

## Maine Working Communities Challenge Frequently Asked Questions

To view a recording of a Regional Information Session, [click here](#) (use password: Gxkm9N3G).

View the Maine Working Communities website [here](#).

### What are key dates to remember?

- Letter of Interest (LOI) Due: **Tuesday December 1, 2020 by 5:00 PM**
- Release of WCC Design Phase application: **by December 9, 2020** (via email to those who submit an LOI)
- **<Optional>** Q&A Session for Applicants: **Friday, January 8, 2021 at 12 PM**
- Design Phase application Due: **Sunday, January 31, 2021 by 9 PM**
- Team Interview with Jury: **February 2021**
- Design Phase grant awards announced: **March 2021**
- Design Phase: **April-September 2021**
- Number and size of awards: **8 Design Phase Grants of \$25,000 each**

### What does the Working Communities Challenge support?

The Working Communities Challenge (WCC) supports cross-sector teams working collaboratively to build strong, healthy economies and communities in Maine's rural towns, regions, and small cities. With a focus on changing the way systems work to benefit residents, especially residents with low incomes.

See the Shared Goal and core principles in the appendix to this document.

### Why is cross-sector collaboration a focus of the WCC?

Cross-sector collaboration is the ability to work together across the nonprofit, private, and public sectors to achieve a shared, long-term vision. Places that develop a culture of cross-sector collaboration strengthen their capacity to adapt to changing conditions and overcome unanticipated challenges, and most importantly, are able to sustain progress toward a long-term shared goal.

### What is meant by “systems change?”

Systems change involves a hard look at local processes, institutional practice, and local culture, with an eye toward determining what would cause the community's systems (e.g. education, housing, childcare) to operate more effectively. Faulty systems often block people from new opportunities or get in the way of economic well-being. The Design Phase provides a structure to understand how local systems are affecting people in your community, especially residents with low-incomes, and what will need to change to make those systems work better for everyone.

### How does a town that is *not* a Priority Community participate in an application?

A town that is not identified as a Priority Community will need to partner on a multi-town or regional application that includes at least one Priority Community.

**What is the role of the lead applicant/organization identified in the application, and does the lead applicant/organization need to be a nonprofit organization?**

The lead applicant/organization is simply a leader and their organizational entity that agrees to take responsibility for the task of coordinating the team and application. This organization and the responsible party does not need to continue in the role going forward. We will encourage teams to think more deeply about partners' roles and responsibilities during the Design Phase. The lead applicant can be any type of organization – private, nonprofit, public, or other.

**Can we build off an existing grant we have already received (e.g. USDA or NBRC) grant?**

Yes. While the Working Communities Challenge is not focused on typical “bricks and mortar” projects that might be funded by federal programs, those type of projects could be part of a leadership group’s larger agenda. Moreover, these existing grants may have helped a community develop or refine its goals which would help the team use the WCC grant funding to further strengthen its cross-sector leadership team to implement the goals in a way that deepens community participation, learning, systems change, and diversity.

**Will all teams that submit a letter of interest be asked to submit a Design Grant application?**

All teams that submit a Letter of Interest are eligible to submit a Design Grant application, as long as no two teams include the same priority community as part of their application. See below for more on this requirement.

**What if two teams submit a Letter of Interest that includes the same community?**

The Jury will only consider one Design Grant application per community. If there are multiple leadership teams with the same priority community or communities identified in their LOIs, then we require the overlapping leadership teams to figure out how they will submit only one Design Grant Application. Federal Reserve staff will notify teams by December 11 if there is overlap, with suggested next steps.

Note that the Houlton Band of Maliseets, Aroostook Band of Micmacs, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point, and the Penobscot Nation are priority communities that may be represented in multiple applications.

**Is it okay for the same organization to be included in multiple Letters of Interest or Design Grant Applications?**

The same organization may be supportive of multiple LOIs and Design Grant Applications, but it cannot be the *lead applicant/organization* in multiple LOIs and Design Grant Applications. Partner organizations will have the opportunity to explain their roles in the Design Grant Application.

**Can we add or change partners between submitting our Letter of Interest and submitting our Design Grant Application? How about changing partners during the Design Phase?**

Yes, teams can add or change partners from the LOI stage to their submission of the Design Grant Application. Moreover, experience suggests that teams often add or change partners during the Design Phase, especially as the leadership team adjusts its approach or discovers that it should include other groups at the table to achieve its goals. This can be an example of a team practicing a ‘learning orientation’ that is encouraged by the WCC model. Teams that adapt and work as they learn are typically more successful with our approach than teams that remain static.

