Request for Applications: Strategic Technology Technical Assistance Teams

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Technology Strike Team Technical Assistance
Request for Applications

What This Is

The Community Transportation Association of America, through its National Center for Applied Transit Technology (N-CATT), is soliciting applications from transit agencies for in-depth technical assistance in applying new technologies to address operational challenges or help agencies meet specified goals. N-CATT will select up to three transit agencies to work closely with N-CATT and any necessary consultants to address technology challenges identified by the selected agencies. This will result in a final deliverable such as an implementation plan or solicitation that helps the selected agencies begin making progress on the stated challenges.

> **Interested parties must follow the instructions and format set forth in this Request for Applications. We will review applications on a rolling basis based on our capacity.**

About N-CATT

The goal of the National Center for Applied Transit Technology (N-CATT) is to improve and make more efficient small-urban, rural and tribal transit service by assisting local systems in understanding, selecting, and otherwise planning to incorporate new technology into service. N-CATT helps transportation providers, managers, and decision-makers, such as board members or public officials, identify promising technologies, practices, and opportunities that accomplish agencies' goals or resolve particular challenges.

The recent burst of technology-based innovations in transportation has largely focused on dense urban areas. N-CATT seeks to spread the benefits of these developments to smaller transit agencies that lack the resources and capacities of large-urban systems to research, analyze, and test new products that could enhance their services. This includes educating system managers and helping them to encourage influential stakeholders to support needed technological advancements.

To achieve this vision, N-CATT provides technical assistance opportunities to transit agencies that need support in navigating the evolving technological landscape and understanding how to best improve their systems through practical applications of new technologies.

Overview of the Strategic Technology Technical Assistance Teams

N-CATT will provide in-depth technical assistance to at least six rural, small-urban, and/or tribal transit agencies that will give their leadership and partners the opportunity to collaborate in a focused setting on identified goals for the system, potential technological solutions, and planning

for implementing those solutions. This collaboration will result in an actionable deliverable that agencies can directly apply to their work.

Purpose

The purpose of this technical assistance program is to provide capacity to transit agencies which have identified specific challenges or goals that they believe can be addressed through technology, but lack internal resources to address those challenges or goals. The technical assistance will focus on working with a local or regional team to navigate technology decision-making to achieve a specified goal or related set of goals. N-CATT's collaboration with selected applicants will result in development of an actionable plan for testing or adoption of technology, in-depth planning of new technology(ies), or a reviewed solicitation to procure new technology(ies). What this final deliverable looks like will depend on the needs of selected recipients. It will be determined and iterated upon during regular meetings.

Approach to be Taken

This technical assistance aims to support and strengthen transportation providers through the following:

- Preliminary conference call (1-2 hours): N-CATT staff, applicable consultants, TA recipients. Plan the project scope, plan scoping visit to determine agenda. Collaborate to determine whether to include riders and/or other stakeholders to identify pain points within the context of the identified goal.
- Scoping visit: CTAA staff, consultants visit agency
  - Day 1: Tour the service as it is; highlight "pain points" that they're working on
  - Day 1: Meeting: Meet with transit leadership, partners (or representatives of partner entities) identified in the application, and others whose needs, ideas, or contributions are important to solving relevant challenges and reaching the identified goal.
  - Day 2: Use information gathered from previous day to map out possibilities for addressing those issues; develop three potential avenues to follow up on
  - The site visit will be contingent upon considerations around the COVID-19 pandemic and mutually agreed-upon with CTAA staff, consultants, and recipient agencies
- Virtual meetings, once per month: CTAA staff, consultants discuss progress on research, identify additional information required, work through other details as needed to develop final deliverable.
- (Optional) Planning visit: 1 CTAA staff, consultants visit
  - Day 1: work through the costs/scenarios
  - Day 1: narrow ideas to one plan
  - Day 2: develop 1-year plan for technology procurement, testing, piloting, determining a vendor(s) and creation of a detailed plan for executing these tasks or to create a longer-term in-depth plan
  - The site visit will be contingent upon considerations around the COVID-19 pandemic and mutually agreed-upon with CTAA staff, consultants, and recipient agencies
- N-CATT provides draft final deliverable for review

- N-CATT holds in-person meeting to provide final deliverable that will allow recipient organization to make meaningful progress on the technology challenge it hopes to address
- N-CATT provides a sustainability plan that the recipient can use to guide their work. N-CATT and the recipient organization

Logistical Arrangements and Expenses
Once chosen, CTAA will establish a Memorandum of Understanding with the selected agency, then will work with the selected agency to solicit participation from relevant staff, partners, stakeholders and/or community members, to design the details of the site visits.

