

# Injecting Innovation into Public Transportation

## A call for proposals from TransitCenter

### Do you have what it takes?

We are experiencing one of the most dynamic eras in American urban transportation. And this is only the beginning.

TransitCenter, a philanthropy committed to improving urban transportation, seeks to fund fresh, new thinkers who are committed to overcoming barriers and catalyze systemic change in our transportation system in ways that contribute to sustainable urban vitality.

Though innovation in the transportation field proliferates, practical, new ideas have few opportunities to integrate into existing systems or scale to market. Communities that clamor for better ways of moving around the city are blocked by politics and the dysfunctions and bureaucracy of policy and financing. Our norms have become so entrenched that although many new ideas percolate today, still more challenges stand in the way of practical adoption.

TransitCenter will fund proposals that aim to overcome barriers in existing governance, policies, and practice in transportation that would increase urban vitality. Grants of \$50,000 - 150,000 are available and all organizations are invited to apply.

Perhaps you have an idea that we haven't heard of? Surprise us.

### What kinds of projects and who can apply

Proposed projects may consist of demonstration projects, training, applied research, public advocacy and education, conferences/symposium/events or other activities, so long as they benefit the public and support our mission. In this round of projects, we encourage you to focus on three priorities that we describe below. Whatever the form of the particular project, the proposed activity must be situated in the context of a larger strategy and aligned with our mission.

For the 2015-16 grant cycle, projects are limited to the United States of America. Grant recipients will be entities incorporated or otherwise registered and based in the United States of America.

Political campaigns, electioneering, and legislative lobbying are not qualified uses. We will not support general operating support of other organizations, general capacity building, or back-filling of public sector budgets for activities that are normally the responsibility of government.

Any social mission-oriented organization is eligible for funding, including but not limited to advocacy groups, consulting companies, units of government, technical assistance providers, community-based organizations, educational institutions, and other civic organizations.

### How much is available

For the 2015-16 grant-making cycle, TransitCenter will award grants of \$50,000 - 150,000.

Projects with budgets of less than \$100,000 should be completed within one year of the award. Projects with budgets over \$100,000 should be completed within 18 months of the award.

Projects that are accompanied by matching funds will receive extra consideration in the evaluation process. Applicants are also encouraged to identify other in-kind contributions such as time or materials.

### Schedule for grant applications and awards

May 1	Release of RFP
June 1	Interested parties must submit letter of interest
July 15	Selected applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal
August 15	Full Proposals due (from pre-qualified invitees only)
September 30	Applicants will be notified of grant awards

## What interests us

For the 2015-16 period, TransitCenter strongly encourages applicants to focus on three primary issues:

### LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Transit ridership, demand for new service, and public opinion are very favorable to transit, yet our existing structures for planning and financing it are not meeting that new level of need. The typical transit agency is unchanged in form and character from the transit agency of forty years ago. Federal and state funding allocations and practices remain biased toward the automobile and expansion of highways, despite all evidence that the future has different needs. Cities and regions need new institutions, policies, and practices that will reform past practice and address the growing need for innovative urban transportation. We are seeking proposals that would enable:

- Local leaders to move more transit-friendly policies and investments to implementation faster.
- Practitioners at transit and other agencies to use updated tools, standards, and practices to better integrate transit planning with planning for land use, housing, economic development, and environmental protection.
- Public sector agencies to redesign and or restructure themselves or their services in order to increase the range of mobility options available to the public.
- Transportation agencies to reform their standards and practices in order to rectify the bias toward automobiles and highway expansion which is carried over from the past, and develop standards and practices more suitable for a multi-modal future.

### RIDERS AND TECHNOLOGY

Transit data and the technologies that deliver it to every rider's fingertips are the most dynamic forces changing behavior of transportation consumers today. Technology is also a management tool that can be applied to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of transit services. But adoption of new technology by the transit industry can be very slow and require overcoming significant institutional and cultural barriers. We invite proposals that would:

- Connect civic, private, and public sector organizations utilizing real-time transit information and technologies with transit agencies, in order to expand and integrate consumer travel options and enable more people to take more transit trips.
- Increase transit agencies' utilization of open-data or open-source technological solutions to improve performance, accountability and transparency.
- Nurture technology-based connections between conventional fixed-route transit agencies and other providers of urban mobility.
- Improve the professional state of practice and interaction among technologists involved in the transportation field, whether employed by government, the civic sector, or private enterprise.

### DEMAND AND OPINION

Land use policy, parking regulations, and financial incentives and cultural marketing in the realm of travel demand management (TDM) significantly affect demand for transit. Yet there are often few connections between transit agencies and the entities that plan and manage TDM, parking, and land use. Travel behavior and modal preferences are changing quickly, and with more knowledge of those changes the transit industry should be able to get ahead of the market. More sophisticated attitudinal research can help the transit field understand riders and potential riders, in order to both shape and respond to demand. Opinion research is also critical to informing and emboldening advocates for transit, enlightening elected officials and other policy-makers about their constituents' desire for transit. We invite projects that expand overall understanding of transit demand and encourage:

- Government and business adoption of practices that connect transit with travel demand management and other demand-related policies, such as parking calculation tools or reports on best practices in TDM, etc – and quantification of the value of those practices.
- Local organizations and decision-makers across the country to be better equipped with public opinion data that supports the argument for improved transit.
- Transit agencies and civic organizations to plan multi-modal services and networks that more accurately reflect the demand patterns of the future, whether in terms of demographics, geography or other contexts.
- Integrates a multi-modal mindset into organizations that have previously been uni-modal in outlook.

