North Carolina Safe Routes to School Program

Non-Infrastructure Transportation Alternatives Program Overview

December 2022

Integrated Mobility Division

North Carolina Safe Routes to School Program

Non-Infrastructure Transportation Alternatives Program Guidelines

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I. Introduction and Overview

The North Carolina Department of Transportation's Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program was established in 2005 through the SAFETEA-LU transportation bill as a federally funded program to provide an opportunity for communities to improve conditions for bicycling and walking to school. In North Carolina the program is currently supported with legacy SAFETEA-LU funds and Transportation Alternatives federal funding established under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

The following guidelines provide the necessary information to assist in the submission of a SRTS non-infrastructure program application. This category of funding is intended to support programs and activities that focus on education, enforcement, encouragement, and evaluation elements of a SRTS initiative.

If additional assistance is needed, please contact the NCDOT Safe Routes to School Coordinator, Ed Johnson, at 919-707-2604 or erjohnson2@ncdot.gov or Statewide Planning and Programming Unit Manager Joe Furstenberg at (919) 707-2603 or jcfurstenberg@ncdot.gov.

Purpose of SRTS

The purpose of this program is to:

- Enable and encourage K-12 children and teens, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school

- Make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age

- Facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

II. Available Funding for Non-Infrastructure Program

The SRTS Program has set aside federal funds for non-infrastructure programs and activities over a 3-year period. Funding requests may range from a total amount of $50,000 to $500,000 per project. Applications requesting more than $500,000 will be required to justify the total amount. Projects will be awarded in 2023 and can be one to three years in length. Funding may be requested to support activities for a cluster of schools in close geographic proximity; community-wide, regional or statewide programs.

The non-infrastructure award program is a cost reimbursement program. This competitive program is using a combination of federal funds with differing requirements. IMD will fund as many projects as possible at 100% of the cost. However, it is anticipated that some applicants may be asked to provide a local match if there is a significant demand for available program funds.   Award recipients must be able to cover the costs of the project and will be reimbursed during the course of project implementation. All costs submitted for reimbursement are subject to eligibility requirements and must comply with a reimbursement agreement executed between NCDOT and the recipient. **Any work performed or costs incurred prior to a Notice to Proceed are not eligible for reimbursement.**

Non-Infrastructure Program Timeline*

December 12	Call for Proposals opens
December 14	Informational Webinar
February 6	Applications due by 11:59 PM
February 16	Review committee makes recommendations
March 1	NCDOT presents awardee information to Board of Transportation
March 13	Applicants are notified of award
April	Reimbursement agreement initiated

*This schedule is provided to assist in your planning. The actual dates may be subject to change.

III. Applicant Eligibility

Eligible recipients include the following:
- Local governments
  - Municipality
  - County agency (Public Health, County Tourism or Economic Development Office)
- Regional Transportation Authority and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations under 23 U.S.C. 135(m)
- Natural Resource or Public Land Agency
  - Federal (USACE, National Forests, USFWS, and National Park Service)
  - State or local park or forest agencies (DENR)
  - State or local fish and game or wildlife agencies
- School districts, local education agencies, or schools (public or nonprofit private schools)
- Tribal governments
- Any other local or regional governmental entity with responsibility for oversight of transportation or recreational trails, except MPOs or state agencies
- Nonprofit organizations that oversee the administration of local transportation safety programs

This entity must be willing and able to enter into a reimbursement agreement with NCDOT. A letter of support and administration from the lead sponsoring agency or organization must be submitted with the application indicating support of the project and the sponsor's ability to enter into agreement with NCDOT. The lead sponsor will be responsible for project administration, paying for any work performed or materials purchased, and submitting proper proof of payment to NCDOT for reimbursement. This sponsor will also be NCDOT's primary contact if awarded.

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. *A letter of support from the school district(s) or schools to be impacted by the project is required if they are not the lead agency. Additionally, any organizations listed in the proposed budget also need to have a letter of support.*

To stimulate creative approaches to implementing this program and take an equitable approach, communities are encouraged to develop relationships among diverse stakeholders. Letters of support from these other stakeholders are optional.

Typical costs charged directly to a federal award are the compensation of employees who work on that award, their related fringe benefit costs, the costs of materials and other items of expense incurred for the federal award. For further clarification, see CFR-2017-title2-vol1-part200.pdf; section 200.412, Classification of Costs.

IV. Eligible Programs and Activities

Non-infrastructure projects consist of programs and activities that, when implemented, aim to build a culture for active travel through education, encouragement and evaluation that increase the safety and convenience of children to walking and/or bicycling to and from school. Communities should also consider the role of law enforcement officers within their plans. For example, crossing guard training and equipment, participation in road safety audits, and/or providing input on traffic safety concerns.

