

AGENCY: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)

TITLE: "CLEAN SCHOOL BUS USA ASSISTANCE AGREEMENTS"

ACTION: Request for Applications (RFA)

RFA NO: OAR-CCD-05-13

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE (CFDA) NO: 66.036

SUMMARY: Formal Agency responses to questions/comments regarding the subject solicitation.

DATE: July 1, 2005

Question 1: I understand that up to \$7.5 million will be available in FY 2005 to support 20-30 awards -- are these funding levels fairly stable, likely to change?

Answer 1: Congress has allocated \$7.5 million for a cost-shared grant program for fiscal year 2005. This funding level is stable for 2005. The President's budget for 2006 proposes \$10 million for Clean School Bus USA, but until Congress acts upon that budget and it is signed into law by the President, the future funding level for the program cannot be determined.

Question 2: When was the last time a competitive solicitation for this program was offered? Approximately how many school districts applied, and how many received awards?

Answer 2: The last (and first) competitive solicitation for Clean School Bus USA was issued in April, 2003. The solicitation resulted in approximately 120 applications for the \$5 million allocated by Congress for clean school bus grants. EPA awarded 17 grants that first year, ranging from \$5,000 to \$700,000. In 2004, Congress again allocated \$5 million to EPA for clean school bus projects and EPA awarded 20 grants.

It should be noted that eligibility requirements were different for that first solicitation; non-profits and local and State governments were eligible to apply, along with school districts. Approximately half of the 120 applications were from school districts, while the other half were from cities, counties, air agencies, States, non-profits and other eligible entities. Of the 60 school districts which applied, seven were awarded with grants in 2003 (10 went to entities other than school districts) and eight were awarded in 2004 (12 went to entities other than school districts).

Question 3: Re the 5% cost sharing requirement -- are cash matches preferred over in-kind contributions? Would providing more than 5% increase the competitiveness of an application?

Answer 3: The RFA does not state a preference for a particular kind of cost-share. The RFA does give preference, however, for a higher percentage of cost-share contributed by the applicant and/or its partners. Ten points of 100 are allocated to this evaluation factor. If the cost-share is to come from a partner, evidence of that should be submitted, such as a letter.

Question 4: I see that applications will only be accepted from public school districts, although partnerships with nonprofits are allowed. Is it all right that a non-profit organization proceeds with adding school partners, writes the proposal, coordinates the project, etc.?

Answer 4: It is correct that only applications from school districts will be deemed eligible, as defined in the Request for Applications (Section III.A. Eligibility Information). Non-profit organizations and other non-eligible organizations may, and in fact are encouraged, to team up with school districts to help districts write their grant applications and implement the project. The application must be signed by the appropriate school district official and the grant will be awarded solely to the district. The district is the responsible fiduciary party for the grant funds.

Question 5: Can a public school system which contracts its transportation services with a private bus company apply with the company to retrofit their buses that they use in that district?

Answer 5: Yes. The school district must be the applicant. The Statement of Work should describe the plan for working with the company to retrofit the buses. A letter of support from the company is suggested.

Question 6: I would like to verify that the assistance offered by this agreement is for diesel engine school buses only. Our district will be replacing an older gasoline engine school bus soon and we are wondering if this assistance might be available to us. At this point, we are unsure if we will be replacing this bus with another gasoline engine bus or a diesel engine bus. We prefer to stick with a gasoline engine, but are finding it difficult to locate what we need with a gasoline engine.

Answer 6: The grant program is designed to modernize diesel school bus fleets. However, older gas engine school buses are also polluters and we would like to get these older models off the road as well. If, in the context of modernizing the rest of a diesel fleet, an applicant proposes to retrofit or replace a gasoline-fueled bus, we would be willing to consider that vehicle along with the rest of the diesel vehicles.

As stated in the request for applications, please keep in mind that it is not EPA's intent to fund replacement projects that would have occurred through the normal attrition of vehicles and equipment or to provide funds for expanding a fleet. Therefore, applicants must provide documentation in their applications that the replacement activity would not have occurred without the financial assistance provided by the agency.

Question 7: I am trying to assist several school districts in my area with this grant application. However I don't know who to advise them regarding Question 16 ("is the application subject to review by state executive order 12372 process") on the Standard Grant Fund application page.

