

Solicitation for INVEST Implementation Projects

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is seeking to partner with State departments of transportation (DOTs), metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), Federal lands, and local governments on utilizing INVEST 1.0, FHWA's voluntary self-assessment tool, to assess and enhance the sustainability of their projects and programs.

Background

INVEST (Infrastructure Voluntary Evaluation Sustainability Tool) is a practical, web-based, collection of voluntary best practices and criteria designed to help transportation agencies integrate sustainable practices into their projects, plans, and programs. INVEST helps transportation agencies improve investment decisions while considering limited resources by addressing the sustainability triple bottom line -- enhancing economic, social, and environmental outcomes.

INVEST 1.0 is the result of a collaborative, multi-phased effort. FHWA developed the contents with input from and in cooperation with state and local transportation agency officials and professional organizations such as AASHTO, AMPO and ASCE. The tool was piloted across the country in 2011 and improved to reflect lessons learned. FHWA formally launched INVEST 1.0 in October 2012. FHWA is now partnering with agencies across the country to utilize INVEST 1.0 as part of their efforts to improve the sustainability of their programs and projects.

By offering transportation agencies a collection of best practices, INVEST serves two purposes. First, it enables transportation agencies to gauge their performance in adopting sustainability practices. Second, and more importantly, it helps agencies identify workable solutions that allow them to further incorporate sustainability into pending planning or project decisions, or to identify potential changes to business processes. Many of the best practices presented by INVEST save money as well as improve sustainability. For example, items such as quality construction, designing pavement for long life, life cycle concepts, recycled materials, and improved safety can all show overall lower cost as well as benefits to society.

Description of Opportunity

FHWA's ultimate goal is to improve the sustainability triple bottom line – social, economic, and environmental outcomes – of highway programs and projects. To further this goal, FHWA is seeking implementation of INVEST 1.0 at DOTs, MPOs, Federal lands, and local governments to assess and improve sustainability outcomes. FHWA seeks to establish a broader collection of case studies and best practices in evaluating and improving highway sustainability. These examples can be shared with other agencies interested in how sustainability can be integrated into their projects and programs. Finally, FHWA seeks the continuous improvement of the INVEST tool and requests feedback on further enhancement of the tool. FHWA would like to work in partnership with a set of transportation agencies on gathering lessons learned from implementing INVEST 1.0. A limited pool of funding is available to assist in these activities. In addition to the agencies that receive implementation funding, it is

anticipated that many agencies will choose to implement INVEST without need for additional funding, as the tool is free and easy to use.

Eligible Activities

State DOTs, MPOs, and other transportation agencies may take a variety of approaches. Eligible approaches include:

- Utilizing INVEST to assess and improve the sustainability of specific transportation projects under development, or learn from projects already completed.
- Utilizing INVEST to assess and improve the sustainability of a set of transportation projects.
- Utilizing INVEST to conduct a programmatic evaluation of agency planning and/or construction practices and opportunities for sustainability improvements.
- Utilizing INVEST to review operations and maintenance programs at the district or statewide level.
- Utilizing INVEST to inform the update of the MPO's long range transportation plan.
- Utilizing INVEST to improve the statewide transportation planning process.

Funding may be used for staff or consultant time to use the tool, to conduct additional analyses, to develop reports on lessons learned, to identify changes that can be made to projects or processes, to develop cost estimates for improved practices, to estimate benefits of improved practices, and to develop and evaluate action plans to implement these changes.

Assessing the sustainability of current action is only the first step of the process. Making changes to improve sustainability is the desired result. As such, FHWA is interested in projects that utilize INVEST to assess the sustainability of current practice, identify opportunities for improvement, and implement improvements. Projects should also quantify as best as possible costs and cost savings as well as benefits to environmental, economic, and social outcomes.

