FRA RAIL PROGRAM DELIVERY WORKSHOP

JULY 2024 | WASHINGTON, DC

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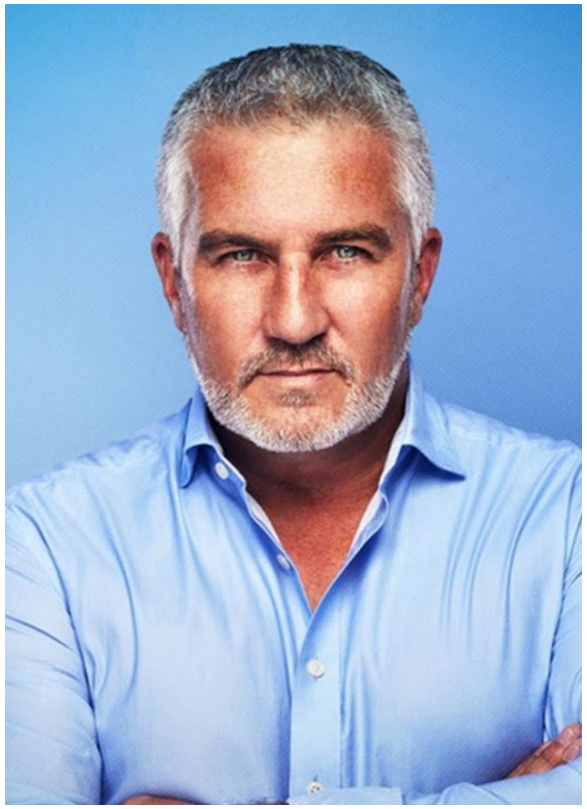
The Pre-Application Process and Tips for Competitive Grant Applications

Rail Policy and Performance Division

Amtrak and NEC Capital Planning Division

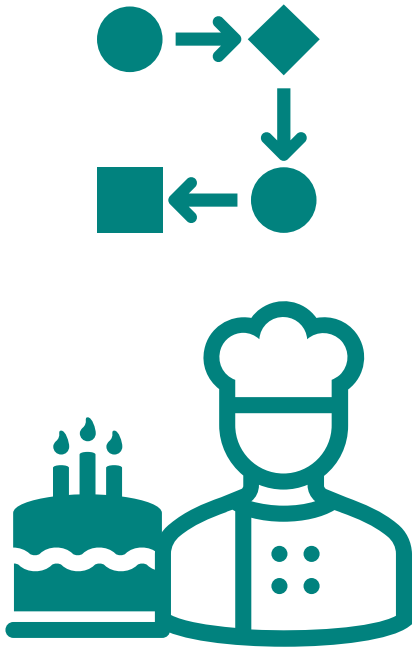
Panelists



Safety Improvement Program

Agenda

- Pre-application process overview
  - The admin
  - The right program
  - The right steps
- Tips for competitive grant applications
  - Key ingredients for the competitive grant application recipe



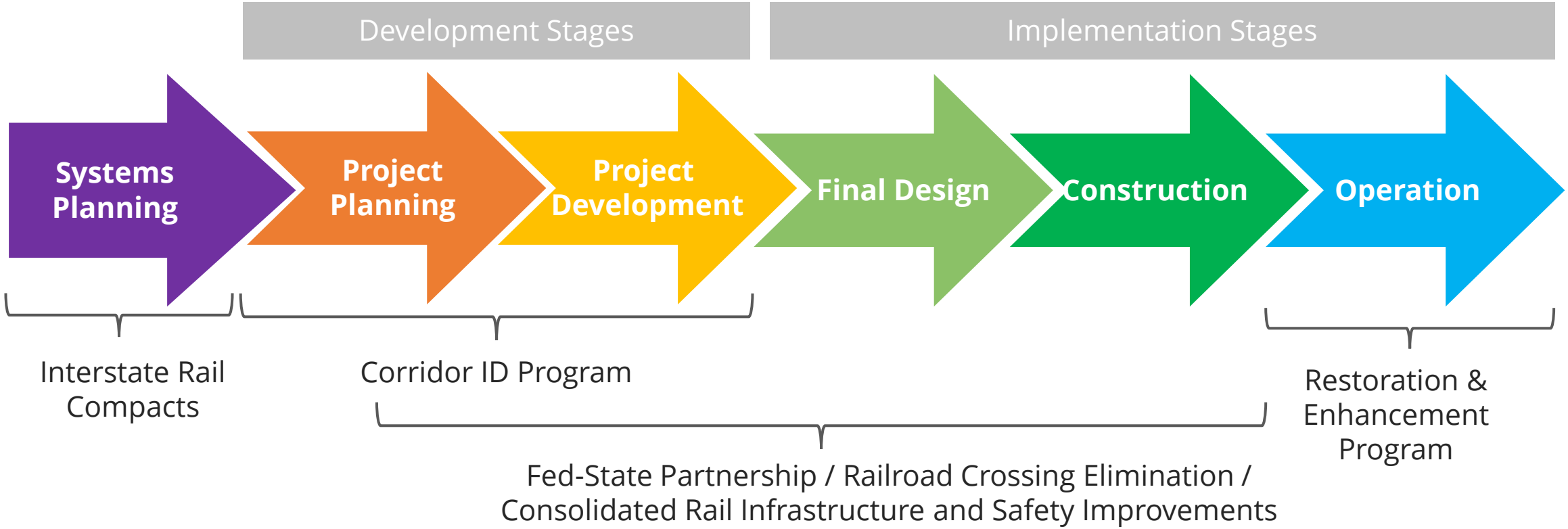
The Pre-Application Process: “Where do I start?”

