

Minnesota Safe Routes to School 2021 Infrastructure Solicitation

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated October 2021

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1. I don't know much about the Safe Routes to School infrastructure program. Where can I find more information?

More information may be found on the state SRTS infrastructure program webpage, along with the 2021 solicitation guide and additional SRTS resources:

- [Safe Routes to School Infrastructure Program Webpage](#)
- [SRTS Program Guide](#)

2. What is the solicitation schedule, and when are important deadlines?

Important dates for the solicitation are shown below. Check the [Safe Routes to School Infrastructure Program Webpage](#) for more updates.

- **Monday, October 4th, 2021** – Safe Routes to School solicitation kick-off. Open letter of intent period
- **Friday, October 29th, 2021** – Deadline for applicants to submit letters of intent
- **Friday, November 12th, 2021** – Deadline for MnDOT to review of letters of intent. Recommendation to proceed forward with full application sent to applicants
- **Monday, November 15th, 2021** – Opening date for full application submittals
- **Friday, January 14th, 2022 (UPDATED)** – Deadline for applicants to submit full applications
- **Friday, March 4th, 2022** – Project selection finalized, and award letters distributed to selected projects

3. I've heard there are a lot of rules associated with bond funds. Where can I learn more about bond requirements and restrictions?

Minnesota Management and Budget is the authority on state bonding. Numerous resources can be found at the following links:

- [Bonding](#)
- [Capital Projects](#)

Note grant awardees from tribes and private schools will not be subject to the bonding requirements. All other awardees should assume bonding requirements will apply.

4. Why is state aid city or county sponsorship required for township, small city, and school projects?

State aid cities and counties can provide expertise and resources that townships, small cities, and schools may not have. State aid cities and counties generally have more experience procuring engineering and design contracts and executing and administering construction contracts. In addition, counties have extensive experience working with MnDOT's district and central office state aid staff and are familiar with processes. State Aid cities and counties may also have experience applying for, securing, and administering grant funds. Finally, state aid cities and counties have existing mechanisms in place that allows state aid to issue project related payments. These mechanisms do not exist for townships, small cities, and schools.

It is typical that state aid cities or counties require townships and small cities to hire an engineering consultant to prepare plans and specifications, coordinate with state aid, and provide construction administration and inspection services. This is allowable as long as the consultant has experience working with state aid and developing state aid plans.

From the state's perspective, state aid city or county sponsorship helps mitigate the risk of bond funds expiring before the project is constructed or being used improperly.

5. \$7.5 million is available in SRTS funds. How much will go to schools, townships, small cities, state aid cities, counties, and federally recognized tribes, and when can I receive the funds?

MnDOT intends to award SRTS grants to schools, townships, small cities, state aid cities, counties, and federally recognized tribes throughout the state. MnDOT will attempt to award grants with an eye towards geographic equity and agency equity. Final awards by MnDOT district and by agency type will depend on number and quality of applications received.

SRTS funds are paid on a reimbursable basis and require execution of a SRTS grant agreement before funds can be accessed. Following execution of the SRTS grant agreement, the grantee will incur construction expenses, pay the contractor, and then submit a state aid pay request to seek reimbursement. School, township, and small city grantees will need to work with their county engineer to submit the state aid pay request on their behalf.

6. If my agency is awarded SRTS funds, what other costs might my agency be responsible for?

Items that are eligible for SRTS funds include reasonable elements associated with roadway construction, including basic landscaping and turf establishment. Eligible items generally include:

- Pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements: pedestrian curb ramps, intersections or midblock crossings, median refuges, raised crossings, raised intersections, speed humps and curb extensions.
- Off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities: exclusive multi-use bicycle and pedestrian trails, sidewalks, and pathways that are separated from a roadway.
- On-road facilities: bicycle lanes, bicycle boulevards and cycle tracks
- Traffic control devices: signs, bicycle and pedestrian activated signals, flexible bollards, and pavement markings *Note: Electronic devices must be permanent - **not** mobile.*

Landscaping planters, benches, bike racks, decorative fences, ornamental lighting, and other aesthetic treatments above the standard are generally not eligible. Other items that are not eligible include engineering, construction administration and inspection, right-of-way acquisition, water main, sanitary sewer, and private utility work. Additionally, work on trunk highways, on trunk highway right-of-way, or on private right-of-way is not eligible.

