



Casco Bay Estuary

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CBEP Resilience and Monitoring Grants Request for Applications

Supporting Projects that Enhance Climate Resilience, Ecosystem
Health, and Environmental Monitoring in the Casco Bay
Watershed

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This Request for Applications (RFA) encompasses three grant programs:

1. ***Casco Bay Resilient Communities Grants:*** Projects that advance planning or strengthen networks to increase community resilience.
2. ***Casco Bay Resilient Habitats Grants:*** Projects that advance the restoration or enhancement of aquatic habitats with the intent of building ecosystem resilience.
3. ***Casco Bay Monitoring Infrastructure Grants:*** Projects that increase the capacity to collect environmental data in Casco Bay.

Each grant has unique application requirements. Applicants should carefully review the entire RFA and adhere to the grant-specific guidelines. Applicants may submit multiple Pre-applications, but no more than one project concept from each applicant would be invited to proceed to a Full Application.

Pre-application Due Date: November 6, 2026 at 5:00 PM

All applicants must submit an initial Pre-application to determine suitability for development of a Full Application. The Pre-application form can be found here:
<https://forms.gle/gFZNtuRzsukQt8tD8>

Full Application Due Date: December 7, 2026 at 5:00 PM

A subset of Pre-applications will be invited by November 7, 2025 to submit a Full Application.

Informational Webinar: October 7, 2026 from 12:00 – 1:00 PM

<https://maine.zoom.us/j/81911045601?pwd=9uMaYjQwWmRVpkaACiX8q9vfjTTvVB.1&jst=3>

A recording and FAQ will be posted at:

<https://www.cascobayestuary.org/about-us/grant-opportunities/>



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SECTION 1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Grant Program Overview

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP) is one of 28 National Estuary Programs and is a collaborative effort of people and organizations interested in protecting and restoring the Bay. CBEP works as a catalyst for action with the goal of keeping Casco Bay and our nearly 1,000 square miles of watershed clean and healthy. These grants from CBEP are funded through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

Casco Bay Resilient Communities Grants: Funds can be used to organize trainings, support plan development, and create new committees and working groups.

Example projects:

- Hire a contractor to help develop a Climate Action Plan.
- Engage the community in developing climate resilience visions and setting priorities.
- Carry out a climate vulnerability assessment.

Casco Bay Resilient Habitats Grants: Funds can be used to support development and implementation of projects that support aquatic habitat restoration and resilience.

Example projects:

- Design or install a [StreamSmart](#) culvert replacement to improve fish passage.
- Surveying, design, and other tasks associated with dam removal.
- Assessment, modeling, design, permitting, and other tasks taken to restore tidal marshes and build community resilience as outlined in the [CoastWise Approach](#).
- Use of novel or established methods for projects that build resilience in tidal marshes, tidal flats, shellfish bars & reefs, islands, and eelgrass beds.

Casco Bay Monitoring Infrastructure Grants: Funds can be used to support equipment purchases, protocol development, and learning opportunities.

Example projects:

- Purchase equipment to monitor river health in a vulnerable location.
- Upgrade outdated equipment to enable higher quality and more frequent data collection.
- Buy start-up supplies for a new monitoring group.
- Fund time and supplies to develop new lab protocols.



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1.2 Eligibility

Eligible applicants include:

- tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations
- academic institutions
- units of government (municipalities, state agencies, districts, counties)
- formally chartered road or lake associations (informal associations must partner with an eligible entity)

Collaborative proposals between more than one organization are strongly encouraged.

In general, projects must occur within Casco Bay or the Casco Bay watershed (See [Casco Bay watershed map](#)). Town-wide projects that occur partly in the Casco Bay watershed and partly in an adjacent watershed (e.g., partly in Saco River/Saco Bay, Kennebec River, Androscoggin River) will be considered, as well as projects that are statewide or regional in nature, if projects will directly benefit the Casco Bay watershed and its communities. In these situations, CBEP funds must be proportional to the benefits provided to the Casco Bay watershed.

To focus resources on new and impactful initiatives, our funding programs generally do not support ongoing administrative support of established programs. For-profit entities are ineligible applicants but are eligible partners. Funds may not be used for political action or legislative advocacy. Applicants may submit multiple Pre-applications, but no more than one project concept will be invited to proceed to a Full Application.

1.3 Funding Amounts, Duration, and Terms

- Funding requests up to \$25,000 per application will be considered.
- CBEP anticipates awarding up to \$195,000 in grants this round.
- CBEP expects to announce the next RFA for these grants in Fall 2027.

