

# U.S. DOT Federal Grants Application Toolkit

## PPM Project

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### Biographies



Sadé Chick is the director of corporate affairs for the Port of Beaumont, where she has worked since 2016. In this capacity, she oversees state and federal legislative affairs, workforce development, community outreach, and grant writing efforts.

During her time at the Port of Beaumont, Chick’s efforts have resulted in more than \$80 million in state and federal grant funding, including an \$18 million BUILD grant, \$26.4 million PIDP grant, \$22.3 million Texas Maritime Infrastructure Program grant, \$5 million EDA grant, and \$9.7 million in Texas Seaport Connectivity Program funding. Prior to working at the Port of Beaumont, Chick served as the Vice President of Economic Development for the Southeast Texas Economic Development Foundation, where she spearheaded efforts associated with the Regional Economic Development Initiative (REDI).

Chick is a designated Maritime Port Executive, a graduate of Leadership Beaumont and Leadership Southeast Texas, and is currently enrolled in the American Association of Port Authorities Professional Port Manager Program. She was named the Southeast Texas Young Professional of the Year in 2020 and was honored as a Pioneering Woman in 2021. She proudly calls Beaumont, Texas home.

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Shannon McLeod oversees AAPA’s member services, including professional and workforce development, education, research and data initiatives.

She was previously a maritime consultant for more than 20 years. In that role, she provided project management and technical direction on maritime and intermodal planning and supply chain initiatives that benefited public agencies, ports, freight railroads, and other private clients. She developed federal grant proposals, communication materials, business case reports and consultation programs used for client promotion, market and trend analyses, public-private partnership opportunities, training and government approvals.



She is the lead developer and a primary author of the Port Planning and Investment Toolkit sponsored by AAPA and the US Maritime Administration.

She has a master’s degree in maritime, ports and logistics management from Old Dominion University. Shannon is the chair of the Ports and Channels Committee of the Transportation Research Board, a designated Maritime Port Executive, and an AAPA Port Professional Manager Program candidate.

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Lindsay Young is an experienced strategic planning and marketing professional and effective project analyst and manager. She excels at synthesizing complex and technical data as well as differing viewpoints to move projects, including market analyses, white papers and grant applications, to successful conclusions. Lindsay's past professional experience has demonstrated a proven ability to bring multi-faceted, collaborative projects from initial concept through development to completion on schedule.

Lindsay joined the PhilaPort team in December 2017 as a project analyst. She brings years of past professional experience in strategic planning and marketing as well as project analysis and management in the hospitality and maritime transportation industries. In her current role as Manager of Business Development and Planning, she has authored position papers on topics related to PhilaPort's improved competitive positioning and provides planning, project management, development and execution for a variety of transportation and port projects. Most recently, Ms. Young has provided leadership and management for PhilaPort's Strategic Plan: Destination 2040.

Lindsay has an M.B.A. from Drexel University Lebow College of Business with a focus in marketing and finance as well as a B.A. in International Studies from The Ohio State University. She is a member of the advisory boards of the Traffic Club of Philadelphia as well as the Young Friends of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Ballet. She volunteers at the Free Library of Philadelphia and is actively involved with the Chamber of Commerce Young Professionals Council. She is a designated Maritime Port Executive, a member of the Transportation Research Board's Ports & Channels Committee and an American Association of Port Authorities PPM Candidate.

## Introduction

U.S. ports have the opportunity to receive the highest amount of federal funding in history as a result of the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)*. Over the next five years, the BIL will invest more than \$17 billion in port and waterway projects. Most port funding is available through three U.S. DOT competitive grant programs:

- Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP), which is administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) Maritime Administration (MARAD) and totals a minimum of \$2.46 billion exclusively for ports.
- Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant Program, which is administered by the U.S. DOT Office of the Secretary and totals \$12.5 billion for which ports are eligible.
- Infrastructure For Rebuilding America (INFRA), which is administered by the U.S. DOT Office of the Secretary and totals \$3.2 billion for which ports are eligible. This program is a funding opportunity that is part of the broader Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG).

