SRTS Grantee 2010 Survey Analysis

CCS Partnership developed an online survey of Federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grantees from Cycles 1 and 2 to gather information for the Caltrans SRTS Coordinator and California SRTS Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC) from grantee perspective on their experience of the planning, application, and implementation phases. Caltrans and TARC staff reviewed and contributed to the survey questions.

An email with the survey link was sent to all the 199 contacts listed on application from cycle 1 and from cycle 2. Up to three emails were sent to the contact person listed in the application with requests to both fill out the survey themselves, but to also forward the request to key partners. One hundred twelve persons initiated and 86 completed the survey, of which is assumed that more than one may have responded per project.

The survey utilized "skip logic" so when a respondent answered "no" to a qualifying question, they skipped sections of the survey.

Key findings are summarized in the table below, followed by detailed summary of responses for each question.

	Findings At a Glance
WHO RESPONDED	70% were public works staff, most were public sector, 7% schools, 2% public health and 3% nonprofit or community group. These respondents represented SRTS projects from throughout the state, from counties small and large, rural, suburban and urban. 16% were from Los Angeles County.
PLANNING PROCESS	Application planning takes sites 2-12 months, with 1/5 taking more than a year. All engaged multiple partners in planning process, with staff from public agencies being most frequently engaged. Non-infrastructure (NI) grantees are more likely to work with community agencies and schools. Community engagement is strongest in interagency collaboration, with input from students and parents through surveys, forums and walk audits. School selection criteria are not highly developed, yet 21% actively outreach to low-income schools. Successful planning requires dedicated staff time, knowledge of Caltrans application process, and benefits from prior application experience.
APPLICATION PROCESS	Successful applicants are familiar with Caltrans grant programs and most apply for the state SR2S grants as well. NI applicants are less likely to have prior Caltrans application experience, 21% find the application more difficult than other applications. Most suggestions were to simplify the NI application and to provide transparent, consistent, readily available support for the application process.

STARTUP	Most grantees have project underway within first year. Those that had delays cited a lack of clear information on how to proceed. Some had difficulty in communication with or getting responses or approvals from Caltrans. Some had difficulty in getting school buy-in.
INFRASTRUCTURE BARRIERS	Most (64%) did not report delays. Those that did cited internal competing priorities or internal staff reductions. Few were stuck in the approval process.
NI BARRIERS	NI delays were attributed to: challenges internal to the lead agency; challenges with the NI administrative requirements, most notably for authorization; and lastly the challenge of working with schools which also are impacted by budget cuts and competing priorities.
EVALUATION	Nearly 2/3 of sites plan to collect data on students walking and biking patterns. They collect data with lead agency, partner agency, and volunteer support. Dissemination of findings is inconsistent, with local partners more frequently receiving reports than Caltrans.

Detailed Report on Survey Questions

Following is a detailed report on the survey responses. Note that most percent figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. Also, respondents could give multiple responses to several of the questions.

RESPONDENTS

Question 1: County

In what county was the Safe Routes to School Project? (Drop-Down Menu)

All regions of the state and all sizes of counties are represented in the survey responses.
Nearly 1/5 of the responses (16%) came from Los Angeles County.

- 53% or 31 of the 58 counties participated
- 93% or 35,578,714 of total CA population is represented
- 29% (9) counties had 1 million or greater total population
- 19% (6) counties had 500,000-999,999 total population
- 45% (14) counties had 100,000-499,999 total population
- 6% (2) counties had less than 100,000 total population
- 52% of respondents were from Northern California
- 23% of the respondents were from Southern California
- 23% of the respondents were from the Central Valley

Question 2: Respondent's Role

Which best describes your role in your community's Safe Routes to School Project? (Multiple Choice)

Responses largely reflect the views of city/county or public works staff. No parent responses were received. Schools were represented by 7% of respondents. Few community based organizations responded. This underscores the key role public works staff play in successful Caltrans applications.

- 70% of the respondents were city or county engineers of public works staff
- 7% were school coordinators
- 7% were other city, county or regional agency staff
- 6% were city/county community services staff
- 3% were nonprofit subcontractors
- 2% were state/local law enforcement
- 2% were county public health
- 1% were from other community groups

PLANNING PROCESS

Question 3: QUALIFIER- Knowledge of Proposal Development

Do you have knowledge about how the Safe Routes to School Grant proposal was developed? (Yes/No)

Responses to questions 4 -10 were collected from the 80% who reported knowledge of the proposal development.

