

Frequently Asked Questions

For more information, visit: <http://nitc.trec.pdx.edu>

1. What is NITC?

The **National Institute for Transportation and Communities**, or NITC, is a program of the [Transportation Research and Education Center](#), or [TREC](#), at Portland State University. NITC is the U.S. Department of Transportation's national center for mobility of people and goods and one of five U.S. DOT national university transportation centers. NITC 2016 is a [Portland State](#)-led partnership with the [University of Oregon](#), [Oregon Institute of Technology](#), [University of Utah](#), [University of Arizona](#), and [University of Texas Arlington](#).

2. What are NITC's priorities?

We pursue our theme – improving mobility of people and goods to build strong communities – through research, education and technology transfer. The NITC theme connects directly with the U.S. DOT strategic goals and includes:

- Increasing access to opportunities
- Improving multi-modal planning and shared use of infrastructure
- Advancing innovation and smart cities
- Developing data, models, and tools

3. When did the NITC grant begin?

DOT awarded the UTC grants in late November of 2016, and the period of performance of the NITC grant begins **November 30, 2016**.

4. What are NITC's core campus activities?

An Executive Committee member from each campus is responsible for coordinating core campus activities intended to strengthen the presence of NITC at their home university. This funding is offered annually and must be used up annually. Each university within NITC is provided core funding to support the following activities:

- **Executive Committee member.** The role of the Executive Committee member is to help provide overall direction for NITC and assist in project funding decisions. Each Executive Committee member is responsible for representing and supporting their respective campus in activities such as regular NITC updates to campus leadership and organizing NITC information sessions for faculty, researchers, and students. In addition, committee members will assist campus researchers in responding to NITC's requests for proposals.
- **Student Groups.** A strong student cohort is important to strengthening the educational experience for students. Each university is provided with funding to help support student group activities such as travel stipends to present transportation and livable communities research at conferences, tours of local facilities, and events that help retain the interest of students.

- **Student Scholars.** Each university is provided some nominal funding to support research or education pursuits of new or existing students who excel academically and pursue transportation-related degrees and projects.
- **Visiting Scholars.** The visiting scholars program is intended to help defray the costs of bringing thought leaders to partner universities to present and share scholarly work that helps to advance transportation and livable communities.

5. What are NITC's funding opportunities?

- **Competitive Research.** This is the largest funding opportunity for PIs. An open request for proposals (RFP) is issued annually to solicit research and technology transfer projects. Projects are typically \$60,000-\$150,000. NITC funds about 50% of all proposals submitted.
- **Small Starts.** NITC offers opportunities to support small faculty development research endeavors with priority given to untenured, tenure-track faculty and faculty who have not received a NITC grant in the past. The purpose of these awards is to assist researchers interested in transportation, but have not had an opportunity, to undertake a small project that supports innovations in livable communities. Small starts grants are \$20,000 or less.
- **Pooled-Fund.** This specific grant program is intended to help maximize implementation of U.S. DOT's commitment to livable communities while providing regional and local agencies, such as metropolitan planning organizations, transit agencies, and municipalities, more opportunity to engage in research. NITC solicits research problem statements from interested organizations. NITC then releases an RFP to eligible PIs to develop proposals responding to one or more specific research problem identified. Partner organizations match NITC pooled projects 1:1 with cash match.
- **Curriculum Development.** One of NITC's objectives is to increase student interest in pursuing transportation degrees that align with transportation and livable communities. This funding is intended to help develop curriculum and other education programs at each partner university that can be replicated at other locations or otherwise enhance transportation education more broadly. NITC will accept these proposals and evaluate the merit on a rolling basis.
- **Dissertation Fellowships.** Fellowships up to \$15,000 will be awarded to cover expenses for the students while working on their dissertation. Dissertation fellowships will be offered competitively three times annually, with an open call for dissertation fellowships occurring every March 1, June 1, and October 1 for the duration of the NITC grant.
- **Diversity Grants.** NITC encourages participation of undergraduate students particularly women and underrepresented groups. NITC has funds available to support underrepresented undergraduate and graduate students participating in transportation research. The goal of the program is to expose and encourage women and people of color to transportation research and job training opportunities. PIs can request up to \$5,000 for an undergraduate student; or \$7,500 for a graduate student. Funding occurs on an ongoing basis.

6. Who is eligible to serve as PIs?

Faculty members and research faculty eligible to serve as PIs at Portland State University, the University of Oregon, the Oregon Institute of Technology, the University of Arizona, University of Texas at Arlington or the University of Utah may submit proposals.

7. Matching Funds

A key requirement of this USDOT federal funding is that the total amount of NITC grant expenditures is matched from *non-Federal* sources. **NITC requires a 120% match for all projects funded through the general RFP.** See table below for the match requirement by grant type. Matching funds (cash and in-kind) must be used to accomplish program objectives and the purpose of the NITC grant. **All match will need to be documented in an auditable way, either through accounting processes at partner universities or by external sponsors.**

There are some exceptions to the non-federal requirement. Match may include funds provided to a recipient under sections 503, 504(b), or 505 of Title 23, United States Code. Those sections refer to the technology deployment, local technical assistance, state planning and research (SPR) and a federal cooperative research program managed by the Transportation Research Board (e.g., NCHRP). Sponsors providing these funds will know if their funds fit these exclusion categories.

