Best Practices: Preparing a Commercial Driver's License Program Implementation (CDLPI) Grant Application

Objective

This document provides an overview of the Commercial Driver's License Program Implementation (CDLPI) 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.

Background

CDL Program Overview

The goal of the national Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Program is to reduce the number and severity of commercial motor vehicle (CMV) crashes in the United States by ensuring that only qualified drivers are eligible to receive and retain a CDL. This goal focuses on maintaining the concept that for every driver, there is only one driving record and one licensing document (One Driver – One License – One Record). To further this concept, States are required to conduct knowledge and skills testing before issuing a CDL, maintain a complete and accurate driver history record for anyone who obtains a CDL, and impose appropriate disqualifications against any driver who violates certain regulations. This effort is directly linked to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) mission to reduce crashes, injuries, and fatalities involving large trucks and buses.

CDLPI Grant Purpose

The CDLPI Grant provides financial assistance to States to achieve compliance with the requirements of 49 CFR Parts 383 and 384. Additionally, the grant provides financial assistance to other entities capable of executing national projects that aid States in their compliance efforts and that will improve the national CDL program through two main project types: CDLPI Basic Projects and High Priority/Emerging Issues Projects.

Tips for Writing a Grant Application

- **Read the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) carefully.** Use additional resources in the Commercial Driver's License Program Implementation Resource Guide 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 the 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 by 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 a CDLPI 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 NOFO 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, with quantitative data, as appropriate.
- **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, number of drivers tested, conviction posting timeliness, etc.). 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 below to learn more about what is required in each section and to be taken to a corresponding example.

[Brief Introduction]

[Program Activity Plan]

[Self-Assessment/ Organizational Capacity]

[Performance Measurement Plan]

[Problem Statement]

[Monitoring Plan]

[Performance Objective]

[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:

This application's goal is to remove barriers to compliance with 49 CFR Parts 383 and 384 to maintain a status of zero open findings in the State Compliance Records Enterprise (SCORE) system. While currently the State has a status of zero SCORE findings, there is room for improvement by reducing the potential for fraud and unqualified drivers being issued a CDL by ensuring continued accurate, complete, and timely CDL data.

Self-Assessment/Organizational Capacity

- Applicants must provide information on their organization's ability to manage the grant award. This should include any relevant experiences (e.g., open/closed grant awards), and the support they have to effectively manage the grant and achieve the proposed objectives.
    - Applications that fail to include the required information will be considered incomplete and risk disqualification.
- Applications from State Driver's Licensing Agencies (SDLAs) must specifically include a CDL program self-assessment, which may be included as part of the project's program overview or project plan; a separate, standalone document is not required.
- The Program Overview is not a comprehensive description or history of the applicant's entire CDL program or an acceptable substitute for the compliance plan mandated by MAP-21 § 32305.
- The Program Overview is a summary of the key elements of the applicant's program and must include the following three components:

    a) A list of all **open findings in the State Compliance Records Enterprise (SCORE) System**, including the finding's citation and a brief description; the reason for the finding; the proposed resolution; and the expected date by which the finding will be closed.

    b) A list of all **open CDLPI Grant awards**, including award number; award amount; purpose; progress made to date in achieving the award's objectives; remaining unexpended funding; the expected date of completion; and how the application's requested funding supports those grants without duplicating costs or activities.

    c) The **total number of noncommercial licenses and the total number of CDLs—and Commercial Learner's Permits (CLPs)—issued, year to date and annually**, listed separately by type of CLP or CDL.

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 proposes to implement strategies that remove barriers to compliance and improve customer confidence to ensure accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of CDL data and to sustain a status of **zero** open findings in SCORE.*

Specifically, this application requests funding to expand the existing suite of online services to add functionality to assist with identification of CDL duplicates, driver address changes, license reinstatement, and calendar reminders about the approaching expiration of the driver's current medical certificate and/or medical variances.
A successful pilot at the applicant's expense has confirmed that this approach reduces the potential for fraud or the issuance of a CDL to an unqualified driver. [Insert metrics supporting this claim and list source.]

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:

This application's performance objective is strengthening CDL program control and oversight to ensure continued compliance with all current program requirements by purchasing and installing approximately 15 Motion Computer Scoring Tablets. This technology will limit each examiner to a unique ID and use GPS to record and log the comprehensiveness and thoroughness of the required CDL road test. These capabilities are both considered best practices to detect and prevent fraud.

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:

Expand the program to automate pre-trip, basic control skills, and road test scoring for all mid-to-high-volume testers/examiners (individuals conducting 50 or more CDL skills tests annually) by purchasing approximately 15 tablets, providing training in using the devices, and coordinating with the vendor to ensure that test results can be successfully transmitted.

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, number of drivers tested, conviction posting timeliness, 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 report on a quarterly basis the number of tablets purchased, number deployed, and the percentage of mid-to-high-volume examiners whose tests are performed using automated scoring devices. The applicant will track the number of errors using these tablets compared to the errors prior to tablet usage. The applicant will report if unscheduled examiner audits increased by 10% as compared to the previous 12-month period and report the actual percentage achieved.

The applicant will provide status updates through quarterly progress and financial reports. The applicant will also provide a final report that includes a process evaluation describing how the project was conducted as well as if and how it met the desired objectives.

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 State CDL Program Manager will be responsible for the continued monitoring and evaluation of the project. The program manager will analyze monthly reports against the data from the prior month and submit these reports quarterly and annually to FMCSA. A final evaluation will look at the overall effect of the program on the timeliness and accuracy of the data and the number of fraud cases by looking at [insert report]. The program manager will also continue to monitor open findings in SCORE. This evaluation will continue beyond the lifecycle of the grant to help inform decisions on other areas for improvement to aid compliance with 49 CFR Parts 383 and 384.

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:

Supplies Cost Budget Narrative (SF-424A, Line 6e)				
Item Name	**# of Units/Items**	**Unit of Measurement**	**Cost per Unit**	**Total Cost**
Mobile Printers	7	Item	$250	$1,750
Laptop Computers	12	Item	$2,000	$24,000
Subtotal Supplies				$25,750
Twelve part-time staff require new laptop computers and seven full-time staff require new mobile printers to complete this grant's activities. The additional laptops and mobile printers are requested for replacement purposes.				

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.