



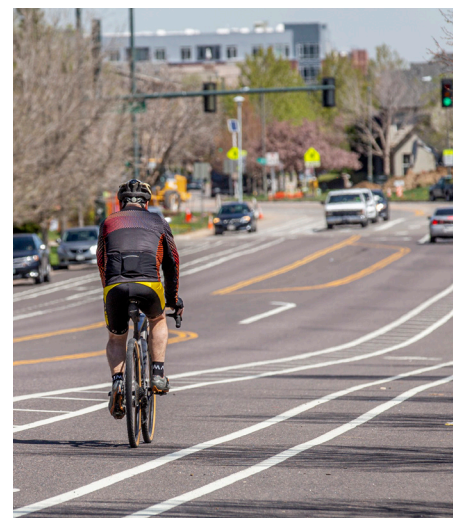
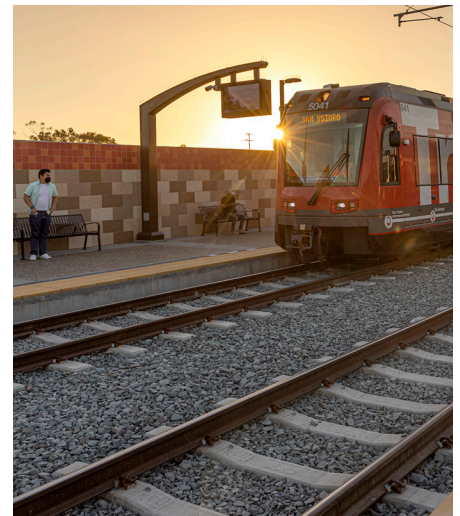
## INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCE

# Tips and Tricks for Successfully Pursuing Federal Grants

By Nathan Macek, HDR Infrastructure Finance Director

Pursuing a federal grant can seem daunting, but with planning and preparation, you can increase the odds that your organization's application will be successful. Our finance experts have helped transportation agencies across the country successfully position for federal discretionary grants. These approaches work for all types of grant programs, funding projects in every mode of transportation and every size.

- **Organize for Program Success:** Consider which projects in your capital plans are the best fit for specific federal grant programs, based on information available from USDOT, including legislative text, fact sheets, and past Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) announcements. Determine which projects will best meet the readiness, eligibility, and evaluation criteria for key programs, and prioritize those projects for applications. Since the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, also known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, is a five year program, develop a five year application strategy, listing projects to pursue grant funding for each year.





- **Assemble a Grants Team:** Put together a high-quality, professional team to help evaluate funding opportunities, write grants, support project development, prepare benefit-cost analyses, and assist with other steps in the grants pursuit process. Understanding the grant process and preparing competitive applications is a complex, specialized process. Having the right experts who've successfully pursued previous grants and recognize the opportunities and pitfalls will make the process much easier. A small investment in preparing strong applications can mean a much larger return in federal funding.
- **Pre-Position Selected Projects for Grants:** Once you've determined which projects will pursue grant funding, it's time to position those projects to optimize their competitiveness. There isn't enough time to do everything after the federal government publishes the grant NOFO, so consider steps you can take in advance of the NOFO. That could include engineering, cost estimation, environmental clearance, and other project development activities to advance project readiness; preparing an initial benefit-cost analysis (BCA), a frequent requirement for many grant programs; lining up political support; and registering for grant information on the websites Grants.gov and Sam.gov. After the NOFO is published, the clock is ticking and it's time to gather letters of support, write the grant narrative, adjust the BCA, and prepare an eye-catching application for USDOT.
- **Consider the Details:** Given overwhelming interest in federal discretionary grants, small actions can have a big impact on improving the competitiveness of your application. Read the NOFO, and make sure your application discusses all the requirements in the NOFO in a clear and concise manner. Ensure the presentation of the application package is straightforward to navigate, with easy-to-read text, maps, and graphics. Prepare the BCA in alignment with the latest USDOT guidance, and share the results of the BCA in the text of the application — don't bury the findings in the appendix. Provide citations for all inputs, such as crashes, emission rates, and traffic counts, and make sure there are no discrepancies between documents. This attention to detail is often what



separates experienced grant preparers from those attempting it for the first time or who only occasionally put together an application.

- **Listen to USDOT's Advice:** Government grant reviewers have provided clear advice to applicants. Make sure there's a clear statement of project needs and impacts that aligns with the grant eligibility and evaluation criteria. Describe the project in a straightforward manner, and don't create something that isn't really there — pursue funding only for legitimate projects with some degree of planning, environmental clearance, design, or cost estimation in hand. If more project development work is required, describe those steps and your plan for accomplishing them.

USDOT staff review hundreds of applications for many grant programs, so it's important that your agency's submittal stands out from the crowd. With these suggestions in mind, you too can submit a strong application to pursue federal grant funding.



**HDR's Advisory Services Team has the experience and understanding of the federal programs created or modified by the IIJA to help clients position their projects for success.**

Our team blends deep infrastructure knowledge with insightful business management expertise to develop tailored solutions. Our experts help plan, procure, develop, prioritize, manage, operate and fund projects and programs.

Our approach integrates technical and business professionals who generate sustainable solutions with a rich understanding of the challenges that clients face. As a trusted advisor, we help clients make lasting, positive change. Our team of experts provide services in all infrastructure types affected by the IIJA and can help clients chart a path forward to successfully plan, fund, design, and deliver their programs.

For over a century, HDR has partnered with clients to shape communities and push the boundaries of what's possible. Our expertise spans more than 11,000 employees in more than 200 locations around the world — and counting. Our optimistic approach to finding innovative solutions defined our past and drives our future.

**If you need any assistance or have questions, please contact:**

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