Question 4: Length of Planning Process

How long <u>before the application was due</u>, did the planning process begin? (Multiple Choice)

The amount of time it takes to plan a successful SRTS application varies with the majority taking between 2 and 11 months to plan.

- 37% (27) respondents report taking between 2 and 5 months to plan
- 32% (24) respondents report taking between 6 and 11 months to plan
- 20.5% (15) respondents report taking 1 year or more to plan
- 5.5% (4) respondents report taking 1 month to plan
- 4% (3) respondents did not know how long the planning period was

Question 5: Community Engagement

Who was engaged in the planning process? (Check all that apply.)

All respondents engaged community partners to varied degrees. Cities and counties are the most involved, but schools, parents, nonprofits and other partners are also part of the planning. Students were engaged in about 20% of the processes.

- 94.5% (69) respondents reported that city or county engineering/public works engaged in the planning process
- The next largest group was school staff with 82% or 60 reporting the involvement of school staff in planning
- 45% (33) report the involvement of community non-profit partners which includes walking and biking coalitions
- 40% (29) report that parents were part of the planning
- 19% (14) respondents report that students were engaged in planning
- 19% (14) report that public health was part of the planning process.
- 35.5% (26) respondents listed others that were engaged in the planning process. These included:
    - 26% (14) law enforcement including police, sheriffs and CHP
    - 11% (6) school staff not including superintendents
    - 9% (6) identified specific city staff from Park and Recreation, Community Services, Public Works
    - 9% (6) named their local bike and/or pedestrian groups
    - 6% (3) mentioned public safety and transportation agencies
    - 4% (2) of each of the following: city council members, school superintendents, county supervisors, school superintendents, consultants, and nonprofit partners
    - 2% (1) of the following: PTA/PTO group, school foundation, county departments, chamber of commerce, resident group

When filtering responses of those 28 who had non-infrastructure project, public works remained the most frequently cited partner (85.7%), but school staff was reported by 75%, community nonprofit partners by 50%, and parents and students by 21.5%.

Question 6: Walking or Biking Organization Role

Did a community walking or biking organization have a leadership role in planning? (Yes/No/List)

Biking organizations had a significant role in less than 20% of all reported processes. Bike and walk groups were engaged by 79% of non-infrastructure grantees. Only one walking organization was cited while 8 biking organizations had significant roles in proposal planning

- 18% (13) said that a walking or biking group played a leadership role in planning
- Of the groups named, 8 were biking organizations , 1 was a walking organization and 2 were coalitions for sustainable transportation

Question 7: Community Engagement Strategies

How was the community engaged? (Check all that apply, multiple choice)

The engagement of the community in the process of planning a Safe Routes to Schools application is varied. More than half engaged the community in traffic/pedestrian counts and about half used parent/student surveys. Other methods of community engagement reported included meetings with elected school officials, city councils, and police or traffic safety staff. This may reflect a more institutional framework of potential community partners. One person reported that the community was not engaged and 3 respondents (with knowledge about the planning process) did not answer this question.

- 57% (40) responded that the community was engaged through traffic/pedestrian counts
- 51% (36) engaged the community through parent/student surveys
- 37% (26) engaged the community through community forums
- 27% (19) engaged the community in walk audits
- 14% (10) said they engaged students
- 27 respondents reported other means of engaging the community, of those:
    - 22% (6) said they held discussions with school officials
    - 15% (4) said they engaged the community through the following ways: newsletters, public notices, website, public service announcements, school notices meeting
    - 15% (4) reported meeting with parent groups
    - 14% (4) said they held public meetings or events
    - 11% (3) reported meeting with or engaging city council
    - 7% (2) met with traffic safety staff
    - 4% (1) each reported the following methods: meeting with police, meeting with nonprofits, conducting field reviews
    - 1 reported that the community was not involved in the process

Question 8: School Selection

How did you decide which schools to include in the proposal? Please list any criteria used. (Open Ended)

Many (21%) respondents were able to include all of the schools in their area. No common selection criteria were sited, but safety needs was mentioned by 12%. Some reported collection of data on: total number of students; number of those walking and biking; and traffic injuries and fatalities. Interest on the part of school leaders and parents and input from the neighborhood was also an important criterion.

