

# COVID-19 Relief Recreational Trails Program

Program Guidance

April 2, 2021

# 1 PROGRAM

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## 1.1 PURPOSE

The COVID-19 Relief Recreational Trails program will award Highway Infrastructure Program funding appropriated by title IV of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (HIP-CRRSAA). The purpose of the appropriation was to provide funding to highway programs impacted by COVID-19. In Iowa, one of the programs negatively affected by the financial impacts of COVID-19 was the State Recreational Trails (SRT) program. To partially offset COVID-19 related reductions in the SRT program, this \$5 million one-time allocation of federal funds toward a recreational trails program was approved by the Iowa Transportation Commission on March 9, 2021.

## 1.2 FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

The COVID-19 Recreational Trails Program is federally funded. The HIP-CRRSAA guidelines require that projects awarded by the COVID-19 Recreational Trails Program must be carried out under the same rules and procedures as a highway project on a federal-aid highway. These rules will be available to successful applicants through the Federal-Aid Project Development Guide as well as through the Iowa DOT Instructional Memorandums. Both of these references can be found on the Iowa DOT website at <http://www.iowadot.gov>. Please refer to Section 5 of this guidance for a brief overview of some of the federal requirements of this program.

## 1.3 COST REIMBURSEMENT

This is a cost reimbursement program. This means project sponsors must incur the cost of the project, pay for those costs, periodically submit a claim for reimbursement to the Iowa DOT, and then receive payment for funds they have expended. Only after a project has been approved by the Iowa DOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), can costs become eligible for reimbursement. Costs must be incurred after FHWA authorization or they are not eligible for reimbursement. Requests for reimbursement will be made to the Iowa DOT Systems Planning Bureau and must be accompanied by sufficient documentation to show that the project costs have already been paid.

## 1.4 PROJECT COMPLETION

Awarded projects must be complete by September 30, 2023.

## 1.5 GRANT REQUEST LIMITATIONS

Applications requesting less than \$500,000 or more than \$1.25 million will not be considered.

## 1.6 NON-FEDERAL MATCH REQUIREMENT

COVID-19 Relief Recreational Trails program funds may pay for up to 100 percent of eligible project costs or up to the approved grant maximum, whichever is less. There is no required non-federal match required; however, the amount of non-federal project funding leveraged by a COVID-19 Relief Recreational Trails program award will factor into the scoring of applications. For example, an application

requesting 100 percent of project costs from the program will not score as well as a project that requests 80 percent of project costs from the program. Non-federal match may include state funds, cash donations, or local agency funds. Services, materials, or real property donated by a third-party may also be counted as match under certain circumstances and only with Iowa DOT approval and FHWA authorization.

## **2 ELIGIBILITY**

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### **2.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS**

Federal and state agencies as well as local governments are eligible to apply for funding. A non-eligible project sponsor (such as a non-profit organization) may partner with an eligible co-sponsor in applying for funds if the eligible sponsor will administer the project.

### **2.2 ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES**

The following activities are eligible for funding under the COVID-19 Recreational Trails program:

1. Construction of new recreational trails;
2. Maintenance, resurfacing and restoration of existing recreational trails;
3. Development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages;
4. Acquisition of easements and fee simple title to property for recreational trails or recreational trail corridors.

### **2.3 ELIGIBLE COSTS**

Only certain costs are eligible for reimbursement through the COVID-19 Relief Recreational Trails program. An obligation of funds occurs when a project is approved and a project agreement is executed between the federal government (FHWA division office) and the Iowa DOT. This is called FHWA authorization. This does not generally occur until a project has cleared a number of steps in the project development process including the execution of a project agreement between the project sponsor and the Iowa DOT. Although considerable time and money may have already been spent developing a project, the obligation of funds upon FHWA authorization marks the beginning of project costs which are eligible for reimbursement. Any costs incurred prior to receipt of a notice to proceed from the Iowa DOT that the specific costs have received FHWA authorization are not eligible for reimbursement.

After FHWA authorization, many project specific costs may be eligible. Preliminary and final engineering work including project development, acquisition of right-of-way, environmental work, cost estimates, and construction plans are eligible costs. Utility relocations as permitted under Iowa Code, construction engineering, and construction costs would also be eligible costs.

### **2.4 INELIGIBLE COSTS**

Ineligible costs include any and all costs incurred prior to Iowa DOT and FHWA authorization of the project. Other ineligible costs include, but are not limited to, general planning studies, costs of administering the

project, costs of preparing the grant application, fund raising, meeting attendance, office supplies, travel, and finance costs. These costs also may not be used as part of the non-federal match.

