



NATIONAL AGING AND DISABILITY TRANSPORTATION CENTER

2021 FTA Section 5310 Compendium

Making 5310 Funding Work for Transportation DEI Efforts

Background

Transportation plays a critical role in a person's ability to access the services, goods and support they need to live and thrive in their communities. In order for communities to thrive, they require adequate and appropriate resources that support accessible transportation options and infrastructure. In the case of marginalized and underserved communities, often overlooked when allocating essential services like transportation, financial investments are all the more important to ensure these communities have the services they need and a voice at the decision-making table when it comes to transportation planning.

The goal of providing transportation that generally meets the needs of older adults and people with disabilities must increasingly expand to programs considering the specific challenges and needs of diverse populations to better serve their communities with greater equity. Traditionally, funding for transportation has not been specifically set aside for equity projects, but many organizations, including federal agencies, are recognizing the importance of creating equitable practices and programs and respecting the unique needs and perspectives of diverse groups.

For example, The U.S. Department of Transportation's RAISE (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) program rewards regional and local governments who prioritize equity and sustainability in their transportation projects. Other federal funding programs like Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program support capital and operating expenses for traditional and non-traditional public transportation services that provide mobility options for older adults and people with disabilities.

About 5310 Funding

The Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program (49 U.S.C. 5310) provides formula funding for states to provide enhanced services beyond traditional public transportation and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit. This funding is used to remove barriers to transportation service and expand mobility options in urban (over 200,000), small urban (50,000-200,000), and rural (under 50,000).

Traditional uses for this funding include (but are not limited to) bus and van procurement, transit-related information technology systems including scheduling/routing/one-call systems, and mobility management programs. Less traditional uses include (but are not limited to) travel training, volunteer driver programs and purchasing vehicles to support new accessible taxi, rides sharing and/or vanpooling programs.

Those who are eligible for 5310 funding include private nonprofit organizations, states or local government authorities, or operators of public transportation.

The availability of 5310 funding has enabled agencies across the country to develop unique, local solutions to increase mobility for older adults and people with disabilities. Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is using 5310 funding to promote innovative activities that are enhancing diverse, inclusive and equitable practices within their organization and externally with the communities they serve. This information brief spotlights the work of WSDOT and how they are making funding work for their DEI efforts.



Moving the Transportation Equity Needle using FTA Section 5310

NADTC conducted an interview with Elizabeth Safsten, Community Liaison with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Public Transportation Division. In the interview, Ms. Safsten discusses WSDOT's transportation equity activities, as detailed below. WSDOT is based in Olympia, WA and serves the entire state of Washington. The Public Transportation Division has been in operation for over 40 years.



Q: What is your agency's mission?

WSDOT's agency mission statement is, "We provide safe, reliable and cost-effective transportation options to improve communities and economic vitality for people and businesses." Our mission statement and strategic plan can be reviewed in detail on this [webpage](#).

The Public Transportation Division's mission statement is, "Advance public transportation and transportation demand management with partners for a safer, more equitable Washington."

Q: What funding source(s) do you receive for your transportation program?

The Public Transportation Division administers around \$250 million biennially in state and federal grant funding.

We administer grants from the following fund sources as a part of our Consolidated Grant Program:

- FTA Section 5310
- FTA Section 5311
- FTA Section 5339
- State Paratransit/Special Needs Grant Program
- State Rural Mobility Grant Program

We also administer other grants from the following fund sources:

- FTA Section 5304
- State Regional Mobility Grant Program
- State Green Transportation Capital Grant Program
- State Vanpool Investment Grant Program
- Commute Trip Reduction Grant Program
- First Mile/Last Mile Connections Grant Program

Q: What geographic region(s) do you serve?

The Public Transportation Division provides grant funding to transit agencies, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and tribes in all of Washington state's 39 counties.

Q: What's the demographic makeup of your community/service area?

Please see the following [maps](#) that the Public Transportation Division used during our Title VI analysis of 2021-2023 Consolidated Grant Program subrecipient awards. These maps show the home offices of grant-funded services along with demographic indicators such as race, limited English proficiency, income, age and disability status. Please note these maps do not capture terrain (i.e., where services are not provided due to major mountain ranges or national parks).

Q: Can you provide a summary of DEI specific work/efforts/programming?

The Public Transportation Division is currently involved in the following DEI efforts:

Title VI analysis:

The Public Transportation Division conducts a biennial Title VI analysis of FTA funds administered through the division's Consolidated Grant Program. The purpose of this analysis is to determine if there are any disparate or disproportionate effects to transportation for disadvantaged communities based on the division's award of federal and state funds. The division uses the maps under the question *What's the demographic makeup of your community/service area?* above as a part of its Title VI analysis.

Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) analysis:

Starting in 2021, the Public Transportation Division is piloting a GARE analysis of its 2021-2023 Consolidated Grant Program application process and subrecipients. The analysis consists of a series of prompts to around the purpose and desired outcomes of the division's grant programs. We will use the results of the prompts to analyze if our grant processes are having the effects that we intend on the disadvantaged communities. We also hope to find out if any of our grant policies intentionally or unintentionally have disproportionate negative effects on disadvantaged communities. We'll use the GARE analysis to reduce our blind spots as a division.

Public Transportation Division, Racial Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee:

The Public Transportation Division recently transitioned its Inclusion Steering Committee to a Racial Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee. In the last year, the committee has:

- Implemented new, more inclusive hiring practices.
- Hosted training opportunities for the division.
- Started establishing a norm of incorporating discussions of diversity, equity and inclusion into our work and all-staff meetings.
- Drafted an inclusive writing guide.
- Examined our current data and geographic-information-system-mapping tools to ensure they are the best option for the division and our grant subrecipients to access demographic data.