Answer 7: The Request for Applications states: “Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs may be applicable to awards resulting from this announcement. Applicants selected for funding may be required to provide a copy of their proposal to their [State Point of Contact](#) (SPOC) for review, pursuant to Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs. This review is not required with the Initial Proposal and not all states require such a review.” Information about this executive order and the list of State Points of Contact can be found at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>. If your State is listed as having a SPOC, then check “yes” on the application. But be advised that a review is not required at this time for these applications.

Question 8: In the recent notice regarding grants for the Clean School Bus Program, are eligible applicants only school bus fleets?

Answer 8: The only eligible applicants for this competition are school districts, as defined in the request for applications in *Section III, Eligibility Information*.

Question 9: I am writing to determine eligibility for the Clean School Bus Grant program. [Our company] has successfully provided technology to reduce the idling of heavy duty trucks and ...I am interesting in finding out what it would take to have this solution verified by the EPA so that we could submit an application for consideration under the Clean School Bus Grant Program.

Answer 9: Regarding your eligibility, only school districts are eligible for this competition (see Question 8). Private companies are not eligible.

Regarding the verification of your anti-idling product, at this time EPA’s retrofit verification program does not verify anti-idling technologies. Funds for this grant competition should be used *primarily* for retrofit technologies that are on either California’s or EPA’s verified list and/or replacements of engines and/or buses. However, the Clean School Bus program strongly supports idling reduction, and urges school districts to put idling reduction management and operational practices in place. Therefore, a school district may submit an application with a small portion of the budget allocated to piloting reduced idling technologies as part of an overall retrofit and/or replacement project.

Question 10: A private school utilizes publicly owned buses to transport its students. Would this entity be eligible to submit a grant application?

Answer 10: No, the private school would not be eligible to receive these funds. However, the school district that owns the buses could apply for, and receive, a grant to retrofit or replace these buses.

Question 11: I am interested in applying for the Clean School Bus USA grant and am wondering if grant funds can be used to purchase biodiesel fuel?"

Answer 11: Yes, grant funds can be used to purchase biodiesel fuel.

Question 12: I am interested in applying for funds under the CSB USA competition for the cost differential of ULSD. Is this allowable under this competition?

Answer 12: Yes, grant funds can be used for the cost differential of ULSD.

Question 13: I noticed that in some information an application due date of July 1st. Is this date correct?

Answer 13: No, this date is incorrect. The correct due date for applications for this solicitation is July 22nd. The due date for the intent to apply is June 24th.

Question 14: On page 11 of the overview, *Section V, Part A* references *Sections II.A* and *II.B*. These references don't make sense in terms of evaluation criteria and I am curious if it is not an error.

Answer 14: Yes, there is an error. The referenced section for the **Project Description and Implementation Plan** should be *Section IV.A*. The referenced section for **Clean Up Effectiveness** should be *Section IV.B*. We regret the error.

Section V, Part A should read:

A. Evaluation Factors (Total – 100 points)

Criterion	Maximum Points per Criterion
Fleet: Extent to which the proposal adequately describes the fleet and its history, and includes a Fleet Information Table, per <i>Section IV.B</i> .	10
Project Description and Implementation Plan: Extent to which the application ably and thoroughly addresses each of the areas identified in <i>Section IV.A</i> .	30
Clean Up Effectiveness: Extent to which the project employs a highly effective diesel emissions reduction strategy, per <i>Section IV.B</i> .	10

Question 15: Can you please let me know if we should list all the vehicles in our fleet in the fleet information table, some 7,000 school buses, or if we should only list those that we would like to be considered for this program?

Answer 15: Ideally, we would like to see information on every vehicle in the fleet. However, in your case, a fleet information table for the vehicles that you propose to retrofit or replace, and a general description of the rest of the fleet, would be sufficient. Other very large fleets can choose to do the same.

Question 16: Can school districts apply for the new Clean School Bus USA funds to develop anti-idling campaigns? Or is the funding only for technology-based approaches?

Answer 16: Related to Question 9 above, funds for this grant competition should be used *primarily* for retrofit technologies that are on either California's or EPA's verified technology list and/or replacements of engines and/or buses. Funds cannot be used to solely fund anti-idling campaigns, but a school district may submit an application with a small portion of the budget allocated to piloting reduced idling technologies as part of an overall retrofit and/or replacement project. Also, as stated in the evaluation criteria in *Section V. Policy Support*, extra points will be given to applications that provide written documentation of an existing idling reduction policy.

Question 17: Can one school system apply as the lead agency? If one school system applies, is the average award about between \$200,000 and \$300,000?