## 3 HOW TO APPLY

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### 3.1 DEADLINE

Applications must be emailed to [scott.flagg@iowadot.us](mailto:scott.flagg@iowadot.us) **before 5:00 pm CST on May 17, 2021.** No hardcopies will be accepted.

Applications received after the deadline will be deemed ineligible and may not be reviewed. Incomplete applications may be disqualified from consideration. The Iowa DOT is not responsible for any errors or delays caused by technical difficulties resulting from the emailing of applications.

Submit all required application components as separate email attachments and in the specified file format, where noted below.

### 3.2 APPLICATION

Application materials are available on the program website at:

[https://iowadot.gov/systems\\_planning/Grant-Programs/-Federal-and-State-Recreational-Trails](https://iowadot.gov/systems_planning/Grant-Programs/-Federal-and-State-Recreational-Trails).

A complete application will include all of the following components:

- **Application Form:** Complete Parts A through E including narrative responses to all questions. Submit in Word format.
- **Part F – Certification:** Use the checklist to verify you have attached all required items to your email and make sure the certification is signed. Scan and submit in PDF format.
- **Project Map.** Provide a detailed map identifying the location of the project. The project scope should be clearly identified and the map may also include other important information referred to in the narrative responses you provide in the application form such as important trail linkages, completed or future project phases, etc. More than one map may be submitted if the scope of the project is such that the desired detail is not feasible to be included on just one map. If the map is unclear, incomplete, or reviewers can't understand the map, your application will likely not score well. Limit map sizes to no larger than 8.5-by-11-inches. PDF format preferred.
- **Sketch Plan.** Provide a sketch plan of the project, including a cross section for bicycle or pedestrian facilities. If the cross section of your facility varies across the project (width, number of lanes, etc.) include a cross section for each situation and identify its location. PDF format preferred.
- **Digital Photographs.** Provide photographs (limited to five) that will help to explain the existing site conditions of the proposed trail. It is not necessary to include photographs of all aspects or the entire route of a project. Photos submitted should be representative of the project as a whole or should support any particularly compelling or complex description included in the narrative

provided in Part E above. It is preferred that the photos compiled into one document altogether with captions and may be a Word document or PDF.

- **Itemized Breakdown of Total Project Costs.** In many cases, this item will be an engineer’s opinion of probable cost, but this is not required. However, it must accomplish two objectives: 1) it must show the method by which the cost estimate was prepared; and 2) it must enable a reviewer to determine if the cost estimate is reasonable. The manner in which these objectives are achieved may vary widely depending on the type, scope, and complexity of the project. PDF format preferred. Absent a fully itemized list of costs, some general guidelines for possible methods of estimating each type of project cost:
  - Construction costs: Historical averages for projects of similar size and scope.
  - Design costs: 8-10% of the construction estimate
  - Inspection costs: 12-15% of the construction estimate
- **An official endorsement (resolution).** A resolution is required from the authority to be responsible for the project’s maintenance and operation. The authority must provide written assurance it will adequately maintain the completed project for its intended public use following project completion. For most construction projects, this will be a minimum of 20 years. The endorsement must also acknowledge the intent of the authority to provide the match funds required for the project. For cities, counties, or other political subdivisions, this should be in the form of a fully executed resolution by the elected body or board, as applicable.
- **A letter of support from the Iowa DOT District Office.** If the project will include construction within Iowa DOT right-of-way, a letter of support from the appropriate Iowa DOT District Office is required.
- **Minority Impact Statement.** PDF format.

## 4 PROJECT SELECTION

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### 4.1 SCORING CRITERIA

Each application will be assessed by consideration of the following criteria (100 points possible):

1. The degree to which the project provides development of trail linkages including ties to other trails. (40 Points)
2. How the project aligns with the Iowa Bicycle and Pedestrian Long Range Plan and any applicable adopted regional, county, or municipal trail plan. (20 Points)
3. The current status of the project toward the required National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance and project readiness for development. (20 points)
4. The degree to which the project will use program grant funds to leverage other public or private investments. (10 points)
5. The degree of commitment to continue operation and maintenance of the project after the project is complete (e.g. trail maintenance fund, endowment, etc.) (10 Points)

While the scoring criteria provided in this section are the primary means of determining a selected project, Iowa DOT may also consider other factors not included in these scoring criteria in making the final selection of projects.