To be selected by the Secretary of the U.S. DOT to receive a portion of this funding, a port must submit a grant application that includes a 30-page Project Narrative (PIDP) or separate Project Description, Project Budget, Merit Criteria, and Project Readiness files (RAISE), as well as Project Requirements (INFRA) information.

A port's grant application must address specific criteria that are described in the related U.S. DOT Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). The NOFOs for the grant programs listed above range from 70 to 95 pages and contain detailed language that describes the eligibility requirements, grant application content, merit criteria, application review process, and other submission details.

The specific conditions listed in these NOFOs can be unclear, overwhelming, and time-consuming to understand and address in a grant application, particularly for small- to medium-sized ports with limited staff.

Most ports that can afford it, hire consultants to help them identify highly competitive projects and to prepare their grant applications. Ports with fewer monetary resources must complete a grant application using their own staff or not submit for federal funding at all.

This process can skew the grant awards towards larger or more well-off ports, while those ports that may need the funding the most may be overlooked or precluded from the competitive process.

An obvious solution to this situation is to provide grant application templates so that any port wishing to compete for a U.S. DOT grant could apply using guiding documents. Unfortunately, the U.S. DOT is not able to offer grant

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*“In the past, the Sabine Pass Port Authority has not applied for federal grants because the team didn’t know where to start and didn’t have the on-staff resources to generate an application of any kind. The NOFO is daunting for a smaller port with limited resources. Any help with some type of resource would be most appreciated to allow smaller ports to apply for these grants.”*

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Mark Viator, Port Director,  
Sabine Pass Port Authority

templates since the use of any unapproved form (including a template) violates the Paperwork Reduction Act. This presents an opportunity for a non-government group or entity to provide grant application templates to assist the port community.

## Objectives


The primary objective of this PPM project is to provide ports that have limited experience or resources in applying for a U.S. DOT grant with templates, supporting resources, and examples that will help them effectively prepare and complete a grant application package. The core of the project is the development of Microsoft Word templates (PIDP, RAISE, and INFRA) that will include sections based on each NOFO to assist ports in addressing the specific criteria, a User Guide, examples of successful grant applications, and boilerplate letters of support, letters of commitment, and letters of intent to Build America, Buy America Act (BABAA).




A secondary objective of the project is for these foundational grant templates to become living documents that can be customized, adapted, and revised as needed by the American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA), as well as other PPM candidates to address changes in the respective NOFOs in future years. This Toolkit will be housed on the AAPA website. AAPA will update the templates each year based on modified NOFO requirements, user feedback, and other state/federal agency insights into areas that require improvement or changes. Future iterations, including any updates made to reflect changes in each respective NOFO, will be available to AAPA members only. If significant changes are made to the grant programs' requirements, new foundational grant templates may be a future PPM Capstone project.

## Approach/Methodology

The following documents were prepared as part of the project:

- Microsoft Word templates for each of the three U.S. DOT grant programs, PIDP, RAISE, and INFRA, that include sections based on each NOFO to help ports address the specific criteria.
- A User Guide that describes how to complete the templates and offers guidance on how to address specific grant criteria.

The Project Team developed the templates based on the requirements outlined in the 2023 NOFOs for the respective U.S DOT grant. In specific locations in the templates where more guidance is needed, a User Guide symbol  is included to remind users to reference the guide for further information.

Since it is common practice for ports to submit a single project for multiple U.S. DOT grants to have the highest possible chance of receiving funding, the User Guide addresses all three grant programs in one document. The User Guide discusses options for answering criterion that is common to the three grant programs, as well as any criteria that are unique to a single grant program. To clearly illustrate the differences in the programs, icons for each grant were added to the User Guide: **PIDP** , **RAISE**  and **INFRA** 

The templates focus on helping ports address the requirements that must be included in the grant applications, except for the Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) narrative and worksheet.