Note: Match or leveraging is not required, but is welcome and encouraged, particularly if it can help demonstrate a project's feasibility. Match will not be an evaluation criterion.

Projects may require a subcontract agreement between CBEP's fiscal host (University of Southern Maine) and grant recipients. Subcontracts are expected to have a start date no earlier than February 1, 2027, and will end by December 31, 2028. Slightly different timeframes will be considered if applicants demonstrate the need. Pre-award costs will not be covered.



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Awards greater than \$10,000 will now be classified as subawards and therefore must comply with federal funding guidance, including entering into a formal agreement with the University of Southern Maine. This formal agreement will require:

1. Have or obtain SAM.gov Registration (<https://sam.gov/entity-registration>)
2. Provide most recent audit or financial statement
3. Providing your NICRA form (if requesting more than the de minimus for the indirect rate)

Awards less than \$10,000 are exempt from these requirements.

If you are planning to hire subcontractors, any subcontract should be below \$10,000.



SECTION 2. GRANT PROGRAM GUIDELINES

2.1 Grant Application Technical Assistance

CBEP is committed to supporting applicants who may need assistance developing project applications. CBEP staff are available to:

- Discuss project ideas.
- Walk through the Pre-application and application processes.
- Provide guidance with preparing applications to interested applicants.
- For Resilient Habitats Grants applications, CBEP can assist with map development and preparation.

Contact Natalie Bingham (natalie.bingham@maine.edu) if you would like support with your Pre-application or Full Application.

CBEP staff will hold office hours at the following dates and times to offer general technical assistance and answer short questions. These meetings are not intended to support in-depth discussion of project ideas.

Office Hours:

Wednesday, October 13, 2026 at 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Tuesday, October 27, 2026 at 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Office Hours Links:

Wednesday 10/13:

<https://maine.zoom.us/j/84270562744?pwd=iuh3nnEskdyQr2sle1Kqb3rL843Gpb.1&jst=3>

Tuesday 10/27:

<https://maine.zoom.us/j/82291669007?pwd=0bCQQJ6kPSbLkfRE696WokXJ0Gfebz.1&jst=3>

2.2 Pre-application Guidelines, Deadlines, and Submissions

All applicants are required to submit a Pre-application. Only reviewed and approved Pre-applications will be invited to submit a Full Application. Pre-applications for all three grants must be submitted by **Friday, November 6, 2026 at 5:00 PM.**

The same online Pre-application form is used for all three grants. While anyone can use the form, a Google account (Gmail) is required to save your progress and return to complete it later. If you do not have a Google account or find using the online form to be a barrier, a PDF or paper copy of the Pre-application is available upon request. If you require assistance accessing or completing the online form, please contact Natalie



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Bingham (natalie.bingham@maine.edu) to explore alternative options.

The Pre-application form can be found here: <https://forms.gle/gFZNtuRzsukQt8tD8>

2.3 Full Application Guidelines, Deadlines, and Submissions

All applicants will be notified of the status of their Pre-application and informed if they will be invited to submit a Full Application by November 9, 2026. If you are invited to submit a Full Application, it will be due **Friday, December 7, 2026 at 5:00 PM** and should be submitted using the online Application Form, which will be provided to you.

All Full Applications must include a detailed budget, letters of commitment from partner organizations identified in the application and may include additional letters of support or other supporting documents.

2.4 General Evaluation Criteria

Pre-applications are reviewed by CBEP staff. Selection of applicants invited to submit a Full Application will be based on the strength, suitability, need, and overall program alignment of the proposed project.

Full applications are reviewed by three separate committees—one for each grant program—comprising CBEP staff, organizational partners, and affiliates. These committees will evaluate Applications and make funding recommendations to CBEP staff for final approval. Committees reserve the right to request additional information from any applicant during the evaluation process.

Applications for all three grants—Resilient Communities, Resilient Habitats, and Monitoring Infrastructure—will be evaluated based on the strength of the proposed scope of work, ability to address a demonstrated need, outcomes and deliverables, and the qualifications of the project team. Applications will also be evaluated on budget completeness, reasonableness, and strategic use of funds.

Evaluation criteria for each grant are outlined in **Sections 2.5 - 2.7** below. See [Appendix 1](#) for grant-specific review criteria and point totals.

Following evaluation, the highest scoring Applications are selected for funding. The selection process aims to ensure a fair and transparent assessment of all Applications.

