INVEST
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Solicitation for INVEST Implementation Projects – Round 2

January 10, 2014

Summary

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) announces a research funding opportunity for State departments of transportation (DOTs), metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and Federal lands to apply FHWA's sustainability self-assessment tool, INVEST 1.0, and gather lessons learned. These applied research projects will benefit the recipients by providing funding to offset the costs of sustainability analyses to improve their economic, social, and environmental triple bottom line. At the same time, the applied research will benefit FHWA and its stakeholders nationally by producing lessons learned from applications of INVEST, examples of sustainability improvements stemming from INVEST assessment, case studies, and suggestions for continuous improvement of the INVEST tool.

This is the second call for projects. An earlier one was issued in January 2013 and funding decisions were announced in Spring 2013. In this second call for projects, FHWA would like to focus on applications of the INVEST Operations and Maintenance module by State DOTs, as this project type was under-represented in the first round. Other types of projects are also eligible if they are likely to demonstrate significant sustainability improvements as a result of using the INVEST tool. The **deadline** for submitting letters of interest to the Division offices is **February 28**, 2014.

Background

INVEST (Infrastructure Voluntary Evaluation Sustainability Tool) is a practical, web-based, collection of voluntary best practices and criteria designed to help transportation agencies integrate sustainable practices into their projects, plans, and programs. A product of FHWA's planning and environmental research program, INVEST helps transportation agencies improve investment decisions while considering limited resources by addressing the sustainability triple bottom line -- enhancing economic, social, and environmental outcomes.

By offering transportation agencies a collection of best practices, INVEST serves two purposes. First, it enables transportation agencies to gauge their performance in adopting sustainability practices. Second, and more importantly, it helps agencies identify workable solutions that allow them to further incorporate sustainability into pending planning or project decisions, or to identify potential changes to business processes. Many of the best practices presented by INVEST save money as well as improve sustainability. For example, items such as quality construction, designing pavement for long life, life cycle concepts, recycled materials, and improved safety can all show overall lower cost as well as benefits to society.

INVEST 1.0 is the result of a collaborative, multi-phased effort. FHWA developed the contents with input from and in cooperation with State and local transportation agency officials and professional organizations such as AASHTO, AMPO and ASCE. The tool was piloted across the country in 2011 and improved to reflect lessons learned. FHWA formally launched INVEST 1.0 in October 2012.

FHWA is now partnering with agencies across the country to utilize INVEST 1.0 as part of their efforts to improve the sustainability of their programs and projects. FHWA funded a number of INVEST implementation applied research projects with a first round of funding announced in Spring 2013. In addition, many agencies are using INVEST without funding assistance from FHWA as the tool is free and easy to use. To see a list of agencies currently using the tool, please see: http://www.sustainablehighways.dot.gov/invest/sites.aspx. Please note that this list is not complete as it only includes agencies that informed FHWA that they are using INVEST. FHWA is announcing availability of a second round of funding with this current solicitation, with funding decisions to be announced in Spring 2014.

Eligible Activities

State DOTs, MPOs, and Federal Lands may take a variety of approaches. Eligible approaches include:

- Utilizing INVEST to review operations and maintenance programs at the district or statewide level.
- Utilizing INVEST to assess and improve the sustainability of specific transportation projects under development, or learn from projects already completed.
- Utilizing INVEST to assess and improve the sustainability of a set of transportation projects.
- Utilizing INVEST to conduct a programmatic evaluation of agency planning and/or construction practices and opportunities for sustainability improvements.
- Utilizing INVEST to inform the update of the MPO's long range transportation plan.
- Utilizing INVEST to improve the statewide transportation planning process.

FHWA intends to primarily fund projects that fall under the first bullet, applying the INVEST Operations and Maintenance module, as this type of project was under-represented in the first round.

The intent of this FHWA research funding opportunity is to develop case studies and analysis showing sustainability improvements that transportation agencies can make through self-evaluation with INVEST and subsequent exploration of promising sustainability practices. As such, funding may be used for staff or consultant time to use the tool, to conduct additional analyses of sustainability practices, to develop cases studies and reports on lessons learned, to identify changes that can be made to projects or processes, to develop cost estimates for improved practices, to estimate benefits of improved practices, and to develop and evaluate action plans to implement these changes.

Assessing the sustainability of current action is only the first step of the process. Making changes to improve sustainability is the desired result. As such, FHWA is interested in applied research projects that utilize INVEST to assess the sustainability of current practice, identify opportunities for improvement, implement improvements, and document case studies and results of analyses. Projects

should also quantify as best as possible costs and cost savings as well as benefits to environmental, economic, and social outcomes.