CTAA will not provide any funds or compensation to selected recipients, and selected recipients will not need to provide any funds or compensation to CTAA or its consultants.

Eligibility
Interested parties should be:

- Providers of public transportation in small-urban (50,000-200,000 population), rural (<50,000 population), or tribal communities;
- Private non-profits that run public transportation services in these areas; or
- Groups of agencies in small-urban/rural regions that intend to or are currently collaborating.

Please note: Applicants that have specific solutions planned for the future, have issued a solicitation(s), or are working with a vendor(s) on the selected issue(s), will not be eligible. This support is designed for agencies working to assess new opportunities for technological improvements.

Application Requirements
A complete application consists of:

(1) Application Cover Sheet;
(2) Application Narrative (described below); and
(3) OPTIONAL letters of support, described below.

Cover sheet - Please provide the following information:
1. Name of applicant lead agency or group;
2. Location of applicant lead agency or group – Street Address, City, State, and Zip Code;
3. Name of lead contact;
4. Title and agency of lead contact;
5. Lead contact's email; and
6. Lead contact's phone number.

Application Narrative – For the Application Narrative, the word limits below are maximums and in no way reflect a requirement for a specific number of words. Please provide the following information:

1. **Clearly Articulated Goal/Challenge (max. 100 words)**: State the goal to be accomplished or challenge to be addressed; why this goal is an important issue to be addressed; and how technology could help.
2. **The "Ask" (max. 100 words)**: State the end deliverable that would benefit your agency based on the goal/challenge, and why the agency needs assistance in achieving this. This may change based on work with the strike teams, but it is important to know the agency's aims.
3. **Background (max. 200 words)**: Describe how you identified this challenge or goal; efforts to address it thus far; and any challenges confronted in identifying a solution, set of solutions, or appropriate tools to accomplish the goal.
4. **System description (max. 150 words)**: Describe the transportation system(s) that you hope to enhance. Are you small-urban, rural, tribal, or a mix? What is your fleet like, and what condition is it in? What are the demographics of your ridership? Provide a map or detailed description of your service area, and areas of importance to your ridership (ex. hospitals, job centers, affordable housing, senior centers, etc.)
5. **Community involvement and partnerships (max. 100 words)**: Describe any community involvement, including with the local or regional government(s) or planning organization(s), that has affected your efforts. Describe partnerships with businesses, advocacy groups, non-profits and/or local or regional leaders to collaborate to accomplish the goal (address the challenge). Describe any larger stakeholder group(s). How would the Goal or Challenge articulated in Item 1 impact the community?
6. **Commitment and feasibility (max. 150 words)**: Describe the ways in which those individuals and entities listed above in **Community involvement and partnerships** have demonstrated a commitment to accomplishing the goal, whether through funding, expertise, participation in discussions or outreach, advocacy, or in-kind donations; and
7. **Capacity and Staffing (max. 100 words)**: Describe the lead organization's capacity for implementation of the plan to be developed in collaboration with the Tech Strike Team. Provide short biographies for the proposed project team.
8. **OPTIONAL Letters of Support** – Please provide relevant letters of support (if any) to indicate any existing efforts and partnerships to address the goal/challenge you have identified. These should NOT be letters of support from vendors related to the technology goal/challenge. Agencies who have already partnered with vendors will not be accepted.

After carefully reviewing this RFA, if you have questions please send them by email to carpenter@ctaa.org. Responses and questions will be added to the webpage where this RFA is posted as they are received. N-CATT encourages interested parties to check the page regularly before submitting their application. The webpage is: https://n-catt.org/news/n-catt-request-for-applications-strategic-technology-technical-assistance-teams/

Selection Process
Summary: Applications will be screened according to initial screening criteria, described below. All applications meeting those criteria will be sent to the review committee and reviewed by that committee according to the evaluation criteria. Initial selections will be made for the highest scoring applications according to the evaluation criteria, described below. FTA will make the final selection of successful applicants for this opportunity.

