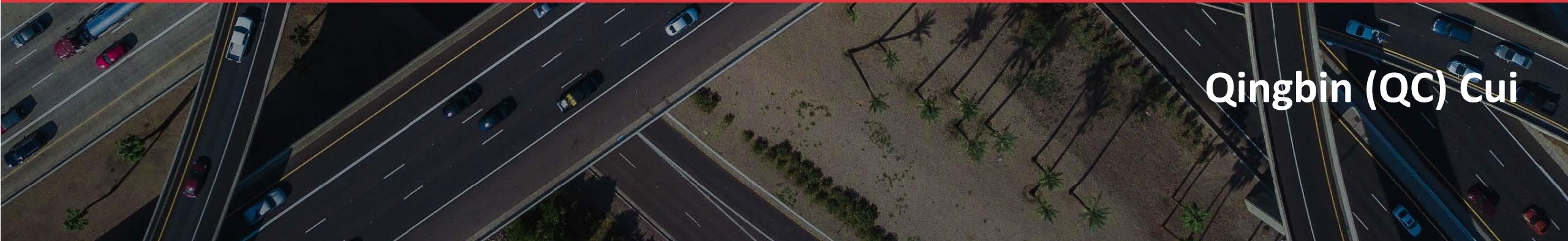


**BUILD AMERICA CENTER**  
INNOVATIVE FINANCING AND DELIVERY  
OF TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

# 10 Tips for Putting a Successful Federal Grant Application Together

Qingbin (QC) Cui





# BUILD AMERICA CENTER

INNOVATIVE FINANCING AND DELIVERY OF TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The Build America Center (BAC) will mobilize the use of innovative financing, funding, and project delivery solutions to foster new approaches to transportation infrastructure development and delivery through creation of a knowledge hub, spurring innovation with cutting edge research, collaborative partnerships and the development of an academy to deliver innovative education and training plus tailored technical assistance.



- BAC BIL Support**
- Funding Strategy
  - Program Analysis
  - Application Planning
  - Project Identification and Scoping
  - Fundability Review
  - Benefit Cost Analysis
  - Justice 40 Review and Analysis
  - Application Development
  - Application Review
  - Data Analysis
  - **No Charge to Localities**

