

Request for Applications and Technical Assistance

Planning and Capacity Building (Planning)

Clean Mobility in Schools (CMIS)

Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP)

2024 FINAL REPORT



By the Institute for Local Government, in partnership with People for Mobility Justice and Fehr & Peers



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Outreach and Concept Phase Improvements	3
RFA and Full phase Improvements	3
TA Improvements	4
General Funding Considerations	4
Program Overview	5
Timeline	6
Outreach	6
Technical Assistance Approach	7
Concept Phase	7
Full Phase	10
Applicant Feedback	12
CARB Debrief Meetings	12
Post-RFA Survey Summary	12
General Feedback	18
Best Practices & Recommendations	20
Best Practices for the RFA and Application Process	20
Best Practices for TA	20
Recommendations for RFA and Application Process	21
Recommendations for TA	24
Appendix A – Post RFA Survey	25
Appendix B – Post RFA Survey Results	46
Appendix C: Outreach List	76
Appendix D: TA Request Form	78

Executive Summary

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) opened a Request for Applications (RFA) for Planning and Capacity Building (Planning), Clean Mobility in Schools (CMIS), and the Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) to award \$32.65 million towards planning, clean transportation, and supporting projects for multiple grantees across the state. The Institute for Local Government (ILG), in partnership with People for Mobility Justice (PMJ) and Fehr & Peers, provided technical assistance (TA) to applicants during CARB's two-phase application RFA process - the Concept Phase and Full Phase.

The goals of the funding programs were to increase transportation equity in disadvantaged and low-income communities, address community-identified transportation needs, increase access to key destinations and services, and reduce GHG emissions. Outreach was conducted to raise awareness of the funding opportunity and accept TA requests from interested applicants. The project team contacted various networks, organizations, and CARB listservs to share the grant opportunities.

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback and recommendations on the RFA and TA process. It includes feedback gathered from applicants through debrief meetings, a post-RFA survey, and general feedback sessions. The report aims to identify areas for improvement in the RFA and TA process and provide recommendations to enhance the experience for future applicants. The recommendations cover various aspects, including the application process, partnership requirements, timeline, communication, outreach, and support provided through TA. This report may serve as a guide for CARB and other state agencies to refine and inform their grant programs to increase access to state funds and improve the overall effectiveness of the RFA process.

As part of the report, the project team identified various recommendations for future RFA processes. Some of the key recommendations include:

Outreach and Concept Phase Improvements

- Begin outreach and applicant support early to inform organizations about the RFA and funding opportunity, especially targeting rural and tribal governments.
- Facilitate networking opportunities for applicants to connect by region.
- Share list of previously unawarded applicants and continue to share list of Q&A session attendees to encourage connections.
- Continue to have a two-phased approach for the application process, allowing applicants to assess eligibility and determine project ideas without committing extensive time and resources.
- Continue to hold Q&A sessions where applicants can directly ask questions to CARB staff and provide written summaries of the sessions for all interested applicants to review.

RFA and Full phase Improvements

- Change the partnership requirements in the RFA to reduce barriers to entry, such as removing the requirement for CBO staff or board members to reside in the Project Community.
- Extend the Full Phase application timeline to at least eight weeks to allow for more time to develop partnership structures, create budgets and scopes of work, and collect letters of support.
- Make changes to the RFA materials clear and easy to find, including sending revised versions of the RFA to all applicants and maintaining an open-access Q&A tracker.
- Provide more examples of successful partnership structures and clarify the budget template to streamline the application process.

TA Improvements

- Encourage strong collaboration and consistent communication between the project team and CARB to provide tailored support to applicants based on their capacity.
- Conduct targeted outreach for rural and tribal governments, using direct outreach and partnership development methods to reach these communities.
- Provide additional support and resources to disadvantaged and low-income communities to facilitate their participation in the application process.
- Expand the TA team to accommodate the high demand for assistance from applicants.

General Funding Considerations

- Prioritize dedicated funding over competitive grant funding to increase opportunities and minimize workloads, particularly for smaller and lower-capacity organizations.

Program Overview

On July 24, 2023, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) opened its Request for Applications (RFA) for Planning and Capacity Building (Planning), Clean Mobility in Schools (CMIS), and the Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) to award \$32.65 million towards planning, clean transportation, and supporting projects for multiple grantees across the state. The Institute for Local Government (ILG), in partnership with People for Mobility Justice (PMJ) and Fehr & Peers, were selected as the technical assistance (TA) project team to provide TA to applicants. The project team provided support on application development during CARB's two-phase application RFA process – the Concept Phase and Full Phase.

CARB's goals for each funding program are as follows:

Planning projects are intended to increase transportation equity in disadvantaged and low-income communities by improving the local understanding of residents' transportation needs, helping develop organizational and community capacity building so communities are ready to plan for clean transportation solutions, and preparing communities to implement community-identified projects that fill transportation gaps and improve clean transportation access.

CMIS and STEP projects aim to increase transportation equity in disadvantaged and low-income communities by addressing community-identified transportation needs, increasing access to key destinations and services, and reducing GHG emissions. CMIS and STEP projects inherently support planning and capacity building projects to help meet the needs of each community within that community's context.

CMIS is focused on supporting public school communities by funding innovative and holistic projects with the potential to benefit the student body, school staff, parents, and nearby residents. CMIS projects include planning for and implementation of shared mobility projects, active transportation projects, school-related zero-emission fleets, school buses, and landscaping equipment. Additionally, capacity building efforts such as education programs, training programs, and curriculum development have tremendous potential when incorporated into CMIS projects. Building relationships between school communities and the community-at-large is critical to developing a clean transportation system built on community engagement and to ensure grant funding benefits the community long-term.

STEP is focused on supporting projects that have the potential to reduce passenger vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and that prioritize long-term mode shift toward sustainable mobility and VMT reduction. Even with improvements in clean vehicle technology and fuels, reducing driving is necessary to meet State climate and air quality commitments. Strategies that reduce driving can also address entrenched inequities experienced by California's most overburdened low-income and disadvantaged communities.⁶ STEP projects include new or expanded public transit and shared mobility services; active transportation infrastructure; and workforce development, planning, and capacity building activities that support clean transportation and transportation equity.

Timeline

Upon initiating the RFA, CARB and the project team conducted outreach to a broad audience with the goal of increasing awareness of the funding opportunities and encouraging potential applicants to fill out a TA request form. In total, 105 potential applicants requested TA and 55 submitted applications to CARB during the Concept Phase. Of the total applications in the Concept Phase, 30 were invited to move forward to the Full Phase and 27 submitted Full Phase applications to CARB.

The RFA and TA timeline is represented in Table 1.

Table 1: RFA and TA Timeline

Date	Key Milestone
July 24, 2023	RFA Open Outreach began
August 7, 2023	Concept Phase TA began
August 10, 2023	First Concept Phase Q&A Session
August 11, 2023	TA Sign Up Form Deadline
August 29, 2023	Second Concept Phase Q&A Session
September 8, 2023	Concept Phase Deadline
September 13, 2023	Applicants Notified of Missing Information
Date	Key Milestone
September 15, 2023	Missing Information Deadline Concept Phase TA ended
September 25, 2023	Notification of Concept Phase Decision Full Phase TA began
October 12, 2023	First Full Phase Q&A Session
October 24, 2023	Second Full Phase Q&A Session
November 3, 2023	Full Phase Deadline
November 7, 2023	Applicants Notified of Missing Information
November 9, 2023	Missing Information Deadline Formal Full Phase TA Ends

Outreach

Once the RFA was initiated, the project team began its outreach to raise awareness of the funding opportunity and began accepting TA requests from applicants interested in receiving TA. The project team conducted outreach to various networks and individual organizations to share the grant opportunities. The project team contacted over 60 individuals representing statewide and regional networks, past unfunded CARB applicants, and other potential applicants. A full list of organizations and networks the project team reached out to is included in Appendix C. CARB also conducted outreach by sending out information to CARB listservs and coordinating with other state agencies to advertise the RFA and TA opportunity.

Technical Assistance Approach

To assess the readiness of potential applicants interested in receiving TA during the Concept Phase, the project team developed a TA Request Form (Appendix D). As the project team received the forms, the team matched applicants with a TA provider that could best serve them based on fit, technical expertise, and geographic location/awareness. ILG served as the lead TA provider for 50% of all applicants, focusing on more rural, tribal, and local government applicants. People for Mobility Justice provided TA for approximately 25% of all applicants with a focus on those in and surrounding the Los Angeles region. Fehr and Peers provided TA for the remaining 25% of applicants and provided technical support for the GIS mapping required in the concept application.

During the RFA period, ILG held weekly meetings with the project team to coordinate TA services, discuss applicant questions, and share resources. CARB also attended these meetings each week to answer questions from the project team – which greatly increased the communication and information-sharing between CARB and the project team. In addition, the project team created a Questions and Answers (Q&A) tracker, which CARB had access to, and which provided an additional layer of coordination. TA providers added questions from applicants on a rolling basis and CARB provided written answers in the Q&A tracker twice a week. ILG also met bi-weekly with the CARB team to share information and coordinate activities.

The application process was divided into two parts — a seven-week Concept Phase, where applicants were asked to submit general project information, and a six-week Full Phase, where invited applicants built out their concept application to include a budget, scope of work, partnership structure, and other details. The project team offered TA during both phases. Any interested applicant was eligible to receive TA. The type and level of TA during the Concept Phase and Full Phase differed based on timeline and demand as detailed below.

Concept Phase

The project team leveraged the TA Request Form to determine general TA needs and included questions that asked for relevant information on ideas for projects, potential partners, and project locations. Potential applicants were asked to submit the TA Request Form by August 11 for guaranteed TA. The project team received 105 requests, including fifteen submitted after the August 11 deadline. The project team reached out to all 105 potential applicants, including those who submitted a late request.

Table 2: TA Requests by County

County	Number of Interested Applicants
Alameda	3
Alpine	1
Colusa	1
Contra Costa	4
Del Norte	1
Fresno	5
Glenn	1
Humboldt	2
Imperial	1
Kern	3
Los Angeles	20
Madera	1
Marin	1
Mendocino	1
Monterey	3
Napa	1
Nevada	1
Orange	2
Riverside	3
Sacramento	5
San Bernardino	7
San Diego	7
San Francisco	3
San Luis Obispo	2
San Mateo	1
Santa Barbara	2
Santa Clara	1
Santa Cruz	1
Sonoma	2
Tulare	1
Yolo	2
Yuba	1
Statewide	4
Multiple (Statewide)	4
Multiple (Southern California)	3
Unsure	4

The breakdown of requests received are as follows: 42 local government agencies, 20 schools or school districts, 27 community-based organizations, three tribal governments, two councils of government, and eleven entities that selected “other”. Organizations in the “other” category consisted primarily of for-profit transportation companies, foundations, and individuals. A member of the project team was assigned to support each potential applicant, and each potential applicant was provided the opportunity to meet twice with their TA provider during the Concept Phase.

Table 3: Program Interest by Organization Type

Organization Type	Planning	STEP	CMIS	Multiple	Unsure	Total
Council of Government		2				2
Community Based Organization or Nonprofit	6	5		11	5	28
Local Government	6	9		17	9	41
Public School District or Public School	2	1	5	8	4	20
Tribal Government	2			1		
Other	1	4		5	1	12

In the Concept Phase, the project team reached out to all 105 interested applicants. Thirty-one interested applicants were unresponsive. An additional seven interested applicants responded declining TA for a variety of reasons, including that they did not have the capacity to apply and that they had merged applications with another organization receiving TA. The project team emailed unresponsive applicants twice and called once to attempt to schedule an intake meeting. The project team held 79 virtual meetings and completed 17 mapping requests. Additionally, the team resolved other questions and reviewed concept application draft materials by email.

The project team answered a wide range of questions. Several questions pertained to what CARB was seeking to fund, the potential competitiveness of the grant funding, whether there was a particular preference for structuring partnerships, or whether this funding opportunity was a good fit for the organizations. There were other competing grant deadlines at the State and Federal level that caused confusion about deadlines or deterred focus from possible applicants.

Overall, the project team was able to help potential applicants determine whether this funding opportunity was a good fit by talking through the considerations of time and capacity of each interested applicant, and their willingness to put together a proposal given the competitiveness of the opportunity.

Table 4: Concept Phase TA Delivered by Organization Type

Organization Type	One Meeting	Two Meetings	Map Created	Responded declining TA	Unresponsive
Council of Government	1	1	1		
Community Based Organization or Nonprofit	13	5	6	4	6
Local Government	23	4	6	3	11
Public School District or Public School	11	2	4		7
Tribal Government	2				1
Other	4			1	6

Following the Concept Phase deadline, CARB offered applicants a two-day grace period to respond to CARB’s requests for additional eligibility information missing from the concept application. This included the opportunity to revise maps, define details on sub-applicants, and expand on other eligibility criteria. Twenty-two CMIS and STEP applicants and 18 Planning applicants were asked to provide missing information during the grace period. During the grace period, the project team worked with 24 applicants to complete CARB’s request for missing information, including completing ten additional mapping requests.

The mapping requirements in the RFA led to various interpretations of what was required. As a result, some applicants submitted incorrect maps or maps with missing information. However, as part of the project team, Fehr & Peers was able to collect the necessary information and assist applicants with their mapping needs to satisfy the grant requirements.

Full Phase

After the concept applications were scored, CARB invited 29 applicants and 30 applications (one applicant applied for both STEP and Planning grants) to submit a full application. Recognizing that different applicants require different TA, the project team worked with applicants to create a customized TA action plan at the beginning of the Full Phase. The action plans included a timeline to meet submission deadlines, an inventory of the applicant’s needs, and an outline of how the project team could help meet these needs.

The project team offered each applicant TA through assorted services, such as:

- Answering clarifying questions on the RFA,
- Reviewing draft application materials,
- Providing guidance on budget development, and
- Strategizing on partnership structure development.

