

NDDOT Grant Preparation and Management Advice

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The following is general grant advice and information NDDOT offers from experience. It is provided strictly as a service to our transportation partners and should be used at your own risk.

- Read the NOFO in detail.
 - Follow exact formatting and content instructions. Most federal grant opportunities receive many times more applications than can be funded. Therefore, even great projects can be eliminated if directions are not followed.
 - Often the NOFO will give an outline on subsections where each criteria should be addressed in the narrative, make sure to follow that in your format. It is much easier for the federal review teams to find and score information you're sharing if it is included in the prescribed section of your application.
 - Anything applicants can do to make it easier for the reviewers will go a long way for the grant review team when recommending a project for funding.
 - Think of a grant application as a high-school or college term paper and marketing document in one. The application must sell the project and meet all the technical requirements of the NOFO.
 - Describe how your project meets or supports as many of the grant program emphasis areas as possible. Do not make up things that aren't true but be creative. Lying in a grant application is not only unethical, it's illegal. So, be truthful and find a way to describe your project in the best light possible.
- Apply for grant submittal system logins and entity identification numbers, now.
 - Most federal grants require a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and Employer/Taxpayer Identification Number (EIN/TIN). Most public agencies already have these numbers, which should be available from your Finance Department or Auditor. If your agency doesn't have these numbers, visit <https://www.SAM.gov/> for more information.
 - Most federal grants require the applications to be submitted through <https://www.grants.gov/>. It can take weeks or even months to obtain a registration and login for this system. Therefore, it is highly recommended to register as soon as possible, even if there isn't an open grant opportunity of interest.
 - For more information about creating a login and linking grants.gov and login.gov accounts see <https://grantsgovprod.wordpress.com/2022/05/04/how-to-create-a-grants-gov-account-and-link-to-a-login-gov-account/>
- Select a project that fits the grant criteria. Some helpful hints follow:
 - Assume it will be two (2) years from the date you apply for a grant to the date you can start spending money on the project. Not all grants will take this long, but this is a good estimate of how long it may be until the grant is awarded and the agreement is fully executed.
 - The more information available about the project, the better. At minimum, the following will be needed:
 - Budget (cost estimate and proposed funding sources)

- Few awards are granted at the maximum allowable grant-funding percentage. Therefore, it is wise to propose a larger non-federal share of funding than the minimum match required in the NOFO.
- Scope (what do you want the project to accomplish)
- Schedule (see the above note and estimate concerning grant award timelines within the NOFO-required expenditure dates. It's okay to be early when implementing your awarded project, but not acceptable to miss proposed dates in your application.)
- Subject matter expert and grant writer (seldom should these be the same person. One defines the technical aspects for the grant and the other provides a compelling story to enhance the application.)
- ALL federal transportation funding requires National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) clearance for construction activities. Some grant programs will allow NEPA as an eligible activity. However, most are looking for projects ready to start construction. Also, the information in NEPA documents is very beneficial in preparing a grant application. Therefore, it's advisable to consider preparing the NEPA document with other funding ahead of applying for a construction grant.
 - An alternative is to submit a planning grant to prepare the NEPA documents. However, this will significantly delay the time to start construction, especially if you also want a grant for the construction. One should assume it would be a minimum of five years before construction can start using this approach.
 - See the first bullet above concerning timeline.
 - Two years to start NEPA, one year to complete NEPA, and two years to start construction.
- Partnerships usually make the application more competitive.
 - It doesn't take a lot of partner money or commitments to have a positive impact. However, partners (especially private-sector ones) being willing to put some money and/or time into the project is often a competitive advantage for an application.
- In highly popular grant opportunities, expect to apply multiple times before receiving an award, even with a good project. Sometimes the third time is a charm but could also be the fourth or fifth time. Don't get discouraged, there are more requested funds than available funds.
 - After each round, ask the granting agency for a debrief of your application to find where you can adjust for the next opportunity.
 - Also, consider submitting the same project for multiple grant opportunities, even if a previous application is still under consideration in another grant application.
 - An application can always be withdrawn if the project is awarded under a different program.
 - Be sure to tailor each application to the specific grant opportunity. See the above notes on following required formats, addressing grant criteria, etc.
- Request letters of support early
 - Most applications include several letters of support.
 - It is unlikely reviewers read these letters in their entirety. However, they do often make note of the number of letters and who supports the project.

