

FY21 Low or No Emission (Low-No) Grant Program

NOFO Webinar Transcript

March 4, 2021

My name is Mark Bathrick and I'm the division chief of the urbanized area programs here in the Office of Transit Programs at FTI, under which is how the low emission grant program. We're very excited to welcome you all here today for this webinar to go over the application process. The notice of funding opportunity and a little bit about the low emission program. This is the six year now with the program and we're very excited to announce the most funding that we've ever been able to, \$180 million would be available for transit providers across the country, and so today, joined by Amy Volz who's program manager here in the Office of Transit Programs. Amy is our lead for the Low or No emission program so should be walking us through today and all of the various information publicly available. In the notice of funding opportunity, which you can find on FTA's website as well as grants.gov. After we conclude the webinar presentation there will be ample time at the end for question and answers, so I would encourage everyone please use the chat pod to submit those questions that our team will be monitoring those as they come in, and then we'll be fielding those at the end of the session, and so once again thank you so much for joining us here and I will now turn it over to Amy.

Great, thank you Mark, let me go ahead and get organized here. OK. So for today's program, here's the lineup for our agenda. Will start with a program overview, then discuss the eligibility information and evaluation criteria, which is listed in the NOFO, then we'll have some time to go over the application requirements and the documents that are needed to submit for the application, and then, like Mark said, will end with some time for questions.

Hopefully everyone is here to learn about the low or no emission grant program, also referred to as low-no, provides funding for the purchase or lease of zero emission and low emission transit buses as well as for the acquisition, construction or leasing of supporting facilities and equipment. The program is unique in its focus on the deployment of advanced technology. It also closely aligns with the administration's recent executive order on protecting public health and the environment and their commitment to an equitable and clean energy future. We even got a little tweet shout out from Secretary Buttigieg announcing his support and excitement for the program. We're currently in our 6th year of funding and we're proud to have awarded over \$400,000,000 in program funds for 203 projects across the country.

Before we discuss this year's current competition I wanted to give a brief overview of last year's competition. In 2020, we received 147 applications from 42 states requesting over \$500,000,000 in funding. As part of the evaluation process 116 of those projects were rated as highly recommended and 18 projects were recommended. We were able to find 41 projects for a total of \$130,000,000. The need for low and no emission buses and facilities far exceeds the available funding as you can see, making this program highly competitive. It's oversubscribed each year and we anticipate that to be true for this year as well. If you're interested to see our previous awards they are listed on our program webpage for 2020 and prior years.

For this year's competition, we have our largest funding amount available to date, at \$180,000,000. This table highlights a few key dates I wanted to bring to your attention. So our notice of funding opportunity, which we refer to as the NOFO, was released on February 11th. This started our solicitation period. And applications are due on Monday April 12. When the solicitation closes, we will do project evaluations and announce awards in summer. And pre-award authority starts on the date of project announcements. So this is when it's posted to our web page. It can sometimes take a few days after that to be posted to the Federal Register. Funds are available for obligation the year of award plus three, so if we announce awards this summer, you would add 3 to 2021, bringing us to 2024. And just a note here. So although you can submit until 11:59 Eastern Time on April 12th, just want to let you know there may not be anyone available after 5:00 PM that day should you encounter any technical difficulties. So please submit your application prior to the deadline, that way if there are any issues we can hopefully resolve those in time for you to resubmit.

Now we'll go into the eligibility information. Eligible applicants for the program include designated recipients, states, local governmental authorities, or federally recognized Indian tribes. This criteria applies to both recipients and subrecipients. If you're applying from a rural area, you must submit as part of a consolidated state application. And eligible recipients can submit an application that includes partners. This could be a manufacturer or a consultant or other private sector entity that participates in project implementation. The low no competition satisfies the competitive procurement requirement for partners named in the application. But keep in mind if there is a change to the name partner after the project is awarded, you may have to go through the competitive procurement process.

For cost sharing or matching the match for vehicles is a maximum 85% Federal and 15% non-federal. For low or no emission bus related equipment or facilities that matches 90% federal and 10 non-federal. In order to comply with the Clean Air Act, the award recipient must itemize the cost of the related equipment and facilities in order to be eligible for that 90% federal share. Workforce

development is also eligible for match at 80% Federal and 20% non-federal and the eligible sources of local match are listed in the nofo if you need additional information.

What projects are eligible? And this includes the purchase or lease of low or no emission buses. This is defined as a passenger vehicle used to provide public transportation that significantly reduces energy consumption, air pollution, or direct carbon emissions when compared to a standard vehicle. I do want to emphasize the word public here, as in public transportation open to the general public. The construction or leasing of facilities and related equipment is also eligible. The facility must directly support the deployment of the low no vehicle, so an example would be a maintenance facility or fueling infrastructure. Applicants can also rehabilitate or improve an existing facility to accommodate low or no emission buses. And lastly, Workforce Development is also an eligible expense which I'll provide a little more detail on.

Workforce development is not a new eligible expense. We've had it in our past NOFOs, but it is highly encouraged. Agencies can use up to 0.5 percent of the grant award for workforce development activities and an additional 0.5% for training at the National Transit Institute. The workforce development activity should directly relate to the low no buses. It can include something like a site visit to an agency that already has a low no bus or participation in a training program sponsored by a transit agency. I've listed the Workforce Development Statute on this side, which has additional information on what's eligible. So I do recommend you check here first before reaching out to us if you have any questions.

Ineligible projects. This is a list of projects that are not eligible for low no funding and includes operating expenses preventative maintenance, development or deployment of prototype or demonstration vehicles, previous project expenses mobility management or planning and design studies.

The next few slides will walk through what we look for when evaluating a project. This follows both what's in the Nofo and the supplemental form.