Final Product

Each INVEST implementation project should result in a final report that details the work performed, parties involved, roles and responsibilities, issues encountered, lessons learned, sustainability improvements identified, sustainability improvements implemented, analyses of costs and benefits of implementing particular sustainability best practices, recommendations for future action, and recommendations on improving INVEST and adding to the state of the practice. The final report should be in a form that is sharable with other agencies, and may be posted to the FHWA website.

Funding

Multiple awards of approximately \$25,000 to \$150,000 are anticipated, though projects may be larger or smaller depending on the context, scope, and approach. By Federal statute, a 100% non-Federal match (50-50 cost share) is required. In-kind contributions such as staffing can be counted towards the match requirement.

Process

Agencies interested in the funding opportunity are asked to submit a four to five page letter of interest to the respective FHWA division office via email. Division offices will review and send letters forward to headquarters.

Projects will be selected based on the following criteria:

- Demonstrated interest and support. For instance, support from senior management, past work in this area, support from local elected officials, public support, etc.
- Impact on decision-making. How the results of the INVEST evaluation will lead to implementation of sustainability best practices. How INVEST results will influence pending planning or project decisions.
- Availability of local match and necessary staffing and resources.
- Willingness and plans to provide case studies and lessons learned to share with others as well as providing feedback to improve INVEST 1.0.
- Diversity of project types. INVEST has three modules: System Planning, Project Development, and Operations and Maintenance. In addition, the project development module has six different scorecards based on project type (basic and extended) and location (urban and rural), as well as separate scorecards for paving projects and a custom scorecard. FHWA would like to see examples of INVEST implementation for a broad range of project types.

After selection, the recipient will participate in a conference call with FHWA to discuss the project. FHWA will provide feedback on the draft work plan, the goals of the project and any additional assistance/resources that FHWA may have available. A revised work plan should be submitted and approved by FHWA before commencing work.

Submitting a letter of interest is not a guarantee of funding.

In addition to the agencies that receive implementation funding, it is anticipated that many agencies will choose to implement INVEST without need for additional funding, as the tool is free and easy to use.

Timeline

Letters of interest will be received and funding allocated on a rolling basis and as funding is available. FHWA is targeting the month of March to fund several projects; letters of interest received by February 15 will be considered for the round of funding targeted for March. Letters of interest are however welcome after that date as well. There is not a set timeframe for project completion. Some projects may be quick turn-around, with timelines as short as one month, while others may take 18 to 24 months because of the stage of the plan update cycle or the project development process.

Required Contents for Letters of Interest

The letter of interest must be no longer than five pages and must include the following elements:

- Description of agency interest in using INVEST, goals for sustainability, and management support for the effort.
- Description of the proposed effort. This section should include the purpose and a detailed description of the effort to be funded. It should explain plans to conduct the INVEST evaluation and use the results. It should also include the phases of work, budget, work products, and timing. If contractor assistance is planned to support the effort, that support and estimated level of effort should be included.
- Impact on decision-making. This section should describe how the results of the INVEST evaluation will lead to implementation of sustainability best practices.
- Collaboration. This section should describe plans to provide feedback for improving the tool, case studies, and, lessons learned.
- Description of dedicated staffing/resources. This section should fully describe the funding and assets that will be dedicated to the project, and demonstrate how the non-Federal match requirement will be met.

Contacts

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- Rob Hyman, Office of Natural Environment, 202-366-5843, Robert.Hyman@dot.gov

Resources

Please visit <https://www.sustainablehighways.org/> to learn more about INVEST 1.0, watch a recording of the launch, browse the criteria, and view videos and case studies of State DOTs and MPOs that have used INVEST.

Please visit <http://www.sustainablehighways.dot.gov/> to learn about FHWA's Sustainable Highways Initiative, hear news of FHWA sustainability activities, and view sustainability-related publications and resources.

An online demo will be available via webinar on Friday, February 1 at 2pm EST. A recording of the demo will be posted on the website shortly thereafter. Information on how to connect to the webinar will soon be available at <http://www.sustainablehighways.dot.gov/>.