

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

# Call for Pilots FAQ and Definitions

March 2023



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# Application Process and Eligibility

**What is TVA's Connected Communities initiative?**

**Connected communities** are towns, main streets, neighborhoods and cities that use data and technology-driven innovations to offer new and improved services to people and businesses. Through resources, funding opportunities and coaching we are helping communities within the TVA service region leverage technology- and data-driven solutions to improve quality of life, deliver environmental benefits and scale economic opportunities.

**What is the application process?**

The application form will be available online on April 3, 2023. Submissions will be accepted from April 3, 2023 until midnight EDT on June 30, 2023. The application form and all related documents will be accessible on the Connected Communities [website](#). The application consists of approximately 35 questions intended to collect sufficient information to understand the project scope, strategic alignment, feasibility, impact and alignment with specific funding criteria. Applications will be evaluated after the application window closes.

**What is the deadline for submitting an application?**

The deadline to submit the application form for this round of funding is midnight (EDT) on June 30, 2023.

**Where can I learn more about pilot projects that have been funded through prior rounds of Connected Communities funding?**

You can learn more about previous and current pilot projects on the Connected Communities [website](#) and in the [2022 Annual Report](#). Please note that the current round of funding aims to explore new topics rather than repeat prior pilot projects.

**What entities are eligible to apply for this pilot project funding?**

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. Any organization that is in good standing in the relevant jurisdiction(s) where they are incorporated and maintained may apply as a principal organization or be a member on an application team. The principal organization must be willing and able to receive federal funding in order to receive a funding award. All application teams must have a community partner organization to facilitate outreach and engagement with the community members impacted by the pilot project. All proposed pilot projects must be conducted in the TVA service region.

Registered lobbying organizations whose primary business is lobbying are not eligible to apply as principal organizations or be part of an application team.

# Application Process and Eligibility (CONTINUED)

**What if my organization is considered a minority-owned business?**

Minority-owned businesses and organizations may receive bonus points on eligible applications. If seeking bonus points for minority business or organization status, please provide evidence of certification in application.

**My community is also receiving support through a Connected Communities partnership (“Beta test”). Am I eligible to apply for pilot project funding?**

Yes, communities receiving support through Connected Communities partnerships are encouraged to submit pilot projects for consideration through this call for pilot projects.

**Who will review my submission, and how long will it take?**

Applications will be evaluated once the application window closes. Submissions will be evaluated by committees comprised of representatives of stakeholder organizations across the TVA service region, including community organizations, colleges, local power companies and TVA representatives. Project selection is expected to be complete by September 2023 when the project selection will be announced.

**How are submissions vetted? Who makes the judgment call about what ideas proceed?**

Submissions will receive an initial screening to ensure they are complete before the Evaluation Committee scores, deliberates and finalizes rankings. The Evaluation Committee will present the top pilot project applicants to the Connected Communities Steering Committee for endorsement. The evaluation criteria are summarized on the call for pilot projects [web page](#). The current round of funding aims to explore new topics rather than repeat prior pilot projects. TVA will make the final decision on pilot project selections.

**If my pilot project idea isn’t selected during this round, will it automatically be considered for funding in future rounds?**

It is not guaranteed that there will be future rounds of funding. If there are, each round of funding will be evaluated separately, and you will need to resubmit your application to be considered in future rounds.

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# Partnerships and Resources

**What if I'm looking for application partners? Is matchmaking available?**

Entities looking for partners can sign up for matchmaking via the [application link](#) to receive a list of potential partners who have expressed interest in matchmaking. On the first page of the application form, you may select either “My organization has an idea but does not have a location secured and would like help connecting to potential partner communities” or “My community would like to host a potential project but does not have an application and would like help connecting to potential partner organizations,” and you will be able to provide information to help interested counter parties connect with you. TVA is providing connections between interested parties only; matchmaking is not guaranteed and is not intended to provide an endorsement for any organization.