## 2022 HIGHLIGHTS

2 Tools

10 Localities

6 Grant Application

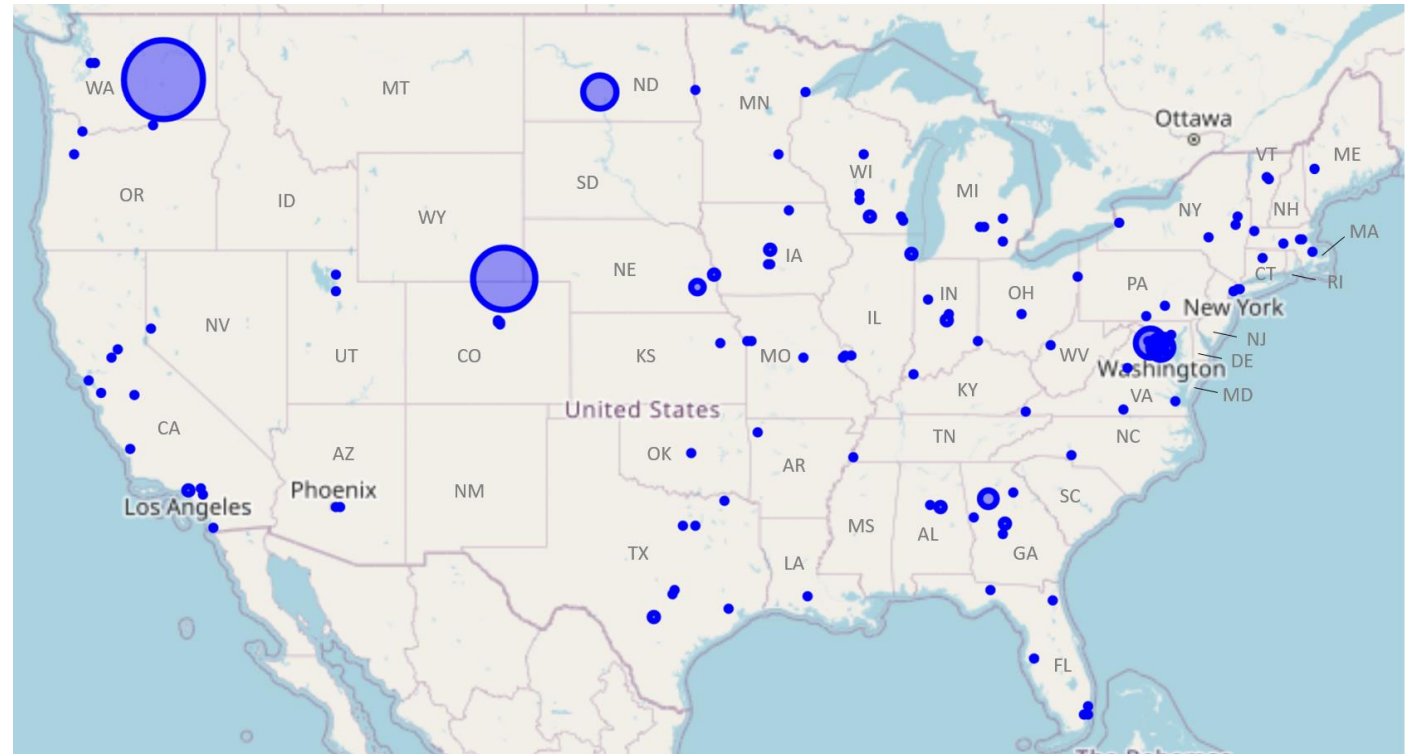
\$13+ million

4 Guides & Whitepapers

## BIL LAUNCHPAD

- [Billaunchpad.com](https://billaunchpad.com)
- NOFO, Plan Ahead, Awards w/ full application packages
- SS4A, SMART, RAISE, TCP, Low/No Emissions, CFI, RIA, etc.
- Build Infrastructure Better Symposium
- CFO Forum
- Stanford Infrastructure Forum
- Modernizing Infrastructure Webinars
- Major Project Database
- Enhancing Mobility Innovation

- Released in January 2023
- [Billaunchpad.com](https://billaunchpad.com)
- Monthly New Users: 362
- Returning Users: 104
- Award Data
  - Successful Applications
  - Unsuccessful Applications
  - Project Narrative, Benefit Cost Analysis, Supporting Documents, Climate Impact Analysis, Equity Analysis, etc.
- Covered BIL Programs: SS4A, RAISE, RCP, TCP, INFRA/Mega, etc.
- Start Now w/ 1-Click Technical Assistance



## [BILLaunchpad Accelerates Localities' Grant Application](#)

1-Click Technical Assistance

Visit Us for Latest Updates

Sign Up to BAC Newsletter

# BAC Empowering Localities Initiatives

## Supported Organizations

- Governor's office and state DOTs
- Counties, Cities, and Tribal governments
- Non-profits, Universities, Communities

2023 Plan	PROGRAM	ORGANIZATION
Winter	RAISE	Town of Lakeview (OR)*
Winter and Spring	Bus Facilities Program and Low/No Emission Vehicle Program	Anne Arundel County, MD University of Maryland, MD
Spring	Regional Infrastructure Accelerator	Montgomery County (MD), Louisiana Governor's Office
Spring	Charging and Fueling Infrastructure	Montgomery County (MD), MCEC, Lakeview, OR
Summer	SS4A	NCRPC, KS
Summer	PROTECT, RURAL	Louisiana
Summer	RCP, TCP	Candidates TBD
Fall	SMART	Candidates TBD
	Other programs per localities request	

## Technical Assistance Highlight



**BIL Program**  
SMART Grant Program FY22

**Project Lead**  
North Central Regional Planning Commission (NCRPC)  
Beloit, Kansas



**Project Location**  
Sedgwick County, Saline County, Cowley County, and Cloud County, Kansas

The NCRPC has a 50-year history of building coalitions in rural areas, thereby generating cost effective solutions to problems where staff and equipment can be shared across multiple jurisdictions and also utilized to serve a wide variety of city/county departments. The organization provides comprehensive planning and development services with a focus on community-led and innovative solutions. NCRPC has been a strong advocate for community-based planning and engaged local communities into the regional planning process.

### EQUITY AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Nearly 40% of the census tracts included in the four counties within the project location are designated as Historically Disadvantaged Communities (HDCs). A considerable proportion of bridges in the project location are structurally deficient (nearly 4%), while approximately 56% of bridges do not meet the traffic safety standards (Table 1). This indicates that the bridge condition issues and any related public safety implications directly impact HDCs within the project target areas. Detailed and high-quality bridge inspections enabled by usage of drone technology can assist inspectors in evaluating the conditions of bridges located in these HDCs in a more timely and safer manner, and to identify any risk that such bridges can present to public safety sooner. The benefits of employing drone technology for bridge inspections to HDCs can be quantified using various metrics including but not limited to the potential reduction in the number of bridge closures due to safety reasons within census tracts designated as HDCs, potential reduction in the traffic volume impacted by such bridge closures in HDCs, and potential improvements in emergency response times in HDCs. Additional benefits from the project will accrue to other HDCs through sharing of project results, which will help in future utilization of drone technology in additional counties. This will create opportunities for safer and more timely bridge inspection, cost savings for citizens, and also enhanced information collection—all of which are likely to benefit other aspects of community infrastructure.