The Admin

- Step 1
  - Register your organization in the federal government's System for Award Management (SAM.gov).
- Step 2
  - Register at Grants.gov. Create a username and password.

- Why start here?
  - These administrative elements are **key** to accessing FRA funding *and* have a potentially long processing time.
  - These steps can be done while other aspects of the application process are being conducted.
  - FRA does not control the SAM or Grants.gov enrollment process.

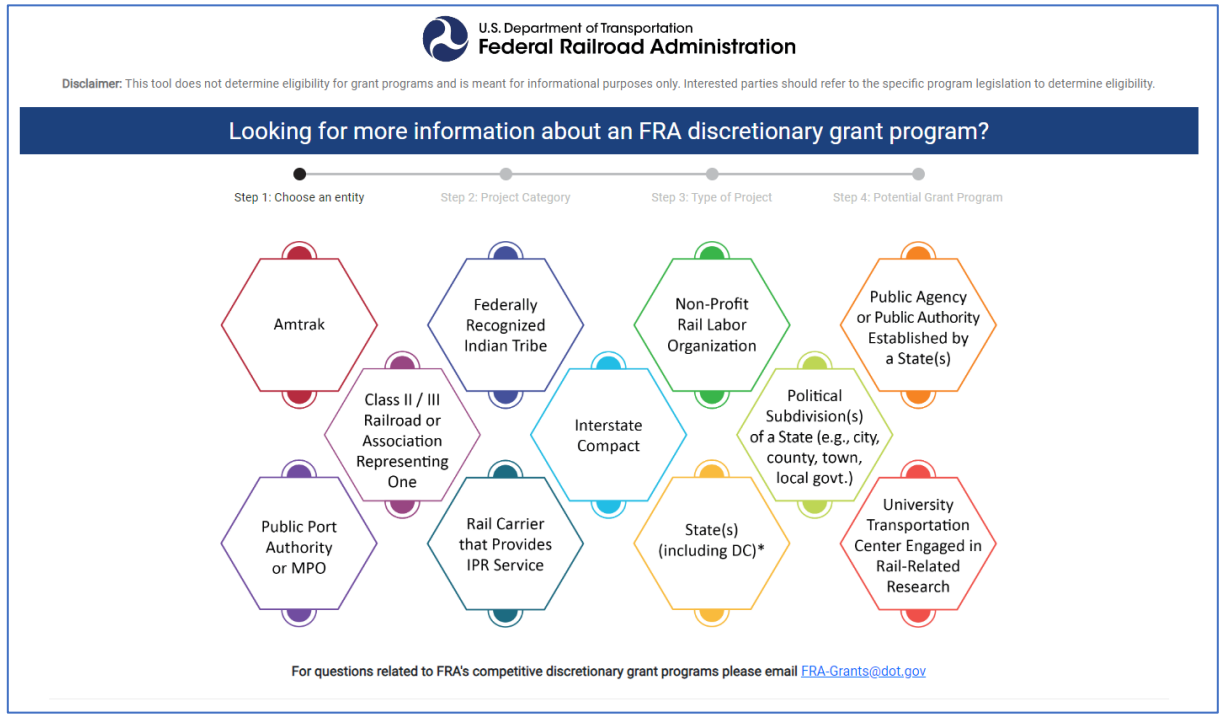
FRA Grant Programs



The Right Program

- What type of applicant are you?
  - City, state DOT, Class II/III, etc.
- What category of project do you have?
  - Capital, safety program, research, etc.
- What is your project?
  - Track improvement, grade separation, bridge replacement, passenger rail station, corridor planning, locomotive replacement, etc.

