



U.S. Marine Highway Program Notice of Funding Opportunity Office of Ports and Waterways Planning

June 5, 2025

1200 New Jersey Ave. SE, Washington DC 20590
Visit www.maritime.dot.gov

To foster, promote and develop the maritime industry of the United States to meet the nation's economic and security needs.

- This webinar is being recorded. The recording will be made available on the MARAD website soon, see [USMHP Webinar](#).
- **Please MUTE your microphones** during the webinar.
- Questions will be answered after the presentation.
 - If you have a question during the webinar, please enter it into the chat for the Q&A.
 - If you have a question during the Q&A, please raise your hand.
- The Program Office will do their best to answer your question today. If a question requires further consideration, an answer will be provided on the MARAD website under [U.S. Marine Highway Program FAQs](#).

If there is a conflict between something that is said today, and the content in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Fiscal Year 2025 U.S. Marine Highway Grant Program, **the content in the NOFO controls.**

- U.S. Marine Highway Program (USMHP) Overview
- Changes from the FY2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
- U.S. Marine Highway Program Eligibility
- Merit Criteria and Selection Considerations
- Q & A



United States Marine Highway Routes

May 2025



- Removes references to rescinded Executive Orders.
- Updates rating rubric for selection criteria to better align with statutory requirements.
- Clarifies eligibility of, and provides a definition for, Marine Highway Transportation Planning Activities.
- Clarifies what applicants must provide to demonstrate that Project funds will be spent efficiently and effectively.
- Updates the organization of the NOFO and references to comply with the recent changes to 2 CFR Part 200 Appendix I.

Applicants who choose to re-apply using materials from prior competitions should ensure their FY 2025 USMHP application fully addresses the criteria described in this year's NOFO.

- On May 16, 2025, the NOFO for the FY 2025 USMHP was published on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). All applications must be submitted using [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).
- *MARAD will accept applications through 11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on Tuesday, July 15, 2025.* Late applications will not be accepted for any reason.
- The total funding available under the FY 2025 NOFO is **\$14,042,621.**
- There is no minimum or maximum award size under the program.

Your Application MUST include....

- The Standard Form (SF) 424 (Application for Federal Assistance). Applicants are encouraged to also complete the SF-424C (Budget Information – Construction Programs), if applicable. The SF-424 and SF-424C may be found at [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).
- A Project Narrative that contains the information, and is in the format, outlined in Section D of the NOFO.
- A Letter of Financial Commitment (defined in Section B.5 of the NOFO) documenting that the applicant has sufficient funding available to meet cost share requirements, unless the applicant qualifies for, and is requesting, 100% Federal funding.
- For private sector applicants, a letter of endorsement from the applicable Marine Highway Route Sponsor.

Additional information may be requested as deemed necessary to facilitate and complete review of the application. If such information is not provided, MARAD may deem the application incomplete and cease processing it.

Eligible applicants are:

- A State
- A political subdivision of a State or a local government
- A United States metropolitan planning organization
- A United States port authority
- A Tribal government
- A United States private sector operator of Marine Highway projects or private sector owners of facilities, including an Alaska Native Corporation, with an endorsement letter from the current Marine Highway Route Sponsor.
 - If there are multiple route sponsors, the private sector applicant is only required to submit an endorsement letter from one of the sponsors.

- The Federal share of the total costs of an eligible USMHP Project may not exceed 80 percent; however, per 46 U.S.C. 55601(d)(4)(B), the Secretary may increase the Federal share of costs above 80 percent for:
 - (1) a grant to an eligible entity that is a Tribal government; or
 - (2) a grant for a Project that is located in a rural area.
- For grants to American Samoa, Guam, the Virgin Islands, or the Northern Mariana Islands, MARAD will waive any cost share requirement for local matching funds under \$200,000 (including in-kind contributions) that otherwise would have applied to a grant under the USMHP.

See p. 5 of the NOFO for how to calculate the cost share for your Project.

