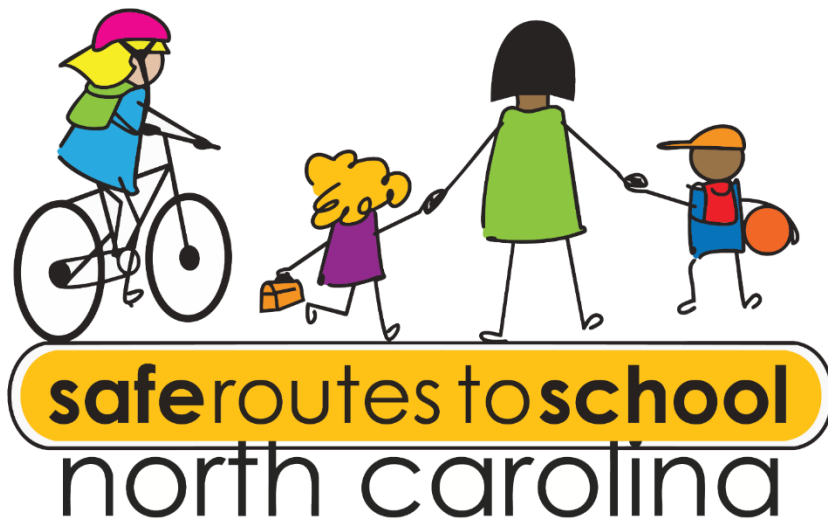


North Carolina Safe Routes to School Program

Planning and Programming Grants Overview



2026

Updated 10/6/2026



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1. Introduction and Overview

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program supports communities in making it safer and easier for K-12 students, including students with disabilities, to walk, bicycle, and roll. These guidelines explain the 2026 Planning and Programming Grant opportunity, including available funding, applicant eligibility, eligible project types and costs, selection criteria, award conditions, and the application process.

Planning may be proposed as a stand-alone project or as one component of a broader SRTS project. Applicants may also request support for programming, project coordination or staffing, demonstration projects, equipment and materials, evaluation, and minor safety improvements when eligible and approved by NCDOT.

Questions may be directed to Jennifer Delcourt, NCDOT Safe Routes to School Program Manager, at jadelcourt@ncdot.gov or 919-707-2609, or Hart Evans, Statewide Planning and Programming Manager, at jhevans1@ncdot.gov or 919-707-2610.

Purpose of SRTS

The purpose of this program is to:

- Enable and encourage children and teens in grades K-12, including those with disabilities, to walk, bicycle, and roll to school and in their communities.
- Build the skills, confidence, and knowledge students need to safely walk, bicycle, and roll to school and in daily life.
- Make walking, bicycling, and rolling safer and more appealing transportation options for students.
- Support the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that improve safety and access around schools and help reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution.

2. Available Funding

The SRTS Planning and Programming Grants are funded through the [Transportation Alternatives Program](#). Grants will fund projects with an 18-month period of performance from January 1, 2027 through June 30, 2028. Funding requests must be between \$25,000 and \$400,000. Requests outside this range will not be considered. The number of projects funded will depend on the number and size of proposed projects submitted and how well they score based on the criteria outlined in section 6.

The SRTS Planning and Programming Grants are reimbursement-based and the awardee is required to expend funds up front and then request reimbursement from NCDOT for eligible expenses on a quarterly basis.

Local Matching Funds Requirement

The Transportation Alternatives Program requires 20 percent local matching funds be contributed to the project by the local entity. Therefore, NCDOT will reimburse up to 80 percent of eligible project costs. Applicants are responsible for providing the required 20 percent local match and must include the full match in the project budget. The application must identify the anticipated source and current status of the match. If this requirement poses a problem for any applicant, reach out to NCDOT for guidance.

All reimbursed costs must be eligible and documented. Costs incurred before NCDOT has issued a written Notice to Proceed are not eligible for reimbursement.

For extenuating circumstances, NCDOT will investigate funding for communities that cannot provide the local match. Applicants will need to explain why they don't have access to any potential match funding. Describe any sources that have already been investigated and why it can't meet local match needs (i.e. local foundations, state and local general funds, councils of government, planning organizations, etc.). NCDOT does NOT guarantee that any funds will be available for matching funds.

Planning and Programming Grant Timeline

This schedule is provided for planning purposes and may be subject to change.

