



Project Evaluation and Program Selection Process



FY 2023-2024 Call for Projects

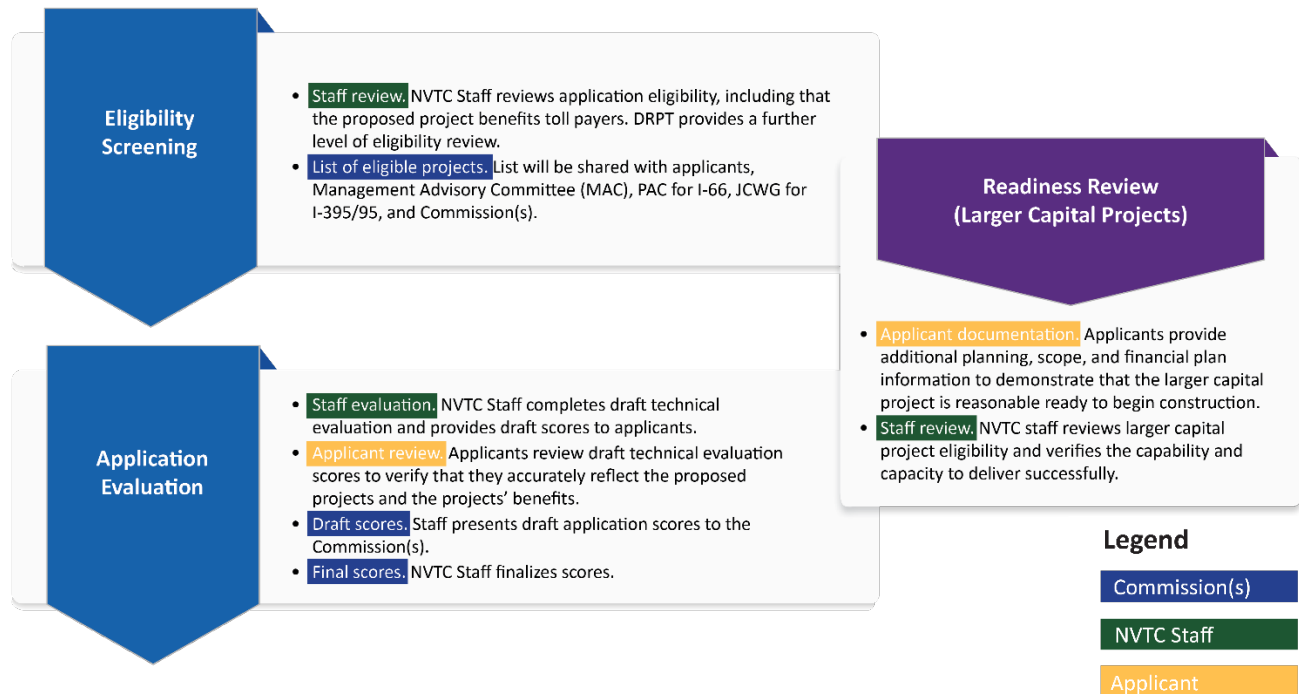
Note: the following is excerpted from an earlier version of the Commuter Choice Recipient Handbook that applied to this call for projects. For current guidance on the program, please visit the [Commuter Choice Resources page](#).



Chapter 4 Project Evaluation

NVTC staff will evaluate applications in accordance with the Commission-approved review process (NVTC approval for I-66, both NVTC and PRTC for I-395/95). The review process entails an eligibility review and, for all eligible applications, development of project scores. **Figure 8** shows the key steps in the evaluation process.

Figure 8: Key Steps in the Evaluation Process



The readiness review for larger capital projects (Section 4.1.1) will be conducted parallel to the standard eligibility review (Section 4.1) and the subsequent technical evaluation (Section 4.2).

4.1 Eligibility Screening

Each application will be screened to determine if it meets the eligibility criteria outlined in Chapter 2. NVTC will request additional information from applicants if needed to help determine projects' eligibility and will review project eligibility determinations with DRPT and Commonwealth Office of the Attorney General staff. Eligible applications will advance to the technical evaluation phase (Section 4.2); NVTC will notify applicants with ineligible projects.