Of the 29 applicants invited to submit a full application, one declined TA, two did not respond to TA’s outreach, and three chose not to apply (one being an applicant that was invited to apply for both a STEP and Planning grant, but only chose to submit a STEP application in the full phase). The project team held over 40 meetings with applicants, in addition to reviewing draft materials from all applicants that requested TA.

Table 5: Full Phase TA Delivered by Grant Program Type

Grant Program	One Meeting	Multiple Meetings	Draft Material Review	Responded declining TA	Unresponsive
Planning	8	4	7		1
STEP	4	3	4	1	1
CMIS/STEP	3	5	6		

The project team was able to work directly with all the applicants invited to submit an application during the Full Phase, with the exception of those that chose not to use TA or elected to not move forward in the process. The most frequent questions asked by applicants centered around partnership agreements, required elements of the Full Phase, and the results from the Concept Phase evaluation. As part of the TA, the project team was able to provide support on partnership development, attend several check ins with entire applicant teams, and review application materials prior to submitting to CARB.

As in the Concept Phase, after the Full Phase deadline, CARB offered applicants a two-day grace period to submit any information missing from the full application. In total, 27 applications were submitted: ten for the Planning grant and 17 for CMIS and STEP, requesting a combined total of \$128,221,716.62. Twelve CMIS and STEP applicants and four Planning applicants were asked to provide missing information during the grace period. This information included asking for missing letters of support (four); asking for missing signatures (two); clarifying project eligibility (four) or applicant eligibility (one); resolving issues with or alignment between the budget, scope, and timeline (five); clarifying California Environmental Quality Act or readiness concerns (three); or better documenting changes between the Concept Phase and Full Phase (two).

Initially, seven applicants were awarded Planning and Capacity Building grants and five were awarded CMIS and STEP grants. An additional five CMIS and STEP grants were awarded with 2023-24 funding to the next five highest-scoring applicants. The breakdown of awardees includes five local governments, one school district, and six community/nonprofit organizations. (Table 6)

Table 6: Grants Awarded by Lead Applicant Organization Type

Grant Program	Community Based Organization	Local Government	School/School District
Planning and Capacity Building	4	2	1
STEP	2	5	
CMIS/STEP		2	
CMIS			1

Applicant Feedback

Throughout the RFA, the project team gathered feedback on improvements to ensure applicant needs were being met and appropriate assistance was provided whenever possible. After application decisions were made in both the Concept Phase and Full Phase, CARB offered each unselected applicant a debrief. Additionally, after the RFA process concluded, the project team worked with CARB to develop and distribute a post-RFA survey to gather feedback on the entire RFA process. The project team also collected feedback from applicants verbally.

CARB Debrief Meetings

CARB offered unselected applicants a debrief call to go through how the application was scored and the applicant's feedback on the process. In the Concept Phase, CARB held debriefs with 13 CMIS and STEP applicants and 8 Planning applicants. In the Full Phase, CARB held debriefs with 11 CMIS and STEP applicants and 3 Planning applicants. Applicants shared the following comments about the RFA process:

- **Local government lead applicants could not find CBO sub-applicants to partner with in the Concept Phase.** In the Concept Phase, local government lead applicants had a challenging time finding CBO partners or partners that had the capacity to be part of their project.
- **The timeline for the Concept Phase was too short.** Several applicants shared that they did not hear about the grant programs until later in the Concept Phase, and therefore did not have adequate time to build partnerships and identify community needs. Additionally, one applicant had limited staff capacity due to turnover and struggled to meet the Concept Phase timeline.
- **The character limit was too low for the Concept Phase and Full Phase applications.** Several applicants shared that they struggled to communicate information about their project within the application's character limits.
- **Applicants in the Full Phase had capacity issues.** Several applicants shared that they did not have the staff time or relationships with sub-applicants to be able to successfully complete the Full Phase application.
- **Eligible costs and the budget template were unclear.** Applicants were unclear about eligible costs and were unsure how to navigate the budget template. Applicants shared that allowable expenses for partners, residents, and stipends were unclear. In addition, the budget template format was difficult to use.

Post-RFA Survey Summary

After the RFA process was complete, CARB and the project team developed a post-RFA survey to gather feedback from applicants and those who considered applying but ultimately did not on the application process and TA. The post-RFA survey ran from January 2, 2024 – January 29, 2024. CARB sent the survey to over 300 emails, including applicants and co-applicants, Q&A session attendees, and other individuals who provided emails to CARB and indicated interest in the funding opportunity. The project team followed up by email with applicants who had received TA.

The project team received 42 responses, which equates to a 14% response rate. Of the respondents, thirteen noted they did not submit a Concept Phase application, five said they had only submitted a Concept Phase Application and did not get selected, one was selected to move forward to the Full Phase but elected not to proceed, and 23 respondents submitted a Full Phase application. Since the number of applicants is relatively small, it is difficult to protect the anonymity of each respondent and breakout the results by specific characteristics of their application. Therefore, this report describes the results generally.

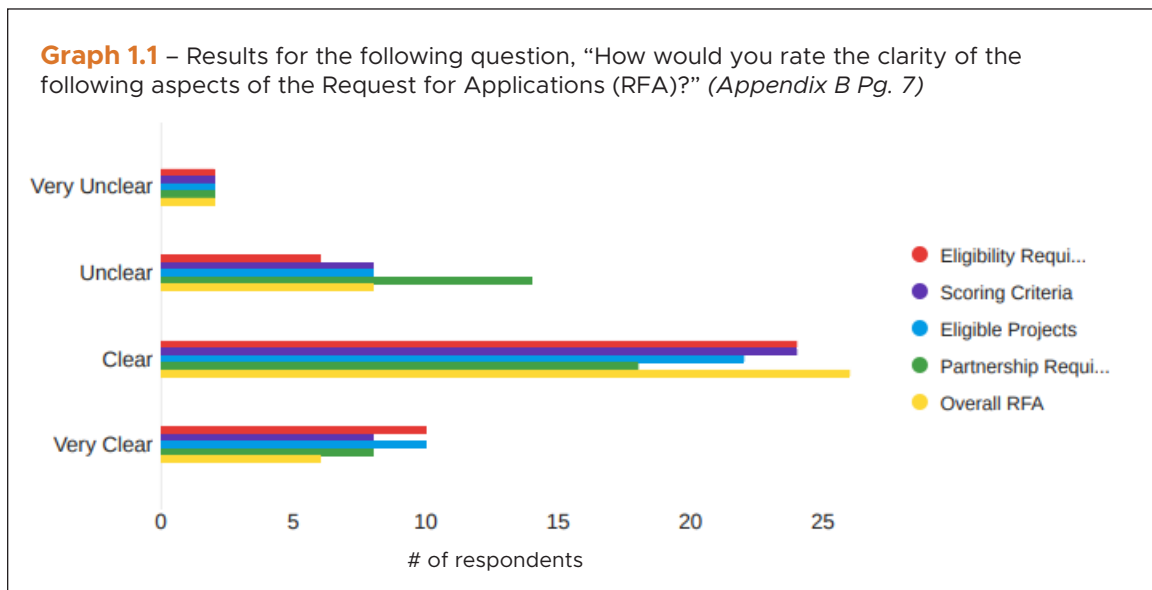
The survey was extensive and provides good insight on ways to improve the process and increase access to these much-needed state funds. These responses help shed light on key aspects of the process and ways to improve it.

It is important to note that most of the respondents indicated that they have capacity to apply for grants such as these – indicating a level of capacity potentially higher than organizations that did not complete the survey.

The survey contained questions about how and when applicants learned about the grant opportunity, whether the two-phased RFA process was beneficial, if the RFA and other requirements were clear, and if and how the TA and the CARB-hosted Q&A sessions helped. The survey is attached as Appendix A.

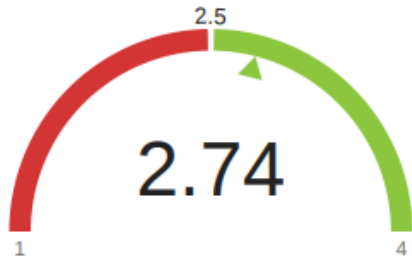
Some key highlights from the survey include:

- **The majority of the respondents rated the RFA as “clear”.** Overall, respondents found the application process clear and thorough, including the eligibility requirements and the scoring criteria. (Graph 1.1) Some respondents, however, indicated they found certain requirements, such as partnership requirements, a bit confusing. Though not a category on the survey, a few applicants noted a lack of clarity of the workforce development components. Certain applicants felt as though the focus within the RFA was not centered around the outcomes of the projects – and the benefits to communities. Respondents mentioned wanting more examples of successful proposals and/or templates to guide their application.



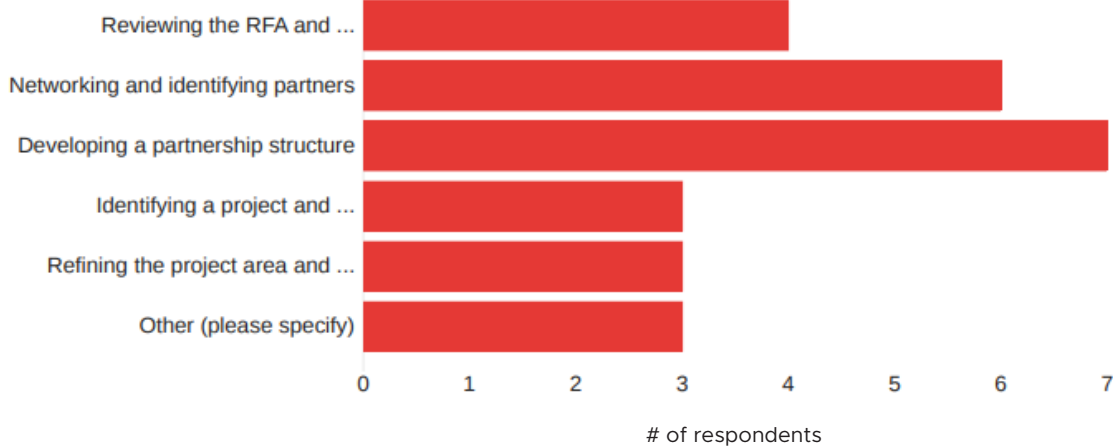
- **The Concept Phase was appreciated and considered fairly easy.** Many respondents appreciated the manageable approach of breaking the application process into two phases. However, concerns were raised about limited character counts within the Concept Phase application and some noted confusion regarding what details to include. Some respondents questioned whether two phases were needed – saying they potentially add more work for an applicant with only limited new information. When asked to rate the ease of the Concept Phase out of four, respondents rated an average of 2.74 (Graph 1.2). This signifies that many respondents considered the Concept Phase moderately easy.

Graph 1.2 – Average from the following question, “On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the ease of the Concept Phase? (1 star being very difficult and 4 stars being very easy) (Appendix B Pg. 12)



However, 48% indicated a challenge with partnership identification and developing the partnership structure. This challenge was reiterated in responses about the timing of the Concept Phase. While 58% indicated that the seven weeks provided was enough time, 41% said additional time was needed to work on solidifying partnerships and developing a partnership structure (Graph 1.3). Respondents also shared in the comments how they appreciated the TA provided during this phase and said TA made the process easier, as it allowed applicants to assess their projects and determine feasibility before applying.

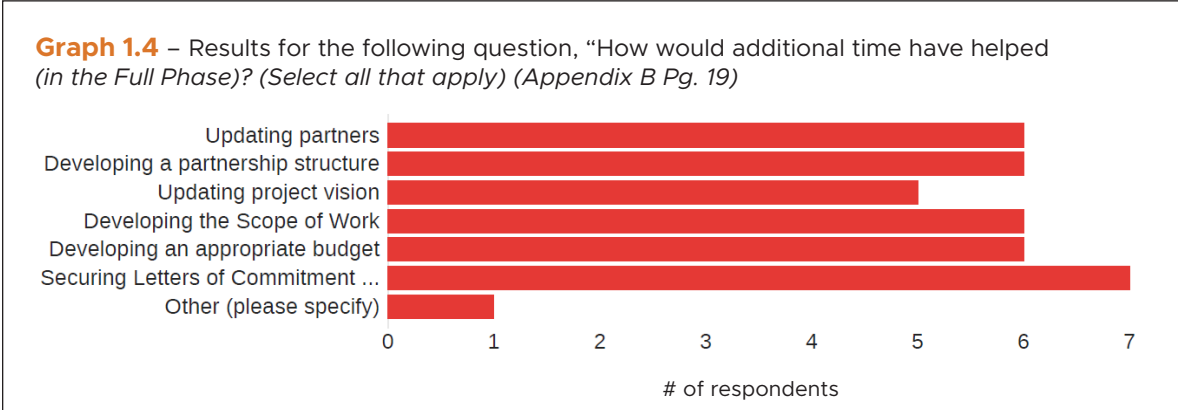
Graph 1.3 – Results for the following question, “How would additional time have helped (In the Concept Phase)? (Select all that apply) (Appendix B Pg. 14)



- **The application was too complicated for some, but others say it was a good fit.** 31% of respondents indicated that they did not apply in the Concept Phase but showed interest in the funding by attending a Q&A session or requesting/meeting with TA. 2% of respondents did not apply in the Full Phase after being invited to apply. Of those who did not apply, 32% said it was due to the seemingly complex process, while 28% said they lacked the organizational capacity to apply. 16% said the RFA seemed too competitive, 12% said they could not find the required partners, and the remaining either found out about the opportunity too late in the process or had ineligible projects.
- Of those that applied in the Concept Phase, 69% said the funding opportunity seemed to address their community’s needs, followed by 45% who said it seemed like a good fit taking their capacity

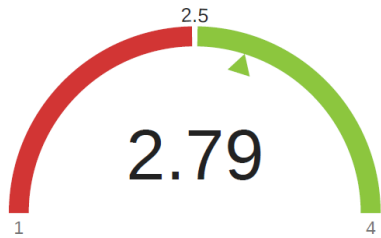
into consideration. Notably, 34% said they had a list of ready projects for the grant and 25% have previously been awarded a STEP planning grant or Clean Mobility Options (CMO) community transportation needs assessment voucher.

