RURAL SAFE EFFICIENT ADVANCED TRANSPORTATION

(R-SEAT) CENTER

2026 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

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Submission Deadline: 04/01/2026 at 11:59 p.m.

Submit to: tsegai1.yhdego@famu.edu **and copy** amon.bryant@famu.edu

R-SEAT Contacts

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SECTION A – BACKGROUND

R-SEAT Center's Vision, Mission, and Alignment with USDOT Strategic Goals

The R-SEAT Center is a consortium of six institutions that addresses multimodal transportation challenges through research to improve the quality of life in rural America. The R-SEAT activities are consistent with the US DOT statutory research priority *Area A: Improving Mobility of People and Goods*, with a focus on rural transportation. The Center's strategic thinking and planning of rural transportation in the United States is of paramount importance, given that 19 percent of the U.S. population lives in rural communities, which is increasingly marked by growing diversity and expanding service gaps within and across regions[1]. In addition, 97 percent of the land mass in the US is categorized as rural and has 68 percent of the Nation's total lane-miles[2]. Thus, the desired transformation of the transportation industry requires overcoming geographical challenges in access, connectivity, and modernization of rural transportation systems. While the transportation system undergoes a transformation with new technologies (e.g., connected and autonomous vehicles), a concerted, focused approach is needed to evaluate the efficacy of these solutions for rural transportation needs.

The **Center's vision is to be the go-to resource for researchers and practitioners seeking implementable solutions in** transportation, particularly in rural areas. The Center's **mission** is to build a track record of transformative projects that push the research frontier, inform policy-making, and develop education and outreach programs that help sustain the Center's momentum in translating knowledge into practice. Scientific research efforts are geared toward consolidating our understanding of the knowledge gaps towards the USDOT Strategic Plan. In this vein, the Center puts forward four research thrust areas: *Innovation and Technology, Transportation Safety*, *Resilience*, and *Workforce Development*.

2026 Call for Proposals

R-SEAT is soliciting proposals from its consortium faculty for research projects in 2026. The proposal will be selected for funding after peer review based on the merit of the proposed research, alignment with the USDOT and R-SEAT Center mission and objectives, real-world implementation, and technology transfer potential. The topic areas for solicited projects, as well as other requirements and documentation, are provided below.

R-SEAT Consortium Members

Florida A&M University (Lead Institution), Cleveland State University, Florida State University, Stony Brook University, Tallahassee State College, and the University of Washington – Tacoma

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[1] Rowlands, D.W. and H. Love. "*Mapping Rural America's Diversity and Demographic Change",* The Avenue. As viewed https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/09/28/mapping-rural-americas-diversity-and-demographic-change/, August 7th, 2022.

[2] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, *"Annual Vehicle Distance Traveled in Miles and Related Data, 2017-2018"*; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Fatality Analysis Reporting System, 2018.

SECTION B – R-SEAT CENTER RESEARCH THRUST AREAS

The submitted proposals should fit into one or more of the R-SEAT thrust areas listed below. The proposals should clearly articulate how the proposed project will fit into the R-SEAT themes.

- **Thrust #1: Innovation and Technology**

Objective: Technology and Innovation

Scope: Emerging technologies affect all aspects of transportation systems, ranging from traffic operations to long-term planning. The feasibility and/or impacts of technology implementations vary based on multiple factors, including the technology infrastructure (e.g., sensor deployments), funding availability, and public and agency perspectives on specific technologies (e.g., perceptions of AV adoption). The Center is interested in supporting and advancing the development and deployment of innovative transportation technologies, particularly to enhance rural mobility, connectivity, and system efficiency.

Thrust #2: Transportation Safety

Objective: Promote Transportation Safety

Scope: Even the most efficient transportation systems pose risks to its users. The emerging technologies, ranging from wearable devices to automated vehicles, offer safety improvements, yet those advancements require vetting for efficacy beyond mere technological optimism. The Center will support projects that use a safe systems approach while assessing the technology's benefits for user safety, including bicyclists, pedestrians, and motorcyclists.

