The Rockefeller Foundation | OpenAI Foundation

Cities Deliver: AI Solutions for Public Services

Updated FAQs (November 4, 2026)



The updated FAQs below are based on questions we received by email between October 14 and October 31, 2026. Please read these updated FAQs together with the FAQs published on October 14.

While we cannot respond individually to the many project-specific questions we received, we hope the responses below meet the key needs for most potential applicants.

1. Applicant eligibility

Does the lead applicant need to be located in the same city or country as the city partner? Are new organizations eligible? Which countries are eligible?

No. The lead applicant does not need to be in the same city or country as the city partner. Country eligibility is addressed in the Overview and FAQs.

New organizations may apply but must be able to document legal status and show that the project leads have a track record of working with the topics, tools, and partners covered in the proposal. New organizations can provide the current-year operating budget rather than the three-year average budget that the proposal questions request. Organizations must have the maturity and capacity to manage awarded grants.

How is the two-proposal limit counted for universities with several schools or labs, international NGOs with country offices, fiscal sponsors, and linked organizations that each lead one proposal and partner on another?

An eligible organization may take part in no more than two Round 1 proposals, whether as lead applicant or partner.

For universities, the limit applies per school, center, or lab, but we do not expect to fund more than one or two projects from any one university.

For eligible organizations that have offices in multiple countries, the two-proposal limit applies per legal entity.

A fiscal sponsor may appear in more than two proposals, as long as each fiscally sponsored organization submits no more than two proposals.

Does participation in another fund affiliated with the OpenAI Foundation or The Rockefeller Foundation affect eligibility? Are new projects in cities where The Rockefeller Foundation already has partnerships eligible?

Current grantees of the OpenAI Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation may apply, including for projects in cities where the Foundations already have partnerships.

Can multilateral organizations, multilateral development banks, UN agencies, and other international or intergovernmental organizations apply as lead applicant? If not, in what capacity can they participate and be funded?

No. All grantees under this Open Call must be able to accept and comply with RFCC's standard grant requirements, including signing RFCC's grant agreement and meeting its narrative and financial reporting obligations. Multilateral organizations, multilateral development banks, United Nations agencies, and other international or intergovernmental organizations generally operate under their own governing rules and under privileges and immunities that do not permit them to accept these terms. Accordingly, these organizations are not eligible to apply as lead applicant. This applies whether the organization would apply through its headquarters or through a regional or country office, and grant funds cannot be directed to a regional or country office of such an organization.

These organizations may be able to participate in a joint application as a partner (for example, by contributing

technical expertise, data, or convening support at their own cost). A lead applicant may sub-grant or subcontract grant funds to any organization, including these organizations, to the extent legally permitted and consistent with the Open Call rules and the terms of the lead applicant's grant agreement. The lead applicant remains responsible to RFCC for the use of all grant funds.

For Category 2 organizations, which types of entity can serve as lead applicant (for example, non-profits, for-profit companies, public benefit corporations, low-profit limited liability companies, trade associations, and city-owned companies)? How is the charitable-purpose and incidental-benefit test applied to each?

Organizations with 501(c)(3) status or an equivalency determination are preferred. Other organizations may apply as lead applicant, including non-profit organizations without 501(c)(3) status or an equivalency determination, public benefit corporations and for-profit companies, whether organized in the United States or elsewhere. These applicants must provide a certificate of incorporation and show in their application and project materials that the project is charitable as defined by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (see Section 1.C of the Terms and Conditions), and they are subject to the additional conditions in Section 2.D. Every applicant must also be legally able to receive the grant funds under the laws of the jurisdictions in which it operates.

The applicant must be a legal entity that is duly organized, validly existing, and in good standing. A department, division, branch, or country office that is not a separate legal entity cannot apply in its own name; the legal entity of which it is part must apply. Trade associations, chambers of commerce, and other membership organizations may apply, but the project must benefit a charitable class rather than the organization's members or their businesses. Entities owned or controlled by a city government are addressed in the FAQ on public and government-linked institutions.