2.5 Resilient Communities Application Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria



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Casco Bay Resilient Communities Grants support projects that increase community climate resilience in one or more Casco Bay watershed communities. Project Applications must align with at least one of these two project categories:

Planning

Planning Projects seek to develop assessments, plans, ordinances, designs, or other information that will guide community and/or habitat resilience. *Planning Project* examples include, but are not limited to:

- Conducting a climate vulnerability assessment, [Maine Flood Resilience Checklist](#) program, or other assessments.
- Integrating conservation data and knowledge into local or regional plans such as comprehensive plans, capital improvement plans, open space plans, etc.
- Creating new community-driven plans such as local hazard mitigation plans, natural resource inventories, or open space plans that will help build community resilience.
- Creating climate resilience stand-alone chapters for comprehensive plans
- Updating community ordinances that advance climate resilience, such as local shoreland zoning, floodplain management, and other local ordinances.
- Projects to develop designs that address community resilience needs, provided the design (a) is developed via a collaborative community process and (b) helps prepare communities to apply for funding for final design, permitting and construction.
- Convening a design charrette for a vulnerable neighborhood.

Strengthening Community Networks

Network-building projects aim to enhance the capacity of applicants and their partners to advance climate resilience. These projects focus on building or strengthening planning networks, expanding knowledge, and improving access to resources, including funding opportunities. *Strengthening Community Networks* project examples include, but are not limited to:

- Supporting community-based and neighborhood organizations in their efforts to prepare for storm events and bolster social resilience, including creation of peer-to-peer learning opportunities and cross-sector collaborations.
- Improving the intersection of groups working on community issues related to community resilience (such as public health, affordable housing, public transportation, etc.).
- Supporting or creating a cross-sector municipal or regional committee, grassroots community group or advisory working group focused on



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community resilience.

- Organizing leadership training, support for community engagement or facilitation, or convening non-traditional or historically excluded partners, toward climate resilience.

Evaluation Criteria

Resilient Community Grants evaluations will place a significant emphasis on equitable engagement, including how well the project involves and collaborates with vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. Additional points are available for projects benefiting priority populations or from first-time applicants. See [Resilient Communities Evaluation Criteria and Application Tips](#) for grant-specific review criteria and point totals.

2.6 Resilient Habitats Application Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

Resilient Habitats Grants support projects that contribute to the restoration, enhancement, and resilience of Casco Bay's coastal habitats and aquatic habitat continuity in the Casco Bay watershed.

Priority areas include:

1. **River and stream restoration** through [StreamSmart](#) culvert installation, removal of dams on main stem rivers and streams, in-stream habitat enhancements (placement of woody debris), or other actions that enhance fish passage and expand habitat quality and access for native species and anadromous fish.
2. **Resilience-building of tidal marshes and tidal flats** through emerging and novel methods.
3. **Application of [CoastWise](#) best practices** for addressing tidal restrictions, replacing tidal culverts, and accommodating tidal marsh migration in response to sea level rise.

Restoration and resilience of sub-tidal shellfish reefs and eelgrass beds.

This grant is designed to strategically advance projects through critical stages of development. The strategic use of grant funds depends on the specific needs of each project and may include activities such as topographic surveys, geotechnical analyses, hydrological monitoring and modeling, and other site assessments. Eligible uses also encompass engineering and design work, including conceptual alternatives, preliminary designs, and final designs, as well as regulatory 'pre-application' meetings, permitting, or bid oversight. Additional activities may be supported if a clear strategic need is demonstrated. Projects that integrate community resilience with ecological resilience outcomes are encouraged. As appropriate, applicants should provide documentation of landowner permission for the proposed project.



Evaluation Criteria

Resilient Habitats Grants evaluation criteria include alignment with habitat restoration and ecosystem resilience goals and anticipated ecological benefits. Additional points are available for projects benefiting priority populations, applicants who have not previously received funding, and equitable engagement with disadvantaged groups. See [Resilient Habitats Evaluation Criteria and Application Tips](#) for grant-specific review criteria and point totals.

2.7 Monitoring Infrastructure Application Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

Monitoring and Infrastructure Grants address the monitoring needs identified in the [Casco Bay Plan](#) and [Casco Bay Monitoring Plan](#). The goal is to enhance monitoring infrastructure and capacity to support the long-term collection of environmental data in Casco Bay and its watershed by:

1. ***Establishing New Monitoring Programs or Collaborations:*** Creating innovative partnerships to improve data collection.
2. ***Enhancing Existing Monitoring Programs:*** Enabling more frequent data collection, monitoring at additional sites, or gathering new types of data.
3. ***Updating Monitoring Programs:*** Replacing outdated equipment or developing practices and protocols to meet certification requirements.