- **Thrust 3: Resilience**

Objective: Enhance Resilience with Community Needs in Mind

Scope: Resilience is a multifaceted concept that has both technical and social dimensions. Regardless of how multimodal, accessible, and safe the transportation system is, the geographical diversity in rural areas makes it challenging to devise resilient strategies that balance the technical aspects of infrastructure resilience with the social aspects of community resilience. The Center will support projects that adopt socio-technical methodologies to address transportation system resilience and provide transformative approaches.

- **Thrust 4: Workforce Development**

Objective: Prepare the workforce for the transformation in the transportation industry

Scope: R-SEAT Center treats workforce development not as an afterthought in the Center's research activities but as an integral part of the transformative mission of the Center. The transformative potential of research can only be realized if the gap between the state of the art and the state of practice is reduced. In the mid- to long-term, this can be achieved most effectively by educating the next generation of researchers and practitioners who embrace the same principles that lead to an accessible, multimodal transportation system. In the short term, training and education programs for the existing workforce can begin to bridge the gap between research and practice. The Center will support training programs for the existing workforce and educational initiatives to sustain the transformation in the transportation industry.

SECTION C – GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL

Eligibility

All project PIs must be affiliated with one of the R-SEAT consortium institutions, namely:

- Florida A&M University (Lead Institution),
- Cleveland State University
- Florida State University
- Stony Brook University
- Tallahassee State College
- University of Washington – Tacoma

Budget and Duration

The projects should not exceed 12 months in duration and $100K in requested budget. Ideally, each project should provide a 2:1 cost-share match (e.g., $50K match for a $100K request). Otherwise, the cumulative cost-share amount from each consortium institution must meet the 2:1 match for the total funds requested for that institution.

Required Documents

All applicants must use the proposal template below for the 2026 R-SEAT RFP submissions. All application files must be submitted as a single PDF document. The proposal format and outlined sections are provided below:

1. **Cover Page** (Please see APPENDIX-A)
2. **Abstract** (300 words max)
3. **Main proposal narrative** (10 pages max)

3.1. Background and Problem Statement (1-2 pages max)

Provide an overview of the research problem, indicate the objective and its significance, and list the anticipated outcomes. Clearly indicate the project's relevance to the R-SEAT themes and USDOT Strategic Plan

3.2. Literature Review (1-2 pages max)

Utilize the literature to document the research gap that you are addressing

3.3. Methodology and Proposed Approach (2-page max)

Provide an overview of the methodology and substantiate its fit to the research problem at hand

3.4. Proposed Statement of Work - Task Descriptions (4 pages max)

The Statement of Work (SOW) is the primary contractual document that outlines work activities and specifies deliverables. It describes each step/task necessary to accomplish the project objectives. SOW needs to include descriptions of projects, step/task/actions (i.e., how it will be performed), a clear indication of responsibility (i.e., who will perform it), and the intended result. Each task should include the deliverable(s) for that task. Task deliverables will be used to assess the performance. Add as many tasks and subtasks as necessary to accomplish the project goals.

Each project is required to have two mandatory tasks: 1) Final project report (1 month) and 2) One- to two-page research brief summarizing the methods, findings, and significance of the research project in non-technical language, suitable for distribution to transportation agencies and policymakers.

3.5. Proposed Schedule and Deliverables (1 page max)

Each proposal should include a work schedule with a start and duration for each task and subtasks, and indicate due dates for the deliverable(s) and progress reports. (Please see SECTION D – REPORTING REQUIREMENTS for details)

3.6. Research Obligations/Commitments of Key Personnel (1 page max)

Please list the research obligations of the key personnel for the duration of the proposed R-SEAT project, including both R-SEAT and non-R-SEAT projects.

3.7. References (no page limit)

4. Assessment of Technology Transfer and Transformation Potential

4.1. The description (<250 words) on how the results of this project will be disseminated and/or adopted for practical use by transportation industry stakeholders.