Answer 17: Yes, one school system can apply as the lead applicant, and in fact, this is encouraged as smaller school districts do not always have the resources to apply for and manage Federal grants. Applications will receive extra points for covering multiple school districts, as stated in *Section V., Policy Support*.

It's impossible to predict what the award amount might be for an application covering multiple school districts. The individual award amounts will depend on the quality, number and diversity of applications, as evaluated using the criteria listed in *Section V.* The highest amount that the award could be is \$725,000.

Question 18: May a State Energy Office and/or a Clean Cities organization apply for funding under this solicitation with the intent of distributing the funds to eligible sub grantees?

Answer 18: No, neither State agencies nor non-profits such as Clean Cities organizations are eligible for this competition; only school districts are eligible.

Question 19: Is the biodiesel funded through this program a pure fuel or blended with petroleum?

Answer 19: Funds from this competition may be used to buy any blend of biodiesel.

Question 20: [Our school district] will be applying for the school bus grant and would like to know if [DOC supplier] is an acceptable supplier of catalysts for school bus retrofit or only the companies that appear on the verified list.

Answer 20: Only the DOCs listed on EPA's or California's verified technology lists are acceptable retrofit technologies for this competition.

Question 21: I understand that the performance period of the grant, as listed on page 6 of the RFA, is "October 2005-October 2007". To be sure I am interpreting this correctly, I would like to pose an example. If a school district applied for, and was granted monies for [a project], would they be able to submit requests...up to October 1, 2007, or October 31, 2007? Likewise, is there a minimum date by which they must start their purchases, and if so, what is that date?

Question 21: You have correctly interpreted the meaning of "performance period" of the grant—that grant funds are available from the beginning date through the end date of the performance period. The period cited in the solicitation was an estimate; when the grants are awarded, the performance period will have a specific beginning date and end date and will cover two years. There is no minimum date by which purchases must begin; however, applicants will not be reimbursed for any purchases made *before* the beginning date of the performance period.

Funds should be used before the last date of the performance period. However, under some circumstances, a grantee can ask for a "no-cost extension," which would delay the performance period end date for an agreed-upon amount of time.

Question 22: Since ULSD will be available nationwide by October 15, 2006, and its use mandated by that date, will we still be able to use grant funds to pay for the differential cost of ULSD after October 15, 2006?

Answer 22: Applicants can propose that the grant funds cover the cost differential between ULSD and regular diesel fuel until the end of October, 2006. After October, 2006 ULSD will be available nationwide. After this date, grant funds should not be spent on ULSD.

Question 23: [School District] has contacted us regarding applying for a CSB USA grant to install Donaldson Spiracle Closed Crankcase Filters on buses that have already been retrofitted with DOCs from an earlier CSB USA grant. Donaldson's EPA verification is for a DOC + Spiracle System. Since the buses already have DOCs, would adding Spiracles satisfy the verified product requirement and thus be eligible for a grant?

Answer 23: Yes, most likely, although each case will be different and evaluated using the criteria.

Question 24: Are private school buses eligible to apply?

Answer 24: School buses that belong to private schools are not eligible. School buses that belong to private companies but are contracted to provide transportation for a public school districts are eligible. The school district must be the applicant in this situation.

Question 25: Would EPA consider giving a grant for calming music to be installed on buses?

Answer 25: No, EPA funds in this competition cannot be used for such a purpose.

Question 26: Regarding the 5% match, does the match have to come from the school district or can it be contributed from the vendor/contractor that they would be purchasing the technology from?

Answer 26: The 5% match can come from the applicant itself, or any other entity. If the 5% match is coming from another organization, a letter of commitment should be included with the application. The 5% match can be cash or in-kind contributions.

Question 27: I've received the forms in the application kit but am unsure of which forms I need to complete and send in. Can you help?

Answer 27: For the July 22nd deadline, the applications must contain the following:

- a. Signed Standard Form 424 (one page)
- b. Fleet Information Table
- c. Narrative Work Plan following the **required** outline (10 pages maximum)
- d. Budget Detail & Narrative

In addition, optional materials such as letters of support from potential sub-awardees or partners and/or a copy of the district's idling reduction policy, should be included if applicable.

For more information on what is required in the application, and instructions on where and how to send in the application, please see the Request for Applications, located at <http://www.epa.gov/oar/grants/05-13.pdf>.