I'm going to go through the application evaluation criteria, but I highly advise that you read through the NOFO carefully so you have a full understanding of what we're looking for in an application. The information I'm presenting here is not exhaustive, it's just an example of some questions you may want to think about as you're developing your application. For the demonstration of need please articulate the needs within your community that justify this project. Is this an expansion project and if so, why do you need those additional buses, are you adding routes? has ridership increased? etc. If this is a replacement project, we will need information on the age, condition and performance of the

vehicles. And if these vehicles have met or will exceed their useful life at the time of project implementation. The project should also be consistent with the fleet management plan. And what evidence can you provide to support your narrative? I've listed this question only once, but it really applies to each response on the supplemental form. Please provide materials that support your narrative. For demonstration of benefits, we want to know how the proposed project will support program objectives. This includes reducing each of the following: energy consumption, harmful emissions, and direct carbon emissions. Applicants can provide quantitative or qualitative information, or both. We're also looking for how this project fits into other plans or programs you may have that relate to the stated objectives. Basically, please don't just say this project meets the objectives because its zero emission bus, we do need a little more context than that.

For planning and local or regional prioritization we're looking to see here if your project is consistent with local and regional planning activities, it's usually best to document this through letters of support, so these can be from anyone that would benefit from the implementation of the project. Maybe a municipality or County or a nonprofit agency or other local stakeholder. Please note that these letters must be received by the April 12th deadline and must be attached to your application. The next one is a local financial commitment and the sources of local match again are listed in the Nofo, I suggest you read that section carefully so you understand what funds are eligible for local match. We're interested in knowing both the source of the funds and when they will be available.

For the project implementation strategy, how soon can the project be obligated and how will it be implemented? We're hoping that applicants can tie this response back to the project milestones which we also request on the supplemental form and mention any special considerations. We are asking for a little more than just we issued an RFP, we began a contract and we ended the contract. Please be as descriptive as possible to show that you can implement the project in both a realistic and a reasonable timeframe. FTA does rate projects higher if grant funds can be obligated within 12 months of selection. Finally, for the technical, legal and financial capacity, we are looking for information here on your capability to carry out the project and adhere to all federal and program requirements. For most FTA recipients, we do regular audits, and review of grantees to make sure everything is in compliance. If that applies to you, it would be good to mention it here as well.

The next two slides will go into detail on other considerations outside of scored evaluation criteria. If you remember from last year's program we had over a 130 highly recommended or recommended applications and we were only able to fund 41. These considerations are at the discretion of the administration to help with final project selection.

If you applied last year, you might notice that this year's supplemental form has two new questions. The first is related to the identification of nonattainment or maintenance areas in the proposed service area for the project. We're interested in the following four pollutants: carbon monoxide, ozone, particulate matter 2.5, and particulate matter 10. If you're unsure if this applies to you, I highly encourage you to reach out to your MPO to determine your status. Your second option could be to look at the EPA greenbook, and the link is provided on this slide.

There we go, little too fast OK, this second new question is related to environmental justice, which includes low income and minority populations. Low income is defined as a person who's median household income is at or below the Department of Health and Human Services Poverty guidelines. A minority population includes, but is not limited to, the following: American Indian, Alaskan Native Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. You can also use a locally developed threshold, so if you have developed an environmental justice definition for another purpose or grant program, you can use that here as long as it's appropriate for the project. You can also use a percentage of median income for the area, as long as it's consistent with the HHS poverty guidelines. We were intentional in not specifying a threshold or geographic unit, but it should be appropriate to the scope of the project. A formal EJ analysis is not required, nor is it requested. We're really looking for information on environmental justice populations in your area, as you define them, and how the project can benefit those populations. If you need additional information you can refer to FTA environmental circular or the executive order. Both are listed on this slide. You can also take a look at the HHS guidelines, which were just updated for 2021.

OK, so now we will transition into the application instructions on how to apply for the funding, so I will turn this over to Johnita, our grants.gov expert, who will walk through this section.

Thanks Amy. I am Johnita Glover in office of Grants Management and guidance and this portion of the webinar is to provide an orientation on the resources available to applicant organizations on the FDA website grants.gov, and the application process. You can stay on the slide Amy, please thanks. FTA funding opportunities are published on FTAs website the Federal Register and on grants.gov website we recommend applicants begin their search and application process on FTA funding opportunities webpage using the Nofo page as your start provides links to related information and links to the websites and resources to assist with the application process. To locate the Nofo page, go to the FTA homepage, which is FTA Dot gov at the top of the web page. Click on the funding icon and select applying. Then click on a notice of funding on the left side of the page. The notice of funding page provides links to all the current or active FDA opportunities available. Click on Opportunity ID which is

the hyperlink to the FTA web website. If you click on a grant program link, it will bring you to the program page which is sponsoring a discretionary funding and soliciting applicants. If you are searching for old or expired notices, they are available in a separate menu directly under the notice of funding. Next slide.

As mentioned the FTA Nofo page contains a summary of the opportunity announcement. Important dates such as the application deadline and brief explanation of eligibility requirements, and links to the grants.gov site. Additionally, it has the FTA supplemental form Federal Register Notice and other relevant information about FTA programs, which may assist applicants in developing and submitting a successful proposal or application. The supplemental form is a fillable PDF which is a FTA product. It is used to capture the key elements of the applicant's proposal. This form contains fill in blanks for information which will be used by FTA to evaluate the proposed projects and funding requested. This form must be attached to the application in grants dot gov in order to receive consideration. Please do not use forms from prior years or attempt to create your own PDF, in lieu of the supplemental form that we have provided specifically for the opportunity. Please only use current forms provided at the FDA website or in grants.gov. Please do not attempt to attach images or scan copies of the supplemental form. The PDF must be completed with and attached to the application in grants.gov. You can navigate directly to the grants.gov site by clicking a blue hyperlink opportunity ID on a nofo page. Next slide.

Once you click the blue hyperlink opportunity ID on a nofo page, you will be taken to the grants.gov site. The grants.gov opportunity page contains 4 tabs. The synopsis version, history, related documents, and package. This is also the page where you can begin to apply for the funding opportunity. The synopsis tabs. I'm sorry to provide similar information, which would be which we published on the FDA website. But also shows if any changes have been posted. Additionally it provides key dates and related regulatory references. The version History tab is just that, a history of any changes made since the original announcement. The related Documents tab leads to a folder which contains documents related to the funding opportunity. It includes items such as the Federal Register Notice, the FTA supplemental form to be used for submitting the proposal or application, and other related documents. The package tab contains the references and links to download and apply for this opportunity. Please note that anyone could download the application package, but only individuals who have been designated in grants.gov as the authorized organizational representative can submit the application. Next slide.

