

issues, contact John Donaldson, Office of Chief Counsel, NCC-113, NHTSA, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Room 5219, Washington, DC 20590, by phone at (202) 366-1834. Interested applicants are advised that no separate application package exists beyond the contents of this announcement.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), Pub. L. 105-178, was signed into law on June 9, 1998. Section 1403 of TEA-21 contains a safety incentive grant program based on safety belt usage rates in the States. Under this program, funds are allocated each fiscal year to States that exceed the national average safety belt use rate or that improve their State safety belt use rate, based on certain required determinations and findings. Section 1403 provides that any funds remaining unallocated in a fiscal year after determinations and findings related to safety belt use rates have been made are to be used to "make allocations to States to carry out innovative projects to promote increased safety belt use rates." The authorization for this program under TEA-21 expired at the end of fiscal year 2003. However, on September 30, 2003, Congress enacted the Surface Transportation Extension Act of 2003, Pub. L. 108-88, extending the authorization for the program for an additional five months. As of the date of publication of this Notice, appropriations for the full five month period were not in place. Today's Notice solicits applications for funds that are expected to become available in FY 2004 under this extension provision.

TEA-21 imposes several requirements under the innovative projects funding provision. Specifically, to be eligible to receive an allocation, a State must develop a plan for innovative projects to promote increased safety belt use rates statewide and submit the plan to the Secretary of Transportation (by delegation, to NHTSA). NHTSA was directed to establish criteria governing the selection of State plans for allocations of grant funds and was further directed to "ensure, to the maximum extent practicable, demographic and geographic diversity and a diversity of safety belt use rates among the States selected for allocations." Finally, subject to the availability of funds, TEA-21 provides that the amount of each grant under a State plan should not be less than \$100,000.

In the following sections, the agency describes the application and award procedures for receipt of funds under

this program for FY 2004. This description includes the requirements regarding contents of a State's proposal and the elements, procedures and criteria the agency will use to determine which proposals are eligible for award and the amount of each award. Applicants should note that awards are subject to the availability of funds, and Congress has not yet appropriated sufficient funds for this program.

These application and award procedures are built upon the experience of the past several years. They are designed to make the process as streamlined as possible, and at the same time, to ensure that programs with the maximum potential for impact receive adequate funding to significantly increase safety belt usage. This year, the Application Procedure section further simplifies what States are required to address under the Applications Contents and Grants Criteria Section. The award criteria have been designed to support States proposing to carry out intensified, statewide programs of high-visibility enforcement of their safety belt laws. The Application Procedure has been especially streamlined for States that followed the high-visibility enforcement model in May 2003, and converted at least 1 percent of their non-belt users to users. Experience from many States has shown that such programs can substantially increase safety belt use rates in a very short period of time and such gains can be sustained.

Objective of This Grant Program

The objective of this grant program is to increase statewide safety belt use rates by supporting strategies and activities with the greatest potential for impact.

To be considered for an award under this program in FY 2004, the State must conduct a program of high-visibility enforcement of its safety belt law. Further, the proposed program must focus on the national Buckle Up America/Click It or Ticket mobilization, spanning the period from Monday, May 10 through Sunday, June 6, 2004. The State's participation in that 4-week mobilization must include all of the following elements:

- Earned media (press events, news conferences, etc.) spanning the entire 4-week period;
- A paid media campaign, from Monday, May 17 through Sunday, May 30, featuring broadcast advertisements delivering the Click It or Ticket message, or other equally clear enforcement focused message that NHTSA explicitly approves;

- Intensified enforcement activities (e.g., safety belt checkpoints, enforcement zones, saturation patrols) spanning the period from Monday, May 24 through Sunday, June 6, and involving the participation of law enforcement agencies serving at least 85 percent of the State's population.

- Pre- and post-mobilization observational surveys of safety belt use.

The post-mobilization observational survey must be a full statewide survey conforming to NHTSA's Uniform Criteria for State Observational Surveys of Seat Belt Use, (23 CFR part 1340) (the "Uniform Criteria"), for which data collection must begin on or shortly after Monday, June 7 and must conclude no later than July 11, 2004. The pre-mobilization observational survey may be either a full statewide survey or a sub-sample survey derived from the full survey design. Data collection for the pre-mobilization observational survey must begin no earlier than April 1 and conclude no later than May 9, 2004.

Unlike previous years, NHTSA does not intend to sponsor a national safety belt mobilization in November 2004.

NHTSA will consider awarding a Section 157 Innovative grant to a State whose application consists solely of a proposal to participate in the May 10-June 6 national mobilization as detailed above. However, States are strongly encouraged to include a proposal for an additional program of high-visibility enforcement of the safety belt law during FY 2004, subsequent to the May 10-June 6 mobilization. NHTSA intends to permit considerable latitude to the States in choosing the timing and nature of any additional high-visibility enforcement program conducted subsequent to the May 10-June 6 mobilization. Non-exhaustive examples of the kinds of additional high-visibility enforcement programs that NHTSA likely would approve in a State plan include:

- A mobilization (e.g., around Labor Day, 2004), similar to the May 10-June 6 mobilization.
- Two one-week periods of stepped up safety belt enforcement, separated by some interval of time (e.g., one in mid-July, another in late August).
- A sustained enforcement program, spanning two consecutive months (e.g., mid-July through mid-September); this could be achieved, for example, by scheduling each participating law enforcement agency to conduct one or two weeks of stepped up enforcement during that interval, and rotating the schedule so that in any given week the program would be underway in significant portions of the State.