

ACTION: Notice; request for proposals.

SUMMARY: This solicitation is for proposals for a cooperative agreement to research the processes and performance measures used by Federal agencies to award and manage grants and the methods these agencies employ to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs that they fund. This research will be funded by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The total available funding is \$200,000.

DATES: Proposals must be submitted electronically by **May 28, 2009** (45 days after the notice is posted on www.grants.gov). Anyone intending to apply should initiate the process of registering on the <http://www.grants.gov> website immediately to ensure completion of registration before the deadline for submission.

ADDRESSES: Proposals must be submitted electronically to <http://www.grants.gov>. Grants.Gov allows organizations to electronically find and apply for competitive grant opportunities from all Federal grant-making agencies. Grants.Gov is the single access point for over 1,000 grant programs offered by the 26 Federal grant-making agencies. Anyone intending to apply should initiate the process of registering on the <http://www.grants.gov> website immediately to ensure completion of registration before the deadline for submission.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. David Schneider at (202) 493-0175 or David.Schneider@dot.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Funding Opportunity Description

SUMMARY

The recipient of this cooperative agreement will select a sample of Federal grant programs whose uses and restrictions, eligibility requirements, application and award procedures, funding levels, and Federal management policy directives are similar to the formula grant programs administered by FTA. For each program, researchers would examine the process and performance measures used by the agencies to award and manage their grants and the methods these agencies employ to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs that they fund. On the basis of this information, researchers will make recommendations on how FTA might incorporate effective practices employed by other agencies.

BACKGROUND

FTA is one of ten agencies in the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and provides funding to state and local entities to construct and operate public transportation services. FTA makes grants primarily for capital investments but also provides some grants for operating assistance. Each year, local agencies leverage FTA grants in combination with fares and other local revenue sources to deliver more than nine billion trips on buses, streetcars, vans, ferry boats, light rail, heavy rail, and commuter rail. For many people, public transportation provides

an affordable, safe, and dependable alternative to driving a car on congested roads. For many other Americans, transit is a vital link to employment, medical services, education, and other opportunities.

Over the course of Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, FTA processed 2,811 grants for a total of \$11 billion. FTA also actively manages and provides oversight for a portfolio of \$58 billion in active grants that span multiple years. On an annual basis, more than 80 percent of FTA funds are allocated to grant recipients by customized formulas and 20 percent are allocated at the discretion of Congress or the FTA. FTA administers the following formula grant programs:

- The Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Programs (49 U.S.C. Sections 5303, 5304, and 5305). These programs provide funding to support cooperative, continuous, and comprehensive planning for making transportation investment decisions in metropolitan areas and statewide.
- The Urbanized Area Formula Program (49 U.S.C. Section 5307), which makes Federal resources available for transit capital and, in some cases, for operating assistance in urbanized areas and for transportation related planning. Eligible purposes include planning, engineering design and evaluation of transit projects and other technical transportation-related studies; capital investments in bus and bus-related activities such as replacement of buses, overhaul of buses, rebuilding of buses, crime prevention and security equipment and construction of maintenance and passenger facilities; and capital investments in new and existing fixed guideway systems including rolling stock, overhaul and rebuilding of vehicles, track, signals, communications, and computer hardware and software.
- The Capital Investment Program, Fixed Guideway Modernization Program (49 U.S.C. Section 5309), which provides capital assistance for the modernization of existing fixed guideway systems.
- The Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities Program (49 U.S.C. Section 5310), which provides formula funding to States for the purpose of assisting private nonprofit groups in meeting the transportation needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting these needs.
- The Nonurbanized Area Formula Program (49 U.S. C. Section 5311), which provides formula funding to states for the purpose of supporting public transportation in areas of less than 50,000 populations. Funds may be used for capital, operating, and administrative assistance to state agencies, local public bodies, Indian tribes, and nonprofit organizations, and operators of public transportation services. The state must use 15 percent of its annual apportionment to support intercity bus service, unless the Governor certifies, after consultation with affected intercity bus providers that the needs of the state are adequately met.

