



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Transit Administration

Competitive Funding Opportunity: Public Transportation COVID-19 Research Demonstration Grant Program

AGENCY: Federal Transit Administration (FTA), DOT.

ACTION: Notice of funding opportunity.

SUMMARY: The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency has had a significant impact on transit operations. During a series of FTA listening sessions held over the last three months, transit agencies asked FTA to support research to identify solutions to address the operational challenges that they are facing as a result of COVID-19. In response, FTA makes available through this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) funding to support research demonstration grants to public transit agencies to develop, deploy, and demonstrate innovative solutions that improve the operational efficiency of transit agencies, as well as enhance the mobility of transit users affected by the COVID-19 public health emergency. Demonstration grants under this NOFO are authorized under FTA's Public Transportation Innovation Program (49 U.S.C. 5312). Eligible projects will demonstrate innovative solutions to improve the operational efficiencies of transit systems and enhance mobility for their communities in four major areas: (1) vehicle, facility, equipment and infrastructure cleaning and disinfection; (2) exposure mitigation measures; (3) innovative mobility such as contactless payments; and (4) measures that strengthen public confidence in transit services. The total funding available for awards under this NOFO is \$10,000,000. FTA may supplement this amount if additional funding becomes available.

DATES: Applicants must submit completed proposals for funding opportunity FTA-2020-015-TRI through the GRANTS.GOV “APPLY” function by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on November 2, 2020. Prospective applicants should register as soon as possible on the GRANTS.GOV website to ensure they can complete the application process before the submission deadline. Application instructions are available on FTA’s website at <http://transit.dot.gov/howtoapply> and in the “FIND” module of GRANTS.GOV. FTA will not accept mail and fax submissions.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Please send any questions on this notice to Jamel El-Hamri email: Jamel.El-Hamri@dot.gov phone: 2020-366-8985. A Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD) is available for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing at 1-800-877-8339.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

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A. Program Description

The Public Transportation COVID-19 Research Demonstration Grant Program is funded through the Public Transportation Innovation Program (49 U.S.C. 5312), with the goal to develop, deploy, and demonstrate innovative solutions that improve the operational efficiency of transit agencies, as well as enhance the mobility of transit users affected by the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Eligible projects will propose to develop and deploy innovative solutions in four major areas: (1) vehicle, facility, equipment and infrastructure cleaning and disinfection; (2) exposure mitigation measures; (3) innovative mobility such as contactless payments; and (4) measures that strengthen public confidence in transit.

As required by 49 U.S.C. 5312(e)(4), projects funded under this NOFO must participate in an evaluation by an independent outside entity that will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the success or failure of the projects funded under this subsection and any plan for broad-based implementation of the innovation promoted by successful projects.

B. Federal Award Information

FTA makes available \$10,000,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2020 funds under the Public Transportation Innovation Program (49 U.S.C. 5312) to finance the Public Transportation COVID-19 Research Demonstration Grant Program. FTA may supplement the total funds available if additional funding becomes available at the time project selections are made.

FTA will grant pre-award authority starting on the date of the project award announcement for selected projects and should be completed within 24 months from the date of award. Funds are available only for eligible expenses incurred after the announcement of project selections.

C. Eligibility Information

1) Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include State and local governmental authorities, direct recipients of Urbanized Area (49 U.S.C. 5307) and Rural Area (49 U.S.C. 5311) formula funds, and Indian tribes. Eligible applicants are limited to FTA grantees or subrecipients who would be the primary beneficiaries of the innovative products and services that are developed -- typically public transit agencies. Except for projects proposed by Indian tribes, proposals for projects in rural (non-urbanized) areas must be submitted as part of a consolidated State proposal. States and other eligible applicants also may submit consolidated proposals for projects in urbanized areas. The submission of the Statewide application will not preclude the submission and consideration of any application from other eligible recipients in an urbanized area in a State. Proposals may contain projects to be implemented by the recipient or its subrecipients. Eligible subrecipients include public agencies, private nonprofit organizations, and private providers engaged in public transportation. Eligible applicants may submit consolidated proposals for projects.