**PROJECTS OUTSIDE THESE PROGRAM AREAS WILL BE CONSIDERED ONLY UNDER LIMITED CIRCUMSTANCES.**

TC will consider projects outside of the three program areas only if they are of significant merit, as measured by whether they include distinctive innovation, investigate an emerging issue of critical importance, and articulate a plausible theory of how the proposed work will lead to significant change in the field of urban mobility.

## What your project should aim for

### Applied approaches, not pie-in-the-sky

All projects will be expected to provide fresh insights and approaches to vexing, systemic questions. Whatever the idea or project may be, there should be a pragmatic connection to clear, real-world improvements, as defined by the applicant. Projects should clearly describe the intended audience or participants. Events should convey an outcome or purpose that will help improve urban transportation by bringing together particular people who would not otherwise cross paths. Studies should be connected to constituent demand and application.

### Multi-modality

Good urban mobility is by definition multi-modal and considers a variety of vehicular forms in the public transportation sector. We strongly encourage proposals that take a multi-modal approach, not those that promote any particular vehicle type regardless of context. We also encourage projects directed at positive outcomes for the general public, not those that enhance public relations for any particular provider or agency.

Successful projects, whatever their form, will also tend to serve one or more of these functions:

- **Build technical capacity that will change practice or reform existing policy within the field of urban mobility.** Applicants should describe how a proposed project would lead to real-world application and address a constituency or problem in need of new solutions.
- **Transfer knowledge and learning.** Obstacles to improving transit in one region are often similar to the obstacles in other parts of the country. Projects that have the potential to be transferred and can build understanding across multiple locations, though they might be applied to a specific region in the near-term, will be given preference. Applicants should describe how their project leads to replicable results beyond the immediate target.
- **Support interdisciplinary approaches.** Often, transit practitioners are institutionally isolated from other sectors affected by transportation. Projects that connect transportation issues to issues of urban design, economic development, housing, environmental concerns, and social impacts will be given preference. Proposals that connect practitioners beyond their respective parochial sectors are strongly encouraged.

## Requirements

### Letter of Interest

Applicants who are interested in funding from TransitCenter must electronically submit a letter of interest (3 pages maximum) with the following elements by June 1, 2015:

- Proposed product title
- Statement of purpose and goals
- Summary scope of work
- List of measureable outcomes with regard to program area objectives
- Amount requested for funding

### Attachments:

- Timeline of activities and milestones
- A summary budget with provision of matching funds and other resources.
- W9 form with EIN

### Proposal

Applicants who are invited to submit a full proposal will be notified by July 15, 2015. Full proposals will be due on August 15, 2015.

Full proposals should be 5-10 pages in length and include:

- Product title
- Statement of purpose and goals
- Complete scope of work
- Extent to which measurable outcomes advance program area objectives
- Related work and degree to which product is distinctive
- Organizational capability and qualifications, including names of leadership individuals involved
- Product management/implementation plan

### Attachments:

- Schedule
- Budget with details outlining key personnel, other than personnel expenses, and additional resources including outside funding, in-kind or materials

- **Nurture pro-transit voices.** A robust civic sector – local foundations, advocacy groups, membership associations – have long been a force in policy arenas such as housing, parks, health, social services, and arts and culture. These groups from outside of government often provide the push for improvement and innovation. By contrast, public interest groups who represent the interests of current and future transit riders and progressive transportation policy are relatively rare. We seek to bolster civic organizations’ potential to lead transportation reform at the local, regional and state levels (with the exception of direct legislative lobbying and electioneering).

## About TransitCenter

TransitCenter is a civic philanthropy dedicated to improvements in urban transportation. With our independent endowment, we commission activities designed to unlock innovations in how people move around in cities and that contribute to urban vitality.

In addition to work which we supervise directly — such as a national public opinion survey on transit attitudes (*Who’s on Board*); a report on regional transit governance (*Getting to the Route of It*); a conference on transit and shared mobility in Los Angeles (*LiveRideShare*), and a series of training workshops for local leaders interested in improving transit (*the Transportation Innovation Academies*) — we will use our funds to support organizations who share our belief that significant reform of how American metropolitan areas plan and operate their transportation systems is essential to improving urban residents’ quality of life, including their economic prospects. While national and state policy continues to wield considerable influence on transportation systems, our inaugural call for proposals is directed at strengthening neighborhoods, communities, municipalities and regions that continue to make great strides in spite of that broader context.

Operating as a philanthropic foundation, TransitCenter is non-partisan and independent of any corporate affiliation, and is managed under the sole control of a public-spirited board of directors.

## How will we choose

Grant awards will be made by approval of the TransitCenter Board of Directors at their sole discretion. Applications will be judged by measures such as:

- Technical merit within the context of an articulated strategy
- Originality
- Probability of success measured by pre-determined goals
- Extent to which outcomes advance objectives in the program area(s) cited
- Transferability of results and breadth of impact
- Organizational capability of the applicant
- Cost effectiveness

## Guidelines for final product

Grant awards will be contingent upon finalization of a grant agreement between TransitCenter and grantee. Grant agreement will set forth conditions such as progress reporting, milestones and other factors. Final products will be produced with acknowledgement to TransitCenter.

## Submissions and requests for information

Letters of interest should be submitted by June 1, 2015 via our online form at:

**<https://www.grantinterface.com/transitcenter/common/logon.aspx>**

Only letters of interest submitted through this interface will be considered.

Any questions should be directed to **[grants@transitcenter.org](mailto:grants@transitcenter.org)**.