Important Dates	Action
October 5, 2026	Call for Proposals opens
October 7, 2026, 3:00 p.m.	Informational webinar
November 6, 2026, 11:59 p.m.	Applications due
November 6, 2026- December 3, 2026	Application review, NCDOT/Applicant coordination on additional information or program refinement (as needed),
December 3, 2026	NCDOT presents awardee information to the Board of Transportation
December 4, 2026	Applicants notified and reimbursement agreements initiated

3. Applicant Eligibility

Eligible applicants include:

- Local governments
 - Municipalities
 - County agencies (Public Health, County Tourism or Economic Development Office)
 - Councils of Governments (COGs)
- Regional Transportation Authority and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations under 23 U.S.C. 135(m)
- Transit agencies
- 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
- Municipal Planning Organizations (MPOs) that serve urbanized areas with a population of 200,000 or fewer
- Nonprofit organizations
- Other eligible local or regional governmental entities with responsibility for or oversight of transportation or recreational trails

The lead applicant must be willing and able to enter into a reimbursement agreement with NCDOT and will be responsible for project administration, payment of project expenses, reimbursement requests, and required reporting.

Other eligible agencies and organizations with a strong interest in, and support for, the use of funding for planning and programming 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. Include a letter of support from each partner that will have a substantial role in implementing the project or managing project funds. Letters are not required from every vendor or organization named in the budget. Applicants are encouraged to involve partners who reflect the community and can help shape or carry out the proposed project. Letters of support are optional unless a partner will have a substantial financial or implementation role.

4. Eligible Programs and Activities

Funded activities must benefit K-12 students directly or indirectly. The general public may benefit from a project but may not be its sole or primary beneficiary. Projects may serve one school, a cluster of schools, a school district, a municipality or county, or a regional or statewide area. The

proposed scope, staffing, and budget should be proportionate to the number of schools, students, and communities the project is intended to serve.

Applicants should describe the schools and communities to be served and contact NCDOT with questions about the eligibility of a specific location. Eligible projects may include the activity types below. The examples are illustrative, and applicants should select the activities that best address the needs identified in their application.

Applicants may select one or more of the project types below based on the needs identified in the application. Projects are not required to include every activity type. All projects must include an appropriate evaluation component.

A proposal should describe a complete and useful project that can be implemented within the grant period. A stand-alone activity, equipment purchase, or smaller project may be eligible when the applicant clearly explains how it will be used, managed, evaluated, and sustained as part of an eligible SRTS effort.

Planning

Develop or update a community-informed SRTS plan for one school, a cluster of schools, a school district, a municipality or county, or a broader service area. Planning may be a stand-alone project or part of a larger project.

- Assess existing conditions, barriers, opportunities, and student access needs
- Engage students, caregivers, school staff, community members, transportation agencies, and other partners
- Conduct walk or bike audits, safety assessments, mapping, data analysis, or other needs-identification activities
- Identify and prioritize program, policy, operational, and infrastructure recommendations
- Develop realistic implementation steps, responsible partners, potential funding pathways, and near-term priorities
- Use eligible consultant support when specialized planning or technical expertise is needed (the lead applicant remains responsible for grant administration and applicable procurement requirements)

Programming

Provide education, encouragement, engagement, and locally appropriate traffic-safety activities. Law-enforcement participation may be included where it supports local project needs, but is not required.

- Walking and bicycling safety or skills instruction
- Traffic gardens and hands-on safety education
- Crossing-guard training
- Driver-safety campaigns focused on student safety
- Walk and Roll to School Day and other encouragement events
- Walking school buses, bike buses, remote drop-off programs, mileage clubs, or similar activities
- Outreach and engagement with students, families, school staff, and community partners

Program Coordination and Staffing

Support staff time or contracted services needed to coordinate eligible SRTS activities, partnerships, outreach, procurement, training, implementation, evaluation, and reporting. The application should describe the project work to be completed and the estimated level of effort. Eligible personnel costs may include documented salary and fringe benefits or contracted-service costs associated with approved project work.

Demonstration Projects

Plan and carry out temporary or pilot activities that test potential safety, access, education, or encouragement strategy. The application should explain what will be tested, how participants will be engaged, and how the results will inform future decisions.

Equipment and Materials

Purchase equipment or materials that directly support an eligible SRTS activity, such as bicycles, trailers, training equipment, curricula, helmets, or other safety and educational materials. Applicants requesting major equipment should explain how it will be used, stored, maintained, managed, and sustained after the grant. All purchases must comply with applicable federal and NCDOT procurement and purchasing requirements.

Minor Safety Improvements

Minor permanent safety improvements, such as crosswalk-related improvements or rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs), may be eligible when they are defined in the work plan and budget form as part of an overall SRTS program and are approved by NCDOT. Applicants considering work in a public right-of-way should coordinate with the agency that owns or maintains the road before applying. For state-maintained roads, contact the appropriate NCDOT Division to discuss feasibility, approvals, project development requirements, and potential implementation pathways.