- Eligible Project activities include Projects or components of Projects that:
 - 1) Provide a coordinated and capable alternative to landside transportation; mitigate or relieve landside congestion; promote Marine Highway Transportation; or use vessels documented under 46 U.S.C. chapter 121 (U.S. built/flagged/crewed) ; and
 - 2) Develop, expand, or promote Marine Highway Transportation or shipper use of Marine Highway Transportation.

- Eligible Projects may be either capital Projects, Projects for Development phase activities, or Projects for Marine Highway Transportation Planning Activities.
- Note the following definitions:
 - Development phase activities: Includes planning, feasibility analysis, revenue forecasting, environmental or other permitting-related reviews, preliminary engineering and design work, and other preconstruction activities intended to support construction activities for a capital project.
 - Marine Highway Transportation Planning Activities: Activities that are intended to develop strategies, plan for, or research the development, expansion or promotion of Marine Highway Transportation on one or more designated Marine Highway Transportation Routes (including activities that consider the potential expansion or modification of designated Marine Highway Transportation Routes), but that are not intended to directly support construction activities for a specific capital project or an existing Marine Highway Transportation Service.

Note that Projects for Development phase or Marine Highway Transportation Planning Activities that do not include any construction activities will be less competitive than those Projects that result in construction.

- Ineligible Project activities include:
 - Improvements outside the United States.
 - Raising sunken vessels, constructing buildings or other physical facilities, or acquiring land, unless the Secretary determines that such activities are necessary to carry out the Marine Highway Transportation Project for which such assistance is provided.
 - The purchase or installation of fully automated cargo handling equipment remotely operated or monitored, with or without the exercise of human intervention or control if the Secretary determines that such equipment would result in a net loss of jobs within the port or port terminal.
 - Improvements to Federally owned facilities.
 - No funds may be awarded to an entity that utilizes or provides in part or in whole: the national transportation logistics public information platform (commonly referred to as ‘LOGINK’) provided by the People’s Republic of China of departments, ministries, centers, agencies or instruments of the Government of the People’s Republic of China.

Please refer to the NOFO for the full list of ineligible Project activities.

- An application must describe only one Project, but that Project may contain more than one component and may describe components that may be carried out by parties other than the applicant.
- MARAD expects and will impose requirements on fund recipients to ensure that all components included in an application will be delivered as part of the USMHP Project, regardless of whether a component includes Federal funding.
- The status of each component should be clearly described (for example, in the Project schedule and budget).
- If the application identifies one or more independent Project components, the applicants should clearly identify the applicant's priority for funding among the components.

- Narrative Section I: Project Description D.3.a.
- Narrative Section II: Project Location D.3.b.
- Narrative Section III: Grant Funds, Sources,
and Uses of Project Funds D.3.c.
- Narrative Section IV: Additional Application Information
Needed from All Private-Sector
Applicants D.3.d.
- Narrative Section V: Merit Criteria D.3.e.
- Narrative Section VI: Selection Considerations D.3.f.

MARAD recommends applicants follow this Project Narrative outline to ensure that applications address all NOFO requirements.

- Include a detailed statement of work and a description of the proposed Project, with focus on its technical/engineering as well as its current status.
- Describe how the Project promotes, expands, or develops a Marine Highway Transportation Service and the type of cargo moved by the Project or Service.
- If submitting a joint application, identify the lead recipient of the award and a description of the roles and responsibilities of each applicant. Joint applications must include a signed letter of support from each eligible non-lead joint applicant.
- Citation of authority to establish an applicant's authority to carry out the Project, so that MARAD can make the statutory determination necessary for award.
- NOTE: For equipment purchases, given the competition requirements in 2 CFR 200, applicants should describe the equipment generally, focusing on the operating requirements and features that are required to achieve the intended Project benefits and objectives, as opposed to just describing a specific brand of equipment.

- Describe the direct physical location of the Project, including a map and photographs if available.
- The location of the Project is where the requested grant funds will be used, not the headquarters, corporate office, or other office of the applicant.
- Describe the U.S. Marine Highway Route served by the Project.
- Identify whether the Project is:
 - Rural: An area located outside a 2020 Census-designated urban area.
 - Urban: An area located within (or on the boundary of) a 2020 Census-designated urban area.
- If the Project includes multiple sites, include location information for all sites.

