

Speaker:

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Mohammed. We are still hearing some echo. If our participants can mute their phones, that will be helpful. We are going to wait another minute or so before we get started. We are still getting a lot of echo. I think we are going to get started. Hopefully the echo will get better. Good afternoon. On behalf of FTA's Office of Research, Demonstration and Innovation I would like to thank you for joining us. My name is Mohammed. I am the Director for the Office of Infrastructure Safety within FTA's Office of Research, Demonstration and Innovation, which is also known as RDI. We are happy to have Mary Leary for the Office of Research, Demonstration and Innovation. With that let me invite Mary Leary for her remarks.

Speaker:

Thank you, Mohammed, and it's really an honor to be Acting Associate Administrator for the office. I want to extend a warm welcome on behalf of FTA to all of our attendees and applicants for joining us for this information webinar. We appreciate you taking time out of what we know are very busy schedules to hear about this exciting Federal Transportation Administration COVID-19 Research Demonstration Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity. This webinar is being provided for informational purposes only. It is considered off the record and not for public attribution; any media inquiries should be directed to the FTA Office of Public Affairs. Now let's get started with the webinar! The Federal Transit Administration's mission is to improve transportation in America's community; our research mission is to advance public transportation by accelerating innovation that improves people's mobility and enhances public transportation operations and ensures everyone's safety. This program falls under the Department of Transportation innovation strategy to lead in the development and deployment of innovative practices and technologies that improve the safety and performance of the nation's transportation system. The coronavirus COVID-19 disease public health emergency has had a significant impact on transit operations. This NOFO was developed in response to what we learned during the sessions FTA held over the last three months. Transit agencies asked FTA to support research to identify challenges faced as a result of COVID-19. So, the overarching goal of this \$10 million program—and we have about \$28 million we receive every year—so \$10 million in this program is a significant investment and its purpose is to support research demonstration grant public agencies to develop and deploy and demonstrate innovative solutions to improve the operational efficiencies of transit agencies and the mobility of users. Over the next hour or so, we will provide an overview of this opportunity and a lot more detail. Again, thank you so much for joining us. Welcome, and we look forward to seeing your innovative applications. I will now turn it back over to Mohammed to walk through the details of the NOFO. Over to you, Mohammed.

Speaker:

Thank you, Mary, for your remarks. In terms of the webinar agenda we have today, we are going to go over the webinar logistics. We will provide a quick program overview, eligibility requirements, support for rural communities, evaluation criteria, key dates, and application submission requirements, and we will also have links to additional information and a walk-through of grants.gov.

We are so happy to have so many of you with us this afternoon. Over 500 of you have registered for this webinar, and we have a lot of information to cover. In the next hour or so that we have for today's webinar, we will not have a live question and answer session. Please use the Q&A pod at the bottom of your screen to submit questions. FTA will review the questions submitted and [inaudible]. Additional questions can be submitted to the Program Manager, Jamel El-Hamri, at jamel.el-hamri@dot.gov. Presentation materials will be posted to FTA's website on the public transportation COVID-19 Research Demonstration Grant Program site.

Now I am going to take a moment to quickly go over the Demonstration Program. This program, as you know, is funded with \$10 million in research diamond frustration grants under FTA's Public Transportation Innovation Program, 49 USC under 5312. The goal of this program is to fund innovative solutions to improve the operational efficiency of transit agencies as well as enhance the mobility of transit users. With 100 percent federal funding, no match is required, although you are encouraged to consider [inaudible]. There are four key areas of focus for projects for this grants program. Number one, vehicles, facility, equipment, infrastructure cleaning and disinfection. The second area is exposure mitigation measures. The third area is innovative mobility such as contactless. The last area of focus is measures that strengthen public confidence in transit.

With that I am going to turn it over to Jamel El-Hamri. He is the Program Manager [inaudible]. Over to you, Jamel.

Speaker:

Thank you, Mohammed. So getting into the eligibility requirements for this funding opportunity, the funding opportunity is limited to FTA grantee sub-recipients who would be the primary beneficiaries of innovative products and services developed. Within the funding opportunity it is specified that lead applicants include state and local government authorities, direct recipients of urbanized area funding and rural area formula funding as well as Indian tribes. Eligible sub-recipients can include public agencies, private nonprofit organizations, and private providers engaged in public transportation. One thing to notice, proposals for projects in rural non-urbanized areas who do not currently receive Section 5311 funding the rural area funding must submit their application as part of a consolidated state proposal except for projects proposed by Indian tribes. Additionally, states and other eligible applicants also may submit consolidated proposals for projects in urbanized areas if they choose to do so. Each applicant may only submit one proposal.