TABLE 1. STAGE 1 PROJECT SERVICE AREA AND BRIDGE DEFICIENCY

County	Community Size	No. Of HDcs (Census Tracts)	Population In HDcs	% Population In HDcs	No. (And %) Of Structurally Deficient Bridges	% Bridges Not Meeting Traffic Safety Standards
Sedgwick	Large	43	195,924	27.2%	46 (3.47%)	39.17%
Saline	Mid-sized	5	21,479	39.1%	4 (1.08%)	51.16%
Cowley	Rural	6	31,770	89.3%	21 (6.18%)	76.62%
Cloud	Rural	3	7,714	85.1%	15 (4.73%)	65.06%
Total (or Average%)		57	205,287	32.7%	86 (3.87%)	55.89%

Notes: HDC = Historically Disadvantaged Community; No. = Number  
Source of Data: Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: <https://climate.gov/data/cejscreeningtool/geoplatform/download/>  
FHWA's 2022 National Bridge Inventory (NBI): <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridges/nbi.aspx>

### PROJECT PARTNERS

Build America Center  
Cloud County, Cowley County, Saline County, Sedgwick County  
Skydio Robotics Company, ESRI ArcGIS  
Kansas Department of Transportation  
Kansas State University Aerospace and Technology Campus  
University of Kansas GIS Clearinghouse, Kansas WorkforceONE

### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE BAC

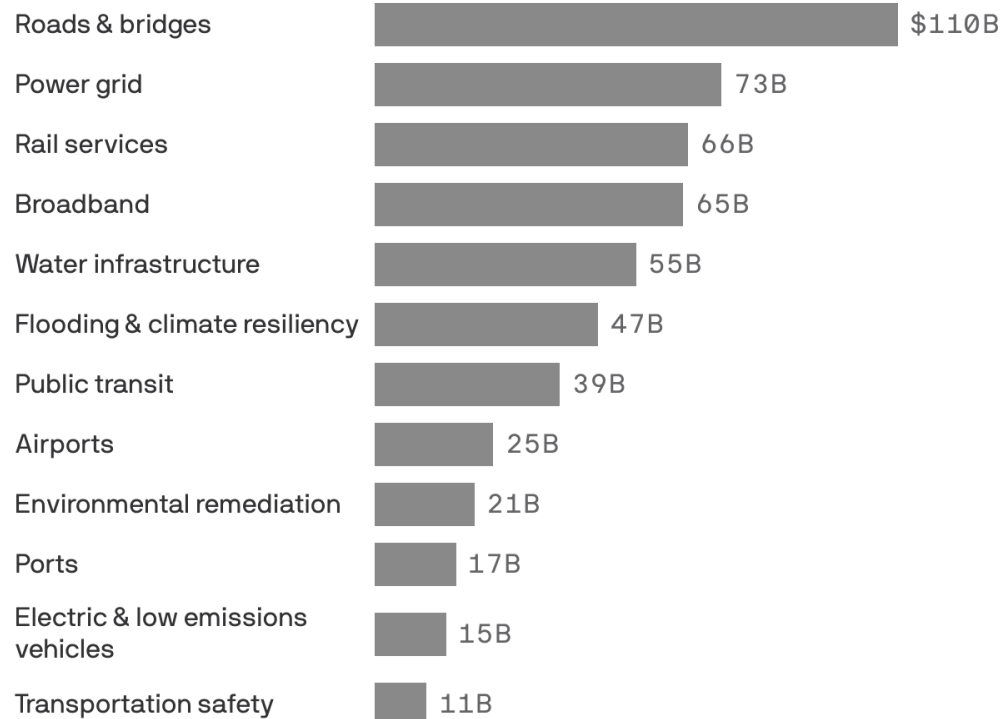
- BIL funding strategy planning
- Requirement analysis and management
- Project development and scoping
- Data gathering and analysis
- Application narrative support
- Quality control and application review

"The BAC staff were easy to work with, listened to our needs and were very responsive. They helped us to interpret the NOFO funding descriptions so we could understand what projects we could submit. The BAC was invaluable in providing the data and data sources that we needed for the application; plus, they even assisted with interpreting the data and providing it in the format we needed. NCRPC could not have submitted this grant application without the assistance from the BAC. They had the knowledge, expertise and extra hands we needed to submit a competitive application!"

