

# Public Lands Highway Discretionary Program – Grant Writer’s Checklist

## *Before you begin writing, have you checked to see if...*

- you have a project that is consistent with a specific Federal Land Management Agency and/or Tribal government’s transportation goals or priorities, and that they will provide you a letter or email communication confirming their support?  
(Contact information is provided for Federal Land Management Agencies as part of the Application and Additional Information here: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/discretionary](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/discretionary))
- you have the complete application, including the SF-424; you have thoroughly read the PLHD statutory and project selection criteria; you know who will be managing this project if awarded, and that you can get a letter or email confirmation from the entity that will manage this award acknowledging that it will do so?
- there are environmental concerns or conflicts associated with the project?
- there are Right of Way (ROW) concerns or conflicts associated with the project?
- there are local/ political concerns or conflicts associated with the project?
- there are there other factors that you can identify that would inhibit completion of this project?

### **Review Status:**

- Continue on to fully develop a PLHD application
- Need to do some additional research before I begin writing
- Stop (Based on the above considerations, my application request is premature or may not be competitive)

## **Provide Identifier Information + Geographic Location**

1. **State**
2. **Title**
3. **Congressional Information**
4. **Geographic Location**

## **Identify Title, Contact and Congressional Information and Project Administration**

- Keep the title and location in mind as you’re writing for consistency throughout your narrative

### **Things to look for:**

- Is the title reflective of the funding request, and specific enough to be understood by reviewers?
- Is the Congressional information correct? Are both congresspersons and senators listed? Have you verified that they are correct?

### **Review Status:**

- Continue writing
- Revise (Need to do some additional research to address specific concerns in this section)
- Stop (Based on the above considerations, my application request is premature or may not be competitive)

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## Prepare the Project Abstract + Narrative

5. Abstract
6. Narrative
  - a. Description of Proposed Work
  - b. Amount of PLHD funds requested
  - c. Project Schedule
  - d. Previous Federal Funds
  - e. Commitment of Other Funds
  - f. Federal land management agency or Tribal government support
  - g. Project Administration
  - h. Project ready to advance
  - i. Safety, state of good repair
  - j. Livability

### Writing the Abstract and Narrative

- Does the abstract succinctly state how PLHD funds will be used, as well as the intended outcome of the funding request? (*see “helpful hints for writing a PLHD project abstract”*)
- Does the narrative explain how the Federal Land Management Agency and/or Tribal government supports the funding request?
- Is it clear who is administering this project? For example, if this project will be administered by other than the State DOT, such as a Federal Lands Division or Federal Land Management Agency, is there a letter of support or e-mail communication confirming this?
- Does the project schedule include a completion date? Based on the project schedule, is this project ready to advance? Is the timeline realistic?
- Is there a letter of support or email communication to substantiate your assertion of the project’s benefit to Federal and/or Tribal lands?
- Can the funds be obligated within one year of the date funds are made available?
- Are all elements of the funding request eligible for PLHD funding?

### **Things to look for:**

- Superfluous narrative that does **not** specifically describe the project for which funds are being requested; overemphasis on Federal lands or tribal descriptions or the planning process or project background, but not the project itself.
- Description of ineligible activities
- The abstract and narrative do **not** clearly and succinctly describe how Public Lands Highway Discretionary funds will be used to complete the proposed project or how it meets the project selection criteria.
- The narrative does **not** describe what the intended outcome of the project is; or how it supports the transportation needs, strategic goals or priorities of a Federal Land Management agency and/or Tribal government.
- The narrative provides little or no detail regarding project goals and expected results in context of the eligibility categories identified.
- There is no project schedule, or it does not include a project timeline from “cradle to grave.”
- The narrative does not include a line item (scalable) budget that associates each line item with a completed task or deliverable that contributes to the completed funding request.
- The narrative does **not** discuss leveraged funding, both public and private, or any other PLHD or other Federal funding being used for this project.
- For applicants other than State DOT’s, the narrative does **not** discuss coordination with State DOT and MPO as well as the ability to act on behalf of the applicant jurisdiction, and ability to meet Federal funding requirements.