Another thing that was highlighted within the funding opportunity is that applications were encouraged to support rural communities using our ROUTES concept, which stands for rural opportunity to use transportation for economic success. The ROUTES initiative involves engaging with rural stakeholders to tangibly enhance the safety and economic competitiveness of transportation projects within rural communities. Consistent with the ROUTES initiative, the Department will consider how the project will address the challenges in these areas. More information within the ROUTES initiative can be found on the link you see on your third bullet.

The funding opportunity highlights five evaluation criteria that will be considered when ranking the applications that include project innovation and impact, which will look

at the effectiveness of projects and achieving and demonstrating specific program objectives and benefits in addressing the needs of the transit industry, including the degree of improvement over current technologies, designs, and practices. Moving forward, the project approach will look at the quality of the approach and if the proposal is realistic in its ability to fulfill milestones and deliverables, schedules, and goals. The national application of the criteria will look at the ability for the project to be replicated by other agencies regionally or nationally, the ability to evaluate technologies, designs, and practices in a variety of conditions and locales, and the degree to which they can be replicated by other rail and transportation modes. The commercialization and/or knowledge transfer will look into the demonstration of a realistic plan for moving the results of the project into the transit marketplace, how the project team plans to work with the industry and improving best practices, guidance, and standards, and a demonstrated clear understanding and approach to data collection, access, and management. Finally, the last evaluation criteria—technical, legal, and financial capacity—will look into application of whether the applicant and any partners can successfully execute the project effort. There should be no outstanding legal, technical, or financial issues with the applicant that would make this a high-risk project.

Some key dates and application submission requirements: the NOFO as discussed was released on October the 5th. Applications need to be submitted by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time on November 2nd, 2020. Applications must be submitted through grants.gov. You want to include an SF-424 application for federal assistance supplemental form and any additional supporting documentation that you feel relevant to your application. Listed below are several key links including the grants.gov opportunity, the program webpage, as well as instructions for applying for FTA funding, and, additionally, my e-mail address is listed below, and as a reminder, applications are due by midnight on November the 2nd, 2020.

Now I am going to hand it over to my colleague Walt, who will go over the grants.gov walk-through. Walt, you are on mute.

Speaker:

Can you hear me now?

Speaker:

Yes, go ahead.

Speaker:

This portion of the presentation is primarily to orient you on the resources available on the FTA website and grants.gov and also a little more detail about the application process.

FTA funding opportunities are published on the FTA website and also in the *Federal Register* as well as on grants.gov, primarily on grants.gov, which is our focus. We recommend that all applicants begin their search on the At and for the application process at the FTA funding opportunities webpage using the NOFO webpage, which you start to provide you related links and information—links to the websites and resources to assist you with the application process. To locate the NOFO page, the specific NOFO page, as we've seen earlier, however, if you go directly to the FTA

website FTA.DOT.gov, at the top of the page, click on the Funding section and then select Applying and then click on Notices of Funding on the left side of the page. The Notices of Funding page provides a link to all the current or active FTA opportunities available to you. Click on the opportunity ID, which is hyperlinked to the FTA NOFO summary page. If you click on the grant program side of the links, this will bring you to the program page TRI, which is sponsoring the discretionary funding and soliciting applicants. If you are searching for older expired notices, they are available on a separate menu directly on the Notices of Funding. We won't cover that right now. As previously stated, the NOFO page contains a summary of the opportunity announcement, important dates such as application deadlines, a brief explanation of eligibility requirements, links to the grants.gov website; additionally, it has the FTA Supplemental Form, the *Federal Register* notice, and other relevant information about FTA programs which may assist applicants in submitting a successful proposal for application. The Supplemental Form is a fillable PDF form, and this is our FTA product, not something produced by grants.gov. It's used to capture the key elements of the applicant's proposal, and it contains fill-in-the-blanks for information, which will be used by FTA to evaluate the proposal and funding requests. This form must be attached to the application in grants.gov in order to receive consideration. Please do not use this form or any form from prior years or other programs or attempt to create your own form; Use this Supplemental Form we provided. Use the current forms that are on the FTA website as well as available in grants.gov and the Resources link. From prior experience, we know the problems when applicants attempt to attach images or scanned portions of the proposal form within this PDF. I recommend you not attempt to do that, but rather complete the forms and type in the text as requested and attach it to your grants.gov application or submit it.

