

**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 29, 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, March 7, or March 27, 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 it better to have more partners and scale back on other resources in the request?

There is no preferred strategy. Partners should be chosen such that there is an opportunity to benefit from their expertise and connections, a potential for long-term commitment, in many cases, an opportunity to leverage resources, and so forth. It should make sense that they be involved with the project. Sheer numbers of partners will not enhance your proposal if it is not clear that they are logical partners whose involvement will enhance the project and its potential for success.

B. Can a non-profit organization function as the lead organization submitting the proposal?

No. Such organizations should partner with a qualified government agency, which would submit the proposal on its own behalf as well as that of its partners. Funds would be passed through to partners, as indicated in the proposal, consistent with federal grant/subgrant rules and those of the state.

C. How many applications are expected to be received?

Based on the letters of intent, EPA anticipates between 100 and 200 proposals to be sent in.

D. What will be the minimum award amount? Can one submit a proposal for less than \$50,000.

The Request for Proposals states that grants will range from \$50,000 to \$300,000. Checking with EPA's legal office after the call confirmed that no award can be made for less than \$50,000, because that was the figure stipulated in the Request for Proposals.

E. Has a summary of the previous Q&A's been posted on the internet?

(The March 6 and 7 notes were posted in the afternoon of April 19 at www.epa.gov/otaq/whatsnew.htm; look for the announcement in the April listings concerning this Request for Proposals.)

F. We anticipate adding new partners as the project progresses; will that be a problem?

No. List as many of the current or potential partners as you expect to have on board, but it will not be a problem to add others later.

G. Are there any guidelines on setting measurable reductions or how much should be budgeted in the proposal for research vs implementation?

There are no guidelines. EPA will accept an estimate of the reductions that will be achieved that shows some attempt to use methods approved by EPA or used by other professionals. Please identify the source of the methods used. Visit the Office of Transportation and Air Quality (OTAQ) web site at www.epa.gov/otaq/ to review related guidance that may be helpful with estimates (see notes from the March 7 call for more information on useful materials). Not all projects will be measurable in the same way, so there will be no direct comparisons of proposals' projections by review staff. Initial benefits may not be large but could continue to build over time; EPA is interested in both short-term and long-term benefits expected.

H. Follow-up on research question: We could spend most of our requested funds on research, but what is the minimum allowed?

There is no minimum. However, EPA can not request or fund information collection, either before or after the project period, if the survey would involve asking more than nine people more than nine questions without an Information Collection Request (ICR) rulemaking approved by the Office of Management and Budget. This requirement is imposed on all federal agencies under the Paperwork Reduction Act and is designed to protect stakeholders from excessive information demands from government.

If the grantee determines that this information is necessary to ensure a successful project, and it determined that the research must be funded through the grant, an ICR can be created; however, please note that the process may take several months to complete. The ICR must be completed prior to the research phase of the funded project, again, only if EPA funding is being used to conduct the research. EPA can work with the grant recipient in creating and processing the necessary paperwork.

I. Follow-up on research question: Does that mean we should not include as part of our request any money for the cost of research to determine our estimates?

The grant can identify funds used to develop a methodology for evaluation, but can not fund the evaluation process itself if it involves more than nine participants (unless an ICR is done). In order for others to determine the usefulness of an approach, there must be some way to evaluate whether enough benefit was obtained from the resources invested. **So**, it is important that the proposal show how such an evaluation could be made for the project.

J. Follow-up on research question: Would more rigor be more competitive?

This will depend upon the judgment of the review team. Estimates should be based in well-

founded methodology. An attempt to clearly portray how estimates of benefits will be made, using accepted methodologies as appropriate, will probably do better than those that do not show much effort to do so.

K. Follow-up on research question: What if proposal breaks new ground on the quality of measuring reductions or research into?

Yes, that will enhance the proposal if the methodology proposed looks strong, but it must still be a part of an overall project that results in emissions reductions, and must be replicable.

L. What sort of points are assessed for areas in attainment or nonattainment?

None. There is no discrimination between attainment and nonattainment. Also, there is no point system.