4.2. Technology Readiness Level (TRL) and Stakeholder Engagement Form (APPENDIX-B).

The form includes pre- (actual) and post- (anticipated) project assessments of TRL and stakeholder engagement. The form can be downloaded from here. All PIs are required to provide a final version (i.e., actual by the end of the project) of the TRL and Stakeholder Engagement Form before the official completion of the project. The pre- and post-project forms will be used to assess the success of both the projects' and the R-SEAT Center's technology transfer and stakeholder engagement activities.

5. Data Management Plan (please see APPENDIX-C)

6. Budget, Budget Justification & Matching Funds

The project budget (not exceeding $100K for 12 months) should be provided in an MS Office Excel file (available for download from here). The budget justification should provide details of the request, the source of match funding and commitment, and in-kind or other quantifiable support or participation from project collaborators (community organizations, industry, etc.).

7. Qualification of the Research Team

- 2-page CV for PI and co-PIs, showing relevant skills and experiences to ensure the project's success.

8. Supporting Documentation

- Letters of participation, statements of support
- A cost-share commitment letter

SECTION E – REVIEW CRITERIA

Each proposal will be reviewed by a Review Committee to ensure it meets the Center's requirements. Proposals with missing information (as outlined in Section C – Guidelines for Submitting a Proposal) will be returned without review. The Review Committee will seek at least 2 peer reviews from outside the Center to gain additional perspective. The Review Committee will make the final decisions, which are justifiable to the Center's Advisory Board. The Review Committee will rank proposals, and the funding will be allocated accordingly. The Review Committee can request adjustments to the scope or budget of a proposed project.

The proposals will be judged based on the following criteria:

1) Intellectual merit
2) Level of contribution to the mission and the thrust areas in the R-SEAT Center that are outlined in the RFP
3) The extent of technology transfer plans and stakeholder engagement
4) Inclusion of training or workforce development components
5) Feasibility of project scope, budget, and data
6) Track record (e.g., successful and timely completion of projects) and existing commitments of project PIs

Deadlines and Schedule

- Full proposals must be submitted via email by **04/01/2026** to Tsegai Yhdego, Assistant Director at tsegai1.yhdego@famu.edu
- Review, follow-up, selection, and funding allocations will take place over **April and May 2026.**
- Notice of award will be sent out in **May 2026**.
- All projects are expected to commence by **June 1**, or a later date, with approval of the R-SEAT Center Director.
- Please note that final report drafts are due to the **Center 1 month after** project completion.

SECTION D – REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The Principal Investigators (PI) are required to submit all project deliverables and reports to the Project Manager, first in draft format for review. The Project Manager may provide feedback and/or comments, and the PIs are required to address the comments and resubmit the deliverable to the R-SEAT Project Manager for final review and approval. Failing to submit the deliverables and reports on time, or not addressing the feedback provided, may lead to suspension of funding and/or ineligibility for funding under subsequent R-SEAT Center RFPs.

In addition to the project-specific deliverables that are outlined in the Statement of Work (SOW) for each project, the PIs are required to provide the following reports to the R-SEAT Center management:

- **Quarterly Progress Report (QPR)**

The PIs are required to submit quarterly project status reports to the R-SEAT Project Manager. A template will be provided at the time of the award. QPR should be submitted within 2 weeks of the end of each quarter and should reflect activities within the quarter, including a description of issues or problems (and proposed solutions to those problems) that may inhibit project progress, require scope or budget revisions.

- **Final Project Report**

The PIs are required to submit a final draft report one month before the project's conclusion. The draft report should include a cover, a disclaimer page, and a completed USDOT Form 1700. The final project reports will be reviewed by the R-SEAT Center Review Committee. The reviewers' comments should be addressed in the final report for approval.

- **Research Brief**

The PIs are required to submit a one-or two-page non-technical summary of the project along with the draft final report. A template will be provided by the project manager. The brief should summarize the research project's methods, findings, and significance in non-technical language, suitable for distribution to transportation agencies and policymakers.