Applicants which are selected will need to fill out the entire application package in order to complete the award process.

Question 28: I cannot seem to download the Standard Form from EPA's web site. Is there another way I can obtain it?

First, make sure you are on the right web page. EPA's grant forms are located at: <http://www.epa.gov/ogd/AppKit/application.htm>. The Standard Form 424 can be downloaded in Microsoft Word or in PDF. It is also available at this web site in PDF: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/sf424.pdf>

The application packet is also available on paper and can be mailed to you. Use this web page to order the paper application: http://www.epa.gov/ogd/grants/how_to_apply.htm#1

Question 29: I am in the process of assisting several municipalities with their grants. Some municipalities only have 10 or so buses. If they were to use oxidation catalysts at roughly \$2000 a piece, the equipment would only cost about \$20,000. Staff time would probably be \$40,000 as a rough, rough estimate. My point is that a small municipality could end up requesting less than \$100,000. Your announcement states that funds will be distributed in average amounts of \$200,000 to \$300,000. If this is the case, would you recommend that smaller districts still apply? Or should this grant be restricted to municipalities with very large fleets (50+ vehicles)? What is the lowest amount of money you would grant?

Answer 29: The average amount of the grants is just an average, designed to give applicants an idea of usual amounts awarded. In the past two years, there were projects awarded as little as \$5000 and as much as \$725,000. There is no minimum amount of funds that can be awarded. And certainly all districts are invited to apply, regardless of the size of the district.

Question 30: Can you provide a definition for bus types A, B, C and D?

Answer 30: Yes. This definition comes from the May, 2005 National Congress on School Transportation.

Type A bus is a van conversion or bus constructed utilizing a cutaway front-section vehicle with a left side driver's door. This definition includes two classifications: Type A-1, with a gross Vehicle Weight Rating of 14,500 pounds or less; and Type A-2, with a GVWR greater than 14,500 and less than or equal to 21,500 pounds.

Type B school bus is constructed utilizing a stripped chassis. The entrance door is behind the front wheels. This definition includes two classifications: Type B-1, with a GVWR of 10,000 pounds or less and Type B-2, with a GVWR greater than 10,000 pounds.

Type C school bus is constructed utilizing a chassis with a hood and front fender assembly. The entrance door is behind the front wheels; also known as a *conventional school bus*. This type also includes cutaway truck chassis or truck chassis with cab with or without a left side door and a GVWR greater than 21,500 pounds.

Type D school bus is constructed utilizing a stripped chassis. The entrance door is ahead of the front wheels; also known as *rear or front engine transit-style school bus*.

Question 31: Can grant funds be used to fund the fuel infrastructure for CNG buses?

Answer 31: No, grants funds cannot be used to fund fuel infrastructure for CNG buses. For more information on

Question 32: The RFA states that EPA will pay for up to 30-45% of the cost of a new bus. Does that mean the district pays for the rest?

Answer 32: Yes, the applicant must supply the remainder of the cost of a new, replacement bus. However, other non-profit and/or governmental entities could contribute as well.

Question 33: Regarding Section 1 - Funding Opportunity Description, B. Scope of Work, paragraph 3, page 3: "Applicants may propose to establish a sub-grant program to multiple school districts and fleets," can a regional Educational Service District (ESD) representing multiple school districts sub-grant the award to a state or local air quality agency?

For example, a regional ESD submits an RFA to EPA to install retrofit technologies for multiple school districts. (Example: 100 buses for 10 rural school districts.) The ESD sub-grants the awarded funds to a state or local air quality agency. Under an existing retrofit contract and at no charge to the ESD, the air quality agency contracts installations for multiple school districts under a single contract. The contractor invoices the state or local air quality agency. The air quality agency pays the contractor for services received.

Answer 33: Yes, any applicant can sub-award any part of the statement of work, such as the purchase and installation of retrofit equipment. The applicant should state their intention to make such a sub-award in their application. The sub-award would be a sub-contract and would be subject to competition under 40 CFR 31.37 (b).

Questions 34: What regions of the US are in greatest need?

Answer 34: EPA believes that every child deserves to ride in a clean school bus, therefore the Agency has not specifically targeted one area of the country over another. Instead, the Agency is targeting the oldest, dirtiest buses. Also, the evaluation panel may consider geographic equity and environmental justice concerns, as defined in *Section V.B., Other Factors*, as they make their decisions about which applications to award.