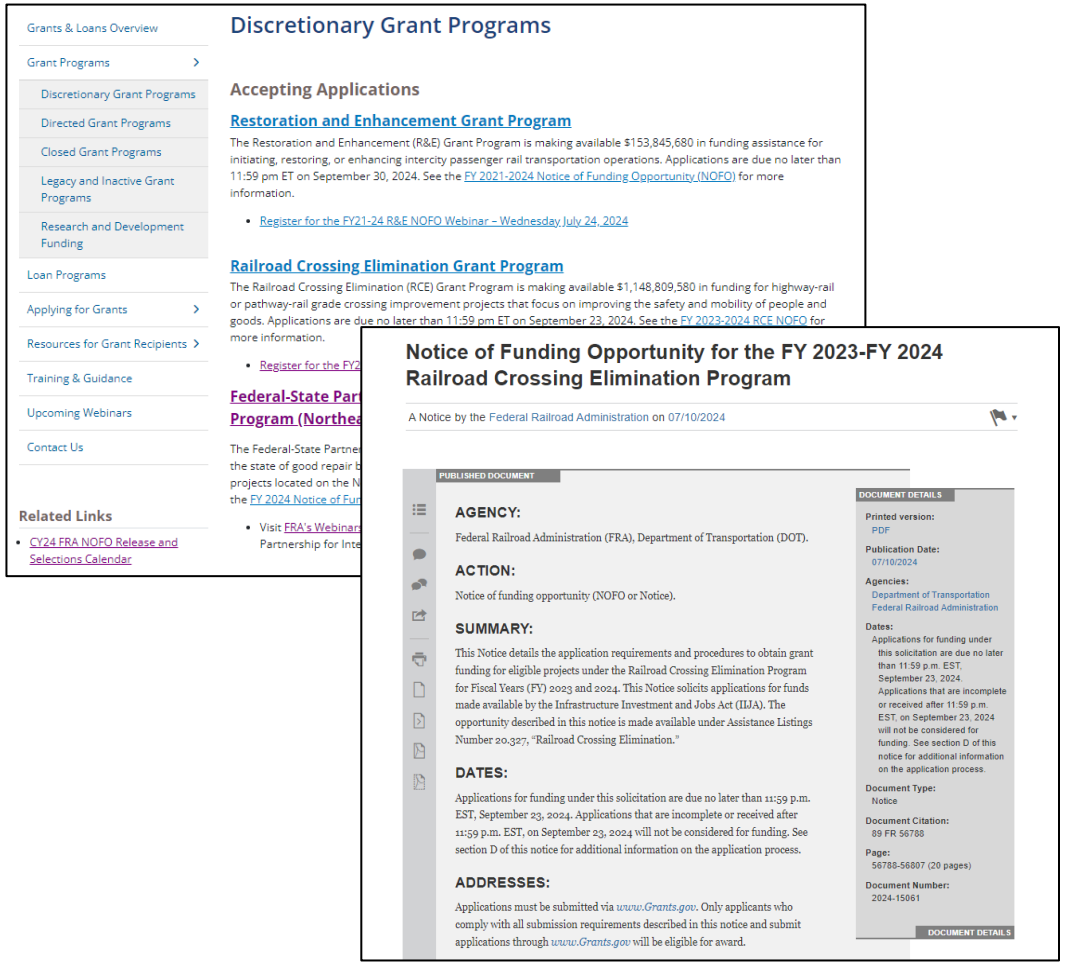
There is a tool for that!



Would You Like to Know More?

