



Tips for Successful State Funding Applications Panel

Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP), Active Transportation (AT) & Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Infrastructure Programs

2018 St. Louis County LRIP Project

January 2026 MCEA Conference

Panel Members and Agenda

Panel Members:

- Rashmi Brewer, MnDOT State Aid
- Steve Prusak, MnDOT State Aid
- Bruce Hasbargen, Beltrami County
- Jodi Teich, Otter Tail County

Agenda:

- State Grant Programs Overview
- State Aid Tips for Solicitation Readiness
- County and County Sponsorship Perspectives: Project Lessons Learned and Tips for Successful State Grant Funding Applications
- Wrap Up, MnDOT State Aid
- Questions & Open Discussion

Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP), Active Transportation (AT) & Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Infrastructure Programs Overview

LRIP, AT & SRTS infrastructure grant programs and projects are administered by MnDOT State Aid (SALT) for local eligible entities. Please refer to the [LRIP - State Aid – MnDOT](#), [AT infrastructure](#), and [SRTS Infrastructure](#) websites.

LRIP:

- Provides funding assistance for roadway construction, reconstruction, or reconditioning projects



AT & SRTS Infrastructure:

- Provides funding assistance for construction of bicycle and pedestrian facilities to provide safe and accessible routes between community destinations (AT) and to & from schools (SRTS).



LRIP, AT, and SRTS Infrastructure Grant Eligible Items

LRIP:

Capital Construction Costs Only, up to 100% State Funds for Grant Eligible Costs
– No Local Match Required

- Includes reasonable elements associated with roadway construction, reconstruction, and reconditioning and may include:
 - Crossing Improvements
 - Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities
 - Traffic Control & Safety Devices

AT & SRTS Infrastructure:

Capital Construction Costs Only, up to 100% State Funds for Grant Eligible Costs – No Local Match Required

- For Crossing Improvements – Crosswalks, Curb extensions, curb ramps, medians, etc.
- For Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities - Walks, trails, paths, bike lanes, ped. bridges, etc.
- For Traffic Control & Safety Devices - Signage, roadway striping, lighting, flexible bollards

Project Readiness for Competitive State Grant Solicitations

Project readiness is demonstrated by a planning process initiated prior to the grant solicitation being available

- Deficiency and/or safety concern(s) documented. Project need is well understood.
- Improvements are known with identified starting and ending termini (e.g., reconstructed four-lane roadway with trail from location A to location B)
- Basic cost estimate complete - consider MnDOT's Length Width Depth (LWD) cost estimating, <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/pm/cost.html>
- County, city, township and other impacted entities/stakeholders understand the project and are on board
- Project must align with construction year requirements per current grant solicitation parameters



Three Questions for Consideration

In service of building project readiness, we have structured three questions for Counties to consider in their capacities as:

- 1) Direct applicants for these State grants, and
- 2) As project sponsors for non-state aid cities and townships within their jurisdictions.

We will present the following three questions and then provide helpful tips for future consideration.

Question 1: Pre-application and Planning Considerations – What Can Be Done 1-2 Years Prior to a Solicitation?

Question 2: What Can An Eligible Applicant Do to Prepare for a Grant Solicitation?

Question 3: What Are Some Tips for Completing a Successful Grant Application?

Question 1: Pre-application and Planning Considerations – What Can Be Done 1-2 Years Prior to a Solicitation?

As a potential direct applicant or project sponsor, please consider the following:

- How are smaller entities within your County being engaged to understand needs to identify construction timing and grant program funding opportunities to promote project collaboration and coordination?
- Are locally derived project concepts receiving engineering vetting and/or County mentorship?
- Are required project soft costs understood by local entities?
 - How can a County support small entities with performing this work?
 - Can Counties provide guidance for small entities in design and/or construction consultant selection?

Tips from Question 1: Pre-application and Planning Considerations – What Can Be Done 1-2 Years Prior to a Solicitation?

