

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Linking Iowa's Freight Transportation System (LIFTS) program

Please note these answers are based on the best available information at the time. Answers may be subject to change as this program further develops.

1. Where can I access the LIFTS webinar

The material from the webinar is posted on the [LIFTS program website following the webinar](#).

Note: This webinar was recorded during our first round of LIFTS funding (2017). The funding amount for the current 2018 round is \$1.3 million. We are no longer requiring a pre-application.

2. Is a pre-application required?

For the 2018 round of LIFTS funding, a pre-application is NOT required.

3. I am not sure that I can get cost estimates, scheduling, and other details finalized before the pre-application is due. Can preliminary information be included on the preapplication and changed on my application?

Yes. We understand that there is a limited time to finalize the details of a project before the pre-application is due. Costs, schedule, and other details can vary; however, the location and general scope of the project cannot change significantly. We only ask that the application indicate what has changed from the pre-application. The application is what will be evaluated for possible award.

4. How is this round of LIFTS funded?

This round is federally funded. The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act was signed into law in 2015 and expanded the eligibility of multimodal freight projects for federal transportation funding through the establishment of a National Highway Freight Program (NHFP). Up to ten percent of Iowa's NHFP apportionment may be used on freight intermodal or freight rail projects. The Iowa Transportation Commission has chosen to award this funding through the administration of the LIFTS program, a competitive grant application program.

5. Does federal funding have more stringent requirements than state funding.

Yes. [Appendix A – Federal Requirements, Standards, or Guidelines](#) provides a brief outline of what is involved in the receipt of federal funding.

6. Is there a Buy America requirement?

Yes. The Buy America requirements of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will apply. [FHWA's Buy America Q and A for a Federal-aid Program](#) provides information and additional resources to explain the requirements. This requirement is applicable to all materials incorporated into a project; including equipment.

7. How do you define a public, private and public-private partnership for the LIFTS program?

A private applicant would be any non-governmental entity such as a "for profit" company or "non-profit" organization. A public applicant would be a governmental subdivision or affiliated organization that is publicly funded (i.e., city, county, metropolitan planning organization, etc.)

A public-private partnership would be a partnership of a government organization and one or more private sector companies. Both the public and private entities would need to contribute toward the match to be considered a public-private partnership. In a public-private partnership, the public entity shall act as the fiscal agent and execute the funding agreement as the responsible party for the grant.

8. Can two or more private companies partner to submit an application?

Yes. Partnerships, whether private-private or public-private, are encouraged. Inclusion of a public partner would make a project eligible to receive up to 80 percent of project costs. Projects sponsored by private entities are limited to awards up to 50 percent.

9. Highway only projects typically eligible for local, state, or federal highway funding are not eligible costs under LIFTS. Can you explain and give some examples?

The purpose of the LIFTS program is to provide flexible funding for freight projects that don't have a traditional funding source available. Many projects that benefit freight transportation are eligible to be programmed with public highway funding. Because a funding source for those already exists, they are not eligible as stand-alone projects under LIFTS. Examples of *ineligible* costs would be adding turn lanes, highway reinforcement or rehabilitation to better accommodate heavy trucks, widening a turn radius, eliminating height or width restrictions of a bridge, truck parking, or traffic control systems.

Within an eligible project there may be roadway related or paving costs that are eligible under LIFTS if they are an integral part of a project. Examples of eligible costs would be entrances or exits to a transload facility, paved areas to store freight out-of-doors, parking areas within a freight facility, or paved staging areas for freight transfer.

Some projects that include highway components may be able to take advantage of another Iowa DOT program, [Revitalize Iowa's Sound Economy \(RISE\) program](#) (through a separate application process), for the establishment, construction, improvement, and maintenance of roads and streets to promote economic development in Iowa.

10. Can the funding be used for planning studies? What types?

Yes. Planning studies are eligible if the goal of the study is to evaluate the need or feasibility of a freight facility or improvement or to develop a strategy to address a freight transportation challenge. Eligible planning studies are expected to lead toward a freight transportation solution or provide input into the feasibility or design concepts of a possible future freight investment (even if the recommendation of the planning study is to not move forward with the investment.) Planning studies simply to gather data, establish a marketing plan for an existing facility, or that do not conclude with a recommendation are likely to be ineligible or expected to score poorly in the evaluation process.

11. I see that equipment that is integral to a freight transportation improvement is an eligible cost. Can you explain?

Equipment, such as that used to transfer freight from one mode to another, is an eligible expense. The agreement between the department and any awardees will include a requirement for on-going maintenance of the project. Any equipment included as part of the grant, whether mobile or fixed equipment, must remain with the project for the duration of that maintenance period and must meet Buy America requirements.