- **Respondents needed more time for the Full Phase application.** 69% of survey respondents that submitted a Full Phase application noted that six weeks to complete the Full Phase was not enough time and an additional week or two would have helped them develop a more complete application. Notably, those in the Full Phase would have liked more time to build out their scope of work and partnership structure, secure the necessary letters of commitment, and refine their project budget. (Graph 1.4)



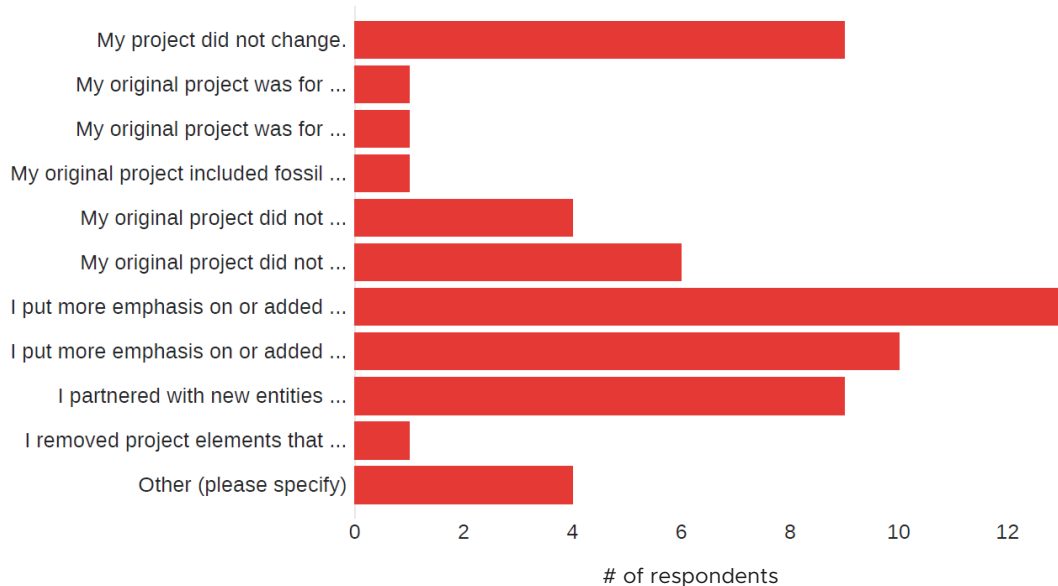
- **The Full Phase application was considered moderately easy. Developing a project budget was the most challenging for respondents.** When asked to rate the ease of the Full Phase on a scale of one (very difficult) to four (very easy), respondents rated an average score of 2.79 (Graph 1.5). This signifies that the majority of respondents considered the Full Phase fairly easier than the median score between one and four (2.5), noting that it was a generally straightforward process though with some challenges. Respondents appreciated the helpfulness of the application guidance documents, although they found them dense and occasionally challenging to understand. Applicants understood the importance of partnerships within the RFA and program goals, but some found it onerous and noted that it required considerable time for coordination, feedback, and negotiation among multiple partners. Participants found the budget breakdown by task challenging, noting that the budget template was difficult to use, and expressed the need for a more streamlined budget. Respondents praised the project team for being able to answer individual questions and interpret the complex requirements.

Graph 1.5 – Average from the following question, “On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the ease of the Full Phase? (1 star being very difficult and 4 stars being very easy) (Appendix B Pg. 16)



- **Respondents emphasized the need for more outreach and engagement to better meet RFA requirement and goals.** When asked about their project scope and how it changed to meet the requirements and goals of the RFA (Graph 1.6), 45% of respondents said they put more emphasis on or added outreach and engagement activities. This was followed by 31% who said they put more emphasis on or added a community-led decision-making structure. 31% also said they partnered with new entities, primarily more community-based organizations, to meet the RFA requirements and goals. Only 31% of respondents said they did not change their scope based on the RFA requirements and goals.

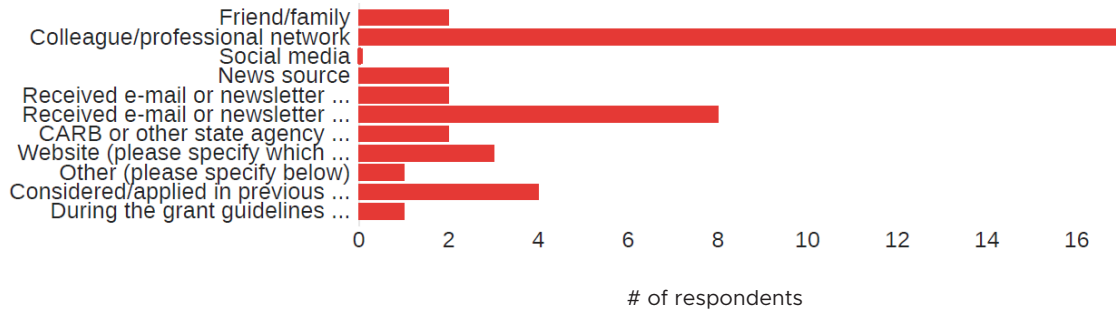
Graph 1.6 – Results for the following question, “How did your project scope change to suit the requirements or goals for the RFA? (Select all that apply) (Appendix B Pg. 8)



- **The majority of respondents had not applied for CARB funding previously.** When asked if they had applied for a CARB grant previously, 57% indicated it was their first time applying. This indicates successful outreach as well as the ease of the RFA, partnership requirements, and program goals.

- Most learned about the grants through a colleague or professional network.** When asked how the respondents learned about the grant opportunity (Graph 1.7), 40% said it was through a colleague or professional network, followed by 19% that learned about it from a CARB or ILG newsletter or email. Only 10% learned about this because they had applied for or considered applying in a previous round.

Graph 1.7 – Results for the following question, “How did you learn about the Planning/CMIS/STEP grants? (Appendix B Pg. 1)



- The Q&A sessions were helpful but can be improved.** Overall, respondents valued the Q&A sessions and urged CARB to continue hosting them. When asked to rate the helpfulness of the Q&A sessions out from one to four, the average was 2.86. Some respondents provided suggestions to improve the sessions in the future, indicating they would like to see more focus on key aspects of the application such as the partnership structure and would like examples of what reviewers are looking for rather than just referring back to what is in the RFA. There was also a desire for additional sessions.
- Most respondents used TA and found it valuable in the process.** On a scale of one to four, the average rating from respondents was 3.89. (Graph 1.8) The survey respondents rated review of the draft application materials to be the most valuable service offered by the project team. This was followed closely by the RFA review – assisting applicants in understanding all the RFA requirements, insight into the important aspects to emphasize for reviewers, and support with development of the scope of work. One suggested improvement is for additional support with networking, particularly with previous grant awardees to hear lessons learned from grant implementation.

Graph 1.8 – On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the quality and value of the technical assistance you received? (1 star being not valuable at all and 4 stars being very valuable) (Appendix B Pg. 28)



- **Some respondents suggested that separating STEP and CMIS could add clarity.** Two comments noted that combining STEP and CMIS added some challenges in tracking RFA terms and requirements. Other comments did not specifically call out any issue with combining STEP and CMIS; however, they noted the lengthiness of the RFA and having issues with designing their project scope to meet RFA requirements. Having separate RFAs for STEP and CMIS could help focus project scopes and shorten the RFA overall, which could be beneficial for applicants.
- **Some respondents asked to consider block grant funding for lower capacity organizations.** One respondent suggested to model the RFA like the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) program, since it has minimal reporting, upfront payments, and a straightforward reimbursement process. The suggester noted this would allow smaller and lower-capacity organizations to participate in the program, as it would be less competitive and time/resource intensive to secure for frontline communities.
- **Some respondents noted a need for more funding and outreach.** Some general suggestions include providing more grant awards, even if for smaller amounts, to increase opportunities and minimize the workload. Feedback highlights the importance of clear project identification and early awareness of grant opportunities through effective outreach. Some respondents expressed a desire for more awareness and support in finding appropriate partnerships, particularly to address potential disadvantages for smaller/low-capacity organizations. Recommendations also included more outreach to community-based organizations and a reevaluation of the scoring system to prioritize projected outcomes over process.

Participants emphasized that this was a positive experience and noted that they look forward to future collaboration with CARB. In the survey, they acknowledged CARB's influence and expressed gratitude for the debriefs and interactions with the agency.

General Feedback

In addition to the survey, the project team met with TA recipients who shared general feedback on the process and RFA that can help refine and inform the grant programs and supporting TA.

- **The definition of community-based organization (CBO) was challenging for rural applicants.** The RFA required a CBO sub-applicant to ensure the projects connected with the community. The RFA defined CBOs as nonprofit organizations with staff or board members that live in the Project Community. Several rural applicants could not find a CBO sub-applicant that met that definition because no CBO staff or board member lived in the Project Community, despite the CBO serving that area. Some CBOs are more regional and may not have a staff member or board member specifically from the small community that it serves.
- **Applicants need more clarity or examples on partnership structure.** Many applicants struggled to understand the best approach for developing the partnership structure and did not have ample time to co-develop the structure with all their sub-applicants. The project team was able to provide some guidance, but more examples of successful partnership structures would be beneficial.
- **The budget template was confusing and proved most challenging.** Most applicants struggled with the budget template. Many encountered errors that they did not know how to resolve when trying to input their budget numbers. For example, many applicants calculated direct labor and non-labor costs based only on the amount they were requesting from CARB and not the resource contributions, so the cells identified errors for those numbers.

Other problems encountered by applicants included some confusion about what information to enter and where (ex: how to fill out the budget summary table, where to enter indirect costs).

Many applicants were creating their own spreadsheets to figure out the budget and then trying to translate it to the template. Their own spreadsheets had breakdowns of staff/hours/rates, stipends for community members, how much was going to sub-applicants. But that does not translate very clearly, especially in the budget details tab.

Some noted that they felt like strong familiarity with Excel was required, and there was limited flexibility on how best to showcase how the grant funds would be used. More could be done to streamline the budget template and ensure flexibility for the applicants. For example, Caltrans' sustainable transportation planning grant requires a simple budget - just tasks, lump sum per task, and timeline. They ask for more info in the narrative but have really simplified the template. Similarly, in the Strategic Growth Council's (SGC) Regional Climate Collaboratives (RCC) Round two, SGC really simplified their budget template compared to past versions.

- **Dedicated funding should be prioritized over competitive grant funding.** Some small and lower capacity agencies and organizations expressed the need to set aside funding to targeted communities rather than establishing a competitive grant process – similar to CDBG funding. The participants feel this would be a more equitable process, noting that it is difficult for smaller communities to compete for grant dollars against more high-capacity agencies and organizations. One way to achieve this would be to dedicate a portion of funding for smaller or lower-capacity regions, or other priority areas CARB wishes to support – such as for rural or tribal applicants.

Best Practices & Recommendations

Best Practices for the RFA and Application Process

There are several ways in which CARB can develop the RFA and TA process to improve the experience for all potential applicants. The following section details some best practices that CARB and the project team implemented during this RFA.

- 1. A two-phased approach for the STEP and CMIS application.** By structuring the RFA into two phases, a concept phase and full phase, CARB allowed applicants to assess their eligibility and determine project ideas and partners without committing the full amount of time and resources necessary to apply for the grant. The Concept Phase did not ask for all the project details, but instead intended to ask for just enough information for CARB to assess if it met the program goals. This structure allowed applicants that have lower capacity or needed more time to collect application materials and secure partnerships to still apply for a competitive program.

Having an initial phase is a great way for applicants to share their thoughts and ideas for project scopes they believe will meet the funding goals and provides an opportunity to check eligibility or note necessary changes for a Full Phase application. It also provides the funding agency – in this case CARB – the ability to flag potential lack of eligibility requirements without discouraging projects with great potential to meet the program goals. This way, ultimate flexibility can be given to applicants to change their proposal to meet requirements and shift their project without drastic changes to their concept.

- 2. Hold Q&A sessions where applicants can ask questions directly to CARB.** CARB held two sessions in each application phase for applicants to access CARB staff directly. Having two sessions per phase allowed applicants time to consider some of the more detailed questions that came up as they progressed on their application. In addition, CARB posted the written responses to questions posed during the Q&A sessions on the program webpage, allowing for all interested applicants to review the responses.

Best Practices for TA

- 1. Encourage strong collaboration and consistent communication with the project team.**

Consistent communication between the project team and CARB helped promote a collaborative and responsive approach to TA and contributed to the overall success of the grant application process. Holding regular meetings with CARB and the project team ensured consistent communication and timely updates on the progress and challenges encountered during the application process. In weekly meetings, CARB provided the project team with insights on the RFA and helped solve challenges and questions related to applicant needs.

This practice has also proven successful in other grant TA contracts, such as with the Strategic Growth Council's Regional Climate Collaboratives grant. Implementing a feedback loop during regularly scheduled meetings facilitates open communication between CARB and the project team. This allowed both parties to share observations, lessons learned, and areas for improvement. This iterative process can ensure continuous refinement of TA strategies and help align efforts to better meet the evolving needs of grant applicants. For grant programs with short timelines (six weeks or less), TA providers should meet weekly with the grant administrator. For programs with longer timelines, TA providers should meet bi-weekly with the administrator.

2. Use collaborative tools and templates. Throughout the process, the project team used the cloud-based Microsoft suite of tools like Excel and Word to develop TA outreach and progress trackers, application document examples, Q&A trackers, an outreach toolkit, and communication templates that streamlined communication between the project team and applicants. The project team also used the scheduling tool Calendly to streamline scheduling applicant meetings. These processes simplified and enhanced the quality of TA, particularly when working with a team of multiple organizations.

