

**Questions and Answers for the Fiscal Year 2019-20
Sustainable Transportation Equity Project Solicitation
Mid-solicitation Planning and Capacity Building Grant Applicant Teleconference**

July 22, 2020

Introduction

On July 22, 2020, California Air Resources Board (CARB) staff held the Mid-solicitation Planning and Capacity Building Grant Applicant Teleconference to answer questions regarding the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-20 Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) Implementation Grant Solicitation (Solicitation). STEP, which was approved in the FY 2019-20 Funding Plan for Clean Transportation Incentives, is a new pilot that takes a community-based approach to overcoming barriers to clean transportation. The STEP Planning and Capacity Building Grant's overarching purpose is to increase transportation equity in disadvantaged and low-income communities throughout California. STEP aims to address community residents' transportation needs, increase residents' access to key destinations (e.g., schools, grocery stores, workplaces, community centers, medical facilities), and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Please note that the funding available for STEP has changed from \$22 million to \$19.5 million. Specifically, CARB has \$1.75 million available for the Planning and Capacity Building Grant. For more information about STEP, see:

<https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/msprog/lct/opportunitiesgov/step.htm>

The questions and answers (Q&A) in this document include both questions received via email before the Q&A session and questions asked during the Q&A session. To minimize repetition, similar questions have been combined and answered together. Staff encourages Applicants to read this document as CARB has provided more written detail than what was discussed during the Q&A session. *The following written responses serve as an update to and take precedence over verbal responses provided at the Q&A session.*

Technical Assistance

Potential Applicants interested in technical assistance should still fill out the technical assistance survey, even if they missed the July 15 deadline:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeZn9n-7gGU7ScAkaBjllPwReXRpkH6ohWUKut8DG4BzUN2tw/viewform>. Estolano Advisors will contact all survey respondents and will determine their capacity to support any potential Applicants that signed up for technical assistance after the July 15 deadline.

Solicitation Clarification

Page E-3 of Appendix E identifies costs for implementing existing policies, plans, ordinances, or programs (e.g., local government staff salaries, supplies, meetings, etc.) as an ineligible cost. To clarify, this was intended to prohibit STEP funds supplanting existing funds for implementing existing projects. It is not meant to prohibit planning projects that build upon previously developed plans.

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Applicant Eligibility

1. Questions:

- a. Can a school district be considered a non-profit community-based organizations and qualify as an applicant for an Implementation Grant?
- b. Are school districts able to apply for funding?

Answer: Local governments are eligible to apply to STEP as Lead Applicants or as Sub-applicants. The definition of local governments that STEP uses is in Appendix A of the solicitation. It says that local governments are any non-State public agency, including but not limited to cities, counties, councils of governments, air districts, transit agencies, school districts, and joint powers authorities.

2. Question: Can a council of governments, serving as the metropolitan planning organization and regional transportation planning authority for a region, apply for STEP funds as the lead applicant and pass through the funds to four local qualifying member agencies to fund STEP eligible projects?

Answer: Per page 13 of the Planning and Capacity Building Grant solicitation, if an entity that would be the Lead Applicant does not have the administrative capacity to assume this role, they may be a Sub-applicant and partner with another entity applying as the Lead Applicant. In this scenario, all Lead Applicant requirements would still apply. The Lead Applicant would still enter into a grant agreement with CARB and assume responsibility and accountability for the use and expenditure of received STEP funds, but the partnership could be set up so that the Lead Applicant supports the grant administratively and the Sub-applicant leads project implementation.

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3. Questions:

- a. Can a lead applicant apply for more than one application? For example can City X's dept of Y apply as a lead, and then another department apply as a lead for another applicant? Or can there only be one application from the same city?
- b. Is a city allowed to submit more than one grant application from different departments?

Answer: STEP has no limitations on the number of proposals that may be submitted by a single Applicant or from a single community.

4. Question: We have managed transportation equity planning in our city for more than 5 years, and are the lead organization in the Transportation Electrification Partnership. We believe that we have significant capabilities to coordinate and manage a multi-collaboration effort, leveraging other public and private investment and scaling up several very high profile mobility projects in disadvantaged communities. Do we meet the criteria for providing transportation services?

