

United States Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Air and Radiation
Office of Transportation and Air Quality

**"Clean Air Transportation Communities" RFP Conference Call
Q&A from March 27, 2001**

(Dialogue has been paraphrased for clarity, but an effort has been made to accurately portray the content of the questions and answers. Questions that repeat those in the March 6 and March 7, 2001, conference calls may not be indicated here. Some questions that could not be answered in full during the conference calls were followed up upon, and the answers are given here.)

A. Is there any allowance for the fact that a project may take a year to lay ground work and a year to get up and running or will the grant be coming again next year?

We are stipulating a two year project period, concurrent with a two-year budget period, that will begin from the date the award is made. The grant request must reflect the full anticipated cost (i.e. not anticipate any additional funding from a subsequent grant). Generally, money is drawn down as needed. Funds must be used within three business days from withdrawal, and can not be put into an interest-bearing account at any time.

B. Does the requirement to have "measurable emissions at the end of the project period" mean that we would have to send in reports of actual emissions reductions achieved, or is it something we quantify on paper in advance?

The latter; you can use information available to model the expected results. You need to provide some explanation of approximate reductions, using a reasonable methodology. See notes from the March 6 conference call for more information on resources that can be used to help guide estimates (accessible from an entry at the OTAQ website at www.epa.gov/otaq under "What's New;" see item "U." in the file "Q&A030601").

As mentioned in the March 6 notes, EPA is trying to get a very general idea of what kind of proportional return on the resources invested one can expect from the proposed project. There will be no direct comparisons of one project's estimates to another. EPA is not simply judging proposals upon the volume of expected emissions reduction.

C. In the case of a small community looking at a trolley using compressed natural gas as a centerpiece of a project, would this be the kind of project that would qualify?

Innovation is a top priority we are looking for projects that have not been done before in the United States; the context has to be new, so the burden is on you to make sure that the project is not replicating something that's already been done elsewhere. The knowledge of the EPA staff sitting in on the call is not sufficiently complete that it can be sure that any given proposal has not been essentially undertaken elsewhere already, so it can give no assurances on this point. EPA

will rely on the expertise of its review team to be aware of the level of innovation in a given topic area.

D. If an environmental organization partners with a council of governments, would this constitute an eligible partnership?

Yes. In this case, the council of governments would need to be the lead organization submitting the proposal (and receiving funding, if awarded).

E. What are the specifications for the proposal? Can we exceed the length requirement, or will our project be rejected? Are there standards for font type/size, or margins?

The required specifications of the proposal are set forth in the Request for Proposals, in Section VII. (Note that it requires that each criterion listed in Section V. is directly addressed in the course of completing the narrative.) Section VII. says that proposals "should be approximately 7-8 pages in length," which allows a certain amount of flexibility in cases where the proposal cannot be summarized in a substantive way in that space. But extending this by more than a page or so stretches the limits of what is meant by "approximately 7-8 pages," and will not enhance a proposal's chances. EPA is required under the Paper Reduction Act to limit the length requested in the proposal to make sure that it will not overburden stakeholders. Moreover, excessive length is unfair to the reviewers, who have been tasked with an extremely short evaluation period, and unfair to other submitters who make an effort to keep their proposals concise.

Regarding formatting: EPA set no standards in the Request for Proposals. One might use the ten-item list in Section VII. as a guide, making sure that all the criteria are addressed in the process, but again, there is no specified format. Simply be certain that the narrative is laid out in a manner that will make it plain how the requirements have been addressed, and that it is clearly legible; kindly consider the reader.

CLARIFICATION: Regarding the Application Kit for Federal Assistance, please note that all the forms in the Application Kit should be filled out in their entirety, not just Federal Forms SF 424 and SF 424a. Be certain that SF 424/424a have been signed by the person in the applicant organization authorized to disburse grant funds, if awarded.

F. If a project meets EPA's criteria and creates a very positive impression, but would cause EPA to exceed the \$750,000 available for all proposals, is there an opportunity to negotiate the award amount?

Yes. If EPA were eager to fund an additional project, but remaining funds were insufficient to meet the whole amount requested, it would seek to negotiate a smaller award with the potential recipient. (Remember, proposals must request between \$50,000 and \$300,000 to be eligible.)

G. What if an applicant had a project that exceeded the maximum award size, but it had matching funds available, and would only need part of the amount from EPA? Would such

a proposal be eligible?

Potentially. However, be certain to show that a discrete product will result from the EPA portion of the funding. Pooled funding is not permitted. In your budget, leave out the information on funding from other sources; you must detail only the part of the project that is to be funded by EPA. Because it is helpful for EPA to see the proposal with its full scope, general information about the amount and type of support from other sources would be helpful elsewhere in the narrative.

Note that EPA cannot add money to an existing project; any EPA funding must be paying for a new project or a new dimension of an old project that is innovative and unique. Again, in your budget, you should be very clear how the EPA's funding will result in a product that, itself, directly yields measurable emissions benefits.

H. If an organization is putting together a project requiring different funding sources in addition to EPA's portion, and the product won't be purchased solely with the EPA funding, how do we submit a budget? Since the emissions reductions are part of the project as a whole, and this is the key to leveraging the funding for the project, this seems inconsistent. Anything that would include new technology is definitely going to cost a lot of money.

