How to Compete for New FRA Grants

March 22, 2018

Objective

- Provide guidance to applicants on how to compete for new FRA grants
  - Grant Program Information
  - Application Content
  - Notices of Funding Opportunity
  - Application Review Information
  - Key Takeaways

Grant Program Information

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration

Restoration and Enhancement

Purpose of Program

▶ Provide **operating assistance** to initiate, restore, or enhance intercity passenger rail service

Federal Funding

▶ $4,796,500

Federal Share

▶ 80% 1st year
▶ 60% 2nd year
▶ 40% 3rd year

Restoration and Enhancement

Application Due Date

▶ **May 22, 2018**

Eligible Applicants

▶ State Entities
▶ Public Agencies or Publicly Chartered Authority
▶ Local Governments

▶ Amtrak
▶ Intercity Passenger Rail Carriers
▶ Any Rail Carrier in partnership with at least one state entity, public agency, and/or local government

Eligible Projects

▶ Additional frequency
▶ Extension of service

▶ Offering new on-board services
▶ Establishing new service

Examples of eligible expenses: train engineer staffing, fuel, train dispatching, station management, and overhead.

Restoration and Enhancement

Application Requirements

▶ Identify private sector and/or state, local, or other Federal funding

▶ Include detailed SOW, capital & mobilization plan, operating and funding plans

▶ Provide status of negotiations and agreements with operators (e.g., Amtrak) and host railroads

Restoration and Enhancement

Evaluation Criteria

▶ **Technical Merit:**
  ▶ Project readiness
  ▶ Restoration of service over routes formerly operated by Amtrak
  ▶ Financially sustainable beyond the 3-year grant period

▶ **Public Benefits:**
  ▶ Daily or daytime service
  ▶ Service to underserved communities
  ▶ Promotion of economic development particularly in rural communities
  ▶ Enhancing connectivity and geographic coverage
  ▶ Other non-transportation benefits

Restoration and Enhancement

Selection Criteria

▶ Preference for higher matching funds
▶ Key departmental objectives
  ▶ Supporting Economic Vitality
  ▶ Leveraging Federal Funding
  ▶ Innovative Approaches
  ▶ Accountability

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Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements

Purpose of Program

▶ To fund capital projects that improve safety, efficiency, and/or reliability of intercity passenger and freight rail systems

Federal Funding

▶ $65,232,400
- ▶ $10M for initiation/restoration capital projects
- ▶ At least $17M for rural area projects

Federal Share

▶ Maximum: 80%
▶ Statutory Preference: 50% or less

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements

Application Due Date

▶ **June 21, 2018**

Eligible Applicants

▶ State Entities

▶ Public Agencies or Publicly Chartered Authority

▶ Local Governments

▶ Amtrak or other Intercity Passenger Rail Carrier

▶ Class II or III Railroad

▶ Any Rail Carrier or equipment manufacturer in partnership with at least one state entity, public agency, and/or local government

▶ The Transportation Research Board

▶ A University transportation center engaged in rail-related research

▶ A non-profit labor organization

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Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements

Eligible Projects

▶ Wide Range of Rail Capital Projects:
- ▶ Congestion mitigation
- ▶ Ridership growth facilitation
- ▶ Enhancements to multimodal connections
- ▶ Improvements to short-line or regional railroad infrastructure

▶ Railroad Safety Technology, including PTC

▶ Track, Station, and Equipment Improvements

▶ Grade Crossing Improvements

▶ Rail Line Relocation and Improvement

▶ Regional Planning and Environmental Analyses

▶ Safety Programs and Institutes

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Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements

Application Requirements

▶ Identify private sector, state, and/or local funding
▶ Provide benefit-cost analysis
▶ Separate projects into Tracks:
  ▶ (1) Planning
  ▶ (2) PE/NEPA
  ▶ (3) Final Design/Construction
  ▶ (4) Safety Programs & Institutes

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Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements

Evaluation Criteria

▶ **Technical Merit:**
  ▶ Project readiness
  ▶ Private sector participation
  ▶ Consistent with DOT planning guidance and documents

▶ **Project Benefits:**
  ▶ Effects on system performance, safety, competitiveness, reliability, trip or transit time, and resilience
  ▶ Integration with other modes
  ▶ Ability to meet existing or anticipated demand

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements

Selection Criteria

▶ Preference for higher matching funds, maximized net benefits, and private sector participation

▶ Key departmental objectives
  ▶ Supporting Economic Vitality
  ▶ Leveraging Federal Funding
  ▶ Innovative Approaches
  ▶ Accountability

Notices of Funding Opportunity

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What is a NOFO?

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

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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

NOFO Best Practices

► Read the NOFO in its entirety, several times, before starting the application process

► Start early

► Apply early

Application Content

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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

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Application Content

▶ Required Documents
- ▶ Project Narrative
- ▶ Statement of Work
- ▶ Project Development Supporting Documentation
- ▶ Benefit- Cost Analysis
- ▶ Other required documents, such as NEPA documentation and planning documents

Application Content

▶ Required Forms
  - ▶ SF 424 (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

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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

▶ 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

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.

Statement of Work (SOW) – Best Practices

- Organize the scope of work for the project into discrete tasks
  - Be clear regarding the work to be done in each task
- Align tasks with proposed deliverable, schedule and budget line items
- Use the FRA Standard Cost Categories as a way to organize a SOW and Budget
  - https://www.fra.dot.gov/Elib/Document/16647

CRISI Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA)

▶Follow the general DOT BCA guidance (for TIGER and INFRA projects from July 2017)

▶Refer to FRA's BCA FAQs for some rail specific examples of how to apply the BCA Guidance

CRISI BCA Best Practices

▶ Document ALL assumptions. The more detail, the better.

▶ Clearly state your base & alternative cases.

▶ Work from the bottom up.

▶ Provide individual costs and benefits for all separable project elements.

▶ If you predict modal diversion, provide local data to support your conclusion.

▶ If you use a consultant, double check their work for transparency.

▶ Include an Excel spreadsheet that shows all calculations and assumptions.

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BCA Grade Crossing Tools

▶ GradeDEC link: https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0337

▶ GradeDEC documentation: https://www.fra.dot.gov/eLib/Details/L03761

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Environmental Reviews

▶ Are triggered by a Federal Action

▶ Interact with the planning process

▶ Can help with good decision-making

▶ Required by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Types of Environmental Reviews

▶EIS / ROD: Environmental Impact Statement

▶EA / FONSI: Environmental Assessment

▶CE: Categorical Exclusion

▶Tiered Environmental Documents

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Environmental Readiness

▶ Document NEPA completion or review underway

- ▶ Date of actual or anticipated completion and related milestones
- ▶ Website link to documents

▶ See additional FRA NEPA compliance information at:

https://www.fra.dot.gov/eLib/Details/L05286

Application Review Information

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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

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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

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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

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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

▶ When applying through Grants.gov, use the "Track My Application" function

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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 project 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?

Thank you!

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