- **Post-Completion Technology Readiness Level (TRL) and Stakeholder Engagement Form**

The PIs are required to submit the updated *Technology Readiness Level (TRL) and Stakeholder Engagement Form* based on the project's achievements during the project duration.

SECTION E – OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

APPENDIX A – TITLE PAGE

PROJECT TITLE: XXXX

Proposing Consortium University:
XXXXX

Principal Investigator:
Name
Affiliation
Phone:
E-Mail:

Co-Principal Investigator(s):
Name
Affiliation
Phone:
E-Mail:

Date of submission: XX/XX/XXXX
Requested federal fund amount: $XX,XXX
Non-federal matching fund amount: $XX,XXX
Proposed project duration: XX/XX/XXXX –XX/XX/XXXX (Date to Date)

APPENDIX B – ASSESSMENT OF TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER AND TRANSFORMATION POTENTIAL

Researchers supported by the R-SEAT Center are expected to actively participate in the Center's engagement, outreach, and technology transfer activities. R-SEAT Center strongly encourages PIs to present their research to policymakers and practitioners at non-academic conferences and events. PIs will be called upon to participate in R-SEAT Center-sponsored workshops, forums, legislative briefings, webinars, and other events. Project budgets must include researcher time associated with engagement activities; however, discretionary travel funds are available to support PIs in presenting their research at these venues. The R-SEAT Center advisory board will assist PIs in identifying and creating opportunities to connect their research with policymakers and practitioners.

In terms of proposal and project assessment, each project must include a technology transfer plan (max 250 words) that outlines how the PI will communicate the research and engage stakeholders to maximize the understanding, impact, and adoption of the research outcomes.

In addition, to assess and document the R-SEAT projects' transformation potential, the following categories are identified for evaluation: Technology Readiness Level, Public Stakeholder Engagement, Private Stakeholder Engagement, Community Stakeholder Engagement, and Education/Training Partner Engagement. Based on the information below, proposals must include the assessment using the R-SEAT template form in MS Office Excel (available here).

At the proposal submission stage, the PIs will be asked to indicate their project's pre-project (proposal-level) status and anticipated post-project status for each assessment category. This information will be used as one of the review criteria. After the project's completion, the PIs will be required to provide an update on whether the anticipated goals have been realized, along with evidence of accomplishments (e.g., email correspondence with stakeholders, announcement of a pilot study, policy changes related to the project, publication of a proof-of-concept, etc.). R-SEAT Center projects will be required to demonstrate improvements in TRL and to demonstrate improvement in at least one of the stakeholder engagements. R-SEAT Center strives to hit the highest assessment level (implying implementation) in at least one category of assessment at every RFP cycle.

Technology Readiness Level (TRL)

R-SEAT Center adopts the definition of technology as outlined in the National Critical Technologies report[3] by the Whitehouse that summarizes the 3rd biennial National Critical Technologies Review:

- *"Systematized and practical, based on experimentation and/or scientific theory*
- *May involve new discoveries, current knowledge, or a combination of both*
- *Directed toward application or achieving a goal rather than only toward understanding*
- *Involves direct manipulation of materials or biological systems, or the implementation of mathematical algorithms*

[3] https://clintonwhitehouse3.archives.gov/WH/EOP/OSTP/CTIformatted/index.html

- *Is reproducible and transferable"*

TRL for the R-SEAT center follows the USDOT guidelines for TRL[4]:

1. Basic principles and research (Basic Research)
2. Application formulated (Basic Research)
3. Proof of concept (Basic Research)
4. Components validated in a laboratory environment (Applied Research)
5. Integrated components demonstrated in a laboratory environment (Applied Research)
6. Prototype demonstrated in a relevant environment (Development)
7. Prototype demonstrated in operational environment (Development)
8. Technology proven in operational environment (Development)
9. Technology refined and adopted (Implementation)