- Multiple criteria are used by most applicants
- 21% (16) included all of the schools in their city or area
- 12% (12) used safety needs as a criteria
- 9% (7) used the lack of infrastructure as a criteria
- 6% (5) used at least one of the following criteria: the volume of students walking or biking, schools along a selected route, input from schools

- 5% (4) used at least one of the following as criteria: traffic volume/congestion, parent interest
- 4% (3) used at least one of the following criteria: number of students, input from the - neighborhood, school interest or champion, city or county staff chose sites -
- 3% (2) used at least one of the following criteria: elected official requests, pedestrian /biking volume, population density, selected area of the city
- 1% (1) used the population density as a criteria for selection

Question 9: Low Income Schools

Did you use any strategies to encourage participation from low income schools or communities? (Open Ended)

Most applicants did not strategize about how to include low income schools in their application. Of those that did employ a strategy the largest number used specific outreach to a school or a community.

- 79% (53) reported that they did not use a strategy to include low income schools
- 21% (14) reported that they did use a strategy to include low income schools.
- There were 19 specific strategies listed
- Respondents sometimes used more than one strategy
- Of the 19, 26% (5) conducted outreach to specific low income schools or communities
- 16% (3) each stated that all schools were included or that they used input from school officials
- 11% (2) each said they included materials in both English and Spanish in their outreach efforts
- 5% (1) each reported using one of the following: targeting community block grant areas, using accident and injury data, providing education and incentives to a low income school, providing information in Spanish at another program event

Question 10: Planning Resources

What resources were required for a successful planning phase? (Check all that apply.)

Knowledge and experience are the most important resources for a successful application. This includes knowledge gained from prior grant applications, and implementation and knowledge of Caltrans applications.

- 89% (63) said that in house staff hours were the most important resources
- 80% (57) respondents found that experience gained from prior grant planning and - implementation w as the most valuable resource for success -
- 79% (56) respondents indicated that having staff with knowledge of Caltrans applications was a necessary resource
- 14% (10) reported that having the involvement of a community organization that had funds for planning was a necessary component of success
- 16% (11) cited other important resources. They include:
  - community school collaboration
  - experience in non motorized planning

- planning team has regular & effective communication
- community organizations / schools without funding
- support from law enforcement management & school officials
- research and strategic analysis of the community needs
- coordination with elected officials -
- obtained input from all project partners based on prior program experience -
- traffic & engineering consultant
- community support
- transportation consultants
- bicycle coalition staff had knowledge of SRTS

APPLICATION

Question 11: QUALIFIER- Knowledge of Application Process

Were you involved or have knowledge of the application development? (Yes/No)

Most respondents were involved or had knowledge of the application development phase. Questions 12-15 reflect their responses

- 90 respondents answered this question
- 82% (72) responded yes
- 20% (21) responded no

Question 12: Experience with Other Caltrans Grants

Other than the federal Safe Routes to School program, for what other Caltrans-administered grant programs has your agency been an applicant? (Multiple Choice)

Successful applicants are familiar with Caltrans grant programs and most apply for the state SR2S grants as well.

- 68 respondents answered the question
- Respondents checked all that applied from a list of 6 Caltrans grant programs
- 81% (55) applied for the state Safe Routes to Schools(SR2S) funds
- 62% (42) applied for Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds
- 53% (36) applied for Transportation Enhancements (TE) funds
- 43% (29) applied for Bicycle Transportation Account (BTA) funds
- 25% (17) applied for Transportation Planning funds
- 15% (10) applied for Environmental Enhancements & Mitigation (EEM) funds
- 9% (6) applied for no other Caltrans programs
- 10% (7) applied for other grants, including:
    - ARRA
    - FTA Section 5311,FTA Section 531F, HES, PSP
    - SB821, CML, BROL, STIP, STPLN, BR-NBIL
    - Environmental Justice, Office of Traffic Safety (OTS)

- Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Project
- Community Based Transportation Planning (CBTP)
- TCRP Grant, PLH grant
- Highway Bridge Program, FHWA-Emergency Relief
- Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) grants
- STP/MAQ, ARRA, STIP, et al
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)
- City regularly receives Federal-aid for transportation projects

Question 13: Application Difficulty

Compared to other grant applications,
how difficult was it to complete the SRTS application? (Multiple Choice)

The preponderance of successful SRTS grant recipients found the SRTS application at the same level of difficulty as other Caltrans applications, with about 1/5 finding it more difficult.

