

# Best Practices: Preparing a High Priority (HP) Grant Application

## Objective



This document provides an overview of the High Priority (HP) Grant and offers suggestions for writing a competitive and successful grant application. It provides details on the application structure, with examples of each element in the project and budget narratives.

## HP Grant Program Overview

The High Priority Grant Program provides Federal financial assistance to enhance Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program (MCSAP) commercial vehicle safety plan (CVSP) activities, as well as maintain innovative technology and/or new projects not included in the CVSP that will have a positive impact on large truck and bus safety. Two major purposes of the program are Innovative Technology Deployment (ITD) and commercial motor vehicle (CMV) safety-related activities and projects.

### HP ITD Program activities:

- Advance the technological capability and promote the deployment of intelligent transportation system applications for CMV operations.
- Support and maintain CMV information systems and networks.

### HP CMV safety-related activities and projects:

- Support participation in Performance and Registration Information Systems Management (PRISM).
- Conduct safety data improvement projects.
- Increase public awareness of and education on CMV safety.
- Target unsafe driving of CMVs and non-CMV in areas identified as high-risk crash corridors.
- Improve the safety and security of moving hazardous materials.
- Improve the safety of transporting goods and persons in foreign commerce.
- Demonstrate new technologies to improve CMV safety.
- Improve CMV safety and compliance with CMV safety regulations.

# Tips for Writing a Grant Application

- **Read the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) carefully.** Use additional resources such as in the High Priority Grant Resource Guide and MCSAP Comprehensive Policy (MCP) for additional clarification and guidance. For any outstanding questions, refer to the point of contact listed in the NOFO.
- It is always preferred to make sure your project goal connects to the National Priorities listed in the NOFO each year. Anything you can do to make the connection between your project and the National Priorities will strengthen your application.
- Use the checklist provided in the NOFO. This will ensure you have required materials on hand prior to submission.
- Use the budget templates provided with the NOFO in Grants.gov. This will ensure your application has all of the information required. If you do not wish to use the template, please use it as a reference to ensure you are capturing all items incorporated in the template.
- All forms required in the NOFO must be completed/uploaded in Grants.gov.
- Once you have completed the draft, have someone who was not involved in developing the draft read over and edit the application. It is recommended that you provide this person with a copy of the NOFO as well.
- Take the time to thoughtfully read through all edits and comments provided by the internal editor. The objective is to write a highly responsive application.
- Upload your application to Grants.gov prior to the due date.
  - Within two business days of upload, you should receive two emails from Grants.gov:
    - One that confirms application receipt by the Grants.gov system.
    - One that indicates that the application has either been successfully validated by Grants.gov prior to transmission to FMCSA or has been rejected due to errors.
- Be careful when copying from a previous year's application.
- Make sure the budget narrative matches the SF-424 and SF-424A that is submitted with the application.

## Application Overview

### What Is a Project?

A project may consist of one or more priorities that work toward achieving a defined goal.

If an applicant chooses to propose multiple projects within a single application, each project must contain:

- A distinct title.
- Separate and distinct project narratives.
- Separate and distinct budget narratives and line item budgets.
  - Applications with multiple budgets must include a comprehensive budget.

To learn more about the project narrative and budget narrative for an HP Grant application, see the section below on the Application Structure.

## Application Structure

Follow the NOFO for detailed structural requirements, such as font, type size, and page limitations. Should you have any questions when completing the application, reach out to the contact listed in the NOFO.

A **Project Narrative** includes:

- **Introduction:** Explain the project purpose, including what specific grant priorities the project will address.
- **Problem Statement:** Provide a quantitative description of the issue the project will address, including baseline data and targeted outcome.
- **Performance Objective:** Describe the anticipated project outcome.
- **Program Activity Plan:** Outline activities required to achieve the performance objective, including a timeline and benchmarks.
- **Performance Measurement Plan:** Explain how progress toward the performance objective will be measured (hours, carrier contacts, inspections, etc.). Measures should include key milestones and timelines.
- **Monitoring Plan:** Explain the method that will be used to monitor the project's progress.

A **Budget Narrative** includes:

- A description by budget category (SF-424A object class categories) that clearly supports the project plan and justifies the expense to determine if it is allowable, allocable, reasonable, and necessary. The justification must show a direct link to the project's success. If replacing equipment or technology, always reference your agency's replacement schedule to include age and/or miles.

## Project/Budget Narrative Development

Click on each section of the application below to learn more about what is required in each section and to be taken to a corresponding example.

[Brief Introduction](#)

[Problem Statement](#)

[Performance Objective](#)

[Program Activity Plan](#)

[Performance Measurement Plan](#)

[Monitoring Plan](#)

[Budget Narrative](#)

## Brief Introduction

- Include a description of the **goal** of the application and the applicable NOFO **priorities** met by the application's projects. For each goal identified, the applicant must provide:
  - Problem statement.
  - Performance objective.
  - Program activity plan.
  - Performance measurement plan.
- Include specific information about the **outputs** the application proposes to achieve.

