

RAIL

MOVING AMERICA FORWARD



Best Practices – Project Narrative

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Upcoming Office Hours

- **Every following Thursday at 2pm!**
 - [August 18 - Project and applicant eligibility, project type, and lifecycle](#)
 - [August 25 - Statement of work](#)
 - [September 1 - National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\) and environmental considerations](#)
 - [September 8 - NOFO "nuts and bolts" \(e.g. Grants.gov, SAM registration, and other required elements\)](#)



The banner features the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Railroad Administration logo on the left. The central text reads "FRA Program Delivery Webinar Series" in large white font. On the right, there is an image of a computer monitor displaying a play button icon and the text "FRA Program Delivery Webinar Series".

Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program NOFO Office Hours
Thursday, August 11, 2022
2:00 PM Eastern
[Register Now](#)

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) recently hosted a webinar about the new [Railroad Crossing Elimination \(RCE\) Grant Program](#) established under the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#), and its [FY 2022 Notice of Funding Opportunity \(NOFO\)](#). In response to high levels of interest in the RCE Grant Program NOFO, FRA is holding a series of "office hours" to expand upon key sections of the NOFO and offer potential applicants the opportunity to hear from FRA staff on how to adopt best practices for their grant applications.

The office hours series kicks off on Thursday, August 11, 2022, at 2:00 pm EST with an overview of best practices for creating a project narrative. FRA staff will cover the basics on structuring each section of the application - like the project summary, funding synopsis, and selection and evaluation criteria - into a cohesive narrative. FRA presenters will identify helpful tools and resources to strengthen the applicant narrative and attendees will have the opportunity to ask questions about the topics covered. [Register now!](#)

The remainder of FRA's RCE Grant Program NOFO office hours series will be held on Thursdays at 2:00 pm EST.

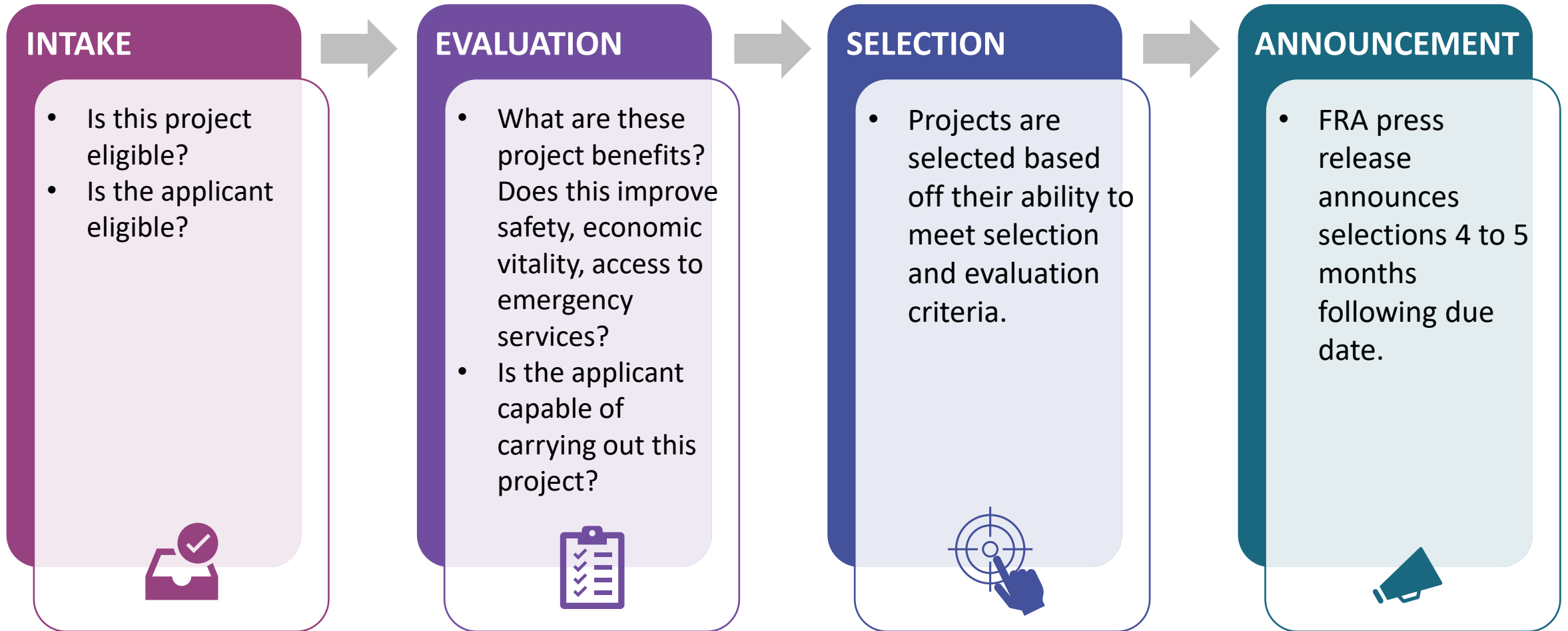
You are also invited to participate in any or all of the following sessions. *Please note that a separate registration is required for each one:*

