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Alaska Rural Health Transformation Program

Project Application Evaluation Framework Planning Pathway - Fall 2026

This evaluation framework is designed to support a consistent assessment of each planning pathway project application submitted for funding under Alaska's Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP). Applications will be first evaluated based on the below weighted criteria, which reflect the State's goal to invest in projects that help make health care work better for Alaskans by improving access and prevention, expanding workforce, leveraging technology, and creating long-lasting changes that help people stay healthy.

A separate framework will be used to evaluate project applications submitted through the implementation pathway.

Planning awards support projects that have a partially defined scope and need support to refine design, partnerships, budget, and other details in preparation for launch. Planning applications are evaluated on the strength of the planning work proposed and on whether that work is likely to produce a project that could be implemented. The planning framework uses the same criteria and weights as the implementation framework. Outcomes, Rural Impact, Transformation Potential, and Sustainability are assessed in relation to the planning work and the project it's intended to produce; Planning Approach, Workplan and Monitoring is assessed in relation to how the planning work itself will be carried out.

The project application evaluation framework is designed to assess the strength of each project on its own merits. Projects meeting quality and merit criteria will be further considered in the context of the full portfolio of fundable projects as per the Portfolio Analysis Framework. Because ~~anticipated~~ requests are anticipated to exceed available funding, final decisions will also consider the full set of projects to make sure RHTP investments help all Alaskans, support all of the State's RHTP initiatives, maximize impact, and stay within federal funding limits. ~~Projects must meet a minimum score threshold of 3 or higher in each category to advance to portfolio-level review.~~ All projects must support Alaska's RHTP initiatives and are subject to review and approval by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

In order to be considered for funding, projects must meet minimum administrative requirements as outlined in the federal RHTP Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and the State of Alaska Rural Health Transformation program, including permissible uses of funds and administrative cost limits. Projects that do not meet these requirements will not be considered for funding. Additionally, projects will be reviewed for budget justification, expenditure rationale, and compliance with federal cost principles.

How Applications are Scored

Applications are scored by a Department of Health review panel made up of subject matter experts from across the Department. Three reviewers from that panel are assigned to each application, and each assigned reviewer scores every criterion independently.



DRAFT

Each criterion score is the average of the assigned reviewers’ scores for that criterion. The overall score is the weighted average of the criterion scores, using the weights shown in the framework.

Advancing to Portfolio Review

To advance to portfolio-level review, a project must meet both of the following:

- An overall weighted average score of 3.0 or higher; and
- An average score of 2.5 or higher in every criterion.

Because each criterion score is based on the average of three reviewers, the 2.5 threshold allows the combined assessment of the review team to account for reasonable differences in reviewer judgment. Every criterion must still meet a minimum threshold for the project to advance

	Description	1 (Poor)	2	3	4	5 (Excellent)
Alignment with State & Federal RHTP Goals and Alaska RHTP initiatives (1520%)	Alignment with Federal CMS RHTP goals and initiatives and State of Alaska’s approved RHTP initiatives . <u>Applicants are expected to propose activities and uses of funds that are consistent with CMS requirements. Evaluation will consider both the project’s overall alignment and the significance of any allowability concerns. Limited issues that can be resolved without materially changing the project may be addressed through clarification, while concerns affecting the project’s core purpose or a substantial portion of the proposed work will be reflected in the score.</u>	The project is not aligned with State and federal RHTP goals and initiatives or Alaska’s RHTP initiatives; <u>and/or the project being planned could not be funded under RHTP; and/or the project’s core purpose is not a permissible use of funds predominantly includes activities or requested uses of funds that are impermissible under CMS requirements.</u>	Alignment with State and federal RHTP goals and Alaska RHTP initiatives is weak or superficial and/or <u>a substantial portion of the proposed work would not be a permissible use of funds, and could not be removed without changing what the project ispredominantly includes activities for which there is limited or unclear justification of permissibility under CMS requirements.</u>	The project broadly aligns with State and federal RHTP goals and Alaska RHTP initiatives, <u>and requested uses of funds appear permissible</u> ; however, the proposal may not meaningfully or sufficiently drive impact. <u>Requested uses of funds appear permissible or impermissible costs are not central to the project and could be removed.</u>	The project shows clear alignment with State and federal RHTP goals and Alaska RHTP initiatives, with well-supported justification that proposed activities and requested uses of funds are permissible under CMS requirements and advances Alaska’s intended purpose for the program.	The project demonstrates strong, explicit alignment with State and federal RHTP goals and initiatives, clearly advances one or more initiatives, and includes a well-substantiated and compliant use of funds that reflects a strong understanding of CMS requirements and Alaska’s intended purpose for the program.



