CRISI and R&E Grant Program Q&A's (March 22, 2018)

Restoration and Enhancements (R&E) Grants Program

1. Would R&E grant funds cover initiatives already in place to enhance or initiate service?
   FRA will only fund the portion of the net operating costs associated with the Enhancement, Restoration or Initiation, and not the entire project or service. As the R&E Grants Program covers operating costs, the Enhancement, Restoration or Initiation of service must not have begun yet to receive operating assistance.

2. Is Streetcar eligible to receive R&E Operational Assistance?
   Depending on the facts of the specific service, streetcars likely provide either "commuter rail passenger transportation" (49 U.S.C. 24102) or "urban rapid transit operations" (see 49 CFR Part 209, App. A.) A project for either service is not eligible.

3. Are projects that are anticipated to start in 3-5 years from now eligible to apply for operating assistance funding and banking it until the service begins, or are there timeline requirements?
   Although there is no deadline for the commencement of service to be eligible to receive operational assistance through the R&E Grants Program, one of the priorities in the evaluation criteria is readiness of service.

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Grant Program

1. Are commuter railroad projects eligible?
   Most commuter railroads are eligible to apply as a public agency. However, CRISI cannot fund commuter rail projects. If there are shared-use corridors, FRA can fund the freight or intercity passenger rail portions of projects.

2. Are Tribal Governments eligible applicants?
   They are not eligible applicants. Tribal governments could seek to work with one of the eligible applicants if there is an eligible project located on tribal land.

3. Are high speed rail (HSR) entities eligible to apply for CRISI grants?
   If the HSR entity is an intercity passenger rail carrier or other eligible applicant, then yes.

4. What is the eligibility for Tier 1 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation?
   Track 1 – Planning includes Tier 1 NEPA documentation.

5. Is a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or Regional Transportation Planning Organization eligible to apply?
   An MPO or Regional Transportation Planning Organization may also be eligible to apply if it is a public agency or if it falls within one of the other eligible recipient categories in 49 USC 24407 (b).

6. Is a benefit cost analysis (BCA) required for planning award? If so, what do you evaluate, the planning effort or the future improvement?

> The BCA must demonstrate in economic terms the merits of investing in the proposed project. The BCA for Track 1—Planning projects should be for the underlying project, not the Planning work itself. The project narrative should summarize the project's benefits.

7. Is there a defined Period of Performance limitation for Tracks 2 and 3?

> No.

8. Does a Safety/Quiet Zone project require a NEPA study?

> Yes.

9. Is an approved FRA NEPA Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) a pre-requisite for applying for Track 3 final design (FD)/Construction?
   Given that the cost of preliminary engineering is usually wrapped into the cost estimates given during the Railroad's Quiet Zone diagnostic, is completion of the diagnostic sufficient for applying via Track 3?

> The Preliminary Engineering (PE)/NEPA and design work for a CRISI project do not have to be completed before the application due date. See the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) requirements for FD and/or construction projects in Section C(3)(b)(iii). The applicant should document its plan if it decides to pay for those items. See the NOFO Section D(2)(a)(x-xi). Note that if selected for a grant, activities initiated prior to the execution of a cooperative agreement or without FRA's written approval may not be eligible for reimbursement or included as a grantee's matching contribution.

10. Can the grant money be used for a project that has components on railroads controlled/owed by more than one railroad?

> Yes.

11. In terms of ranking grants, are those projects designed to reduce congestion evaluated separately from those that provide safety benefits? Or do we get a benefit if our proposal reduces congestion and improves safety?

> FRA will be considering all of the criteria in the Project Benefits Section E(1)(b)(i) of the Notice of Funding Opportunity when evaluating the project benefits of proposed CRISI projects. Please refer to the Benefit-Cost Analysis Guidance for Discretionary Grant Programs for information on preparing a BCA for CRISI applications. In addition, please also refer to the BCA FAQs for some rail specific examples of how to apply the BCA Guidance for Discretionary Grant Programs to CRISI applications.

12. Is a full-blown Project Management Plan required for Track 2 and 3?

> A Project Management Plan is not a CRISI grant program requirement, as part of the application. For the implementation and project management information required in the application project narrative, see the NOFO Section D(2)(a)(ix).

13. Are rail projects that don't have an immediate passenger rail service benefit, but establish the foundation for future passenger rail improvements, eligible for CRISI funding? For example: projects that in the short term would only offer benefits to host railroad, with future improvements extending the benefits to Amtrak service.

    Yes.

GRANT ADMINISTRATION

14. When will FRA announce grant selections?

    FRA expects to announce the CRISI and R&E grant selections in the Fall of 2018.

15. How much time does the actual review process take?

    The application review and selection review process typically takes approximately four months, but the length of time is dependent on the number of applications received.

16. What is the typical timing from application to award?

    The typical timing from the application due date to the award or obligation of funding is approximately 10 – 18 months.

17. How long does it take to register with System for Award Management (SAM)?

    It can take several days or longer to complete the SAM registration. According to the SAM website, the average overall processing time is up to three business days, but the external reviews can take up to ten business days.

18. Which grant would cover positive train control (PTC)?

    Deployment of railroad safety technology, including PTC is an eligible CRISI project. Expenses associated with the operation of PTC are eligible under the R&E grants program.