—Deb Ohlde, Strategic Development Advisor, North Central Regional Planning Commission, Kansas

# #1: Match Your Local Needs with Funding Opportunities

## Bipartisan infrastructure bill spending breakdown



**BIL LAUNCHPAD**
Funding Opportunities

[Navigate Funding Opportunities](#)

We have compiled a comprehensive database of all transportation related Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) for competitive and discretionary program, agency, category, and keyword(s). Key elements of NOFOs are available with links to full NOFO documents.

### Notice of Funding Opportunities

Post Date Range: All Date Range

Start Date: mm/dd/yyyy to End Date: mm/dd/yyyy

Category: All

Federal Agency: All

Eligible Applicants: All

Search keywords:

Special Filter Options:

Pedestrian and Bicycle Projects

Planning Projects

Search

#### NOFO By Category

Category	Percentage
Roads, Bridges and Major Projects	44.4%
Public Transportation	22.2%
Safety	23.5%
Resilience	2.7%

**FY 2022-2023 Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation Program**

Close at: 2023-08-18

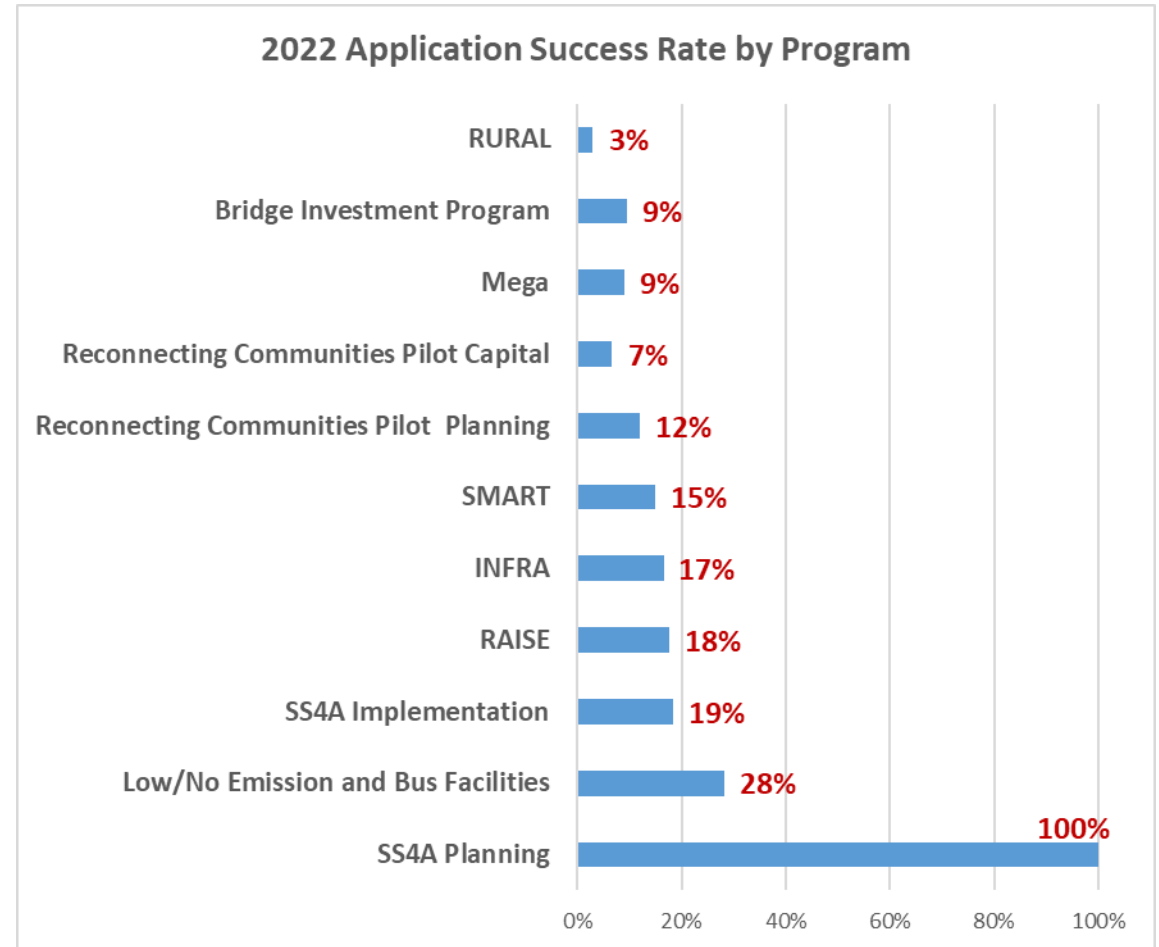
Resilience - Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

\$ 848,000,000

Match Required: No

## #2: Follow the NOFO

- Clearly articulate alignment with grant program goals and objectives.
- Develop a comprehensive and well-defined project plan with specific objectives, timelines, and budgets.
- Demonstrate strong partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders.
- Highlight community engagement and support throughout the planning process.
- Use data and evidence to support project feasibility and potential positive impacts.
- Showcase innovation and creativity in project design and financing strategies.