- The Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program (49 U.S.C. Section 5316), which funds transportation projects designed to help low-income individuals to have access to employment and related activities where existing transit is either unavailable, inappropriate, or insufficient. The JARC program also funds reverse commute transit services available to the general public.
- The New Freedom Program (49 U.S.C. Section 5317), which funds projects that reduce barriers to transportation services for people with disabilities and expand the transportation mobility options available to people with disabilities beyond the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

Additional information on FTA grant programs can be found at <http://www.fta.dot.gov> and FTA grant programs can be found in the Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) in series 20.500. See <http://www.cfda.gov>.

Over the past ten years, the number of grants awarded and managed by FTA has increased markedly while the number of employees and other resources available to administer the public transit grants has remained relatively constant. For example, the 2,811 grants processed by FTA in FY 2008 represents a 26 percent increase over FY 2007 and a 46 percent increase over the number of grants processed in FY 2001. FTA anticipates that its grant-making activities will significantly increase in FY 2009 as the result of funds made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This increase in the volume and monetary amount of grants awarded means that FTA is under increasing pressure to ensure that grants are awarded in a timely and effective manner, that projects, once funded, are being managed consistent with the requirements of the grant, and that the funds awarded are resulting in tangible improvements for the communities they are intended to serve.

Although FTA has established a goal for the amount of time it will take to award grants, additional performance goals may help FTA more effectively award and manage its formula grants. In addition, examiners from the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program have encouraged FTA to benchmark its grants processes against those of other agencies. The Baldrige program examiners have noted that FTA does not compare itself to other grant-processing Federal agencies and that without an analysis of comparative data, FTA may not be able to fully understand how it compares with the relative customer satisfaction of other organizations providing similar products or services.

FTA may be able to improve its grant award, management, and evaluation activities if it had a better understanding of how other Federal government agencies award, manage, and evaluate comparable grant programs. This information may also be of interest to other Federal agencies that award, manage, and evaluate the effects of financial assistance.

OBJECTIVES

The proposed research and demonstration activities will:

- Support FTA's FY 2009 Annual Performance Plan objective of managing the development, approval and administration of grants that support provision of excellent public transportation service.
- Support FTA's strategic research goal to conduct research that improves the performance of transit operations and systems.
- Support FTA's continuous improvement goals, which include increasing the number of decisions that are driven by empirical information.

TASKS

FTA expects that the research of the cooperative agreement will contain the following elements:

1. The recipient shall select between four to six Federal domestic formula grant programs (i.e., "comparison programs") that have uses and restrictions, eligibility requirements, application and award process, funding levels, and Federal management policy directives that are similar to one or more of the formula grant programs administered by the FTA. In addition, the FTA is interested in benchmarking its grant programs against domestic programs that provide assistance for transportation, housing, community development, health, or employment labor and training. A comprehensive list of Federal domestic assistance programs is included in the Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance at www.cfda.gov.
2. For each reference program selected, the cooperative agreement recipient shall investigate the following topics:
 - a) The processes that the Federal department uses to award funds to a recipient, such as how applications are solicited, reviewed, and awarded.
 - b) The performance measures (such as the time taken to award funds) that the department employs to manage its grant-award process.
 - c) The processes that the agency uses to manage the grant after it is awarded; such as how comparison agencies monitor disbursements and grantee progress towards milestones identified in the grant, and compliance with Federal requirements.
 - d) The performance measures comparison agencies use to guide its post-award grants management process.
 - e) The processes that the agency uses to evaluate the outputs and outcomes of the programs that it funded.
 - f) The performance measures employed by the agency to evaluate grant program outputs and outcomes.
3. The cooperative agreement recipient shall prepare a report that summarizes its findings in section two (above), assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the other agency processes relative to the process that FTA currently uses to award, manage, and evaluate its formula grant programs, and makes recommendations to FTA on how to strengthen its grants administration. The contractor shall compare performance measures of all the grant programs reviewed to look for commonly measured characteristics that can become the basis for cross-agency comparisons. Issues associated with this kind of performance

benchmarking shall be explored and candidate measures for this purpose shall be identified.

II—Award Information

FTA will fund one cooperative agreement for a one-year award. FTA funding for this cooperative agreement will not exceed \$200,000. FTA will participate in activities by attending review meetings, commenting on technical reports, maintaining frequent contact with the project manager, approving key decisions and activities, and redirecting activities if needed.

Cost Sharing or Matching:

Federal transit funds are available to research projects at up to 100 percent of the project cost. However, cost sharing will be an evaluation criterion.