This slide shows the contents of the application package available in grants.gov, which will include the mandatory SF 424, the lobbying form, and attachment form used to attach supporting materials for the application. Please note that the application package does not contain the supplemental form. Next slide.

This slide depicts a screenshot of the supplemental form. Each opportunity has its own form, the supplemental form must be downloaded separately from the FTA site or within a related documents tab. The form to be attached to the application or the attachments form. The attachment form is a way for applicants to include documents supporting their application as Amy mentioned in her presentation. Any supporting documents that you may have to support your application will be attached here. And as mentioned before, the supplemental form is a fillable PDF and is used to capture the information FTA needs to evaluate the proposed project. Please do not attach scan copies the PDF, it must be filled in with text, otherwise FTA will reject the application and again, please do not submit supplemental forms from other programs or prior years. Next slide.

Applicants who have not previously applied on grants.gov must visit grants.gov and select the applicants tab. Applicants who have previously applied are still encouraged to review the Applications tab in Grants Dot to make sure that you have the latest information about the application process. The applicants tab will walk you through the process of registering on grants.gov as well as help you check to make sure you have the correct or compatible version of Adobe Acrobat, this site will also provide you with training on the use of grants.gov. Just keep in mind that there is Adobe Compatibility, check on this site to ensure that applicants are using the correct version software packages in order to submit your application This site also provides the option to download the software if you need it. There are many instances where applications encounter technical issues and normally it is due to the use of a different version of Adobe Acrobat, so play pay close attention to make sure that the current version you are using is up to date. Next slide.

For new applicants to grants.gov federal funds, the grants.gov site assist organizations with the registration process in the system for award management Sam, with obtaining a duns registration. Next slide.

Registered organizations can create a workspace in which Grant proposal teams can collaborate in developing the application proposal and associated documents. This workspace eliminates the need for email and documents between team members grants.gov. Has been enhanced to allow applicant organizations the workspace in which assign individuals can collaborate, share files, and perform very attached to develop the application. This is also the place which the authorized organizational

representative can submit the completed application to grants.gov. Please review the workspace information in grants.gov and identify the type of workspace and team members who will prepare your application. Please review the roles and privileges and remember that only the authorized organizational representative can submit the application. FTA is accepting applications submitted via grants.gov from organizations and not individuals. Such organizations must be registered in grants.gov. All the information and pertinent links are available on applicants tab of the site. Next slide.

Last, if you encounter any technical issues or problems while working in application or submitting the application and please submit those concerns to grants.gov. And any program related issues can be addressed to the FTA program manager. Thank you and I'll turn it back over to Amy.

Thanks, Johnita. OK, so this slide we're basically just summarizing the components that must be included in your application. That's the SF 424 form that we just went over along with the low no supplemental form. We also need the lobbying form. Again, any supporting documentation which will be your attachments. Please refer to the supporting documents by filename in your narrative within the supplemental form so we can then match these to the actual document you've uploaded. If we can't match, then we might not be able to review them. I also want to mention that we can only consider the materials submitted as part of the grants.gov application, so please don't add any hyperlinks or send anything to us directly. And keep in mind that FTA attachments work best in Internet Explorer, so if you're getting a blank page or an error message, it could be an Adobe issue that Johnita mentioned, but it could also be a browser issue. This one actually got me yesterday, I almost sounded the alarm, and then someone graciously pointed out that I was in the wrong browser.

The last slide here I just wanted to consolidate some of our important links for everyone. So the notice of funding opportunity. Hopefully everyone has a copy, but if not, you can find it at that first link here. We've seen the grants.gov link a few times and again a link for the supplemental form. Lastly, we have the low no program web page, that's where you can see the previous program winners, and we will continually update that, including the recording and the transcript for this webinar hopefully in the next few days. Or next week. And then just a reminder applications must be submitted through grants.gov by 11:59 Eastern Time on April 12. Late applications may not be accepted.

And with that, I just want to thank everyone again for being here today and for your interest in the program. We continue to see a need for low and no emission buses and we're excited to work with our partners across the country. And we're really excited about the amount of funding we have available, so we can't wait to review your application. And with that, I believe we can open it up now for questions and answers and I think Mark is going to assist us with this.

Yes, thanks Amy and thank you to Amy and Johnita and Tom Wilson in our office for setting up this webinar. Great job everybody as Amy and Johnita have been speaking here we've been getting a ton of questions coming into the queue in a pod, so we'll definitely do our best here in the time that we have to get through as many of those as possible. So Amy, the 1st question that we have here and we've got a couple of different iterations of this, but will the presentation and the PowerPoint slides be available after this webinar? My favorite question. So the answer is yes, and I even have a few of these in my inbox right now to respond to. Both the webinar, the transcript, and the slides will be available and posted to our website. It takes us a few days to get those materials together, so be on the lookout within the next week to have that posted. Excellent, thanks Amy, the next one is another logistics question so we're compiling our letters of support and are interested in knowing who those should be addressed to. Great question you can submit your letter of support directly to me if you don't require a response. If you would like a response to your letter, you can send them directly to the secretary. Awesome, thank you Amy for that clarification for us. Now the next couple we've got from folks are some project specific questions, so the first one we have here is can the low and no emission program fund airport shuttles and also broaden that question Amy for you to also ask about school buses. Sure, so the Low-No program funds vehicles that are used in the provision of public transportation, so like I said, they have to be open to the general public and you also have to be an eligible applicant which again is the designated recipients, a state or local government authority or an Indian tribe. So unfortunately, airport shuttles typically do not fall into that category, mostly because they aren't open to the general public. And the same would go then for school buses as well. Alright, our next question that's come in here for us is we're a transit agency located at a public State University, would we qualify to apply directly for the low and no emission program? That's a good question and just related to our school buses one. And so this one can be a little tricky, again that you do have to be an eligible applicant so sometimes with public universities if they are designated as a local government authority, that would make them an eligible applicant to apply directly. Typically, though, if you are providing public transportation services closed just for the campus, then the project would not be eligible. So again, that's where that public transportation provision comes into place. The service has to be open to the general public. Alright, thank you Amy. Next we've got a couple here on funding, so the first one we have is if we're applying for multiple elements in a grant, so someone for example there would be applying for buses, facility and maybe workforce development, does the match ratios apply to each of those individually? Can the applicant blend the match rate for the overall project? It's individual so each one of those components would have whatever the applicable match rate is, so for the buses that's the