Grant Type	Start Date	Match Requirement
General RFP	Aug. 1	1.2:1
Small Starts	Nov. 1	1:1
Pooled-Fund	TBD	1:1 (from project sponsors)
Dissertation	May, July, Dec	None
Diversity Grants	Ongoing	1:1
Education	Ongoing	1:1
Executive Committee	July 1	1:1
Student Groups	July 1	1:1
Student Scholars	July 1	1:1

8. What is match?

A key requirement of this USDOT federal funding is that the total amount of NITC grant expenditures is matched from *non-Federal* sources. **NITC requires a 120% match for all projects funded through the General RFP.** Matching funds (cash and in-kind) must be used to accomplish program objectives and the purpose of the NITC grant. **All match will need to be documented in an auditable way, either through accounting processes at partner universities or by external sponsors.**

There are some exceptions to the non-federal requirement. Match may include funds provided to a recipient under sections 503, 504(b), or 505 of Title 23, United States Code. Those sections refer to the technology deployment, local technical assistance, state planning and research (SP&R) and a federal

cooperative research program managed by the Transportation Research Board (e.g., NCHRP). Sponsors providing these funds will know if their funds fit these exclusion categories.

9. Cash Match

Some examples of expenses that can be used as match are:

University Match – considered “cash”

- Faculty salary and benefits for a reasonable percentage of FTE plus indirect costs at the approved federal rate (indirect costs are also known as Facilities and Administrative costs or F&A)
- Student salary and benefits (graduate assistants, and hourly) plus F&A
- Tuition (note that indirect or F&A is not charged on tuition)
- Supplies plus F&A
- Domestic travel plus F&A
- Scholarships (note that F&A is not charged on scholarships)
- Equipment (note that F&A is not charged on equipment) with prior approval
- International travel plus F&A with prior approval

Indirect Cost Return (also called “F&A”)

At some campuses and in some units, Indirect Costs received by the university on grant expenditures are returned to academic units for re-investment. In these cases, these funds are considered to be non-Federal cash match, and may be used.

External Cash

Any of the categories listed above paid from grant/gift funds administered by the university may also be match (for example, faculty and student salary, OPE and F&A, as long as it's documented and auditable).

10. In-Kind Match

In-kind match is generally defined as a contribution other than cash, donated or pledged, that originates from the gifting of the value of time, goods, services, equipment or other expendable property. The evaluation of in-kind match must be determined by the donor, his/her authorized representative or a qualified third party. It must be assessed at a “real” fair market value rate.

In-kind match is also allowed, as long as it is documented in an auditable way. A sample letter committing match to a project is available on the [NITC website](#).

11. Can Unrecovered Indirect Costs be used as match?

Maybe, but *prior* approval must be obtained. NITC accepts unrecovered indirect costs as match with prior approval from the sponsor (OST-R). Unrecovered indirect cost means the difference between the amount charged to a grant award and the amount which could have been charged to the grant award under the Center's approved negotiated indirect cost rate. Such costs must be fully documented for audit purposes.

12. Can NCHRP funds be used as match?

Yes. NCHRP is funded by voluntary contributions from state Departments of Transportation. The contribution is recommended at 5.5% of the state apportionment of the SP&R funding received. States typically pay this contribution from SP&R funding.

13. Where can I find more guidance on match?

ITC follows the rules set forth in [2 C.F.R. 200.306](#) for the use of in-kind and cash contributions as matching funds. NITC staff and partner university research office staff can also assist.

14. What expenses are *not* allowed on NITC grant budgets?

You should avoid proposing to use NITC funds to purchase equipment (unit cost of \$5,000 or more), international travel, or non-compensation stipends for international students. If a substantial need can be generated, in rare cases, NITC is required to obtain special advance approval from USDOT *prior* to grant award. Expenses for items normally considered already covered by university overhead (phones, office space, admin, etc.) should not be included in the budget grant request.

Non-NITC partners including universities and private consultants may be included in the proposal. If PIs anticipate the **sub-consultant role will be 20% or more** of the budget, justification and budget details must be submitted to Eva-Maria Muecke (emuecke@pdx.edu) at least two weeks before the proposal deadline for approval by the Executive Committee. Approval is granted when it is determined that success of the project requires significant involvement (e.g., 20% or more of the budget) from the sub-consultant.

15. Can I use expense items for match that are typically not allowed as project expenses (for example, equipment or international travel)?

Maybe, but *prior* approval must be obtained. Our sponsor guidelines note that, “any restriction on the use of Federal funds applies equally to non-Federal matching funds.” This would include equipment and international travel. However, rare exceptions can be made with *prior* approval and if these expenses are used to *accomplish program objectives and the purpose of the grant*, are completely auditable and can be tracked through the life of the grant.

Expenses for items normally considered already covered by university overhead (phones, office space, admin, etc.) should not be included in the match budget.

16. How far back can I go to use match?

The start date of matching funds is November 30, 2016.

17. Useful links and information

- Main NITC site — <http://nitc.trec.pdx.edu>
- NITC funding opportunities — <http://nitc.trec.pdx.edu/for-researchers>
- Email: asktrec@pdx.edu
Phone: 503-725-8545
Fax: 503-725-2880
Address: TREC, 1900 S.W. Fourth Ave., Suite 175, Portland, OR 97201

18. How to reach us

NITC Staff	Contact for	Email
Jennifer Dill, Ph.D	Congressional relations, strategic partnerships, advisory board	jdill@pdx.edu
Hau Hagedorn	Connecting with researchers, partner agencies, funding opportunities, RFP	hagedorn@pdx.edu
Eva-Maria Muecke	RFP, performance measures and tracking, project requirements	emuecke@pdx.edu
Cheyenne Kailnoff	Budget, expenses, invoices	trecdra@pdx.edu
Lisa Patterson	Transportation and Communities Summit, K-12 programs, student support, tech transfer	l.patterson@pdx.edu

PSU Research and Sponsored Projects	Contact for	Email
Kathleen Choi	Master subaward agreement, MOU, task orders	spasilver@pdx.edu
Lauren Russell	Master subaward agreement, MOU, task orders	spasilver@pdx.edu