Catalyst Pre-Development NOFO
Question and Answer (Q&A)

Last Updated: March 7, 2025

Will travel be required to attend an in-person convening during the project period?
Answer: There is no expectation that the regional convener will be requesting travel.

Is there a map where it is easier to tell which cities these census tracts fall under?
Answer: Yes, there is another map on the ocbc.org/cjf website that has the census tracts with city boundaries. Please make sure that you have map 2 of 4, 3 of 4, or 4 of 4 to see the census tracts in blue and/or green.

What's the difference between Job-Creating and Community-Enhancing Projects?
Answer: The key difference lies in their primary focus:

- Job-Creating Projects emphasize economic growth and creation of good paying jobs in priority industries.

- Community-Enhancing Projects focus on quality-of-life improvements, such as housing and environmental sustainability, or projects that create good paying jobs in non-priority industries.

- Both types of projects can overlap but have distinct goals, one focuses on job creation, while the other aims for holistic community development. If you are unsure which category your project would fall under, please contact staff at jobfirst@ocbc.org.

Does the restaurant and food services industry fall under the Tourism and Outdoor Recreation sector for the Jobs First Catalyst application?

Answer: Yes, the restaurant and food services industry is included under the Tourism and Outdoor Recreation sector.

Is it permissible to include more than one letter of reference?

Answer: Yes. We just ask that every applicant provide one.

Is there a preferred number of letters of interest?

Answer: No. We just ask that every applicant provide one.

What is the max number of letters of reference that can be included?

Answer: No. We just ask that every applicant provide one.

Is there a page limit on letters of reference?

Answer: No. We just ask that every applicant provide one.

If we include cited references for the application, does that go towards the 10 page limit count?

Answer: No, however, overly lengthy applications go against the intent of a 10-page application to ensure that applicants who aren't as experienced in grant writing aren't disadvantaged and to allow for an efficient review process of applications.

On page 4 of the NOFO, under the ELIGIBLE PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES, is it allowed to include more than one category of activities. For example, could we propose a pilot project and also include feasibility study as an additional activity? Or are the activities listed mutually exclusive?

Answer: Applicants are free to include multiple predevelopment activities, regardless of category, as part of their workplan. The activities just need to be advancing the same project. If the activities are meant for different projects, then they need separate applications.

NOFO says, "All entities are eligible for funding, with the exception of applying as an individual. The individual can be involved in an application, but the applicant must be a legally recognized entity." Can an existing not developed licensed business with a single owner apply? Can you elaborate on what legally recognized mean?

Answer: Yes, a business with a single owner can apply as long as it is legally recognized, meaning it is registered to operate in California and has documentation such as a business license and tax ID number. For more details, refer to page 21, Applicant/Organization Documentation for Contracting, where required documentation is outlined, including evidence of eligibility to conduct business in California, financial statements, and insurance certificates.

This item is listed as a requirement on the application form. Can you elaborate on what this entails? Please also explain what type of partnerships are these and whether or not they should be paid (or can be collaborators)?

Answer: They are not a requirement, because the answer to the question in the application "Are there additional organizations who are co-applicants or partners in your proposal?" could be no. However, the intent of this documentation is to verify that organizations mentioned in the proposal have agreed to participate in the way it is stated in the proposal. Therefore, any documentation that attests to that will suffice. Any documentation that clearly states the partnership or collaboration and is signed by the party mentioned will suffice. Partnerships and collaborators could be paid or unpaid.

Are applicants able to apply for both projects?
Answer: it is highly unlikely that the same project should apply to both project categories. If you have questions as to which category is a better fit, please email us at jobsfirst@ocbc.org. If you are asking about two separate projects, then yes, each project can apply to the project category that is the best fit.

Is it allowable to include multiple target sectors in one application? For example, could we include hospitals, ambulatory care, and social services? How would that be evaluated? Should we focus on just one sector, or is it beneficial to include multiple?

Answer: If it is a single project that spans multiple sectors, as long as the project aligns with the eligible categories, it's fine. Your project doesn't have to be limited to just one sector.

Can you convert the $48,353 annual salary into an hourly wage? Is it approximately $25 per hour?