85/15. For the facilities, as long as the costs are itemized, that's the 90/10, and then for workforce development, that's the 80/20. Excellent. So the next question we have here is for an example of what mobility management is, they notice that was ineligible expenses were asking for clarification on what is mobility management. This kind of falls into the operations or mobility management, and that's ineligible under this program. So in order to be eligible for low no funds, the software or the technology has to be directly applicable to the operations of the low or no emission vehicle, so something like a software that helps you extend battery life would be eligible. But if it's just related to the operations, more like route planning or something like that, that would not be an eligible expense under low no. Thank you, Amy and just for additional clarification for folks. This also would be applicable to mobility managers and other folks that we were traditionally fund in the 5310 program for example, that might provide travel, training and other logistics and planning coordination. Those particular activities are not eligible as well in the low and no emission program which is traditionally focused on we would consider capital projects. The purchase of buses and facilities and equipment. So our next one we have, Amy is if we apply for a facility or for equipment, do we also have to apply for buses? So in essence if we apply for one particular item for low emission project, do we have to apply for the others or all three? You can apply individually, you don't have to have an application that includes both facility and buses. I do want to just note if you are applying for a facility you have to, it has to be directly related to the low or no emission vehicles within your fleet. So again, everything ties back to these lower no emission buses, you're not required again to apply for buses if you're also applying for a facility, but we would want to see evidence that this facility is supporting the low or no emission vehicles within your fleet. OK next we have another funding question. Can the low and no emission grant be paired with other Department of Transportation grants or TIFIA loans, for example. So other FTA funding cannot typically be used for FTA program [match], so we couldn't combine two FTA funding sources to use as match. On the TIFIA part Mark, I'll have to ask you to take that question. Sure, so as Amy mentioned, typically federal funding sources are not permissible to match other federal funding sources. There are in very rare instances federal programs that are applicable and allowed to match FTA dollars. As a reference, you can actually look at FTA's federal Fund Braiding Guide that the coordinating council on access and mobility develops for a listing of those potential opportunities. That being said, you can have additional federal funding that may be part of a larger Low-No project. So for example, if you're looking at constructing a maintenance facility, for example, that could certainly have a pretty high cost. And so you may be looking at not only some money with low no grant dollars but also maybe 5307 funds. That is allowable, but you would just need to make sure in your application that you highlight the match that's going to be

going to each of those federal sources. Similarly, for TIFIA loans those are also permissible. Applicants need to make sure that they highlight that in their project budget, what components are coming from TIFIA, and then what would be being used in 5339C or low-no portion. So our next question, some folks who sound like you're familiar with our NOFO, it appears that departmental objectives are no longer listed in the notice of funding this year. Are those items that we should still look to address in our responses? Right, so as you may know, we do have a new administration this year. I mean we had a few other updates to our nofo again the non attainment and the environmental justice areas. And so if it's not listed in NOFO, we're not looking for you to address that in your supplemental form. And so that includes things like the removal of the ROUTES or opportunity zones that you might have seen last year. You're more than welcome, if it's applicable to your project, to still include that type of information to justify the need for your project, but it's not required this year. Alright, our next question here. We have an eligibility question, can grant funding be used to cover training for employees to maintain electric, or in this case will say low and no emission buses? Yes, so that would be eligible under the workforce development activities, that includes items like training for your existing workforce or even trying to recruit new employees to help with the maintenance of the low or no emission buses. Perfect, so here's a general one, but we actually get this a lot. What does FTA consider a bus or vehicle in this case in the low and no emission program? Good question. I know it has to have rubber tires because we've gotten this once or twice with the hovercraft and the trolley definition. I guess to be more, let me pull up the statute here. So the definition of a low or no vehicle it this this is a low or no emission a passenger vehicle used to provide public transportation that sufficiently reduces energy consumption or it's a zero emission vehicle used to provide public transportation, so we don't specify the size of the vehicle necessarily or the type of bus, as long as it's low or no emission and it's used for public transportation then it's eligible under this program. Mark, do you have anything else to add to that? For the specifications, no, that's great answer Amy, and definitely one that we continue to see folks asking especially as the transit world continues to adapt to the variety of operating services that are out there. And so if you have any questions about your particular situation or about your particular project that you're interested in exploring with us, definitely please feel free to email me and we can be sure to look at and provide you as much technical assistance as we can for your particular project. I'll also add just to throw out there. That all of the vehicles have to be in compliance of course, with the federal and program requirements. So that includes the useful life, the bus testing, the DBE requirements, etc. So this kind of ties back again to the demonstration and pilot projects vehicles are not eligible for low No funding. So everything has to have gone through all of the certifications and testing. Alright, we gotta