2) Cost Sharing or Matching

The maximum Federal share of project costs is 100 percent. FTA may give additional consideration to applicants that propose a local share and may view these applicants as more competitive. The applicant must document the source(s) of the local match, if any, in the grant application. For any applicants proposing match, eligible local match sources include the following:

- cash from non-Government sources other than revenues from providing public transportation services;
- revenues derived from the sale of advertising and concessions;

- revenues generated from value capture financing mechanisms;
- funds from an undistributed cash surplus;
- replacement or depreciation cash fund or reserve;
- new capital; or
- in-kind contributions.

3) Eligible Projects

Eligible projects will propose innovative solutions to improve operational efficiencies of transit agencies and enhance the mobility of transit users, through projects that demonstrate innovative solutions for:

- vehicle, facility, equipment and infrastructure cleaning and disinfection;
- exposure mitigation measures such a real-time notification of rail and bus passenger loads;
- new multi-modal payment innovative mobility systems such as contactless payments; and
- measures that strengthen public confidence in transit.

Each applicant may only submit one proposal.

D. Application and Submission Information

1) Address and Form of Application Submission

Applications must be submitted through GRANTS.GOV. Applicants can find general information for submitting applications through GRANTS.GOV at www.fta.dot.gov/howtoapply, along with specific instructions for the forms and attachments required for submission. Mail and fax submissions will not be accepted.

2) Content and Form of Application Submission

a. Proposal Submission

A complete proposal submission consists of at least two forms:

1. the SF-424 Mandatory Form (downloadable from GRANTS.GOV) and
2. the supplemental form for the FY 2020 COVID-19 Demonstration Program

(downloadable from GRANTS.GOV), which is available on FTA's website at (placeholder for FTA COVID-19 Demonstration Program).

The application must include responses to all sections of the SF-424 mandatory form and the supplemental form unless a section is indicated as optional. FTA will use the information on the supplemental form to determine applicant and project eligibility for the program and to evaluate the proposal against the selection criteria described in part E of this notice. FTA will accept only one supplemental form per SF-424 submission. FTA encourages applicants to consider submitting a single supplemental form that includes multiple activities to be evaluated as a consolidated proposal.

Applicants may attach additional supporting information to the SF-424 submission, including but not limited to letters of support, project budgets, or excerpts from relevant planning documents. Supporting documentation must be described and referenced by file name in the appropriate response section of the supplemental form, or it may not be reviewed.

Information such as applicant name, Federal amount requested, local match amount, description of areas served, etc., may be requested in varying degrees of detail on both the SF-424 form and supplemental form. Applicants must fill in all fields unless stated otherwise on the forms. If applicants copy information into the supplemental form from another source, they

should verify that the supplemental form has fully captured pasted text and that it has not truncated the text due to character limits built into the form. Applicants should use both the "Check Package for Errors" and the "Validate Form" validation buttons on both forms to check all required fields. Applicants should also ensure that the Federal and local amounts specified are consistent.

Addressing the deteriorating conditions and disproportionately high fatality rates on our rural transportation infrastructure is of critical interest to the Department, as rural transportation networks face unique challenges in safety, infrastructure condition, and passenger and freight usage. Consistent with the R.O.U.T.E.S. Initiative, the Department encourages applicants to consider how the project will address the challenges faced by rural areas.

b. Application Content

The SF-424 Mandatory Form and the supplemental form will prompt applicants for the required information, including:

- i. Applicant Name
- ii. Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number
- iii. Key contact information (contact name, address, email address, and phone number)
- iv. Congressional district(s) where project will take place
- v. Project Information (title, executive summary, and type)
- vi. A detailed description of the need for the project
- vii. A detailed description of how the project will support the Program objectives

- viii. Evidence that the applicant can provide the local cost shares
- ix. A description of the technical, legal, and financial capacity of the applicant
- x. A detailed project budget
- xi. Details on the local matching funds
- xii. A detailed project timeline
- xiii. Whether the project impacts an Opportunity Zone

3) Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

Each applicant is required to: (1) be registered in SAM before submitting an application; (2) provide a valid unique entity identifier in its application; and (3) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which the applicant has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by FTA. These requirements do not apply if the applicant: (1) is excepted from the requirements under 2 CFR 25.110(b) or (c); or (2) has an exception approved by FTA under 2 CFR 25.110(d). FTA may not make an award until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements. If an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time FTA is ready to make an award, FTA may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive an award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant. All applicants must provide a unique entity identifier provided by SAM. Registration in SAM may take as little as 3-5 business days, but there can be unexpected steps or delays. For example, the applicant may need to obtain an Employer Identification Number. FTA recommends allowing ample time, up to several weeks, to complete all steps. For additional information on obtaining a unique entity identifier, please visit www.sam.gov.

4) Submission Dates and Times

Project proposals must be submitted electronically through GRANTS.GOV by 11:59 p.m. Eastern on November 2, 2020. Mail and fax submissions will not be accepted.

FTA urges applicants to submit applications at least 72 hours prior to the due date to allow time to correct any problems that may have caused either GRANTS.GOV or FTA systems to reject the submission. Proposals submitted after the deadline will only be considered under extraordinary circumstances not within the applicant's control.

Deadlines will not be extended due to scheduled website maintenance. GRANTS.GOV scheduled maintenance and outage times are announced on the GRANTS.GOV website.

Within 48 hours after submitting an electronic application, the applicant should receive two email messages from GRANTS.GOV: (1) confirmation of successful transmission to GRANTS.GOV; and (2) confirmation of successful validation by GRANTS.GOV. If the applicant does not receive confirmation of successful validation or receives a notice of failed validation or incomplete materials, the applicant must address the reason for the failed validation, as described in the email notice, and resubmit before the submission deadline. If making a resubmission for any reason, applicants must include all original attachments regardless of which attachments were updated and check the box on the supplemental form indicating this is a resubmission.

Applicants are encouraged to begin the process of registration on the GRANTS.GOV site well in advance of the submission deadline. Registration is a multi-step process, which may take several weeks to complete before an application can be submitted. Registered applicants may still be required to update their registration before submitting an application. Registration in SAM is renewed annually and persons making submissions on behalf of the Authorized

Organization Representative (AOR) must be authorized in GRANTS.GOV by the AOR to make submissions.

5) Funding Restrictions

Funds may be used for post-award expenditures only. Funds under this NOFO cannot be used to reimburse projects for otherwise eligible expenses incurred prior to the date of project award announcements.

6) Other Submission Requirements

FTA encourages applicants to identify scaled funding options in case insufficient funding is available to fund a project at the full requested amount. If an applicant indicates that a project is scalable, the applicant must provide an appropriate minimum funding amount that will fund an eligible project that achieves the objectives of the program and meets all relevant program requirements. The applicant must provide a clear explanation of how a reduced award would affect the project budget and scope. FTA may award a lesser amount whether or not the applicant provides a scalable option.

E. Application Review Information

1) Project Evaluation Criteria

Addressing the deteriorating conditions and disproportionately high fatality rates on our rural transportation infrastructure is of critical interest to the Department, as rural transportation networks face unique challenges in safety, infrastructure condition, and passenger and freight usage. Consistent with the R.O.U.T.E.S. Initiative, the Department will consider how the project will address the challenges faced by rural areas. In addition, the Department will review and consider applications for funding pursuant to this Notice in accordance with the President's September 2, 2020 memorandum, entitled *Memorandum on Reviewing Funding to State and*

Local Government Recipients of Federal Funds that Are Permitting Anarchy, Violence, and Destruction in American Cities, consistent with guidance from the Office of Management and Budget and the Attorney General and with all applicable laws.