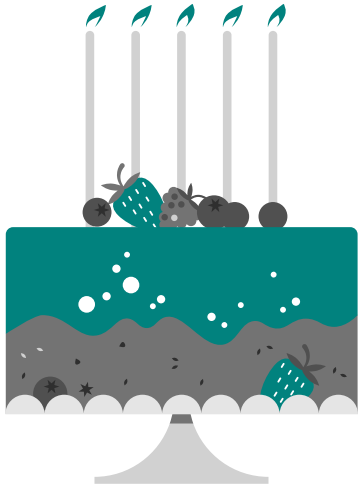
- FRA Discretionary Grants Webpage
  - Basic program information
  - Application periods (if open)
  - Eligibility information

- Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
  - Application deadlines
  - Required documents
  - Evaluation criteria and program requirements



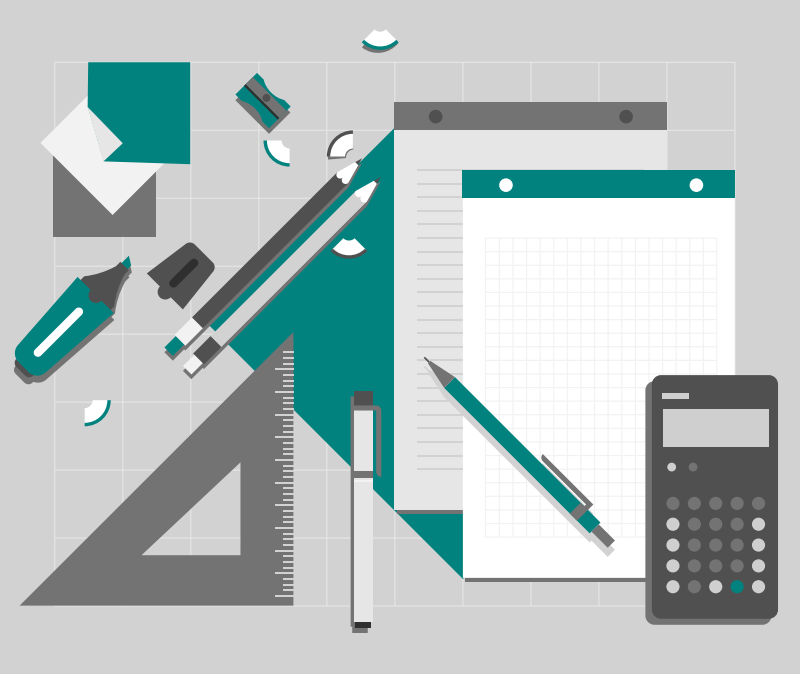
Pre-Application Summary

- Not so secret ingredients:
  - Eligibility
  - Non-federal match
  - Required documents
  - Evaluation and selection criteria



- Other cookbooks to refer to:
  - The NOFOs
  - Program webinars
  - Guidance on Development and Implementation of Railroad Capital Projects
  - CY2024 Grant Schedule
  - Grant Application Guide
  - Discretionary Grant Application Process
  - Grant Agreement Templates (SOW, Schedule, Financial Information, Performance Measures)

Now What?

