Welcome to the Commuter Authority Rail Safety Improvement (CARSI) Grants Webinar

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Number 693JJ320NF00005

This webinar is brought to you by the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT)

Date: September 10, 2020, Time: 2:00-3:30 pm (EST)

- We will not be using video or audio from participants in this meeting, so please turn off your cameras and mute your audio for the duration of the event.
- Submit your questions or comments via the Chat Box.
- To turn on automatic Closed Captions, please click the ellipses (…) at the bottom of this meeting window, (a menu will appear). Choose Turn on Live Captions.

Welcome

Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer

USDOT / Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Office of Acquisition and Grants Management

Purpose and Disclaimer

- This webinar will be conducted as a virtual forum and will help potential Applicants gather additional information about this Funding Opportunity and ask specific questions. Participation in this webinar is not mandatory to submit an application under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).
- As soon as possible after the webinar, the U.S. DOT will post the webinar presentation slides and a Q&A Summary at www.Grants.gov.
- In the event of any discrepancy between the information presented in this webinar and the NOFO written document, the NOFO written document will prevail.

Agenda

- **Introduction of Presenters**
  - Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer, FHWA
  - Kelly Morton, Team Leader, FHWA Office of Safety
- **Grant Program Overview: Purpose, Legislative Authority, & Goals**
- **Grantee Eligibility, Cost Share Requirement**
- **Technical Details: Eligible Projects**
- **Application Instructions: Submittal Process & Content**
- **Application Review and Selection of Awardees**
- **Q&A**

Program Overview

Kelly Morton, Team Leader, FHWA Office of Safety

CARSI Grants Program Overview

The Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2020 (Public Law 116-94) (Appropriations Act), appropriated $50 million to DOT to award competitive grants for activities described in Section 130(a) of Title 23, United States Code (U.S.C.) railway-highway crossings.

- Multiple grant awards anticipated
- No specified minimum or maximum amount per grant

CARSI Grants Program Overview

- The purpose of this grant program is to improve safety at public railway-highway crossings. The program provides one-time funding to eligible entities for the construction of projects for the elimination of hazards at railway-highway crossings.

CARSI Grants Program Overview

- Specific program goals include:
  - Improve safety at railway-highway crossings through the elimination of hazards at public railway-highway crossings;
  - Reduce fatalities, serious injuries, and crashes at public railway-highway crossings;
  - Reduce the number of existing public at-grade crossings by closure or grade separation; and
  - Reduce delays or improve system performance by eliminating hazards posed by blocked grade crossings due to idling trains.

Grantee Eligibility and Cost Share

Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer, FHWA

Eligible Grantees

- The prime grantee must be either: (1) a commuter authority; OR (2) a public or non-profit entity partnering with an eligible commuter authority.
- A grantee team must include a "commuter authority" as defined in 49 U.S.C. 24102, which is a State, local, or regional entity established to provide, or make a contract for, commuter rail passenger transportation.
- An eligible commuter authority must have experienced at least one accident investigated by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2018, and for which the NTSB issued an accident report.

NOTE: Applicants are encouraged to PARTNER with their STATE DOT to the extent possible. Awards may be made to State DOTs as pass-through entities for administration of the funds.

Cost Share

- Minimum required cost share = 10 % of the project cost.
  - 90% Federal share + 10% Non-Federal share = 100% Total Project Cost
- Valuation of cost share or match is covered in 2 CFR Part 200 (aka the Uniform Guidance) in section § 200.306 Cost sharing or matching.
  - Grantee must provide documentation to support the value of cost share proposed, to prove fair market value.
- Selection criteria gives preference to projects that include cost share that exceeds the 10% minimum.

Cost share or "match" means the portion of project costs not paid by Federal funds.

Cost Share

- Cost share <u>can</u> include:
  - Project costs incurred during the grant period by the grantee or a 3rd party, in the form of labor, equipment, etc. ("soft match" or "noncash match");
  - Cash contributions from the grantee used to pay for project costs incurred by a vendor during the grant period. ("hard match").
- Cost share cannot come from Federal sources (*like another grant*) unless the underlying statute specifically authorizes use for a match.
- Cost share contributions may come from the prime grantee, a project partner, project subcontractor, 3rd party. But prime grantee remains responsible for satisfying the cost share.

Cost share can include direct and indirect costs.

Estimated Timeline

Date	Action
August 25, 2020	NOFO issued
October 26, 2020	Applications due by 11:59 PM (Eastern Time) through www.Grants.gov
December 2020	Estimated announcement of selected awardees

Technical Details: Eligible Projects

Kelly Morton, Team Leader, FHWA Office of Safety

Eligible Projects

- Eligible projects under this grant program are limited to the following:
  - the separation or protection of grades at crossings;
  - the reconstruction of existing railroad grade crossing structures;
  - the relocation of highways to eliminate grade crossings; or
  - projects at grade crossings to eliminate hazards posed by blocked grade crossings due to idling trains.
- NOTE: The proposed location of the project is not required to be the location of the accident previously investigated by the NTSB. The proposed location of the project is up to the discretion of the applicant.

