The Rockefeller Foundation | OpenAI Foundation

Cities Deliver: AI Solutions for Public Services
Overview + FAQs

Overview

Nearly half of the world's population lives in cities. Public services shape those residents' everyday lives. They affect whether they can get health care, find meaningful work, live safely, and have a voice in local decisions. City governments and their partners are on the front lines of delivering these public services.

Artificial intelligence now offers new ways to meet these needs. AI can help residents access services, anticipate problems before they become crises, and respond to resident needs more effectively. Putting these capabilities to work requires solutions built around residents' needs and developed in partnership with city governments.

In 2023, we convened over 40 civic leaders to explore how AI could improve city services. City data and AI leads across six continents, along with academic, philanthropic, and nonprofit partners, shared their use cases and discussed how to best optimize AI's promise while mitigating the potential risks. Throughout the two-day convening, the partners expressed a clear and consistent theme: cities want to have the talent, tools, and resources to improve city services and resident wellbeing with cutting-edge technologies. In response, The Rockefeller Foundation supported partnerships for three cities to test how AI could improve livelihoods. Building on this experience, we are pleased to deepen our collaboration and expand our ambition to improve the wellbeing of city residents.

There is growing demand, and growing potential, to strengthen public services on a global scale. Philanthropy is well-positioned to support the innovation and partnerships necessary to meet this potential.

The Rockefeller Foundation and OpenAI Foundation are committing $50 million to Cities Deliver to support this work. The initiative will provide grants of $500,000 to $2 million to organizations working with city governments to improve public services through AI, especially for underserved communities. Together, these projects will aim to reach up to 100 million city residents worldwide.

Building on the lessons from this cohort and others, we aspire to grow our reach and impact through new funding partnerships, supporting the actors, sectors, and conditions necessary for safe AI solutions to benefit humanity. As societies work to shape the future of AI, we aim to spark imagination and make possible a future in which a mix of AI innovation and human ingenuity improves opportunities and wellbeing for the world's most vulnerable communities.

Focus Areas

We are seeking proposals that improve access to and quality of public services in vulnerable or underserved communities in the following focus areas:

- **Public health:** Solutions that extend the reach and readiness of public health systems, from frontline care and disease surveillance to population-scale prevention. Includes healthcare, disability services, food access, and nutrition.
- **Economic mobility**: Solutions that use AI to connect unemployed and underemployed residents to income, skills, and benefits. Includes AI-enabled benefits enrollment, career navigation and skills-based hiring, and employer-aligned training.
- **Environmental resilience**: Solutions that help cities forecast, withstand, and recover from environmental shocks, protecting both people and the infrastructure they depend on. Includes public safety and emergency services, energy and grid infrastructure, and land management in communities at risk.
- **Civic engagement**: Solutions that help city governments reach residents proactively and respond faster, from two-way service channels to participatory decision-making. Includes digital access and connectivity, court services, and permitting and regulatory processes. Excludes projects related to voting or elections.

AI Solutions

We seek to fund proposals with the greatest potential to meaningfully and measurably improve city services. Solutions must include a meaningful frontier AI component, which involves using recent generative AI models to complete complex tasks. We welcome solutions where frontier AI works in concert with and adds real value to the practical tools that already help cities serve their residents. We aim to support projects at two stages of development:

Seed: ($500,000 to <$1 million): Projects are early concepts that seek funding for a first pilot in a city context. Grantees would be provided with funding to refine an idea with city partners, build and test a prototype with real users, and pilot the solution in a city setting. By the end of a Seed grant, grantees should know whether the solution works in practice, whether people use it, whether it shows enough early results to justify expanding it, and what would be required to sustain and scale it in a city context.

Scale: ($1-2 million): Projects already been piloted in a city, shown early results, and seek funding to scale up. Grantees would be provided with funding to expand the solution within their city, reach more residents, neighborhoods, or services, or extend the solution to another city. By the end of a Scale grant, the solution should reach more people and have a credible path to longer-term financial sustainability, e.g., through government funding.

This call for proposals is platform agnostic; there is no requirement to use tools developed by OpenAI or preference for any AI platform.

Who Can Apply

Every project needs a lead eligible organization. We're looking for organizations that work well alongside city governments and that have the capacity to deploy AI-powered solutions in a public sector context. This is a global call. To be eligible, your organization must be one of the following:

- Nonprofit organizations, including university departments or labs, and fiscally sponsored organizations .
- Public benefit corporations and for-profit companies in certain circumstances. There may be circumstances where a for-profit company has a project with a charitable purpose that will lead to no more than an incidental benefit to the for-profit company's business.