A BCA is a systematic process for identifying, quantifying, and comparing the expected benefits and costs of a port project. While the BCA is a critical component of many grant applications, this Toolkit does not include a template for this portion of the application because:

- the U.S. DOT regularly updates its [BCA Guidance for Discretionary Grant Programs](#), which can consist of changes in methodologies, data sources, and reporting standards;
- very specific information is typically needed from each port and for each project being evaluated as part of the BCA;
- certain grant applications for small projects at small ports do not require a BCA; and
- project team resources were focused on effectively providing a high-quality U.S. DOT Grants Application Template Toolkit.

If a port is unfamiliar with these requirements and must provide a BCA as part of its grant application, the Project Team encourages applicants to consult with BCA specialists for guidance relating to the compilation of the BCA narrative and worksheet.

## Resources

The project team used our collective past experience preparing grant applications for the U.S. DOT and institutional knowledge to successfully complete the project. We continually referred to the following fundamental documents and resources to complete the project:

- PIDP, RAISE, and INFRA Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs) for 2023
- Federal Register Documents
- PIDP, RAISE, and INFRA U.S. DOT websites
- Grants.Gov website - grant application forms
- Past U.S. DOT Grant Applications completed by ports
- AAPA's Port Planning and Investment Toolkit

In addition, the project team referenced various online resources as listed in the “Additional Resources table” at the end of the User Guide.

## Body/Content/Activity

The Project Team strived to minimize the page length of the templates and supporting documents and provide short, bulletized instructions/explanations as much as possible. This was meant to assist port staff who do not have time to read and decipher lengthy documents.

The 2023 PIDP NOFO only required one template file to address the various criteria under “Project Narrative”. The RAISE and INFRA NOFO required that the files be separated so that the grant applications could be reviewed based on a first- and second-tier analysis. The Toolkit includes the following content, which aligns with the respective NOFOs:

### **PIDP Project Narrative**

- Project Description
- Project Location
- Grant Funds, Sources and Uses of Funds
- Merit Criteria
- Selection Considerations
- Project Readiness

- Domestic Preference
- Determinations

#### **RAISE (separate files)**

- Project Description
- Project Budget
- Merit Criteria Narrative
- Project Readiness

#### **INFRA (separate files)**

- Project Description
- Project Budget
- Merit Criteria Narrative
- Project Readiness
- Project Requirements

#### **USER GUIDE**

- 3 Grants – 1 Guide Step-by-Step Instructions
- Project Eligibility Table
- Commitment Letter Template
- Letters of Support Template
- Letter of Intent to Buy American Template
- Successful Grant Applications Examples (3 PIDP, 2 RAISE, 2 INFRA)
- Additional Resources Table

*The Project Eligibility Table, Letter Templates, and Grant Application Examples are embedded in the User Guide and will also be provided as separate files on AAPA's website.*

The following language will be included on the website where the Toolkit can be downloaded.

*NOTE: It is still imperative that all applicants carefully review and adhere to requirements in the PIDP, RAISE, and INFRA NOFO documents in their entirety and adhere to their provisions. The use of any application template or form provided by the Project Team or AAPA is intended for convenience purposes only and should not be relied upon as a substitute for understanding and complying with the NOFO.*

*Applicants are advised that their eligibility for funding, the evaluation of their application, and any subsequent grant award will be determined in accordance with the criteria and requirements set forth in the NOFO.*

*It is the responsibility of the applicant to keep abreast of any amendments, updates, or clarifications to the NOFO that may be issued by the U.S. DOT. The Project Team or AAPA shall not be held liable for any misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the NOFO's requirements, irrespective of the use of any application templates or forms provided.*

*By using these templates, the applicant acknowledges that they have read, understood, and agree to comply with the terms and conditions of the NOFO as the governing document for their grant application.*