couple here. I'll kind of just merge them together, but can an applicant send, an eligible applicant, can they send in an application on their own and then also submit as part of a state application? That's a great question, Mark is somebody able to submit both I've only seen it submitted one way or the other. Either there are, I guess it would depend on the type of project. If you're applying for the same project, we wouldn't want you to apply both on your own and as part of a consolidated application. Can you speak to if it's a different project? Yeah, so that's a great point Amy, and just to emphasize that if you're applying for the same project please only apply through one mechanism, either through yourself as the agency or through your State Department transportation or whoever would be the lead agency. If you are applying for different projects, certainly that is at the discretion of the applicant to make that determination. However, I would caution on 2 items. The first is that whoever is the applicant to the Federal Transit Administration in this program will be the grant recipient and we will be responsible for complying with all federal rules and regulations, so just please be cognizant that whoever was going to be the lead agency. The second item is to make sure that the particular projects are not dependent upon one another. You would hate to be in a position to where you are awarded funding for buses and you're charging infrastructure, for example, or your fuel cell infrastructure is another application that is not selected. So definitely please take that into consideration when you're determining how you're going to compile your application. Alright our next one is related to the partnership provision, so in the past we could name partners or vendors in our application. Is this not the case this year? That's still the case this year, you're able, I mean, you'll see the question on the supplemental form that asks you to identify any of your partnerships in the application, and so this would satisfy the competitive procurement process for partners for private sector partners. So a manufacturer or vendor, consultant, etc. So yes, that's still allowable this year. I mean, you'll see that both in the NOFO and on the supplemental form. Alright, our next question looking at vehicles in particular, there's a vehicle that's looking to be replaced have to be past its useful life at the time of application or prior to the delivery of the vehicle. Replacement vehicles are not required to have met their useful life at the time of project implementation, although it is encouraged and then just keep in mind if you're replacing a vehicle that has not met its useful life and you've used FTA funds in the past to purchase that vehicle you would either need to repay those funds or request a waiver from FTA. Excellent. Are VW settlement funds still eligible as a source of non federal match? Yes, VW funds are still eligible and we do encourage you to please reach out and coordinate with your regional office on the VW funds, they do have some very specific requirements in order to use them. I mean, you would just want to touch base with your regional office so that you don't get ahead of something or sort of miss something with those funds, they do have some specific requirements

associated with them. Alright, we've got a couple of questions from folks asking about if we will be awarding more than one project per state regarding the average size of the grant, I'll just address those for those group of questions that are coming in. There is certainly a lot of factors that play into that, whether or not only the amount of applications that we received in a given year and the amount of funding that's requested but also how competitive the applications are. This is also certainly competitive program, and so it will be at the discretion of the administration acting administrator Nuria Fernandez and the secretary, as Amy mentioned, when it comes to project selection, so we aren't able to comment when it comes to anything in regards to speculation and looking at the size of applications or the number applications that might be given out this year. Another question we've got a couple of times. Your aim is just for a confirmation, folks were looking to confirm that rural applicants must submit as part of a state consolidated application? That is correct. Alright, and just another clarification that school buses public school buses are not eligible and considered public transportation. Correct, unfortunately for this program we do not fund yellow school buses. There are other programs and other funding available for that, so depending on what state you live in, there might be some school bus funds. There's also a program under EPA that we might be able to refer you to, so unfortunately this program does not include school buses, but there are other dollars out there for you. Excellent question here from Andrea, would a study on the charging facilities needed to support an electric fleet qualify for a loan or grant? So it gets a little bit tricky here. The Low-No program itself is for capital projects, so that means buses and facilities, planning is not an eligible cost unless it's considered incidental to the project. So if you're building a facility and you need planning on the last part of engineering work or where to locate something, that might be eligible, but in general planning and design studies are not eligible under Low No, it's for capital projects specifically. Excellent, thanks for that distinction, Amy. Our next question is in regards to spare ratios and the current situation that we have with the global pandemic. So with COVID and service cuts our transit agency currently has a higher spare ratio than the recommended or required 20%? With that, what type of documentation should we include or wouldn't be expecting to explain that in their application this year? So I know the spare ratio policy applies to all of the buses in the agencies fleet, but Mark I think I'll have to ask you to answer the COVID component to this question. Sure, so as a part of FTA spare ratio policy, transit recipients across the country have the option to request relief from their regional office for up to two years. So any agency that might find themselves currently over their spare ratio, we would encourage them to include documentation that might reference communications with your FTA regional office notifying them of the spare ratio situation. Folks could also include documentation looking at the service implications that Covid has had so far and how you plan on

responding to that with these buses that you would be looking to purchase. So certainly with any application that we're looking for folks to submit that we would want to make sure that you are always tying it back to the project at hand in the project that you're applying for. So that's just some food for thought there for you. So let's see here we got a bunch of questions coming in. So thank you everyone for putting these are some excellent questions. We gotta couple on this one so I'll just address, when will the notice of funding for the bus and bus facilities program be available? so that one, so the bus and bus facilities or the bus competitive program as we refer to it that is in development at this time. We are currently working here within FTA and with the administration on that notice of funding opportunity. So stay tuned in the coming weeks and months for that particular program and I would encourage everyone to make sure that you sign up for our Gov delivery blast that FTA sends out because that has a wealth of information on programs when they are announced as well as other Department initial initiatives that are underway. So here's one from Raymond, Amy, looking at the application reviews, will an applicants prior year award or an application be considered in the evaluation of this year's application? So that sort of speaks to what Mark said earlier about the kind of the universe of applicants that we get in, so that could be a consideration as we're doing final funding selections. If you've received either prior low no funds or other FTA funds, it could be something that's considered at the end, as we're trying to pare down our final award selections. But it doesn't preclude you by any means from applying this year, so please do apply, it's just one of those considerations that the administration can use if we're trying to pare down our projects. Excellent thank you for that clarification, Amy and another one looking for clarification here that we've got in. It looks like there's some confusion about whether you can or cannot apply for vehicles and infrastructure in the same grant, and I just want to make sure that we're very clear for folks, that you can apply for both in the application, that will certainly be up to the discretion of the applicants on how you feel your project best meets your needs at the local area and certainly also is competitive. We just want to make sure that folks are considering, especially for those applicants that may be looking to implement low or no emission technology for the 1st time, that you don't find yourself in a position where you have one without the other. Certainly, when you're starting your fleet transition. So our next one that we've got here, Amy looking at vocational rehabilitation workforce participants, so can the program provide transportation for vocational rehabilitation workforce? So a closed door smaller grouping than the general public. So again, this comes back to that emphasis on the word public, so the services have to be open to the general public so unfortunately closed door programs or services are not eligible for funding under low no. Alright got, let's see here, a couple more questions that we got, is there a funding cap on projects that are awarded?