Any items that are not eligible for SRTS funds will be the responsibility of the grantee.

7. Can SRTS bond funds be used on private school property or on private roadways?

No. SRTS funds can only be used on publicly owned and maintained roads. SRTS funds cannot be used on private driveways, private parking lots, or other infrastructure improvements located on privately owned right-of-way unless the local agency can demonstrate an ownership over that right-of-way for no less than 125% of the useful life of the improvement. In addition, the right-of-way that contains bond funded improvements will become “state bond financed property,” as defined in [Minnesota Statute 16A.695](#).

Note grant awardees from tribes and private schools will not be subject to the bonding requirements, including those that restrict use of funds on private property. All other awardees should assume bonding requirements will apply.

8. Is there an expiration date for the SRTS bond funds?

Yes. It is expected that the SRTS funds will expire between December 31, 2024 and June 30, 2025. Accordingly, the SRTS solicitation guide states that projects should be ready for construction in 2022 or 2023. This creates some float in the schedule in case there are unforeseen delays.

9. How can tribal, school, township, or small city projects compete against larger city or county applications?

MnDOT intends to award SRTS grants to schools, townships, small cities, state aid cities, counties, and federally recognized tribes. In determining SRTS grant awards, MnDOT will consider geographic equity and also equity across the various agency types, including utilizing the [Student Transportation Equity for Priority Populations \(STEPP\) Tool](#). Accordingly, projects will be compared against other projects based on the pools of applicants below:

- MN Cities of the First Class (Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Rochester, & Duluth)
- Metro District Communities (excluding Minneapolis & Saint Paul)
- Greater MN State Aid Cities (excluding Duluth & Rochester)
- Greater MN non-State Aid Cities & Townships
- Federally Recognized Tribes

10. Does MnDOT have a template resolution of support for the submitting agency?

Resolutions are not required from tribal applicants. For all other applicants, we do not have a standard template. However, local agencies can consider the following in creating a customized resolution.

Include WHEREAS statements that describe some or all of the following:

- \$8 million in SRTS funding is available, with a minimum of \$50,000 and cap of \$500,000 for each project
- The township, city, or county has adopted subdivision regulations that require Safe Routes to School infrastructure in developments authorized on or after June 1, 2016
- Acknowledgement that SRTS funds can be used to reimburse construction costs on SRTS eligible items, and that construction costs above the SRTS award will need to have alternate funding sources
- The school(s) or school district name, project limits, and student safety hazards to walking or biking

- How the project will address the safety hazards
- Pedestrian counts, safety history and statistics, number of students living within 1 mile of the school(s) (if available)
- Previous SRTS plan or other planning documents that identify the project
- Which parties and number of students and other users that will benefit from the project
- Whether the project will benefit students, pedestrians, and cyclists across multiple agencies
- The construction cost estimate and planned year of construction
- Whether and which type of other funding sources have been secured
- For schools, small cities, townships, and federally recognized tribes, discuss coordination efforts with the county
- Any other information that the local agency deems relevant

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The town board, city council, county board, or school board supports the construction of the project and agrees to maintain such improvements
2. The town board, city council, county board, or school board supports submittal of the SRTS application
3. The township, city, county, or school board assures that the township, city, county, or school will pay all costs associated with the project beyond the SRTS grant award
4. In the case of schools, small cities, and townships, that the town board, city council, or school board seeks the support by resolution of the state aid city or county to act as project sponsor for the project should the school, small city, or township be awarded SRTS funds, and that such sponsorship shall include the following responsibilities:
 - Be the fiscal agent on behalf of the community and have funds flow from MnDOT to the state aid city or county to the contractor
 - Request SAP/SP number for the project
 - Ensure the project meets milestones and dates
 - Assist local agency in execution of a grant agreement
 - Develop, review and/or approve the plan
 - Submit plan, engineers estimate, and proposal to the DSAE
 - Advertise, let, and award the project
 - Submit pay requests to State Aid
 - Communicate progress and updates with the DSAEs and State Aid Programs Engineer
 - Ensure that the project receives adequate supervision and inspection
 - Assist with project close out

11. Does MnDOT have a template resolution of support for the sponsoring state aid city or county?

We do not have a standard template. However, local agencies can consider the following in creating a customized resolution agreeing to act as project sponsor.