Application Screening and Review Process

1. Screening. All applications received will be screened to determine that the minimum requirements, as noted in the initial screening criteria, are met. Only those applications that meet the minimum requirements of the initial screening criteria will be reviewed.
2. Review committee. N-CATT staff will convene a committee to rate applications according to the criteria noted below.
3. Review Process. The review committee will evaluate the applications based on the evaluation criteria specified below. N-CATT may schedule follow-up phone calls with up to 8 agencies to further discuss their visions for the technical assistance, as well as potential dates and activities.
4. N-CATT will choose those projects receiving the highest recommendations by its review committee.
5. FTA will make the final selection of successful applicants for the opportunity.

Initial screening criteria

- Application is submitted by an eligible applicant.
- Complete application must be received by email by the deadline (see timeline above)
- Application must comply with all word limits prescribed for each section.
- Application must be submitted as a single pdf document.
- The applicant must be a small-urban, rural, or tribal operator
- The applicant has NOT partnered with a vendor
- The application must include all the required elements, as noted above.
- Because the Strike Teams are designed to provide technical assistance, any request for funding will not be accepted.

Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be rated by the review committee on the basis of highly recommended (HR), recommended (R), and not recommended (NR) in the following areas:

1. Identified goal – This will be evaluated through the following:
    a. The identified goal is succinctly stated as a goal to be accomplished or as a problem to be solved; and
    b. The application explains why this goal is an important issue to be addressed
    c. The application explains how technology would contribute to addressing the goal and the impact it will have on their community.
2. The "Ask" – This will be evaluated through the following:
    a. The application succinctly identifies a desired end-deliverable
    b. The application justifies needing assistance for this ask
3. Background: This will be evaluated through the following:
    a. The application provides strong background on how and why the particular goal or challenge was identified; Previous and current efforts to address the goal/challenge; and; Any challenges confronted in identifying a solution, set of solutions, or appropriate tools to achieve the goal.
4. System description: The transit system is described in terms of the following:
    a. The nature of the fleet and what condition it is in;
    b. The demographic information of your ridership; and

     c. A description (written or visual) that conveys the service area and areas of importance.

5. Community involvement and partnerships. This will be evaluated through the following:
   a. The application discusses any relevant public engagement, community involvement, engagement or leadership of local or regional government(s) or planning organization(s), that has affected your efforts; Any partnerships with businesses, advocacy groups, non-profits and/or local or regional leaders (elected or otherwise) to collaborate to accomplish the goal (address the challenge); and/or Any relevant larger stakeholder group(s).
   b. The application explains how the goal or challenge would impact the community described.

6. Commitment and Feasibility. This will be evaluated through the following:
   a. The ways in which those individuals and entities discussed in your community involvement and partnerships section have demonstrated a commitment to accomplishing the goal; and
   b. Whether and what partners have demonstrated a commitment through contributions of funding or in-kind donations; assisting with expertise; participation in discussions, meetings, or events; or through outreach or advocacy.

7. Capacity and Staffing: Describe the lead organization's capacity for implementation of the plan to be developed in collaboration with the Tech Strike Team through the following:
   a. The agency provides evidence of its ability to participate in the activities outlined above to fully participate in the Tech Strike Team process; and
   b. The agency provides evidence of the organization's ability to collaborate to develop a plan and execute it.
   c. The agency provides biographical information on agency project leads.
   d. Relevant letters of support can contribute to this category

8. Suitability assessment: The applications will be assessed to determine that applying a technology would, when implemented, significantly assist the lead and partners to reach the goal identified or to overcome substantial challenges described to reach that goal.

The review committee will make its recommendations based on the following guidelines:
- Applications rated as highly recommended (HR) will be those that receive "HR" in all categories:
- Applications rated as recommended (R) will be those that receive "R" in at least these categories:
  - The "Ask"
  - Identified Goal
  - Suitability Assessment
- Applications rated as recommended (R) will have no more than one (1) "not recommended" (NR) in categories other than those identified above
- Highly Recommended applications will take precedent over Recommended. If the committee chooses among multiple Recommended applications, they will be ranked based on HR ratings within their evaluations.

Submittal Instructions

Please submit your application in PDF format to Andrew Carpenter, carpenter@ctaa.org, as soon as possible. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis based on N-CATT's capacity. No calls, please.