Answer: STEP has no specific criteria for the partners that will actually provide transportation services as part of a STEP-funded project. Per page 14 of the Planning and Capacity Building Grant solicitation, the proposal must demonstrate the ability of each Sub-applicant to support the Lead Applicant and fulfill their roles on specific projects or project elements on time and within the budget. A statement of qualifications must be included for each Sub-applicant that demonstrates that they have successfully implemented projects or project elements similar in scope or size in California within the last seven years.

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5. Questions:

- a. We want to ensure that we meet the expectations of a community-based organization as lead applicant. As a non-profit organization, whose entire team lives in Los Angeles and is focused on transportation equity, we believe that we do. We are also aware that perhaps ARB has a different perspective on the concept of community-based organization. Can we discuss Lead Applicant eligibility?
- b. If the focus area of an organization is a specific city or county, and the STEP project is within that metropolitan area, does the organization meet the requirement of a community-based organization: "A nonprofit organization that is place-based, with an explicit geographic focus area that includes the STEP community"?

Answer: The definition of a community-based organization that STEP uses is in Appendix A of the solicitation. It says that a community-based organization is a nonprofit organization that is place-based, with an explicit geographic focus area that includes the STEP Community. The organization's staff members, volunteers, or board members should reside in the community where the project is located. The organization must have a demonstrated record of at least one full year providing transportation- or equity-related services in the STEP Community. To qualify as a Lead Applicant, a community-based organization must have tax-exempt status with the Internal Revenue Service under Internal Revenue Code Section 501, be tax exempt under California State law, have at least one year of incorporation prior to proposal submittal, and be based in California or have at least one full-time staff person based in California. It is up to the Applicant to determine if they meet this definition of a community-based organization.

6. Question: Do you know if our organization is eligible for the CARB STEP grant as a lead agency?

Answer: Per page 12 of the Planning and Capacity Building Grant solicitation, eligible Lead Applicants include community-based organizations, federally recognized tribes, and local governments. Appendix A includes a definition of each. It is up to the Applicant to determine if they meet any of these definitions.

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7. Question: Is a Sub-applicant required or can you have a Lead Applicant and Community Partner?

Answer: Page 12 of the solicitation outlines the high-level requirements for Applicants. If the Lead Applicant is a local government, at least one of the Sub-applicants must be a community-based organization. If the Lead Applicant is a community-based organization, at least one of the Sub-applicants must be a local government. If the Lead Applicant is a federally recognized tribe, no specific partnerships are required, though partnerships are still strongly encouraged.

8. Question: If we plan to subcontract multiple community-based organizations for specific projects under the Sub-applicant, how should we represent that in the application? Should they be listed as Community Partners?

Answer: There can be more than one Sub-applicant identified for each project identified in the proposal. Applicants should refer to Appendix A for definitions of Sub-applicant and Community Partner. If the entity will be responsible for implementing a project or project element funded through STEP, they should be identified as a Sub-applicant. If the entity will not be responsible for implementing projects funded through STEP like the Lead Applicants and Sub-applicants are, but instead will serve as a key stakeholder and representative of the STEP Community residents, they should be identified as a Community Partner.

9. Question: Can we list more than ten Community Partners?

Answer: Yes, if you have more than ten Community Partners, you may add rows to the Proposal Template spreadsheet (Appendix B) to list them or you may attach another document to your proposal that includes a list of the additional Community Partners.

Community Engagement

1. Question: How much community engagement is required in advance of developing the Planning Grant proposal?

Answer: Per page 7 of the solicitation, all aspects of the proposal, including identification of the vision and projects, must be developed through community engagement. Community engagement may be undertaken specifically to apply for STEP funds or may have been previously completed as part of another relevant local planning process undertaken in and with the STEP Community (e.g., community engagement for active transportation plan, General Plan, specific plan, neighborhood plan, unmet transit needs assessment). These community engagement activities must have been conducted within at least four years of the proposal submittal date.