Answer: A $48,353 salary translates to about $23.25/hour based on a 40-hour workweek.

Are good paying jobs starting at $48,353 or a program that can eventually lead to these wages?

Answer: It would be preferable for this part of the initiative that they start at that wage level.

If we are serving the entire City of Santa Ana, do we need to identify specific census tracts designated as a "disinvested community," or are city boundaries sufficient?

Answer: It would be best if you identified the specific disinvested community census tract.

Who should the letter of reference be addressed to?

Answer: You can address it to Orange County Business Council.

How important is using the map for the application? If our target population consists of low-income residents throughout Orange County, should we be matching them to disadvantaged areas?

Answer: It would be ideal if you could match to the disinvested community areas. If your project is a physical development, consider its location. If it's a service-based project, think about whether it benefits residents in those areas.

If we plan to work with a consultant for a Concept Phase proposal, does the contracted consultant need to be identified in the application?

Answer: You're not required to select a consultant outright, but when you align your work plan with the 20-point scoring criteria, it demonstrates thorough preparation. However, even if you do select a consultant, Charitable Ventures and OCBC will still need to verify and validate the choice as part of quality control. The more details you can provide, such as identifying the consultant, obtaining a quote, and outlining costs in your budget, the stronger your application will be. That said, not having this information won't disqualify you, but it will result in a lower score.

Is it permissible to include multiple target sectors, such as hospitals, ambulatory care, and social services?

Answer: Yes, that would be allowable.

It seems like a key element of this initiative is to create pre-development projects that will then be competitive in the development phase. We've been competing in the Inland Empire, and I am aware of some projects moving forward there.

Answer: It's not necessarily true that pre-development projects will always transition into implementation funding, especially given how the state's timelines have unfolded. Initially, that was the idea, but due to uncertainties in the budget, there's no guarantee that a pre-development project will automatically receive funding in the implementation phase.

We are developing an affordable housing project and would like to explore adding employment services to help residents achieve financial progress goals. Would this be an eligible component of the Job Creating Project?

Answer: Yes, if that project is in a disinvested community census tract, that would be allowable

Will priority be given to businesses of different sizes, such as small businesses, growth firms, or large companies?

Answer: The focus is primarily on the number of good-paying jobs created and the income level associated with them.

For example, if a business plans to hire 500 people at good wages from disinvested communities, that will likely score higher than 20 small businesses hiring two employees each. That said, we recognize that impact can be measured in different ways. A cluster of small businesses creating good jobs might have comparable benefits to one large employer. We'll take a broad view of impact when evaluating proposals.

When a grant is approved, is the full amount awarded as a single payment, or is it disbursed in smaller increments?

Answer: The budget should clearly outline whether costs will be structured as a not-to-exceed amount, an hourly rate, or a scheduled payment. Since this is a cost-reimbursement grant, expenses must be incurred upfront and then submitted for reimbursement based on our contract with the state.

How many applications do you anticipate receiving?

Answer: We do not know.

Can you describe what is expected in the reference letter?

Answer: Provide one letter of reference that includes the following:

- Their name, email, and phone number.
- A summary of your capacity to deliver the type of work outlined in your proposal and your ability to meet reporting requirements and adhere to the approved budget.

For clarification, should the grant focus on a pre-development project rather than an implementation-ready project?

Answer: The purpose of the funding is to support activities that advance projects to become implementation ready. We will not fund projects that are asking for implementation funding. Projects must be physically located in or significantly involve Orange County residents, significantly benefit disinvested communities, and align with industries and/or strategies outlined in Jobs First Regional Plan Part 2.

We are a large educational institution. Does the reference letter need to be from an external source, or can it be written by our Chancellor?

Answer: It should be a third-party reference.

What about letters of reference from potential partners who are not receiving funding? Are those acceptable?

Answer: If you have partners, we want something in writing. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) could work as well, whether they receive funding or not.

Is this funding primarily for non-profits? Can you provide examples of eligible applicants?

Answer: There is no preference on who is awarded funding. Ineligible applicants are individuals.

Can the person who writes the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) also be the same person who provides the letter of reference?