Trackers, for instance, served as a handy record-keeping tool for reporting purposes and ensured the smooth continuation of TA when team members transitioned out. CARB also had access to the trackers, which helped CARB understand the status of each applicant and which member of the project team to involve when asking applicants for missing eligibility information during the grace periods. The Q&A tracker encouraged knowledge sharing among project team members, boosting both individual and collective expertise. Templates redirected individual time toward actual TA work instead of repeatedly drafting messages.

3. Provide tailored support to applicants dependent on their capacity. Applicants that signed up for TA had varying degrees of capacity; some had just one person working on the application materials while others had a large team. The project team worked more closely with lower capacity applicants to ensure they had the appropriate TA support and insights to submit successful applications. This included more frequent check-ins or email communication, attending meetings with CBO partners to facilitate partnership development, and more in-depth review and revision of draft application materials. Due to the high volume of applicants, especially in the Concept Phase, the project team prioritized these more extensive services for organizations that have lower capacity, such as those with a small team (1-2 staff members), with little to no experience applying to a state grant, or from communities who have not previously applied for or received state or federal funding.

Recommendations for RFA and Application Process

With the feedback from applicants and lessons learned through the process, the project team identified key recommendations for CARB's consideration – and for the consideration of any other public agency looking to provide funding via grants – in the future.

- 1. Begin outreach and applicant support early.** By executing the TA contract earlier, the project team could begin outreach earlier to inform organizations who may be less familiar with CARB or other state agencies about the RFA and funding opportunity. Low capacity, tribal, and rural applicants may need more time and support in assessing the grant program and determining their own readiness. Outside of the TA contract timeline, CARB should begin the outreach process early, especially by reaching out to organizations that have applied to or expressed interest in CARB grant programs in the past. By starting outreach earlier, CARB and the project team provide a longer runway for those applicants.
- 2. Provide targeted outreach for rural and tribal governments.** Additional effort, time, resources, and strategies are needed to reach rural communities and tribal governments. Often, these communities are less responsive to emails and online outreach. More personal outreach is required to reach these communities. This may be achieved by directly going to these communities or meeting in a common space, such as conferences, trainings, regularly scheduled meetings through regional networks, or other spaces where they are regularly present. Some such events may include the Tribal EPA & U.S. EPA Region 9 Annual Conference and Rural Council Representatives of California Annual Meeting.

3. Facilitate networking opportunities for applicants to connect by region. A common challenge applicants shared was identifying sub-applicants for their application. The RFA emphasized CBO involvement and community engagement, but many local government applicants do not have existing relationships with CBOs in their project areas. The project team connected several applicants working in the same region with each other during the Concept Phase; however, future rounds of the program may benefit from networking support and earlier interventions, such as sharing past unawarded applicants and past Q&A session attendees at the start of the RFA to encourage interested applicants to connect with those organizations. CARB could also use the last 30-45 minutes of the Q&A sessions to place applicants in breakout rooms by region. This networking time could allow for the organic development of connections and new relationships. CARB could hold pre-RFA meetings with organizations who had previously shown interest in a state grant but had not applied or been awarded. Additionally, during the development of the RFA, CARB could identify organizations within regions that have not been previously funded and host focus groups to determine what barriers exist, if any, to access to State grant funding. CARB could also use the California Climate Investments Community Connections tool to connect interested organizations in the pre-RFA period.

4. Modify partnership requirements in the RFA. While many found the Concept Phase easy and beneficial, there were comments related to difficulty solidifying partnerships for the Concept Phase. Many of the challenges stemmed from developing the necessary partnerships to meet the RFA requirements. The RFA defined CBOs as nonprofit organizations with staff or board members that reside in the Project Community. For rural local government applicants, this posed a challenge as the agency worked with regional CBOs or CBOs with remote staff. For large local government agencies with applications focused on geographic subsections of the jurisdiction, this posed a challenge as well, because even if they had a CBO partner that served the Project Community, CBO staff may have lived in other parts of the city/county. We recommend removing the board and staff residence piece from the CBO definition to reduce barriers for small and large applicants. Specifically for the Planning grants, CARB should emphasize that funding can be used for future partnership development. CARB could change the RFA and scoring criteria to require that applicants include a plan for how to recruit and empower future partnerships through the grant funds.

5. Extend Full Phase to at least eight weeks. The Concept Phase and the Full Phase for this round of the RFA were seven and six weeks, respectively. While most were satisfied with the length of time for the Concept Phase, applicants expressed the need for additional time to identify and coordinate partners and partnership structure in the Full Phase. During the Full Phase, applicants applying for a STEP or CMIS grant needed more time to develop partnership structures, create budgets and scopes of work, and collect letters of support. Extending the Full Phase would allow applicants to create more trusting relationships between the lead and sub-applicants and develop more thoughtful and complete application materials.

6. Make changes to the RFA materials clear and easy to find. CARB documented updates and clarifications to the RFA in the Q&A session written summaries. However, not all applicants attended these sessions or looked at the written summaries after the sessions. To prevent applicants from missing any updates to the materials, CARB could send out a revised version of the RFA to all applicants by email, via the CARB listserv, whenever possible. This was an effective approach used by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for their Clean California Round 1 RFA. Updates should also be made very clear on the webpage and only the most current versions should be available online to avoid confusion.

- 7. Create an open-access Q&A tracker.** For this program, CARB used two methods of answering applicant questions: Q&A sessions during the application phase and a Q&A tracker that was managed by the project team. Although applicants asked questions through both methods, many applicants had the same questions during the sessions and TA calls. CARB could explore an open-access Q&A tracker, in which applicants could submit questions by email throughout the RFA period. This would allow applicants to see publicly posted answers throughout the process and would eliminate the need for CARB to respond to the same question multiple times. It would also help applicants access more information in one easy-to-find location.
- 8. Provide more examples of partnership structures.** In TA meetings during the Full Phase, applicants consistently expressed the need for clarification on the partnership structure section. Although the RFA, Application Guidance, and scoring criteria provided information on the partnership structure, many applicants asked for more examples of successful partnership structures.
- 9. Clearly explain program goals and reflect these goals in the scoring criteria.** For example, CARB intends to meet the goals of STEP by funding projects that support an integrated transportation network, through improvements to existing modes and connections between new and existing modes. However, this did not come across clearly in the RFA and some applicants proposed seemingly divergent projects. The RFA and scoring criteria should include clearer explanations about expected project characteristics, such as connectivity with existing modes or enhancement of existing services.
- 10. Ensure application deadlines do not overlap with other State grant deadlines.** Many applicants did not have adequate time to work on application materials because of competing State grant deadlines, including SGC's RCC and Community Resilience Centers grant programs. As CARB develops future RFAs, it should coordinate with other State agencies to identify grant programs with overlapping timelines. When possible, CARB should avoid having grant deadlines too close to other programs' deadlines to allow applicants to dedicate the necessary time to the CARB application materials.
- 11. Consider a single-phased application for the Planning grant.** Although applicants generally appreciated the two-phased application approach, CARB can streamline the Planning grant application by removing the second phase. Since CARB has the goal of funding Planning grants that will allow grantees to build capacity, form new partnerships, and develop project ideas, the application for this program especially would benefit by being as simple as possible. During the Concept Phase, several potential applicants dropped out due to capacity issues. Further streamlining the Planning grant application will remove barriers for low-capacity, rural, or community-led organizations from applying.

SGC interviews applicants as the final phase of the RCC application process, which helps gather more context on the application. CARB should explore replacing the Full Phase application for Planning grantees with a virtual "interview."
- 12. Revise the budget template and character limits.** Many applicants shared that the budget template was unclear. Applicants were not consistent in providing notes or justifications for budgets by task or subtask. CARB may want to revise the application to have a budget narrative section where applicants can expand on budget asks by task. CARB could also provide applicants with a "sample budget" to show how the budget template should be completed.

Additionally, applicants struggled to include relevant information with the narrative character limits. CARB should increase the character limits, especially for sections that are asking for project details or information on the sub-applicants and partnership structure.

13. Create a mapping tool to further simplify the Concept Phase application. Many applicants worked with their TA provider to create a project map. However, applicants that did not sign up for TA during the Concept Phase struggled to create a map that met the application requirements. The Project team worked with applicants during the two-day grace period after the Concept Phase to create new maps. However, CARB could also explore using a mapping tool that applicants can use to create their own maps by drawing in project boundaries or inputting the project area census tracts. In the second round of the RCC grant, SGC created a mapping tool that allowed applicants to easily create their own maps.

Recommendations for TA

- 1. Customize the TA approach for extremely low-capacity applicants.** Implement a more persistent and proactive approach, ensuring that applicants from organizations with very limited staff fully benefit from available TA, resources, and expertise. This may involve clear communication about the advantages of assistance; customized, centrally located, and user-friendly application checklists and corresponding resources with templates and examples; targeted brainstorming sessions with the project team to think more creatively about potential project benefits; identification and facilitation of strategic community partnerships that emphasize authentic collaboration and trust-building; more hands-on grant writing from the TA provider; and technological assistance, such as support using Excel documents.
- 2. Facilitate partnership-building opportunities.** Encourage and facilitate strategic regional and local partnerships. Such partnerships can enhance the quality of applications and projects by incorporating community knowledge and additional expertise. This ultimately promotes a more robust and interconnected community working toward common goals that are sustained beyond the RFA process and grant timeline, increasing the positive impact in these communities. Fostering collaborative relationships early in proposal development can also contribute to sustained and productive collaboration during grant implementation.

The TA team can help with this by having a list of interested organizations or past applicants/Q&A attendees by region to help identify potential partners, include a question related to interest for additional partners when potential applicants sign up for TA, and include time for TA to make connections with potential partner organizations or businesses/vendors that can enhance a potential applicants applications or scope of work/proposal.

Appendix A – Post RFA Survey

Default Question Block

Thank you for your interest in the California Air Resources Board's (CARB) Fiscal Year 2022-23 funding programs related to Planning and Capacity Building (Planning), Clean Mobility in Schools (CMIS), and the Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP). To better serve you and future applicants we appreciate you taking 10 to 15 minutes to share your feedback on the most recent application process and technical assistance (TA). Your feedback will help us evaluate and improve these programs.

Providing contact information is optional; you may choose to provide your responses anonymously.

Block 1

How did you learn about the Planning/CMIS/STEP grants?

Friend/family

Colleague/professional network

Social media

News source

Considered/applied in previous round

During the grant guidelines update process

Received e-mail or newsletter from the Institute for Local Government, People for Mobility Justice, or Fehr & Peers (please specify in the next question)

Received e-mail or newsletter from CARB or another state agency (please specify below)

CARB or other state agency meeting/event (please specify below)

Website (please specify which website below)

Other (please specify below)

Please specify your previous answer.

When did you learn about Planning/CMIS/STEP?

Before the Concept Phase opened

During the first 3 weeks of the Concept Phase

During the last 4 weeks of the Concept Phase

Which grant program(s) were you interested in? (Select all that

apply)

Planning and Capacity Building (Planning)

Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP)

Clean Mobility in Schools (CMIS)

How far along did you progress in the application process?

Did not submit a Concept Phase application

Submitted a Concept Phase application

Was invited to submit a Full Phase application but did not apply

Submitted a Full Phase application

Why didn't you submit a Concept Phase application? (select all that apply)

The project(s) I wanted funded weren't eligible.

My community was not eligible.

I couldn't find a required partner (local government, community-based organization).

My organization did not have the capacity at the time.

It seemed too complicated.

It seemed too competitive.

Other (please specify)

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

RFA Feedback

Was it helpful to have the application process include a Concept Phase followed by a Full Phase?

Yes

No

Unsure

Please share why you believe having the application process include a concept phase was or was not helpful.

How would you rate the clarity of the following aspects of the Request for Applications (RFA)?

	Very Unclear	Unclear	Clear	Very Clear
Eligibility Requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scoring Criteria	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eligible Projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Partnership Requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall RFA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any additional comments on the clarity of the RFA's eligibility requirements, scoring criteria, or other components.

How did your project scope change to suit the requirements or goals of the RFA? (select all that apply)

My project did not change.

My original project was for Planning and I realized I was ready for a CMIS/STEP grant.

My original project was for CMIS/STEP and I realized I should apply for a Planning grant first.

My original project included fossil fuel vehicles and I added zero-emission vehicles.

My original project did not include working with schools and I added school-related projects.

My original project did not include workforce development and I added a workforce development component.

I put more emphasis on or added outreach and engagement activities.

I put more emphasis on or added a community-led decision-making structure.

I partnered with new entities (please specify).

I removed project elements that were not eligible (please specify).

Other (please specify)

Please specify your previous answer.

Concept Phase Application

Why did you submit a Concept Phase application for CMIS/STEP or Planning? (select all that apply)

A technical assistance provider suggested the program as a good fit for my project.

CARB suggested the program as a good fit for my project.

Previously awarded a STEP Planning Grant or Clean Mobility Options needs assessment voucher.

Had list of ready projects.

Seemed like the best fit for our community needs.

Seemed like a good fit considering our organizational capacity to apply.

Other (please specify)

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

What was (or would have been) your role in the application?

Lead Applicant

Sub-Applicant

Community Partner

Other (please specify)

Please specify your previous answer.

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the ease of the Concept Phase? (1 star being very difficult and 4 stars being very easy)

Ease of Concept Phase

Which of the following elements, if any, from the Concept Phase did you find most challenging? (select up to two)

Partnership structure/partner identification

Project identification/vision

Application template

Email submission

I did not find any element from the Concept Phase to be challenging

Other (please specify)

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

How much time did it take to complete the Concept Phase application? Did you have enough time to submit a high-quality Concept Phase application?

I used the 7 weeks provided and it was enough time.