FTA will evaluate proposals submitted according to the following criteria: (a) Project Innovation and Impact; (b) Project Approach; (c) National Applicability; (d) Commercialization and/or Knowledge Transfer; and (e) Technical, Legal and Financial Capacity. FTA encourages each applicant to demonstrate how a project supports all criteria with the most relevant information the applicant can provide, regardless of whether such information has been specifically requested or identified in this notice.

a. Project Innovation and Impact

- i. Effectiveness of the project in achieving and demonstrating the specific objectives of this program.
- ii. Demonstration of benefits in addressing the needs of the transit agency and industry and impacts to infrastructure, equipment, transit workforce, and riders
- iii. Degree of improvement over current and existing technologies, designs, and/or practices applicable to the transit industry.

b. Project Approach

- i. Quality of the project approach such as existing partnerships, collaboration strategies and level of commitment of the project partners.
- ii. Proposal is realistic in its approach to fulfill the milestones/ deliverables, schedule and goals.

c. National Applicability

- i. Degree to which the project could be replicated by other transit agencies regionally or nationally
- ii. Ability to evaluate technologies, designs and/or practices in a wide variety of conditions and locales.
- iii. Degree to which the technology, designs and/or practices can be replicated by other transportation modes.

d. Commercialization and/or Knowledge Transfer

- i. Demonstrates a realistic plan for moving the results of the project into the transit marketplace (patents, conferences, articles in trade magazines, webinar, site visits, etc.).
- ii. How the project team plans to work with the industry on improving best practices, guidance and/or standards, if applicable.
- iii. Demonstrate a clear understanding and robust approach to data collection, access and management.

e. Technical, Legal and Financial Capacity

Capacity of the applicant and any partners to successfully execute the project effort. There should be no outstanding legal, technical, or financial issues with the applicant that would make this a high-risk project.

2) Review and Selection Process

An FTA technical evaluation committee will evaluate proposals based on the published project evaluation criteria. Members of the technical evaluation committee will rate the applications and may seek clarification about any statement in an application. The FTA

Administrator will determine the final selection and amount of funding for each project after consideration of the findings of the technical evaluation committee. Geographic diversity, diversity of the project type, the amount of local match to be provided, and the applicant's receipt and management of other Federal transit funds may be considered in FTA's award decisions. Prior fare payment innovation efforts may receive priority consideration. The FTA Administrator will consider the following key DOT objectives:

- a. Utilizing alternative funding sources and innovative financing models to attract non-Federal sources of investment;
- b. Whether the project is located in or supports public transportation service in a qualified opportunity zone designated pursuant to 26.U.S.C. 1400Z-1; and
- c. The extent to which the project addresses challenges specific to the provision of rural public transportation.

3) FAPIIS Review

Prior to making a grant award, FTA is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS) accessible through SAM. An applicant may review and comment on information about itself that a Federal awarding agency previously entered.

FTA will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in FAPIIS, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 CFR 200.205 Federal Awarding Agency Review of Risk Posed by Applicants.

F. Federal Award Administration Information

1) Federal Award Notices

FTA will announce the final project selections on the FTA Web site. Project recipients should contact their FTA Regional Office for additional information regarding allocations for projects. At the time project selections are announced, FTA will extend pre-award authority for the selected projects. There is no blanket pre-award authority for these projects before announcement.

There is no minimum or maximum grant award amount, but FTA intends to fund as many meritorious projects as possible. FTA only will consider proposals from eligible recipients for eligible activities. Due to funding limitations, projects selected for funding may receive less than the amount originally requested. In those cases, applicants must be able to demonstrate that the proposed projects are still viable and can be completed with the amount awarded.

2) Administrative and National Policy Requirements

a. Pre-Award Authority

FTA will issue specific guidance to recipients regarding pre-award authority at the time of selection. FTA does not provide pre-award authority for competitive funds until projects are selected, and there are Federal requirements that must be met before costs are incurred. For more information about FTA's policy on pre-award authority, *see* the FY 2020 Apportionments Notice published on June 3, 2020, at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-06-03/pdf/2020-11946.pdf>

b. Grant Requirements

Selected applicants will submit a grant application through FTA's electronic grant management system and adhere to the customary FTA grant requirements for research project