Public Sector Stakeholder Engagement

R-SEAT Center defines public stakeholders as any public entity or organization with jurisdictional responsibilities for transportation planning, policy, and operations, such as DOTs, MPOs, and local governments. Accordingly, the following levels of engagement are defined:

1. No communication or engagement with public stakeholders
2. Public stakeholder(s) are identified but NOT communicated/engaged
3. Public stakeholder(s) are communicated/engaged (requires proof of engagement, such as emails, meeting notes, letters of support)
4. Public stakeholder(s) are a part of the study (requires proof of engagement, such as data/time/personnel commitment, data/information sharing agreement, letter of support, pilot study partnering)
5. Public stakeholder(s) adopted the project solutions/recommendations (requires proof of engagement, such as modifications in actual policy/planning/operations)

Private Sector Stakeholder Engagement

R-SEAT Center defines private stakeholders as any entity or organization with an interest in project outcomes and that can help ensure the project's success in achieving transformation, such as consultants, non-profits, technology companies, and start-ups. Accordingly, the following levels of engagement are defined:

1. No communication or engagement with private stakeholders
2. Private stakeholder(s) are identified but NOT communicated/engaged
3. Private stakeholder(s) are communicated/engaged (requires proof of engagement, such as emails, meeting notes, letters of support)
4. Private stakeholder(s) are a part of the study (requires proof of engagement, such as data/time/personnel commitment, data/information sharing agreement, app/technology development pilot study partnering, letters of support)

[4] https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/ear/17047/001.cfm

5. Private stakeholder(s) adopted the project solutions/recommendations (requires proof of engagement, such as modifications in business plans, mobile app)

Community Stakeholder Engagement

R-SEAT Center defines community stakeholders as any entity or organization that does not have direct authority over planning/policy/operational aspects related to the project but has an interest in project outcomes, primarily as end users and/or beneficiaries, such as community organizations, town residents, etc. Accordingly, the following levels of engagement are defined:

1. No communication or engagement with community stakeholders
2. Community stakeholder(s) are identified but NOT communicated/engaged
3. Community stakeholder(s) are communicated/engaged (requires proof of engagement, such as emails, meeting notes, letters of support)
4. Community stakeholder(s) are a part of the study (requires proof of engagement such as data/time/personnel commitment, data/information sharing agreement, app/technology development pilot study partnering, letters of support)
5. Community stakeholder(s) adopted the project solutions/recommendations (requires proof of engagement, such as modifications in business plans, mobile app)

Education/Training Partner Engagement

R-SEAT Center defines Education/Training Partner as any public, private, or community entity or organization that has an interest in project outcomes in terms of education and/or training opportunities for students, employees, or the public, such as DOTs, local governments, colleges, etc. Education/Training partner engagements are expected to produce products towards workforce development, such as training programs, tutorials, operational pamphlets, and new or modified college courses. Accordingly, the following levels of engagement are defined:

1. No communication or engagement with the education/training partner
2. Education/training partner(s) are identified but NOT communicated/engaged
3. Education/training partner(s) are communicated/engaged (requires proof of engagement, such as emails, meeting notes, letters of support)
4. Education/training partner(s) are a part of the study (requires proof of engagement, such as data/time/personnel commitment, letters of support)
5. Private stakeholder(s) adopted the project solutions/recommendations (requires proof of engagement such as training programs, new courses, etc.)

APPENDIX C – DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

The R-SEAT PIs are required to comply with the USDOT Public Access requirements for all data (e.g., surveys, datasets generated from the research, video recordings, image files, etc.) associated with federally funded research. As a condition of funding, PIs are required to prepare their final data for the repository, including removing all personal identifiers as required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), converting to non-proprietary formats, and preparing metadata.
In general, the researcher will address the following in their project DMPs:

1. Name who has the right to manage the data.
2. Indicate who holds the intellectual property rights to the data.
3. List any copyrights to the data. If so, indicate who owns them.
4. Discuss any rights be transferred to a data archive.
5. Describe how your data will be licensed for reuse, redistribution, and derivative products.

Additional information on the data management plan and guidance is available here