DRAFT

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	<u>For planning applications, alignment is assessed in relation to the project the planning process is intended to produce. Permissibility is assessed for both the planning costs requested and whether the project being planned could be funded under RHTP.</u>					
Demonstrated Need Aligned with Intervention (10%)	Alignment of proposed activities with need and the strength of supporting documentation or justification. Need may be described and demonstrated through multiple forms of information, including local data, documented community or Tribal input, practitioner experience, planning documents and emerging or other evidence.	Need is not demonstrated. The proposal does not describe the problem to be addressed or why it matters for the intended community/region.	Need is minimally described but not supported with data, community input, or credible rationale, and it is unclear why this project is a priority for the community/region.	Need is reasonably described and supported by some evidence or justification (e.g., limited data, local context, or stakeholder input), but the magnitude, root causes, or target population are not fully clear or compelling. The intervention proposed to address the need appears appropriate, but the connection is weak or unclear.	Need is clearly demonstrated using strong justification which may include community or Tribal input, with linkage between identified needs, target population(s), and the proposed intervention.	Need is compellingly demonstrated through a well-rounded picture that may draw on multiple sources such as data trends and documented community/regional planning input) where applicable and accessible. The proposal clearly articulates why the proposed approach is the right solution for this community or region, and reflects alignment with local and regional priorities.
Outcomes (105%)	Alignment of outcomes with project and population served. Impact should be considered in	No concrete <u>planning project</u> outcomes are identified. <u>The proposal</u>	<u>Planning outcomes are unclear or are not connected to the decisions</u>	<u>Planning outcomes are reasonable and specific, and relate to the</u>	<u>Planning outcomes are clear and specific. It is evident what</u>	<u>Planning outcomes are clear, specific, and well matched to what the</u>



DRAFT

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	proportion to community size, baseline conditions, and project scope.- For planning applications, outcomes are what will be resolved, decided, or known at the end of the planning period, together with the outcomes the project being planned would be aiming to achieve. Planning outcomes may include a defined scope, resolved feasibility questions, confirmed partnerships, a validated budget, or a decision about whether and how to proceed. Outcomes may include direct clinical outcomes, access improvements, avoided emergency utilization, workforce or system capacity gains, continuity improvements, or other measurable changes that advance RHTP goals.	does not describe what would be resolved, decided, or known at the end of the planning period.	the project needs to make. The intended outcomes of the eventual project are not described. Project outcomes are unclear or not measurable. Outcomes are not appropriate for the project or population served and may not clearly advance RHTP goals.	decisions the project needs to make. The intended outcomes of the eventual project are described in general terms and are related to State RHTP goals. Project outcomes are reasonable and specific, and measurable using feasible methods, and reflect meaningful changes for the population or community served, and are related to State RHTP goals, targeted outcomes, or metrics.	uncertainties will be resolved and what decisions will be made, and the intended outcomes of the eventual project are clearly identified and drive progress towards State RHTP goals. Project outcomes are clear, specific and measurable using feasible and reliable methods. Outcomes are well-aligned and appropriate for the project and population served and drive progress towards State RHTP goals.	project needs in order to move forward. The proposal articulates what will be known and decided at the end of the planning period, and clearly identifies measurable outcomes the eventual project would be positioned to achieve that advance State RHTP goals, targeted outcomes or metrics. Project outcomes are ambitious, clear, specific and measurable using feasible and reliable methods. Outcomes clearly advance State RHTP goals, targeted outcomes or metrics, and are well matched to the project and population served.
Rural Impact (15%)	Rural impact will be assessed in proportion to the applicant's service environment, baseline capacity, and the significance of	Unclear how the project being planned and outcomes would impact rural residents.	Impact of the project being planneds and outcomes for rural residents is would be limited or indirect.	Impact of the project being planneds and outcomes for rural residents would beis	Impact of the project being planneds and outcomes for rural residents is would be	Impact of the project being planneds and outcomes for rural residents would beis