M. Is there duplication between this and the 105 grants?

See the Request for Proposals for a discussion of this. (Section VIII.Q.) One can not submit the same application for both. However, one can submit a proposal that would address a project submitted for funding under the Mobile Source Outreach Assistance Competition that is re-tooled to meet the criteria of this competition BUT there will be no double funding. If an award were given under one competition, the proposal for the same project submitted to the other competition would no longer be eligible.

N. Are Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) eligible?

Yes, but not federal agencies or federal regional offices.

O. What about proposals that have a research focus--are they eligible?

Yes. But the activities have to be implemented, and real emissions reduction activities have to result. This grants vehicle is designed to support activities that achieve measurable emission reductions by the end of the project period (two calendar years from date of award) as a direct result of the implementation of the project.

P. The RFP seems to be sending a mixed message with regard to research.

We have designed the proposals to require emissions reductions at the end of the project period. Proposals need to show some indication of how you will measure the reduction that will be obtained.

Q. Would consider emissions reductions but not VMT reductions?

Yes. Emissions reductions could be obtained without VMT reductions.

R. Are there vehicles or fuels that are not eligible?

There are many available technologies and fuels. The context must be new, the implementation must be innovative. Suggestion to look at the ICLEI web site listed in the RFP and DOE's alternative fuels web site, also listed in the RFP.

S. It was stated in the first call that EPA might negotiate down the grant ask.

- 1. Would that be based on geography to increase the spread?**
- 2. Or would that be based on technology or innovation?**

There is no policy to negotiate down grant request but we will investigate how we might fund the best set of projects within the funding limits. We will not do anything that is not legally allowed. (See notes from the March 27 call.)

T. What's the difference between demonstration and pilot projects?

Both terms are used to indicate projects that debut some new technology, methodology, or approach. No important distinction is made.

U. Would measuring ride times and commuter choice qualify?

The measuring methodology, by itself, would not qualify. This grant is intended for projects that go beyond the groundwork of surveys, education, analysis, visioning, etc., to the point where the actual, measurable emissions benefits are being actively generated. If the project were carried through to the point where driving behavior is then being changed, as a result of communicating the study to the public, it might be eligible.

(This idea might be a candidate for OTAQ's annual Mobile Source Outreach Assistance competition, which will be announced again at the end of this year.)

V. Will a large or small proposal be better? Why is there a seven to eight page narrative limit? Is there a minimum font size?

There is no recommended approach. See March 7 notes regarding number of pages. The strategy is up to the submitter, but please respect the recommended 7-8 pages for the narrative.

Paper Work Reduction Act requires that EPA limit its requests for information from its stakeholders, even for voluntary programs and competitions. Also, keep in mind that EPA is expecting over 100 proposals that it must expedite rapidly through the review and grants process.

Font selection is up to the submitter, but should be clearly legible and respect the reviewers, who will be reading many packages.

W. Would a proposal that packages the results of the cost of auto-ownership to encourage less driving qualify be eligible?

It would not be eligible if that is as far as the project goes. (See answer to question U., above.)

X. Would a parking cash-out pilot qualify ?

Parking cash-out is a subset of the program known as "Commuter Choice," and has already been demonstrated at various locations around the U.S. In order for a proposal to meet the "innovation" criterion, you must define what makes the program different than other Commuter Choice/parking cash-out programs already underway. Are there any aspects to it that would make it unique (aside from a new locality for implementation)?

Y. Any priorities regrading specific sectors?

No distinctions are being made.

Z. There are forms other than the SF 424 and SF 424a in the grant application kit. Do I need to fill these out, too?

Mary Walsh has received a clarification from EPA's grants office: "When an applicant submits a proposal to EPA for funding, it must submit all the forms designated in the EPA application kit." In other words, not just the federal forms SF 424 and SF 424a. However, proposals selected for funding will not be rejected for lacking forms other than the SF 424 and SF 424a, due to the confusing wording in the RFP. They can be completed at a later date. However, failure to have signed and completed forms SF 424 and SF 424a will constitute an incomplete application. (This item is an addendum to the phone call notes.)