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## Review Status:

- Continue writing
- Revise (Need to do some additional research to address specific concerns in this section) **HINT:** *Have someone review your application that has never read it before, and is not familiar with your project. Do they understand what you’re trying to do with PLHD funds? If they understand it, we probably will too. Please remember that reviewers are likely to be unfamiliar with your project.*
- Stop (Based on the above considerations, my application request is premature or may not be competitive)

## Background information that you should know, or can check into: Capacity to Implement

### 7. Prior Projects

#### Prior Projects

- Does my organization have the capacity to implement this project as written in this request?
- Does my organization have previous outstanding grant awards that may reflect poorly on this request?

#### Things to look for:

- Have I adequately identified prior projects to date, noting specific PLHD prior awards, and their current status? *This does not need to be included in the narrative, but would be part of a discussion you may have with your State DOT during the solicitation process. They will be reviewing your application in this context before submitting to FHWA.*
- Have I adequately distinguished prior efforts from the current proposal, such that this project request does not appear duplicative of past efforts by reviewers?

#### Review Status:

- Continue writing
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- Stop (Based on the above considerations, my application request is premature or may not be competitive)

## Check and Double Check: Other Considerations

- 8. Compare Narrative to Budget/Project Schedule
- 9. Assess Reasonableness of Cost
- 10. Are PLHD funds the best source of funding for this project request?

#### Review Narrative against Project Timeline and Budget

- Does the funding request include all project elements from inception to completion?
- Is the budget and project timeline consistent with what is stated in the narrative and vice versa?
- Does it have reasonable costs and time estimates necessary to complete identified deliverables?
- Does it have a clear beginning or phase associated with the project?
- Does it have an end date to complete the project?
- Am I willing to accept partial funding; if so, have I said so? If so, can a component of the funding request be completed with the amount identified, and does my cost estimate clearly identify those components?
- Given the limited amount of PLHD funding available, is the amount of my request reasonable? Is PLHD the best source of funding for this project?

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## Things to look for:

- Missing components of the application, such as no cost estimate or project schedule or letters of support
- Inconsistencies: Elements mentioned in the abstract are not discussed in the narrative or vice versa
- Inconsistencies: Elements in the project timeline are not reflected in the cost estimate or vice versa
- Unrealistic costs or deadlines
- No real project administration identified such that project delivery cannot be guaranteed, or delivered in an expeditious manner

## Review Status:

- Continue writing
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## Review Leveraged Funding

- Has prior investment identified in the application contributed to completion of prior stages of this project?
- Are the leveraged funds from a viable source and reasonable?

## Review Status:

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## Reasonableness of Costs

- Is the cost of each project element (deliverable) sufficient or excessive? Has the applicant provided cost estimates to substantiate identified costs?
- Are there elements of this project that are of benefit beyond Federal or Tribal lands? If so, are funds requested proportionate to all activities/services directly involving Federal or Tribal lands? Example: a Visitor Center proposed for a shared use space should request less than the 100% of the total project cost from PLHD funds.

## Things to look for:

- Are all identified costs associated with this funding request?

## Review Status:

- Continue writing
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## **Including Attachments**

### Relevant attachments

- If attachments are included, are they related to the specific project request, such as cost estimates, site plans, contextual maps, support letters, visualization of completed project?
- Do attachments support or conflict with information provided in the application?

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### Things to look for:

- Do the attachments add value and substantiate my funding request, or does my application rely too heavily on the information in the attachments to make my argument? (*Application should **not** depend on attachments to tell your story, but substantiate your request.*)
- Information unrelated to project request or general information on the project that does not support the funding request.
- Information in the attachments is inconsistent, or conflicts with what is provided in the application narrative.

### Review Status:

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### Talking to your State PLHD Coordinator

- Does this project request fit into my State’s transportation plan?
- Is the project outcome sustainable? If maintenance is required upon completion, does my organization have the means and a plan to do that?

### Review Status:

- Continue writing
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### Writer’s Notes