



**Discretionary Grants:** Funds are appropriated by the federal or state government to specific programs, existing or new, where eligible applicants can apply based on a competitive process. Each application provides unique evaluation criteria that will be used to score the applicant in addition to an overview of who within the agency will be scoring and the level of review.

**Formula Grants:** Non-competitive awards based on predetermined formula set by state or federal law for a specific program. While non-competitive, formula grants have their own set of criteria that determines the entity eligible to receive funding, including an application process as the capturing mechanism.

**Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL):** enacted by President Joe Biden in 2021 and serves to allocate billions of dollars in competitive and formulaic funding available to municipalities, states, rural, tribal, and Regional Planning Agencies across new and existing programs. The focus of the legislation is tied to infrastructure improvements in transportation; climate, energy, and the environment; and broadband. Funding has also been appropriated to the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, and Energy.

**Inflation Reduction Act (IRA):** In parallel to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the Inflation Reduction Act was signed into law in 2022, providing additional funding to address clean energy and climate change, assisting both residents and local governments. The Inflation Reduction Act includes tax provisions that will result in savings on energy bills, accelerate the deployment of clean energy, clean vehicles, clean buildings, and clean manufacturing. These provisions also offer additional credits to low-income communities.

**Rolling Deadline:** Two types of rolling deadlines: the first is related to a specific set of deadlines that will roll out depending on the program tract and grant award cycle. The second type of rolling deadline is not tied to a specific day or time constraint but accepted any day or time during an open application period.

**Planning Grants vs. Implementation (Construction) Grants:** Typically, but not always, federal and state discretionary programs require at least 25% design and/or engineering to be complete before an applicant can apply for implementation or construction grants. Additionally, there may be requirements for eligibility entities to have specific studies completed related to the programmatic focus before they can apply for implementation or construction funding. However, there are exceptions depending on the program and whether the eligible entity can demonstrate preliminary planning requirements have been met.



**Benefit-Cost Analysis:** Federal discretionary grants often require a detailed benefit-cost analysis to be conducted when applying for implementation or construction grants. Depending on the discretionary program, there may or may not be a template to assist. It is often up to the applicant to develop the analysis and provide a justifiable and reciprocal conclusion for the end result. The US Department of Transportation has developed their own template that can be used for prospective applicants with detailed instructions for the formulaic parameters. Generally, the agency requiring a BCA will provide detailed instructions on how to conduct the analysis.

**Non-Federal Match:** Federal grants typically require a non-Federal source of match funding in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E. Uses vary depending on the agency, but generally can include cash or in-kind sources.

**Merit Criteria:** Defined as the application plan for review that is evaluated by the respective federal agency that is being applied to. While there are some slight differences between agencies, generally the merit criteria consist of the following:

- Safety
- Environmental Sustainability
- Quality of Life
- Mobility & Community Connectivity
- Economic Competitiveness
- State of Good Repair
- Partnership & Collaboration
- Innovative Technologies/Project Delivery/Financing

*See the following page for descriptions of each*

# MERIT CRITERIA



**Safety:** How the project will inform documented safety problems within the project area or wider transportation network. Projects should demonstrate how they will protect motorized and non-motorized travelers or communities from health and safety risks. The Department of Transportation (DOT) has developed the safe system approach model for addressing and mitigating the risks of crashes by reinforcing multiple layers of protection to both prevent crashes from happening in the first place and minimizing the harm when they do occur.

**Environmental Sustainability:** Applicants will demonstrate how the project will reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from transportation and increase the use of lower carbon modes of travel. This can include incorporating lower-carbon pavement and construction materials as a remedy.

**Quality of Life:** Demonstrate how the project improves the quality of life by increasing equity and accessibility and reducing transportation and housing cost burdens. Facilitating greater public and private investments in commercial and mixed-income residential neighborhoods. Finally, removing physical barriers for individuals and communities, and addressing racial equity and barriers to opportunity.

**Mobility and Community Connectivity:** How the project encourages individuals and communities to move around freely without a car and create neighborhoods where people can live, work and play. Describe how the project will meet ADA requirements and be accessible to those with disabilities.

**Economic Competitiveness:** Improvements to system operations to increase travel time reliability and manage travel demand for goods movement, thereby improving local and regional freight connectivity to the national and global economy. How the project increases affordable transportation options and system connectivity to revitalize communities, and increases access to location-efficient affordable housing, and tourism opportunities. Project delivery and implementation should consider creating good paying jobs with free and fair choice to join a union to the greatest extent possible, the use of demonstrated strong labor standards, practices, and policies. Finally, describe planning methods of delivery and implementation that provide opportunities for all workers, including those underrepresented in construction jobs.

**State of Good Repair:** How the project restores and modernizes core infrastructure assets and addressing current or projected system vulnerabilities. The application should include information on how the proposed project will improve asset condition, to ensure the ongoing state of good repair.

**Partnership and Collaboration:** How the project has or will engage communities affected by the project and demonstrates that equity considerations for disadvantaged communities are meaningfully integrated into planning, development and implementation. Describe any public involvement plan or targeted outreach, demonstrating engagement of diverse input during project planning.

**Innovative Technologies/Project Delivery/Financing:** Describe innovative strategies used and the benefits of using those strategies including:

- **Innovative Technologies:** Demonstrate the capacity to implement those innovations and understanding of Federal requirements and whether innovations may require extraordinary permitting, approvals, exemptions, waivers or other procedural actions.
- **Innovative Project Delivery:** Plans to use innovative approaches to project delivery such as public-private partnerships and how they are expected to improve the efficiency of the project development.
- **Innovative Financing:** The applicant should describe the funding or finance approach, including a description of all activities undertaken to pursue private funding or financing approach.