- Describe the budget for the Project using three funding source categories: non-Federal, USMHP funding request, and other Federal, with specific amounts from each funding source.
- Do not include expenses incurred prior to Project award selection.
- The applicant must demonstrate that the non-Federal funding sources are stable, dependable, and dedicated to this Project by attaching or linking to the Letter(s) of Financial Commitment.
- If a Project is in two or more census tracts or is located only partially within an urban or rural area, the budget needs to separate the costs between the various census tracts.

- In addition to the required Marine Highway Transportation Route Sponsor endorsement letter, all private-sector lead applicants must provide:
 - A description of the entity including location of the headquarters; a description of the entity's assets (tugs, barges, etc.); years in operation; ownership; customer base; and website address, if any.
 - Unique Entity Identifier of the parent company (when applicable).
 - The most recent year-end audited, reviewed, or compiled financial statements, prepared by a certified public accountant (CPA).
 - Statement regarding the relationship between applicants and any parents, subsidiaries, or affiliates, if any such entity is going to provide a portion of the matching funds.
 - Evidence documenting applicant's ability to provide cost share requirement.
 - Pro-forma financial statements and information on current and projected financial condition of company.
 - Statement regarding bankruptcy or reorganization under Chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code, or any other insolvency or reorganization proceedings.

Please refer to the NOFO for the full discussion on Private-Sector Applicants.

- The applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the Project aligns with the four merit criteria described in Section F of the NOFO:
 - Demonstrating the Need to Develop, Expand, or Promote Marine Highway Transportation or shipper use of Marine Highway Transportation
 - Expanding the Benefits of Marine Highway Transportation
 - Measuring Project Support
 - Leveraging Federal Funding and Financial Viability
- Reviewers will assess a Project's alignment with the merit criteria and evaluate whether the benefits of the Project under each criterion are clear, direct and reasonable.

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the rating tables for each merit criterion on pages 21 through 27!

Demonstrating the Need to Develop, Expand, or Promote Marine Highway Transportation or Shipper Use of Marine Highway Transportation

- The criterion will be evaluated based on the following three categories:
 - Market Need Specific commodities, markets, and shippers the Marine Highway Transportation Service is attracting or is expected to attract.
 - Project Need The extent to which the Project is needed to attract the specific commodities, markets, and shippers necessary to develop, expand, or promote the Marine Highway Transportation Service.
 - Project Impact The impact, if any, to the development, expansion, or promotion of the Marine Highway Transportation Service if the Project is delayed or not realized.

Ratings for Demonstrating the Need to Develop, Expand, or Promote Marine Highway Transportation

Non-Responsive	Low	Medium	High
The application contains insufficient information to assess this criterion, or the information provided fails to effectively demonstrate that the Project is needed to develop, expand, or promote Marine Highway Transportation or shipper use of Marine Highway Transportation. An application that receives a non-responsive rating for this criterion will not be considered for award.	The application effectively demonstrates only the Project Need, but the demonstration of Market Need and Project Impact is less clear.	The application effectively demonstrates only Market Need and Project Need, but the demonstration of Project Impact is less clear.	The application effectively demonstrates Market Need, Project Need, and Project Impact.

Expanding the Benefits of Marine Highway Transportation

- The applicant should only describe benefits directly attributable to the Project, not those attributable to the overall Marine Highway Transportation Service, which would exist with or without the Project.
- Project benefits will be evaluated on the following four categories:
 - Mitigates or relieves landside congestion.
 - Economic competitiveness via transportation efficiency and economic gains.
 - Alternative to landside transportation and improved transportation network resiliency.
 - Projected safety improvements that would result from the Project.