## **Audience Identification**

The U.S. has more than 300 ports that are eligible to apply for grants through U.S. DOT discretionary grant programs including PIDP, INFRA, and RAISE. While funding is at an all-time high, applications from eligible small- and medium-sized ports are lagging. Based on PIDP 2022, RAISE 2022, and INFRA 2022 application data, 149 U.S. ports submitted applications for these grant programs. Using 300 as the (conservative) number of port entities eligible to apply, 49.6 percent of U.S. port entities apply for one or all programs, and 51.4 percent do not apply. Conversations with several small U.S. ports revealed the primary reason many ports are not taking advantage of the programs is the lack of resources needed to complete the application(s). Small ports do not have the funds to contract a grant writer and seldom have the staff resources needed to complete the application(s) in-house.

Thus, the audience for this project is not only the small- to medium-sized ports that plan to complete a grant application to obtain federal funding for a qualified project but also the 51.4 percent of ports that have never applied for a grant due to lack of knowledge and resources. In addition, the use of standard templates will streamline the application review process, making the U.S. DOT and MARAD beneficiaries of the project as well.

## **Implications for Practice**

The toolkit provides the basic framework needed to complete U.S. DOT grant applications, based on each respective NOFO. It sets expectations in an easy-to-follow way that allows grant writers to learn what is expected from the U.S. DOT and MARAD and build upon those skills with each successive application. The templates not only assist small- and medium-sized ports with decoding the world of federal grants, but they also serve as a resource to the U.S. DOT and MARAD. The project reduces the amount of post-application outreach these representatives have to do as a result of incomplete submissions, which conserves the limited staff resources they have.

This toolkit also has the potential to expedite the grant agreement process, which has been known to take up to two years. The template provides applicants with the tools needed to ensure much of the information required in the Grant Agreement is addressed in the application, including the risk assessment, NEPA, budget, project schedule, BABAA compliance, and other subjects. By proactively addressing these items, it is possible to shave months off the Grant Agreement process.

This U.S. DOT Grant Template Project is expected to reduce barriers for small- to medium-sized U.S. ports interested in applying for U.S. DOT grants, allowing federal dollars to flow more equitably to and through our nation's seaports. It is the team's hope that this project will inspire other federal agencies to streamline the grant application process to ensure it is fair and accessible to all eligible applicants.

## **Reflections on Learning**

The Project Team has learned many valuable skills and lessons in the completion of this PPM Capstone project, including how to use Microsoft Developer; an appreciation for consistent NOFO standards/language; the benefits of teamwork, differing perspectives, and individual strengths; and the reward of working for the benefit of others.

The process of designing templates in Microsoft Developer and the research required to become familiar with the program was an undertaking. The Project Team learned how to provide the user

interface elements, including drop-down lists, check boxes, and forms to make the templates intuitive to navigate and completed thorough testing to identify errors or inconsistencies.

Each of the Project Team members has played a key role in the submission of these grants in our current and/or previous jobs and clearly understands the existing challenges inherent in this process. And still - with this knowledge - a key lesson learned was that the NOFOs and grant programs are far more cumbersome and involved than the team expected. Comparing each NOFO and familiarizing each member with the information therein required a great deal of effort and attention to detail. While the programs are similar, hundreds of slight differences exist that the Project Team worked to reflect in each template and the User Guide. During this process, we realized that while the U.S. DOT continually strives to make the NOFOs more manageable, there is an obvious lack of collaboration between agencies and/or within departments of the same agency that results in inconsistencies in language and errors that continue to confuse the applicants.

Working together on this PPM Capstone gave us respect for different perspectives and expertise, an understanding of the strengths of each team member, and a deeper friendship. We learned... that we can still learn, perfectionism involves balance, communication is key, chickens that leave the coop don't always die, and buying yourself flowers is funnier than you ever expected.