Agenda

1. Overview of the competitive grant process
2. Components of the narrative
 - a) Cover Page to Environmental Readiness
3. Tools and resources
4. Questions



FRA Competitive/Discretionary Grant Review Process



Best Practices – Project Narrative

Project Narrative Outline

- I. Cover Page
- II. Project Summary
- III. Project Funding
- IV. Applicant Eligibility
- V. Detailed Project Description
- VI. Project Location
- VII. Grade Crossing Information
- VIII. Evaluation and Selection Criteria
- IX. Safety Benefit
- X. Project Implementation & Management
- XI. Environmental Readiness

- Structure your project narrative in accordance with the outline specified in the NOFO
- Include all elements identified in the outline
- Follow the instructions for each element
- Adhere to 25-page limit

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Cover Page

Use a table or create a list:

- Project Title
- Funding Requested
- Proposed Match
 - Sources
 - In Kind?
- Other Federal Funding – only if it applies
- Total Project Cost
- Did you submit for a previous grant – tell us which program
- City/State Location
- Congressional District
- Planning Documents – State Rail Plan, State Action Plan
- Rural or Tribal Location
- Funding Set-Aside (Planning, Safety Information, Rural Tribal Set-Aside)
- Project located in Rural or Tribal Area with 20 or fewer residents
- US DOT Crossing Numbers
- Project located on real property owned by someone other than the applicant

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Project Summary

- ✓ Briefly describe the project in **4 to 6 sentences**
 - ✓ Tell us what your project is, where it is, how much money you are requesting and why
- ✓ Don't start off by confusing reviewers - **Keep it simple**
- ✓ **Don't frontload all your information** 
- ✓ Examples – [FY21 CRISI Press Release](#)



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Project Funding

- ☑ **TABLES are always welcome**
 - ☑ Only include eligible costs
- ☑ Specify each source of non-Federal match
 - ☑ Supporting documentation
 - ☑ Provide details about in-kind match
 - ☑ Indicate public- vs. private-sector match
- ☑ Identify if the proposed match will not be available until a certain date or if funds must be spent by a deadline
 - ☑ State Competitive Funding or other competitive federal sources

Funding Source	Amount	Percentage
RCE Grant Request	\$XX	80%
Local Funding	\$XX	10%
State Funding	\$XX	5%
Railroad Co. Funding - Private	\$XX	5%
Total Match	\$XXX	100%

Task/Component	Cost	Percentage
Preliminary Engineering	\$XX	50%
NEPA	\$XX	50%
Total Cost	\$XXX	100%

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Applicant and Project Eligibility

Look at the NOFO

- Match Project to eligible project type
- Match Applicant to eligible applicant type

Make Your Case

- Describe how your project meets the criteria and how you meet the criteria

References

- Supporting Documentation
- Citations and Hyperlinks

1. Eligible Applicants

The following entities are eligible applicants for all projects permitted under this notice:

- a. A State, including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and other United States territories and possessions;
- b. A political subdivision of a State;
- c. A federally recognized Indian Tribe.
- d. A unit of local government or a group of entities described in any
- e. A public port authority.
- f. A metropolitan planning organization;
- g. A group of entities described in any

A. PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

The following Highway-Rail or Pathway-Rail Grade Crossing Improvement Projects that focus on improving the safety and mobility of people and goods are eligible for funding under 49 U.S.C. 22909(d), and this NOFO:

- (1) Grade separation or closure, including through the use of a bridge, embankment, tunnel, or combination thereof;
- (2) Track relocation;
- (3) The improvement or installation of protective devices, signals, signs, or other measures to improve safety, provided that such activities are related to a separation or relocation project described in paragraph (1) or (2);
- (4) Other means to improve the safety and mobility of people and goods at highway-rail grade crossings (including technological solutions);^[6]
- (5) A group of related projects described in paragraphs (1) through (4) that would collectively improve the mobility of people and goods; or
- (6) The planning, environmental review, and design of an eligible project described in paragraphs (1) through (5).^[7]