Some of the training the Racial Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee has sponsored includes diversity/equity training sessions from Dr. Caprice Hollins, "Me and White Supremacy" book circles, lunch-and-learns, and quarterly newsletters with DEI-focused articles and training opportunities. The committee is currently organizing a DEI-focused communication training from a local university that will pair with the launch of our division's new inclusive writing guide.



Equity session at the 2021 Washington State Public Transportation Conference:

The Public Transportation Division's grants team is hosting a session on equity at the 2021 Washington State Public Transportation Conference in mid-October. The session is a way for the division to gain perspective from our external partners about how to make our programs and processes more equitable. This is a listening session aimed at finding ways to improve our programs and processes to be more inclusive and avoid institutional forms of discrimination.

WSDOT DEI Efforts and Training:

WSDOT issued an agency executive order in 2021 on "Anti-Racism Policy and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Planning." It commits to updating the agency's strategic plan to "ensure diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism are appropriately incorporated" and "propose additional policies, procedures, and training" for staff.

In 2021, WSDOT added a new 30-minute, mandatory, self-paced training for staff called "Bridging the Diversity Gap." The training highlights the value of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The training also addresses barriers to diversity and inclusion, such as unconscious bias.

Q: Are you working with any community partners? If yes, who?

The Public Transportation Division works with partners including government agencies, tribes, nonprofits, regional planning organizations, and statewide and national organizations.

These organizations include:

- Washington State Transit Association
- Washington State Transit Insurance Pool
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations
 - In particular: Puget Sound Regional Council
- The Washington State Tribal Transportation Planning Organization
 - In particular: Muckleshoot Tribe
- Organizations on transportation demand management boards
- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and Western Association of State Highway Transportation Officials
- Washington State agencies (various)
- Community Transportation Association of the Northwest
- Commute Seattle
- Riders' associations
- Human services agency stakeholders (various)

The Public Transportation Division also contracts with regional transportation planning organizations to complete coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans for projects to be eligible for the division's grants. This planning process includes extensive outreach to riders and social service agencies.

Q: Are 5310 dollars being allocated specifically to DEI efforts? If yes, how?

The Public Transportation Division uses Section 5310 in combination with Section 5311 administration funds to complete coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans. Section 5310 funds also pay for the work of our Race, Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee and, potentially, for trainings. Additionally, we use the funds for our Title VI and GARE analysis.

On another level, the Section 5310 Program is, by definition, allocated to enhanced mobility of seniors and individuals with disabilities. As such, 100 percent of the division's Section 5310 funds are allocated to DEI efforts through our Consolidated Grant Program process. For the grant program, we score applicants' projects and assign Section 5310 funds as appropriate to projects that meet federal requirements/eligibility criteria for funds. We also use our Title VI analysis and the information from local coordinated public transit-human services transportation planning efforts to ensure inclusion of traditionally disadvantaged communities in our planning efforts. Factors such as race, income, limited English proficiency and others are considered when scoping projects to improve services and provide better access to the transportation system. As an example of DEI focus, one awarded project will sustain a bilingual mobility coordinator/travel trainer position that informs the community how to use transportation services in three Washington state counties.

Q: What's been the greatest impact of your DEI focus?

As a result of the Public Transportation Division's 2021-2023 biennium Title VI analysis, division management decided to fund an additional project that was originally low on the priority list. The management team made this decision after an analysis of the demographic data around the unfunded project area revealed that there were limited transportation options compared to the high amount of need. The focus on DEI and transportation-dependent populations in the context of grant awards allowed our division to focus on the outcomes of the Consolidated Grant Program.

In terms of refocusing our public transit work to incorporate DEI, we are in the process of making grant program modifications. We conducted research for internal land acknowledgement practices, which resulted in new information about tribal federal recognition dates. This in turn allowed us to revise grant scopes to better serve a tribal grant subrecipient.

Establishing our division's Racial Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee has led to strong staff engagement and leadership on DEI issues. Voluntary DEI events (i.e., lunch-and-learns, book circles) are well attended. Staff capacity to apply a racial equity and inclusion lens to our work has improved.

Q: In doing this work, what have been the biggest lessons learned?

- Our work in the Public Transportation Division has great potential to address historical discrimination in transportation issues. We also need to keep analyzing our programs and processes to ensure that we haven't institutionalized practices that lead to poor outcomes for disadvantaged populations.

- Approach DEI work with an attitude of starting where we are and setting realistic goals. It's important to understand our organization's staff and their ability and willingness to engage with this work and go from there.
- Prioritize ensuring that ADA, Title VI and other federal requirements, which are intended to produce equitable outcomes, are more than administrative "boxes to be checked." Ensuring our organization's subrecipient technical assistance, monitoring and compliance work reflects the true intentions of these civil rights protections. This alone can result in better outcomes and realizing DEI goals.
- Invest in staff training.

To learn more about WSDOT's mission statement and strategic plan visit this [webpage](#).

This information brief was developed as a resource on Section 5310 funding and transportation efforts to address diversity, equity and inclusion. To learn more about NADTC's DEI Initiative, please visit our website: <https://www.nadtc.org/diversity-equity-inclusion-initiative/>

References

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration. Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities - Section 5310. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/enhanced-mobility-seniors-individuals-disabilities-section-5310>

Strategic Plan. Washington State Department of Transportation. (n.d.). Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://wsdot.wa.gov/about/secretary/strategic-plan/>