Question 35: Are multiple district proposals more likely to be funded?

Answer 35: Applications will be evaluated on a number of criteria, per *Section V.A. Evaluation Criteria*. It's impossible to say whether multiple district proposals would be more likely to be funded. However, one of the criteria, *Policy Support*, states that applications will receive extra points for covering multiple school districts.

Question 36: Is it acceptable for [State] to submit an application defining one school district as the main applicant, with several other schools around the state as subgroups for the Clean School Bus grant? I wanted to make sure that we could define these schools in advance and not have to wait to put out a competitive subgrant process if awarded a grant. We are striving to set up model school bus programs around the state and would like to share this funding amongst several school districts.

Answer 36: It is acceptable for a district to submit an application with other school districts listed as potential recipients of sub-grants, sub-awards, or retrofit equipment. It would be helpful to have letters of commitment/interest from these potential school districts submitted with the applications to show support. However, the school district must establish a fair and open process after award for determining which school districts receive the benefits of the grant funds.

Question 37: It seems as if the email inbox address does not work.

Answer 37: It does work. Make sure you are typing CSB, then an underscore, then RFA, then @epa.gov. CSB_RFA@epa.gov.

Question 38: We received a \$41,000.00 American Lung Association grant via [our State] Clean School Bus Program to convert to Ultra Low Sulfur Fuel for the next school year (July 2005 - May 2006). Can I use this as in-kind money?

Answer 38: Yes, as long as you include the switch to ULSD as a component of your Statement of Work. Make sure you include a letter of commitment from this association.

Question 39: With regard to the Clean School Bus USA request for application OAR-CCD-05-13, can application be made to retrofit model year 2004 and 2005 school buses? The proposal does not explicitly state that these years will not be considered for retrofits. My reading of the regulations for the 2004 model year versus the 2007 model year would seem to indicate that the 2004 to 2006 models would still have room for improved particulate reductions that could be realized from installation of retrofit devices.

Here is the context of the question: There is a school district that we encouraged to apply for a grant (our PM2.5 monitor which registers well into the nonattainment level is located on the roof of their school, and any reduction could help us reach attainment). However, they told us that their contractor-supplied buses are model year 2004 and 2005. Would it make any sense to retrofit these buses?

Answer 39: If the engines on these buses do not now include retrofit equipment like a filter, a catalyst or crankcase system, then they could be retrofitted with those devices. In addition, they could be run on a cleaner fuel. The school district should check with the school bus contractor to ascertain what, if any, emissions equipment came with the bus.

Question 40: I am a bit unclear what the grant funds. For bus replacement does it only fund 30-45% of the cost of a new bus or does it fund merely the difference between what a diesel bus vs. a clean fuel bus would cost?

Answer 40: The grant would fund 30-45% of the cost of the entire bus. If the bus costs \$100,000, the applicant can apply for up to 45% of the cost, or \$45,000. However, since districts are competing with other school districts, it might be a good idea to consider whether the entire 45% is needed.

Question 41: How does this funding relate to the statement that this grant requires a 5% contribution of the total project cost? E.g. if the grant funds 30-45% of a new school bus and our district contributes the required 5% contribution who picks up the remaining percentage of the cost?

Answer 41: The applicant figures out the budget for the project, say \$200,000, which includes equipment, personnel costs, etc. Then the applicant has to contribute at least 5% of that total amount, or \$10,000. That \$10,000 can be cash or in-kind services, and can come from the applicant itself or another organization. EPA would fund the remainder, up to \$190,000.

Question 42: If our district is awarded 30% of the cost of a new school bus (if that is indeed the scenario [see question #40]) could we use already awarded grant money from our local air pollution control district to contribute a large part of the remainder of the purchase price?

Answer 42: Yes. Be sure to include a letter of commitment from the local air pollution control district.

Question 43: Along the same lines could the grant award be used to purchase a used bus – not a brand new one, but a newer bus than the one that is being phased out?

Answer 43: Yes, the funds could be used this way. But the applicant would have to make the case that there's a positive emissions impact resulting from this purchase.

Question 44: The application asks to provide budget detail and narrative. At this preliminary stage in the process should this be completed on the Form 424A?

Answer 44: The 424A form is a one-page cover sheet form that has basic information about the applicant and a place for the required signature. That is the only form that needs to be submitted at this time. The rest (the narrative, budget and fleet information table) are not forms, but are required elements of the application. The application deadline is July 22nd.