Transportation agencies receiving funding will benefit from this opportunity through additional resources for assessing current levels of sustainability and analyzing options for sustainability improvements. FHWA and stakeholders nationally will benefit from this opportunity as it will establish a broader collection of case studies of evaluating and improving the sustainability of transportation projects and programs and produce feedback for further enhancement of the INVEST tool.

Final Product

Each INVEST implementation applied research project should result in a final report that details the work performed, parties involved, issues encountered, lessons learned, sustainability improvements identified, sustainability improvements implemented, analyses of costs and benefits of implementing particular sustainability best practices, recommendations for future action, and recommendations on improving INVEST and adding to the state of the practice. The final report must also include a two page summary case study. The final report should be in a form that is sharable with other agencies, and may be posted to the FHWA website.

Funding

Funding levels for applied research projects may vary depending on the depth and extent of analysis proposed as well as the potential benefit to FHWA and the recipient. FHWA anticipates making approximately four to six awards. For illustrative purposes, in the previous round, federal funding for most of the eleven projects funded ranged from $14,000 to $50,000, with the highest funded project receiving $150,000. By Federal statute, a 100% non-Federal match (50-50 cost share) is required. In-kind contributions such as staffing can be counted towards the match requirement.

Process

Agencies interested in the funding opportunity are asked to submit a four to five page letter of interest to the respective FHWA division office. Division offices will review and send letters forward to headquarters. Applicants that applied unsuccessfully in the earlier round must reapply if they would like to be considered in this current round.

Projects will be selected based on the following criteria:

- Workable plan for conducting an evaluation with INVEST, analyzing additional sustainability strategies identified as a result of the INVEST evaluation, and documenting a case study.
- Impact on decision-making. Evidence that the results of the INVEST evaluation will lead to implementation of sustainability best practices, such as evidence that results will influence pending planning or project decisions.
- Potential of project to serve as a national case study of the benefits of using INVEST.
- Willingness and plans to provide case studies and lessons learned to share with others as well as providing feedback to improve INVEST 1.0.

- Demonstrated interest and support. For instance, support from senior management, past work in this area, support from local elected officials, public support, etc.
- Availability of local match and necessary staffing and resources.
- Project adds to the diversity of the set of INVEST projects underway nationally. Applications of the INVEST Operations and Maintenance module are currently under-represented, and as such, FHWA is particularly interested in this type of application.

After selection, the recipient will participate in a conference call with FHWA to discuss the project. FHWA will provide feedback on the draft work plan, the goals of the project and any additional assistance/resources that FHWA may have available. A revised work plan should be submitted and approved by FHWA before commencing work.

Submitting a letter of interest is not a guarantee of funding.

Timeline

The deadline for submitting letters of interest to the Division offices is February 28, 2014. Division offices will forward letters of interest to headquarters by March 7, 2014. Funding decisions will be announced in April. Projects must be completed by April 2015 unless a reason for a longer timeline is justified in the letter of interest. Earlier conclusion dates are encouraged.

Required Contents for Letters of Interest

The letter of interest must be no longer than five pages and must include the following elements:

- Description of agency interest in using INVEST, goals for sustainability, and management support for the effort.
- Description of the proposed effort. This section should include the purpose and a detailed description of the effort to be funded. It should explain plans to conduct the INVEST evaluation and use the results. It should also include the phases of work, budget, work products, and timing. If contractor assistance is planned to support the effort, that support and estimated level of effort should be included.
- Impact on decision-making. This section should describe how the results of the INVEST evaluation will lead to implementation of sustainability best practices.
- Collaboration. This section should describe plans to provide case studies, lessons learned, and feedback for improving the tool. It should also describe the potential of the project to serve as a national case study of the benefits of using INVEST.
- Description of dedicated staffing/resources. This section should fully describe the funding and assets that will be dedicated to the project, and demonstrate how the non-Federal match requirement will be met.

Contacts

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Resources

Please visit https://www.sustainablehighways.org/ to learn more about INVEST 1.0, watch a recording of the launch, browse the criteria, and view videos and case studies of State DOTs and MPOs that have used INVEST.

Please visit http://www.sustainablehighways.dot.gov/ to learn about FHWA's Sustainable Highways Initiative, hear news of FHWA sustainability activities, and view sustainability-related publications and resources.