(insert Circular name). All competitive grants, regardless of award amount, will be subject to the Congressional notification and release process. FTA emphasizes that third-party procurement applies to all funding awards, as described in FTA Circular 4220.1F, “Third Party Contracting Guidance.” However, FTA may approve applications that include a specifically identified partnering organization(s) (2 CFR 200.302(f)). When included, the application, budget, and budget narrative should provide a clear understanding of how the selection of these organizations is critical for the project and give sufficient detail about the costs involved.

c. Planning

FTA encourages applicants to engage the appropriate State Departments of Transportation, Regional Transportation Planning Organizations, or Metropolitan Planning Organizations in areas to be served by the project funds available under this program.

d. Standard Assurances

The applicant assures that it will comply with all applicable Federal statutes, regulations, executive orders, FTA circulars, and other Federal administrative requirements in carrying out any project supported by the FTA grant. The applicant acknowledges that it is under a continuing obligation to comply with the terms and conditions of the grant agreement issued for its project with FTA. The applicant understands that Federal laws, regulations, policies, and administrative practices might be modified from time to time and may affect the implementation of the project. The applicant agrees that the most recent Federal requirements will apply to the project unless FTA issues a written determination otherwise. The applicant must submit the Certifications and Assurances before receiving a grant if it does not have current certifications on file.

e. Free Speech and Religious Liberty

In connection with any program or activity conducted with or benefiting from funds awarded under this notice, recipients of funds must comply with all applicable requirements of Federal law, including, without limitation, the Constitution of the United States; statutory, regulatory, and public policy requirements, including without limitation, those protecting free speech, religious liberty, public welfare, the environment, and prohibiting discrimination; the conditions of performance, non-discrimination requirements, and other assurances made applicable to the award of funds in accordance with regulations of the Department of Transportation; and applicable Federal financial assistance and contracting principles promulgated by the Office of Management and Budget. In complying with these requirements, recipients must ensure that no concession agreements are denied or other contracting decisions made on the basis of speech or other activities protected by the First Amendment. If the Department determines that a recipient has failed to comply with applicable Federal requirements, the Department may terminate the award of funds and disallow previously incurred costs, requiring the recipient to reimburse any expended award funds.

3) Reporting

The post-award reporting requirements include submission of the Federal Financial Report (FFR) and Milestone Progress Report in TrAMS. An evaluation of the grant will occur at various points in the demonstration process and at the end of the project. In addition, FTA is responsible for producing an Annual Report to Congress that compiles evaluation of selected projects, including an evaluation of the performance measures identified by the applicants. All applicants must develop an evaluation plan to measure the success or failure of their projects and

describe any plans for broad-based implementation of successful projects. FTA may request data and reports to support the evaluation and Annual Report.

a. Independent Evaluation

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the impacts and implications of each proposed COVID-19 Research Demonstration Program, projects funded under this announcement will require the recipient to conduct a third party independent evaluation of their project. Recipients will be required to contract with a third party independent evaluator to assist in developing an evaluation plan, and collecting, storing and managing data required to fulfill the evaluation requirement. No more than 10 percent of the Federal share of the project may be used to hire the third-party independent evaluator and the inclusion of a third-party independent evaluation should be described in the grant application. If the project duration is more than two years, an interim evaluation report would need to be submitted to FTA, otherwise the evaluation report should be included as part of the final project report.

b. COVID-19 Research Demonstration Grant Program Evaluation

Projects funded under this announcement will be required to establish a set of performance metrics set by the third-party independent evaluator and shared with FTA.

G. Federal Awarding Agency Contacts Information

For questions about applying, please contact Jamel El-Hamri email: Jamel.El-Hamri@dot.gov phone: 202-366-8985. A TDD is available at 1-800-877-8339 (TDDFIRS). To ensure that applicants receive accurate information about eligibility or the program, applicants are encouraged to contact FTA directly with questions, rather than through intermediaries or third parties.

FTA staff also may conduct briefings on the competitive grants selection and award process upon request.

K. Jane Williams,

Deputy Administrator.

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