- 67 respondents answered the question
- 64% (43) found the SRTS application to be about the same as other applications
- 19% (13) overall, found the application to be more difficult than others. 21% of NI grantees found it more difficult.
- 10% (7) found the application to be somewhat easier than others
- 1.5% (1) found the application to be much easier and the same found it to be much more difficult
- 3% (7) said the question was not applicable to them

Question 14: Differing Applications for NI Grants

Would it be helpful to have different types of applications for
infrastructure and non- infrastructure grants? (Yes/No)

Most respondents, particularly NI grantees, would like to see different types of applications for infrastructure and non-infrastructure grants.

- 70 respondents answered the question
- 59% (41) replied yes that it would be helpful to have different types of applications
- 13% (9) said no it would not be helpful
- 91% of respondents who had NI grants thought a different application would be appropriate.
- 29% had no opinion

Question 15: Application Suggestions

If one thing could be changed in the application process, what would that be? (Open Ended)

Most suggestions were to simplify the NI application and to provide transparent, consistent, readily available support for the application process.

- 36 answered the question
- 19% (6) respondents indicted the process does not need to change
- 72% of NI grantees offered suggestions
- 16% (5) overall want the application simplified
- 9% (3) want each of the following changes: change the grant cycle; have a longer period to complete applications
- 6% (2) want each of the following changes: different applications for infrastructure and non-infrastructure grants, less emphasis on style and graphics more on content (greater chance for small agencies to succeed), more transparency in how grants are selected (selections factors beyond stated criteria)
- 3% (1) respondent each wanted the following changes
    - Separate instructions/guidelines from application
    - Provide sample forms
    - Forms that allow for spell check
    - Change emphasis on infrastructure improvements
    - Faster turn around from Caltrans
    - Eliminate the question re keeping momentum after end of project
    - Eliminate demographic information
    - Simplify Local Procedures Manual
    - Have a Caltrans hotline to answer application questions
    - Make procurement easier

START-UP

Question 16: QUALIFIER –Knowledge of Start-Up Phase

Do you have knowledge of the initial period after the grant was approved? (Yes/No)

More than half of those responding to the question are knowledgeable about the initial period after the grant was approved

- 69 responded to the question
- 78% (54) of those responding have knowledge of the initial period after grant approval
- 22% (15) do not have such knowledge

Question 17: From Notification to Start-Up

How long was it, after your community received notification that you were awarded the SRTS grant, that the project got underway? (Multiple Choice)

Most grants begin implementation within a year of receiving notification of the award. A few are implemented with in the first 3 months and a few take up to 2 years to begin. "Underway" is defined differently by project.

- 66 responded to the question
- 24% (16) reported that the project began between 9and 12 months after notification
- 15% (10) reported that it took 3-6 months to begin implementation
- 14% (9) said it took 1-3 months
- 14% (9) said it took 6-9 month to begin implementation
- 11% (7) reported taking 18-24 months to get started
- 8% (5) indicated that initial implementation began in 12-18 months
- 15% (10) had other timeframes for initial implementation.
    - 4 reported that the project has not yet been implemented
    - 1 said it took a year to receive funding for the non-infrastructure grant
    - Preliminary engineering began in 1-3 months but the construction has not begun
    - One launched the program in the year prior to receiving notification
    - One reported that it took 30 months due to not knowing the grant had to be administered by a governmental agency

Question 18: Reasons for Delays

If you have not yet started the project, what is the reason? (Open Ended)

Of those reporting start-up delays, the most prominent reason was insufficient internal staff to add this project to the existing workload. Some have scheduled the project for the 2011-2012 year. Others had a variety of reasons.