For infrastructure changes, contact the local NCDOT division staff about possible funds for developing engineering solutions in the vicinity of schools in your area.

Funds are not available for partial activities that cannot function as a complete and useful whole.

Applicants may apply for eligible programs and activities that allow for needs to be addressed at a cluster of schools; a school district, municipality, or county; or a regional or statewide level. Applications must define complete, identifiable and implementable projects. Funds are not available for partial activities that cannot function as a complete and useful whole or for programs that do not have an independent utility.

Inappropriate Uses of Funds

Although funding for SRTS is flexible to allow for creative partnerships and solutions, there are certain activities and projects that are ineligible for funding. Ineligible expenses include:

- Programs and activities that do not specifically serve the stated purposes of the SRTS Program (see Purpose of SRTS).
- Projects that focus on pick-up and drop-off areas or procedures in order to make it more convenient for the drivers rather than to improve child safety and/or walking and bicycling access.
- Education programs that primarily focus on bus safety.
- Purchases of promotional or incentive materials that do not serve a training purpose.
- Purchases of bicycles, bike trailers or other equipment that does not comply with the Buy America Act.

Program and Activity Locations

Any program or activity funded should benefit K-12 students either directly or indirectly. Programs may indirectly benefit the general public; however, it cannot be the sole or primary beneficiary. Programs specifically including traffic education and enforcement activities for a specific school(s) must take place within approximately two miles of the identified school(s). Other eligible non-infrastructure activities do not have a location restriction. Funding for education and encouragement activities at private schools is also allowed.

Types of Programs and Activities

This program specifies that public awareness campaigns and outreach to media and community leaders; traffic education and enforcement in the vicinity of schools; and student sessions on bicycle and pedestrian safety, health, and environment are all eligible non-infrastructure related programs and activities. Further ideas for eligible non-infrastructure programs and activities are broken down into the categories below. Projects must address all three categories:

- **Education**: educate parents and neighbors as drivers in and around the school area on the rules of the road and proper drop-off/pick-up procedures; launch driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools; teach children about pedestrian, bicyclist and traffic safety; teach personal safety, health and environmental benefits of walking and cycling; educate parents as teachers to encourage proper safety practices with their children; plan and implement a traffic garden; educate law enforcement officers on laws related to pedestrian and bicycle safety and the role of law enforcement; develop or procure appropriate curricula, materials and trainers; deliver instruction on how to teach Let's Go NC! or a similar skills course, or crossing guard training; use social media, local traditional media, and community leaders to conduct outreach and public awareness campaigns

- **Encouragement**: support the development of policies that encourage safe walking and bicycling to school; hold special SRTS-related events; participate in Walk & Roll to School Day; participate in Bicycle Month/Bike & Roll to School Day, Car Free Day, or some other Walk and Roll to School Day; develop and implement mileage clubs and contests; implement a walking school bus or bike bus program; establish a remote drop-off program; secure and distribute safety and training materials that encourage and reinforce more walking and bicycling over time.

- **Evaluation**: conduct road safety audits; collect student travel data; evaluate the implementation of a SRTS project, program or activity

Applicants should also consider the role of law enforcement. We recognize the involvement of law enforcement officers and agencies depends on the community. Law enforcement officers bring experience with traffic safety concerns and locations that could play an important role in road safety audits or needs identification as well as crossing guard training. They could serve in a role to support crossing guard training and equipment needs (vests, gloves, STOP paddles, cones, etc.); develop and implement a safety patrol program; initiate a neighborhood speed watch program and/or participate in walk audits or other needs identification.

Existing SRTS programs have also used non-infrastructure funding for the following purposes:

- Pay for substitute teachers if needed to cover for faculty attending SRTS-related training functions during school hours;

- Costs to engage the services of a consultant (either non-profit or for-profit) to coordinate the efforts of numerous stakeholders and volunteers and manage the process for implementation at a community-wide, regional, or statewide level.

- Provide funds for trainers, volunteers, and managers of SRTS programs.

The non-infrastructure programs and activities listed above are not exhaustive; other programs and activities not listed here may be eligible if they meet the purposes of the SRTS Program.

V. Selection Criteria and Review Process

The NCDOT staff will conduct a preliminary review of all applications for eligibility, completeness and general appropriateness. Applications that pass the initial screening will then be scored by the Review Committee. This group will include NCDOT staff, HSRC staff, and individuals with professional experience related to developing, administering and/or implementing bicycle- and pedestrian-related programs and activities. These individuals will represent agencies such as MPOs, RPOs, COGs, advocacy organizations, public health. The Review Committee will evaluate each application using the selection criteria outlined below and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Transportation Alternatives guidance. The Committee will also look for the final set of selected projects to show both a geographical spread across the state and representation from urban and rural communities. The Review Committee will forward their recommendations to NCDOT for final approval.