**Can I combine this call for pilot projects with other grants?**

Yes! Leveraging other funding opportunities is encouraged. Pilot project teams with plans to expand the reach of the project by pursuing complementary funding opportunities or leveraging synergies with other initiatives may get bonus points in the selection process. This can also serve to meet the required 30% cost-share requirement for all projects.

**Are there resources available to help us develop a project idea?**

Resources are available on the Connected Communities [website](#) to help you develop an application. Entities looking for partners can sign up for matchmaking via the application link to receive a list of potential partners who have expressed interest in matchmaking.

# Funding Available and Cost Match Requirements

**How is this Connected Communities pilot project grant opportunity funded?**

This pilot project grant opportunity is being funded in its entirety by TVA. Project teams are required to contribute 30% of their individual project's total cost.

**How much funding is available?**

A total of \$2,000,000 in funding is available, and TVA anticipates awarding it to approximately four to eight projects. TVA intends to provide awards of up to a maximum of \$750,000 per pilot project. The intent is to fund a mix of smaller and larger projects. Funding is intended for only the Connected Communities focus area-related portion of projects. For example, if a pilot project installed smart devices, a grant could pay for sensors and connectivity but not building renovations.

**Can the funding be used to support salary for staff working on the pilot project or other administrative costs?**

Funds from the award must go toward the pilot project's scope of work as identified in the application idea and be spent within two years of contract signing. Overhead costs to implement the pilot project, such as salaries for staff working on the pilot project, may be included in the total project cost.

**When will the grant funding be available to selected applicants?**

This will depend on the type of pilot project you are proposing. If your pilot project will involve construction, especially if any grounds or trees will need to be cleared, the site will need to undergo an environmental and/or cultural review before funding can be distributed. If the pilot project is in a national historic district or building, it will need a more extensive review, which can delay contract development by several months. Funds will be distributed on a reimbursement basis upon achievement of project milestones. A portion of the award may be made available as an advance at the start of the project if there is demonstrated need.

**What can the grant funding be spent on?**

Funding is intended for the Connected Communities portion of pilot projects, rather than infrastructure costs. For example, if a pilot project installed smart devices, a grant could pay for sensors and connectivity, but not building renovations. A portion of the award may be used for pilot project administration and overhead costs.

# Funding Available and Cost Match Requirements (CONTINUED)

**What types of financial documentation will be used to determine our organization’s financial health if we are selected?**

Documentation of a recent audit is preferred. If your organization has not had an audit performed recently, financial statements may be utilized instead.

**What are considered acceptable in-kind services for the 30% cost-share?**

Typical in-kind services include staff hours or donation of materials. If your organization would like to provide other in-kind services, please include a description and equivalent financial value in your submission. TVA is willing to negotiate the source of the cost-share with organizations that are selected.

**What if my organization is small and can’t meet the 30% cost-share at the time of submission?**

Any organization with confidence in their proposal is encouraged to apply; you do not need to have your match secured at the time of submission. If your proposal is selected, TVA is willing to help you identify sources of funding during the negotiation and contracting phase to account for the 30% cost-share via in-kind services or securing funding elsewhere.

**My organization would need to seek approvals (from our Board of Directors or other governing body) for the 30% funding match requirement and won’t have these approvals on hand by the submission deadline. Can we still apply?**

Yes! Submit your application, and in the budget section include a letter of intent stating that the applicant will be requesting the 30% cost-sharing funds through a governing body with an expected decision by September 2023. There will be a contracting period after pilots are selected in which there will be time to confirm that everything is approved by the necessary governing bodies and funding secured.

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# Concept Criteria

**What if my idea doesn't fit the eligible project concept criteria?**

All proposals must meet all eligibility criteria for the current round of funding to be considered. Eligibility criteria are available [here](#). If your current idea does not match eligibility criteria, you can sign up for our [mailing list](#) to be notified of additional funding opportunities in the future.