- If planning documentation is light for AT & SRTS infrastructure related improvements, consider applying for planning or design assistance grant first, provided by MnDOT Office of Transit & Active Transportation (OTAT)
 - [Planning Assistance Solicitation Guide - Active Transportation Program – MnDOT](#)
 - [Planning Assistance Grants - Safe Routes to School – MnDOT](#)
 - [Design Assistance - Safe Routes to School - MnDOT](#)
- Align CIP (Capital Improvement Plan) with project types available to be funded by state grants
- Understand funding cycle and solicitation cadence for competitive state grants
 - Solicitations depend upon legislative appropriations to be offered. These can be as frequent as annually.
 - Pending funding availability, State Aid would ideally hold any specific program solicitation every other year

Tips from Question 1: Pre-application and Planning Considerations – What Can Be Done 1-2 Years Prior to a Solicitation?

- Identify proposed project cost needs
 - Understand capital construction costs and non-capital (soft) costs
 - Identify project funding gaps/needs. * REMINDER: Non-capital (soft) costs are ineligible State grant expenditures
 - Identify potential local project funding sources available and secure commitments
- Identify opportune times to construct small entity projects together/adjacent to County projects
 - Avoid small standalone projects and achieve economies of scale
 - Minimize construction impacts and disturbances for community residents
 - Alignment of construction activities can result in stronger and longer-lasting infrastructure

Tips from Question 1: Pre-application and Planning Considerations – What Can Be Done 1-2 Years Prior to a Solicitation? (Continued)

- When applying for both federal and state grant funding, consider timing of fund availability for optimal grant and project schedule coordination.
 - Remember State funds can be used to fund local matches for federal grants
 - Understand grant funding windows to ensure overlap and avoid risking expiration or other loss of funds
- Review previous solicitation program and application summary documents, then consider reaching out to successful applicants to gain insights
- Review previous solicitation application guides, FAQs, and program resources online
- Contact State Aid Programs staff if you've applied previously yet not been selected for funding. This can help to understand how to strengthen a future application.
- Coordinate and collaborate with District Engineer for proposed MnDOT Trunk Highway impacts to obtain project support ASAP and secure a letter of support for the application

Tips from Question 1: Pre-application and Planning Considerations – What Can Be Done 1-2 Years Prior to a Solicitation? (Continued)

- Vet locally developed concepts to promote best practice improvements, design standard compliance, reasonable cost estimation, etc. – highlight any red flags or potential project risks
 - May also extend to supporting smaller entities directly (via contributions to project delivery services)
 - Or supporting their procurement of design and construction administration services by consultants
- Any time PRIOR to the grant application release date:
 - Consider collaborating with other impacted entities
 - Seek support or advice from your DSAE
 - Engage with State Aid Programs about questions regarding proposed project readiness
- Do your homework ahead of seeking funds to better set up your application for success!



Question 2: What Can An Eligible Applicant Do to Prepare for a Grant Solicitation?

- Based on your proposed project concept or scope, have you collaborated with adjacent local partner entities and/or impacted stakeholders to obtain support? Also, have you identified any potential project risks?
- Do you fully understand the previous or current program solicitation guide to identify what data, project information, and required attachments are needed to prepare for a grant application submittal for your proposed project?
- Did you study the previous program FAQs document to understand how the program, application, solicitation, final design and construction will proceed?
- Do you have an approach for collecting and/or developing the project information and supporting documentation needed?

Tips from Question 2: What Can An Eligible Applicant Do to Prepare for a Grant Solicitation?