### **Will all teams be invited for an interview?**

Not necessarily. The Jury that will award the Design Grants recognizes that a brief, typewritten application may not fully capture your team’s collaborative nature, capacity, and enthusiasm for taking on this work. Therefore, the Jury will select teams to be interviewed in February 2021 based on the written applications.

### **Can organizations whose leadership sits on the statewide Maine WCC Steering Committee have a representative on the core team?**

If leaders of an organization represented on your application’s core team are on the Steering Committee, they will recuse themselves from participating during your team’s application and interview process. If your team receives a Design Grant, we will work with your team to determine the best path forward.

If these representatives are also on the WCC Jury, they will be disclosing their conflicts to the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and their other colleagues on the Jury through a signed “conflict disclosure form.” Members of the Jury who fall into this category will be recusing themselves from any deliberations and decisions related to your team’s application as part of the Jury process.

### **What are some best practices/learned lessons for bringing together a cross-sector collaborative team?**

Consider reviewing [\*Sparking Change in New England’s Smaller Cities: Lessons from Early Rounds of the Working Cities Challenge\*](#). We will explore and learn together about collaborative leadership further in both the Design Phase and the Implementation Phase.

### **According to the Design Grant Application, our team must build “meaningful engagement of a diverse set of residents, including those with low-incomes.” How do we do this?**

Community engagement empowers residents to participate in the development and implementation of your initiative. The Design Phase is organized to help teams understand why and how to do this. Because communities have different structures, capacity and readiness to address resident engagement, we understand that not everyone will have this aspect fully built out, nor do we expect it, for your Design Grant Application. A lesson from other states is that it is helpful to have a partner at the table who already practices community engagement with a diverse group of residents.

### **Can we add or change partners between submitting our Letter of Interest and submitting our Design Grant Application? How about changing partners during the Design Phase?**

Yes, in other states it has been common practice for teams to add or change partners from the LOI stage to their submission of the Design Grant Application. Moreover, experience suggests that teams often add or change partners during the Design Phase, especially as the leadership team adjusts its approach or discovers that it should include other groups at the table. This can be an example of a team practicing a 'learning orientation' that is encouraged by the WCC model. Teams that adapt and work as they learn are typically more successful with our approach than teams that remain static.

### **Can we submit a Design Grant Application to build upon an existing collaborative effort?**

Yes. The WCC is not meant to replace or compete with an existing collaborative effort in town, but rather to deepen and broaden this work if it exists. Please note that the WCC looks for all sectors (public, private, non-profit, community) to be involved on teams, so building on an existing effort may involve broadening the partnership. If there is another collaborative in town, the selection Jury may ask how and why the team is partnering with them (or not).

### **Do we need to have a concrete plan at the end of the Design Phase?**

No. We expect your team to have a stronger understanding of the challenge you are tackling, deeper partnerships and ways to continue to engage residents, and a clearer shared purpose to drive your work in the future.

### **What measures (data) do we need to provide to demonstrate we will be serving residents with low income?**

Each team should make the case for how they will serve residents with low incomes in their community. We will accept and review both quantitative data and qualitative data. Data providing evidence of residents can come from many sources, such as secondary data from federal, state, or local sources or primary data collected by your community leaders or non-profits agencies or public institutions. It is up to your team to determine the best way to show this.

## **WCC in Maine**

This three-year grant competition is supported by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (Boston Fed), the State of Maine, national and local philanthropy, and private sector businesses. A 19-member Steering Committee of Maine leaders guide and oversee the effort.

### *Funders include:*

State of Maine • Doris Duke Charitable Foundation • Robert Wood Johnson Foundation • Harold Alfond Foundation • John T. Gorman Foundation • Elmina Sewall Foundation • Northern Border Regional Commission • NeighborWorks America • Avangrid Foundation • Bangor Savings Foundation • Dead River • Skowhegan Savings • Maine Community Foundation • Maine Credit Union League

## APPENDIX:

### *Shared Goal:*

The Maine WCC supports local teams working together to improve economic outcomes for all people in Maine's towns, cities, and rural communities. Successful teams will address economic growth and reduce inequity of opportunity tied to race, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity and background.

### *Core Principles:*

- **Cross sector team of leaders** from private, public, nonprofit and community work toward an **ambitious shared goal**
- Engagement of **community residents** in setting direction and decision-making
- Economic **inclusion, racial equity, and diversity** across age, gender and sexual orientation important part of process and shared goal
- **System solutions**, not just programs, to achieve team's shared goal
- **Learning and adaptation** through research, data, and peer exchange
- **Connections to ideas, people, and markets** within and across local economies and communities