Every project needs a city partner. All applicant organizations must have a city partner with a commitment to collaborate. All applicants must submit a letter of intent, or an equivalent document, from a city government office or agency.

Every project needs a charitable purpose. All projects must have a charitable purpose, intended to have a benefit for underserved, poor, or distressed communities or intended to promote social welfare. (See Terms and Conditions.)

Every project needs vision and ambition. We are looking for projects and partnerships that:

- **Respond to demand**. The project addresses credible demand from city government partners and the communities they serve.
- **Start with the problem**. The project tackles a significant problem that your city government has prioritized, which affects vulnerable communities or promotes social welfare.
- **Then plan a solution**. The project takes advantage of the latest capabilities of frontier AI models, and those capabilities are core to the proposed solution.
- **Focus on readiness**. Your team and city partner have the know-how to integrate technology into public sector settings, deep knowledge of the context, and a culture of agility and learning.
- **Build for sustainability**. The project will help strengthen government muscle to work nimbly with AI solutions, integrate into existing government systems, and position the work to be sustained through government or institutional funding.
- **Act responsibly**. Applicants demonstrate the ability to build and manage AI solutions safety and responsibly.
- **Plan to learn**. Applicants propose a clear learning agenda for assessing progress including evaluation, user feedback, and path to social impact.

Program Components

Funding

Grants will range in size from $500,000 to $2 million. All grant terms will be 24 months, with 50% disbursed at

the start of the grant and 50% upon completion of a documented mid-term milestone. Grant amounts will depend on a set of factors including but not limited to: size and location of city, size and maturity of partner organization, intended reach (number of people) of the proposed project, and track of the AI solution (as described above). Receiving grant funding under this call does not guarantee follow-on funding. Applicants should be able to achieve intended project goals with funding available in this grant and within 24 months.

Learning

Partners will be invited to join a facilitated peer cohort to share lessons and experiences. Cohorts may be determined by geography, area of focus, or by track or type of AI solution. Other learning opportunities, potentially including topic-specific webinars, expert mentorship, and support for institutional monitoring, evaluation, and learning, will be developed based on demand from partner organizations and cities.

Technical expertise

Partners will have access to occasional AI product and engineering support, subject to capacity, to help improve the effectiveness, reliability, cost, and scale of their AI systems. This support is likely to be coordinated across a group of partners with a common set of questions and challenges. This program does not include bespoke technical accompaniment for each project. Project teams should have sufficient technical capacity to plan, deploy, and evaluate their proposed AI solutions in a public sector context, and to identify specific areas of support they need on an ad-hoc basis.

Visibility & Network Access

Partner organizations and cities will have access to The Rockefeller Foundation's and OpenAI Foundation's networks of city leaders, funders, and technical partners -- connections intended to unlock the capacity and relationships that accelerate learning and improve access to follow-on capital that helps sustain the work past the grant term. The Foundations may also use their communications channels and public appearances to amplify the partners' work with global audiences.

Convening

Partners will be invited to participate in a global or regional convening to share experiences and lessons and to showcase their work. Date to be announced in Q1 2027.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What are the details of the application process?

Step	What's involved	Key dates
1. Eligibility Screen	Complete eligibility screening to verify that your organization and project meet the initiative's threshold eligibility requirements.	October 14, 2026 – Call for proposals opens October 31, 2026 – Deadline to submit questions to citiesdeliver@rockfound.org by 11:59pm EST November 4, 2026 – Revised FAQs based on applicant questions available on website [link] by 8:00pm EST
2. Round 1 Proposal	If your organization meets the threshold eligibility criteria, submit a Round 1 Proposal per the template provided. In addition, you are required to submit documentation of your organization's legal status, a letter of intent from your city government partner (or an equivalent document), and a short video demonstrating your AI solution.	November 29, 2026 – Screening and Round 1 Proposal due at 11:59pm EST December 2026 – Applicants are notified, either invitation for interview or decline to advance. Applicants advancing to interview stage will be asked to schedule January interviews in December.

Step	What's involved	Key dates
3. Interview	If your organization is selected to advance, participate in a 45-minute virtual interview. From the Foundation side, program leads and technical advisors will participate. From the applicant side, project leads and technical leads must participate. City government partners are encouraged but not required to attend.	Interviews take place in January 2027. Please confirm your interview slot in December 2026 Applicants will be notified in early February 2027 if they are selected to advance to the Round 2 Proposal stage.
4. Round 2 Proposal	If your organization is selected to advance, prepare a Round 2 Proposal per a template we will provide. You will be required to submit the following: narrative proposal (building on the Round 1 Proposal), project budget, audited financials or equivalent of the applicant organization, team biographies, an official letter or MOU from your city government partner, documentation of evidence for the track of your AI solution, and compliance documents.	Round 2 Proposals will be due March 1, 2027
5. Selection	Based on the above steps, we expect to select up to 50 partners. Successful applicants will sign a grant agreement letter.	Final selection decisions will be communicated in April 2027

What geographies are eligible?