- Application Development Considerations
 - Project collaboration with adjacent local partner entities, small communities, and/or impacted stakeholders (seek and obtain project sponsorship or support)
 - Data needs (quantitative and qualitative): ADT, speed limit, actual speed, crash history, existing conditions compromising safety
 - Quantify current safety and operational issues (i.e., level of service, average delay, gap analysis, crash rate, critical crash rate, etc.)
 - Identify potential impacts: trunk highway, right-of-way, railroad impacts, & other risks
 - Proposed project description/scope: describe infrastructure improvements and benefits to mitigate safety and operational concerns



Tips from Question 2: What Can An Eligible Applicant Do to Prepare for a Grant Solicitation? (Continued)

- Application Development Considerations (continued):
 - Develop compelling, effective, and concise narrative responses to application questions (refer to previous or current solicitation guide as a resource) and include data to demonstrate need for proposed project
 - Planning Documentation - Non-motorized or motorized transportation plan, public engagement, outreach
 - Map - identify project location (with termini) and proposed improvements & consider adding photos of existing conditions
 - Consideration of Complete Streets
 - LRIP: Can Complete Streets elements be included in your proposed project?
 - AT & SRTS Infrastructure: Promote Complete Streets policies and practices in planning, design, and construction

Tips from Question 2: What Can An Eligible Applicant Do to Prepare for a Grant Solicitation? (Continued)

- Application Development Considerations (continued):
 - Cost Estimate: Construction costs only (please include separate columns to identify grant eligible and ineligible line-item costs in an Excel editable file format)
 - Project Schedule and identify any potential schedule issues
 - Identify funding sources (committed and potential) and consider other funding schedules (if applicable)
 - Attend program solicitation webinars (not required, yet very informative of any potential changes!)
 - Encourage Letter of Intent (LOI) submittal for AT & SRTS Infrastructure programs only

Tips from Question 2: What Can An Eligible Applicant Do to Prepare for a Grant Solicitation? (Continued)

- Application Development Considerations (continued):
 - Letters of support from local businesses, legislators, stakeholders, schools, etc. to help tell your project need, story, and confirm all stakeholders are aligned
 - Refer to previous or current FAQs document as a resource to develop an understanding of general program, application support, application evaluation, and design and construction. Then, identify any potential questions and inquire with State Aid Programs.
 - Review program solicitation webinar slides in a pdf format

Question 3: What Are Some Tips for Completing a Successful Grant Application?

- What makes this grant application stand out?
- Is the grant application complete, compelling and easily understood?
- What is your plan to secure all required attachments prior to the application submittal deadline?
- Is your proposed project able to deliver within the required timeframe identified in the solicitation guide?
- How have you concisely and realistically demonstrated project readiness?

Tips from Question 3: What Are Some Tips for Completing a Successful Grant Application?

- Proposed project addresses goals of the program – deficiency correction, increased connectivity, and/or improved safety of multi-modal interactions
- Data and details (speed limits, ADTs, # of lanes, roadway/trail widths, crash history, CRSP, stakeholder engagement) are all included in narrative responses with clearly referenced page numbers of attachments
- Realistic connection between improvements proposed and benefits they could achieve
- Jurisdictional responsibility understood and project impacts are well-described
 - Who will own and maintain the improvements? Are there railroad impacts? Will right-of-way or easement acquisition be necessary? Who else is impacted?

Tips from Question 3: What Are Some Tips for Completing a Successful Grant Application? (Continued)

- Alignment of mapping, project estimate, project timeline, and narrative description, including termini, locations, and improvements proposed are all consistent across each attachment or response
- Not “kitchen-sinking” attachments – Include only required, relevant, and cited documents with page numbers
- Avoid answering only “No” or “N/A” – No penalty for trying/guessing, give us something, could receive partial scoring
- Equity narrative should be highly focused on the users benefitting from the proposed project with specific destinations named, stats reflecting area demographics (Note: for AT & SRTS Infrastructure only)

Tips from Question 3: What Are Some Tips for Completing a Successful Grant Application? – Key Takeaways

- Existing: Concisely describe the problem and need - What, Why, & How?
- Proposed: Then, describe the proposed improvement - Objective & Expected Benefits
- Existing condition photos are extremely helpful; include within your map attachment
- If you indicate a checkmark that your proposed project meets a criteria, please follow up with a brief qualifying narrative describing how or why it meets the criteria
- Remember to refer to the question asked, then confirm your responses completely answers each question – Keep It Simple!
- Refer to the FAQs for key points in resolution language to include as an applicant, entity project sponsor, or other non-applicant jurisdictions impacted
- If applying for other grants or received additional project grant funds, please include it

Tips for a Successful Grant Application – County Engineer’s Perspective

Next, let’s hear from two County Engineers who have had successful experiences with competitive state grant funded programs.

