

2017

FRA Rail Program Delivery

Meeting

Completing New Grant Applications

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Objective

- ▶ Provide guidance to applicants on how to complete FRA grant applications focusing on:
 - ▶ Eligibility Information
 - ▶ Application Content
 - ▶ Application Review Information
 - ▶ Key Takeaways

What is a NOFO?

What is a NOFO?

- ▶ NOFO = Notice of Funding Opportunity
 - ▶ Announces a grant opportunity to the public
 - ▶ Federal Register
 - ▶ Grants.gov
 - ▶ GrantSolutions.gov
 - ▶ FRA Website: Discretionary Competitive Grant Programs at <https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0997>

What is a NOFO?

- ▶ A NOFO consists of several parts:
 - ▶ Program summary
 - ▶ Key Dates
 - ▶ Addresses
 - ▶ FRA Contact info
 - ▶ Table of Contents
 - ▶ Program Description
 - ▶ Federal Award Information
 - ▶ **Eligibility Information**
 - ▶ **Application and Submission Information**
 - ▶ **Application Review Information**
 - ▶ Federal Award Administration Information
 - ▶ Federal Awarding Agency Contacts

What is a NOFO? Best Practices, etc.

- ▶ Read the NOFO in its entirety, several times, before starting the application process
- ▶ Start early
- ▶ Apply early

Eligibility Information

Eligibility Information*

- ▶ Type of Applicant
 - ▶ Entities identified
 - ▶ Joint applicants must **all** be eligible
- ▶ Type of Project
 - ▶ Project requirements listed
 - ▶ Project examples are provided
- ▶ Cost Sharing/Matching
 - ▶ May or may not be required, parameters will be stated

*Authorizing statutes and appropriations often drive the eligibility information contained in a NOFO

Eligibility Information – FAQs

- ▶ Does FRA prefer applications that include additional matching funds?
 - ▶ It will depend on the grant program. Check the language within the NOFO, but often times, yes
- ▶ What is the difference between a joint applicant and a project partner?
 - ▶ A joint applicant refers to one or more Eligible Applicants (as described in the NOFO) who submit a single application
 - ▶ A project partner refers to one or more stakeholders or collaborators that support the project

Eligibility Information – Best Practice

- ▶ Best Practice –
 - ▶ Ensure matching funds meet minimum requirements
- ▶ Contact FRA with any questions about eligibility
 - ▶ Amy Houser, Program Analyst, at amy.houser@dot.gov

Application Content

Application Content

- ▶ Required Documents
 - ▶ **Project Narrative**
 - ▶ **Statement of Work**
 - ▶ SF424 (Application for Federal Assistance)
 - ▶ Either: SF 424A or 424C- Budget info for Non-Construction OR Construction
 - ▶ Either: SF 424B or 424D – Assurances for Non-Construction OR for Construction
 - ▶ FRA's Additional Assurances and Certifications
 - ▶ SF LLL: Disclosure of Lobbying Activities
 - ▶ Project Development Supporting Documentation
 - ▶ Benefit- Cost Analysis Guidance
 - ▶ <https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0940>
 - ▶ Other required documents, such as NEPA documentation Planning documents

Application Content

- ▶ Applicants are expected to deliver what is proposed in the application
- ▶ FRA must uphold the competitive integrity of its grant programs

Application Content - Project Narrative

- ▶ ***Critical part of the application***
- ▶ Page Limit
- ▶ Formatting
- ▶ Project narrative contents differ for each grant program.
- ▶ Narrative can include several parts

Application Content - Project Narrative

- ▶ May include:
 - ▶ Cover page
 - ▶ Brief summary of the project
 - ▶ Project funding information
 - ▶ Applicant eligibility
 - ▶ Project eligibility
 - ▶ Detailed project description
 - ▶ Project location/map
 - ▶ Project implementation and management
 - ▶ Evaluation and selection criteria
 - ▶ Project readiness

Application Content - Project Narrative

▶ Cover page

- ▶ As indicated in the NOFO, include items, such as:
 - ▶ project title
 - ▶ location (i.e., city, State, Congressional district)
 - ▶ applicant organization name
 - ▶ name of any co-applicants
 - ▶ amount of Federal funding requested
 - ▶ proposed non-Federal match

Application Content - Project Narrative

- ▶ Provide a brief summary of the project
- ▶ Provide Project Funding information
- ▶ Explain how applicant and project meets eligibility criteria
- ▶ Describe the project in detail