4.1.1 Readiness Review for Larger Capital Projects

For larger capital projects (Sections 2.2.2.5 and 3.2.6), NVTC will conduct a readiness review parallel to the standard eligibility screening and technical evaluation. The readiness review will evaluate the supplemental planning, scope, cost, schedule and financial commitment documentation provided with the application to determine whether the project will be able to



have its Commuter Choice funding obligated and enter construction within two years of the allocation of Commuter Choice funds to the project, and fully expend Commuter Choice funds within five years of their allocation.

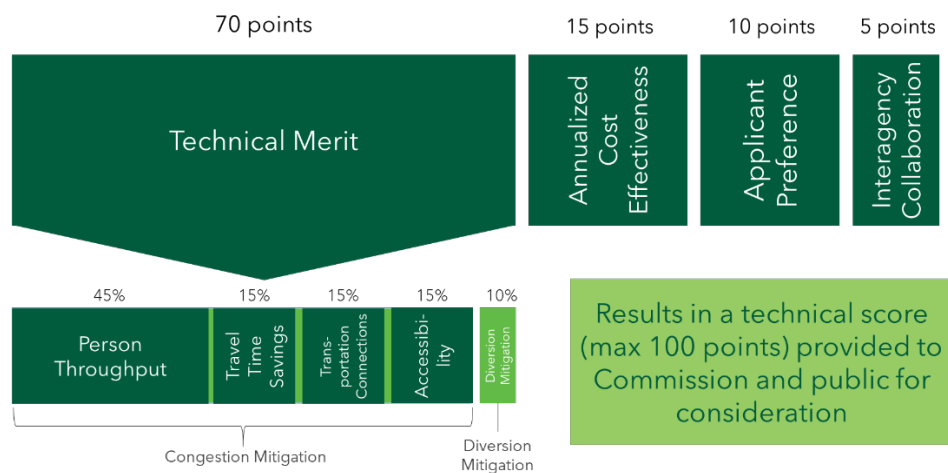
The review will also consider the applicant’s ability to implement a project of similar complexity. This aspect of the review will be based on the applicant’s prior project delivery experience, as available, with NVTC and potentially other funding agencies in the region, namely the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) and DRPT.

NVTC’s Commuter Choice technical support contractor or a DRPT support contractor will conduct the review, though NVTC will make the final determination as to readiness. If NVTC cannot reasonably determine that a project will meet the funding obligation and expenditure deadlines, the project may be removed from funding consideration. Given limited time to conduct the review, applicants should anticipate limited opportunity to submit substantial additional documentation beyond that provided with the application.

4.2 Application Evaluation

All eligible applications will be scored according to the Commission-approved technical evaluation process. The current approved process is shown in [Figure 9](#). The overall process assesses how well proposed projects meet the Commuter Choice improvement goals and other aspects of program policy. The project score, together with public input and the constraints of the available funding, inform the list of projects that is recommended by the Commission(s) for final approval by the CTB. As a courtesy, NVTC provides evaluation results to each applicant along with an explanation of any significant changes in the scoring from what the applicant may have anticipated prior to presenting the results to any committee(s) or the Commission(s).

Figure 9: Technical Evaluation Criteria



[Table 4](#) summarizes the four Commuter Choice technical evaluation criteria, which are described further in the sections below.



Table 4: Commuter Choice Technical Evaluation Criteria

Criterion	What it Captures	General Scoring Approach
Technical Merit (Section 4.2.1)	Expected ability of the project to address some or all of the Commuter Choice improvement goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum 70 points, split across five factors • Each factor is on a Higher/Medium/Lower scale • The Person Throughput factor's scoring is relative to other applications • The others are based on set criteria
Annualized Cost Effectiveness (Section 4.2.2)	Technical Merit score per million dollars of Commuter Choice investment accounting for the useful life of elements of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum 15 points • On a Higher/Medium/Lower scale relative to other applications
Applicant Preference (Section 4.2.3)	How the project ranks in priority relative to the applicant's other proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum 10 points • Applicant's top priority application receives all 10 points, the rest zero
Interagency Collaboration (Section 4.2.4)	Whether the project has been coordinated or discussed with other entities in the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum 5 points • Documentation of coordination or support earns all 5 points, otherwise zero

4.2.1 Technical Merit

The Technical Merit criterion encompasses five factors that gauge how well proposed projects support the Commuter Choice improvement goals of maximizing person throughput and implementing multimodal improvements that improve mobility, support new and diverse travel choices, and enhance transportation safety and reliability. NVTC reaches the total Technical Merit score by combining the factor scores with the weights shown in [Figure 9](#) and the subsection headers below, then scaling the total so that the maximum possible score (if a project received a Higher rating under every factor) is 70 points.