Answer: We can't say a definitive no, as it may depend on the circumstances. However, if they are involved in the project, they have an incentive to vouch for your capability, which is why we prefer a reference from someone you've worked with who is not directly involved. While there may be exceptions, we recommend finding someone else for this role.

As I'm completing the budget, I'd like to know the difference between "Operating Expenses" and "Indirect Costs." Can you please explain the difference and let me know what I should complete?

Answer: Operating expenses are the costs directly related to running your program or project. These can include things like buying supplies, marketing/promotional, or software for program activities. Basically, it's what you spend to make the program happen — but it shouldn't be excessive.

Indirect costs, on the other hand, are the behind-the-scenes expenses that keep your organization running but aren't tied to one specific program. By allowing organizations to claim indirect costs, we are helping to create a more level playing field — especially for

smaller or resource-limited groups. This way, organizations can focus more on delivering impactful programs without struggling to keep their basic operations running.

If your organization has indirect costs, you can include them in that section to help cover those expenses. Organizations that might fill out the indirect costs section include:

- Nonprofits and Community Organizations: If they have administrative staff, office space, utilities, or other shared resources that keep the organization running.
- Universities and Research Institutions: They often have established indirect cost rates to cover infrastructure, library access, compliance offices, and more.
- Government Agencies or Departments: When they manage multiple programs and need to account for shared costs like HR, legal services, or IT support.
- Large Organizations with Centralized Services: If they provide resources like accounting, payroll, or tech support that benefit all programs.

If an organization doesn't have these kinds of shared expenses, — or the funder doesn't allow for indirect costs — they can skip this section and focus solely on operating expenses.

Can you confirm if someone is awarded catalyst funding at one phase during the first round, are they eligible for additional funding during future rounds at another phase?
Answer: You can apply for future rounds of funding. Receiving funding this time would not disqualify you from receiving funding in the 2nd or 3rd round.

Can a catalyst funding recipient also apply for implementation funding when it becomes available if they are still actively in the pre-development phase, but will be done with that phase before the deadline to complete the project?
Answer: Unfortunately, we cannot answer this question as the NOFO/RFP is written by the state, so the state would have to be clear on what is and isn't eligible.

What is the key difference between the Accelerator and Last Mile projects?

Answer: The accelerator phase is the middle stage of a project's development, where significant progress has been made, but more work is needed before reaching last mile. At this stage, the project has moved beyond the concept phase and is actively being developed, but it's not yet fully ready for execution.

- Key characteristics of the accelerate phase include:
  - Some foundational work is complete. Research has been conducted, partnerships may be forming, and a business or strategic plan is likely in place.
  - Initial steps, such as securing funding, or conducting pilot programs may have started.
  - The project is being tested, and adjustments are being made based on feedback, unforeseen obstacles, or resource availability. The focus is on strengthening the foundation.
  - This phase represents a transition from planning to action, with the goal of positioning the project for successful completion.

Answer: The last mile phase means you're nearly ready for implementation, where most of the work is complete, and only a few remaining steps are needed to launch or finalize the project. This phase is typically the most expensive because it involves critical finishing touches that make the project fully operational. Some of the hurdles could include obtaining permits, securing final funding, finalizing legal agreements, or completing infrastructure. There is no requirement that projects fit neatly into each category, and there are no strict funding limits. However, to allow for fair comparisons, we recommend using these three phases as a guide. Exceptions exist, but if you're seeking last-mile funding, you're most competitive at around the $750,000 range. This phase is about closing the gap between preparation and execution, ensuring all final requirements are met to launch the project successfully.

In the first section of the application, where it asks for "a concise overview of the project, including its main goals, activities, how these activities will be executed, and expected results," is this referring to the final project (i.e., the business once it launches) or the pre-development proposal?

Answer: This section is asking you to look at the application by paying attention to what the broader project will be, what the project will achieve, and how the activities will be executed. It asks you to describe what your project will do and who will benefit. This is all pre-development.

Is a new sole proprietor small business that started 6 months ago eligible to apply? This is a legal entity as required, but it's a newly created small business.

Answer: Yes, it would be allowable.

Is the provision of free legal services for low-income veterans to remove barriers to accessing healthcare and housing allowable services under this grant?