2. Question: The solicitation also requires that "All aspects of the proposal, including identification of the vision and projects, must be developed through community engagement." We (community-based service organizations/nonprofits) have been engaged in community resident representation since the start of 2018 through today and continuing, and as part of this are addressing what kind of community-based transportation/assistance systems may be devised for our underserved populations. We have preliminary ideas, but expect that specifically defining such systems is what a STEP planning grant, and the additional community engagement it will make possible, is for. (a) May we propose *general* project ideas in our grant solicitation? (b) Is the community engagement to date described here sufficient to meet the above requirement?

Answer: CARB does not expect Applicants to identify specific transportation projects in Planning and Capacity Building Grant proposals. If the proposed project will involve community engagement to identify transportation projects, the proposal should identify this community engagement as the proposed project – not the potential future transportation projects. The Planning and Capacity Building Grant does not have a threshold requirement for community engagement. Community engagement will be scored in all proposals via the scoring criteria outlined in Appendix D.

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3. Question: Is there a preference for how long ago the community engagement was?

Answer: Per page 7 of the solicitation, community engagement activities must have been conducted within at least four years of the proposal submittal date.

4. Question: Is it acceptable to use the public engagement results done by an organization which is not the Lead Applicant or Sub-applicant, as a community engagement process needed for a STEP planning grant for a separate organization?

Answer: Yes. The solicitation does not specify any preference for who conducted the community engagement processes used to determine aspects of the proposal.

5. Question: What is meant by "appropriately incentivizing for their time and expertise"?

Answer: Per page 25 of the solicitation, STEP requires that, during implementation of STEP-funded projects, community engagement participants who are not already being paid for their participation (including Community Partners and other community residents, members of community groups and community-based organizations, community leaders, and members of environmental justice organizations) receive appropriate incentives for their time and expertise. It is up to each Applicant to determine what appropriate incentives are for their community engagement processes. See the Community Inclusion Guidance linked in Appendix F for more details on and examples of participant incentives.

Other

1. Questions:

- a. Can we write a contractor directly into the grant's scope of work without going out to bid (i.e. naming a specific consultant for public engagement or other activities)?
- b. How can we identify contractors in the application if we don't know who will win competitive bid?

Answer: That must be determined by each individual entity's contracting processes. STEP proposals should identify who will be responsible for implementing each project or project element. If a subcontractor will be responsible for implementing a project or project element, they should be identified in the proposal as a Sub-applicant. CARB understands that timeline and logistical issues might hinder identification of all subcontractors before the STEP proposals are submitted. If a subcontractor has not been identified, Applicants should identify the qualities and experience they plan to look for in a subcontractor to implement the specified project or project element.

2. Question: Are you using a technical definition of equity?

Answer: The only version of equity defined in the solicitation is transportation equity. Per page 8 of the solicitation, transportation equity is defined as when a community's transportation system provides accessible, affordable, environmentally sustainable, reliable, and safe transportation options to all residents, in particular those that have been disproportionately impacted by pollution or lack access to services. Transportation equity is intrinsically linked to access to economic opportunities and occurs when community residents have the power to make decisions about their transportation systems.

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3. Question: What is the purpose of the requirement for a Lead Applicant to submit a letter of support for the application they are submitting?

Answer: Per page 13 of the Implementation Grant solicitation, the Lead Applicant's letter of support is the place in their proposal where they should do all of the following:

- Define their contribution to the proposal
- Identify their role in developing the Partnership Structure
- Express a commitment to implementing the proposal if funded
- Highlight any strategies they are currently implementing or plan to implement that will support the proposed STEP-funded project
- Identify any resource contributions they are committed to providing

It is up to the Applicant to determine the format of the letter of support.

4. Question: Do you expect Letters of Support from elected officials and supporting agencies that are not technically a Sub-Applicant or Community Partner?

Answer: No, we only expect letters of support from Lead Applicants, Sub-applicants, and Community Partners.

Process

1. Questions:
 - a. What organization is providing technical assistance on CARB's behalf?
 - b. Can you tell me who is providing the Technical Assistance for the STEP applications and what can they assist with?