A project cannot have a primary purpose of generating profit or of benefiting a for-profit company, and any commercial benefit to the applicant or any other organization must be incidental to the project's charitable outcome. RFCC may decline an application where the charitable benefit of the project is not clearly severable from the applicant's commercial activities. In assessing this, RFCC will consider, for example, whether the grant-funded activities, budget, and outputs can be clearly distinguished from the applicant's commercial products, contracts, and business plans, and whether the software, models, and documentation developed with grant funds will be openly licensed as required by Section 10.A. An applicant that intends to use a platform for both charitable and commercial purposes, or that has an existing contract or planned business expansion in the project community, must disclose this and explain how the grant will support long-term charitable impact rather than its commercial development.

Participating as a partner rather than as lead applicant does not exempt partners from these requirements: all grant-funded activities, including those carried out by partners, must further the project's charitable purpose.

RFCC cannot advise applicants on the tax treatment of grant funds in their jurisdictions. Under Section 5.F of the Terms and Conditions, any taxes, levies, and fees associated with an award are the applicant's sole responsibility, and applicants should consult their own tax advisors.

Are public universities, community colleges, city or state government-created foundations, state-owned or city-owned companies, and other government-linked bodies (inside and outside the U.S.) treated as government entities (which cannot apply) or as eligible organizations?

Public universities are generally not considered part of government for purposes of this Open Call, and they may apply under Section 2.A of the Terms and Conditions (see the exception for public universities in Section 2.C). Because the legal status of public universities varies from country to country, RFCC may ask a public university to confirm that it can enter into the grant agreement and receive grant funds in its own name, and RFCC will make the final determination of eligibility.

A department, lab, center, or other unit applies through the university, which is the applicant and grantee of record; the unit does not need to be separately incorporated.

Government entities cannot apply. An agency, department, or public authority owned or controlled by a city government may serve as the Government Partner (Section 1.E), but not as the applicant. A separately organized body created or owned by a government, such as a foundation or company, may apply only if it is not itself a government entity and otherwise meets the eligibility requirements described in the answer on for-profit, hybrid, and other entity types above. RFCC will make this determination case by case.

Any of these institutions may also participate as a project partner and receive sub-grants or subcontracts from a lead applicant, on the terms described in the answer on international and intergovernmental organizations above.

Can a church or other faith-based organization that relies on an automatic tax-exempt status, without an IRS determination letter, serve as lead applicant, and what documentation establishes eligibility?

Yes. A church or other faith-based organization may apply as lead applicant on the same basis as any other organization. A U.S. church that is treated as tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) without an IRS determination letter may apply as a Category 1 organization. In place of a determination letter, it should submit its governing documents and a written statement, signed by an authorized officer, explaining the basis for its status as a church that is not a private foundation. Faith-based organizations outside the United States should follow the documentation requirements for other non-U.S. organizations.

As with any applicant, the project must have a charitable purpose (see Section 1.C of the Terms and Conditions) and be open to beneficiaries without regard to religion. Grant funds may not be used for religious worship, instruction, or proselytizing.

Can an individual contributor or a not-yet-incorporated organization take part in a proposal?

No, not without a fiscal sponsor.

2. Legal status, documentation, and compliance

Is it permitted to submit legal documents in languages other than English?

Yes. Applicants may submit the organization's legal documents in their original language. Please provide an English translation in a combined PDF and upload as one document.

Which countries and territories are excluded under the sanctions rule? How does it apply to an organization that has only part of its activity or a partner in an excluded country, and where will the list be published?

RFCC cannot provide legal advice on whether sanctions apply to a particular applicant, partner, or project, and applicants should consult their own counsel. As a U.S. organization, RFCC is prohibited from providing funds, directly or indirectly, to persons, organizations, countries, or regions subject to U.S. sanctions administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). In addition, under Section 2.C of the Terms and Conditions, applicants and partners may not appear on the sanctions lists maintained by the United Nations, the European Union and its Member States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the United States, or other authorities that maintain economic and trade sanctions. Applicants should check the lists published by each of these authorities, including OFAC's list of sanctioned countries and programs.