I used the 7 weeks provided and could have used an additional week or two.

I used the 7 weeks provided and could have used more than two additional weeks.

I did not use the full 7 weeks and it was still enough time.

I did not use the full 7 weeks and could have used more time.

How would additional time have helped? (Select all that apply)

Reviewing the RFA and determining eligibility

Networking and identifying partners

Developing a partnership structure

Identifying a project and developing a project vision

Refining the project area and creating a map

Other (please specify)

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

Please share any additional comments on the Concept Phase application process.

Full Phase Application

Why didn't you submit a Full Phase application? (select all that apply)

- A required partner dropped out and I couldn't find a replacement (local government, community-based organization).
- My organization did not have the capacity at the time.
- It seemed too complicated.
- It seemed too competitive.
- The proposed project was already funded through a different funding source.
- I wanted to make changes to from my Concept Phase application that were not eligible (please specify).
- Other (please specify)

Please specify your previous answer.

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the ease of the Full Phase?
(1 star being very difficult and 4 stars being very easy)

Ease of Full Phase

Which of the following elements, if any, from the Full Phase did you find most challenging? (select up to three)

Budget

Scope of Work

Project Readiness

Partnership Structure/Identification

Letters of Commitment and Support

Narrative

Application template

Kiteworks (online submission platform)

I did not find any element from the Full Phase to be challenging

Other (please specify)

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

How much time did it take to complete the Full Phase application?
Did you have enough time to submit a high-quality Full Phase application?

I used the 6 weeks provided and it was enough time.

I used the 6 weeks provided and could have used an additional week or two.

I used the 6 weeks provided and could have used more than two additional weeks.

I did not use the full 6 weeks and it was still enough time.

I did not use the full 6 weeks and could have used more time.

How would additional time have helped? (Select all that apply)

Updating partners

Developing a partnership structure

Updating project vision

Developing the Scope of Work

Developing an appropriate budget

Securing Letters of Commitment and Support from partners

Other (please specify)

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

Please share any additional comments on the Full Phase application process.

Applicant Capacity and Support

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate your organizational capacity to prepare and submit an application (i.e., staffing resources and expertise dedicated to developing the application, building partnerships, developing a budget, etc.)? (1 star being very low capacity and 4 stars being very high capacity)

Organizational Capacity

Have you applied for a CARB grant before?

Yes

No

Unsure

Which CARB grant(s) have you applied for previously?

Were you awarded any of the grants mentioned above?

Yes

No

Still waiting for decision/announcement

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the helpfulness of CARB's Q&A sessions? (1 star being very unhelpful, 4 stars being very helpful).

Please share what could have made CARB's Q&A Sessions more helpful, if anything.

Did you receive technical assistance from one of the TA providers? (Institute for Local Government, Fehr & Peers, People for Mobility Justice)

Yes

No

If you did not receive technical assistance, please tell us why.

1. I was unaware of any technical assistance available
2. I opted not to receive technical assistance (please share why)
3. Other (please specify)

Please specify your previous answer.

Who was your technical assistance provider?

Institute for Local Government (Roberto, Nikita, Hanna, or Seth)

Fehr and Peers (Adrita or Sofia)

People for Mobility Justice (Andres, MaryAnn, or Lena)

On a scale of 1 to 4, how responsive was your technical assistance provider? (1 star being not responsive at all and 4 stars being very responsive)

Responsiveness of TA
Provider

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the quality and value of the technical assistance you received? (1 star being not valuable at all and 4 stars being very valuable)

Value of TA

What was the most beneficial assistance from your TA provider?
(select all that apply)

- RFA (Request for Applications) review and grant insight
- Partner identification
- Partnership structure
- Project vision
- Scope of work development
- Budget development
- Letters of commitment and support development
- Mapping support
- Review of draft application materials
- Other (please specify)

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

What, if any, needs were not met by your TA provider?

What additional support, either from your TA provider or CARB, would have been helpful to you during this application process?

Wrap Up

Please share any additional comments on the RFA and application process, technical assistance, or Planning, CMIS, and STEP grants more broadly.

Optional Demographic Questions

May we contact you if we have any follow up questions?

- Yes
- No

Please provide the following information so we may follow up with you on any additional questions. Providing the following information is optional.

Full Name

Organization

Email

Which county(s) would/is your project located in?

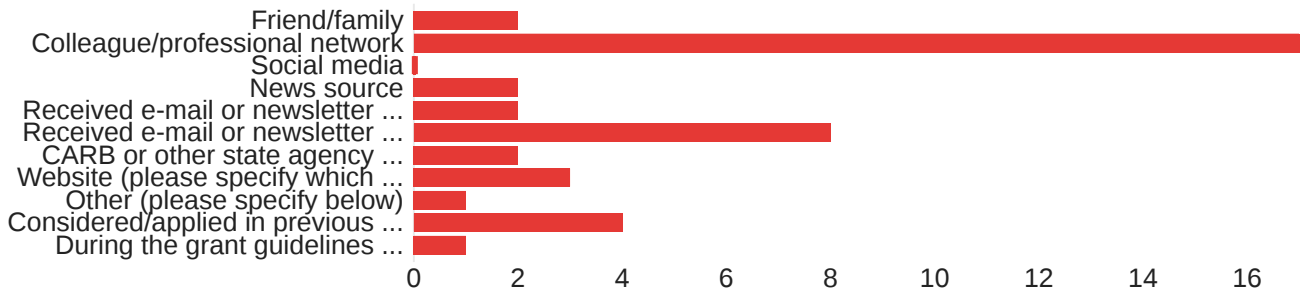


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Appendix B – Post RFA Survey Results

CARB Clean Mobility Funding Post Survey Results

How did you learn about the Planning/CMIS/STEP grants?



Field	Choice Count
Friend/family	2
Colleague/professional network	17
Social media	0
News source	2
Received e-mail or newsletter from the Institute for Local Government, People for Mobility Justice, or Fehr & Peers (please specify in the next question)	2
Received e-mail or newsletter from CARB or another state agency (please specify below)	8
CARB or other state agency meeting/event (please specify below)	2
Website (please specify which website below)	3
Other (please specify below)	1
Considered/applied in previous round	4
During the grant guidelines update process	1
Total	42

Please specify your previous answer. (How you learned about Planning/CMIS/STEP grants.)

Please specify your previous answer.

Cannot remember but it was really late.

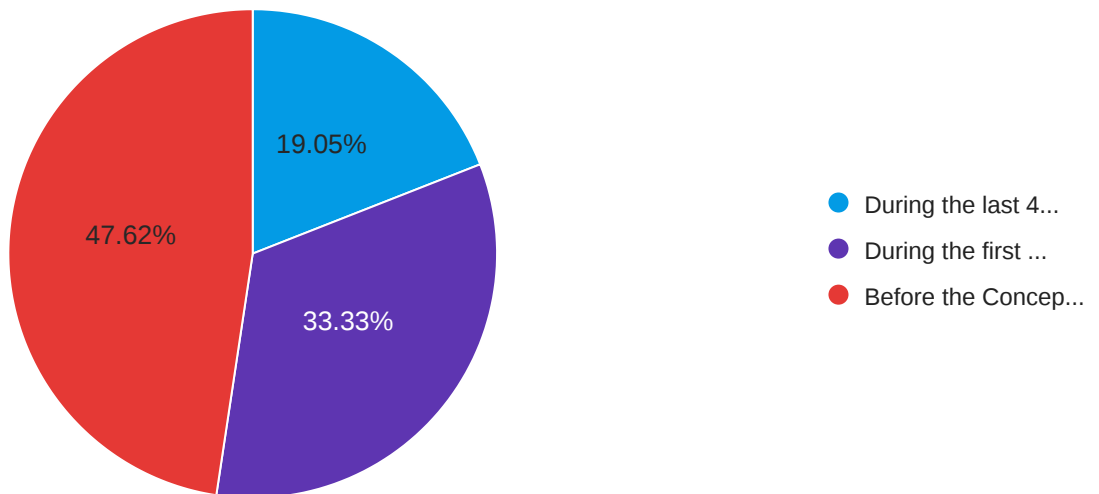
Institute for Local Government

Can't recall.

I'm on way too many email lists so not sure which one

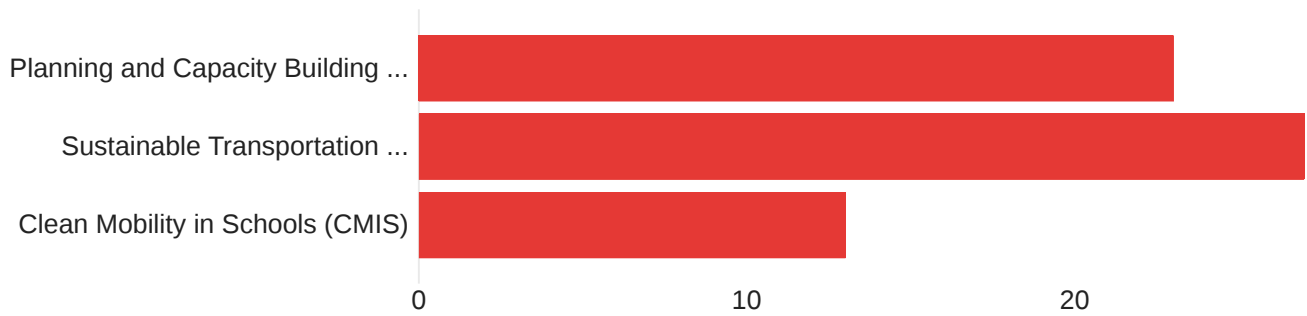
Via Email

When did you learn about Planning/CMIS/STEP?



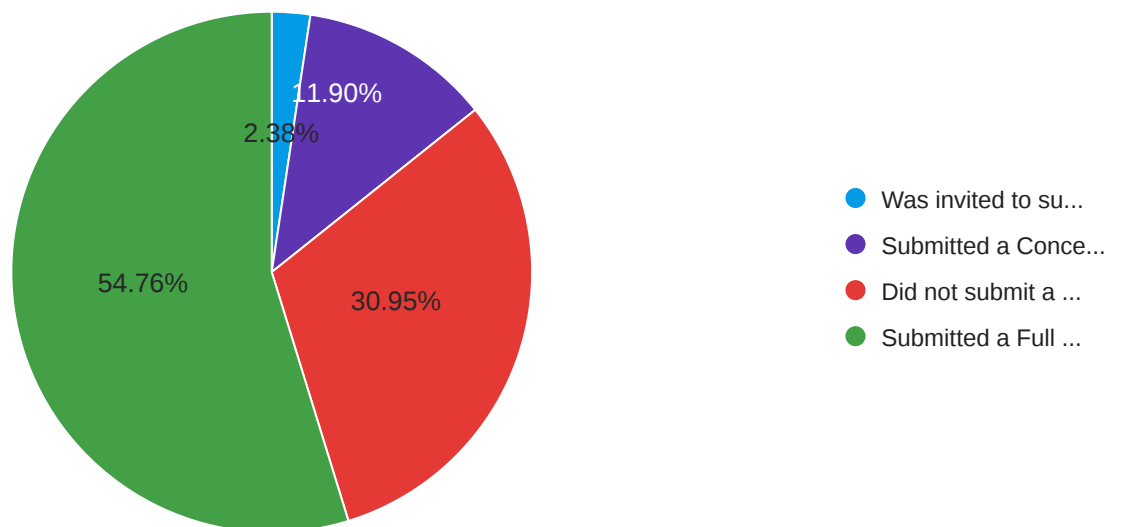
Field	Choice Count
Before the Concept Phase opened	20
During the first 3 weeks of the Concept Phase	14
During the last 4 weeks of the Concept Phase	8
Total	42

Which grant program(s) were you interested in? (Select all that apply)



Field	Choice Count
Planning and Capacity Building (Planning)	23
Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP)	27
Clean Mobility in Schools (CMIS)	13
Total	63

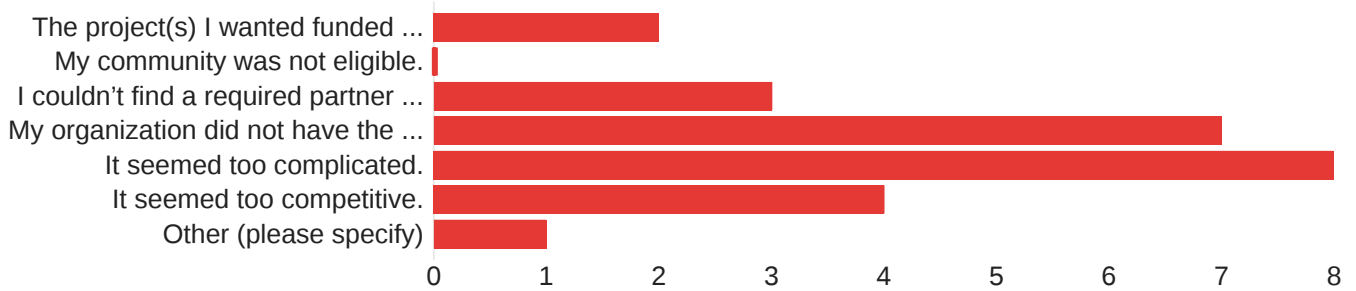
How far along did you progress in the application process?