### Example Introduction:

*[The applicant]'s high-visibility traffic enforcement blitz project will be focused on HP NOFO Priority 1, targeting unsafe driving of commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) and non-CMVs in areas identified as high-risk crash corridors. As identified in the 2018 CMV Crash Report of State X from CY 2016-CY 2018, CMV crashes on Highways 10 and 20 have shown an upward trend. In 2016 CMV crashes on these two highways accounted for 35% (1,900) of the State's CMV crashes compared to 38% (2,100) in 2018. Through high-visibility traffic enforcement blitzes the State can meet its goal to reduce CMV crashes by 10% (210) from the 2,100 crashes identified in CY 2018 along these corridors. High-visibility blitz activity for the two corridors will include 18 sworn officers conducting an estimated 1,100 inspections and 2,300 traffic enforcement contacts through the allocation of 1,152 overtime hours, with an average of two contacts per hour, dedicated to high-visibility traffic enforcement activities.*

## Problem Statement

- Include a **quantifiable description** of the identified problem.
- Include **details on the data used to identify the problem** and to establish the baseline (include data source and date and explain how the applicant collects, maintains, and analyzes the data).
- The data should **support the proposed project**.

### Example Problem Statement:

*[The applicant] has identified that two highway corridors, Highway 10 and Highway 20, accounted for 38% (2,100) of all CMV crashes in State X in CY 2018. State traffic records also show a three-year upward trend from CY 2016 to CY 2018 in speeding, following too closely, and improper lane change violations; in CY 2018 these violations accounted for 84% (1,764) of the crash causation factors along these highways. Further, after conducting Level 3 inspections, hours-of-service (HOS) violations were also identified in 40% (1,500) of the CMV crashes and considered a causation factor. This proposal would be a new project in an effort to combat the upward trend of driver-related crashes within the identified crash corridors. [Insert data source here: 2018 CMV Crash Report, April, 2019; 2018 State Traffic Records Report, April 2019]*

## Performance Objective

- Include a description of the applicant's **quantifiable goal** related to the problem statement. This can be measured in:
  - Numbers.
  - Percentages.
  - Other forms that accurately measure the **outputs and outcomes** that the applicant anticipates will result from implementing the strategies and activities proposed.
- Goals should be SMART:
  - Specific.
  - Measurable.
  - Achievable.
  - Relevant.
  - Time-bound.

### Example Performance Objective:

#### Objective #1:

*[The applicant] will reduce the percentage of speeding, following too closely, and improper lane change violations by 20% (1,344) of the crash causation factors along Highways 10 and 20 during the grant's Period of Performance (POP). This reduction utilizes 2018 as the baseline, i.e., in CY 2018 speeding, following too closely, and improper lane change violations were cited in 84% of the CMV crashes on these two highways.*

#### Objective #2:

*[The applicant] will reduce the number of CMV crashes in which HOS violations were identified in a post-crash inspection in the two identified high-crash corridors by 10%, from a baseline of 1,500 in CY 2018 to 1,350 in CY 2019.*

#### Objective #3:

*[The applicant] will reduce the total number of CMV crashes in the two identified high-crash corridors by 10%, from a baseline of 2,100 in CY 2018 to 1,890 in CY 2019.*

## Program Activity Plan

- Include a description of the activities the applicant believes will help mitigate the problem.
- Description should include details, such as number and frequency of activities.

### Example Program Activity Plan:

*[The applicant] will conduct one high-visibility traffic enforcement and inspection campaign each quarter during third shift (2300-0700) around each of the two high-crash corridors on Highways 10 and 20 (for a total of eight campaigns). Each campaign will consist of at least nine officers per crash corridor focusing on speeding, following too closely, and improper lane change violations on CMVs and non-CMV's operating around CMVs. Traffic enforcement will average two contacts per hour, per officer over an eight-hour shift, and at least half of the traffic enforcement contacts will be conducted in conjunction with a Level 3 inspection, focusing on HOS violations.*

*Proposed activity includes 144 traffic enforcement contacts and inspections per location per campaign, totaling ~2,300 traffic enforcement contacts and 1,100 Level 3 inspections during the POP. See table below.*

Highway	Number of			Avg. Number of Contacts	Total	Avg.	Total
	Officers	Quarters	Hours per Shift	Traffic Enforcement Contacts per campaign	Traffic Enforcement Contacts (Grant POP)	Level 3 Inspections per campaign	Level 3 Inspections
Highway 10	9	8	8	144	1,152	72	576
Highway 20	9	8	8	144	1,152	72	576
<b>Total</b>					<b>2,304</b>	<b>1,152</b>	

## Performance Measurement Plan

- Include a description of how the applicant will measure progress toward the performance objective, such as quantifiable and measureable outputs (hours, carrier contacts, inspections, etc.), and in terms of performance outcomes.
- Measures must include specific benchmarks and timelines that can be reported in quarterly progress reports and as annual outcomes.