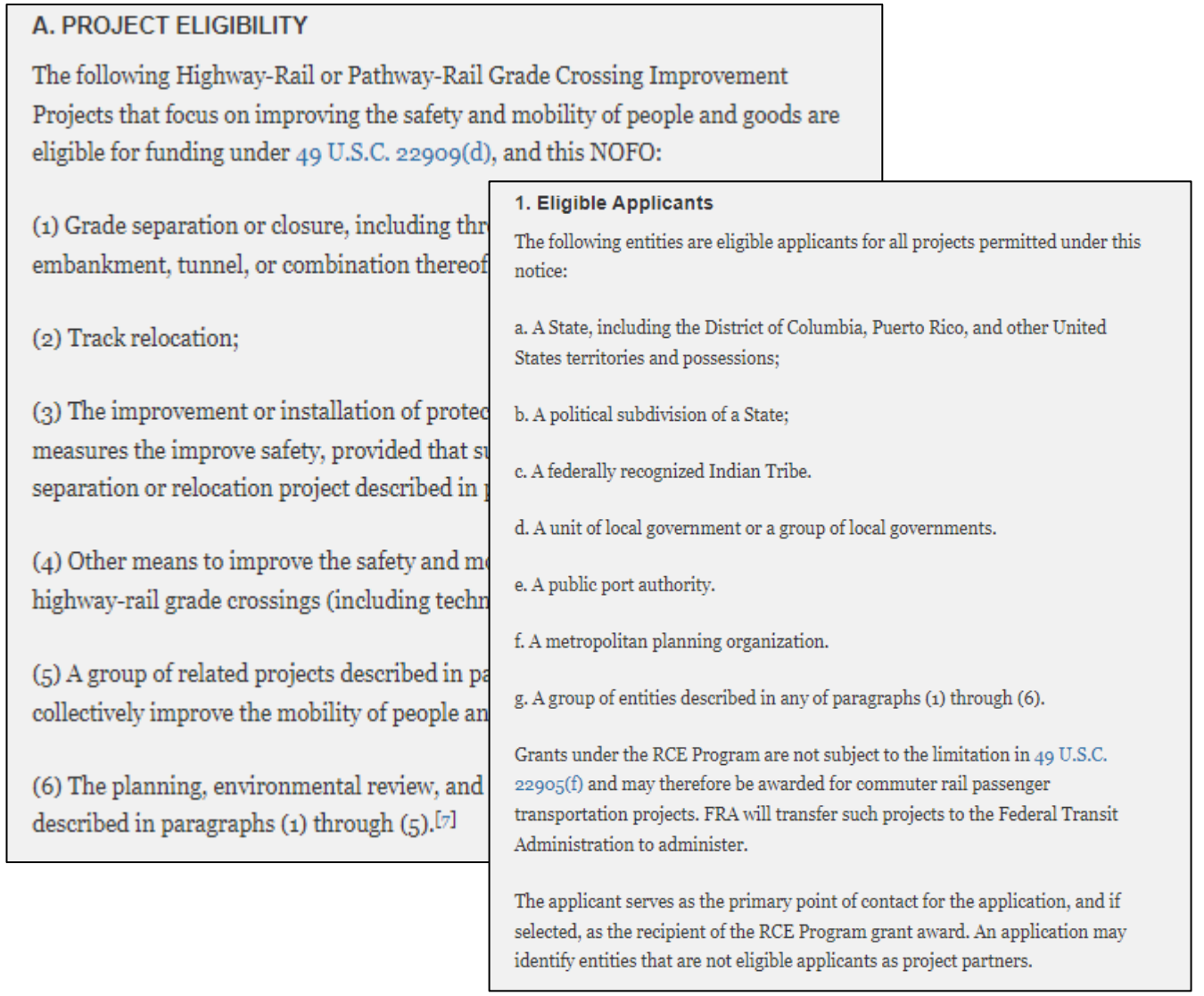


- You have registered with SAM.gov and have a UEI
- You have registered with Grants.gov
- You have decided the best program fit for your project
- The program you want to apply for is open and accepting applications

Tips for Competitive Grant Applications

Eligibility

- Ensure your project and the applicant are eligible
- Applicants must make their eligibility case
- Cite appropriate founding legislation in hyperlinks or via supporting documentation if necessary



A. PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

The following Highway-Rail or Pathway-Rail Grade Crossing Improvement Projects that focus on improving the safety and mobility of people and goods are eligible for funding under 49 U.S.C. 22909(d), and this NOFO:

(1) Grade separation or closure, including thr
embankment, tunnel, or combination thereof

(2) Track relocation;

(3) The improvement or installation of protec
measures the improve safety, provided that s
separation or relocation project described in

(4) Other means to improve the safety and m
highway-rail grade crossings (including techn

(5) A group of related projects described in pa
collectively improve the mobility of people an

(6) The planning, environmental review, and
described in paragraphs (1) through (5).[7]

1. Eligible Applicants

The following entities are eligible applicants for all projects permitted under this notice:

a. A State, including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and other United States territories and possessions;

b. A political subdivision of a State;

c. A federally recognized Indian Tribe.

d. A unit of local government or a group of local governments.

e. A public port authority.

f. A metropolitan planning organization.

g. A group of entities described in any of paragraphs (1) through (6).

Grants under the RCE Program are not subject to the limitation in 49 U.S.C. 22905(f) and may therefore be awarded for commuter rail passenger transportation projects. FRA will transfer such projects to the Federal Transit Administration to administer.

The applicant serves as the primary point of contact for the application, and if selected, as the recipient of the RCE Program grant award. An application may identify entities that are not eligible applicants as project partners.