Evaluation Criteria

Application review will focus on the following criteria:

PROPOSAL QUALITY
- **Likelihood of success**. Do the selected strategies have a track record of supporting safe walking and biking? Is there sufficient support to implement the proposed strategies? Does the sponsor appear to have the capacity to ramp-up and implement the project in a timely way? Is there a project champion or regional support to keep the project on-track?
- **Collaboration.** Does the proposed project show regional or multi-municipal cooperation? Has the sponsor demonstrated coordination and collaboration with agencies such as their NCDOT Division, MPO/RPO, municipality, general public, advocacy organizations, school district, etc. in developing the proposed activities and plans for implementation?
- **Need.** Is there a timeliness and need for the project? What benefits are expected as a result of the project?
- **Reasonableness of cost**. Is the cost of the proposed project reasonable based on the scope?
- **Comprehensive.** Does the project describe planned education, encouragement, evaluation and enforcement strategies?

CONTEXT

- **Experience**. Does the project include partners who have experience implementing safe walking and biking strategies? Does the sponsor show evidence of understanding federal aid requirements?
- **Equity**. Does the project meet the need of a disadvantaged group or area? How will community members be included in the SRTS planning and implementation process? What's been done to understand how this project helps to meet the needs of underserved groups?
- **Fit**. Is the proposed project consistent with and supportive of local and regional plans and initiatives? Does the proposed project leverage other projects or leverage funding from other agencies, local governments and/or community- based organizations?

VI. Conditions of Reimbursement Award

Funding is provided on a reimbursement basis to the agency or organization responsible for the administration of the funds. The contracting agency or organization must execute a legal agreement with NCDOT prior to receiving funding authorization. This agreement will outline the responsibilities of each party, the terms of reimbursement, and the deliverables. This agreement must be executed within three months of being awarded the project. Selected recipients will receive a formal Notice to Proceed from NCDOT once the reimbursement agreement is fully executed.

Costs incurred before receipt of a Notice to Proceed are not a reimbursable expense, and any such costs must be absorbed by the contracting agency/organization. Invoices for partial project completion will be allowed; conditions will be defined in the reimbursement agreement. A portion of the total NCDOT allocation will be withheld until the project is completed, including any evaluation tasks, and all relevant materials are submitted to NCDOT and approved by the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation. Educational and encouragement materials or safety messages must be submitted to NCDOT for review and approval prior to distribution and use.

Award recipients will have up to thirty-six (36) months to complete their projects unless otherwise stated in the agreement, starting from the date of receipt of a written Notice to Proceed.

Award recipients of projects that implement school-based programs and/or activities must collect evaluation data on their non-infrastructure initiative. One option for data collection issuing the Student In-Class Travel Tally and the Parent Survey. The time period for collecting evaluation data will be defined in the reimbursement agreement. A percentage of the final reimbursement payment will also be contingent upon the lead sponsor conducting a closing evaluation of programs and/or activities implemented through this non-infrastructure award reimbursement program. Periodic progress reports describing accomplishments and expenditures will be required. Changes in project schedules must be approved by NCDOT-IMD. Unspent funds may be withdrawn from award recipients that fail to meet timely benchmarks in their project implementation.

NCDOT must be credited for project participation in documents, materials, press releases and other announcements and promotional materials related to the non-infrastructure project.

All electronic files, maps, technical illustrations, graphics, etc. produced with these funds will become the property of NCDOT-IMD and the award recipient.

VII. Application Process

1. Review application information at https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/BikePed/Pages/Non-Infrastructure-Alternatives-Program.aspx.

2. Review application questions and obtain necessary letters.
The online system does not permit applicants to save and return to complete the application. Applicants should use the Word file version of the application questions to prepare their responses and then copy and paste responses into the online application portal. The Word file is available on the main page at https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/44dab36a95a740f6b7c80749eca47b99.

The following letters need to be uploaded with the online application
- Letter of commitment from Lead Agency
- Letter from partner(s) included in the budget
- Letter of support from school(s) or school district(s) impacted by the program
- Letter of support from the community/communities impacted by the program
- Letter(s) of support from community partners or those who might benefit from the project are encouraged but not required.
- Draft or adopted Board resolution in support of the project.

3. Complete and submit application and upload necessary letters through the online application portal at https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/44dab36a95a740f6b7c80749eca47b99.

Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 pm on February 6, 2023.