# #3: Learn From Successful Applications

- Narrative structure and templates
- Who should we contact for support letters
- How each evaluation criterion was addressed
- How should we develop a budget
- Good practices in presenting qualifications
- Example analysis, format, and spreadsheet

The image shows two screenshots of the BIL LAUNCHPAD website. The top screenshot is the search interface, and the bottom screenshot is the project detail page for a specific project.

**Search Successful Awards**

Public agencies can improve their grant applications by learning from previous applications and successful awards. The BIL Launchpad collects successful project applications since 2021 and allows quick project matching by key project features using machine learning and natural language processing techniques. The process is simple. Just enter keywords or sentences from your project and the BIL Launchpad database will identify similar projects that were awarded funding. The smart search allows you to enter more complete project descriptions and features for AI-based search results. Selected project narratives and supporting documents are available for you to dive into the details of those successful awards. This database helps public agencies determine some "best-fit" funding programs and learn from successful applications.

Keyword Search  Smart Search

Including Application Documents

Example search entries: ⓘ

Select States

Keywords  
safe

Search

**Project Detail**

Name	Interstate 95 at Hogan Road Improvement Project Maine	
Organization	Maine Department of Transportation	State Maine
Funding Source	N/A	Project Lead N/A
Funding Amount	\$24,610,298	Project Cost \$34,945,000
Status	Awarded	
Start Date	N/A	End Date N/A

Application Documents

- [Project Narrative](#)
- [Benefit Cost Analysis Report](#)
- [Letter of Support](#)
- [Supporting Document #1](#)

# #4: Leverage All Technical Assistance Resources

- DOT Navigator
- FHWA/FTA/FAA/Bureau
- Thriving Communities Capacity Builders
- State Resources (Governor’s Office, DOTs, MPOs, etc.)
- National Associations - NGA, NLC, NACo, etc.
- Non-Profit Organizations and Universities
  - Smart Growth America
  - Local Infrastructure Hub
  - Build America Center
- Private Entities

- [Home](#) \ [Grants](#)
- [DOT Navigator Home](#)
- [DOT Discretionary Grants Dashboard](#)
- [Grant Application Resources](#) ▸
- [Technical Assistance Resources](#)
- [Learn About the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#)
- [Find Transportation Contacts Near You](#)
- [ROUTES Home](#)

## Technical Assistance Resources

At DOT, “technical assistance” includes programs, processes, and resources that provide targeted support to a community, region, organization, or other beneficiary to help them access and deploy federal funding and build local capacity to develop, design, and deliver transportation plans and projects.

View and search the table below to find existing technical assistance resources and programs funded or managed by DOT that can provide deeper levels of assistance, technical information, best practices, and training.