An applicant whose activities are authorized under an OFAC general license (or a specific license) must disclose the license in its application and explain how it implements the license and its sanctions compliance practices. RFCC will consider these applications case by case.

These restrictions also apply to project partners and to sub-grants and subcontracts: grant funds may not be directed to any sanctioned person, organization, country, or region through a partner or other third party.

For applicants that are public universities or private companies, can grant agreements include clauses specific to these organizations, upon applicant request?

In limited circumstances, we will revise grant agreements only to reflect the recipient organization's circumstances (for example, its tax-exempt status) or to comply with local law.

3. City government partners

Can local governments that are not cities in the strict sense (counties, districts, local government areas, councils of governments, dependent special districts, or departments such as a library or redevelopment agency) serve as the city partner? Does the program prioritize smaller or under-resourced municipalities over major, well-resourced cities?

We use the term "cities" flexibly to encompass a range of urban jurisdictions that vary across national and sub-national contexts.

For every proposal, the project purpose, public services, and grant funds must be focused on the residents of a specific urban jurisdiction or sub-jurisdiction. There must be a government partner with statutory authority over the services provided to these residents. Urban centers take many forms and names. Likewise, city government entities may take many forms. In all cases these entities must be part of or created by government and must be below the state, province, or equivalent level (except as stated below). In your proposal, please explain the jurisdiction and specific residents that will benefit, and select a government partner that has direct authority over the services that these residents use.

We will consider applications from eligible partners:

- Cities that include peri-urban or rural areas.
- Multiple adjacent cities with a combined population of at least 50,000, with a letter of intent from each.
- Cities that are also counties, states, federal districts, or nations (e.g., Washington DC, Singapore).
- Under-resourced or well-resourced cities, if the project is charitable and benefits vulnerable communities.

We will consider proposals from eligible partners working with county (or equivalent) governments under these conditions only:

- If no city-level agency provides the relevant public service because these services are provided only by other jurisdictions (e.g., county public health departments, courts, tax authorities, emergency response units with no city-level entity), or
- If there are no incorporated municipalities within the county.

These conditions must be explained in the government letter of intent.

If another government entity within the same city, or at the county, state, or national level, is a planned project partner (in addition to the primary city government partner) applicants only need to submit a letter of intent from the primary city government partner. The letter should name and describe the role of any other government entity participating in the project.

Individual, direct public service providers (such as a single hospital, library, school, or fire station) are not eligible government partners.

Can one eligible applicant work with multiple cities? Can one city be part of multiple proposals?

Yes to both. A city may partner on multiple proposals, and one proposal may include multiple cities; each participating city must provide a letter of intent for each proposal. We seek a geographically diverse portfolio.

Who may sign the city partner's letter of intent? What form must it take? May it be in the national language with a translation?

Each Round 1 proposal must include a letter of intent from the government partner, using the template or an existing document confirming interest in the specific project. The signatory must have authority over the relevant public service and expect to retain it through the grant term (mid-2027 through mid-2029). The letter may be in the national language with an English translation.

4. Project scope and fit

Does my specific project align with one of the four focus areas?

We cannot respond to every specific query about alignment with the four focus areas.

Projects related to transportation, public transit, traffic management, and road safety are not in scope for the four focus areas and are not eligible for support.

In deciding whether to propose a given project, the most important considerations are whether it has a clear charitable purpose, a meaningful frontier AI component, and a credible path to impact, scale, and sustainability.

Does my proposed AI solution count as frontier AI?

Cities Deliver supports solutions that use recent generative AI models to improve city services. These models can perform a broad range of tasks, including understanding and generating text, interpreting documents and images, working with speech, synthesizing information, and supporting multi-step workflows.

AI capabilities should materially improve the positive impact the project can achieve, including through more effective interventions, faster delivery, greater reach, or improved accessibility. The solution does not need to interact directly with residents; it can primarily support city staff instead. Solutions can take many forms and do not need to include a chatbot.