Funding should increase monitoring capabilities and infrastructure within the Casco Bay watershed and **must not** be used to cover the regular costs of ongoing monitoring efforts.

Examples of Allowable Costs:

- Purchase of automated field monitoring equipment (e.g., buoys, data sondes, data loggers).
- Acquisition of laboratory equipment for processing field samples.
- Adding telemetry to existing data collection platforms for real-time or near real-time data access.
- Establishing long-term “sentinel” monitoring programs to track climate change impacts.
- Supporting new monitoring collaborations.
- Developing and documenting data quality assurance practices, including:
- Supporting staff time for writing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or Quality Assurance Project Plans (QAPPs).
- Upgrading laboratory practices to meet certification standards.



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Data Quality Requirements

All data collection funded by this program must adhere to robust data quality assurance practices. If required, a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) approved by the EPA must be developed prior to data collection. Please note that QAPP development and formal EPA approval may delay project start time.

Evaluation Criteria

Monitoring Infrastructure Grants will be evaluated based on their potential to expand or enhance monitoring capabilities. Additional points are awarded for projects that involve priority communities, first-time applicants, and engagement with disadvantaged groups. See [Monitoring Infrastructure Evaluation Criteria and Application](#) Tips for grant-specific review criteria and point totals.

NOTE: The Monitoring Infrastructure Grant Program also provides Rapid Response Grants to support monitoring efforts in response to sudden events that warrant timely monitoring for environmental impacts, such as oil spills, major storms, or widespread algae blooms. These grants follow a different application and evaluation process and are open year-round. To start the application process, please contact Natalie Bingham (natalie.bingham@maine.edu) with a description of the sudden event and monitoring need.



APPENDIX 1: EVALUATION CRITERIA AND APPLICATION TIPS

Priority Populations

These grant programs award additional points to projects that involve or benefit one or more of the following priority populations¹:

- Small communities (population 4,000 or less)
- Rural communities
- Low-income towns
- Towns with limited staff capacity
- New Mainers
- Indigenous-led and -serving organizations
- Working lands or waterfront economy communities

In alignment with CBEP's [Equity Strategy](#), CBEP strives to make every effort to reach, build trusting relationships with, and center priorities of groups that have been historically excluded from municipal government and other decision-making spaces.

¹ *The Equity Subcommittee (ESC) of the Maine Climate Council (MCC) identified these groups as "priority populations" for climate action, either because of their vulnerability to climate change impacts, limited resources or capacity to respond and adapt, or because of intersections between these.

Resilient Communities Evaluation Criteria and Application Tips

Evaluation Criteria	Maximum Points	Details	Application Tips
Scope of Work	60	Project Description (20): Detailed, aligned with goals such as community networks and resilience planning. Project Need (15): Importance to the Casco Bay Watershed; justifies funding need. Timeline (5): Realistic and achievable. Outcomes and Deliverables (15): Tangible, aligned with scope of work. Project Team (5): Collaborative, qualified team.	Project Description: Provide a detailed, well-thought-out description of your project and its scope of work. Ensure alignment with the program's goals, such as advancing climate resilience or strengthening community networks. Project Need: Clearly explain why the project is important to the Casco Bay Watershed region. Timeline: Present a detailed and realistic timeline achievable within the project period. Outcomes and Deliverables: Clearly describe your project outcomes and deliverables. Highlight their alignment with the scope of work and potential for tangible, lasting impact. Project Team: Define roles and responsibilities for all team members. Demonstrate your team's qualifications and capacity to complete the project.
Engagement Approach and Equity	25	Clear description of engagement strategies, target groups, and inclusive collaboration with vulnerable populations.	Clearly identify the groups or populations your project will engage and explain why and how they will be engaged. Highlight collaborative approaches, especially with vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, to develop goals, work plans, and deliverables.
Budget Proposal	20	Detailed, complete budget with line items. Reasonable costs and strategic use of funds.	Budget Details: Submit a complete and accurate budget with line items clarifying each cost. Ensure your budget is reasonable and does not include excessive staff time or overhead costs. Strategic Use of Funds: Demonstrate how your project makes effective and strategic use of the requested funds. Additional Funding (not scored): If applicable, include details about outside funding, in-kind contributions, or other leveraged funding sources.
Additional Points	10	Previous Grant Status (1): First-time applicants. Priority Populations (9): Benefits one or more priority populations.	Identify if you are a first-time applicant and if your project benefits one or more priority populations.