- 22 responded to the question
- 26% (6) responded that the question was not applicable or the project was complete
- 17% (4) reported that they did not have enough staff
- 13% (3) reported that the project is scheduled for the 2011-2012 year
- 13% (3) reported that they have started the project
- 4% (1) reported each of the following reasons
    - Waiting for Caltrans approval
    - Waiting for city council approval
    - ARRA funding delayed start
    - Competitive bid process
    - Time to establish collaboration
    - Waiting for final notification
    - Pedestrian safety

Question 19: Barriers to Project Launch

If you have not yet started the project, what is the reason? (Multiple Choice and Open-Ended)

Of choices offered, the top two barriers cited by 1/3 of respondents were a lack of information on how to proceed and lack of knowledge how to comply with federal requirements. Almost as many indicated either difficulty knowing who at Caltrans to call or how to get the information they needed. This was experienced as frustration with the approval process. Some had difficulty in getting school buy-in.

- 45 answered the question
- 44% (20) respondents had barriers other than the options listed
- 33% (15) had insufficient information on how to proceed and the same number did not know how to fill out federal forms
- 29% (13) had difficulty communicating with Caltrans
- 27% (12) were unclear about who to communicate with at Caltrans
- 13% (6) had difficulty getting school participation
- 9% (4) did not have enough buy-in form parents
- 4% (2) had difficulties with subcontractors
- 2% (1) did not have enough buy-in from students
- Other barriers were offered.
    - 15% (8) cited insufficient staff and an equal number cited difficulty with Caltrans processing paperwork
    - 9% (5) cited delays in getting gE-76 approval
    - 7% (4) each cited the following barriers: amount and cumbersomeness of the paperwork, the federal process is not appropriate for a non-infrastructure grant, Caltrans lacked clarity in how to administer non-infrastructure grants
    - 6% (3) each cited the following barriers: schools were slow to respond or unresponsive, staff changes, getting field reviews, environmental hurdles or clearances, Caltrans local assistance staff was not helpful or inadequately prepared
    - 4% (2) cited city RFP process or hiring subcontractors
    - 2% (1) each cited the following: school site selection, time it took to build and internal project team, pubic concern over installing sidewalks, a revised scope of work

DELAYS

Question 20: QUALIFYIER Type of Grant

Was your community's grant for an <u>infrastructure</u> project?

More than half of the respondents received grants for infrastructure projects. Questions 21-24 were asked only of the 48 who indicated they had an infrastructure grant. Questions 25 were asked of the 36 that had NI projects.

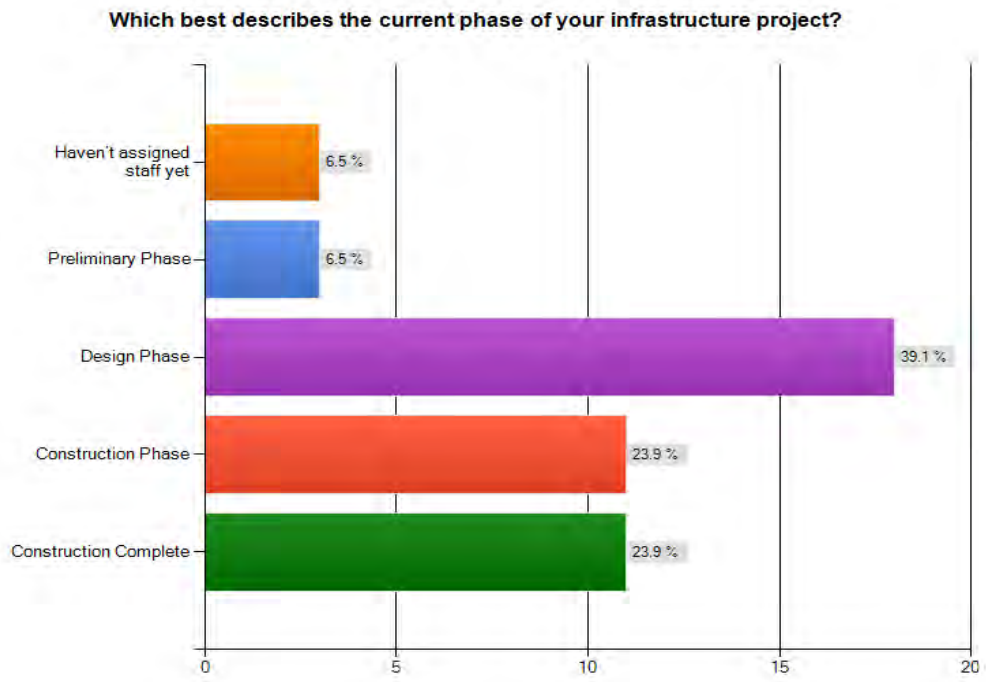
- 84 respondents answered the question
- 57% (48) were for infrastructure projects

- 42% (36) were not for infrastructure projects

Question 21: Infrastructure Implementation Phase

Which best describes the current phase of your infrastructure project?