On the download page, once you click the hyperlink we provided for the opportunity ID, you will be taken to the grants.gov site synopsis page; the image at the top left is grants.gov synopsis page, and you will notice at the top—it contains tabs which bring you two different areas of the grants.gov site. It contains a synopsis, a Version History of related documents, which will contain the *Federal Register* notice, and the application package itself. This is the page where you can not only learn about the opportunity, but also where you can begin to apply for the funding opportunity. It contains similar information, which we published on the FTA website, but it also shows any changes that may have been created prior to closing. It additionally provides the key dates and related regulatory references. The Version History is just a history of the changes made since our original announcement. The Related Documents tab is the folder which contains documents related to this funding opportunity that includes the *Federal Register* notice, the application package, and just related applications. Please note that anyone can download this application package; however, only individuals who have been designated in grants.gov as authorized or organizational representatives can submit an application.

The application package is provided in the last tab in grants.gov on the synopsis page. It contains the mandatory SF-424, the lobbying form, and the attachment form. It does not include the Supplemental Form which is an FTA product, which must be attached to the form shown in this diagram.

So you must -- you can download these application packages to your desktop

computer and basically draft up information; however, in order to file, you have to actually log into your grants.gov account and submit it within their application package. Each FTA opportunity has its own form; the Supplemental Form must be downloaded, as I said. It's to be attached in the application with the attachment form. The Supplemental Form is also a fillable PDF and, again, just to remind everyone not to scan any documents or information into the Supplemental Form, as we have encountered numerous applicants for FTA funding in prior years.

So, for grants.gov applicants, if you are a new applicant and have not previously applied in grants.gov, this is the grants.gov site for Applicants tab. It contains all the information needed for applicants to not only register in grants.gov, but also if not a current federal funding recipient, they can register in SAM. Applicants who previously applied are still encouraged to review the Application tab to make sure they have all the latest information about the application process. The Applicants tab will walk you through the process of registering on grants.gov and help you to check to make sure you have the current and compatible versions of Adobe Acrobat. This site also provides you with the training you may need to use grants.gov. A word about Adobe Acrobat or Adobe compatibility. You need to check Adobe compatibility at this site to ensure that you were using the correct version of the software package in order to submit the application. The site also provides options to download the software if needed. There are many instances where applicants encounter technical issues submitting their applications because they are using either an expired or a different version of Adobe Acrobat from that which is specified by grants.gov. Applicant organization registration—so, again, this site is available within the Applicants tab, and this is primarily for new applicants that are requesting federal funds to assist organizations with the registration process in SAM as well as if needed to obtain a DUNS number or a unique entity identifier which is a version of the replacement for the DUNS number.

Grants.gov provides the applicants or registered users—it might even be called a workspace or is called a work space—a folder where applicants for a specific grant proposal can collaborate and develop the application proposal and collect associated documents which they need to submit. This workspace eliminates the need for e-mailing documents between two members. Grants.gov has enhanced this activity or facility for organizational applicants and can assist individuals in filesharing, collaborating, and also developing automated and developing the application process for the application itself. This is also the place in which the authorized organization representative can submit completed applications to grants.gov. Please review the workspace information on grants.gov and identify the type of workspace that your team needs in order to prepare your application. Please review the roles and privileges and remember that only authorized organization representatives can submit the application. FTA is accepting applications submitted via grants.gov and not information from individuals. Such organizations must be registered with grants.gov, and all the information and pertinent information is listed in the Applicants tab on grants.gov.

There are various links and sites that you will probably need in your application process or to submit your application. So, if you run into issues related to technical issues, that is, in submitting your application or filling out the required grants.gov forms, I recommend you contact grants.gov immediately at the support@grants.gov e-mail. It's probably the most expeditious way of getting assistance and, in turn, you can call the

800 number we've provided with the slides. However, I also recommend—although you have the Program Manager's name and e-mail and phone numbers probably—I recommend you only contact the FTA Program Managers related to programmatic issues and not technical issues involved with registering or submitting applications in grants.gov.

And now I will turn it over to DRI.

Speaker:

Thank you, all. I just want to take a moment to thank everybody for attending today. Again, this presentation will be made available on the Program's webpage, and we are here at the Office of Research Demonstration and Innovation at FTA. We are very excited to review all the incoming applications. This program is going to provide a unique opportunity with a goal to develop, deploy, and demonstrate innovative solutions that will improve the operational efficiency of transit agencies as well as enhancing the ability of transit users affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we will highlight projects; the eligible projects we are looking at will focus in four major areas that include vehicle facility equipment and infrastructure, cleaning and disinfection, innovative mobility such as contactless payments, and measures that strengthen public confidence in transit. Our goal is to have an anticipated award by the end of the calendar year, but please stay tuned via the Program webpage for any other updates. Again, if you have any questions that you think of after this webinar, please feel free to e-mail me. My e-mail is the fourth bullet, jamel.el-hamri@dot.gov. And, again, thank you for attending. Enjoy the rest of your day.