4.2.1.1 Congestion Mitigation - Person Throughput (45%)

The person throughput factor assesses the efficiency by which a proposed project moves more people through the corridor - specifically the number of new people moved through the corridor by, or resulting from, a submitted project relative to the total number of vehicle trips involved in moving the additional people. In the case of previously awarded projects being submitted for continuation of funding, the number of 'new' people moved should be those commuters who would not make the same trip without the project in place.

For projects primarily affecting non-motorized travel modes - biking and/or walking - the project will be given a 'Lower' score if the project can be reasonably assumed to increase person throughput. If there are no expected changes to throughput, the project will be given 'No Score.'

This scoring recognizes the throughput benefits of projects geared towards non-motorized modes, but also realizes those benefits may not be on the same scale as the throughput



benefits potentially realized by projects geared towards motorized travel. However, if the project can be demonstrated to result in a strong increase in the corridor's person throughput, the scoring methodology described for motorized travel modes may be applied.

For projects primarily affecting motorized travel modes - vehicular and/or transit - the project will be assessed based on the calculated increase in a.m. peak-period person throughput, inbound, divided by the number of vehicle trips involved in that increase. If there is a project that improves the p.m. peak period outbound capacity in the corridor to a greater extent than a.m. inbound, p.m. outbound may be considered.

Each project will be assigned a 'Higher,' 'Medium' or 'Lower' score based on the rank order of the calculated result. Projects in the top third of rankings will be scored 'Higher,' the second-highest third will be scored 'Medium,' and the remaining third will be scored 'Lower.' If the number of projects is not evenly divisible by three, the 'Lower' tier and potentially 'Medium' tier will each have one project more than the 'Higher' tier.¹⁵

In the event of ties in the ranking, multiple projects may have the same rank. This is the only case where the size of the tiers may vary from the mathematical approach identified above.

NVTC will review each proposed project's person throughput estimate for reasonableness based on transit ridership forecasting tools, past project performance and professional judgment. NVTC reserves the right to amend person throughput estimates on these bases.

4.2.1.2 Congestion Mitigation - Travel Time Savings (15%)

The travel time savings factor assesses how much time commuters could save by using the proposed project and thus how well the project would improve the operational efficiency of the transportation network.

Each project will be assigned a score of 'Higher,' 'Medium,' 'Lower,' or 'No Score' based on the extent of travel time reductions it would afford for a commute trip compared to a similar commute without the project:

Higher - the project is likely to result in reductions of 30% or greater in peak-direction, peak-hour total travel time per user

Medium - the project is likely to result in reductions of 15 to 30% in peak-direction, peak-hour total travel time per user

Lower - the project is likely to result in reductions of 5 to 15% in peak-direction, peak-hour total travel time per user

No Score - the project is likely to result in no change (less than 5%) in peak-direction, peak-hour travel time per user, or users of the project would have longer travel times

Applicants must identify the travel time for a representative commute trip with the project, based on the following guidelines:

¹⁵ As an example, if there are four projects, the 'Lower' tier will have two projects while the 'Higher' and 'Medium' tiers will each have one. If there are five projects, the 'Lower' and 'Medium' tiers will each have two projects while the 'Higher' tier will have one.



- The start and end points should represent a trip origin (residential area) and destination (work site) that the applicant expects the project to serve.
- Unless otherwise appropriate due to the nature of the project, applicants should consider trips most closely aligns with a worksite arrival at 8:30 AM.
- Any automobile travel should be timed using [Google Maps](#), assuming Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday travel and the midpoint of the range of travel times.
- For trips including transit service, five minutes should be added to the start of the total trip calculation to account for time needed to reach the service, and half (½) of the headway time should be added at each transfer to different routes and services (e.g., for a trip that transfers to peak period Metrorail on 8-minute headways, the transfer should be estimated to take 4 minutes).
- When calculating the travel time on an access to transit project such as a bikeshare expansion or trail construction, the full trip length, from origin to destination, should be considered.