Field	Choice Count
Did not submit a Concept Phase application	13
Submitted a Concept Phase application	5
Was invited to submit a Full Phase application but did not apply	1
Submitted a Full Phase application	23
Total	42

Concept Phase Questions

Why didn't you submit a Concept Phase application? (select all that apply)



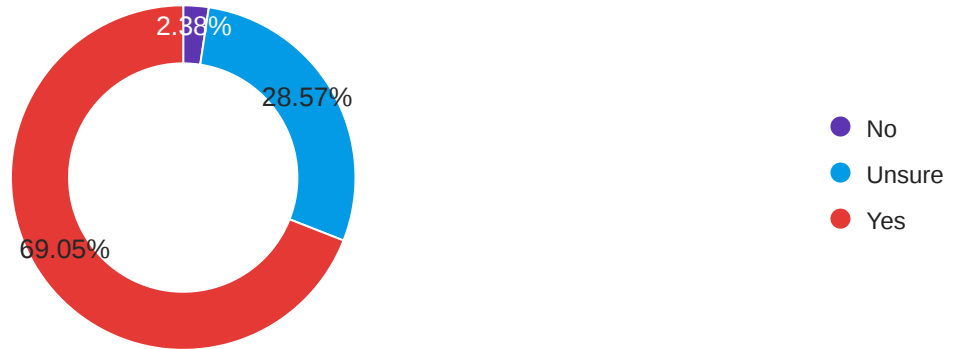
Field	Choice Count
The project(s) I wanted funded weren't eligible.	2
My community was not eligible.	0
I couldn't find a required partner (local government, community-based organization).	3
My organization did not have the capacity at the time.	7
It seemed too complicated.	8
It seemed too competitive.	4
Other (please specify)	1
Total	25

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

We found out too late to apply

Was it helpful to have the application process include a Concept Phase followed by a Full Phase?



Field	Choice Count
Yes	29
No	1
Unsure	12
Total	42

Please share why you believe having the application process include a concept phase was or was not helpful.

We could flush out ideas.

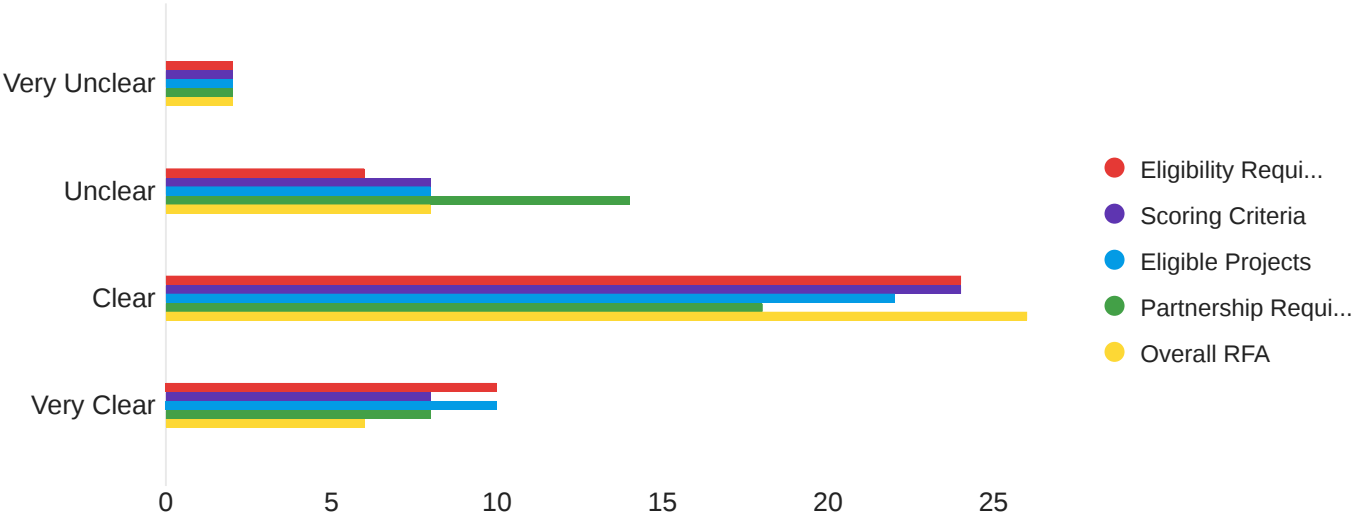
It was helpful to have concept phase because it was a simplified application that determines if we should move forward or not. so it saves staff time and effort would be required for full application

Many grants require months of preparation and with it broken into two phases, it felt more manageable.

The incorporation of a concept phase in the application process may have presented challenges. The limited space within the concept phase application has posed a constraint, making it difficult for applicants to fully elaborate on their projects and potentially impacting the progression of their applications.

Good to produce a high-level document and receive feedback before diving into a full application, which requires more time and resources.

How would you rate the clarity of the following aspects of the Request for Applications (RFA)?



Field	Min	Max	Mean	Responses
Eligibility Requirements	1.00	4.00	3.00	42
Scoring Criteria	1.00	4.00	2.90	42
Eligible Projects	1.00	4.00	2.95	42
Partnership Requirements	1.00	4.00	2.76	42
Overall RFA	1.00	4.00	2.86	42

Field	Very Unclear	Unclear	Clear	Very Clear	Total
Eligibility Requirements	2	6	24	10	42
Scoring Criteria	2	8	24	8	42
Eligible Projects	2	8	22	10	42
Partnership Requirements	2	14	18	8	42
Overall RFA	2	8	26	6	42

Please provide any additional comments on the clarity of the RFA's eligibility requirements, scoring criteria, or other components.

partnership requirements were bit confusing as we had CBO that were not classified as non profit. Had to clarified with CARB and technical advisors. Eligibility requirements were also confusing because we weren't sure micromobility was considered as active transportation

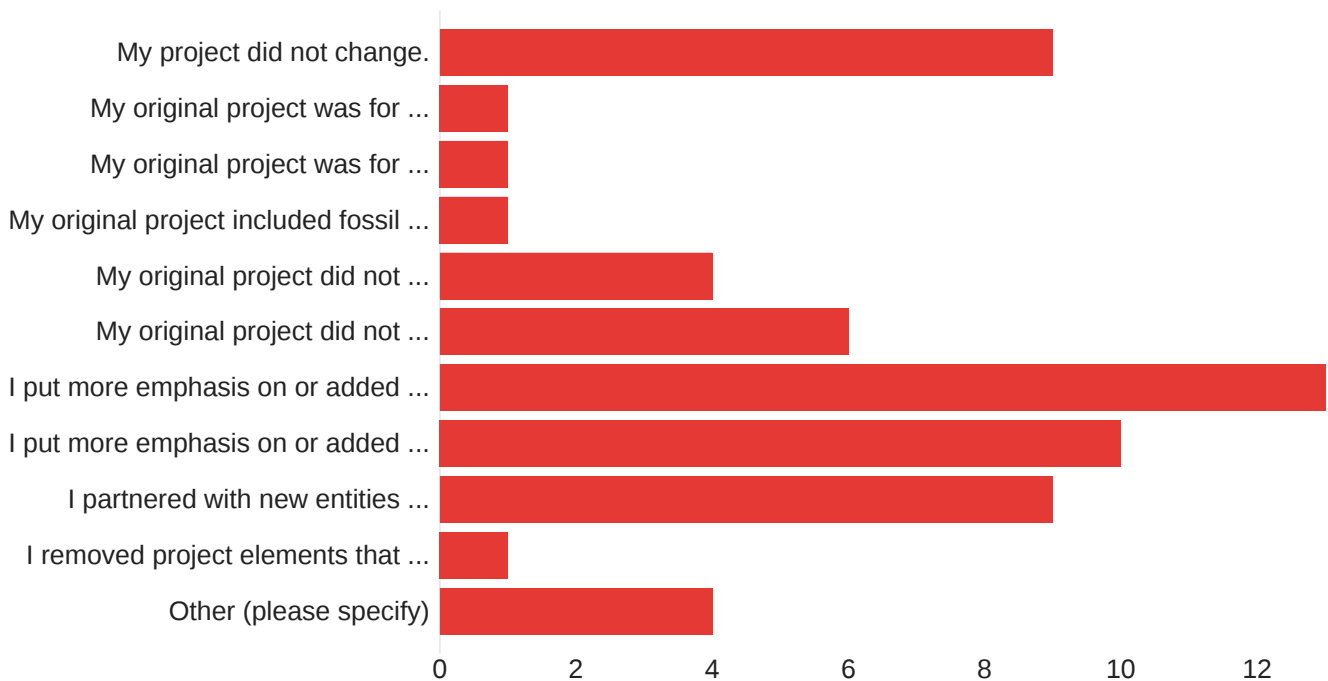
I dont think I understood the workforce development piece very well.

All RFA's are unclear. No one wants to write them or read them. Help everyone out and provide block grants and save everyone's time.

it can be R&D project with new approach

It was hard to track terms of the RFA with so much information and with different programs separate but blended into one larger call for projects.

How did your project scope change to suit the requirements or goals of the RFA? (select all that apply)



Field	Choice Count
My project did not change.	9
My original project was for Planning and I realized I was ready for a CMIS/STEP grant.	1
My original project was for CMIS/STEP and I realized I should apply for a Planning grant first.	1
My original project included fossil fuel vehicles and I added zero-emission vehicles.	1
My original project did not include working with schools and I added school-related projects.	4
My original project did not include workforce development and I added a workforce development component.	6
I put more emphasis on or added outreach and engagement activities.	13
I put more emphasis on or added a community-led decision-making structure.	10
I partnered with new entities (please specify).	9
I removed project elements that were not eligible (please specify).	1
Other (please specify)	4
Total	59

Please specify your previous answer.

Partnered with UC Davis for the research component.

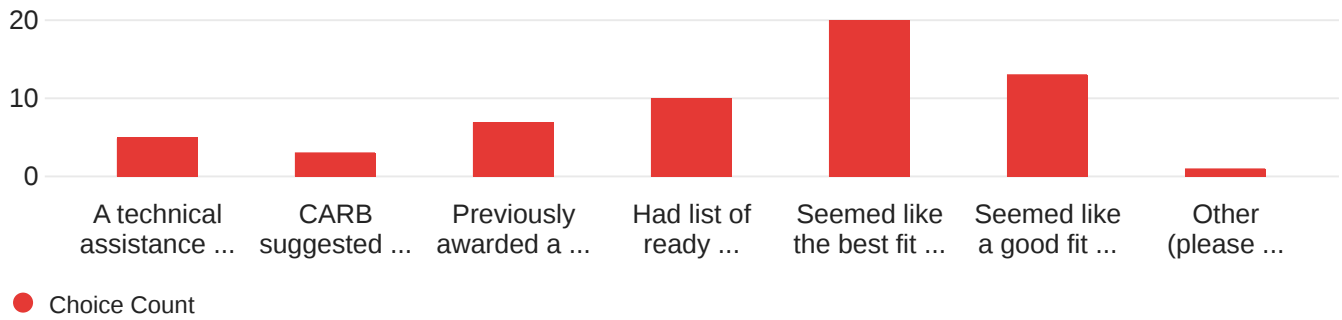
We added another clean energy component

Partnered with CBOs that I wouldn't have considered partnering with in the past.

We partnered with two community based organizations, which really strengthened our application.

We had a proposal that would have dramatically expanded free and clean transportation to K-14 students throughout the entire region. From our POV, there was limited need for upfront engagement as all stakeholders universally applauded our proposal. I'm sure the awardees had great proposals, but I felt that the scoring criteria "penalized" our proposal for offering free transit to all K-14 since this didn't require prioritization of needs or further study. Rather, we felt that we could expedite outcomes and bypass some of this engagement since the proposed outcomes were so well supported by the entire community. Our outreach efforts didn't require significant stakeholder engagement since we could work directly with all schools to issue free transit passes. But we felt we were penalized because we didn't have an elaborate outreach / engagement plan since ours was relatively simple (but effective). From what I can tell, our proposed outcomes may have had the most significant impact, but impact didn't seem to be scored as highly as the engagement process.

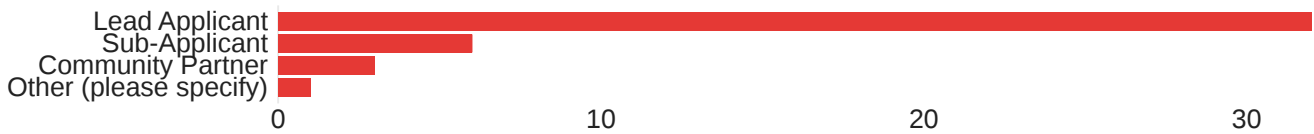
Why did you submit a Concept Phase application for CMIS/STEP or Planning? (select all that apply)



Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

Other community partners wanted to work with us on it too.

What was (or would have been) your role in the application?

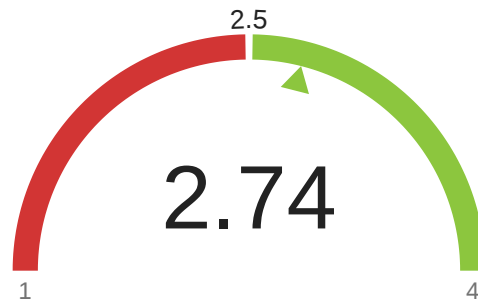


Field	Choice Count
Lead Applicant	32
Sub-Applicant	6
Community Partner	3
Other (please specify)	1
Total	42

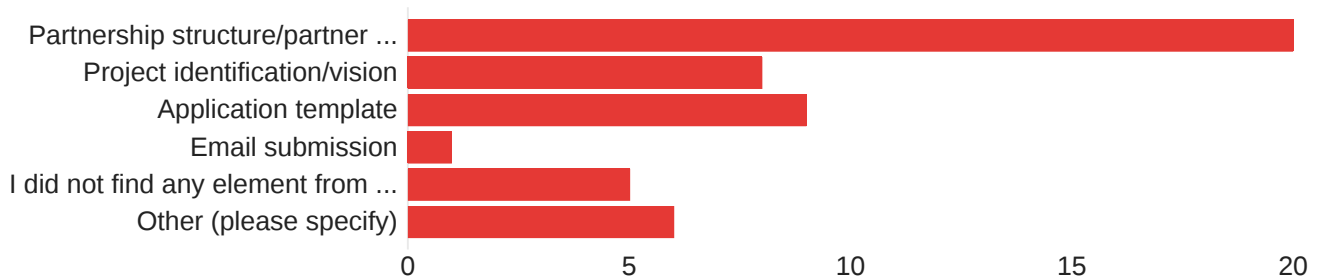
Please specify your previous answer.