Answer: The scope of technical assistance available to STEP Applicants and recipients is on page 28 of the Planning and Capacity Building Grant solicitation. Estolano Advisors is the lead on the team of technical assistance providers available to support all STEP Applicants and recipients. Estolano Advisors will work with each interested Applicant to determine what support is needed for each Applicant.

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2. Questions:

- a. The window to apply for technical assistance has passed but is it still possible to speak to a technical assistance advisor?
- b. I signed up for technical assistance this morning, although I see the deadline passed (we just learned about the opportunity through our air pollution control district). Is it still possible to speak with technical assistance consultants to vet a project's eligibility?

Answer: Potential Applicants interested in technical assistance should still fill out the technical assistance survey, even if they missed the July 15 deadline: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeZn9n-7gGU7ScAkaBjllPwReXRpkH6ohWUKut8DG4BzUN2tw/viewform>. Estolano Advisors will contact all survey respondents and will determine their capacity to support any potential Applicants that signed up for technical assistance after the July 15 deadline.

3. Question: Would grant submissions from one city compete against each other?

Answer: Yes, all Planning and Capacity Building Grant proposals will be scored against each other.

4. Question: Would an agency be eligible for STEP funding if they already received funding from another CARB grant program?

Answer: Probably, unless this is prohibited by the other CARB grant program. STEP will not double-fund projects or project elements that have already been funded by a previous grant program. Otherwise, STEP has no restrictions for funding based on what other funding has been received by an Applicant.

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5. Questions:

- a. Is there a limit on how much an application can apply for?
- b. Could you please let us know how much funding can be requested?
- c. Could you let us know how much is the planning grant for each proposed project?

Answer: STEP has no minimum or maximum amount of funds for each proposal. The maximum funding amount available for all funded proposals is \$1.75 million.

6. Question: How many applicants do you anticipate for this grant?

Answer: Since this is the first solicitation for STEP, we do not have an estimate of how many applications we will receive. Per page 2 of the solicitation, CARB anticipates awards will be made to approximately ten disadvantaged and low-income communities.

7. Question: What is the likelihood that the Planning and Capacity Building grant funding will be diminished?

Answer: The updated funding available for the Planning and Capacity Building Grant is \$1.75 million.

8. Question: Is it acceptable for a project to be 18 months long?

Answer: Yes. Per page 4 of the solicitation, the grant term must end on or before March 31, 2025. Any project timeline within those bounds is acceptable.

9. Question: When was STEP first presented to the public?

Answer: May 15, 2019 was the first workshop for the Funding Plan for Clean Transportation Incentives that included a discussion of STEP. After being a part of the Fiscal Year 2019-20 Funding Plan's public process, STEP was presented (as part of the Funding Plan) to the Board on October 24, 2019 and began having public work group meetings to receive feedback on the design of STEP a few days later. The Archives webpage on STEP's Moving California webpage has more information about the materials presented at these work group meetings: https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/msprog/lct/opportunitiesgov/step_archives.htm

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10. Question: Is there a newsletter or email sign up to be notified of future grants?

Answer: Yes. You can sign up for CARB's Govdelivery using this link: https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/CARB/subscriber/new?topic_id=listserv. Sign up for the subtopic Clean and Sustainable Mobility Options to receive information about STEP and other clean mobility-focused CARB grant programs.

11. Question: Is it possible for this program to give partial awards? And if yes, will the applicants be able to scale down the project scope to the level it is being funded?

Answer: Per page 33 of the Planning and Capacity Building Grant solicitation, CARB retains the right to remove discrete elements of proposals selected for funding that CARB determines to be ineligible or to reduce the scope of a proposal to use any remaining funds. Per page 9 of the Planning and Capacity Building Grant solicitation, Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate how project elements may be prioritized for funding in case the full proposal cannot be funded.

12. Question: Can you give explicit guidance on expected word count for the responses in the application? The space given in the application, without adjusting row height, seems to suggest 70-150 word counts per response.