NVTC reserves the right to amend travel time calculations submitted by an applicant to conform with the foregoing guidance. NVTC will estimate the travel time for a baseline (non-project) trip, using the guidelines above and assuming non-tolled automobile travel unless otherwise appropriate depending on the nature of the proposed project, and compute the travel time savings.

4.2.1.3 Congestion Mitigation - Transportation Connections (15%)

The transportation connections factor assesses how well a project is suited to create, complete, or link transportation network elements and/or modes. The measurement of this factor is based on the number of created or enhanced connections between different modes and the promotion of transportation choice in daily travel.

Each project will be assessed for potential impacts on modal interaction and transportation choice in the corridor and assigned a score of 'Higher,' 'Medium,' 'Lower,' or 'No Score.'

Higher - the project provides or enhances connections between two or more different travel modes

Medium - the project meets at least one of the following conditions:

- It provides a new travel mode, not already available, between the origin and destination for the identified route.
- It further promotes transportation choice
- It completes a significant existing gap in the transportation network
- It is a TDM project that does not consist of direct connections between two different modes

Lower - the project has minimal or no impact on connectivity

No Score - the project creates a barrier between modes or results in a loss of travel options

NVTC will consider the purpose of the project in assigning a score for this factor. NVTC will award a 'Medium' or 'Higher' score if in alignment with what the project has been designed to achieve, rather than connections that occur by chance as a factor of the project location.



4.2.1.4 Congestion Mitigation - Accessibility (15%)

The accessibility factor evaluates the project's ability to link people and opportunities along the corridor. This measure is based on the connections created or enhanced between activity centers at the project origin and destination.

NVTC assigns each project a score of 'Higher,' 'Medium,' 'Lower,' or 'No Score' based on the project's improvement to transportation options and connections between activity centers:

Higher - Both the project's origin AND destination are defined as activity centers

Medium - Only the project's origin OR destination is defined as an activity center

Lower - Neither the project's origin or destination is defined as an activity center but the project addresses, improves or enhances 'first/last mile' travel between home/employment locations, transit facilities, or carpool/vanpool facilities

No Score - the project does not connect travelers to activity centers nor improve 'first/last mile' travel

Activity centers are based on the following locations:

- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Regional Activity Centers (projected for 2045) - for both I-66 and I-395/95 corridors
- Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Long Range Transportation Plan Activity Centers - for I-395/95 corridor only

Access to transit projects are scored 'Lower' if the project is outside an activity center and 'Medium' if the project is within an activity center. TDM projects with unspecified origins or destinations are scored 'Medium,' based on the assumption that these projects will serve at least one destination activity center in alignment with major employment areas.

4.2.1.5 Diversion Mitigation (10%)

The diversion mitigation factor assesses how well a project is suited to mitigate the impacts of trips that are diverted from the expressway onto parallel routes because of tolling or HOV restrictions. The factor responds to jurisdictions' concerns that tolling policies may negatively impact parallel roadways and neighborhoods in the corridor.

NVTC assigns each project a score of 'Higher,' 'Medium,' 'Lower,' or 'No Score' based on the project type and an assessment of the potential for trip diversion mitigation:

Higher - the project provides or enhances transit service that attracts trips that are diverted from I-66 or I-395/95 due to tolling or HOV restrictions

Medium - the project either:

- provides, supports, or enhances carpool or vanpool services that attract trips that are diverted from I-66 or I-395/95 due to tolling or HOV restrictions or
- is a TDM project

Lower - the project either:

- provides, supports, or enhances operational or geometric improvements along a roadway in the corridor that may be used by trips that are diverted from I-66 or I-395/95 due to tolling or HOV restrictions or



- otherwise is another project type not specified in the ‘Higher’ or ‘Medium’ categories that can be demonstrated to mitigate diversion from I-66 or I-395/95 due to tolling or HOV restrictions

No Score - the project does not mitigate the impacts of diversion

Consideration will be given to locations where trip diversion is expected based on most-recently available traffic analyses at the time of the technical evaluation.