Eligible Projects

- Priority will be given to applications that bundle safety improvements to eliminate hazards at more than one public railway-highway crossing.
- Priority will be given to applications that bundle grade separation project(s) with closing more than one existing public at-grade railway-highway crossing.
- Priority will be given to applications that propose projects for construction as opposed to engineering and design.

Application Instructions:

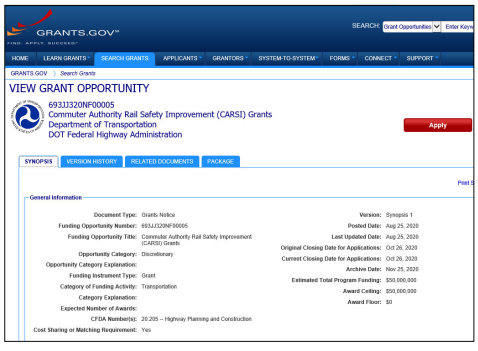
Submittal Process & Application Content

Kelly Morton, FHWA Office of Safety

Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer, FHWA

Application Submission Process

- Applicants must submit their applications via Grants.gov under the Notice of Funding Opportunity Number: 693JJ320NF00005
- Applications are due on October 26, 2020 by 11:59 PM (Eastern Time) through www.Grants.gov
- You need a registered Grants.gov account. Obtaining an account can involve multiple steps and numerous days. Please see the NOFO and Grants.gov website for detailed instructions, training videos, an online user guide, and a help desk.



Application Submission Process

- To apply for a Federal grant using Grants.gov, an Applicant needs a DUNS number, an active www.Sam.gov registration, and a Grants.gov account.
- Can take 4 weeks to complete all these steps. Start now!
- *Grants.gov Support*: Grants.gov provides applicants 24/7 support via the toll-free number 1-800-518-4726 and email at support@grants.gov.
- If you have technical difficulties, it is best to call the Grants.gov Support Center and get a ticket number.

Late Applications

- A late application will not be reviewed or considered unless the Agreement Officer determines that doing so is in FHWA's best interest.
- In the event of system problems or technical difficulties with the application submittal, Applicants should contact the FHWA point of contact designated in the NOFO.
- If Applicants are unable to use the system due to technical difficulties, Applicants must e-mail applications to the FHWA point of contact no later than the application deadline cited above.

Application Content

- **Volume 1 – Project Application**
  - Cover Page
  - Project Narrative (30-page limit on Project Narrative section)
  - Project Readiness (no page limit)
  - Letters of Support (no page limit)
  - Benefit-Cost Analysis (no page limit)
- **Volume 2 – Budget Application** - no page limit
  - Application Forms
  - Cost Breakdown
  - Other Business Information

Volume 1 – Project Application

- Cover Page
- Project Narrative (30-page limit on Project Narrative section)
- Project Readiness (no page limit)
- Letters of Support (no page limit)
- Benefit-Cost Analysis (no page limit)

Volume 1 – Cover Page

Cover Page should include:

- Project Name
- Project location
- If project is included in rural area
- Name of eligible entity applying
- Total project costs (from all sources)
- Amount of Federal funding requested
- Amount of non-Federal share proposed.

Volume 1 – Project Narrative

Project Narrative is limited to 30-pages and should include the necessary information necessary for FHWA to determine that the project satisfies the eligibility criteria, and to assess how the application addresses the selection criteria.

- Statement of applicant eligibility
- Statement of project eligibility
- Project description
- Safety impacts
- Safety performance metrics
- Innovation
- Summary of benefit-cost analysis

Volume 1 – Project Readiness

Project Readiness should include information sufficient for USDOT to determine whether the project is reasonably expected to begin construction in a timely manner.

- Technical feasibility
- Project schedule
- Required approvals
- Assessment of risks and mitigation strategies
- Consistent with Department's R.O.U.T.E.S. Initiative
- Innovation
- Summary of benefit-cost analysis

Volume 1 – Letters of Support

Letters of support should be included from all identified partners, as applicable, and required if:

- Rail corridor is owned by an entity other than the commuter authority.
- Funding or resources is contributed by other partners, including if the State DOT will act as a pass through entity for the proposed project.
- Operation and maintenance is required by another entity than the eligible commuter authority.

Volume 1 – Benefit-Cost Analysis

- The Benefit-Cost Analysis should document the assumptions and methodology used to produce the analysis, including a description, sources of data, and values of key input parameters so that FHWA can replicate and evaluate the analysis.
- The results of the analysis should be summarized in the Project Narrative and the analysis attached as an appendix, including all relevant spreadsheet files and technical memos.
- USDOT Guidance applies to all USDOT grant programs that require a benefit-cost analysis. The Guidance is found here: https://www.transportation.gov/office-policy/transportation-policy/benefit-cost-analysis-guidance-discretionary-grant-programs.