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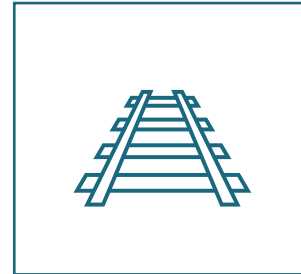
Detailed Project Description

- ✓ Thoroughly discuss the transportation challenges and benefits
- ✓ Include data to support project benefits
- ✓ Describe how project components are related and will be sequenced
- ✓ Include photographs or diagrams
- ✓ Identify all host railroads, operators, and beneficiaries



Don't let this be the only time you talk about benefits

v. Project Description



Picture of Project

Simple description of challenges and proposed solution. Relevant history **OF** project.

- These XX grade crossings are dangerous, and we want to create an overpass

Summary of Qualitative and Quantitative **benefits** of this project.

- XXX fatalities will be prevented by this project
- How and Why



Location of Project Area

Summary of who benefits.

- Town residents
- Emergency Services
- Freight

Host Railroad – status of negotiations

- Draft negotiation document,
- Summary of ongoing conversations, demonstration of support

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Project Location

- ☑ Identify cities, counties, and states where project is located
 - ☑ Congressional districts of project(s) location
- ☑ Include a map of the project
 - ☑ Multiple if necessary
- ☑ Identify railroad mileposts
- ☑ Geospatial data – longitude and latitude



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Grade Crossing Information

- ✓ Cite specific DOT National Grade Crossing Inventory information, including:
 - ✓ Railroad that owns infrastructure
 - ✓ Primary railroad operator
 - ✓ DOT crossing inventory number
 - ✓ Roadway at the crossing

The image shows two overlapping screenshots of the Federal Railroad Office of Safety website. The top screenshot is titled '5.02 - Generate Crossing Inventory and Accident Reports'. It features a navigation menu with 'Home', 'What's New', 'Crossing', 'Forms/Publications', 'Downloads', and 'Data'. Below the menu, there is a section for generating reports. It includes a 'Report Type' section with radio buttons for 'Inventory' (selected), 'Accident', and 'Contact Sheet'. There is a 'Crossing#' text input field and an 'Inventory' section with radio buttons for 'Current' (selected) and 'History'. At the bottom of this section are 'Generate Report' and 'Generate Map' buttons. Below this is an 'Additional Links' section with several blue hyperlinks: 'Query by Location \ Railroad', 'Query by Crossing', 'Accident Prediction (WBAPS)', 'DOT Crossing Inventory Infor', 'Crossing Data help', 'Rail Crossing Locator Mobile A', 'Maps', 'Notice', and 'Using this Site'. At the bottom right of this section, it says 'Accident File as of: May 31, 2011' and 'Crossing Inventory File as of: May 31, 2011'.

The bottom screenshot is titled '8.01 - Query by Location'. It features a 'Location' dropdown menu set to 'Alabama'. Below it are radio buttons for 'County' (selected) and 'City'. A 'County/City' dropdown menu is open, showing 'ALL', 'AUTAUGA', 'BALDWIN', and 'BARBOUR'. There are three more radio button sections: 'Crossing Type' with 'Public Only' (selected) and 'All (Includes Private and Pedestrian)'; 'Crossing Position' with 'At-Grade Only' (selected) and 'All (Includes Grade Separated)'; and 'Crossing Status' with 'Open' (selected) and 'All (Includes Closed)'. There is a 'Street' text input field and a 'Reporting Level' dropdown menu set to 'All'. Below the dropdown menu is a list of letters: '0-9 A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z All'. There is a 'Railroad' dropdown menu set to 'All' and a 'Sort' section with radio buttons for 'Sort by Railroad Name' (selected) and 'Sort by Railroad Code'. At the bottom, there is a red note: 'Note! You need to specify state and either county or city, street or railroad search pattern.' and 'Run Query' and 'Reset' buttons.