4.2.2 Annualized Cost Effectiveness

The annualized cost effectiveness criterion assesses how efficiently proposed projects support the Commuter Choice improvement goals in terms of the amount of Commuter Choice funding requested and the duration of that funding’s benefit to corridor commuters. Annualized cost effectiveness will be computed as the project’s total Technical Merit score (Section 4.2.1) divided by the annualized funding request¹⁶, then projects will be ranked according to the resulting ratios. The top third will be given a ‘Higher’ score, the middle third will be given a ‘Medium’ score, and the bottom third will be given a ‘Lower’ score.

The approach to creating ‘Higher’, ‘Medium’ and ‘Lower’ tiers is identical to that described for the person throughput factor (Section 4.2.1.1).

The useful lifespans for common capital assets among Commuter Choice projects are shown in Table 5. The useful lifespans of common Commuter Choice assets were determined using FTA and DRPT guidance, with simplified categories. The useful lives for determining projects’ annualized funding requests are consistent with those that NVTC will apply for asset management purposes (Section 11.3).

Table 5: Useful Life of Commuter Choice Assets

Asset Type	Useful Life
Bikes	5 years
Bus shelters / Capital Bike Share Stations	15 years
Pavement (parking lot, roadway asphalt, sidewalk, trail)	20 years
Rail Vehicles	25 years
Real Estate	100 years
Structures / Buildings	40 years
Technology	10 years
Transit Buses	12 years
Vans	4 years
Other Capital Costs (does not include soft costs such as PE, promotion, design)	2 years

Note: Constructions, buildings, and improvements occupying land have useful specific lives. While for FTA purposes, the land itself does not depreciate and does not have a useful life, for the purposes of the Commuter Choice program a useful life of 100 years should be used for all land.

¹⁶ The Commuter Choice Cost Estimate and Milestone Schedule workbook will perform this computation and identify the resulting figure to be entered on the application form.



Where [Table 5](#) does not provide guidance on a particular asset class, recipients should contact NVTC's Program Manager for assistance with identifying an appropriate useful life. NVTC may consider FTA guidance, Commonwealth guidance and/or industry standards in determining an appropriate useful life.

To help illustrate the annualizing of costs, consider a hypothetical project proposal for \$3.9 million in Commuter Choice funding that includes:

- A \$2.4 million bus purchase (useful life 12 years)
- \$200,000 for infrastructure upgrades at a park-and-ride lot (useful life 40 years)
- \$1.3 million for two years of transit operations

The annualized Commuter Choice funding request for this proposal is \$855,000, computed as follows:

$$\frac{\$2,400,000}{12} + \frac{\$200,000}{40} + \frac{\$1,300,000}{2} = \$855,000$$

The project's total Technical Merit score would be compared against the \$855,000 figure.

4.2.3 Applicant Preference

As part of the application, each applicant must rank their application submissions in priority order on the application form and in the Board, Council or Commission endorsement to apply for funding. The top-ranked project for each applicant will be given 10 points. Should a project that is ranked highest be determined ineligible or otherwise withdrawn by the applicant during the application period, the 10 points will be assigned to the next highest-ranking project for that applicant.

In case of any inconsistency in the priority order between the application form and the Board, Council or Commission endorsement, NVTC will use the order on the endorsement as the basis for scoring.

4.2.4 Interagency Collaboration

The interagency collaboration criterion aims to incentivize discussion and coordination of project proposals among Northern Virginia jurisdictions and agencies. Applications that include either (or both) of the following will receive five points:

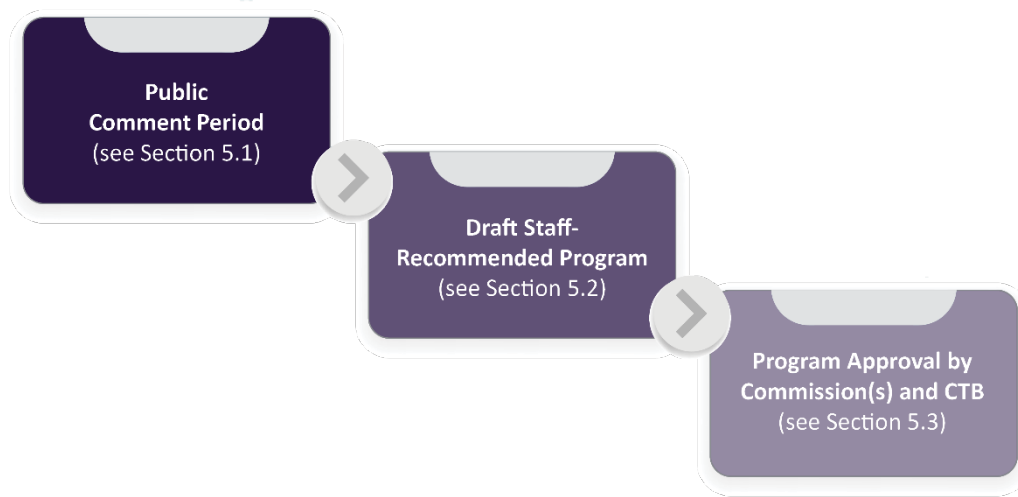
- Sufficient documentation of Executive-, Board- or Council-level support from any third parties that will be significantly involved in the implementation of the project ([Section 3.2.1](#)), and/or
- A completed Interagency Collaboration template identifying the basis for another entity's support for the project, signed by Director- or higher-level officials with the applicant and supporting entity ([Section 3.2.2](#))



