

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

River Cities Alliance Challenge on Rejuvenating Urban Rivers

A. About the RCA Challenge

1. What is the River Cities Alliance (RCA) Challenge?

The RCA Challenge on Rejuvenating Urban Rivers is an initiative to help RCA member cities translate the principles of holistic urban river management into **practical, innovative and measurable projects on the ground**. Projects are expected to align with the 10-point agenda of the Urban River Management Plan (URMP) framework.

2. Who is eligible to participate?

All member cities of the River Cities Alliance are eligible. Cities are classified into two categories based on population:

- **Category 1:** Population below 10 lakh
- **Category 2:** Population above 10 lakh

Population may be considered based on Census 2011 or the projected 2026 population based on Census 2011.

3. How many cities will be selected?

The Challenge envisages selecting **10 cities**—five each from Category 1 and 2.

4. Can a city submit more than one project proposal?

No.

B. Project Scope and Themes

5. What kinds of projects can be proposed?

Projects should address a specific urban river-related challenge faced by the city and should be **practical, innovative, implementable, outcome-oriented and measurable under the URMP Framework**. The indicative project list includes river pollution control, waterbody and wetland rejuvenation, eco-sensitive riverfront development, riparian restoration, catchment restoration, nature-based stormwater management, digital river platforms, citizen monitoring and AI/GIS-based river management solutions.

6. What are the thematic areas of the Challenge?

Projects should contribute to one or more of three broad themes:

- **Environment:** protection and restoration of river ecosystems
- **Economy:** sustainable economic opportunities linked to rivers
- **Society:** citizen participation, awareness and inclusive river management

These correspond to the 10-point URMP agenda.

7. Does the project have to be a conventional riverfront development project?

No. The Challenge is not limited to riverfront infrastructure. Cities are encouraged to propose **context-**

specific solutions addressing their own river-related challenges. Standalone projects with clearly defined and measurable outcomes are particularly encouraged.

8. Can a proposed project be part of another ongoing project or scheme?

Projects that are part of another project through project blending are **not eligible** where the outcome, impact or success cannot be directly measured within the proposed project period. The application therefore requires the ULB to clearly disclose any convergence or dependency on other projects.

9. Can land be purchased under the Challenge?

No. Land purchase or transfer from a government or private entity to the ULB/ implementing agency is an ineligible component. The proposal also needs to clearly indicate land availability and ownership status.

10. Can the project involve displacement or relocation of communities?

No. Relocation or displacement of local communities from government/public land is listed as an ineligible component. The proposal must also address social safeguards, inclusivity and protection of vulnerable groups.

C. Grant and Financial Arrangements

11. What financial support is available?

Selected cities will receive **100% grant support**, subject to the approved project cost and applicable ceiling:

- **Category 1:** Up to ₹10 crore
- **Category 2:** Up to ₹20 crore

The grant may include provision for O&M, where applicable.

12. Is the grant amount automatically equal to ₹10 crore/₹20 crore?

No. These are the **maximum grant ceilings**. The final approved project cost will be determined after the project maturation phase and approval of the final DPR and the actual cost of implementation of the project supported by Utilization Certificates. The approved DPR amount cannot exceed the sanctioned grant ceiling.

13. Will the grant cover any additional cost if the project becomes more expensive during implementation?

Not automatically. Any cost escalation, expenditure beyond the approved scope or additional financing requirement is to be **borne/arranged by the ULB**, unless specifically approved otherwise by NIUA and subject to availability.

14. How will funds be released to the ULB?

Funds will be released against **pre-agreed project milestones**. The indicative structure is:

- 10% – signing of Agreement and initiation of maturation phase
- Subsequent instalments – linked to agreed project milestones/deliverables
- Final 10% – completion of agreed milestones and submission/approval of the completion report

The exact milestone structure and payment percentages will be agreed project-by-project and incorporated in the Agreement.

15. Is the grant released upfront?

No. Except for the first instalment linked to signing of the Agreement and initiation of the maturation phase, subsequent releases are linked to achievement of agreed milestones, eligible expenditure and submission/approval of the required documentation.

16. What is the process for requesting a fund release?

Once an agreed milestone is completed, the ULB will submit a **Drawdown Request Form** to NIUA along with the prescribed supporting documents, which may include milestone completion documents, Utilisation Certificate, procurement/work-order documents, progress reports and other required records.

17. What bank account does the ULB need to maintain?

The ULB must maintain a **dedicated Zero Balance Account (ZBA)** exclusively for the RCA Challenge project. Project funds must not be diverted or used for purposes other than approved project activities. Separate financial records, vouchers, invoices, ledgers and bank statements must also be maintained.