So finding caps if used in a competition are again dependent on a variety of factors, so we mentioned this before. The number of applicants, the requested funding amount, how competitive the applications are. You're encouraged to apply for the funding that you need to ensure your project is successful. An again that funding cap could be applied at the end at the discretion of the administration if we're trying to pare down projects again. We don't always use them, but they could be used in a competition and it really just depends on all of those different factors that we've mentioned. Excellent thanks Amy for that. The next two questions are tied together, so I'll ask them both, Amy, cause I think it would be beneficial for folks to address them in conjunction with one another. So the first one is what is the benefit in listing a private partner in your application? And the second question is do project partners have to have gone through a competitive solicitation in order to be listed as a project partner in their application? OK, so I think the answer I'll give applies to both. Mark, let me know if I missed one of those questions. So the benefit of identifying your partner in your application is that you will not have to go through the competitive procurement process. So the low no program's competitive selection process satisfies the competitive procurement which would be beneficial if you name a manufacturer then you don't have to go out and do a competitive solicitation again as long as they are named in the application. That competitive selection process has been satisfied and I'll just mention if something changes, so if you've named someone in your application, you're given an award, and then that partnership changes you may have to go through the competitive procurement process at that point. Does that cover both of those? It does? And I'll just mention one other item when it comes to that, if you're interested in selecting a private partner for your application that will be up to the local agency and up to the applicant on making a determination on how you would select that entity. So that will certainly be up to any local or state rules and regulations that would be in place. Alright, we've got a couple very specific questions. So it looks like we're asking a lot of folks you're asking about ratings when it comes to including a partnership or not including a partnership. So Amy maybe just want to address the project implementation strategy section and give folks maybe some context about what we're looking for there. Sure, so we're looking for an implementation strategy that's both reasonable and descriptive to show us that you've done your due diligence to make sure that you can implement this project within your specified time frame. So if you have to coordinate with any other agencies, if you need to do anything for the environmental clearance process if you have a facility that you're looking to construct, we would want to see that information in your implementation strategy to see both what you have accomplished up to this point and what you still have left to accomplish as part of your project and your project's timeline. So in terms of partnerships, we do want to see that you've coordinated with the appropriate agencies or entities

and then we would want to see you explain that in your supplemental form as well as part of your schedule to implement your project. Excellent so the next question Amy, all throw it out to you and we also are joined by Sadaat Khan from our Office of Planning and Environment who certainly can jump in on this, but can you discuss the new portion in particular environmental justice and how best to identify what those populations are? And where we can find information about that? Sure, let me flip back to my slide here just to make sure I've got the information OK, so again, I just want to reiterate that we did not specify a threshold or geographic unit, and that was intentional, but it should be appropriate to the scope of your project. So if you have identified a local threshold that you think is appropriate for this project, you're more than welcome to use that and you can also use the definitions that we've provided, which is the low income and minority populations that are found in the executive order that was listed on the slide. Or you could take a look at FTA's environmental justice circular, so hopefully those will give you enough information or resources to identify these populations within your area. Again, we're not looking for a formal analysis, we're just asking for you to identify environmental justice populations in your area and how the project can benefit those populations. Sadaat, do you have anything you want to add to that to help folks out? No, thank you Amy, you said it very well. Think you highlighted all the main points from the presentation itself. Great, thank you, so you can find our environmental justice circular on our website. I think you can even just Google it and then it'll pop up, if you type FTA environmental Justice Circular 4703.1 or you can take a look and Google the executive order which is 12898. Again these slides will be posted on our website so you'll have another resource there as well. And lastly you can take a look too at the HHS guidelines which were just updated for 2021, so those are posted too at the HHS website as well. Awesome, thank you both really appreciate it. Our next question is looking at submission logistics. So the question here is Amy, if we are in a rural area, so a rural transportation provider, and we need to submit as part of a consolidated application, where would we find the application? The application should be on grants.gov, Mark do you want to take this? The logistics of this one between the two [agencies]? Yeah you bet Amy, I can definitely do that. So if you were a rural provider, public transportation, so these are typically our 5311 providers throughout the country, so you're normally a subrecipient of the State Department of Transportation. You would actually want to get in touch with your state DOT. They're going to be the recipient and so they'll be the folks that will be going into grants.gov and actually filling out the information that Amy and Johnita referenced, the SF 424 form and supplemental form and the various attachments. So you want to work with them and determine what their processes for soliciting applications and how they are choosing to combine and submit a consolidated application. So that's for rural folks. If you're one of our eligible direct recipients,

you would want to go into grants.gov and submit that directly. Alright so our next question, somewhat tide to this, Amy can multiple agencies submit under one application? Yes, applicants are able to partner with other agencies. Each application though, should only have one agency who would be the grant recipient and then all other agencies or entities would be a subrecipient to that agency. So your primary recipient is the one that's responsible for ensuring all of the subrecipients named in the application adhere to the Federal and program requirements and then just also note that both the recipient and the subrecipients have to be eligible applicants. For the application side of this, you should only have one SF 424 form and one supplemental form, and within that supplemental form is where you would explain the roles and responsibilities of each agency involved. So don't give us more than one supplemental or more than one SF 424, even if you have multiple agencies within one application. Alright our next question excellent. The first time this has come up here this afternoon, so asking about scalability. So our scalable projects more competitive and also expand that Amy, if you could just provide a little bit of context on what it means to have a scalable project. Sure, so you'll see on the supplemental form that we do ask for your overall project budget and then below that will ask if your project can be scalable. And this comes into play sometimes if we're wanting to spread out our total funding amount. So we might award a lesser amount and we're looking for information on what would still make your project valuable to the needs within your community. So if you have your total project, we will ask for a scaled amount and you can explain in that narrative what's the minimum amount of funds that you would need to still have a project that's beneficial for your community. I can't necessarily speak to the competitiveness or if that makes your application more or less competitive, it's just be aware even if you didn't name a scalable amount, you might still receive an award amount that's less than what you've asked for, just based on the funding needs and the applications that we've received. Alright, our next question here does NEPA need to be completed for facility projects that are being requested in an application? So NEPA would be part of that environmental clearance process that we were talking about earlier, so we would be looking for you to explain where you are at with your environmental clearance in your project implementation strategy and your milestones. It doesn't necessarily have to be completed before you apply for funds, but we do want to have confidence that you have done your due diligence or if it still needs to be done and how that plays into your timeline for when funds can be obligated and the project can be implemented. Excellent Amy, and really for some additional clarification for folks. We at FTA truly understand that there are a lot of factors that play at the local level when it comes to project implementation. So really just be as honest and as detailed as possible in your applications when looking at project implementation strategies or your financing for your project.

