

Caltrans Grant Modernization User Survey Response Summary

- 39 responses received
- Respondents represent applicants for all included grant programs
- Overall, the majority of responses indicate support and enthusiasm for this process

Current Challenges

- 82% of respondents find the application to be the most challenging part of the current process
- Contracting (46%), Invoicing (39%), and Payments (21%) were identified as other significant challenges
- Grant applications are time consuming and confusing to complete, with too many attached documents and unclear instructions on what is required. Confusing uploads were mentioned frequently as an area for improvement
- The timeline for application submission presents a challenge, especially for smaller agencies and those with limited staff. Timing and deadlines are inconsistent year to year and across programs, and not enough time or advanced notice is provided for planning and completion. Covid has exacerbated this challenge
- Allocation/contract timelines are unrealistic
- Instructions on how to complete the application are confusing, there are no examples to illustrate how to correctly complete required document uploads
- Lengthy turnaround time for payment
- Lack of transparency in scoring and contracting process

Suggestions for Improvements

- 74% of respondents would like to see a consolidated application across grant programs
- 49% of respondents would like to see consolidated contracts across grant programs
- 85% say a consistent annual schedule would improve the grant process
- 31% would like to see a shorter turnaround time for payment
- Most respondents want to see a simpler application process with fewer uploads and redundant questions, improved forms and templates
- Most respondents also report that a more consistent annual schedule across programs that did not conflict with major holidays and was mindful of other dependencies would make it easier for applicants to plan for the year and resource. Several respondents mentioned that the current schedule does not allow agencies to make adjustments before project start dates or plan for alternative funding sources if their applications are denied
- Better turnaround time on payment
- Align questions and requirements with FTA requirements
- Minimize changes to the grant application from cycle to cycle
- Clear formatting and instructions within the application
- Clearer eligibility requirements and assistance understanding what other funding sources might be available
- Clear and consistent communication from Caltrans on deadlines and timelines, including ample opportunities for training on the new application process. Hold grant guideline training before the application is open
- One respondent noted that consolidation across all programs did not seem helpful but consolidating based on project or funding type would be
- One respondent suggested a global standard grant authorization local resolution to make grant submittal turnaround quicker
- An application consistent with local match requirements would be helpful

- LCTOP
 - Spreadsheet is especially frustrating
 - Overly involved application relative to the amount of funding awarded
 - Turnaround time is unrealistically short
 - Application is not overly difficult but “everything happens at a different time”
 - Having a set schedule for invoices/checks would be helpful
- TIRCP
 - “An absolute beast of an application” that would be a big burden for small agencies
 - But at least the lead time is longer
- Timelines for allocation/contracts are unrealistic
- Semi-annual reporting for 5310 is not streamlined

Imagining a Consolidated Application

- Most respondents envision a single application and corresponding single set of documents to upload that would allow them to apply for several or all grants at once
- Several expect to check boxes that would indicate which grants they wanted to apply for, and that the information required of them would automatically update in the application
- Almost every respondent said that the greatest benefit of a consolidated application would be saving staff hours
- One respondent expressed concern that the application would be very lengthy if consolidated
- One respondent said it would make the grants process more comprehensible to board leadership and executive staff. Systematized and regular cycles for applications would help elected officials to understand where their revenues come from and who their funding partners are if they are adopting single local resolutions every year or every few years that cover all fund sources, then those can fit into annual budgets more understandably

Impacts of a 2-Year Cycle

- 81% of respondents said that they would need at least 3 months to complete the research, planning, and approvals required to prepare for a 2-year cycle. Even without moving to a 2-year cycle, additional lead time to complete an application (more than 30 days) is something that many respondents requested
- A regularly scheduled cycle would be helpful to most agencies, as would coordination with the FTIP planning cycles. It should also align with the SCO apportionment announcements, currently that timing is a pain point
- Opportunities to update budgets mid-cycle would make it easier to make changes to projects
- Concerns voiced about a void in funding between application and first year of implementation
- A consistent schedule for check-issuance and invoicing would be helpful for multi-year applications
- Concern that a 2-year cycle would require an unrealistic amount of work for limited agency grant development staff
- Some concern about LCTOP and SGR being on 2-year cycle, not knowing funding in advance or how funds would be distributed