Keywords

▸ Advanced options

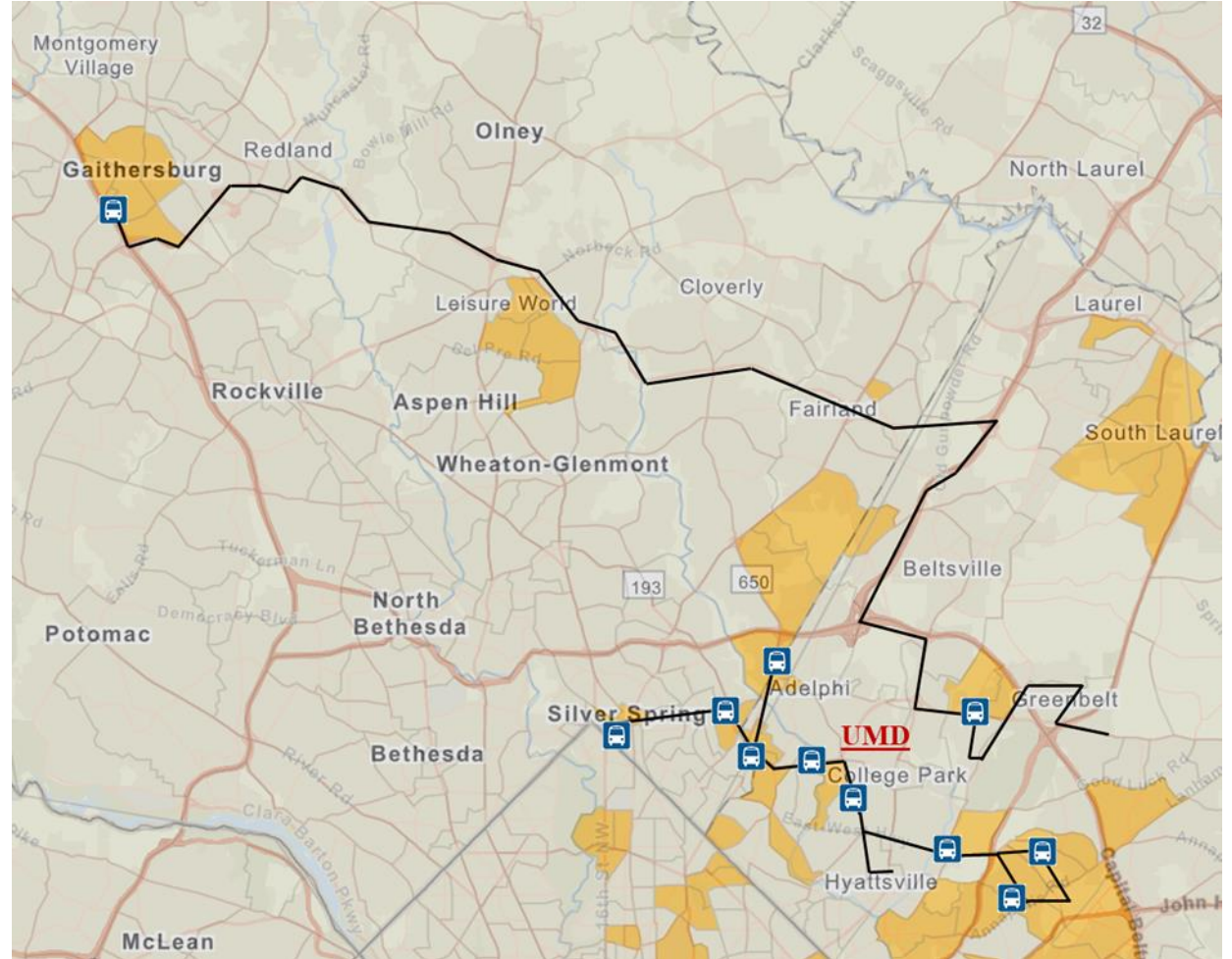
Displaying 10 results in 1 10 of 55 records.

Resource ▾	Stakeholder Type(s)	Resource Type(s)	Transportation Mode(s)
<a href="#">Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC)</a> PTACs provide no-cost advising on all aspects of selling to federal, state, and local governments.	Contractor	Fact Sheet, Guidance Document, Resource Center, Toolkit, Training, Video/Webinar	Air (airports, aviation, drones), Bicycle, Electric or Autonomous Vehicles, Highway, Intelligent Transportation and Data Systems, Micromobility (bike share, scooters, etc.), Pedestrian, Ports, Railway, Transit
<a href="#">Bicycling &amp; Walking in the U.S. Benchmarking Project</a> This interactive, online report by the League of American Bicyclists provides publicly available data on biking and walking for all 50 States, and other localities in the U.S.	Contractor, Local Government, Other, Regional/Metro Planning Orgs (MPO), State DOT, Transit Agency, Tribal Government, U.S. Territory	Fact Sheet, Report	Bicycle, Pedestrian
<a href="#">Build America Center</a> The BAC mobilizes the use of innovative solutions through a knowledge hub. The BAC aims to spur innovation through training and technical assistance.	Contractor, Local Government, Other, Regional/Metro Planning Orgs (MPO), State DOT, Transit Agency, Tribal Government, U.S. Territory	Resource Center	Air (airports, aviation, drones), Bicycle, Electric or Autonomous Vehicles, Highway, Intelligent Transportation and Data Systems, Micromobility (bike share, scooters, etc.), Pedestrian, Ports, Railway, Transit



