

## North Carolina Safe Routes to School Program

### Non-Infrastructure Transportation Alternatives Program Overview

Questions with Answers provided by Ed Johnson, North Carolina SRTS Coordinator  
(many transcribed and paraphrased from the informational webinar on 2/26/2019)

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#### Timeframe

**QUESTION: Does the program have to run for three years or can it be a shorter timeframe?**

ANSWER: It can be a shorter timeframe. The recipient has up to 36 months to start and complete the program. We are encouraging, for sustainability reasons of SRTS, that the longer the program and the greater the geographic reach and the more collaborative partners involved, the better. We are encouraging a broad level of participation both in duration and geographical reach.

**QUESTION: Given that this application process is for up to three years, but can be shorter than three years, could an applicant apply for funding for something just in the third year?**

ANSWER: They could, certainly, to be allocated within the third year, 2021, but our encouragement is that the project has sustainability. We're trying to reach communities over a large geographic area to keep the initiatives and momentum of Safe Routes to School in North Carolina moving forward. So, I would encourage that if there's a collaborative effort for that third year for implementation, that it be a strong application.

**QUESTION: Will there be another call for applications at some point in the future, like 2020 or 2021?**

ANSWER: No, this will be the only application period over the next 3 years.

**QUESTION: One month to put an application together and reach out for potential partners and build relationships for collaboration is a tight window, particularly given that this is one shot for funding for the next three years. Would NCDOT consider extending the application period to help eligible applicants build that collaboration?**

ANSWER: Unfortunately, not. To help avoid having Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) funds rescinded to the extent possible, NCDOT is seeking to have these funds authorized and well underway before the end of Federal Fiscal Year 2019 (9/30/19). Adhering to such an aggressive timeline means we are abiding to the TAP guideline requirements by holding the competition, selecting the projects, writing the agreements, and having the funds authorized. This is the schedule that the SRTS office has been asked to adhere to so we are being as proactive as we can in order to have this roll out as quickly as we can. We realize that this is a tight window and we certainly apologize for that, knowing that people will have to react and proact rather quickly in order to build partnerships, but we are encouraging folks to be able to do just that and be able to do it quickly.

## Budget

**QUESTION: The press release says \$1.5 million is available for the SRTS grant program, but only \$1 million is being made available for grants. What is the discrepancy?**

ANSWER: There is no discrepancy. \$500K is for personnel and overhead costs, some amount of training materials that will be in-house and our Technical Assistance provisions through UNC-HSRC. The funding cap for each recipient would still be \$100K per year up to three years.

**Question: Is this a \$1.5 million amount per year for 3 years, meaning there is \$1.5 million each year, or for all three years?**

It's each year. So, the total amount available over the course of 3 years is \$4.5 million.

**QUESTION: Can applicants apply for the \$50-\$100k per year for three years, or can they apply for the total \$150 - \$300k total? So, do applicants have to break down how much they are requesting per year over that 3-year period, or if they go for a 3 year project, is it just that the total amount is within the cap?**

You'll see the answer in the grant guidelines, which delineates that you break the budget down per year, so we can see what is spent per year, and then there's a cumulative budget for the entire 3-year period.

## Activities

**QUESTION: Are there any examples or is there anything online that you could point to for what you consider a successful project, maybe for what a small municipality has completed?**

ANSWER: Certainly, I encourage anyone listening while the Active Routes to School program is still underway, you can go to the NC SRTS website for NCDOT and look at examples and periodicals that are there, but also Active Routes to School on the NCDPH website, and there are examples there for different evaluation, encouragement and enforcement, education programs that each one of the ten coordinators has participated in over the five year period.

**QUESTION: Does the requirement for activities to take place within 2 miles of a school only apply to enforcement activities or also to other programs and trainings?**

ANSWER: We are looking for it to be within 2 miles of a K-8 school, but we understand that gets a little squishy. We certainly are encouraging activities to take place within that 2-mile radius so the school can participate, but it's not locked in to a strict 2 miles.

## Eligibility

**QUESTION: The eligibility guidelines specify that “county agencies” can apply. Can a County Government apply if the application does not specifically come from an agency like the health department?**

ANSWER: Yes, County agencies and county governments are eligible. More specifically, if the application comes from county government, that application is eligible.

**QUESTION: Can any non-profit apply for this grant?**

ANSWER: “Nonprofit organizations that oversee the administration of local transportation safety programs” is per the FHWA guidance. A health focused non-profit could be the lead agency as long as transportation safety was part of their mission and goals. “Other eligible agencies and organizations with a strong interest in and support for the use of funding for non-infrastructure programs and activities are strongly encouraged to partner with the lead sponsor to develop the project application as a co-sponsor.” – This speaks to the collaborative nature of the application and also pushing the applicant to work with other partners and partnerships.

**QUESTION: Are charter schools eligible for funding?**

ANSWER: Yes.

## Use of Funds

**QUESTION: Where is the line between infrastructure and non-infrastructure? Is painting or striping a crosswalk considered infrastructure?**

ANSWER: Yes, that is considered infrastructure. And again, I would encourage applicants, that if there are projects from the non-infrastructure application that require paint or signage or any kind of delineation like that, that’s where the relationship-building with your NCDOT Division staff becomes important. Traffic signals, crosswalks, pedestrian heads – anything related to the hard environment is considered infrastructure and applicants would need to seek a different funding source.

**QUESTION: Would infrastructure improvements such as school speed zone flashers eligible?**

ANSWER: No. You would need to talk to your NCDOT Division staff about this issue. This sort of thing involved extra steps like a foundation, right-of-way acquisition, an environmental review, etc.