**What if I have more than one idea or solution to offer? Can I make more than one submission? Is it possible to win multiple awards?**

While there is no limit to how many applications an organization can submit, we highly encourage all applicants to ensure each submission is comprehensively built out. Additionally, TVA is striving to fund a diversity of applicant types, geographies and project ideas. While organizations are welcome to submit multiple ideas across focus areas, multiple awards will not go to the same principal organization.

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# Assistance with Application and Submission

**I have a question that is not addressed in this FAQ, who can I ask?**

Please email [connectedcommunities@tva.gov](mailto:connectedcommunities@tva.gov) with your question and you will be contacted within two business days to help answer the question. Questions and answers may be added to this FAQ over time.

**Do you have a glossary available?**

Yes, a glossary and definitions are available, starting on the next page.

**I'm having issues with the application form. Can you help?**

Yes, please email [connectedcommunities@tva.gov](mailto:connectedcommunities@tva.gov) with your application ID and a description of the problem, and you will be contacted within two business days to help you resolve the problem.

**Is it possible to work with TVA to modify an application after its submission?**

If you believe there may have been a mistake in your submission, please reach out to [connectedcommunities@tva.gov](mailto:connectedcommunities@tva.gov) with your application ID and an explanation of the needed change. Please note that submissions are considered finalized when the application window closes, regardless of completion status. Any changes must be made before the deadline. We encourage applicants to submit applications 24 hours prior to the deadline to allow time to address any technical issues that may arise during submittal.

**Are the submissions made public?**

Aggregate data, such as the number of submissions per focus area, may be made public, but individual submissions will not be shared publicly.

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# Terminology Definitions

For the purposes of this call for pilot projects, the following definitions apply. Consistency with other federal entities and funding opportunities was sought where possible.

## Community Partner

A community organization aimed at making desired improvements to a community's social, health, well-being and overall functioning. They could be community projects, neighborhoods, organizations, voluntary associations, localities and social networks, which may mobilize around geography, shared space, shared experience, interest, need and/or concern.

## Community Resilience

The National Institute for Standards and Technology defines community resilience as the ability to prepare for anticipated hazards, adapt to changing conditions and withstand and recover rapidly from disruptions. Activities, such as disaster preparedness—which includes prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery—are key steps to resilience.

Source: [National Institute for Standards and Technology](#)

## Connected Community

Connected communities are towns, main streets, neighborhoods and cities that use data- and technology-driven innovations to offer new and improved services to people and businesses.

## Digital Literacy Skills

According to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, digital literacy measures an individual's ability to use the internet and modern technologies, such as computers and smart phones.

Source: [National Telecommunications and Information Administration](#)

## Disadvantaged Community

As set forth in Executive Order (EO) 14008 on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, disadvantaged communities are those that are marginalized, underserved and overburdened by pollution. A disadvantaged community is a community that meets both of the following criteria: the census tract is above the threshold for one or more environmental or climate indicator, and the tract is above the threshold for socioeconomic indicators.

- The [Council on Environmental Quality](#) (CEQ) has one of the most inclusive definitions, and uses a methodology and dataset that identifies communities that are economically disadvantaged and overburdened by pollution and underinvestment in housing, transportation, water and wastewater infrastructure, and health care.
- Other agencies may use their own criteria and definitions to identify disadvantaged communities for specific programs or initiatives. We are primarily using the CEQ's definition and qualifying criteria for the purposes of designating a pilot project community as disadvantaged. If the proposed pilot location would qualify under a different federal agency's definition, we will also accept alternatives.

Sources: [White House](#)



# Terminology Definitions (CONTINUED)

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

According to The White House's Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce:

- The term “diversity” means the practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures and beliefs of the American people, including underserved communities.
- The term “equity” means the consistent and systematic fair, just and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.
- The term “inclusion” means the recognition, appreciation and use of the talents and skills of employees of all backgrounds.
- The term “accessibility” means the design, construction, development and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them. Accessibility includes the provision of accommodations and modifications to ensure equal access to employment and participation in activities for people with disabilities, the reduction or elimination of physical and attitudinal barriers to equitable opportunities, a commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities can independently access every outward-facing and internal activity or electronic space and the pursuit of best practices such as universal design.