## **4.2 DISQUALIFICATION OF APPLICATIONS**

The Iowa DOT may reject outright and may not evaluate applications for any one of the following reasons:

- The applicant fails to deliver the application by the due date and time.
- The applicant acknowledges that a requirement of the program cannot be met.
- The applicant's proposal materially changes a requirement of this guidance or the proposal is not compliant with the requirements of this guidance.
- The applicant fails to timely respond to the Iowa DOT's request for information, documents, or references.
- The applicant presents the information requested by this guidance in a format inconsistent with the instructions of the guidance or otherwise fails to comply with the requirements of the guidance.
- The applicant provides misleading or inaccurate responses.
- There is insufficient evidence (including evidence submitted by the applicant and evidence obtained by the Iowa DOT from other sources) to satisfy the Iowa DOT that the applicant is properly qualified to satisfy the requirements of the guidance or application.
- The proposed project(s) are not in compliance with applicable state and federal statutes and rules.

## **4.3 CLARIFICATIONS AND IOWA DOT DISCRETION**

The Iowa DOT reserves the right to contact an applicant after the submission of an application for the purpose of clarifying the application to ensure mutual understanding. The Iowa DOT will not consider information received if the information materially alters the content of the application. Failure to comply with requests for additional information may result in rejection of the application as non-compliant. The Iowa DOT reserves the right to reduce or adjust grant requests.

The Iowa DOT is not obligated to fund an application from an applicant that has demonstrated marginal or unsatisfactory performance on previous grants or contracts with the Iowa DOT or other state agencies.

## **4.4 FUNDS AWARDED**

Projects recommended for funding will be presented to the Iowa Transportation Commission for approval. Following Commission action, the Iowa DOT will notify each applicant of the status of their application and details concerning initiating project development will be provided to those awarded funding. Final funding decisions are anticipated to be made by August 15, 2021.

## 5 FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS, STANDARDS, OR GUIDELINES

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Since the COVID-19 Relief Recreational Trails program is a federally funded program, awarded projects are subject to certain federal laws and regulations including:

1. Involvement of the public, including the adjacent property owners, in the development of the project.
2. Compliance with the Uniform Relocation Property Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act (the Uniform Act) for the acquisition of easements or the purchase of land in fee simple. This includes fair treatment practices and may include the completion of an appraisal on parcels to be acquired. This requirement applies whether or not federal funds will be used for the acquisition costs.
3. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This requires verification the project is not harmful to the environment in the following areas:
  - Noise. Impacts of noise during and after construction.
  - Air Quality. Compliance with Iowa's state implementation plan for maintaining its attainment status relative to the national ambient air quality standards. Conformity with the requirements of the Clean Air Act must be verified.
  - Cultural Resources. Disturbances to areas of archaeological or historical significance. Properties proposed for rehabilitation or preservation must be eligible for or on the list of the National Register of Historic Places. (Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act)
  - Water Quality. Impacts to water quality.
  - Wetlands. Impacts to wetlands.
  - Floodplains. Impacts to regulatory floodways or to a 10-year floodplain.
  - Farmland Protection. Impacts to surrounding farmland.
  - Hazardous Waste Sites. Location of and impacts to hazardous waste sites.
4. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Projects must conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act, which allows for reasonable access to the project for persons with disabilities.
5. Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) and Minority Business Enterprises (MBE). Verification must be received that efforts have been made to solicit bids from disadvantaged and minority business enterprises.
6. Prevailing wage (Davis-Bacon) requirements. Projects will be required to comply with Davis-Bacon wage requirements, which state that contractors will conform to federal minimum wage requirements.
7. Buy America requirements. All iron or steel products incorporated into the project (purchased, donated, or provided) must be accompanied by manufacturer's certifications indicating that all

manufacturing processes, including the application of coatings, have occurred in the United States.

8. Competitive bidding requirements. Construction projects are required to be let through the Iowa DOT or according to procedures for a public letting as per Sections 26.3 through 26.13 of the Code of Iowa.
9. Permits or Other Approvals. It is the project owner/sponsor's responsibility to obtain all permits or other approvals that may be required as a result of the activities proposed as part of the project.
10. Accounting Procedures. The Grantee shall establish and maintain for the project either a separate set of accounts or accounts within the framework of an established accounting system, in a manner consistent with 2 C.F.R. §§ 200.302, 200.303, and 200.305. All costs charged to the project, including any approved services contributed by the Grantee or others, shall be supported by properly executed payrolls, time records, invoices, contracts, or vouchers describing in detail the nature and propriety of the charges. The Grantee shall ensure that all checks, payrolls, invoices, contracts, vouchers, orders, or other accounting documents pertaining in whole or in part to the project are clearly identified with a grant agreement number, readily accessible, and to the extent feasible, kept separate from documents not pertaining to the project.
11. Maintenance. The project owner/sponsor will commit to maintaining the completed project for a minimum of 20 years.