Applicants should explain how the project uses AI and how that use materially improves what the project can achieve. Conventional machine learning can complement the solution, but would not meet the AI requirement on its own. There is no requirement or preference to use OpenAI models, and applicants do not need to use the newest models available; applicants should choose the models best suited to their use cases.

How does the city-level requirement apply to projects that use or support national systems or programs? What counts as scaling to a national level?

Grant funds may not be used to scale AI solutions to or through national government agencies (except in the case of city-states).

Grant funds may be used to scale solutions to multiple cities within a country, or across multiple countries, working through city-level government entities. In this case, each city government must submit a letter of intent.

Proposed projects at the city level may draw on national information such as census and civil registry data. Likewise, projects may support city government entities to implement national policies or mandates (e.g., universal health coverage or education standards as required by the national government).

Where is the line between permitted nonpartisan information, public-comment, and participation tools and the restrictions on lobbying and election-related activity, including for tools whose outputs feed into legislative or planning processes?

Grant funds and funded activities may not be used for lobbying or election-related activity (Sections 2.C, 6.B, and 6.C of the Terms and Conditions). Projects related to voting or elections are not eligible.

Participatory planning, participatory budgeting, and public-input tools may be eligible if they are nonpartisan and do not express a view on, or urge action on, specific legislation, including where their outputs inform legislative or planning decisions. Project content must not refer to or support any candidacy or political party.

An applicant is not eligible if its leader or any member of its leadership team is, or during the grant term becomes, a candidate in a public election. Applicants must notify RFCC promptly of any change. RFCC will determine compliance in its sole discretion.

What data protection expectations apply to projects that process resident reports or other personal data, and what may the application itself contain?

Application Materials, including the video, must not contain personal information about residents or other beneficiaries, or any sensitive personal data. Describe datasets and populations only in aggregate, de-identified terms, and use synthetic, fictitious, or de-identified data in any demonstration (Section 7 of the Terms and Conditions).

These restrictions apply to the application. They do not by themselves make a project ineligible because it will process personal data. Grantees are solely responsible for complying with all applicable data protection, privacy, and AI laws, including the GDPR and the EU AI Act where they apply (Section 5.D). Proposals should explain how the project will manage privacy and security risks; RFCC will assess this as part of its review.

5. Funding, budget, and intellectual property

Is there a minimum funding amount? Is there a required relationship between the organization's annual operating budget or audited financials and the amount requested?

Yes. The minimum amount an applicant can apply for is a $500,000 Seed proposal. We are looking for organizations with the maturity and capacity to manage a project of at least this size.

There is no set ratio between the requested budget amount and the annual operating budget of the applicant organization. However, lead applicants must credibly demonstrate the capacity to absorb and effectively use the requested budget. Financial management and accountability of the grant budget must reside with one lead applicant; it cannot be spread across multiple organizations.

Which costs are allowable in the project budget? Are matching funds required?

Matching funds are not required.

Grant funds must be used by the grantee to implement the project in its capacity as a partner to the city. Reasonable programmatic and operational expenses associated with project implementation, including costs related to events and per diems, may be allowable where they are necessary to carry out the approved project. All grant expenditures must be incurred by the grantee in accordance with its applicable local laws, regulations, and internal policies, and must be appropriately documented. The grantee is responsible for ensuring that all proposed costs are reasonable, directly related to project implementation, and compliant with these requirements. Funds may not be provided directly to city government partners through subawards, contracts, reimbursements, or other arrangements. Grant funds may not be used to purchase physical equipment for the project, whether for the grantee or a government entity. RFCC will review grantee budgets during Round 2 and will share additional guidance with applicants invited to submit a Round 2 proposal.

Can an eligible lead applicant use grant funds to contract with a private business or technology vendor?

Yes. Applicants can propose sub-contracts or sub-grants to support their deployment of the project. We expect contracting costs to be reasonable and directly support the project's goals.