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	the change for the affected community or region. For the purposes of RHTP, all areas outside of Anchorage are considered rural. Organizations located across the state are eligible for RHTP funding if projects can demonstrate impact on rural health care delivery systems. <u>For planning applications, rural impact is assessed in relation to the project the planning process is intended to produce.</u>			moderate. The explanation of impact may lack sufficient evidence, clarity, or connection to the community served.	meaningful relative to the community or population served. The explanation is clear.	significant relative to the community or population served. The explanation of impact is clear and compelling.
Transformation Potential (10%)	Transformation is considered in terms of context-specific change relative to the starting point of the community, region or system improvements. In some communities, establishing access where none existed, reducing patient travel, stabilizing and developing workforce pipelines, improving referral coordination, or building core infrastructure may constitute meaningful transformation relative to the local baseline. <u>For planning applications, transformation potential is assessed in relation to the project the planning process is intended to produce.</u>	<u>Proposed activities</u> The project being planned would not lead to change or <u>is are</u> at risk of resulting in harmful changes to existing health care system and facilities.	<u>Proposed activities</u> The project being planned would lead to small, incremental changes to the community or existing health care system, with limited reach or durability of impact.	<u>Proposed activities</u> The project being planned would modestly support measurable changes to the community or existing health care system, but <u>are is</u> limited in scope, reach, or degree of system-level change.	<u>Proposed activities</u> The project being planned demonstrates significant transformative potential for the community or health care delivery system, demonstrating clear improvements within the applicant's service area or target population, relative to the community's baseline.	The <u>proposed activities</u> project being planned represents a well-designed <u>plan concept</u> to meaningfully transform rural health care delivery, relative to the community or regional baseline, with impact that extends beyond the applicant organization and may align with or amplify other awarded projects.

DRAFT

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Community Alignment and Partnerships Community Alignment and Strength of Partnerships and Coordination (10%)	Projects should show an understanding of who else serves the same patients or communities and demonstrate awareness and support from the people, communities, and organizations affected by the work. The proposal should describe any engagement that has been initiated or occurred and what came of it. If the eventual project will depend on participation or coordination with other organizations, the proposal should identify those organizations and explain how the planning process will engage them and define their roles. Where partnerships are proposed and/or necessary for project success, applications should clearly substantiate them through letters of support or other documentation, and describe partner roles, demonstrated contributions and how the partnership strengthens implementation, integration, or sustainability. Where partnership development is part of the planning work, the application should describe the intended partners and how those relationships will be	The proposal does not identify other organizations serving the same patients or communities, does not recognize partnerships or coordination that appear necessary for the eventual project and describes no outreach to them or to the people served, coordination, evidence of support, or does not explain why coordination and partnership would not be needed. Partnerships, if proposed, are not documented. The proposal does not document partnerships; describe meaningful coordination with relevant partners, systems, or the community; or does not explain why coordination and partnership would not be needed.	The proposal identifies few relevant organization or only partially recognizes partnerships or coordination that appear necessary for the eventual project, describes outreach to them or to the people served that is minimal, undocumented, or unclear, or gives an insufficient explanation of why coordination and partnership would not be needed. Partnerships, if proposed, lack documentation or clear roles. The proposal mentions some partnership or coordination activities, but these are not documented, and roles, relationships, or community connections are unclear, informal, or poorly described; or the rationale for proceeding without partnership is insufficient.	The proposal identifies relevant organizations and describes outreach to them or to the people served that has been initiated, with limited evidence of support, but engagement or coordination is still developing; or provides a reasonable explanation for why coordination and partnership are not needed. Partnerships, if proposed, are documented, but roles or contributions are not fully defined. The proposal includes documented evidence of partnerships and demonstrates appropriate coordination with partners, systems, or the community, with some defined roles or integration strategies; or provides a reasonable	The proposal clearly identifies who else serves the patients or communities, describes substantive outreach to them or to the people served and what came of it, and provides documented evidence of support, and the project does not duplicate existing efforts; or clearly explains why coordination and partnership are not needed and shows the project is connected to the people and community it serves. Partnerships, if proposed, are documented with defined roles and contributions. The proposal includes documented evidence of partnerships, shows intentional coordination with partners, existing systems, and/or the	The proposal demonstrates a thorough understanding of the local and regional landscape, documented engagement with the organizations and people relevant to this work, and clear evidence of support, with coordination that meaningfully strengthens the project or the broader local or regional system; or the project operates as a strong standalone model that is clearly shaped by the people it serves and connected to the systems around it. Partnerships, if proposed, are well documented, defined and accountable. The proposal includes documented evidence of partnerships; demonstrates robust, well-integrated