- Bruce Hasbargen – Beltrami County
- Jodi Teich – Otter Tail County



Tips for a Successful Grant Application – County Engineer's Perspective

Communicate Opportunities

- With local entities, communities, interest groups, consultants and your county board
- Prepare for the next opportunity
- Good Projects
 - What sets your project apart from another project in the County/District/State?
 - County/City collaboration

Tips for a Successful Grant Application – County Engineer’s Perspective

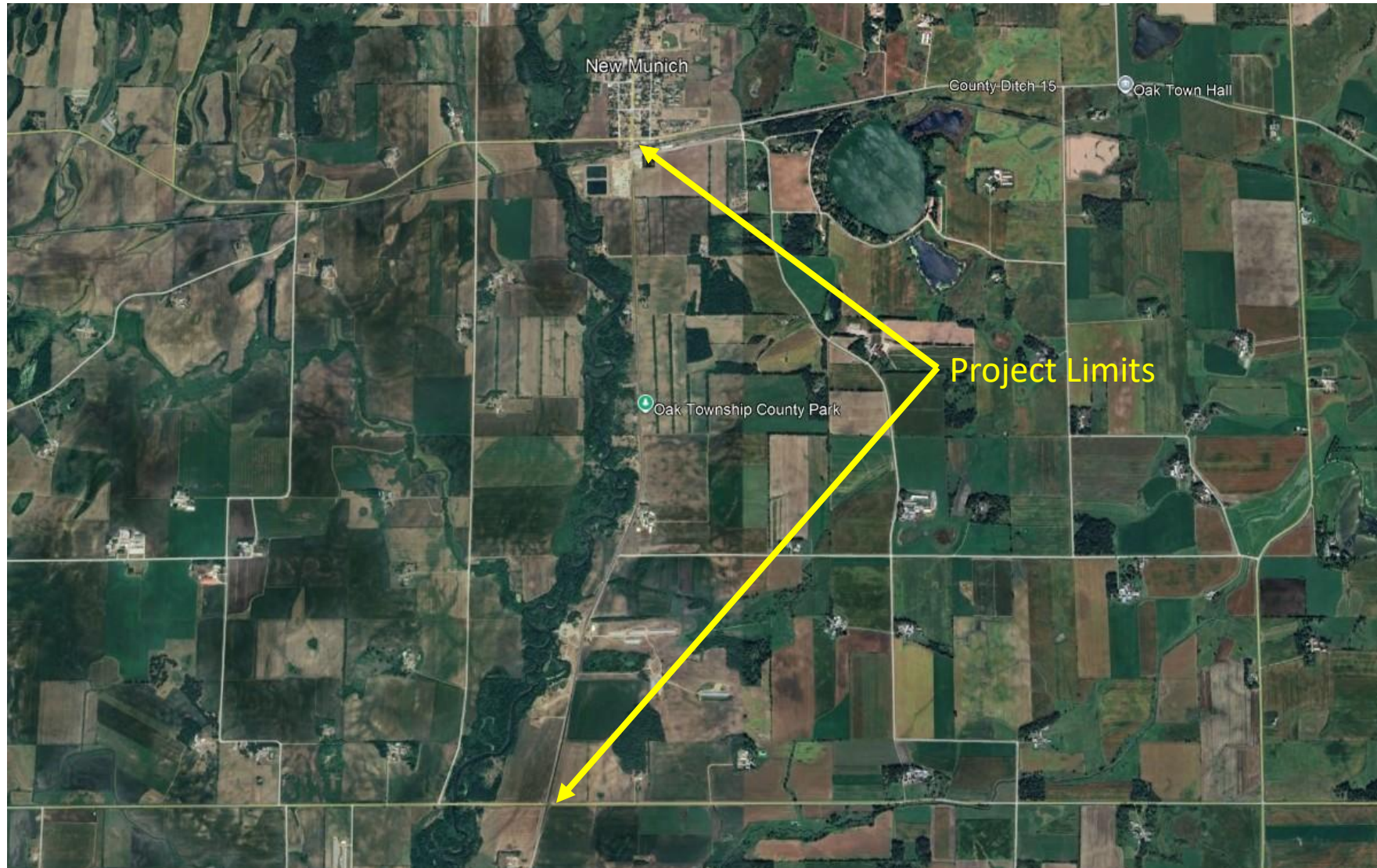
Planning – Prepare for grant opportunity