18. What happens to unutilised funds or interest earned?

As per the draft Agreement, unutilised amounts or interest earned from the approved budget shall remain with NIUA or be returned, unless otherwise approved.

D. Project Maturation and DPR**19. What happens after a city is selected?**

Selected cities will undergo a **project maturation phase** before full-scale implementation. During this phase, the project will be refined with support from NIUA, the RCA Challenge PMU and relevant experts.

20. What documents need to be prepared during the maturation phase?

The key deliverables include:

1. Project Implementation Plan (PIP)
2. Final DPR with O&M Framework
3. Procurement Plan
4. Communication and Outreach Plan
5. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework
6. Project Risk Register and Risk Management Strategy
7. Environmental & Social (E&S) Safeguards Plan
8. Other project-specific documents, where required.

21. Can the project proposed in the application be modified after selection?

Yes. The maturation phase is specifically intended to **strengthen and refine the selected project**. However, any material or major modification to the scope, location, design, outputs, financing plan, duration or approved activities requires prior approval from NIUA.

22. When can major implementation and procurement activities begin?

Major implementation and procurement works should commence after the relevant maturation deliverables have been approved and the required written clearance/approval from NIUA has been obtained. Preparatory activities may be undertaken during maturation with the concurrence of the PMU.

E. Procurement and Implementation

23. Who will implement the project?

The **ULB is responsible for end-to-end implementation** of the selected project, including tendering, procurement, contract management, statutory approvals, quality assurance and timely execution. NIUA will provide programme management, technical assistance, monitoring and expert support.

24. Who will issue the tenders?

The ULB will remain the **procuring entity** and will issue tenders for on-ground implementation. Procurement must follow applicable World Bank procurement guidelines, rules and approved procurement arrangements, with guidance from NIUA's procurement and financial specialists.

25. Does NIUA's review mean that the ULB is no longer responsible for procurement?

No. NIUA will review, guide and provide technical support, but the ULB continues to retain its statutory, fiduciary and contractual responsibilities as the procuring entity.

26. Does the ULB need NIUA's approval before procurement?

Yes. The draft Agreement requires the ULB to obtain **No Objection from NIUA before undertaking procurement activities** and prior approval for material contract variations.

27. Who bears the additional cost if the tendered cost is higher than the approved project cost?

Any variation arising from change in scope, delay or a higher tender quote is to be **borne by the ULB**, unless otherwise specifically approved by NIUA and subject to availability.

F. Roles and Responsibilities**28. What is NIUA's role in the Challenge?**

NIUA is the **Implementing Agency** and is responsible for programme management and coordination, technical assistance, expert engagement, review of project documents and milestones, monitoring, fund management, STEP Portal management, capacity building and knowledge dissemination.

29. What are the main responsibilities of the ULB?

The ULB is responsible for:

- End-to-end project implementation
- Designating a Project Nodal Officer and project team
- Site/land availability and statutory approvals
- Procurement and contract management
- Financial management and record keeping
- Quality, safety and E&S compliance
- Stakeholder engagement and grievance redressal
- Progress reporting and submission of UCs/audit documents
- Facilitating inspections and audits
- O&M and sustainability of project assets.

30. When does the ULB need to nominate the Project Nodal Officer?

The Project Nodal Officer should be designated upon signing of the Agreement, and the details of the officer and project management team should be provided to NIUA **within seven days of Agreement signing**.

31. What role does the State Government have?

The State Urban Development Department/State Mission for Clean Ganga in Ganga-basin states, or the relevant department/agency responsible for ULBs, provides **strategic review and support**. States may also facilitate coordination, statutory approvals, convergence and implementation support and may supplement the grant from their own resources.

G. Monitoring, O&M and Sustainability

32. How will the project be monitored?

Monitoring will be based on the approved **MEL Framework**, including project activities, outputs, outcomes, indicators, baselines, targets, risks and means of verification. NIUA/NMCG or authorised agencies may undertake site visits, technical and financial reviews, audits and third-party assessments.

33. How frequently will the ULB interact with the RCA Challenge PMU/NIUA?

The Operational Guidelines envisage **monthly online review meetings** with each ULB during implementation, along with at least two site visits—one during the middle of the project and another towards completion.

34. Who is responsible for O&M after project completion?

The ULB remains responsible for the **operation, maintenance, upkeep and sustainability** of the assets/interventions created under the project. The ULB must implement the approved O&M Framework and ensure institutional and financial arrangements for at least five years after project completion, unless otherwise specified.