Include WHEREAS statements that describe some or all of the following:

- \$8 million in SRTS funding is available, with a minimum of \$50,000 and cap of \$500,000 for each project
- Non-state aid cities, townships, and schools must have a state aid city or county sponsor
- City, township, or school has requested sponsorship for this project by Resolution XX-XX
- The school(s) or school district name, project limits, and the small city or township that is responsible
- Discuss coordination efforts with the school, city, or township
- The city, township, or school understands that it will be responsible for all costs not covered by SRTS including but not limited to consultant engineering, right-of-way acquisition, construction administration and inspection, utility construction, as well as construction costs above the SRTS award
- The city, township, or school has agreed to maintain such improvements for the lifetime of the improvements.
- Any other information that the state aid city or county deems relevant

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The city or county agrees to act as project sponsor for the project should the school, small city, or township be awarded SRTS funds, and that such sponsorship shall include the following responsibilities:
 - Be the fiscal agent on behalf of the community and have funds flow from MnDOT to the city or county to the contractor
 - Request SAP/SP number for the project
 - Ensure the project meets milestones and dates
 - Assist local agency in execution of a grant agreement
 - Develop, review and/or approve the plan
 - Submit plan, engineers estimate, and proposal to the DSAE
 - Advertise, let, and award the project
 - Submit pay requests to State Aid
 - Communicate progress and updates with the DSAEs and State Aid Programs Engineer
 - Ensure that the project receives adequate supervision and inspection
 - Assist with project close out

12. I have a project schedule for 2022 construction. Can I begin construction before the awards are announced and be reimbursed after being awarded?

No. The project cannot begin construction until a grant is executed between MnDOT and the applicant agency. Applicants whose projects are selected will first receive an award letter. Following that, the applicant agency must receive a funding letter from the MnDOT State Aid for Local Transportation (SALT) Programs Manager or Active Transportation Engineer. Finally, after the applicant agency receives and awards a bid to a contractor, then the grant may be executed. More instructions will be provided to awardees.

13. When will awards be announced?

Projects awards will be announced by March 4, 2022.

14. Can agency staff construct the project, and if so, can SRTS funds be used to pay for staff time?

No. The project must be advertised and awarded to a contractor, consistent with [Minnesota Statute 471.345](#) Subdivision 3. This applies to all SRTS funded projects, even if the total contract amount is less than \$175,000.

And no, SRTS funds cannot be used for agency staff costs.

15. How will projects be scored and compared against each other?

In scoring the applications, we will consider all of those elements identified on the application, some of which include:

- A full description of the project and the safety concerns which it addresses. This includes identifying the safety concerns, explaining the intended use(s) of the project improvements, and recognizing policies that the school(s) or school district set related to students walking or biking to school.
- Previous SRTS work accomplished, including the development of a SRTS plan and implementation of the [6E Strategies](#) in the school(s).
- The Student Transportation Equity for Priority Populations (STEPP) Tool, which assigns an overall score to each public school and district in the state. Private and charter schools will be scored by using the overall average STEPP score for the district in which the school is located. More information on STEPP scores can be found [here](#).
- Project readiness. Due to the expiration of the bond funds, we want to fund projects that have a high degree of certainty of being constructed in 2022, or 2023, with little controversy or potential for the project to be delayed or abandoned.

16. Do I need to hire a consultant to develop the SRTS application?

No. While many engineering consultants do provide this as a service, applicants are not required to hire an engineering consultant to develop the SRTS application.