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Evaluation and Selection Criteria

Project Benefits

Improves Safety at Highway-Rail or Pathway Rail Grade Crossing

Proposes to grade separate, eliminate, or close one or more Highway-Rail or Pathway-Rail Grade Crossings

Improves the mobility of both people and goods

Reduces emissions, protects the environment, and provides community benefit

Improves access to emergency services

Improves access to communities

Provides economic benefit

Uses contracting incentives to employ local labor, to the extent permissible under Federal law

Technical Merits

SOW tasks and subtasks outlined are appropriate

Demonstrates strong project readiness

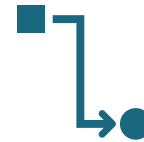
Technical Qualifications and Experience of Personnel

Project is in the freight investment plan

Project will use innovative technologies, design or construction techniques or materials will reduce GHG emissions

Project has support from impacted Rail Carriers

Project will improve the mobility modes of transportation, including entry and exit from freight facilities, pedestrians, bicycles, and public transportation



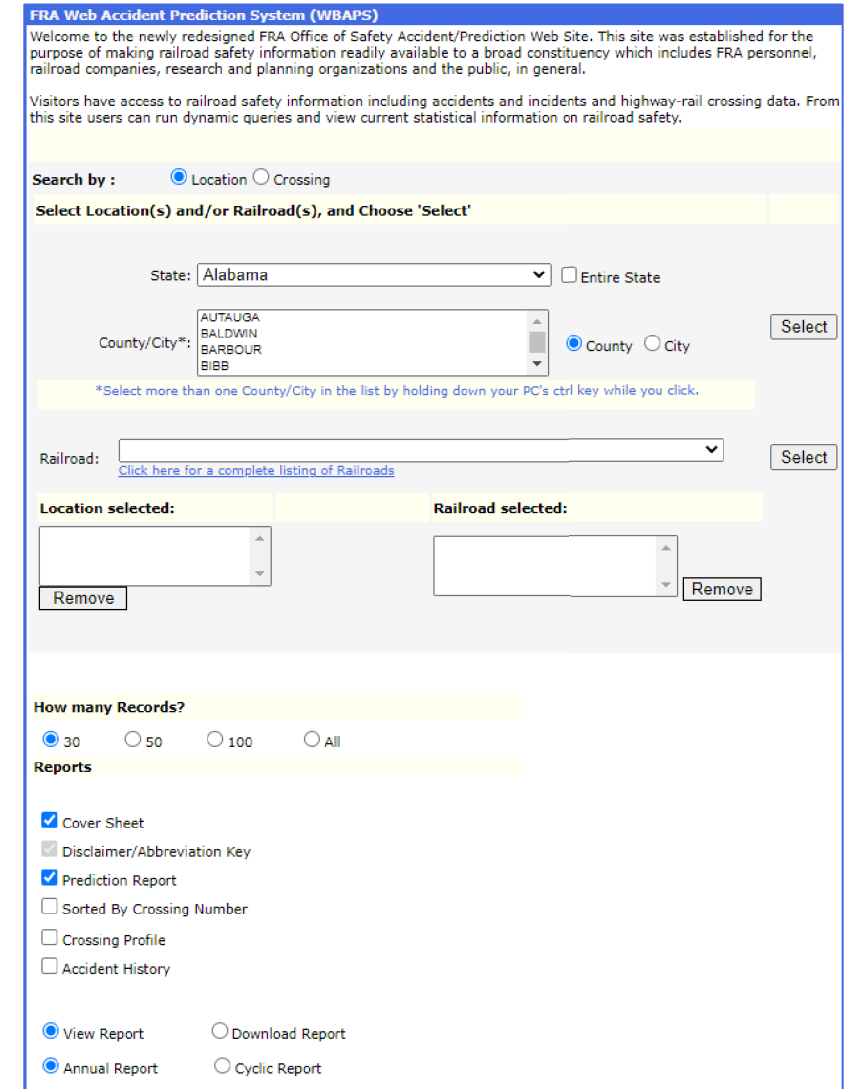
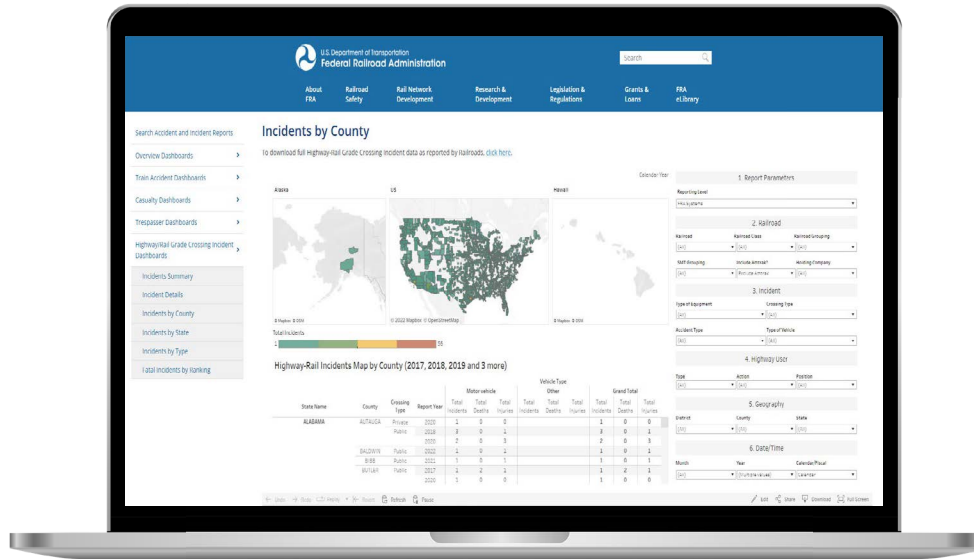
- ☑ Quantitative and Qualitative
 - ☑ Relevant Benefits only – don't digress to other projects
- ☑ Address each component
 - ☑ **Address it again!**
 - ☑ Separate out each section – don't bunch