Source: [White House](#)

## Energy Justice

According to the Initiative for Energy Justice, energy justice refers to the goal of achieving equity in both the social and economic participation in the energy system, while also remediating social, economic and health burdens on those historically harmed by the energy system (“frontline communities”). Energy justice explicitly centers the concerns of marginalized communities and aims to make energy more accessible, affordable, clean and democratically managed for all communities. The practitioner and academic approaches to energy justice emphasize these process-related and distributive justice concerns.

Source: [Initiative for Energy Justice](#)

## Energy Poverty

Energy poverty is “the inability to attain a socially and materially necessitated level of domestic energy services.” However, in other definitions, the phrase generally refers to a lack of or limited access to the electricity and fuel required to sustain basic human needs that may differ because of climatic conditions, technological improvements and country-specific social, cultural, political and environmental conditions.

Source: [Bouzarovski, S; Petrova, S](#)

## Environmental Health

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) defines environmental health as the science and practice of preventing human injury and illness and promoting well-being by identifying and evaluating environmental sources and hazardous agents and limiting exposures to hazardous physical, chemical and biological agents in air, water, soil, food and other environmental media or settings that may adversely affect human health.

Source: [National Environmental Health Association](#)

# Terminology Definitions (CONTINUED)

## Environmental Justice

The EPA defines environmental justice as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

Source: [Environmental Protection Agency](#)

## Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Zones

Historically underutilized business zones are an area located within one or more:

1. Qualified census tracts
2. Qualified non-metropolitan counties
3. Lands within the external boundaries of an Indian reservation
4. Redesignated areas
5. Qualified base closure areas
6. Qualified disaster areas
7. Governor-designated covered areas.

Determine if you are located within a HUB zone [here](#).

Source: [Small Business Administration](#)

## Minority Owned Businesses

Examples of certifications and qualifications under various federal and state programs can be found [here](#).

## Regional Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)

HBCUs in the TVA service region include Alabama A&M University, American Baptist College, Fisk University, Lane College, LeMoyne-Owen College, Meharry Medical College, Oakwood University and Tennessee State University.

Other HBCUs in the broader region include Rust College, Coahoma Community College and Mississippi Valley State University in Mississippi; Spelman College and Clark Atlanta University in Georgia; Winston-Salem State University and Livingstone College in North Carolina; Kentucky State University and Simmons College of Kentucky in Kentucky.

## Renewable Energy

As defined in 42 U.S.C. § 15852(b), renewable electricity is electric energy generated from solar, wind, biomass, landfill gas, ocean (including tidal, wave, current and thermal), geothermal, municipal solid waste or new hydroelectric generation capacity achieved from increased efficiency or additions of new capacity at an existing hydroelectric project.

Source: [U.S. Government Publishing Office](#)

## Rural Community

The U.S. Census Bureau's urban-rural classification is a delineation of geographic areas, identifying both individual urban areas and the rural area of the nation. The Census Bureau's urban areas represent densely developed territory and encompass residential, commercial and other non-residential urban land uses. The Census Bureau delineates urban areas after each decennial census by applying specified criteria to decennial census and other data. Rural areas encompass all population, housing and territory not included within an urban area. To qualify as an urban area, the territory identified according to criteria must encompass at least 2,000 housing units or a population of at least 5,000.

Source: [U.S. Census](#)

## Sustainable Products or Services

In addition to renewable energy as defined above, sustainable products and services include ENERGY STAR rated equipment; products that are bio-based, made from recycled content, water-efficient, fuel-efficient, made with safer chemical ingredients and non-ozone-depleting; and products that have earned third-party ecolabels reviewed and recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Sustainable products and services should not contain perfluoroalkyl or polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Source: [Federal Sustainable Procurement Guidelines](#)