### Example Performance Measurement Plan:

*[The applicant] will monitor and evaluate the various traffic enforcement contacts each quarter within the State traffic management system to ensure that officers are meeting their goal of 144 traffic enforcement contacts per corridor per campaign to reach the total goal of 2,300 traffic enforcement contacts throughout the POP and that Level 3 inspections are conducted in conjunction with half of all enforcement contacts to reach the total of 1,152 inspections (for an average of 72 inspections per corridor and campaign) during the POP.*

*[The applicant] will monitor and evaluate the CMV crashes and their related factors on Highways 10 and 20 to determine if there has been a reduction in the crash factors relating to speeding, following too closely, and improper lane change violations and HOS violations (if an inspection was conducted) to determine the effectiveness of the traffic enforcement blitzes. Specifically, the applicant will –*

- *Reduce the percentage of speeding, following too closely, and improper lane change violations to 64% (1,344) of the crash causation factors along Highways 10 and 20 during CY 2019 from the baseline of 84% (1,764) during CY 2018.*
- *Reduce the number of CMV crashes in which HOS violations were identified in a post-crash inspection in the two identified high-crash corridors by 10%, from a baseline of 1,500 in CY 2018 to 1,350 in CY 2019.*
- *Reduce the total number of CMV crashes in the two identified high-crash corridors by 10%, from a baseline of 2,100 in CY 2018 to 1,890 in CY 2019.*

## Monitoring Plan

- Include a description of the applicant’s method for ongoing monitoring of project progress.
- This should include who will conduct the monitoring, the frequency with which it will be carried out, and how and to whom reports will be made.

### Example Monitoring Plan:

*The (identify position performing this function [e.g., State Police Lieutenant]) will monitor weekly traffic enforcement activity reports for the prospective corridors and schedule the enforcement details. Clerical administration personnel will assist with all reports to State X and FMCSA and any other day-to-day operations as needed. All reporting to FMCSA will be completed on a quarterly basis. The (identify position performing this function [e.g., State Police Lieutenant and administrative personnel]) will also maintain the data by completing reports at the end of each traffic enforcement campaign to ensure accurate capture of data on tasks performed. The coordinators will file quarterly reports with FMCSA.*

## Budget Narrative

- Include a description, by budget category (object class), detailing costs necessary to achieve the proposed project goals and objectives. The level of detail should be sufficient to support the funding requested.
- The budget narrative:
  - Should be clear, specific, detailed, and mathematically correct.
  - Explain the “what,” “how,” and “why” of a line item cost to carry out grant project goals and objectives.
  - Show how costs are allowable, allocable, reasonable, and necessary.
    - The justification must show a direct link to the project’s success. If replacing equipment or technology, always reference your agency’s replacement schedule to include age and/or miles.
  - Show how costs are calculated.
- Object Classes:
  - Personnel.
  - Fringe Benefits.
  - Travel.
  - Equipment.
  - Supplies.
  - Contractual.
  - Other.
  - Indirect Costs.
- Refer to the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200) for specific cost guidance, such as what constitutes allocable, allowable, necessary, and reasonable costs.

**Example Cost Element:**

Personnel Budget Narrative						
Position(s)	# of Staff	% of Time	Work Year Hours	Hourly Rate	Total Cost	Federal Share (85%)
Troopers Overtime	18	100	64	55.00	\$63,360	\$53,856
Clerical Administrative Specialist	1	100	8	32.00	\$256	\$218
<b>Subtotal Salary</b>					<b>\$63,616</b>	<b>\$54,074</b>
<p>The State will conduct one high-visibility traffic enforcement and inspection campaign each quarter in the 2 high-crash corridors on Highways 10 and 20 (for a total of 8 campaigns). Per campaign, there will be 9 officers staffing each location during an 8-hour shift, for a total of 64 additional work hours per officer, or 1,152 total hours. The State budgeted an average rate of \$55 per hour, as mandated by the State’s Collective Bargaining Agreement for the State Troopers’ Association. This totals \$63,360.</p> <p>The part-time hours are for the Clerical Administrative Specialist who prepares the quarterly performance reports. Applicable program hours are tracked through the State’s electronic timecard system. We have projected eight hours during the performance period for these tasks at an hourly rate of \$32. This totals \$256.</p>						

## Questions and Additional Resources



This grant is a partnership. Along the way, should you have any questions, reach out to your Grants Management Office Point of Contact listed in the NOFO, or your Field Office Point of Contact.

Visit FMCSA’s Grants Management Training page for additional resources and links to the Grants Management eLearning Series.