Application Content - Project Narrative

- ▶ Provide geospatial data for the project, as well as a map of the project's location
- ▶ Include a thorough discussion of how the proposed project meets all the evaluation criteria and selection criteria
- ▶ Describe project implementation and project management
- ▶ Provide project readiness information, such as NEPA completion or review progress

Project Narrative – Best Practices

- ▶ Be sure to organize the Project Narrative headings and corresponding information exactly as specified in the NOFO
- ▶ The Project Narrative must sufficiently address the evaluation and selection criteria to be a competitive application

Application Content – Statement of Work (SOW)

- ▶ Addresses the scope, schedule, and budget for the proposed project ***as if it was selected for award***
- ▶ A Sample SOW Template is located at:
<https://www.fra.dot.gov/eLib/Details/L18661>.

Application Content – Statement of Work (SOW)

▶ Includes:

- ▶ Background
- ▶ Objective
- ▶ Project Location
- ▶ Description of Work
- ▶ Project Schedule and Deliverables

Application Content – Statement of Work (SOW)

- ▶ Background
 - ▶ High-level overview information regarding the project and applicant/grantee
- ▶ Objective
 - ▶ A clear description of the underlying transportation problem that the project will address
 - ▶ The work that will be accomplished
 - ▶ The end-state of the project
 - ▶ The public benefits

Application Content – Statement of Work (SOW)

▶ Project Location

- ▶ The geographic scope of the project, as well as to identify important related intercity corridors or service
- ▶ Specific and detailed

Application Content – Statement of Work (SOW)

- ▶ Description of Work
 - ▶ Organize the scope of work for the project into discrete tasks
 - ▶ Be clear regarding the work to be done in each task
 - ▶ Tasks must align with proposed deliverable, schedule and budget line items

Application Content – Statement of Work (SOW)

- ▶ Project Schedule and Deliverables
 - ▶ Project Estimate/Budget
 - ▶ Project Coordination
 - ▶ Project Management

Statement of Work (SOW)

– FAQs, Best Practices, etc.

▶ Best Practice

- ▶ Use the FRA Standard Cost Categories as a way to organize a SOW and Budget

- ▶ The FRA Standard Cost Categories are located here:

<https://www.fra.dot.gov/Elib/Document/16647>

Application Review Information

Application Review

1. Intake and Eligibility

Each application is reviewed for completeness and eligibility to determine which applications move to the evaluation stage



2. Evaluation

Each complete and eligible application is evaluated by a panel of DOT subject matter experts using criteria outlined in the NOFO



3. Selection

Final funding decisions are made by taking into account the evaluation and selection criteria outlined in the NOFO

Application Review – Best Practices

- ▶ **Think like a reviewer!**
- ▶ Make a strong case for the overall significance of the proposed project
- ▶ Provide statistics, when possible
- ▶ Include project timeline information
- ▶ Describe the results/outcomes to be achieved by the end of the funding period

Application Review – Best Practices

- ▶ In all responses, be brief, direct and clear
 - ▶ Reviewers have many applications to go through
 - ▶ Write application in such a way that responses to the review criteria are easily identifiable
 - ▶ Do not bury responses in long-winded blocks of text
- ▶ Do not exceed page limits

Key Takeaways

How to Apply

- ▶ Obtain a Dun and Bradstreet number (DUNS)
- ▶ Register in the Federal government's System for Award Management (SAM)
- ▶ For Grants.gov, complete an Authorized Organization Representative profile and create a username and password
- ▶ Submit an application addressing all requirements outlined in the NOFO

Key Takeaways

- ▶ *Follow the directions*
- ▶ Read the NOFO carefully and use a checklist
- ▶ Indicate what "success" will look like.
- ▶ Name key partners, indicate in-place agreements, and include letters of support
- ▶ Register and send in the application early;
- ▶ If applying through Grants.gov, use the "Track My Application" function

Key Takeaways

- ▶ NOFOs identify a point of contact who can address any questions
- ▶ That said, FRA staff cannot give hints, tips or a competitive advantage to one applicant over others

Final Check

- ▶ Are you on schedule to meet the application deadline?
- ▶ Does the project align well with the evaluation and selection criteria?
- ▶ Does the application demonstrate strong collaboration and partnerships?
- ▶ Do the projects benefits exceed the costs?
- ▶ Do all budget figures match corresponding figures on the cover sheet and in the Project Narrative?
 - ▶ Do numbers in columns and rows all add up properly in budget tables?
- ▶ Have you addressed all of the criteria on which you will be rated?
- ▶ Are your strategies, activities, staffing, and other application content in alignment?

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Thank you!

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