Ratings for Expanding the Benefits of Marine Highway Transportation

Non-Responsive	Low	Medium	High
The application contains insufficient information to assess this criterion, or the information provided fails to demonstrate how the Project benefits a) Landside Congestion and b) Economic Competitiveness. An application that receives a non-responsive rating for this criterion will not be considered for award.	The application only demonstrates how the Project benefits a) Landside Congestion and b) Economic Competitiveness.	The application demonstrates how the Project benefits a minimum of three categories, two of which must be: a) Landside Congestion and b) Economic Competitiveness.	The application demonstrates how the Project benefits all four categories, specifically Landside Congestion, Economic Competitiveness, Alternative to Landside Transportation and Safety Improvements.

Measuring Project Support

- Clearly document the supporters of the Project, which may **include both private sector and public sector partners**. If an applicant is a private entity, the required endorsement letter from the Marine Highway Transportation Route Sponsor will count as a letter of support.
- Letters of support for the Project **must be written no later than six months prior to the date of application** to the FY 2025 USMHP. Letters intended or used for other Federal grant programs will not be considered.
- Letters of support that **clearly demonstrate a commitment** by a public or private sector supporter to continue or expand their usage of the Marine Highway Transportation Service as a direct result of the Project will result in higher ratings for this criterion.

Ratings for Measuring Project Support

Non-Responsive	Low	Medium	High
The application does not demonstrate support for the Project by either public or private sector partners.	The application demonstrates support for the Project by either public or private sector partners. Letters of support need not demonstrate a commitment to continue or expand their usage of the Marine Highway Transportation Service as a direct result of the Project.	The application demonstrates support for the Project by both public and private sector partners. Letters of support need not demonstrate a commitment to continue or expand the supporter's usage of the Marine Highway Transportation Service as a direct result of the Project.	The application demonstrates support for the Project by both public and private sector partners. Letters of support must demonstrate a commitment to continue or expand the supporter's usage of the Marine Highway Transportation Service as a direct result of the Project.

Leveraging Federal Funding and Financial Viability

- To maximize the impact of USMHP awards, MARAD seeks to leverage USMHP funding with non-Federal contributions.
- The applicant must document that the proposed Marine Highway Transportation Project is financially viable, will remain financially viable for as long as the Project is used for the purposes outlined in the application, and that the funds will be spent or used efficiently and effectively.
- This section may include a discussion on the applicant's business processes and operations that support a Marine Highway Transportation Service.
- The rating has two parts: 1) Leveraging Federal Funding and 2) Financial Viability.

Ratings for Leveraging Federal Funding & Financial Viability (Part 1, Leverage)

	Non-Responsive	Low	Medium	High
Leverage	The applicant does not meet the 20 percent match requirement and did not qualify for a Federal share above 80%. Applicants that receive a rating of “non-responsive” will not be eligible for award.	The applicant matches exactly the statutory 20 percent match in non-Federal funding or the applicant matches less than 20% but qualifies for a Federal share above 80% and the applicant demonstrates that the non-Federal matching funds are stable, dependable, and dedicated to this specific Project.	The applicant matches more than 20 percent but less than 40 percent of total Project costs in non-Federal funding and the applicant demonstrates that the non-Federal matching funds are stable, dependable, and dedicated to this specific Project.	The applicant matches 40 percent or higher of total Project costs in non-Federal funding and demonstrates that the non-Federal matching funds are stable, dependable, and dedicated to this specific Project.

Ratings for Leveraging Federal Funding & Financial Viability (Part 2, Financial Viability)

	Non-Responsive	Low	Medium	High
Financial Viability	<p>The applicant has not satisfactorily demonstrated that the Project is, and will remain, financially viable and the funds will be used efficiently and effectively.</p> <p>Applicants that receive a rating of “non-responsive” will not be eligible for award.</p>	<p>The applicant demonstrates a low level of confidence that the Project is, and will remain, financially viable and the funds will be used efficiently and effectively.</p>	<p>The applicant demonstrates a moderate level of confidence that the Project is, and will remain, financially viable and the funds will be used efficiently and effectively.</p>	<p>The applicant demonstrates a high level of confidence that the Project is, and will remain, financially viable and the funds will be used efficiently and effectively.</p>

- After completing the merit review among Projects of similar merit, MARAD may prioritize Projects based on the extent to which they align with the following selection considerations:
 - Technical Capacity
 - NEPA Process and Permitting Risks
 - Workforce Development and Job Quality

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the rating tables for each selection consideration on pages 27 through 31!

