement already conducted or to be conducted in the community to validate the need for this pilot project, as well as the plan for ongoing community oversight of the pilot project.

Lessons Learned

Describe what we will learn from this pilot project/problem to be solved.

Anticipated Benefits

Describe the intended benefits, including how they enhance a community's ability to pursue emerging technologies in the future.

Repeatability

Describe how you anticipate that learnings from this pilot project could be used and scaled.

DEIA Attributes

Describe how the pilot project will address issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA).

FEASIBILITY

Pilot Team

Describe your team leads, team members, community partner(s), what each team member brings to the pilot project and the team's relevant experience in the pilot project.

Approach and Plan

Describe the project plan and approach/methodology to implementing the pilot project as well as milestones. Include information on any additional grants that you plan to leverage or synergies with existing efforts.

Location

Describe where this pilot project will occur, including whether the community is rural, suburban or urban, and the size of the community.

Potential for Post-Pilot Project Operations

Describe the post-pilot project support plan, including potential post-grant funding mechanisms.

Relevant Examples

Describe examples, if any, of this pilot project being implemented in other places.

Risk Identification and Management

Describe risks associated with the pilot project (e.g., potential impact of local ordinances, asset/site ownership or dependency on obtaining other grants) as well as mitigation plans.

Cost Proposal

Describe the overall project cost, how TVA funding could be used and how the pilot project team would match the costs through funding or in-kind contributions. Describe level of funding that community partners will receive.

IMPACT

Reach

Describe the scope and/or scale of the project benefits and the intended beneficiaries.

Duration

Describe how long the benefits of the pilot project would last.

Metrics / KPIs

Provide measurable values to track progress of pilot project and outcomes towards focus area(s).

Evaluation Score Descriptions

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Questions

- How closely do the idea and its benefits align with the initiative goals and Call for Pilots eligibility elements?
- Are the expected outcomes and lessons learned clear, relevant and repeatable?
- Is there a plan to engage community representatives in the project and/or does the applicant describe how community engagement informed the proposed project?
- Is the project aligned with community or regional needs and priorities?
- Does the project advance diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) in the community of focus?

SCORE	DESCRIPTIONS
Significantly Exceeds (5 points)	Transformative idea with clear and detailed expected outcomes that directly addresses the initiative goals, is DEIA-driven with community and stakeholders bought-in and has clear, data-driven scalability potential
Exceeds (4 points)	Forward-thinking idea with clear, expected outcomes that directly addresses the initiative goals, promotes DEIA with community and stakeholders engaged and could be easily adapted for others
Meets (3 points)	Cohesive idea with clear, expected outcomes that addresses the initiative goals, has DEIA elements with community and stakeholder engagement plans in place and has some potential for scaling
Does Not Meet (2 points)	Incomplete idea that partially addresses the initiative goals and hints at expected outcomes, DEIA benefits and community stakeholders, or would be difficult to adapt for others
Significantly Does Not Meet (1 point)	Idea that does not address the initiative goals, does not have clear expected outcomes, does not touch on DEIA, community and stakeholders are not identified, or is not adaptable for others

Evaluation Score Descriptions (CONTINUED)

FEASIBILITY

Questions

- Does the project plan demonstrate careful consideration of factors necessary to drive successful outcomes (e.g., sequence of activities, key stakeholders to involve, potential risks and mitigation strategies, etc.)?
- Is the proposed timeline achievable within two years of kickoff?
- Is the pilot project sustainable beyond the initial phase?
- Does the applicant have the authority to implement the pilot project, including a plan to address ordinances, permitting and owner permissions?
- Has this approach been demonstrated elsewhere?

SCORE	DESCRIPTIONS
Significantly Exceeds (5 points)	Accomplished team with robust approach , thought-out timeline, a post-pilot project operations plan, resources secured and minimal associated risks
Exceeds (4 points)	Well-qualified team with compelling approach , a good sense of timeline, resources partially secured and minimal associated risks
Meets (3 points)	Qualified team with practical approach , a general timeline, resources planned and minimal associated risks
Does Not Meet (2 points)	Partially qualified team with unclear or unrealistic timeline , an approach that presents risks or resources inadequately identified
Significantly Does Not Meet (1 point)	Inexperienced team with no clear timeline or approach , resources not identified or considerable associated risks

Evaluation Score Descriptions (CONTINUED)

IMPACT

Questions

- Are the scope and/or scale of the project benefits significant?
- Will the direct benefits extend beyond the duration of the pilot project?
- Are the benefits innovative or transformative?
- Will the project enable a community to better pursue data and technology-driven innovations in the future?
- Is the TVA funding likely to be impactful?

SCORE	DESCRIPTIONS
Significantly Exceeds (5 points)	Idea benefits a major portion of the community or benefits a segment of the community in a transformational way for years to come*, and the TVA funding will be impactful for moving this project forward
Exceeds (4 points)	Idea benefits a significant portion of the community or has deep benefits for a segment of the community for some time after the pilot project concludes*, and the TVA funding will be impactful for moving this project forward
Meets (3 points)	Idea benefits a portion of the community or has meaningful benefits for a segment of the community during the pilot project*, and the TVA funding will be impactful for moving this project forward
Does Not Meet (2 points)	Idea benefits a small portion of the community for a short duration, or the project would most likely move forward even without TVA funding
Significantly Does Not Meet (1 point)	No clear benefits or beneficiaries

*Includes activities that would enable a community to pursue connected technology-driven innovations in the near future.

Bonus Points Available

Rural or Disadvantaged Community

- **Meets (1 point)**
The majority of the beneficiaries of the project are located within a rural census tract or qualified under the Justice40 Initiative or other federal “Disadvantaged Community” criteria (e.g., EPA, DOE).
- **Does Not Meet (0 points)**
The majority of the beneficiaries of the project are not located in census tracts qualified as rural or disadvantaged.

Partnerships with Research and Educational Institutions

- **Meets (1 point)**
National Laboratories and regional universities are part of the project team and have budget allocated to them or contribute cost-share.
- **Meets (1 point)**
Regional HBCUs are part of the project team and have budget allocated to them or contribute cost-share.
- **Does Not Meet (0 points)**
Not part of the project team.

Partnerships with Minority Rights Organizations

- **Meets (1 point)**
Minority rights organizations are part of the project team and have budget allocated to them or contribute cost-share.
- **Does Not Meet (0 points)**
Not part of the project team.

Partnerships with Qualifying Businesses, Nonprofits or Organizations

- **Meets (1 point)**
Small, minority-owned/led, woman-owned/led, veteran-owned/led, service-disabled veteran-owned/led businesses, nonprofit organizations and/or those located in historically underutilized business (HUB) zones are part of the project team and have budget allocated to them or contribute cost-share.
- **Does Not Meet (0 points)**
Not part of the project team.

Pursuing Complementary Funding Opportunities

- **Meets (1 point)**
Complementary funding opportunity identified and timing of complementary funding aligns with the proposed project.
- **Does Not Meet (0 points)**
No complementary funding identified in the application.