12. How is this program different from the Railroad Revolving Loan and Grant (RRLG) program?

The RRLG program is specifically limited to railroad infrastructure. The LIFTS program has a wider eligibility of costs and can be related to any mode of transportation (rail, truck, aviation, barge, etc.) or the facilities that link them. LIFTS funding is broader based with the goal to improve the freight transportation system. The LIFTS program also is federally funded, which comes with different requirements (see question 3). Additionally, no “early start” exemption will be available under LIFTS. No part of the project may be started until authorization to proceed is received.

13. How is this LIFTS program different from the previous round of LIFTS in 2016?

The 2016 program was a pilot program using state funding. This round of funding has slightly different eligibility and is federally funded under the FAST Act. Consequently, applicants should carefully read the guidance documents and understand the requirements inherent with federal funding.

14. What type of projects received funding in the previous round of LIFTS in 2017?

For information on previous year’s awards please visit:

<https://iowadot.gov/iowarail/pdfs/LIFTSCommissionRecommendation.pdf>

15. Can I apply for LIFTS funding to supplement an existing project that has already received RRLG funding?

Yes, if the LIFTS application is for a new or different phase of a project that has previously received RRLG funding.

16. If I have a loan through the RRLG program, or a private loan, can I apply to LIFTS for a grant to pay off that loan?

No, the LIFTS program is expected to stimulate new development. Refinancing of a completed project, even if it would have otherwise qualified under this program, is an ineligible cost.

17. Is it helpful to have letters of support for a proposed project?

Though not technically required, letters of support from local stakeholders and/or government officials speaking to support or readiness for the proposed project may be helpful as the project is evaluated. However, if the project depends upon a transportation provider, such as a railroad, to serve the facility, a letter confirming the willingness to serve the project is required.

18. Is there a limit on submissions from a single entity?

No. Each project submission must be submitted in a separate application.

19. What do you expect the awarded project sizes will be?

There is no minimum or maximum award size pre-determined. The awards will be made based on the evaluation criteria and funds available. Applicants should carefully consider the additional costs and efforts associated with federal funding when determining if a smaller project is feasible.

20. Is there a maximum amount that can be granted to a specific project?

No.

21. Assuming multiple projects qualify in total exceeding the \$1.3M, how will the money be split up among the applicants?

There is no pre-determined methodology. The evaluation team will review the project benefits and readiness and develop a recommendation based on that review. It is possible that not all applicants will be awarded the full amount of their request, but only if a lesser award does not endanger completion of the project. Grant funds will not be split between *all* eligible projects if the total requested exceeds the amount available.

22. Will the LIFTS program be an on-going program?

That depends. The LIFTS program is funded by National Highway Freight Program (NHFP) formula funds that were authorized by the FAST Act which was signed into law in 2015. The FAST Act authorized funding for a six-year period. Up to ten percent of Iowa's NHFP apportionment may be used on freight intermodal or freight rail projects. The Iowa Transportation Commission has chosen the LIFTS program for distribution of this funding and it is anticipated that the LIFTS program will continue. However, the Commission has the authority to allocate these funds in a different way in the future if needs arise.

23. Has there been a demonstrated need from shippers for intermodal rail service in Iowa?

There has been the need expressed for more multimodal freight options for shippers (i.e., transload and/or intermodal facilities). Iowa's Freight Advisory Council identified the need for more multimodal connections as one of seven options for improved freight movement in Iowa. The [Iowa Rail Toolkit](#) contains a list of the rail transload and intermodal sites that were identified when the Toolkit was developed.

24. Would LIFTS funds be available for marketing a new transportation facility?

No. The LIFTS program is designed to encourage new or upgraded infrastructure to benefit freight transportation. Marketing costs are not an eligible expense.

25. Are there restrictions on what can be used for a match?

A funding award from the LIFTS program will reimburse up to 80 percent or 50 percent of eligible projects costs (as applicable). Eligible project costs in excess of the amount reimbursed by the Department will be considered the local contribution (match) and may include cash, non-cash, or approved state fund contributions. The recipient will certify the value of any non-cash contribution to the project to Iowa DOT prior to it being incurred. Iowa DOT retains the sole authority to determine the eligibility and value of the recipient's non-cash contribution.

26. I know you mentioned planning and feasibility studies are eligible, but are design and engineering?

Design and engineering costs are not eligible as a stand-alone cost but are eligible if included as a part of a construction award under this program.

27. Will there be guidance available from IDOT between now and application submission?

Hopefully these FAQ's provide additional information to guide you; however, questions are always welcome. All questions about the program or the application should be directed to [Laura Hutzell](#) by e-mail or call 515-239-1066.