- Project development, preliminary design, cost estimates
- Local agencies work with consultants
 - Some willing to assist at no cost for future work
 - Weed out some projects – not going to waste time on bad projects
- Consider opportunities to “upgrade” a project with added funding
- Northern Twp, Fairgrounds Rd project – LRIP funding
- Stearns CSAH 12 (with city of New Munich) – LRIP

Fairgrounds Road



Stearns CSAH 12 LRIP with New Munich



Stearns CSAH 12 LRIP with New Munich



New project provided improved drainage, appropriate geometry for traffic and structural capacity for local industry

Local industries and city provided letters of support for the project, showing it wouldn't be controversial



Tips for a Successful Grant Application – County Engineer's Perspective

Planning – Prepare for grant opportunity (continued)

- SRTS Planning Grants
- Planning-level estimates
- Flexibility
 - Ability to move projects around in 5-Year Plan
 - Projects contingent upon grant funding

County/City of Bemidji trail to HS and ES – AT and SRTS Infra / TA

Stearns County/City of Cold Spring AT Project

Trail to Bemidji High School and Elementary School



Stearns County/City of Cold Spring AT Application



Tips for a Successful Grant Application – County Engineer's Perspective

Apply

- Time and effort, consultant cost
- Wayne Gretzky – You miss 100% of the shots you don't take

Reapply

- Discuss application with MnDOT staff
- If unsuccessful, reapply. May move from 2nd choice to top choice.
- Just like Vikings fans – There is always next year!

Wrapping Up: If a Non-Selection Letter Was Received, How Can You Prepare for Future Grant Solicitations?

- First and foremost, these are competitive programs. We encourage you to consider applying again. Please don't give up!
- Other proactive considerations:
 - (Re)read the solicitation guide and review your grant application responses again to fully understand if the program solicitation requirements were met, while confirming all questions were answered concisely & completely, and identify any potential areas to improve.
 - Promptly request a State Aid Programs feedback meeting. This is a great way to learn strengths and opportunities to improve in your grant application.
 - Seek feedback from peers who had a successful grant outcome.
- In preparation for future grant solicitations - Review previous program solicitation results & summaries, attend/view the solicitation webinar, consider submitting an LOI (AT & SRTS Infrastructure only), study the Program Solicitation Guide and FAQs

Wrapping Up: If a Non-Selection Letter Was Received, How Can You Prepare for Future Grant Solicitations?

KEEP IT SIMPLE

**DON'T
OVER
THINK**

**KEEP
TRYING!**

Thank You!

State Aid State Grant Programs Contacts:

- Competitive LRIP and AT Earmark: Rashmi Brewer, rashmi.brewer@state.mn.us
- AT & SRTS Infrastructure: Steve Prusak, steven.prusak@state.mn.us

County Engineer Contacts:

- Beltrami County: Bruce Hasbargen, bruce.hasbargen@co.beltrami.mn.us
- Otter Tail County: Jodi Teich, jteich@ottertailcounty.gov

Questions?

Open to All for Discussion