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Safety Benefit

- ☑ Strongly encouraged to submit safety justifications for the project that rely on standardized, objective safety metrics and data
 - ☑ Resources exist
 - ☑ Address it again!



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Project Implementation and Management

- ✓ Highlight applicant's past experiences managing and overseeing similar projects, including FRA- or DOT-funded projects
 - ✓ RAISE (TIGER, BUILD) or CRISI
 - ✓ FTA or FHWA grants
 - ✓ State Grants
 - ✓ Management of Local Funding
- ✓ Describe expected arrangements for project contracting, contract oversight, change-order management, risk management, and conformance with Federal requirements for progress reporting
 - ✓ Experience with Grade Crossings – GREAT!



Assume your reviewer has never heard of you!

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Environmental Readiness

- ☑ *If NEPA is **complete***: Provide copy of NEPA document or link
 - ☑ *If NEPA is **not started***: Provide detailed project description and description of setting/land use, with visuals
 - ☑ *If NEPA is **underway***: Provide current status, expected completion date, and type of document
- ☑ Provide as much known information about project description, project location, anticipated impacts, anticipated local/state/federal permits as possible
 - ☑ FRA reviewers will be determining environmental readiness based only on the information provided with the application
 - ☑ Provide **more** environmental information than less
 - ☑ Describe project planning done to date
 - ☑ Document any past or present environmental studies associated to your proposed project in the grant application, including:
 - ☑ Any previously approved FRA, FTA, or FHWA project related to the grant proposal



In summary... help your reviewer

- Keep it simple and straight forward
 - More information is good...as long as it's relevant
 - Supporting Documentation – submission vs. hyperlink
 - Repetition is key – don't sell yourself short
 - **No detective work**
 - benefits, costs, scope, project stage
 - Qualitative and Quantitative
- **No Assumptions**
 - Location
 - Technical experience
 - Project



Narrative Tools

I. Cover Page

- NOFO

II. Project Summary

- [FY21 CRISI Press Release](#)

III. Project Funding

- NOFO
- [CFR § 200.306 on In-Kind contributions and matching](#)
- [FRA SOW – Budget Template](#)

IV. Applicant and Project Eligibility

- NOFO

V. Detailed Project Description

- NOFO

VI. Project Location

- [Justice40 Census Tracts](#)
- [Congressional Districts](#)
- [Rural Eligibility](#)
- [FRA Safety GIS Map](#)

VII. Grade Crossing Information

- [Grade Crossing Inventory](#)

VIII. Evaluation and Selection Criteria

- NOFO

IX. Safety Benefit

- [FRA Office of Safety Analysis](#)
- [FRA Web Accident Prediction System](#)
- [Highway Rail Grade Crossing Incident Dashboard](#)

X. Project Implementation and Management

- [FRA Reporting](#)
- [FRA Statement of Work Templates](#)

XI. Environmental Readiness

- [FRA CE Worksheet](#)
- [FRA CE Companion Guide](#)
- [FRA NEPA Procedures](#)
- [FRA YouTube Recording on NEPA and Competitive Grants](#)



QUESTIONS?

Contact Us

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Connect with us [USDOTFRA](#)



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