Whatever you use EPA funding for must be a discrete product. (See question above.)

CLARIFICATION: Mary noted that, since we encourage leveraging, she would follow up to be certain that this rule applies even where other funding is guaranteed from the federal government. She asked, for example, about the eligibility of a proposal that only focuses on some aspect of deployment of a project (like research to determine the targeted sector or specific project placement in a community) that would not itself directly generate emissions benefits. The assumption for this question was that the *overall* project providing the context of the aspect proposed for funding was eligible and would result in direct emissions reductions. However, EPA's grants and legal offices do not find this acceptable for the purposes of this competition as stated in the Request for Proposals. They reaffirm that the EPA portion of funds must be directly responsible the emissions reductions anticipated.

I. How soon after the due date will awards be made and money be allocated?

EPA hopes to announce its awards by late May or early June, depending on the amount of time required for grant processing. Funds should become available soon thereafter.

J. Does EPA have a feel for how many proposals it will get?

EPA cannot provide details on the number of proposals received, but a ballpark number would be more than 100 and less than 200. Experience with other grant competitions indicates that a substantial proportion of those submitting letters of intent will not actually submit a proposal.

K. A proposal concerns the evaluation of a set of projects, from which one would be selected for deployment, based upon a determination that it results in the most economic benefit. Would such a proposal be accepted?

EPA requires in this competition that the applicant be able to estimate what emissions reductions will accrue as a direct result of the project to be deployed, therefore, the proposal must be specific to the project to be implemented. The proposal must have an identified product in order to get through the grants process.

L. How do I get a federal assistance application kit (documents SF-424 and SF-424A)?

Email Mary Walsh at walsh.mary@epa.gov and state whether you want MS Word or WordPerfect version.

M. We have three ideas for proposals. The first would look at reducing parking by promoting car sharing; the second would involve partnering with transit agencies to give car sharers free transit passes; the third would involve getting car sharers to sell their cars. Would these be eligible?

All of these are possibly eligible; the key is that the proposals must be innovative and never done before. A new context for such ideas (aside from simply a new geographical context), or a unique spin on implementation, might pass muster. Again, EPA cannot pre-approve project ideas or assert that any given idea is truly innovative prior to the judging.

N. We are looking at adding transit access to our tribal community. This is very new and innovative for the tribe; would this qualify?

Not unless the proposal is innovative at a national level (and further questioning revealed that it was not). In other words, it must be something that has never been demonstrated already anywhere else in the country. Being unique or new to your community will not by itself meet the innovation criterion.

O. If a project has proprietary technology, does EPA claim the rights to the technology?

No.

P. Is it a disadvantage to be making a proposal concerning a project that is ongoing (e.g., is underway with TCSP funding), or that has not yet begun, but has already secured TCSP funding?

It is not a disadvantage, but such a proposal would only be eligible if the EPA funding would apply to a new, innovative dimension that will yield a discrete product as part of the overall project.

Q. If we decided to partner with other groups that are submitting grants, would we submit separate proposals or a joint proposal? Would smaller proposals individually have a better chance of squeezing into the list of funded projects, or is a joint proposal stronger in competition with other proposals?

Partnering is encouraged; if a joint proposal can be created where it makes a good deal of sense to have all the parties involved working together, this will be viewed positively. However, if you have interlocking or interrelated projects but discrete emissions reductions for each, you may opt to submit separate proposals. EPA makes no blanket determination that joint proposals will or will not always have an advantage over smaller, individual proposals; it is up to the potential partners to determine whether to put "all their eggs in one basket."

In cases where related proposals are submitted separately, it is important to note that each will be considered on its individual merits. Being related to another proposal (whether related proposals are funded or not) will not affect its chances of being selected.

R. If we are using a contractor, would they be considered a subcontractor?

Grantees may spend funds on contractors and on subgrants, consistent with EPA's contract and grant rules, and the individual rules of your state governing grants and subgrants. Applicants are encouraged to research how these rules may apply to their proposals before completing their submission. (For access to additional information on federal rules addressing subgrants, see item E. in the summary to the March 7 call.)

S. Would adding an alternative fuels module to a drivers' education program qualify as innovative?

Well, while it might be innovative, but if specific emissions reductions cannot be attributed to the project, it would not meet the criteria of this RFP. The Mobile Source Outreach Competition might be a better place for such a proposal. This competition will be open again in November 2001.

T. Why is there such interest in having multi-state organizations participate?

OTAQ believes that such entities may have a unique ability to help us disseminate and replicate successful technologies.

U. If EPA receives viable projects in all of the four areas that are listed in the RFP, would it try to pick one project per category?

No. EPA hopes that the evaluation process will result in a variety of types of proposals being funded. However, it must be scrupulous about evaluating the proposals based only upon the criteria listed in the RFP. Since the criteria do not include any sort of mechanism for distributing projects over a broad range of topics, EPA can not have any sort of quota for numbers of

proposals within certain categories. As mentioned previously, EPA can, and shall, only evaluate proposals based on the proposal's individual merits. Proposals are not compared to one another.

Note that EPA is also open to making awards to innovative programs that do not fall within those categories highlighted in the Request for Proposals (Smart Growth, Commuter Choice, Clean Vehicles/Green Fleets-type program).