

Enhanced Transparency: A Comprehensive 5310 Program Website Review



NADTC conducted a comprehensive review of FTA Section 5310, Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities programmatic information available on 54 State DOT and U.S. territory websites to determine the usefulness of the resources available and how grant information was presented to current grantees, potential grantees and the public. The outcome of this process was to identify best practices and determine recommendations for State DOTs or designated recipients to display information regarding FTA Section 5310 funding.

This report will highlight states who exemplify best practices for how the available resources and information are displayed, ease of understanding the program eligibility, how an agency might apply for available funding, and how to become involved with the coordinated planning process within their community or region.

Background

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) offers available funding through the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program, better known as FTA Section 5310 program. Eligible entities include State or local government authorities and designated recipients. Funds can also be made available through a subcontract with eligible private nonprofit organizations and operators of public transportation. Funds must be used toward expenses to enhance accessible transit services offered, like buses or vans, wheelchair lifts or securement devices, mobility management, or upgrades to bus stops, curb-cuts and pedestrian pathways.

While the State DOT has discretion of how they utilize or distribute the funding, they still have an obligation to advertise the availability of funding to eligible entities. Recipients follow guidance provided in [FTA Circular 9070.1H](#), which indicates funding should be advertised through public meetings, funding announcements, or during planning activities of the Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan. This coordinated plan must be locally developed and is required to receive FTA Section 5310 funding. The coordinated plans may be developed by the State DOT, designated recipient or Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). All eligible projects must be included in the locally developed coordinated plan to receive funding. Entities are encouraged to coordinate projects with State DOTs and designated recipients to be considered for future funding.

Methodology

When NADTC started examining state DOT websites for transportation information and resources related to FTA Section 5310, search criteria were established for (1) ease of navigation, (2) visibility of transit programs, (3) funding information, (4) application materials, (5) helpful information and related resources, such as toolkits or checklists for existing or potential grantees. This methodology is reflected in our final recommendations.

In our review of 54 U.S. states and territories, we found that 72% (39/54) included some information on transportation or Section 5310. Only 14% (8/54) provided easily attainable information for existing or potential 5310 grantees. Additionally, there was no Section 5310 information available for 27% (15/54) of the websites reviewed. This highlights a significant gap in available information regarding Section 5310 funded programs managed by state DOT's, which are designed to support transportation provider and community needs.

State Examples & Best Practices

Alaska Department of Transportation

ADOT offers a clear and concise website for current or potential grantees to easily navigate. [FTA Section 5310 funding eligibility](#) is detailed to understand which organizations or projects are eligible, as well as examples provided of previously funded projects. [ADOT also offers a toolkit](#) for completing the locally developed Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plans, links to data from research and reports, tips for writing the plans, and templates and forms for conducting public meetings.

Arizona Department of Transportation

AzDOT clearly defines each of their funding programs, including [Section 5310](#), outlines the program overview and defines eligible projects. AzDOT also incorporates a robust listing of Coordinated Planning documents, including 5310 projects that are overseen by their regional mobility managers. Additionally, each funding source has an [informational hub](#) that includes a program guidebook, important deadlines, FAQs, workshop recordings, and notice of funding announcements.

Massachusetts Department of Transportation

MassDOT has created an [easy-to-follow website](#) for understanding how the application process works. The website defines the application cycle and important deadlines, and outlines project eligibility and local match requirements. Additionally, MassDOT offers a

section on best practices and showcases examples of previously funded operating and capital projects using FTA Section 5310 funding.

Minnesota Department of Transportation

MnDOT has developed a robust [website for both riders and transit providers](#), which clearly outlines available public transit funding opportunities, including Section 5310, and guidance for regional transportation providers for the coordinated planning process. MnDOT offers detailed comprehensive guidance for [program compliance](#) that can assist current grantees in program oversight, covering federal rules and regulations for procurement, drug and alcohol programs and the state's compliance review process.

Recommendations

Transportation information can be found in a variety of locations online, including State DOTs, direct recipients or even local transportation provider's websites. However, finding the correct information is sometimes tricky, especially for those unfamiliar with the programs and funding available. During the website scan, it was found there was no standard location for FTA Section 5310 funding information on state websites, some websites housed their programs under Public Transit, Multi- or Intermodal Planning, or Traveler Information. This means navigating the information from state-to-state is not consistent and poses a threat of being overlooked or seemingly non-existent when agencies, transportation providers or the public are seeking information.

The following recommendations were generated from our findings of examining state DOT websites for information on FTA Section 5310 funding. States or designated recipients can implement these strategies to significantly improve the accessibility and clarity of information for potential grantees and foster a more effective grant application process.

Ease of Navigation:

- Maintain a website with a simple page layout that is well-organized and easy to read so current or potential grantees can find relevant information quickly.
- Include a search function that allows users to easily find information on transportation programs and 5310 funding opportunities.
- Ensure information is accessible to all users, including older adults and people with disabilities, especially individuals using a screen reader.

Visibility of Transit Programs:

- Provide an understanding of how transportation works, and what services are available throughout the region or state.
- Develop visuals, maps or a listing that showcases transportation coverage by region, including contact information for each provider.

Application Materials:

- Include templates and/or application platform tutorials so potential grantees know what is required, making the application process easier.
- If using application platforms like Blackcat, provide essential program information on the main webpage, not hidden behind a registration or login process.
- Provide a clear timeline to include appropriate deadlines, and available technical assistance or workshop opportunities prior to submission.

Helpful Information & Related Resources:

- Create checklists for grantees to follow that include required elements of the application, making the application process easier for the grantee and those reviewing the final submission.
- Provide contact information for the 5310 Grant Manager or the person overseeing the program.
- Outline previously funded projects, including Section 5310.
- Clearly outline the coordinated planning process, how to get involved and what elements are required for current or potential grantees.
- Create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section for common issues or questions, allowing current or potential grantees to understand the programs and eligibility factors.



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