Technical assistance to lead applicant

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the ease of the Concept Phase? (1 star being very difficult and 4 stars being very easy)



Which of the following elements, if any, from the Concept Phase did you find most challenging? (select up to two)



Field	Choice Count
Partnership structure/partner identification	20
Project identification/vision	8
Application template	9
Email submission	1
I did not find any element from the Concept Phase to be challenging	5
Other (please specify)	6
Total	49

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

I don't have time for a concept phase. Provide block grants to all jurisdictions

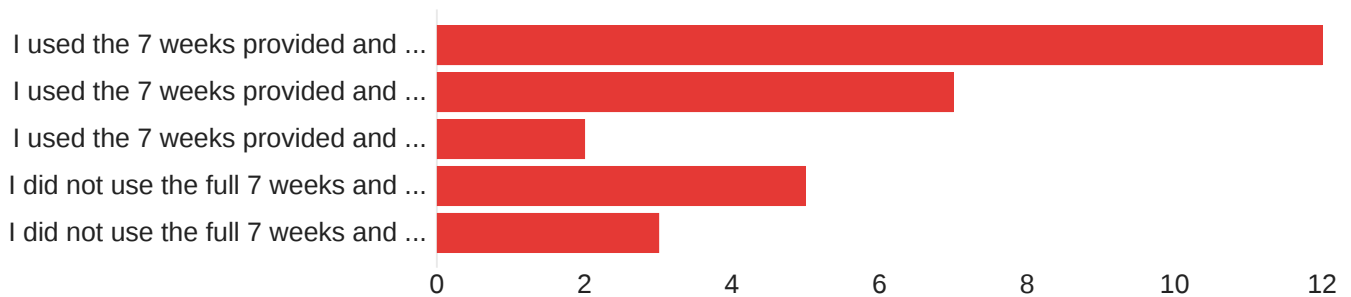
Limited amount of space to answer questions

n/a

call for projects -like webinars were difficult to endure

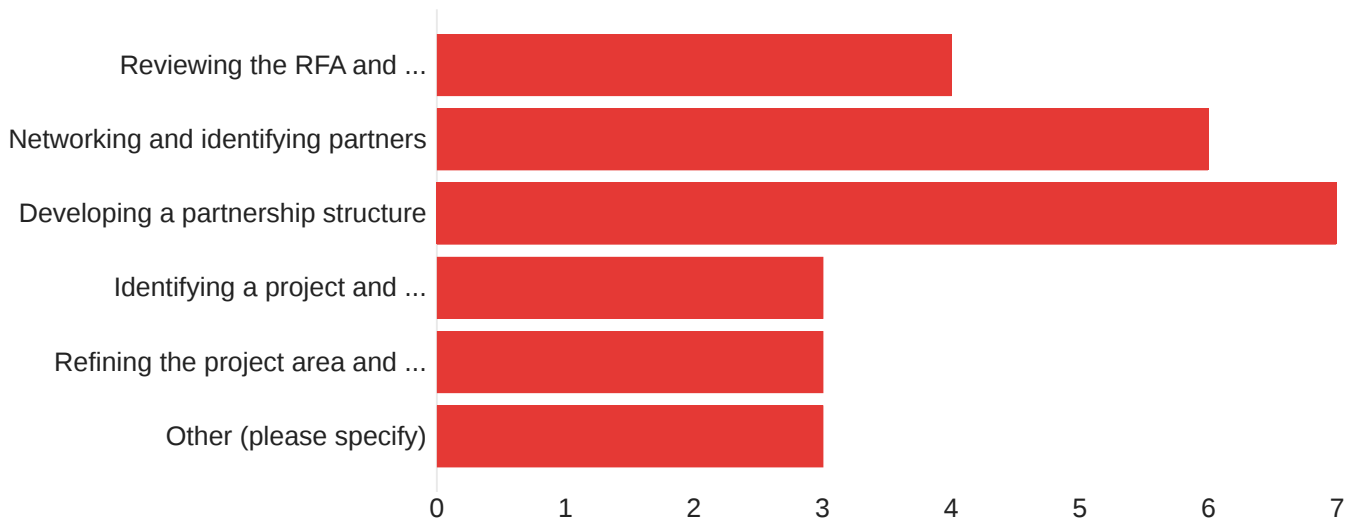
The GIS map - we had to enlist the support of an outside partner who happened to have a graduate degree in 3D models and mapping. This was purely a coincidence and if we did have have access to that support we would not have been able to submit. A small grassroots organization like ours does not have access to that technology

How much time did it take to complete the Concept Phase application? Did you have enough time to submit a high-quality Concept Phase application?



Field	Choice Count
I used the 7 weeks provided and it was enough time.	12
I used the 7 weeks provided and could have used an additional week or two.	7
I used the 7 weeks provided and could have used more than two additional weeks.	2
I did not use the full 7 weeks and it was still enough time.	5
I did not use the full 7 weeks and could have used more time.	3
Total	29

How would additional time have helped? (Select all that apply)



Field	Choice Count
Reviewing the RFA and determining eligibility	4
Networking and identifying partners	6
Developing a partnership structure	7
Identifying a project and developing a project vision	3
Refining the project area and creating a map	3
Other (please specify)	3
Total	26

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

workforce development

Having more time to write it and run it by our partners

More time to account for organizational delays on the part of project partners

Please share any additional comments on the Concept Phase application process.

Please share any additional comments on the Concept Phase application process.

Would like to be able to submit application without partnership at concept phase

It was so nice to have help from ILG

I think I had a meeting for technical assistance (or maybe I'm getting confused with another grant), but after that meeting I found out it would be way too many steps so I walked away from the grant. Like I do many others.
Provide block grants

project can be not accepted for Indigenous community

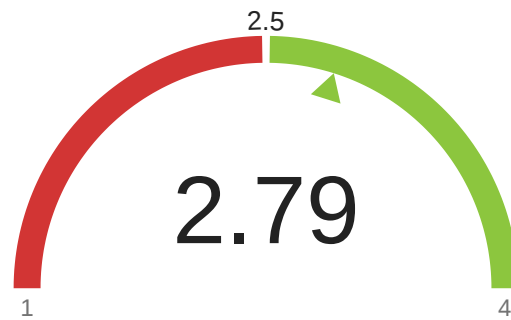
From an applicant perspective, not sure it was helpful. I could see it being helpful from a grantor perspective.

Full Phase Questions

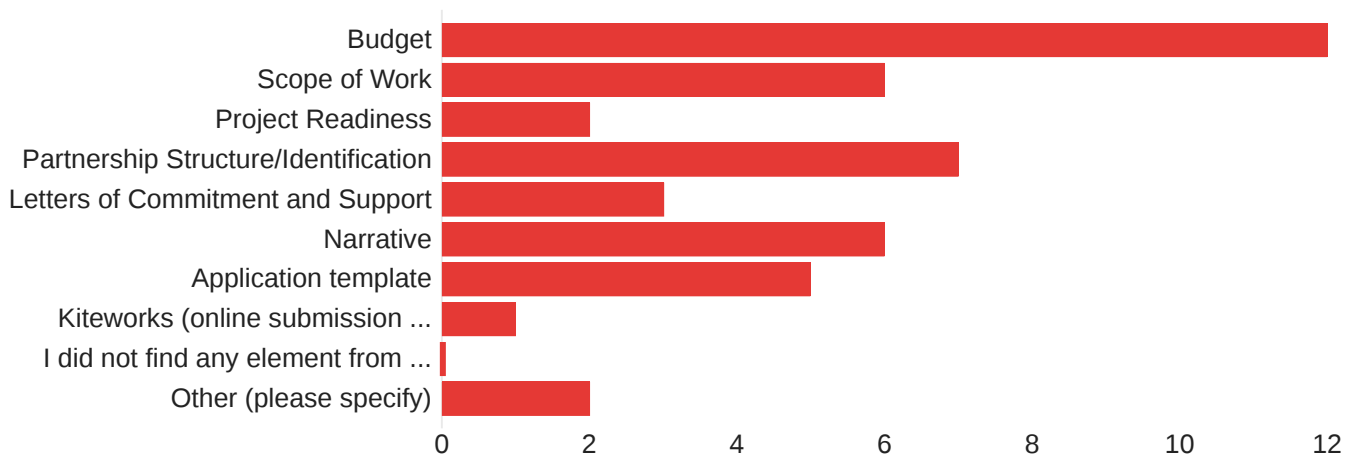
Why didn't you submit a Full Phase application? (select all that apply)

Only one respondent answered this question. They selected 'It seemed too complicated.'

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the ease of the Full Phase? (1 star being very difficult and 4 stars being very easy)



Which of the following elements, if any, from the Full Phase did you find most challenging? (select up to three)



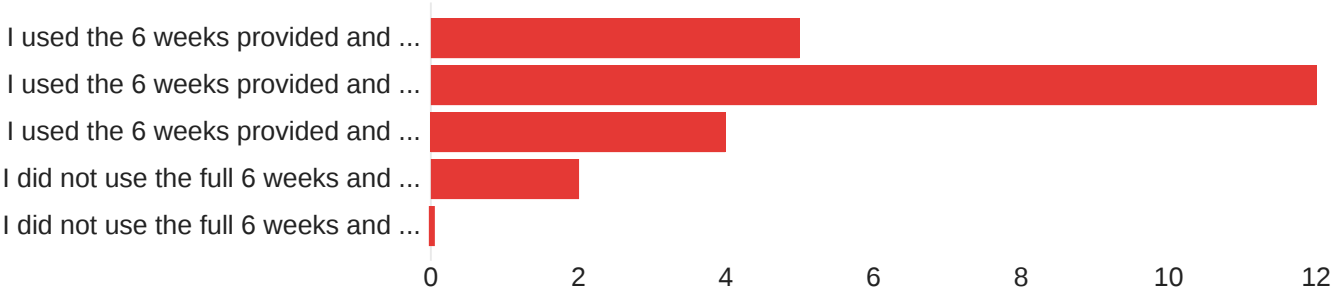
Field	Choice Count
Budget	12
Scope of Work	6
Project Readiness	2
Partnership Structure/Identification	7
Letters of Commitment and Support	3
Narrative	6
Application template	5
Kiteworks (online submission platform)	1
I did not find any element from the Full Phase to be challenging	0
Other (please specify)	2
Total	44

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

word restrictions

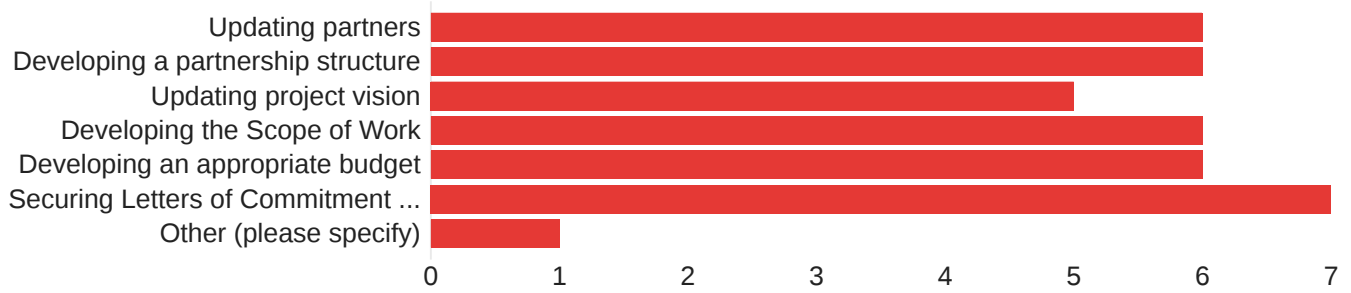
n/a

Q24 - How much time did it take to complete the Full Phase application? Did you have enough time to submit a high-quality Full Phase application?



Field	Choice Count
I used the 6 weeks provided and it was enough time.	5
I used the 6 weeks provided and could have used an additional week or two.	12
I used the 6 weeks provided and could have used more than two additional weeks.	4
I did not use the full 6 weeks and it was still enough time.	2
I did not use the full 6 weeks and could have used more time.	0
Total	23

Q25 - How would additional time have helped? (Select all that apply)



Field	Choice Count
Updating partners	6
Developing a partnership structure	6
Updating project vision	5
Developing the Scope of Work	6
Developing an appropriate budget	6
Securing Letters of Commitment and Support from partners	7
Other (please specify)	1
Total	37

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

Just having more time to work on the various sections and run it by all the partners.

Please share any additional comments on the Full Phase application process.

Please share any additional comments on the Full Phase application process.

The budget submission form was subpar at best. It needs to be completely reworked by someone who works with construction budgets.

The full phase application was mostly straight forward but there were some parts that weren't intuitive that required additional work and time. The manual and app guidance documents where helpful but also dense with information making them challenging to understand at times.

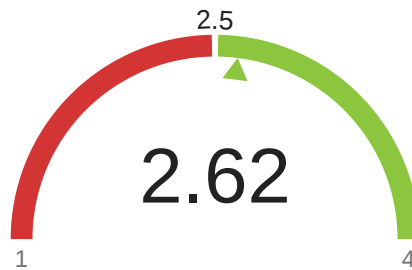
It was a lot of work, especially as the application stresses partnerships so it had to be run by all the partners, have time for feedback and re writes.