What is included in the 15% indirect cost cap?

If the cost exists whether or not this project were funded, or it supports the organization as a whole, it is an indirect cost. If it exists only because of the project and can be traced to project activities, it is a direct cost.

Indirect costs are administrative costs that support an organization's overall operations and cannot easily be assigned to one project or activity. Staff whose time is spent carrying out the project, such as project leads, program staff and field staff, can be budgeted as direct costs along with their fringe benefits. Central administrative functions that support the whole organization fall under the 15% cap. These include accounting and financial administration, grants management, human resources, IT support, and facilities.

Eligible organizations may request indirect costs of up to 15% of direct project costs. The 15% is calculated on direct costs excluding consultant fees and sub-grants. It is not a percentage of the total grant.

For-profit organizations may not recover indirect costs, and company fees (profit, markup, or management fees) are not allowed under any conditions. Staff time spent on substantive project management can be budgeted as a direct cost when it meets three conditions: It is specific to the project; it is charged at actual salary and fringe; and it is documented and justified in the budget narrative.

Is a specific type of license required to meet the open-source requirement? How does the requirement apply to a project that builds on pre-existing proprietary tools or commercial AI services?

No single open license is required for all grantees. Grantees may choose an appropriate open license for their grant-funded outputs and should tell us which license they plan to use.

The overarching principle is that the progress and innovations funded by this program should be available as a resource for others seeking to deploy similar solutions in their cities. We encourage applicants to consider how the work could be useful in other contexts, including by making components separable and independently usable where practical. The open licensing requirement covers grant-funded outputs, including new software, models, documentation, educational articles, and infographics, as well as grant-funded improvements to existing tools or workflows. It does not require changes to the licenses of pre-existing data, code, tools, platforms, or other intellectual property. Existing third-party commercial products and services used by the project are outside the requirement, as is city data that the city has not made open.

Grantees may release their outputs at the end of the grant period, although we encourage sharing useful developments as soon as practical. They may retain editorial control over their own educational content and run a centrally managed service for participating cities.

6. Application materials and support

What are you looking for in the five-minute video about the proposed AI solution?

In addition to the guidance provided in the application portal, a strong video submission will include the following:

- A brief overview of the problem and proposed solution (30 seconds maximum)
- A demonstration of the proposed solution, including its design, outputs, and how the outputs are used.
- The basic technical architecture of the tool you are building, including the AI model(s) you are considering and how you are evaluating the quality of model outputs.
- If you do not yet have a tool, please provide a sketch of the technical architecture, models, and evaluation method.

Can any part of the Round 1 proposal be submitted in a language other than English?

Applicants may submit the letter of intent (or equivalent) from the government partner and the organization's legal documents in the national language. Please provide an English translation, combined in one PDF with the original document.

Applicants may narrate the 5-minute video in the national language with subtitles in English.

All other materials must be submitted in English.

Can an applicant request accessible-format support if mobile or cognitive accessibility barriers make the application process difficult?

RFCC may provide reasonable accommodations upon request. Please send an email to citiesdeliver@rockfound.org with the subject "accessibility request" and describe the accommodations that would make it possible for you to complete an application.

Can I schedule a call to discuss my proposal?

We are pleased to see so much interest in Cities Deliver. Unfortunately, we are not able to schedule calls or review concept notes for any interested applicants at this time. The number of potential applicants already far exceeds our capacity to respond individually. We want to make the process as equitable as possible, rather than favor the few applicants we would have time to engage with individually.

We have tried to respond to as many submitted questions as possible in the updated FAQs, though we are not able to address every specific question about institutional or project eligibility. We also have not repeated responses that can be found in the original materials provided when Cities Deliver was launched on October 14. These include the Overview and FAQs, Terms and Conditions, Eligibility and Round 1 Proposal questions, and the Letter of Intent template.

Does The Rockefeller Foundation or RFCC offer help identifying potential collaborators (technology partners, city partners, or eligible organizations)?

No. We are not able to help identify or develop partnerships at this time.