Non-Federal Match

- Ensure your project has the minimum match
  - 19.5% ≠ 20%
- Federal funding, in most cases, cannot be used as match towards the FRA grant funds.
- Describe non-federal funding arrangements:
  - Do the funds have to be obligated or spent by a certain deadline?
  - Does your agency have immediate access to the funds?
- Provide evidence of match
  - Commitment letters

Required Documents

- Project narrative
- Statement of work, project budget, schedule, and performance measures (Attach 2: program-specific terms and conditions, articles 4-7)
- Benefit-cost analysis (if applicable)
- Environmental compliance documentation (if applicable)
- Required Federal forms:
  - SF424: Is it filled out correctly? Does it match the project narrative/SOW funding amounts?
  - SF424 A/B or SF424 C/D
  - FRA F 251
  - SF LLL (if applicable)
  - FRA F 30
- *As Applicable: Additional documents for certain programs (e.g., Restoration & Enhancement Program)*

Evaluation and Selection Criteria

- Generally broken down into:
  - Project readiness
  - Project benefits/project outcomes
  - Technical merit
  - Administration priorities

- Don’t skimp on the chocolate!
  - Ensure you are addressing each criteria area
  - Don’t be afraid to repeat yourself
  - Don’t copy and paste your benefit-cost analysis stats into your narrative

- Is there a mini cookbook for this?

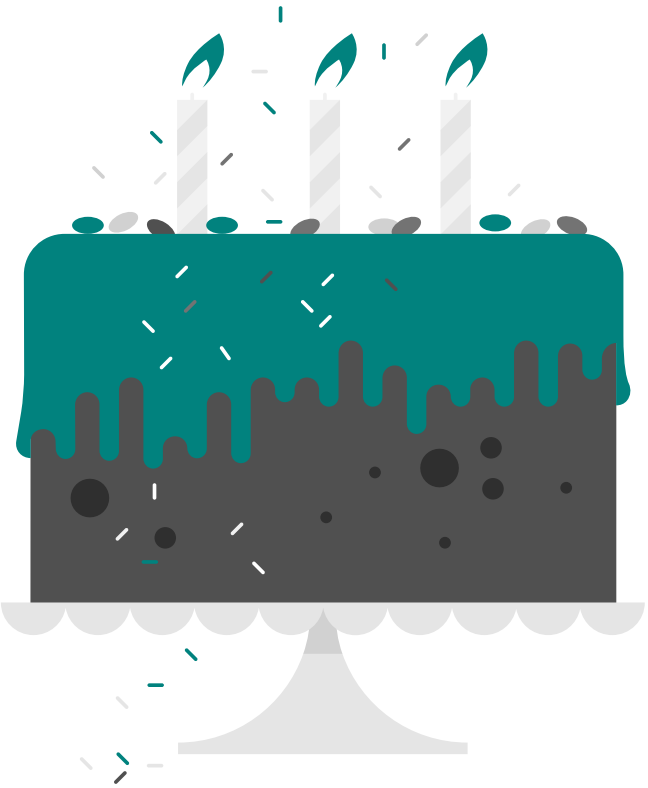
MERIT CRITERIA RATINGS—PROJECT BENEFITS

For the Project Benefits Criteria described in section E(B)(iii), FRA will evaluate the application's responsiveness to the criteria, including an assessment of supporting justifications, and assign a cumulative Project Benefits rating.

Unacceptable	Acceptable	Responsive	Highly responsive
Application provides insufficient information necessary to assess the project benefits criteria, and does not demonstrate that the project will achieve its intended benefits	The application contains limited information to assess the project benefits criteria; or the project is not likely to achieve all of its intended benefits	Application provides sufficient information to assess the project benefits criteria, and adequately demonstrates that the project will likely achieve its intended benefits	Application provides thorough and complete information and evidence to assess the project benefits criteria, and sufficiently demonstrates that the project will achieve its intended benefits.

My Cake is Baked!

- Application contains the appropriate eligibility information
- Required non-federal match
- Required documents
- Most shovel ready (project readiness), most benefits (project benefits), most experts (technical merit)



1. Intake and Eligibility

2. Evaluation Review

3. Steering Committee

4. Senior Review Team

5. Selection and Award

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Still need help with your cake?

Contact:

fra-nofo-support@dot.gov