Almost all of the projects have begun. Most are in the design or construction phase. Some have completed their projects and a few have not yet begun. 46 respondents answered the question



Question 22: Infrastructure Delay Reasons

If you haven't started your project, why not?
(Please check all that apply. Multiple choice and open ended.)

Reasons for infrastructure delays varied.

- 23 answered this question
- 61% (14) did not have delays
- Of those that did five reported higher priorities, 4 reported internal staff reductions, 1 was unfamiliar with federal grant processing requirements, 1 was requesting design authority, 1 was waiting for funding approval, 1 for final approval.

Question 23 – E-76 Technical Assistance Received

Did you receive assistance from any of the following sources to fill out the E-76 form? (Please check all that apply.)

District Local Assistance Engineers assisted over half of the applicants with their E-76 forms, with co-workers being the second most cited source of assistance.

- 45 answered the question
- 24% (11) had not received assistance
- 53% (24) received assistance from District Local Assistance Engineer
- 44% (20) received assistance from experienced co-worker
- 6.7% (3) received assistance from State Headquarters
- One noted that E-76's are prepared and disbursed BY Caltrans, not local agencies.

Question 24: QUALIFIER - Infrastructure Grants with NI Project

Did your grant include non-infrastructure projects? (Yes/No)

Ten of the infrastructure grants also include NI components.

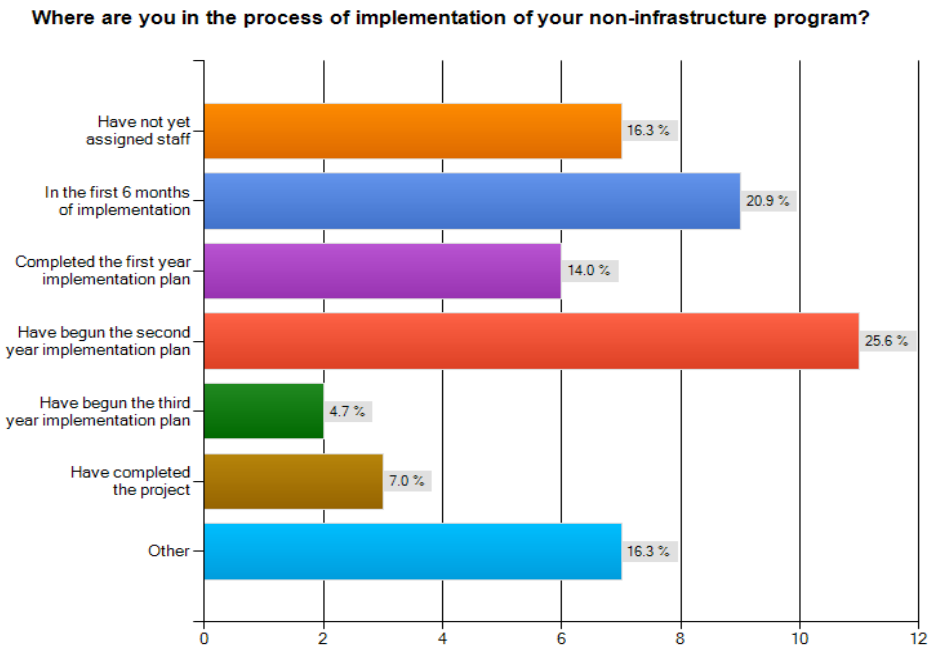
- 46 answered the question
- 22% (10) said yes
- 78% (36) said no

Question 25: Non-Infrastructure Implementation Phase

Where are you in the process of implementation of your non-infrastructure program? (Multiple Choice)

NI grantees are in varied stages from awaiting E-76 and approval of funding through completion. See chart below.

- 43 answered the question
- One grantee needed to revise due application due to school closures.