III. Eligibility Information

Eligible recipients include State and local government agencies, Native American tribal governments, public and private transit agencies, universities, non-profit organizations, consultants, legally constituted public agencies, operators of public transportation services, and private for-profit organizations.

IV. Proposal Content

This announcement includes all of the information that you need to apply. The following forms are available in grants.gov and are required to be completed:

1. SF 424
2. Other Attachments Form
3. A description of key personnel

1. SF 424

Most of SF 424 is self explanatory. The application should answer the following items as follows:

- 1a – Application
- 1b – Annual
- 4a – Leave blank
- 4b – 26

2. Other Attachments Form:

Applicants should prepare their proposals and work plan to be funded over a twelve month period. The application should attach a pre-application as outlined in Chapter II (Item 9.b) of

FTA Circular 6100.C: Transit Research and Technology Programs: Application Instructions and Program Management Guidelines, http://www.fta.dot.gov/laws/leg_reg_circulars_guidance.html. The standard submission for the pre-application is approximately five pages and must include the information listed in the outline below:

- a. Project Objective. A concise statement of the intended project objective.
 - b. Project Description. A description of the proposed project activities to be undertaken in detail by major task with principal output, identification of the person or organization to be responsible for the development, coordination and management of specific activities. The project description should also include a preliminary list of Federal programs that the recipient plans to benchmark against FTA formula grant programs.
 - c. Major Technology Transfer/Dissemination/Outputs. For example, reports (interim, final or other), products, brochures, outreach meetings, etc.
 - d. Project Schedule. A project schedule must be presented, including schedule of major tasks, and an overall project schedule. The schedule should be realistic.
 - e. Benefits and Beneficiaries. The anticipated benefits and the targeted beneficiaries must be described, including quantification or measure of the potential impact. Be as specific as possible.
 - f. Project Budget Justification. If appropriate, discuss specifics about the proposed project budget or breakdown by the given categories, and supplemental information to justify the need for such expenditures. If the budget line items are self-evident, no justification will be necessary. The project budget justification should include identification of any matching funds and their source.
 - g. Project Timing. If appropriate, discuss other pending projects or program activities that may relate to and affect the timing of the proposed project. If there are no special considerations affecting the timing of the proposed project, indicate "N/A." For additional guidance in writing proposals, visit the following web address: <http://www.cfda.gov/public/>
3. The application should attach a description of key personnel, including resumes. This information can be included in an appendix to the application.

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V. Application Review Information

A review panel will be convened to review each proposal. Project proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Proposed Research, which includes the applicability of the proposed research to the requirements, the uniqueness and or need for the research, and the expected results.
2. Qualification of Key Personnel, which includes knowledge of and prior experience researching and writing about Federal grant making programs and program evaluation.

3. Technical Management Plan, which includes the management approach for planning, scheduling, administering, coordinating and conducting the work effort.
4. Past Performance on activities relevant to the proposed work.
5. Cost Sharing.
6. Plan for evaluation and data collection.

VI. Award administration Information

The anticipated notification date for the award of this cooperative agreement is the **summer of 2009**. Following receipt of the FTA Administrator's notification letter, the successful entity will be required to submit the Formal Application as outlined in Chapter II (Items 10-25) of FTA Circular 6100.C: Transit Research and Technology Programs: Application Instructions and Program Management Guidelines at http://www.fta.dot.gov/laws/leg_reg_circulars_guidance.html through the FTA Transportation Electronic Award Management (TEAM) system website.

FTA will manage the cooperative agreement through the TEAM system website. Before FTA may award Federal financial assistance through a Federal grant or cooperative agreement, the entity must submit all certifications and assurances pertaining to itself and its project as required by Federal laws and regulations. Since FY 1995, FTA has been consolidating the various certifications and assurances that may be required of its awardees and the projects into a single document published in the Federal Register. FY 2009 Annual List of Certifications and Assurances for FTA Grants and Cooperative Agreements and guidelines will be published in the Federal Register and posted on the FTA website at <http://www.fta.dot.gov>.

Recipients will be required to manage their projects in accordance with FTA Circular 6100.C: Transit Research and Technology Programs: Application Instructions and Program Management Guidelines at http://www.fta.dot.gov/laws/leg_reg_circulars_guidance.html. This includes requirements on project management and administration, including quarterly reporting, financial management, and payment.