Most importantly, the Project Team recognized the vital need within the industry to complete this project and we are truly excited to offer this resource to help the ports that need it most. This Toolkit encompasses more than 100 pages of work, more than 70 hours of work per team member to complete the documents, and more than 40 hours of meetings to coordinate and discuss the specific requirements of each grant application, ensuring that the templates align with each of the U.S. DOT grant's criteria. Additional research was required for the development and collection of supplementary resources, including boilerplate letters of support, letters of commitment, letters of intent, and examples of successful grant applications.

The Project Team also realized that there is so much more work that can be done in this area. This Toolkit presents a great opportunity for future PPM candidates to supplement, update, and expand on the materials. Areas that future PPM candidates could explore include developing:

- **Other Port-Relevant Grant Templates:** Development of other templates for which ports regularly apply, including:
  - MEGA, part of Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Opportunity (MPDG)
  - Rural Surface Transportation Grant (Rural) Program
  - U.S. Marine Highways Program
  - Port Security Grant Program
  - Reduction of Truck Emissions at Port Facilities (RTEPF) Grant Program
  - Diesel Emission Reduction Act (DERA) National Grants
  - Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Grant Program
  - Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (CFI) Discretionary Grant Program
  - Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program
  - EDA Grants, such as Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs
  - Other EPA Grants, such as Clean Ports Program (once released)
  - NOAA Coastal Resilience Grants



- **ESJ Plans:** Areas of environmental justice and equity have become more of a focus with this Administration and sections such as Equity40 are now important selection considerations in each of the grants. The exploration and development of ESJ plans would be a great PPM candidate project that could supplement or add to the Toolkit.
- **Grant Attachments:** Optional attachments for grant programs like INFRA including Community Benefits Plan, Climate Action Plan and Title VI plans would benefit from having an easy-to-follow template and accompanying guide to facilitate their development at ports.
- **BCA Documents:** Development of a BCA narrative template and sample BCA spreadsheet, including factors to consider and how to quantify benefits and disbenefits, would be very helpful to ports, if the documents could be general enough to be used by most applicants but detailed enough to offer value.
- **Grant Financial Planning Paper:** Many ports need direction on determining which projects would be the best candidates for a grant versus being part of the port's own capital improvement program. A PPM candidate paper could offer guidance on this topic taking into consideration specific merit criteria (e.g., terminal pavement typically has less environmental advantages than electrical conversions), benefits and costs that result in the highest BCR, and the potential for private investment.

## Conclusion

This Toolkit is intended to simplify grant preparation for ports that have limited experience or resources and demystify the NOFO requirements when applying for a competitive grant with the U.S. DOT by providing easy-to-use Microsoft Word application templates (PIDP, RAISE, and INFRA), a User Guide, and supporting materials. The specific conditions listed in these NOFOs can be unclear, overwhelming, and time-consuming to understand and address in a grant application. The Project Team's experience throughout the development of this Toolkit has done nothing but further solidify, if not magnify this observation.

The final Toolkit--inclusive of the templates, user guide, and supporting resources—is comprehensive, follows a logical order as outlined by the respective NOFOs, and provides a stepwise process to successfully submit a grant application. The primary audience of small- to medium-sized ports with limited staff and resources will find this resource to be a game-changing tool.

A solid plan has been developed for communicating the availability of the Toolkit and providing updates to these “living documents” based upon potential changes to guidance in immediately upcoming grant submission rounds. While the Project Team believes that the Toolkit will remain valuable and relevant for years to come, if significant changes are made to the grant programs' requirements, new foundational grant templates may be a future PPM Capstone project. Furthermore, additional areas of exploration as it relates to federal grant programs have been identified for future development.

Perhaps the greatest validation that the stated objectives have been met is the fact that the members of the Project Team are eager to utilize the templates in upcoming grant rounds. This is an applicable, relevant, and timely project that will meet a significant need in the industry.