Na

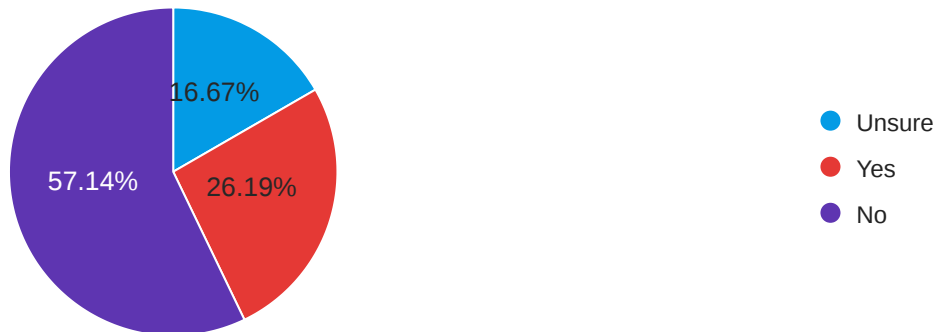
The technical assistance from Fehr & Associates was exceptional! We really valued having them answer questions or follow up on our queries. They also helped interpret some of the requirements, which we didn't understand. The full phase application required a lot of narrative that seemed to emphasize eloquence over more substantive factors / criteria (i.e. numbers served, community impact, infrastructure improved, emissions reduced, etc.). There was an over-emphasis on a theoretical project plan for stakeholder engagement and not enough on how the grantee would quantify outcomes / goals.

Capacity Questions

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate your organizational capacity to prepare and submit an application (i.e., staffing resources and expertise dedicated to developing the application, building partnerships, developing a budget, etc.)? (1 star being very low capacity and 4 stars being very high capacity)



Have you applied for a CARB grant before?



Field	Choice Count
Yes	11
No	24
Unsure	7
Total	42

Which CARB grant(s) have you applied for previously?

Which CARB grant(s) have you applied for previously?

CMO Assessment & Implementation

Planning

Various

STEP, Clean Mobility Options

Community air grant

Were you awarded any of the grants mentioned above?



Field	Choice Count
Yes	9
No	1
Still waiting for decision/announcement	1
Total	11

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the helpfulness of CARB’s Q&A sessions? (1 star being very unhelpful, 4 stars being very helpful).



Please share what could have made CARB's Q&A Sessions more helpful, if anything.

Please share what could have made CARB's Q&A Sessions more helpful, if anything.

A lot of questions were easy to answer and some answers were not eloquently communicating in the fact that I had partner organization telling me that based on the publications put out, the budget #'s were different.

would have liked it if we could have email directly to CARB even after q&a due date

Who has time to listen to a Q&A session? Only large jurisdictions with staff capacity.

Assistance line for application

clear requirements for different kinds of projects/applications

Did you receive technical assistance from one of the TA providers?



Field	Choice Count
Yes	27
No	15
Total	42

If you did not receive technical assistance, please tell us why.



Field	Choice Count
1. I was unaware of any technical assistance available	6
2. I opted not to receive technical assistance (please share why)	5
3. Other (please specify)	4
Total	15

Please specify your previous answer.

I could figure out the templates but found them tedious and time-consuming, and I did not have time to set up a conference to see what was required and what was flexible..

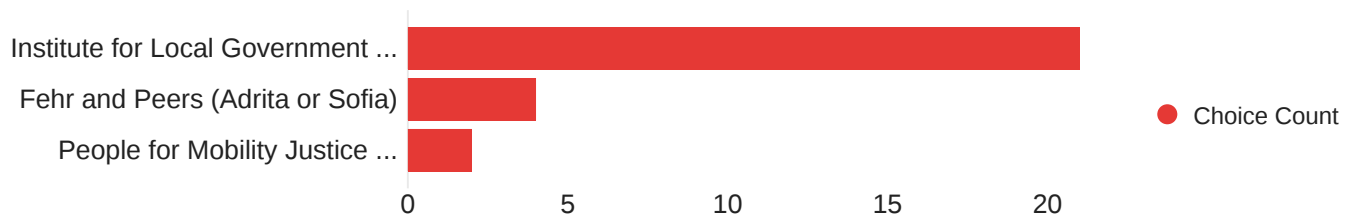
Considered applying but did not

Did not apply.

n/a

Obtained information regarding the grant opportunity too late in the process.

Who was your technical assistance provider?



Field	Choice Count
Institute for Local Government (Roberto, Nikita, Hanna, or Seth)	21
Fehr and Peers (Adrita or Sofia)	4
People for Mobility Justice (Andres, MaryAnn, or Lena)	2
Total	27

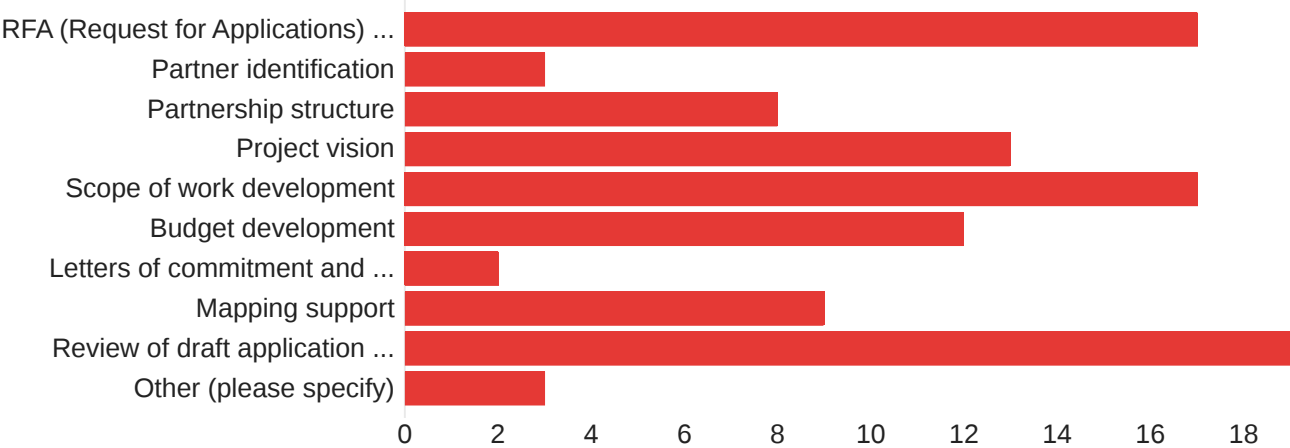
On a scale of 1 to 4, how responsive was your technical assistance provider? (1 star being not responsive at all and 4 stars being very responsive)



On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you rate the quality and value of the technical assistance you received? (1 star being not valuable at all and 4 stars being very valuable)



Q36 - What was the most beneficial assistance from your TA provider? (select all that apply)



Field	Choice Count
RFA (Request for Applications) review and grant insight	17
Partner identification	3
Partnership structure	8
Project vision	13
Scope of work development	17
Budget development	12
Letters of commitment and support development	2
Mapping support	9
Review of draft application materials	19
Other (please specify)	3
Total	103

Please specify what you mean by 'other'.

Nikita was very helpful in every step of application

TA advisors relayed our questions / challenges to CARB staff and well-represented us at critical times.

General thoughts

What, if any, needs were not met by your TA provider?

What, if any, needs were not met by your TA provider?

My meeting with Roberto was great. He helped me see how complicated the grant was and that I have no staff capacity to apply. But by all means was still very supportive.

flexibility on grant application schedule

N/A

It would have been nice for the TA to give some more detailed guidance, but understand the risk of bias.

Understanding eligibility of project

What additional support, either from your TA provider or CARB, would have been helpful to you during this application process?

What additional support, either from your TA provider or CARB, would have been helpful to you during this application process?

Block grants! With minimal reporting, and payment up front. No complicated reimbursements.

assistant support

Connection to grant awardees to learn from their project implementation.

Not sure

NA

Please share any additional comments on the RFA and application process, technical assistance, or Planning, CMIS, and STEP grants more broadly.

Please share any additional comments on the RFA and application process, technical assistance, or Planning, CMIS, and STEP grants more broadly.

I would updated the budgeting process tremendously. Very hard template to use.

I appreciate the work that is being done by everyone. However I am speaking up on behalf of almost all jurisdictions who are tired to competing for competitive grants. Local jurisdictions are already don't have staff capacity to do their daily work, and they definitely don't have time to apply for complex competitive grants. Please consider providing block grants in the future.

clear identification of projects

I like the two phases so those who don't have a well developed proposal don't waste their time on a final application. And I liked being able to develop a concept proposal and then refine it in the final phase of the application.

It might have been better to award a few more awards, even if for lesser amounts to share the opportunity since the application is so time consuming.

Appendix C: Outreach List

Organization/Outreach Channel	Description	Region
Alianza Coachella Valley	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	
Alliance for Community Transit LA		Los Angeles
Amador RCD	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	
ARRCA/CivicWell		Statewide
Blue Lake Rancheria		North State
BOOST R1 Communities	Statewide network	Statewide
California Coalition for Rural Housing		Statewide
California Walks*		Statewide
UC Berkeley SafeTREC		Statewide
Chinatown Fresno Foundation	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	Central Valley
City of Arcata*	BOOST R2 Participant	North State
City of Barstow	BOOST R2 Participant	Inland Empire
City of Jurupa Valley		Inland Empire
City of La Puente	BOOST R2 Participant	Los Angeles
City of Maywood*	BOOST R2 Participant	Los Angeles
City of McFarland*	BOOST R2 Participant	Inland Empire
City of National City	Past unfunded STEP Applicant	
City of Needles*	BOOST R2 Participant	Inland Empire
City of Richmond	Past unfunded STEP Applicant	Bay Area
City of Riverside		Inland Empire
City of South San Francisco	BOOST R2 Participant	Bay Area
CivicSpark Alumni Listserv	Statewide network	Statewide
CivicThread*		Sacramento
Cleantech SD		San Diego
Climate Adaptation Forum	Statewide network	Statewide
Communities for a Better Environment		Bay Area
CSDA	Statewide network	Statewide
CSU Chico	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	
Day One		
Eastside Riders Bicycle Club		
EBCE		Bay Area
FACT		
Franklin-McKinley SD	Past unfunded CMIS Applicant	
Fresno County Rural Transit Agency	Past unfunded STEP Applicant	Central Valley
Gateway Cities COG		Los Angeles
Greenlining Institute		Statewide
ILG Beacon Newsletter	Statewide sustainability network of 170+ agencies	Statewide
ILG Newsletter	Statewide network	Statewide
LA USD	Past unfunded CMIS Applicant	Los Angeles

LA Walks		Los Angeles
LADPW	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	Los Angeles
LAISD	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	Los Angeles
Lake Area Planning Council	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	North State
Lake County	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	North State
League of CA Cities Regional Reps	Statewide network	Statewide
LEAP Institute	Past unfunded STEP Applicant	
Leonard Transportation Center*	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	
Montebello Bus Lines	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	Los Angeles
MTC	Past unfunded STEP Applicant	
Pacoima Beautiful		Los Angeles
PATH	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	
PhilanthropyCA		
PMJ Newsletter		Los Angeles
Porterville USD*	Past unfunded CMIS Applicant	
Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates	Past unfunded STEP Applicant	Sacramento
Sacramento Public Library	Past unfunded STEP Applicant	Sacramento
San Diego Foundation	Past unfunded STEP Applicant	San Diego
San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative		San Diego
San Gabriel Valley COG		Los Angeles
SCOPE LA		Los Angeles
SocioEnvironmental and Education Network	RCC R1 Unfunded Applicant	
South Bay Cities COG		Los Angeles

*Submitted TA interest form

Appendix D: TA Request Form



CARB Clean Mobility Funding Opportunities

Technical Assistance Request Form

Thank you for your interest in applying for the California Air Resources Board’s (CARB) Planning and Capacity Building, Clean Mobility in Schools (CMIS), and the Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) grants. The Concept Application Phase is now open until 9/8/2023. For more information on the grant programs, [click here](#).

Technical Assistance (TA) for the Planning and Capacity Building, CMIS, and STEP grants includes customized application assistance for applicants. TA will be provided by a team of subject matter experts led by ILG. TA is offered at no cost to applicants. However, due to limited time and resources, we request that all applicants fill out this Sign-Up Form to help determine the level of your TA needs. Our goal is to provide a minimum of two TA meetings to each applicant that submits this form by the deadline.

If you would like to receive TA, please complete this form by 8/11/2023 at 11:59 p.m.

If you have any questions regarding this form, please contact Nikita Sinha at nsinha@ca-ilg.org.

Primary Contact Name: *

Primary Contact Job Title: *

Organization: *

Primary Contact Email: *

Primary Contact Phone Number: *

Which of the following best describe your organization: *

- Community-based organization or Nonprofit
- Tribal government
- Local government
- Public school district or public school, as defined by California Department of Education
- Other



<https://www.ca-ilg.org/webform/carb-clean-mobility-funding-opportunities>

Which Clean Transportation and Planning grant program do you intend to apply for? Please reference the Guidelines for information on the three grant types: *

- Planning and Capacity Building
- Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP)
- Clean Mobility in Schools (CMIS)
- Unsure

Which of the following services are most needed for your organization at this time:

- Clarification on the program guidelines and eligibility, including assessing which grant program is most suitable for the project
- Guidance on project scoping and readiness
- Partnership development, identifying roles and responsibilities
- Identifying new/additional partners
- Guidance on community engagement strategies
- Mapping support
- Other
- Unsure

Do you currently have any partners/sub-applicants in mind for this grant opportunity:

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/Currently identifying potential partners

If you are currently considering whether to apply for one of these grant opportunities, briefly describe your potential project and any assistance needed:

If you are currently considering whether to apply for one of these grant opportunities, briefly describe your potential project and any assistance needed

Briefly describe the community or communities you wish to serve. Descriptions may include, but are not limited to: population, education level, race and ethnicity, income, language, priority populations, and other community assets:

Briefly describe the community or communities you wish to serve. Descriptions may include, but are not limited to: population, education level, race and ethnicity, income, language, priority populations, and other community assets

Which county/counties will your project be located? (Hold 'Ctrl' key to select multiple):

Alameda County
Alpine County
Amador County
Butte County

Submit