Because one of the things we certainly consider is making sure that an applicant has a full picture of how they're going to get their project from the infancy of an application all the way through to being open for Revenue Service. So a question here Amy that we've got is our project currently isn't eligible under the low and no emission program so we're not an eligible applicant, but we're interested in other funding opportunities the Department might have to help support with bus transportation. Do you have any examples that you can share with folks? I mean, I don't know if I have enough information to provide other examples besides maybe visiting bus and bus facilities project. Mark, can you provide any information here that might be helpful for them? So a few things I would mention here for anyone that you find yourself in this situation. The first is just as Amy mentioned the bus and bus facilities competitive program is certainly another great opportunity for applicants to apply for public transportation funding. If you don't find yourself either ready with the project, maybe that is fully put together or certainly looking at the applicant eligibility and you don't qualify under Low-No, certainly that could be another option for you depending on your legal status. The Department also has other funding mechanisms that are available, including the build program or the better utilizing investments to leverage development. So that's something as well for folks that should be coming out here in the coming weeks or months. So definitely once again just to kind of put that out there. Be sure to sign up for the Department's Gov Delivery notice, is a great resource, and provides a lot of information on funding opportunities that we have here. Not only in FTA but across the Department of Transportation. So the question we have here is our consulting services eligible for funding? Right, so this kind of goes back to the question that we had earlier, and so the low and no emission program here is for capital projects, so buses and bus facilities Typically that is not consulting - Sorry, I thought this was a repeat of our earlier question [planning and design], but this is consulting services. It's a little tricky here. So they have to be directly applicable to the project and I think we would have to take a look at how those services are being used to implement the low emission vehicles. Or the facility within the project. Sure, Mark you probably have some more to add for that. Yeah, I mean, it's that's exactly right really. The test for anyone out there that is looking to potentially include something like that is going to be is the service or the cost directly tied to the implementation of the project, so keep that in mind. Just as Amy mention for workforce development as well, making sure that that's tied to low and no emission projects you applying for as well so. Just making sure there's a one to one relationship. I have a question we have not gotten before Amy, so would a city owned bike share program qualify? Interesting I'm gonna say no on this one because it's not a lower no emission vehicle but Mark, do you have the specifications for that? Yeah, so that is actually a great question typically. So FTA in general cannot fund the actual purchase of

the bikes themselves. We have been able to help with infrastructure related to bike share projects, really those bikes aren't going to necessarily fall into the low or no emission field even if it's an E bike for example, but I would definitely encourage you to look at the BUILD program as well for opportunities to looking at the infrastructure associated with those projects. That distinction is out there for folks that are concerning any project like that and provide some opportunities as well for you to look for some funding out there. Alright so we've got a question on tribal applicant, so if we're a rural provider but we are a tribe, can we apply directly? Yes, so that's the one exception to the rural area is if you are a federally recognized Indian tribe, you can apply directly for funds under the low No program. You do not need to submit your application as part of a consolidated state application. OK. So these two are tied together here that we've got, so I'll just, I'll combine them here and just ask Amy. Is it a requirement that an agency has an entire fleet, or will transition their entire fleet, to the same type of lower no emission vehicle or can they have a mixed fleet? Applicants are able to have a mixed fleet, we don't have a requirement that specifies the entire fleet needs to be one type of technology or fuel propulsion type. So yes, you're more than welcome to have a mixed fleet and show your transition plan overtime. You can have more than one fuel type. You don't have to have all one type of bus either. OK next question here. Tied back a little bit to the questions that we've been getting about joint applications and partnering with one another. Two transit agencies are in the same urbanized area. Is it beneficial for them to submit a joint application or submit individually? It's really up to the applicant here and the type of project that you're trying to implement. So if it makes sense for you to have a partnership you're more than welcome to have both agencies on one application. Again, you would just have to identify who is the primary recipient and who is the subrecipient. Or you can apply individually. It's really, however you structure your application in a way that best meets the needs within your community and can best implement the project, so it's really it's up to you guys to see what might be the best fit. OK got a couple quick ones here so I'll just go through and just give these quick. Yes and Nos. Are 5311 rural agencies eligible to apply through a state dot? the answer is yes. Do small buses or shuttles qualify? The answer is yes, just as long as they are open to the general public. Are trolleys eligible for funding? The answer is yes, as long as they are rubber tire and open to the public. So in some localities across the country, folks will use kind of the term trolley and bus interchangeably. So as long as they have a typical public transportation tire configuration, they would be eligible. And alright, let's see. We've got a couple more. Get some thank you's and a great jobs Amy, so kudos on that. Alright let's see here from folks. A lot of questions on the fleet plans. So Amy maybe just want to give a little bit more information for folks on if they need to include anything in regards to a fleet transition plan as a part of their application. I