Volume 2 – Budget Application

- Application Forms
- Cost Breakdown
- Other Business Information

Volume 2 – Application Forms in Grants.gov

- Application Forms include: SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance; SF 424C Budget Information for Construction Programs; SF 424D Assurances for Construction Programs; and the SFLLL.
- NOTE: On the SF 424, the information in block 8a (Applicant's "Legal Name") must be the same as entered for registration in www.SAM.gov and for the Applicant's Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number.

Volume 2 – Cost Breakdown

Provide an estimate of all project costs including:

- Federal Share. Provide a detailed project budget showing how the Federal funds will be spent over the proposed period of performance. The budget should estimate – by dollar amount and percentage of cost – the cost of construction work for each project component.
- Cost Share. Describe proposed non-Federal share and demonstrate how the minimum non-Federal cost share of 10 percent can be achieved.

Volume 2 – Other Business Information

A series of questions to be answered by Applicant, including:

- List of past projects, whether an A-133 Audit has been done, Conflict of Interest statement, List contracts performed by grantee that have been terminated, List violations of criminal law
- *Acknowledgement of acceptance of the NOFO terms and acknowledgement and acceptance of any Amendments issued to this NOFO. List Amendment numbers and issue dates, if any.
  - Tip: Register to receive notifications of updates/amendments to this notice. It is the Applicant's responsibility to monitor for any updates to this notice.

Application Review & Selection

Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer, FHWA

Application Review and Selection Process

- A multi-modal team of USDOT technical staff will review eligible applications and rate projects based on the NOFO evaluation criteria.
- A multi-modal team of USDOT senior leadership will determine which projects to recommend to the Office of the Secretary based on the evaluation criteria.
- Discussions with Applicants may be necessary to address questions.
- The final funding decisions will be made by the Secretary of Transportation.

Evaluation Criteria

A. SAFETY IMPACTS: Degree to which the project will deliver safety impacts to meet the program goals.

B. PROJECT READINESS: Likelihood of a successful project, including Environmental Risk, Technical Capacity, and Financial Capacity.

C. ECONOMIC VITALITY: Extent to which a project would support the economic vitality of either the nation or a region.

D. COST SHARE: Extent of matching funds with preference for > 10% minimum.

E. INNOVATION: Extent to which the applicant uses innovative approaches to improve safety and expedite project delivery, including: (1) innovative technologies, (2) innovative project delivery, or (3) innovative financing.

F. RURAL OUTCOMES: Degree to which the project addresses challenges of rural areas, if applicable.

G. OPPORTUNITY ZONES: Whether a project is located in an opportunity zone, if applicable.

Evaluation Criteria - Priorities

- Priority will be given to applications that bundle safety improvements to eliminate hazards at more than one public railway-highway crossing.
- Priority will be given to applications that bundle grade separation project(s) with closing more than one existing public at-grade railway-highway crossing.
- Priority will be given to applications that propose projects for construction as opposed to engineering and design.

Type of Award, Period of Performance, Pre-Award Costs

- Awards will be Cost Reimbursement grants.
- Awards will vary in duration based on the proposed project. The anticipated period of performance is between 1 and 4 years from the effective date of award. Applicants shall propose a period of performance specific to their proposed demonstration project.
- The FHWA will not reimburse any pre-award costs or application preparation costs.

Q & A

Q: Is right-of-way and engineering eligible reimbursable expenses?

- Yes, preliminary engineering costs (design, ROW, environmental) are eligible. However, please note the NOFO, states "Priority will be given to applications that propose projects for construction as opposed to engineering and design."

Q: Is NEPA clearance required? Or can preliminary engineering activities still take place as part of the schedule for the grant award?

- Yes, as applicable, NEPA clearance is required. Preliminary engineering activities can take place as part of the grant period. However, please note the NOFO, states "Priority will be given to applications that propose projects for construction as opposed to engineering and design."

Q & A

Q: Are we eligible if we have not had an accident between 2008 and 2018 that was investigated and had a report generated by the NTSB?

- No, this eligibility requirement comes directly from the 2020 Appropriations Act that authorizes the funding and the grant program.

Q & A

Q: Is it possible to propose a project wherein the State and local environmental and planning approvals process has not yet started?

- Yes, however, the project schedule should demonstrate how the project will be completed within 4 years, including accomplishment of the environmental and planning approvals.

Q: Is the completion date when the construction needs to be obligated by or when construction needs to be completed by?

- The applicant must complete the project actions they are awarded funds for by the completion date, including construction and any preliminary engineering activities included in the grant project.

Q & A

Q: Can preaward costs be included in the Benefit-Cost Analysis even though preaward costs are not reimbursable?

- Yes, the Benefit-Cost Analysis is intended to evaluate the overall merits of the project, rather than the merits of Federal investment in the project. Therefore, previously incurred costs should be included in the analysis even if they are not eligible for reimbursement.

Q: Can a Benefit-Cost Analysis be done after grant selection?

- No, the Benefit-Cost Analysis is a required portion of the application. It must be completed and submitted with the application by the deadline.

More Q & A?

Additional Questions – from the Chat Box

Thank You for Attending

Contact Information

Please direct all inquiries to:

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