The application is open to cities (not states or national governments) in all regions -- Sub-Saharan Africa, MENA, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, North America, and Oceania, with one hard exclusion: organizations headquartered, registered, or operating in a country under comprehensive U.S. OFAC sanctions are ineligible. The applicant must also be legally able to receive the grant funds and participate fully in the Open Call under the laws of the jurisdiction(s) in which it operates.

What is included in "AI solutions"?

We aim to support AI solutions that solve real problems for cities. Proposals must include a meaningful frontier AI component, meaning recent capabilities such as understanding and producing language, interpreting images and documents, reasoning across different types of information, or carrying out multi-step tasks. In practice, these capabilities often deliver the most value working alongside the established, data-driven tools cities already rely on, and we welcome proposals that combine the two. Partners are welcome to propose the AI solutions, tools, and products that best meet their needs. This call for proposals is platform agnostic; there is no requirement to use tools developed by OpenAI or preference for any AI platform. We encourage the development of AI solutions that are open source or reusable across contexts.

What evidence do you expect for each track?

In your Round 1 Proposal, you will summarize your evidence and upload a short video describing your solution. If you are invited to submit a Round 2 Proposal, we will ask you to document that evidence. We expect different evidence for each track, matched to where your solution is today.

Seed

We don't expect results yet. We do expect evidence that the problem is real and the solution is feasible: data showing the scale of the need, a clear request or interest from your city partner, and a credible technical approach. If you have built or tested anything, include it, such as early model evaluations, prototype testing with users, or what you learned from related work. You should also describe your pilot plan: what you will test, with whom, and how you will know whether it worked

Scale

We expect evidence from a completed city pilot. Relevant evidence includes model and product evaluations, user feedback, before-and-after comparisons of service delivery, operational metrics, usage data, and independent reviews. Formal impact evaluations such as randomized controlled trials are welcome but not required. You should also explain what you learned from the pilot and what you will change as you expand.

What do you mean by responsible AI?

Applicants must demonstrate the readiness to integrate the technology into public sector settings and the ability to manage artificial intelligence applications responsibly, including with respect to a human-centric approach and human oversight, respect for fundamental rights, transparency, proportionality, privacy and data protection, confidentiality, security, accuracy, reliability, bias and non-discrimination, and sustainability, consistent with the principles underpinning the *EU AI Act* and other internationally recognized frameworks for trustworthy artificial intelligence.

What does it mean for a project to have a "charitable purpose"?

All projects must have a charitable purpose, intended to have a benefit for underserved, poor, or distressed communities or intended to promote social welfare. A project cannot have a primary purpose of generating profit or benefiting a for-profit company, and any commercial benefit must be incidental to the project's charitable outcome. For examples of charitable outcomes, see work that The Rockefeller Foundation has already supported in the cities of Cali, Cape Town, and Rio de Janeiro. For more information, see Terms and Conditions.

Do proposals need to address specific focus areas?

Yes, proposals must address one of the following focus areas: public health, economic mobility, environmental resilience, or civic engagement. If your proposal addresses more than one, please select the area that is most relevant.

How are proposals assessed?

At the Round 1 Proposal stage, we assess proposals against the principles described on our website, including but not limited to: an important problem that especially affects vulnerable communities; credible demand from government partners and communities, with a clear path to measurable impact; a feasible AI solution with a frontier AI component; a team with contextual knowledge and readiness to work in public sector settings. We are looking for clear thinking on sustainability; responsible management of AI risks, including bias, security, and privacy; and a sensible plan for learning. At the interview stage, we expect to look for leaders with vision, agility, and openness to learning; teams with contextual knowledge and the ability to navigate public sector settings; depth of knowledge about the AI solution; trusted government relationships; and a clear-eyed view of what it takes to achieve change. At the Round 2 Proposal stage, we will ask for more detail on your project plan, team, metrics, and government partnership, along with required documentation.

Is AI used to review applications?

Yes. Some of the information you submit in your application and interviews will be provided to AI tools to summarize and help review it. These tools support human reviewers, but they only assist; they don't replace human judgment. See Terms and Conditions for more detail on how your information is used.

What do you consider a "city"?