**QUESTION: Are salaries for new school crossing guards an eligible expense?**

ANSWER: No, new crossing guards are not eligible. But you can pay for a substitute teacher so that a school staff member may attend a training. Eligibility for reimbursement for a substitute teacher; for them to be that crossing guard and attend a training is eligible, under FHWA Safe Routes to School guidelines.

**QUESTION: What is considered a reasonable percentage of the grant to go toward project management staff. Is there a cutoff or a range that is considered reasonable?**

Answer: It depends on what the program proposal looks like. It could be around 60-65%, but that's if you are looking at the \$100k per year grant.

**QUESTION: If a community wanted to do a network study to evaluate infrastructure solutions as well as look at infrastructure solutions that would be eligible, like preliminary engineering or design work, is that eligible?**

ANSWER: It certainly would be as long as it's incorporating the other three E's: education encouragement and enforcement. We are not encouraging a stand-alone evaluation or what could be called a feasibility study. The application must include all four E's and how you would implement that. A proposal to just do a study would not be sufficient.

**QUESTION: If a community wanted to fund a SRTS plan for a school or municipality, is that eligible, if they address all the E's?**

ANSWER: Yes, if they address all the E's and also how to implement the plan. Developing the plan alone is not enough, they must work towards implementation.

**QUESTION: Are marketing and communications costs eligible, and can you clarify about materials created for the project and how they have to be approved?**

ANSWER: Yes, marketing materials and things like safety campaigns, social media, those kinds of outreach, are certainly reimbursable. As we enter into an agreement with each one of the entities funded, we will establish the communication for that to happen. All materials with any kind of branding, media materials, curricula, that kind of thing, we'll work together on that for that development and branding. But that will be worked out in the agreement itself.

**QUESTION: Would salary for police to help direct traffic at peak times qualify?**

ANSWER: No, this is not eligible.

## Matching Funds

**QUESTION: What can federally funded MPOs do to support applications? Can they provide in-kind services?**

ANSWER: Although MPO's are not financially eligible to participate, as per the FHWA guidance, they can show their support by offering letters of support, letters of resolution, etc., towards the application. I have also checked with FHWA staff with reference to in-kind materials, etc., from the MPO and this is not eligible either.

**QUESTION: Does the lead agency also have to be the agency providing the local match, or could a city or county provide the local match, but a school district be the lead, or vice versa?**

ANSWER: Yes, that is fine. The RPO could be the lead agency with other contributors, the school district could be the lead agency with other contributors, or vice versa.

**QUESTION: What are some examples of eligible matching funding?**

ANSWER: Public health agencies, schools, school districts may help provide the 20% match. "Match" doesn't mean that you write NCDOT a check. You submit for reimbursement and then NCDOT will reimburse up to 80% of those eligible expenditures.

**QUESTION: Can in-kind contributions count toward the required 20% match?**

ANSWER: FHWA guidance references that salaries, fringe benefits, costs of materials and other items of expense incurred for the federal award are reimbursable. But the clarification comes from Code of Federal Regulations 2017 Title 2. And I encourage finance officers to review that for your agency. There's a section on the classification of costs. It depends on the cost allocation plan for the lead agency that will be in agreement with the NCDOT SRTS program submitted. You are encouraged to be in touch with that lead agencies financial staff in order to determine the direct and indirect costs and rates as well as realizing what the cost allocation plan is for the lead agency. These are potentially different for each lead agency.

**QUESTION: What documentation is needed to use staff time toward the match? Can this include volunteers or staff of partner organizations as well?**

ANSWER: That would be within your budget narrative and also your budget spreadsheet, to delineate that.

**QUESTION: Are there other funding sources for infrastructure funding besides working with NCDOT Division offices?**

ANSWER: Yes, you can work with RPOs and MPOs to find out if there may be any direct allocation funding available for infrastructure implementation. Each one of those different agencies has the opportunity and has minimal funding to do some infrastructure. That's why it's important to build that relationship with your MPO, your RPO, and your Division staff. If there is a crosswalk that needs to be put in, a signal, signage, those kinds of things, check with them because they can potentially be incorporated into an existing project in the area of concern.

## Partnerships

**QUESTION: Are you aware of, or can you point to, examples where applicants partnered with a SRTS program in conjunction with an AARP project, or with someone from AARP partnering on a project for SRTS?**

ANSWER: No, unfortunately I can't, but I'd love to see that kind of partnership. AARP has been a wonderful example of being a strong supporter of the Complete Streets Initiative and has been a wonderful catalyst for getting inter-generational activities through older adults and also younger adults. So, unfortunately, I don't have an example for that, but I certainly encourage you to reach out and connect with your AARP representative, if that's a possibility.

**QUESTION: Who is the point of the contact in the NCDOT Division offices?**

ANSWER: The division engineer. You can find their contact information online.

## Evaluation

**QUESTION: Are the travel tallies and parent surveys the minimum requirement, but programs also need to do some other type of evaluation, like maybe something that is listed in the guidance document? Can you clarify what you're looking for with evaluation?**

ANSWER: Evaluation will also be at the end of the project. There will be close-out documentation that will be consistent with the entire project itself and ask such questions like: How did the project go, what were the good, the bad, the right, the wrong, et...? This is so the SRTS office can keep improving. Responding to these project close documents and evaluations will be contingent upon final payment.

## Award Notification

**QUESTION: Once the award process has happened, is there a place where NCDOT will post who received the awards and will the public know when that is?**

ANSWER: We certainly will do a press release for this and we will notify not only the recipients for the awards, but also those applicants that were not awarded. But we'll be sure to do a press release for those who are awarded.