Answer: Yes, that would be allowable.

Is my application still eligible for consideration if it includes disadvantaged neighborhoods/census tracts shared by two municipalities?

Answer: Yes, if they are in the disinvested census tracts that would be eligible

What is the start date of the funding? I know we will get notified in April, so is it May 1?

Answer: The start date of funding would be dependent on when we receive the required paperwork and it's executed by all parties.

Does the timeline of the project need to go through Sept 2026, or can it end earlier?

Answer: It can end earlier.

What if we are working with disinvested communities (homeless) throughout Orange County, in addition to the disinvested communities?

Answer: Yes, that would be eligible.

The Job Creating Project has the $50K, $250K, $750K funding tiers. What are the tiers for the Community Enhancement Project?

Answer: The tiers are the same.

Can you explain who is the financial sponsor agent, a needed field in the cover letter? Can that be the business owner, for example?

Answer: If you do not have a fiscal sponsor, this does not apply to you. If this does not apply to you, this does not count towards nor against your application.

If you get many more "Community Enhancing" projects than "Job Creating" projects, does the collaborative have the opportunity to reallocate the $900,000/$2.5M split?

Answer: There will not be a reallocation.

Nowadays people don't talk on phone, they rather do text/email/SnapChat. How will you verify for LOR or MOU or whatever things you need to verify for the application?

Answer: We will verify via email. The LoR and MoU needs to have contact information available.

Are there any items that are not allowed on the budget, besides activities that do not fall in the pre-development category?

Answer: A disallowable cost list will be provided. Examples include (please note this is not an exhaustive list): attorney fees, payments of debts, and lobbying efforts. The list is flowed down from the State has provided to us. Anything related to the program should be eligible, but if you have any questions, we're happy to review the cost.

Will denied applicants be able to reapply for a future phase?

Answer: Yes, they will.

Will each round be the same funding amount?

Answer: Yes

Will future rounds of catalyst funding also have the same project end date (e.g. 9/30/26)?

Answer: That is correct.

If applying for a construction project, we know there can always be delays. Is that an issue with the grant completion date of September?

Answer: All work needs to be concluded by September 2026.

For the grant writing mentor will it be conducted in person, Zoom or phone call?

Answer: It is up to you and the grant writing mentor. You both can agree on a time.

So expenses can be charged up to 9/30 but reimbursement of those final expenses would occur 2-3 months later (by Dec/Jan)?

Answer: All work needs to conclude by September 30, 2026. Invoices can be submitted after this date but work absolutely needs to be concluded by this point. No work can continue after this point. The reimbursement would be in the months following.

I don't currently have access to the glossary. On both Wednesday and today, the terms "Native American" and "Indigenous" were used. How are we to interpret "Indigenous." Does Indigenous mean, for example, Mexican, given the region was, previously, Mexico? Thanks for clarifying this point.

Answer: The state's preferred terminology is "California Native American Tribes," though I recognize that even this can be debated. Our goal is to use language that respectfully and inclusively reflects the intent and identity of the Native Peoples of this land.

Regarding the formatting of application materials:

- **Are the Calibri font requirements consistent across all application components (responses to questions, MOU, letter of recommendation, and budget)?**
- **If the layout appears cramped when viewing the application, would it be permissible to adjust spacing to improve readability, narrow the margin, utilize more spaces in a page, as long as the complete application remains under the 10-page limit?**

Answer: The font requirements are specified where applicable. There is no need to use Calibri in the budget template, but all other sections must follow the guidelines, including using Calibri 12-point font where required. Additionally, as long as the complete application remains within the 10-page limit and all instructions are followed, you may adjust spacing for readability. Please ensure that your budget narrative is formatted consistently with the rest of your application.

I realized I have one more question regarding the letter of reference. I recently launched a small business a few months ago—does the reference letter need to specifically focus on the business, or can it be about me as the founder?

Answer: The letter of reference should touch upon your organization, but if the letter of reference focuses on you as the founder, that is okay as well. Please ensure that in includes their name, email, and phone number. Additionally, a summary of your capacity to deliver the type of work outlined in your proposal and your ability to meet reporting requirements and adhere to the approved budget. This should be a third-party reference.