think naturally we are interested if you have a fleet management plan so please include that to show us that you've done your due diligence and you thought about how your fleet is going to transition to low and no emission vehicles, the only requirement here in terms of plans or fleet plans, is the fleet management plan. So we do want to see that your project is consistent with your fleet management plan, but otherwise, if you have a transition plan, please include that in your application if it supports your project and to help support your narrative, and demonstration of need that's more than welcome. OK and our next question, is there a preference given to applications who are looking to put low or no emission buses on a variety of routes versus a singular route, so this would be more for our larger applicants, that might have a larger route structure. And is there any benefit to them to apply the bus directed to single route or to their system as a whole, Amy? We don't give preference. Again, this just goes back to please describe the project that best meets the needs within your community. So if it makes sense for you to have low or no emission buses on multiple routes versus 1 route, that's really up to you and we would just be looking for a description of how that best meets the needs that are within your community. Excellent. So can this funding be used for the construction of a new facility to support a brand new implementation of a low or no emission vehicle? The Low-No funding can be used for the construction of a new facility again, as long as it's related to the lower no emission buses within the fleet. Mark, I think I might have to hand it over to you if an applicant doesn't currently have buses, but they're planning to have them, what that might mean for the application. So if folks are finding themselves in a position where you were interested in applying for the infrastructure without actually having the buses. You would certainly want to have a very robust conversation about your plans for having the buses come into service and any funding that you may have identified to help procure those buses. Certainly FTA doesn't want to be in a position where we make a federal investment to support one particular technology, and then the vehicles that are compatible with technology never arrive. So definitely, I would encourage folks to take that into consideration when you're looking at your application and looking at your overall implementation plan. Alright so we've got about 10 minutes or so left, so I'll try to get to a few more here we got. Is paratransit vehicles eligible for funding? Yes, paratransit vehicles are eligible for funding, and they are considered public transportation services, they are open to the general public or a segment of the general public as defined by age, disability, or low income, so that's included in the statute under the definition of public transportation. Awesome, good job Amy and we've got a question next on the project budget. So this individual noticed that the NOFO no longer includes language discussing a higher local share. Will FTA still be considering those applications that have a higher local share than the statutory minimum? Yes, you are correct that language has been removed

from this year's nofo and we wanted to do that under consideration of COVID and what the pandemic has done to ridership in some areas for different transit agencies. So the higher local share is no longer a preference and will not be considered under the evaluation criteria or other considerations. You're still more than welcome to do it if you want to provide a higher local share, but it won't be considered anymore in the evaluation criteria. Alright, our next question that we have Amy is if our agency is awarded funding, when should the funds be used? I mean, when should the funds be used? I think is this getting a pre-award authority? Mark is that what you're thinking? Or is this implementation strategy? I think the individual is looking more for implementation strategy Amy, and basically how quickly they would need to procure the buses or build a facility for example. OK, things have to be obligated within 3 years of our award announcement, so we have until 2024, and we would really just be looking in your implementation strategy to see what's reasonable for you to implement buses. Say again, it does have to be obligated within that three years and we would just take a look at your timeline to see how quickly you might be able to get buses or the facility or the project obligated according to your implementation strategy. And I would also mention, Amy highlighted during the presentation, the Low-No program is extremely competitive and extremely oversubscribed, so we're also looking in our applications to make sure that there is an identifiable need by the applicant to get these vehicles or facility or equipment purchased in constructed into service as well. So we just put that out there for folks. As you're looking at your applications and making sure that you have an identifiable need when applying for funding this year. Alright. Let's see here. So this question come up a few times for folks either asking if buy America requirements and ADA requirements need to be met for the vehicles and facilities. Federal requirements need to be met for the vehicles and the facilities and that would include the Buy America and ADA standards. As well as you know, useful life and all the other federal requirements that are applicable here. Perfect, yes, but when federal funding is involved all applicable federal requirements must be met. So we received a couple of follow up questions and I'll just quickly just elaborate on these. The first one, it looks like is are prison transport vehicles eligible for funding the answer was no, those are not open to the general public and not considered public transportation. The other question is in regards to University transportation and those vehicles that would operate on campus and are open to students. So dorm shuttles and the like, just as Amy mentioned, the transportation must be open to the public. So University transportation systems that are open to students and the general public and provide meaningful public transportation service certainly had the potential to be eligible, but services that are just for students for example, the shuttle back and forth to dorms or for sports teams for example, to receive transportation to and from activities, all of those are not considered public transportation and

are not eligible for funding in the low no program. Take two more here and we got a lot of questions coming in from folks asking about useful life, Amy, so maybe just a little bit more context for everyone when they're looking at their project and the application on having a discussion on useful life. Sure, so for useful life. Let me pull up. I just lost my notes page. Hold on. I'm sorry, are we just speaking in general, sort of about the application or the vehicle itself? They're looking for the application and how to communicate the useful life of the asset to FTA. OK, that is a question on our supplemental form. Mark do you want to take this one? Yeah, you bet Amy. So applicants can certainly address useful life in a couple different ways. Certainly in your narrative is an opportunity to have a discussion about the useful life of buses that you're looking to replace. You can also, as Amy mentioned, feel free to provide attachments and supporting information as well. FTA strongly encourages applicants to provide supporting documentation and substantiating evidence to help with your narratives as you're filling out your application, so that's definitely an opportunity for potential applicants to include fleet management plans for example. Inventory listings or any other documentation that your agency might have that would be applicable. But one thing I will mention is that when you're looking to attach those documents, please just go ahead and attach the page that is relevant to your application. Our review teams when we assemble them, they have about a week to look over applications, and so it always helps to make sure that they have easily accessible information and can readily find what you want them to be looking at. So if you have 100 page fleet management plan and page 25 has which year you're looking to articulate, just go ahead and make sure that you attached page 25 for us. I know our review teams will greatly appreciate that. Alright. Looking here, I'll try to get our last question and make it a good one and actually this will be perfect. This is a great one to end on for folks. Looking at the partnership provision again, I know we get a lot of questions on that are submitted here to our office. But if a project has low no funding, and for example, FTA formula funding. Does the low no partnership provision satisfy the procurement for the Formula Funds? So that might be included in the same project? Yes, the low no program's competitive selection process satisfies the requirement for the competitive procurement under the formula Funds. So as long as you have named your partner in your application you will not have to go through the competitive procurement process for the Formula Funds. Excellent, and it also just make sure that those formula Funds are listed in your loan application as well. So with that thank you, Amy, Johnita, Sadaat and Tom for all your work on getting this webinar ready for everyone here this afternoon. I want to make sure I thank all of you for all that you're doing to help provide public transportation across America. We look forward to continuing to partner with all of you and work with

you as we go through this application and really, for the rest of the fiscal year throughout working with all of FDA's competitive grant programs.