Resilient Habitats Evaluation Criteria and Application Tips

Evaluation Criteria	Maximum Points	Details	Application Tips
Scope of Work	60	Project Description (25): Detailed, aligned with goals such as habitat restoration and ecosystem resilience. Project Need (15): Clearly identifies an issue or need. Timeline (5): Realistic and achievable. Outcomes and Deliverables (10): Quantifiable, meaningful benefits to ecosystems. Project Team (5): Qualified team with clear roles and expertise.	Project Description: Provide a detailed description of your project, including the type and amount of habitat to be restored. Highlight anticipated ecological benefits, such as habitat values, species protection, and ecosystem resilience. Show alignment with goals like river and stream restoration or tidal marsh resilience. Project Need: Clearly define the issue or opportunity your project addresses. Timeline: Present a detailed and realistic timeline achievable within the project period. Outcomes and Deliverables: Clearly define tangible outcomes and deliverables. Demonstrate their potential for meaningful, lasting benefits to aquatic ecosystems. Project Team: Clearly describe roles and responsibilities within your team. Demonstrate the team's expertise and capacity for completing the project.
Budget Proposal	25	Detailed and accurate budget with narrative explaining expenses. Reasonable costs and strategic use of funds.	Budget Details: Submit a detailed budget and budget narrative that includes clear line items and explanations for each expense. Ensure the budget is reasonable, free from unjustified costs, and avoids excessive overhead. Requests for general project management funding are permitted but will be capped at 20% of the total grant award. Strategic Use of Funds: Show how your project makes effective and strategic use of the requested funds. If applicable, highlight any efficiencies or cost savings in your plan. Additional Funding (not scored): If applicable, include details about outside funding, in-kind contributions, or other leveraged funding sources.
Additional Points	15	Previous Grant Status (1): First-time applicants. Priority Populations (7): Benefits one or more priority populations. Engagement and Equity (7): Inclusive collaboration with disadvantaged groups.	Identify if you are a first-time applicant and if your project benefits one or more priority populations. Engagement and Equity: Describe the specific audiences, groups, or individuals your project will engage. Explain how you will engage them (e.g., through collaborative planning or co-development of goals). Emphasize how the project addresses needs of vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.

Monitoring Infrastructure Evaluation Criteria and Application Tips

Evaluation Criteria	Maximum Points	Details	Application Tips
Scope of Work	60	Project Description (25): Detailed, aligned with program goals, including new/existing monitoring programs and regional data synthesis. Project Need (15): Clearly identifies an issue or opportunity; justifies need for funds. Timeline (5): Realistic and achievable. Outcomes and Deliverables (10): Tangible, sustainable outcomes. Project Team (5): Qualified team with clear roles and expertise.	Project Description: Provide a detailed and realistic description of the proposed project and scope of work. Clearly align your goals with the program's objectives. Demonstrate how the project meets funding priorities, such as regional data synthesis or freshwater monitoring. Include a brief description of intended data quality assurance practices if applicable. Project Need: Clearly identify a specific issue or opportunity the project addresses. Timeline: Provide a detailed and realistic timeline for completing your project within the grant period. Outcomes and Deliverables: Clearly define the expected outcomes and deliverables of your project. Highlight how the outcomes will lead to long-term benefits, such as sustainable data collection or increased monitoring capacity in the region. Project Team: Clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of your team members. Demonstrate that your team has expertise to successfully execute the project.
Budget Proposal	25	Detailed, complete budget with line items. Reasonable costs and strategic use of funds.	Budget Details: Ensure your budget is complete, with correct calculations and detailed line items for each budget category. Avoid including excessive staff time or unjustified overhead costs. Additional Funding (not scored): If applicable, include details about outside funding, in-kind contributions, or other leveraged funding sources.
Additional Points	15	Previous Grant Status (1): First-time applicants. Priority Populations (7): Benefits one or more priority populations. Engagement and Equity (7): Inclusive collaboration with disadvantaged groups.	Identify if you are a first-time applicant and if your project benefits one or more priority populations Engagement and Equity: Describe the specific audiences, groups, or individuals your project will engage. Explain how you will engage them (e.g., through collaborative planning or co-development of goals). Emphasize how the project addresses needs of vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.