Evaluation

Every project must include evaluation appropriate to the proposed work. Applicants should identify practical measures that show whether the project was completed and what it achieved. Measures may include participation, deliverables completed, observations, surveys, travel tallies, skills assessments, implementation milestones, or other measures appropriate to the project and community. This will be done through the Work Plan Template.

Other Eligible Costs

Other planning and programming activities or costs may be eligible when they directly support the purposes of the SRTS Program. Examples may include substitute-teacher costs needed for SRTS-related training, approved indirect costs, and other documented project costs that meet applicable requirements. Applicants should consult NCDOT if they are uncertain whether a proposed activity or expense is eligible.

5. Inappropriate Uses of Funds

The following are examples of costs that are not eligible:

- Programs and activities that do not specifically serve the stated purposes of the SRTS Program (see Purpose of SRTS)
- Projects focused on pick-up or drop-off convenience for drivers rather than student safety or walking, bicycling, and rolling access
- Education programs that primarily focus on school-bus safety
- Promotional giveaways or incentive items that do not have a clear educational, training, or approved SRTS program purpose
- Costs incurred before a written Notice to Proceed
- Purchases or activities that do not comply with applicable federal or NCDOT requirements

6. Selection Criteria and Review Process

NCDOT will first review applications for eligibility and completeness. Eligible applications will then be evaluated using the six criteria below for a total of 100 points. NCDOT will use the application and published scoring rubric to guide review and selection.

For applicants with prior NCDOT SRTS grant experience, prior performance may also be considered as part of the overall application evaluation.

Criterion	Points	What Reviewers Will Consider
Project Need and Safety	25	How clearly the application describes transportation and safety needs affecting students and uses relevant local information to explain why the project is needed.
Proposed Strategies	25	How well the proposed activities respond to identified needs, support safe walking, bicycling, and rolling, and provide a clear and realistic approach for reaching intended students and communities.
Budget	15	Whether the budget is complete, reasonable, sufficiently detailed, and clearly connected to proposed activities and anticipated results.
Implementation Capacity	10	Whether the applicant has a credible plan and sufficient staff, contractor, partner, financial, and administrative capacity to begin, manage, and complete the project.
Comprehensive Access and Priority Populations	15	How clearly the application identifies populations experiencing greater barriers and explains how the project will intentionally reach and benefit those populations.
Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnerships	10	How schools, students, caregivers, community members, agencies, and other relevant partners helped shape the proposal and will contribute to implementation.

Local match information is required but is not scored. Applicants must identify the anticipated source and status of the required 20 percent local match. Applicants do not receive additional points for contributing more than the required amount.

7. Conditions of Reimbursement Award

Funding is provided on a reimbursement basis to the agency or organization responsible for the administration of the funds. Selected recipients must execute an agreement with NCDOT within three months of award. The application, work plan, and budget will serve as the project scope of work.

- Recipients may not incur reimbursable project costs before receiving a written Notice to Proceed from NCDOT.
- Recipients must maintain documentation of eligible project expenses and proof of payment for reimbursement requests.
- Projects must be completed within the period stated in the executed agreement, anticipated to be up to 18 months from the Notice to Proceed.
- Recipients must collect project-appropriate evaluation information and submit required progress and final reporting.

- Recipients will be reimbursed quarterly for expenses incurred.
- Material changes to the approved project scope, schedule, or major budget categories must be discussed with and approved by NCDOT.
- Recipients must comply with applicable federal and NCDOT requirements and the terms of the executed agreement.

8. Application Process

Application information, the application worksheet, required templates, and supporting guidance will be posted on the [NCDOT Safe Routes to School Planning and Programming Grant webpage](#).

1. Review the grant guidelines, application worksheet, scoring criteria, and supporting materials.
2. 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 webpage.
3. Prepare application responses and gather required documents before submitting the online application. These documents should be attached to your application submission.
4. Complete the NCDOT templates requested in the application:
 - School Information Template
 - Proposed Work Plan Template
 - Budget and Justification Template
5. Prepare the supporting documents described in Part J:
 - Lead Agency authorization letter
 - Draft or final board resolution (when governing-board approval is required)
 - School district or school letter(s) of support (when the directly affected school or district is not the Lead Agency)
 - Partner letters of support for partners with substantial financial or implementation roles, if applicable
 - Resumes or related staffing documents

Complete and submit the online application by 11:59 p.m. on November 6, 2026.