A permanently settled, self-governing urban community with a population of 50,000 or more, occupying a contiguous built-up area with relatively high population density. It has its own municipal government that provides core public services such as policing, fire protection, water, sanitation, roads, public transit, and land-use planning.

Can cities apply directly to this Open Call?

No. The Open Call funds organizations, not government entities. An eligible organization, such as a nonprofit, university, public benefit corporation, or for-profit, must apply with the city's endorsement, evidenced by a letter of intent at the Round 1 Proposal stage and an official letter or MOU at the Round 2 Proposal stage.

Can for-profits apply?

Yes, with additional conditions. For-profits may apply, but the project itself must be charitable, with no private benefit to the company or any other commercial organization beyond what is incidental to the charitable outcome. For-profit applicants face a higher burden to show that the project benefits charitable communities. They must provide additional disclosure about their business model, including evidence of how open-source approaches and license costs will ensure the grant supports long-term charitable impact rather than commercial development. They may also need to meet higher standards for grant management, including segregating grant funds from other funds, and using those funds exclusively for the charitable purpose of the project, with no benefit to shareholders or equity holders.

Are fund-of-funds included?

No. Our team is funding project-based work only at this time.

Can we submit a research project?

No. This Open Call funds projects that put AI solutions to work in real city services, not research studies. Research institutions and universities can apply, but the project must develop, pilot, or expand solution with a city partner.

Can individuals or independent researchers apply?

No. The Open Call is open only to organizations. Individual researchers, including PhD researchers applying in a personal capacity, are explicitly excluded, as are unaffiliated individuals and consultants.

Can we apply through a fiscal sponsor?

Yes. The fiscal sponsor, not the sponsored project, is the actual applicant and grantee of record. The sponsor must independently meet the 501(c)(3)-equivalent eligibility bar, retain full discretion and variance power over the funds, and the applicant must submit the signed fiscal sponsorship agreement.

Can multiple organizations apply together?

Yes. Joint projects submit a single Round 1 Proposal. One organization must serve as the lead applicant, complete and submit the Round 1 Proposal, and act as sole grantee of record.

What kinds of projects are *not* eligible?

Projects aimed at influencing an election, voter registration drives, or lobbying are excluded outright, and this exclusion applies regardless of the applicant's identity or the individual project team members involved. Likewise, any activities prohibited under Article 5 of the EU AI Act are not eligible.

Can our organization submit more than one application?

An organization is allowed to submit up to two applications in the same or different focus areas. Joint projects with multiple organizations count as a single application under the lead applicant.

What language do materials need to be in?

English is required for all proposal submissions and all communications. The project lead must also be able to participate in convenings and learning sessions conducted in English. Interviews will be conducted in English by default. Upon request, we expect to be able to use real time transcription to conduct interviews in Spanish, French, Portuguese or Hindi.

What documentation about my organization is required, and when?

In addition to the information about your proposed projects required at each stage, institutional documentation is required as follows:

Category 1:

Category 1: Organization with 501(c)(3) status or international equivalent as evidenced by an equivalency determination, including university departments or labs, and fiscally sponsored organizations.

Category 2:

Nonprofit organizations without 501(c)(3) status, equivalency determination or fiscal sponsor; public benefit corporation; for-profit company.

Documents required at **Round 1 Proposal**	Documents required at **Round 2 Proposal**
All applications: Letter of intent from government partner (using our template), or equivalent. Category 1: IRS 501(c)(3) determination letter, equivalency determination or fiscal sponsorship agreement. Category 2: Certificate of incorporation.	All applicants: proposal, project budget, leadership and key personnel bios, cybersecurity form, official letter or MOU from city government partner, evidence for the track of your proposed AI solution. Category 1: Audited financial statements. Category 2: most recent financial statements, and confirmation that grant funds will be segregated.

What are the requirements for the government Letter of Intent?

You may use our template or submit an equivalent document you already have, as long as it meets these requirements. The letter should demonstrate that the goals and objectives of the city agency align with the purpose of the proposed project and the intended outcomes and impact for the target community. The letter must be signed by an official with real authority over the relevant service area (for example, a Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chief Data Officer, Chief Technology Officer, or agency head). It cannot be obtained through any payment, gift, or hospitality to the official, cannot be conditioned on any official act, and cannot imply that the government endorses or receives funding from RFCC, The Rockefeller Foundation or the OpenAI Foundation.

How do you define a government partner?

A government partner is a city or municipal government, or an agency, department, or public authority it owns or controls that delivers public services (e.g., a health department, public utility, or transit authority). State, regional, or national agencies can join as additional partners, but every project must have a city-level partner.