DRAFT

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	developed. A project carried out by a single organization can fully meet this criterion. For planning applications, building coordination and engagement with the people served may itself be a planning deliverable. Where partnerships are proposed, applications should demonstrate documented evidence, identify partner roles, expected contributions, coordination methods, and how the partnership strengthens implementation, integration, or sustainability. Integration with existing systems, coordination across providers and community organizations, and interdisciplinary care models are considerations.			explanation for why the project can succeed without formal partners. Coordination has been initiated, but may be in various stages of development.	community to avoid duplication and strengthen local or regional impact; or clearly explains why formal partnerships are not necessary and demonstrates a coordinated approach with relevant systems, stakeholders, or communities.	coordination and defined partner contributions that meaningfully strengthen the broader local or regional system. Partnerships (if used) are well-defined and accountable, or the project clearly operates as a strong standalone model that is deeply connected to community needs, systems, and outcomes.
Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Justification (10%)	Cost-effectiveness is assessed in terms of whether the requested amount is reasonable for the work proposed within the performance period in the setting where the project will operate. Proposals should show how costs were determined, connect them to specific activities, and explain significant or unusual costs. Cost is considered in proportion to the	The budget provides insufficient information to understand how costs were determined or connected to project activities. There is not enough information to assess whether the requested amount is reasonable for the work proposed.	The budget is explained only in general terms. One or more significant costs are not adequately supported, or the requested amount raises concerns about reasonableness that are not explained by the project scope or operating environment.	The budget is explained and connected to activities, and the requested amount appears reasonable and appropriate for the work proposed and the setting served. Significant costs are explained, although some supporting detail may be limited.	The budget is clearly explained and connected to project activities and outcomes. Significant costs have a clear basis, and the requested amount is well supported and proportionate to the scope of work and operating environment.	The budget is clearly explained and well supported. Significant costs have a documented basis, and the proposal demonstrates strong value for the work proposed within its operating environment, including thoughtful

DRAFT

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	<u>operating environment. Projects serving small, remote, or high-cost communities are not expected to achieve the same cost per person served as projects closer to population centers, and one-time investments that create durable capacity are considered differently from recurring operating costs. For planning applications, cost-effectiveness is assessed in relation to the planning work proposed, not the project it is intended to produce.</u>					<u>consideration of how resources will be used efficiently and sustainably. This may include durable investments, shared resources, leveraged funding, or other efficiencies, where applicable.</u>
Sustainability (10%)	Sustainability beyond the RHTP project period may be financial, operational, workforce-based, reimbursement-based, or system-based. Examples include reimbursement pathways, operational integration, workforce retention strategies, federal match opportunities, cost and/or utilization avoidance, braided funding, or other realistic approaches suited to the project type and setting. <u>For planning applications, sustainability is assessed in two ways: whether the planning work itself creates ongoing cost, and whether the</u>	Sustainability is not not <u>addressed for either the planning work or the project it is intended to produce</u> sufficiently supported or plausible.	Sustainability is somewhat plausible, but but the <u>proposal does not describe how the planning process will address how the eventual project would be sustained</u> without a plan.	Sustainability is plausible, based on reasonable assumptions, with a basic plan, <u>and the proposal indicates that sustainability of the eventual project will be considered during planning.</u>	Sustainability is planned in detail or clearly justified as not necessary given the nature and time-limited purpose of the initiative, <u>and sustainability of the eventual project is identified as a planning deliverable with a described approach.</u>	Sustainability is robustly demonstrated, with a clear plan and justification; and meaningfully supports the sustainability of other projects, organizations, or system-level efforts. <u>The planning process is designed to produce a realistic sustainability approach for the project it is intended to produce.</u>

DRAFT

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	<u>planning process will address how the project it produces would be sustained. Planning work is often time-limited by design and concludes when its deliverables are complete.</u>					
Project Planning Approach, Workplan and Monitoring (10%)	Project <u>The planning</u> approach and workplan must include clear activities or milestones, reasonable monitoring, identified risks, and a practical plan for adjustment over time, but may be phased or scaled to fit rural implementation realities.	Workplan, <u>planning</u> activities, and milestones lack clarity or feasibility, making it difficult to determine whether the <u>project-planning work</u> can be successfully implemented <u>completed</u> as described.	Workplan, <u>planning</u> activities, and milestones are generally clear, but present material risks to timely implementation <u>completion</u> ; limited consideration of how challenges would be addressed; and/or have questionable relevance to the desired outcomes <u>intended deliverables</u> .	Workplan, <u>planning</u> activities, and milestones reflect serious thought about obstacles and potential delays and are clearly relevant to target outcomes <u>the intended deliverables</u> , but mitigation strategies and monitoring approaches are limited or not fully developed.	Workplan, <u>planning</u> activities, and milestones reflect a considered, thoughtful operating and strategic framework with clear and feasible timelines and milestones, including defined approaches to risk management, progress tracking, and course correction.	Workplan, <u>planning</u> activities, and milestones include clear and effective approaches to efficient implementation and tangible impact <u>completing the planning</u> within the RHTP timeframe, with strong monitoring, learning, and adaptive management practices.