Chapter 5 Program Selection

Each two-fiscal year program of projects is selected from the pool of eligible project applications submitted to the Call for Projects. The project score, together with public input and the amount of funding available, informs the list of projects that is recommended by the Commission (NVTC for I-66 and both NVTC and PRTC for I-395/95) for approval by the CTB. [Figure 10](#) shows the key steps in the project selection process.

Figure 10: Key Steps in the Project Selection Process



5.1 Public Comment Period

NVTC holds a public comment period on the projects submitted for Commuter Choice funding consideration as required by the corridors' MOAs. The Commuter Choice public comment period's goal is strictly to help identify which projects merit funding from this competitive regional program.

The public comment period will take place between the completion of project scoring and the Commission's adoption of a program of projects. Comments may be submitted through the program website, by telephone, or by email. NVTC also will conduct a virtual town hall meeting or other similar opportunity for interested parties to learn more about the proposed projects. Applicants are expected to staff meetings, virtual or in-person, to respond to questions from the public on project applications. NVTC staff will present the full set of public comments to the Commission(s) prior to any action to adopt a program of projects.

5.2 Draft Staff-Recommended Program

NVTC staff will consider project scores, public input, and funding availability to develop a draft program of projects. NVTC does not consider partial funding awards for projects that cannot be accommodated within available funding, as partial awards may adversely affect the projected benefits of the project.



NVTC staff will submit the draft program to the PAC for Commuter Choice on the I-66 corridor and the JCWG for Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 corridor for consideration and endorsement before advancing any program to the full Commission(s).

5.3 Program Approval by Commission(s) and CTB

The Commission(s) - NVTC for Commuter Choice on the I-66 corridor, and NVTC and PRTC jointly for Commuter Choice on the I-395/95 corridor - will consider the program endorsed by the PAC or JCWG as a starting point. The Commission(s) may prescribe changes to the program according to their desired approach for prioritizing projects.

Once adopted by the Commission(s), the program will then be referred to the CTB for consideration and final approval, with the engagement of DRPT. As noted in [Chapter 3](#), the Call for Projects schedule is based around the CTB's June action to adopt the SYIP for the following year. For each program, NVTC intends to seek CTB approval of two fiscal years of projects in a single action.

5.4 Split Funding Awards for Larger Capital Projects

NVTC may program Commuter Choice funding awards for larger capital projects ([Section 2.2.2.5](#)) over two consecutive two-year programs to help accommodate these more substantial funding commitments. NVTC will take the amount of funding requested and project cash flow, among other considerations, into account when developing programming arrangements for larger capital projects. NVTC will review proposed programming arrangements for larger capital projects with their applicants during the program development process, before any draft program is presented to the PAC or JCWG.

The full project may advance with the first installment of funding. However, reimbursements are limited to that first installment amount until the second installment of funding is available. With each program, NVTC expects to prioritize fulfilling prior project commitments before funding new projects.

In cases where NVTC splits Commuter Choice funding awards between two consecutive two-year programs, each installment of funding will have its own two-year obligation and five-year expenditure deadlines. This provision has the additional benefit of allowing additional time for project implementation in cases where NVTC believes it may be needed. However, applicants for larger capital projects should conservatively assume a total of five years to implement their projects (i.e., one installment of funding) when applying for funding.