Can an international or multilateral organization be our government partner?

No. International and multilateral organizations (e.g., UN agencies or development banks) are welcome as additional partners, but they can't replace the city partner. Every project needs a city government partner.

What if I don't have a government partner secured yet?

The Round 1 Proposal requires a one-page letter of intent from your government partner, or an equivalent document, and applications without one won't move forward.

What is the grant term and payment schedule?

As noted in the Terms & Conditions, all grants will be 24 months, with 50% disbursed at the outset and 50% upon a documented mid-term milestone.

What is the indirect cost rate?

Indirect costs may not exceed 15% of the total grant. For-profit organizations are not eligible for indirect costs.

Can grant money go toward staffing?

Yes.

Can grant money go toward compute or API credits?

Yes.

Are we required to attend the in-person convening or ongoing learning sessions?

Grantees are asked to send at least one representative to an in-person convening (with reasonable travel costs covered in grant budget) and to participate in monthly virtual learning network sessions conducted in English.

What is the expected commitment for the learning network, and who on our team needs to take part?

The time commitment will equate to 1-2 hours per month. Each grantee team should include at least one decision maker and one technical lead who take part in program activities as relevant to their roles. Other team members and your government partner are welcome to join relevant sessions.

What is your policy on using artificial intelligence (AI) to prepare applications?

Applicants may use AI tools to assist in preparing Application Materials, provided that the substance of the Application Materials reflects the Applicant's own knowledge and understanding. While AI can help you state your ideas more clearly, it can't substitute for the quality and rigor of your ideas. Reviewers will be looking for the specificity only a team close to the work can provide. We expect that you will disclose any use of AI in your application materials. Each Applicant must disclose in its application materials which artificial intelligence tools it used and for what purpose, and must ensure that, where required by applicable law, the Application Materials are accompanied by any metadata, disclosures, labels, watermarks, or other transparency measures required in relation to AI-generated or AI-modified content, including those set out under Article 50 of the EU AI Act.

Does using OpenAI's models give us an advantage, or are we required to use them?

No to both. Selection is technology-neutral. No preference or requirement is tied to using, or not using, OpenAI or any other specific AI provider's technology.

Who owns the data, models, or tools developed through a funded project?

The grantee retains ownership. As a condition of eligibility, the grantee must agree to openly license and publish the software, models, and documentation developed with grant funds under an open-source license acceptable to RFCC, so that other organizations can adopt and adapt the work. This requirement does not extend to pre-existing intellectual property, third-party materials the grantee cannot sub-license, personal or sensitive data, or materials whose release would create a security risk. Other exceptions may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

What happens to my data after I apply?

Personal information you submit is processed under RF's privacy policies. Application materials are treated as confidential, shared only with staff, reviewers, and service providers who need them to run the Open Call. Some of the information you submit will be provided to AI tools to summarize and help review applications. These tools only support human reviewers. If you opt in, unsuccessful materials may be shared with other funders, but only with your affirmative consent, and you can withdraw that consent before sharing happens. Separately, by applying, you grant RF, RFCC, and OAIF a license to use your organization's name, logo, and general application content for promotional and educational purposes tied to the Open Call, though this license explicitly excludes your financial statements and other non-public organizational documentation.

Can grant funds be paid to government officials?

Generally no, except with RFCC's prior written approval, and only where the payment furthers the project's charitable purpose, is reasonable and necessary to that purpose, is documented, and is permitted under applicable law. This covers any salary, stipend, gift, travel, hospitality, entertainment, equipment, or other thing of value paid to or for the benefit of a government official. Grantees must also comply with all applicable anti-bribery and anti-corruption laws, including the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, and applicants may not offer anything of value to a government official in connection with obtaining a Letter of Intent.

Can government entities that include elected officials be project partners?

Yes, as partners, but not as the applicant. Government entities, including offices led by elected officials, cannot apply for the Open Call. We expect every project to have a municipal partner, shown through a letter of intent from the relevant city office or agency, and the applicant is the eligible organization that will receive and manage the grant. All partnerships must comply with the Open Call's compliance rules, including two key restrictions. First, no lobbying: grant funds and funded activities cannot be used to influence legislation, meaning contacting legislators or other government officials who help shape legislation to express a view on specific legislation, or urging the public to do so. Nonpartisan research and analysis is permitted if the results are shared broadly and not only with people on one side of an issue. Second, no election activity: grant funds and funded activities cannot be used to influence the outcome of any election, to support or oppose any candidate or political party, or to run voter registration drives, and projects focused on voting or elections are not eligible. See full Terms and Conditions.