Answer: CARB cannot provide any recommendations outside of what is already stated in the solicitation about how to put together a proposal or fill out the proposal template. As stated in the Instructions tab of the proposal template in Appendix B, Applicants should try to fit their responses to the questions in the solicitation into the space provided in the proposal template (Appendix B). However, Applicants are allowed to include attachments with more detail if they feel that is necessary to fully or accurately answer a specific question. Applicants should include the file name of any attachments submitted in the relevant "Responses" box of the proposal template.

Project Eligibility

1. Question: Our previous community engagement process led to a sustainability plan with specific transportation and mobility goals. Does the language in the Ineligible cost list on page appendix E, page E-3 exclude projects that would help us achieve these goals? The appendix states "Costs for implementing existing policies, plans, ordinances, or programs (e.g., local government staff salaries, supplies, meetings, etc.)" as an ineligible cost. Can you provide clarification?

Answer: The ineligible cost identified in Appendix E as costs for implementing existing policies, plans, ordinances, or programs (e.g., local government staff salaries, supplies, meetings, etc.) was intended to prohibit STEP funds supplanting existing funds for implementing existing projects. It is not meant to prohibit planning projects that build upon previously developed plans.

2. Question: Are bike and pedestrian or recreation trails eligible?

Answer: These project types are not eligible in the Planning and Capacity Building Grant solicitation, but may be eligible in the Implementation Grant solicitation.

3. Question: Can you provide any updated guidance or justification around food & childcare expenses being ineligible, but still highly prioritized in the guidelines, for public engagement?

Answer: CARB lacks authority to allow funding for food, drink, refreshments and childcare.

Resource Contributions

1. Question: I am reaching out to you to confirm that there is no match requirement for the Planning and Capacity Grant Solicitation.

Answer: Correct, there is no resource contribution requiring for Planning and Capacity Building Grant proposals.

STEP Community

1. Question: We are talking with government entities and community partners about a pilot with related projects that would benefit – and would all be within – a specific city or county. Does this metropolitan area meet the requirement for a contiguous boundary?

Answer: If the city or county that comprises the STEP Community has one continuous boundary, then it would meet the contiguous requirement of a STEP Community. Refer to Appendix A for a complete definition of the STEP Community.

2. Question: Is there some flexibility in the contiguous requirement to allow for a city to apply for an Implementation Grant that would include two parts of a district that is separated by another city, even though it's not technically "contiguous"?

Answer: No, the STEP Community must align with the definition in Appendix A to be eligible for funding. If an Applicant wanted to apply for funding for two separate parts of a district, the Applicant would have to apply for two separate Implementation Grants.

3. Question: The grant solicitation, page 19, includes the instruction to submit a STEP Community proposed map - and describes it as a "map shapefile". This implies a GIS-readable electronic file, as opposed to a graphic visual map. Is a GIS shapefile required, or is a conventional graphic map (or set of maps) acceptable?

Answer: The solicitation is asking for a GIS shapefile so that we can verify the geographic area requirements outlined on page 20 of the Implementation Grant solicitation. We understand that all Applicants may not have the resources available to readily map their STEP Community in GIS. The technical assistance contractor can help Applicants map their STEP Community boundary.

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4. Question: How specific must the "tentative project location" (also page 19) be - we would expect that the work funded by a STEP planning grant would help develop locations specifically, rather than this being known already. May we describe in narrative potential *genera*/locations for the transportation assistance system we are envisioning instead?

Answer: The solicitation asks for tentative project locations because CARB understands that some of that may be determined during project implementation. Any changes during project implementation should not impact how the proposal would have been scored. At minimum, the tentative project locations must be within the STEP Community and must stay within a disadvantaged or low-income community if that is how they were previously identified. Where possible, Applicants should clarify where it is expected that identified project specifics might change.

5. Question: Regarding contiguous boundaries, are we free to draw a large enough STEP boundary that would capture an entire area with gaps in the middle?

Answer: The only STEP Community requirements are identified in the solicitation on page 19 and in the definition of the STEP Community in Appendix A. As long as the STEP Community follows these requirements, it is acceptable.

6. Question: Is there a minimum size project area or is there a minimum number of census tracts that should be included in the project area? Is one tract too small?

Answer: STEP has no requirements for the size of the STEP community. One census tract is not too small.