Technical Capacity

- Information demonstrating the technical capacity of the applicant to implement the Project based on experience and understanding of Federal requirements.
 - Describe the applicant's history of delivering similar projects or experience completing a Federally supported project.
 - Include a detailed project schedule with major milestones to demonstrate the project can begin quickly
 - Discuss Project risks and related mitigation strategies. A Project with mitigated risks is more competitive than a comparable Project with unaddressed risks.
 - NOTE: In the case of a proposed Marine Highway Transportation Service that is not yet operational as of the application, the applicant should (1) identify the date by which the Project will be utilized on an operational Marine Highway Transportation Service; and (2) describe the prior and planned efforts to establish that Marine Highway Transportation Service. In addition to assessing Project risk, MARAD may use this information to establish a deadline in the grant agreement by which the proposed service must be operational.

Please refer to the NOFO for the full discussion on Technical Capacity.

Technical Capacity/Domestic Preference

- Projects are subject to the requirements of the Build America, Buy America Act. Discuss steps taken to ensure that the Project complies with Build America, Buy America requirements in maximizing domestic goods, products, and materials.
- Include an assessment of what, if any, iron, steel, manufactured projects and construction material would require a waiver of the Build America, Buy America requirements.
 - Projects that may require a waiver of the applicable Build America, Buy America requirements but present no plan to maximize domestic content may result in a higher risk rating for Technical Capacity

Please refer to the NOFO for the full discussion on Technical Capacity.

Ratings for Technical Capacity

High Risk	Moderate Risk	Low Risk
The application does not include a detailed and reasonable discussion about Project risk and the capacity of the applicant to successfully complete the Project. Depending on the severity of the Project risk, any risk may result in a High Risk rating.	The application includes a discussion about Project risk and the capacity of the applicant to successfully complete the Project but does not fully describe the Project schedule or sufficiently explain how the applicant will manage any risks or challenges.	The application includes a detailed and feasible Project schedule and a detailed and reasonable discussion about Project risk and the capacity of the applicant to successfully complete the Project. The applicant has clearly identified Project risk(s) and demonstrates how the risk(s) would be mitigated.

NEPA Process and Permitting Risk

- Include sufficient information for MARAD to evaluate whether a Project is reasonably expected to begin construction in a timely manner, consistent with all applicable local, State, and Federal requirements. The applicant should indicate:
 - The anticipated NEPA class of action for the Project and describe any environmental analysis in progress or completed. Be aware that the final determination of NEPA class of action will be made by MARAD after announcement of project selections.
 - The application should also include a discussion on the status of any required environmental approvals or permits in addition to the status of the NEPA process.

*Please refer to the NOFO for the full discussion on
NEPA Process and Permitting Risk.*

Ratings for NEPA Process and Permitting Risk

High Risk	Moderate Risk	Low Risk
The application does not include sufficient information, does not clearly document the anticipated NEPA level of review for the Project, does not describe the environmental analysis such that reviewers are able to evaluate whether a Project is reasonably expected to begin construction or be in service in a timely manner, consistent with applicable requirements, and/or does not include the anticipated NEPA schedule.	The application documents the anticipated NEPA level of review for the Project but does not fully describe the environmental analysis in progress or completed and does not effectively demonstrate that the Project is likely to begin construction or be in service in a timely manner, consistent with applicable requirements.	The application clearly documents the anticipated NEPA level of review for the Project, describes the environmental analysis in progress or completed, and demonstrates that the Project is expected to begin construction or be in service in a timely manner, consistent with applicable requirements.