Question 26: NI Barrier to Implementation

What were the barriers to implementation?

Thirty NI grantees offered examples of barriers. These included challenges internal to the lead agency, challenges with the NI administrative requirements, most notably for authorization, and lastly the challenge of working with schools which also are impacted by budget and competing priorities.

- Eight reported internal challenges including staff reductions due to budget crisis, unfamiliarity with program requirements, not knowing how to start, competing priorities, and filling part time positions.
- Seven reported administrative challenges with the Caltrans process, primarily with the sheer volume of paperwork and the authorization process.
- Working with schools was also challenging in these budgetary times with high staff turnover, competing priorities, and timing of grant not coinciding with school calendar. One reported delays with subcontractor.

Question 27: Sticking Places in Process

If you are stuck in the process, where are you stuck and what are the reasons?

Responses to this question reinforced question 26.

- 16 responded of which 9 have not gotten stuck
- 4 complained of paperwork and “red-tape
- 1 had trouble communicating with Caltrans

- 1 had too many competing internal demands

Question 28: Working with Schools

Have you encountered issues related to partnering with schools (such as coordination with school calendars, contract completion, etc.)? Please describe.

Responses to this question also reinforced question 26.

- 25 responded of which 10 had not problems
- 7 found coordination of calendars more challenging than anticipated and some were worried they would not meet their proposed timelines.
- 6 acknowledge school competing priorities at the school site and district levels.

EVALUATION

Question 29: Evaluation Measures

What kinds of evaluation data will you be collecting? Please check all that apply.
(Multiple choice and open-ended)

Nearly 2/3 of sites plan to collect data on students walking and biking patterns.

- 75 responded to question
- 61% (46) will report changes in student walking and biking habits
- 57% (43) will report frequency of student walking and biking
- 43% (32) will report traffic collision data
- 36% (27) are reporting number of participants at events
- 32% (24) will report program activities
- 29% (22) will report car speeds at schools
- 16% (12) are not collecting evaluation data or another agency is charged with this task
- 9% (7) reported no knowledge of the program evaluation
- Comments included use of baseline audits and walkability studies, National Center parent survey

Question 30: Data Collection

How does your project collect evaluation data? (Please check all that apply)
(Multiple choice and open-ended)

Over half the grantees collect their own evaluation data. They also rely on institutional and volunteer partners.

- 72 responded to question
- 53% (38) of the lead agencies collect their evaluation data
- 35% (25) rely on school site staff

- 29% (21) rely on students and volunteers
- 17% (12) have a form of automated data collection such as speed monitors or card readers
- 18% (13) did now know how the data was collected.
- Other method offered in comment include crossing guard data, other school district staff, paid data collectors, city and law enforcement.

Question 31 – Evaluation Reporting

To whom do you report or share your evaluation findings? Please check all that apply.

There is not a consistent pattern of who receives evaluation findings. One quarter of respondents did not know to whom they were disseminated. The most frequent partner to receive findings are school districts (54%) followed by cities or counties (47%). Only 43% share findings with Caltrans.

- 72 responded to question
- 24% (17) did not know who received evaluation findings
- 54% (39) report to the school district
- 47% (34) report to their city or county
- 43% (31) to Caltrans
- 28% (20) report to community partners
- 22% (16) report to parents
- 14% (10) report to students
- 6% (4) report to the Federal Transportation agency
- 8% (6) report to the National Center for Safe Routes to School
- Additional partners who were reported to receive evaluation findings mentioned in the - comments included: law enforcement; website users; requesting agencies. -

PRELIMINARY CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

The application process is resource intensive for local agencies already impacted by CA budget crisis, and is especially challenging for non-public works and small rural sites.

Federal SRTS and CA SR2S have same applicant pool. Consolidation and coordination would be helpful as long as it does not create more cumbersome application.

Non-infrastructure projects should not have to comply with infrastructure application and authorization process.

Centralized consistent TA for all stages would be helpful.

If low-income schools are to be given priority, clear criteria and suggested strategies would be helpful.

Understanding of evaluation requirements is inconsistent across sites. While many sites report collecting significant outcome data on walking and biking behaviors, they are more likely to share with local partners than to Caltrans. **Feedback to the agency that administers the program would foster systematic learning.**