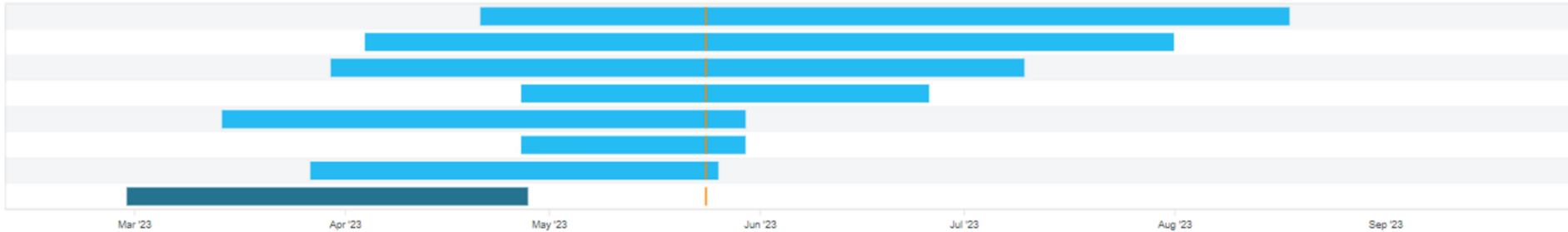
# #5: Align with USDOT Priorities

- Safety
- State of Good Repair
- Economic Strength and Global Competitiveness
- Climate and Sustainability
- Equity and Accessibility
- Transformation
- Organizational Excellence
  
- Justice 40 Initiative
  - USDOT's Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer
  - Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)
- Rural Eligibility



# #6: Plan Ahead and Submit Your Application On Time

## Timeline



## Programs

Select Programs  
Buses and Bus Facilities Competitive Program  Low or No Emission Grant Program

Start Year: 2021 to End Year: 2023

### Buses and Bus Facilities Competitive Program timeline



### Low or No Emission Grant Program timeline



# #7: Do Your Self-Evaluation

**e. Readiness:** The Bureau will consider the extent to which the proposed RIA is prepared to commence operations and begin achieving project-specific results. Evaluators will also assess the viability of the proposed budget as it relates to the establishment and successful operations of the RIA as proposed. In considering this criterion, evaluators will also determine the likelihood that proposed milestones will be subject to delay and/or cost overruns and the risk that key milestones might be missed due to internal or external factors. Evaluators will also consider the readiness of the proposed RIA to commence operations, including but not limited to:

- Availability of facilities and equipment necessary to function;
- Existing governance structure as compared to proposed future structure; and
- Ability of existing relationships to rapidly deliver results.

An applicant that can demonstrate an effective plan to commence operations in at least the three aforementioned categories will receive a STRONG rating in this criterion. Those who can demonstrate an effective plan to commence operations in at least two will receive a MODERATE and those who cannot demonstrate an effective plan to commence operations in any of the above three categories will receive a MARGINAL rating.

## SS4A Safe Streets and Roads for All Self-Certification Eligibility Worksheet

**4** Did the Action Plan development include all of the following activities?  YES  NO  
If yes, provide documentation:

- Engagement with the public and relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and community groups;
- Incorporation of information received from the engagement and collaboration into the plan; and
- Coordination that included inter- and intra-governmental cooperation and collaboration, as appropriate.

**5** Did the Action Plan development include all of the following?  YES  NO  
If yes, provide documentation:

- Considerations of equity using inclusive and representative processes;
- The identification of underserved communities through data; and
- Equity analysis, in collaboration with appropriate partners, focused on initial equity impact assessments of the proposed projects and strategies, and population characteristics.

**6** Are both of the following true?  YES  NO  
If yes, provide documentation:

- The plan development included an assessment of current policies, plans, guidelines, and/or standards to identify opportunities to improve how processes prioritize safety; and
- The plan discusses implementation through the adoption of revised or new policies, guidelines, and/or standards.

**7** Does the plan identify a comprehensive set of projects and strategies to address the safety problems in the Action Plan, time ranges when projects and strategies will be deployed, and explain project prioritization criteria?  YES  NO  
If yes, provide documentation:

**8** Does the plan include all of the following?  YES  NO  
If yes, provide documentation:

- A description of how progress will be measured over time that includes, at a minimum, outcome data.
- The plan is posted publicly online.