However, we do require that the cost estimate submitted in the application is based in planning and engineering principles. Having a good, accurate cost estimate is in everybody’s best interest. For applicants that are selected for SRTS funding, if the engineering plans and specifications later show that costs are above the amount identified for a grant, the grantee will be responsible for paying all costs above the SRTS grant award.

17. What roles are required of state aid cities or counties that are sponsoring township, small city, and school applications?

The solicitation guide states that the sponsor’s tasks include, but are not necessarily limited to the following items:

- Be the fiscal agent on behalf of the community and have funds flow from MnDOT to the state aid city or county to the contractor
- Request SAP/SP number for the project
- Ensure the project meets milestones and dates
- Assist local agency in execution of a grant agreement
- Develop, review and/or approve the plan
- Submit plan, engineers estimate, and proposal to the DSAE
- Advertise, let, and award the project
- Submit pay requests to State Aid
- Communicate progress and updates with the DSAEs and State Aid Programs Engineer
- Ensure that the project receives adequate supervision and inspection
- Assist with project close out

However, there is no expectation that the state aid city or county would design, inspect, and construct the project with in-house staff or hire and pay a consultant with state aid city or county funds. In many cases, state aid cities or counties require that schools, small cities, and townships hire a consulting engineer to provide these services. MnDOT State Aid for Local Transportation is open to this type of arrangement as long as the selected consultant has experience working with State Aid, developing State Aid plans, and administering and inspecting construction projects. Applicants are advised to use State Aid experience as a prerequisite in their request for proposals (RFP). In this case, the state aid city or county would assist the school, small city, or township with development of the RFP and selection a qualified consultant. We would also ask that the county act as a technical resource for the consultant and review the plans before they are submitted to the district state aid engineer.

Since many townships, small cities, and schools have very limited experience advertising, letting, and administering construction contracts, State Aid requires that the state aid city or county hold the construction contract. If the township, small city, or school hires a qualified consultant as described above, the consultant can provide inspection and much of the day-to-day construction administration.

In all cases, the state aid city or county will be required to request the State Aid Project (SAP) number and submit State Aid pay requests during construction. It is acceptable for the consultant to develop draft pay requests for the state aid city or county’s review and submittal.

18. To whom should letters of support be addressed?

Letters of support should be addressed to the applicant. The applicant will attach letters of support to the SRTS application.

19. One of the applicant eligibility items is to have adopted subdivision regulations requiring sidewalks. What does this mean?

One of the requirements listed in [Minnesota Statute 174.40 subd. 4a](#) is that all new developments are required to be constructed with safe routes to school infrastructure. This means that applicants must have a local requirement or ordinance that mandates the construction of accessible sidewalks or bicycle infrastructure with the construction of new developments or large subdivisions.

MnDOT does not dictate the language of local ordinances and does not have strict requirements or trigger language on when, where, or how accessible sidewalks are implemented (e.g. large-scale developments vs cul-de-sacs or single-family lot division). Applicants are eligible for the SRTS infrastructure program if they can prove they have adopted requirements to construct accessible sidewalks or bicycle infrastructure in some capacity with new developments or subdivisions, regardless if the specifics of these requirements are defined in local ordinances or at the discretion of the local governing board or council.

Note that this requirement does not apply to tribal applicants. Additionally, this requirement also does not apply to school or school district applicants whose projects will be constructed entirely on school property. If any improvements take place on any county or city roadway or right-of-way, then the city or county must have adopted these subdivision regulations.

20. I didn't submit a letter of intent. Can I still apply for grant funds?

Yes, any eligible applicant may still apply without having submitted a letter of intent. The letter intent period created an opportunity for MnDOT staff to provide feedback and recommendations to applicants regarding project feasibility and constructability. This also helps us ensure eligible projects would be able to enter construction in the 2022 or 2023 seasons.

For applicants who did not submit a letter of intent, but would still like to submit a full application, be sure to include information in your responses on previous agency coordination (school, township, & county, etc. coordination) and previous work completed on the project up to now.