Workforce Development and Job Quality

- MARAD intends to use the USMHP to support the creation of good-paying jobs with the free and fair choice to join a union and the incorporation of strong labor standards, such as through the use of:
 - Project labor agreements
 - Registered apprenticeships
 - Other training and placement programs

Ratings for Workforce Development and Job Quality

Non-Responsive	Low	Medium	High
The proposed Project negatively affects the selection consideration, or the application contains insufficient information to assess the selection consideration.	The application advances only workforce development or job quality, and lacks a formal commitment supported by examples of data.	The application either (1) provides a detailed description of how the Project advances or improves workforce development and job quality but lacks a formal commitment supported by examples of data or (2) advances or improves workforce development or job quality and has a formal commitment supported by examples or data.	The application demonstrates a formal commitment, supported by examples or data, to advancing workforce development and job quality.

- **Intake Review Phase** Initial screen to determine basic eligibility and completeness of applications received. MARAD may follow up with applicants during this phase for supplemental or clarifying information.
- **Technical Review Phase** Review and rating assignment for the merit criteria and selection considerations as detailed in the NOFO. Applications that receive a “High” rating in Demonstrating the Need to Develop, Expand, or Promote Marine Highway Transportation or shipper use of Marine Highway Transportation and no less than a “Medium” rating in all other merit criteria will be designated as “Highly Recommended” for award. Applications that receive a “Non-Responsive” rating in any of the merit criteria, except Measuring Project Support, will not be recommended for further consideration.
- **Senior Review Phase** Develop a List of Projects for Consideration based on how well a Project meets the merit criteria and the Senior Review Team may also consider a Project’s rating on the selection considerations. The Maritime Administrator will recommend awards from the List of Projects for Consideration to the Secretary.
- **Selection by the Secretary**

- **Grants are reimbursement grants**
 - Notice of selection for award is NOT authorization to begin performance
 - MARAD written pre-approval is required if a grantee wishes to begin expending non-Federal funds before grant agreement execution.
 - Reimbursement occurs after: (1) grant agreement executed; (2) allowable expenses incurred; and (3) valid request for reimbursement submitted.
- **Administrative and National Policy Requirements**
 - Grants are administered in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (2 CFR Part 200).
 - Other requirements to keep in mind: Build America, Buy America Act; Federal prevailing wage rate requirements, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.
 - For an insight into requirements, see prior-year terms and conditions documents here:
<https://www.maritime.dot.gov/grants/federal-grant-assistance/federal-grant-assistance>
- **Subawards and Contracts**
 - Lead applicants intending to make subawards under their proposed FY 2025 USMHP Project should refer to 2 CFR 200.331-333 on how to make subrecipient determinations and what requirements apply to pass-through entities.
 - Applicants should be aware that all contracts executed under the USMHP award that create procurement relationships must follow the procurement standards at 2 CFR 200.317-327, including requirements regarding competition.

- Applications must be submitted via [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov).
- To apply through [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov), you need to:
 - Have a Unique Entity Identifier (UIE)
 - Create a [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) username and password
 - Complete Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) registration in [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov)
 - Register with the System for Award Management (SAM) at www.SAM.gov

*Grants.gov requirements may take weeks
to complete, please start early!*

- Grant applications must be submitted to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) by *11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on Tuesday, July 15, 2025*. No late submissions accepted.
 - The [Grants.gov Support Center](https://www.grants.gov/support) may be reached at 1-800-518-4726 or via email at support@grants.gov. Support is available 24/7, except Federal holidays.
- Maximum of one application from each eligible applicant.
- Content and form of submission:
 - Standard Form 424 (Application for Federal Assistance)
 - FY 2025 USMHP Cover Page (information about the Project)
 - Project Narrative (may not exceed 20 pages in length, excluding table of contents, cover pages and appendices; PDF format preferred)

- Questions related to the USMHP NOFO may be sent by email to mh@dot.gov
- Responses will be posted to [U.S. Marine Highway Program FAQs](#)
- For information on the USMHP, please visit [U.S. Marine Highway Program](#)

Thank You

U.S. Marine Highway Program

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