

Narrative – Planning and Demonstration Grants

Comprehensive Safety Action Plan

Huerfano County, Colorado is requesting **\$141,680** in safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) planning grant dollars for completion of a county-wide, publicly available, Comprehensive Safety Action Plan (the Plan). The County believes this is a critical first step in assessing roadway safety issues and identifying projects/strategies that reduce or eliminate roadway fatalities and serious injuries.

Selection Criteria #1: Safety Impact

Huerfano county is a rural county, encompassing 1,591 square miles with a population of 6,820 (2020 Census). There are 2 incorporated communities: Walsenburg (pop. 3,049) and La Veta (pop. 862) as well as 2 well defined unincorporated communities: Gardner (pop. 106) and Cuchara (pop. included in La Veta by Census). The county markets itself as Southern Colorado's Spanish Peak Country and borders the Sangre de Cristo Range to the west. Huerfano County experienced its largest economic boom during the early to mid-1900s with the discovery and utilization of large coal deposits. Since then, with the decline in coal reliance, there has been a steady economic decline. This has resulted in a shift in economic drivers to tourism and outdoor recreation-related activities. In addition to impact on transportation infrastructure created by tourism growth, the County has identified several areas that require work to alleviate unsafe and/or hazardous transportation infrastructure conditions.

Between 2017 and 2021, Huerfano County recorded 1,049 vehicle crashes resulting in 17 fatalities. The result is an estimated total average annual fatality rate of 13.56 (per 100,000 population) (based on DOT-FARS data). These numbers are high for a rural area and reflect a regional increase in fatalities and serious injuries. Based on the County's continued economic development and tourism strategies, supporting safety and transportation investment, the County believes this is the optimal time to complete the Plan as it will provide information needed to assess current roadway safety concerns, predict impact to safety based on anticipated growth and use of the transportation system, engage county residents in a meaningful and robust way, and support planning, construction, and policy activities that will allow for reduction or elimination of roadway fatalities and serious injuries.

Selection Criteria #2: Equity

According to the USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer, 2 of the 3 Census tracts in Huerfano County are considered disadvantaged (~4,800 individuals). The ETC also indicates that Huerfano County has an estimated 96 percent of the population experiencing transportation insecurity based heavily on transportation access (94%) followed by traffic safety (92%) and transportation cost burden (84%). Additionally, an estimated 64 percent of the population is experiencing social insecurity based heavily on an aging population (97%), lack of internet access (93%), disability (86%) and mobile home living (85%). Given commuter patterns and the demographics of those involved, this will have impact on transportation infrastructure planning and ensuring equitable application of policy and project implementation within Huerfano County.

As part of the process for creation of the Plan, Huerfano County will include robust public engagement to include multiple means/avenues by which all community members will have the opportunity to contribute. Project activities will meet selection criteria and administration goals of equity by ensuring investment in the safety needs of all community members, preventing roadway fatalities and injuries in all places, including rural communities.

Selection Criteria #3: Additional Safety Context:

Huerfano County is proposing the development of a county-wide, publicly available Comprehensive Safety Action Plan that will not only meet SS4A self-certification criteria, opening doors for potential implementation funding moving forward, but will also: 1) Lead to a significant reduction or elimination of roadway fatalities and serious injuries involving various road users; 2) Employ low-cost, high-impact strategies that can improve safety over a wider geographical area; and 3) Involve engaging with a variety of public and private stakeholders. The completed plan will include:

1. Development/solidifying of leadership and an official public commitment to an eventual goal of zero roadway fatalities and serious injuries to include goals and timelines with target dates.
2. Review of membership and recruitment to the committee with oversight of Plan development, implementation, and monitoring
3. Safety analysis of existing conditions and historical trends that provide the baseline crash data as well as analysis of systematic and specific safety needs and identification of higher-risk locations.
4. Robust public engagement and incorporation of information/input into the Plan
5. Consideration of equity in analysis and in development of proposed projects and strategies.
6. Assessment of current policies, standards and plans to identify opportunities for improvement/revision.
7. Identification of comprehensive projects and strategies based on data, best practices and stakeholder input and equity considerations.
8. Identification of methods for measuring progress, including outcome data and ongoing transparency with community members and partners.

A comprehensive scope of work including individual activities to be conducted is attached.

Additional Considerations: Budget Costs

Huerfano County believes the budget reflects reasonable costs to perform the activities as outlined above and in the attached scope of work. Costs include development/implementation of a robust and diverse public engagement plan to include consideration of equitable input and outreach to difficult-to-engage populations in all three incorporated communities. The County is committed to the 20 percent required match, which is available at the time of award. Should costs exceed the proposed budget estimate, the County is prepared to pay for any overruns/additional costs.