**9** Was the plan finalized and/or last updated between 2017 and 2022?  YES  NO  
If yes, provide documentation:



# #8: Build Strong Partnerships

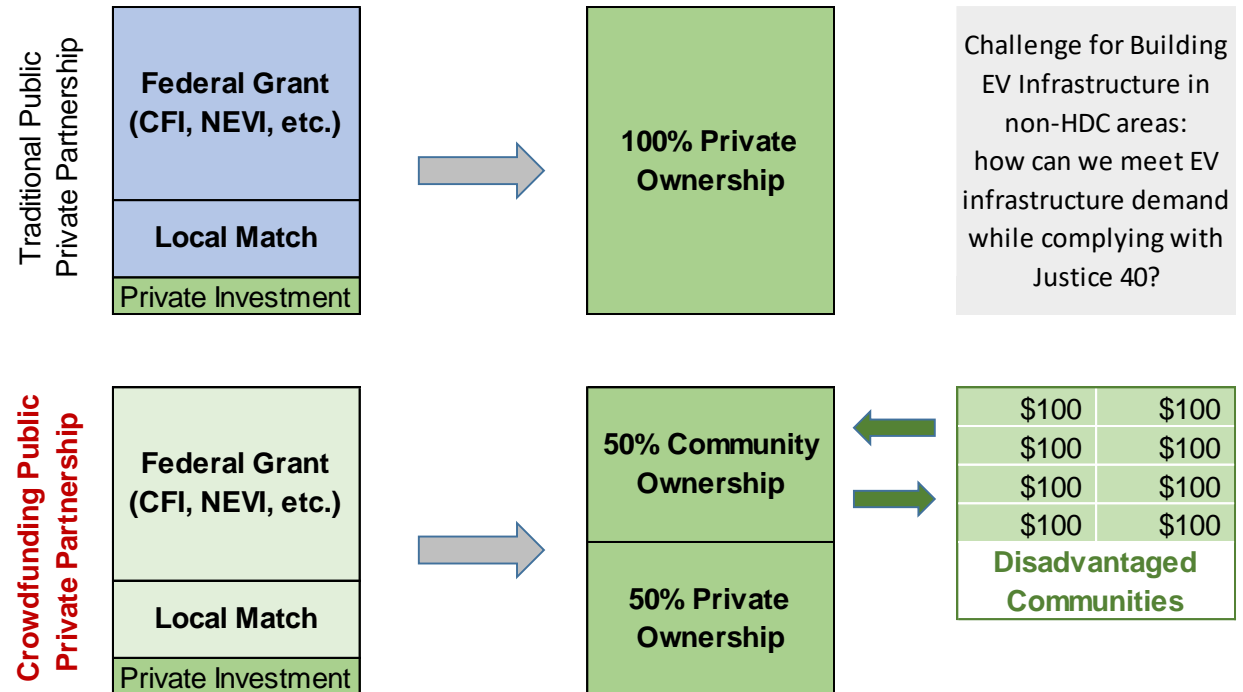


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# #9: Understand Your Strengths and Be Innovative

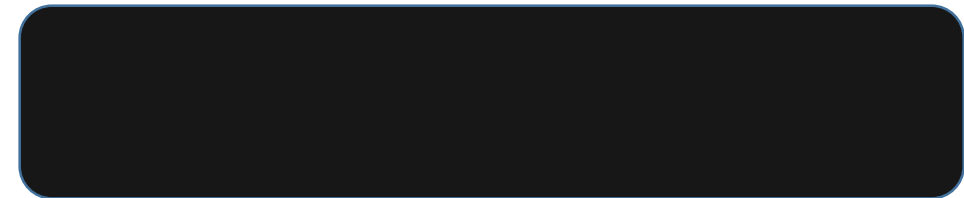
- We have a drone company in the state
- We are located in the rural area
- We are designated as a HDC
- Our workers are unionized
- We are close to a state university
- We are in the urban area and non-HDC
- We have no matching funds
- We are under-resourced



# #10: Request a Debriefing and Keep Trying

Report generated on 03/31/2023

- Evaluation Report tells you more
- Don't forget the overall application results
- USDOT offers suggestions and technical assistance
- Applications will be stronger after addressing the issues



## Problem Identification and Understanding

	Non-Responsive	Low	Medium	High
Problem Understanding	No understanding of the problem.	Some understanding of the problem.	Clear understanding of the problem. Demonstrates insight.	Persuasive and insightful understanding of the problem.
Problem Criticality	Addresses a small problem.	Addresses a moderate problem.	Addresses a significant problem.	Addresses a critical problem.

## Appropriateness of Proposed Solution(s)

	Non-Responsive	Low	Medium	High
Technical Feasibility	No technical basis for presented approach.	Incomplete technical basis for presented approach.	Credible technical basis for presented approach.	Convincing technical basis for presented approach.
Scalable	Fails to address technical scalability.	Technology is not scalable.	Technology may be scalable.	Technology likely to scale.
Impact vs. Status Quo	Fails to address impact.	Small benefits vs. status quo.	Moderate benefits vs. status quo.	Significant benefits vs. status quo.
Contextually appropriate	Fails to address context.	Not contextually appropriate.	Mostly contextually appropriate.	Contextually appropriate.

# BUILD UPON SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP



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