35. Is O&M funding available under the Challenge?

Yes, where applicable, the approved grant may include O&M provision for **up to five years after project completion**. The Operational Guidelines provide for O&M payments over this period, subject to the approved O&M and MEL arrangements and supporting evidence.

36. Can the ULB design a self-sustaining O&M model?

Yes. The guidelines encourage ULBs to develop **self-sustaining O&M mechanisms**, including revenue-generation opportunities or meeting O&M requirements through the ULB's own resources.

H. Environmental and Social Requirements

37. What environmental and social requirements apply to the project?

The project must comply with applicable environmental, social, labour, safety and statutory requirements. The E&S Safeguards Plan will address environmental and social risks, mitigation measures, stakeholder engagement, inclusion, gender considerations and grievance redressal.

38. What statutory clearances should the ULB consider?

The application requires the ULB to identify the status of relevant requirements, including **land availability/ownership, environmental clearance, forest clearance, NGT compliance, utility shifting, encroachment issues and other applicable permissions**.

I. Application and Proposal Preparation

39. What information is required in the project proposal?

The proposal requires information on the project background, problem statement and supporting evidence, project components, beneficiaries, partners, statutory requirements, convergence, feasibility, innovation, sustainability/O&M, expected outcomes and impacts, E&S considerations, scalability and the ULB's relevant credentials.

40. What should the ULB demonstrate regarding project outcomes?

The ULB should identify clear **outcomes, impacts and measurable indicators**, preferably supported

by baseline values and measurement units. The project should be capable of demonstrating results within the project period.

41. What should be included in the project budget?

The application requires a cost break-up covering, as applicable:

- Equipment/works
- Technical/expert services
- Communication and outreach
- Human resources
- Capacity building
- Administrative and operational expenses
- Other project costs

The proposal must also identify the proposed financing sources, including RCA Grant and any own/state/central/other financing.

42. What should the ULB disclose about its readiness to implement the project?

The proposal should demonstrate institutional readiness, availability of resources, technical and implementation feasibility, proposed team structure, statutory approvals, site/land readiness, risks and assumptions, and the proposed implementation timeline.

43. What declarations does the authorised ULB representative have to make?

The application declaration requires the ULB to confirm, among other matters, the intended project timeline, ecological sensitivity, land acquisition, potential community displacement, environmental impacts, NGT/court compliance and availability of O&M resources beyond project completion.

J. Agreement and Project Duration

44. When does the NIUA–ULB Agreement become effective?

The Agreement becomes effective from the date it is signed by both Parties. The current draft provides for a maximum duration of **24 months from the date of award or 31 December 2028, whichever is earlier**, subject to the approved PIP/DPR.

45. What happens if the ULB does not comply with the Agreement?

Depending on the nature and severity of non-compliance, actions may include reminders, delay/suspension/deduction of funds, amendment of the Agreement, suspension or cancellation, and potentially transfer of the project/funds to waitlisted projects/ULBs. In cases such as misutilisation, diversion of funds, serious procurement irregularities or abandonment, NIUA may recover funds or suspend further releases.

46. What records does the ULB need to maintain?

The ULB must maintain complete project and financial records, including procurement records, contracts, bid documents, approvals, variations, payments, correspondence, vouchers, invoices, bank statements, UCs and audit documents. Project records are to be retained for at least **five years after financial closure**, or longer if required under applicable rules.

47. Will successful projects receive any recognition?

Yes. Selected cities that successfully complete their projects will receive a **Certificate of Recognition issued by NMCG and NIUA**. Successful projects may also be documented and disseminated nationally and internationally through case studies, videos, IEC material and other knowledge products.

K. What does this mean for my ULB?

Stage	What the ULB needs to do
1. Selection	Submit/confirm the selected project and participate in the required consultations
2. Agreement	Sign the NIUA–ULB Agreement and designate the Project Nodal Officer/team
3. Maturation	Refine the project with NIUA/PMU support and prepare the PIP, DPR, Procurement Plan, MEL, E&S and other required plans
4. Approval	Obtain NIUA approval/clearance of relevant project and procurement documents
5. Procurement	Undertake procurement as per applicable World Bank guidelines with NIUA guidance/NOC
6. Implementation	Execute the project, monitor progress, maintain quality and comply with E&S requirements
7. Fund Release	Submit milestone-based drawdown requests with required supporting documents
8. Monitoring	Participate in regular reviews, submit progress reports, UCs and MEL data and facilitate site visits
9. Completion	Complete all agreed outputs, submit completion documentation and facilitate final verification
10. O&M	Operate, maintain and sustain the created assets/interventions as per the approved O&M Framework