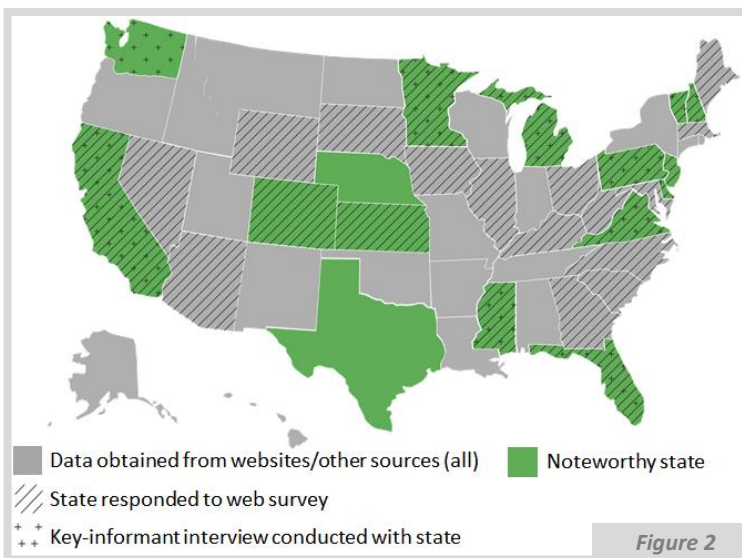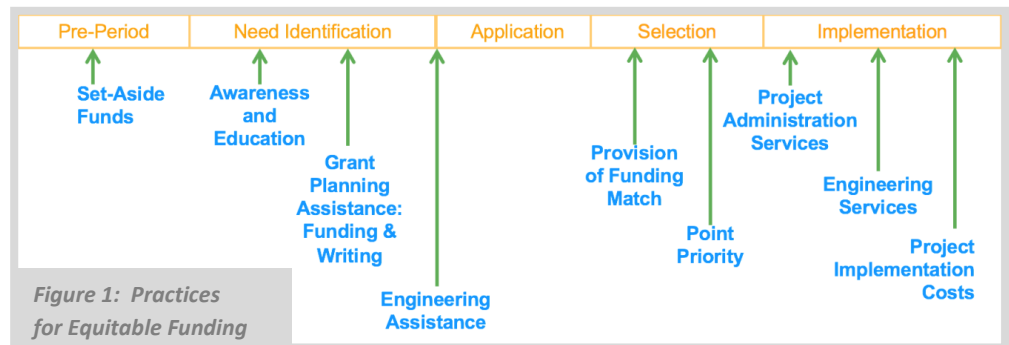# BRIEF: Examining Practices that Promote Access to Safe Routes to School Programs in Vulnerable Communities

Applying for and implementing a federally-funded Safe Routes to School (SRTS) award can be particularly challenging for low-income communities in need of safe and active transportation programming. SRTS programs in multiple states have adopted several approaches to reduce barriers faced by schools in low-income communities, which span the project timeline from planning to implementation (*Figure 1)*. Given the differences in state programs and policies, this study aimed to determine which of these practices for equitable funding were successful in promoting SRTS implementation within vulnerable communities.

The Study

To assess state practices, researchers collected award data (years 2005-2015) from the *National Center for Safe Routes to School State Project List*, sent web-based surveys to individual state-level respondents, and conducted follow-up interviews with a sample of state coordinators. State program and legislative websites were also reviewed. In total, 28 states responded to the survey and 11 states participated in follow-up interviews.

Figure 1: Practices for Equitable Funding

Pre-Period | Need Identification | Application | Selection | Implementation

Set-Aside Funds · Awareness and Education · Grant Planning Assistance: Funding & Writing · Engineering Assistance · Provision of Funding Match · Point Priority · Project Administration Services · Engineering Services · Project Implementation Costs

Figure 2

- Data obtained from websites/other sources (all)
- Noteworthy state
- State responded to web survey
- Key-informant interview conducted with state

Defining Noteworthy States

Several states reported using a number of practices for equitable distribution of funds, though researchers identified 16 states as "noteworthy" as they reported using a number of practices for equitable distribution of funds, or awarded projects to low-income schools at a rate higher than expected during more than one funding cycle (*Figure 2*).

Defining Vulnerable Communities

Researchers learned that states' SRTS programs define "vulnerable" or "low-income communities" using many different standards, such as criteria set by other state agencies or local jurisdictions. Therefore, this analysis may have missed certain states that could be classified as "noteworthy" based on their state's definition of vulnerable communities.

Practices for Equitable Funding

Many states have chosen one or more practices that may promote funding in low-income communities. *Table 1* provides an overview of practices used by states and noteworthy states, listed by the phase in which they occur during the funding process.

Definitions and descriptions of these practices, as well as examples and insights collected from state surveys and interviews can be found in the full report:
https://hsph.me/prc-srts-practices

Table 1: Practices for Equitable Funding

Phase in Project Timeline	Practice that may promote SRTS funding in low-income communities	States Using Practice (N=51)	50 States & DC	Noteworthy States Using Practice (N=16)	CA, CO, DE, FL, KS, MI, MN, MS, NE, NH, NJ, PA, TX, VT, VA, WA
Pre-Period	Set-aside funds for low-income communities	1	CA	1	CA
Need Identification	Practice awareness and education strategies aimed at encouraging applications from low-income communities	15	CA, CO, DE, FL, MA, MI, MS, NC, NJ, OH, PA, SD, VT, VA, WA	11	CA, CO, DE, FL, MI, MS, NJ, PA, VT, VA, WA
	Provide grant planning assistance: funding	8	CA, DE, MN, MS, NH, NM, OH, VA	6	CA, DE, MN, MS, NH, VA
	Provide grant planning assistance: writing	8	AZ, FL, MI, MS, MO, NJ, OH, VA	5	FL, MI, MS, NJ, VA
Application	Provide engineering assistance to communities before they apply	9	CO, DE, MD, MA, MI, NH, OH, VT, VA	6	CO, DE, MI, NH, VT, VA
Selection	Provision of funding match	12	CA, DE, DC, FL, LA, MA, MI, NJ, OH, PA, TX, WV	7	CA, DE, FL, MI, NJ, PA, TX
	Assign extra points or provide special consideration for applications from low-income communities ("point priority")	18	AZ, CA, CO, FL, MI, MS, MN, NE, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, SD, TX, VT, VA, WA	14	CA, CO, FL, MI, MS, MN, NE, NH, NJ, PA, TX, VT, VA, WA
Implementation	Provide project administration services to communities during project implementation	14	CA, CO, DE, FL, KY, MA, MI, MS, NJ, OH, PA, VT, VA, WA	11	CA, CO, DE, FL, MI, MS, NJ, PA, VT, VA, WA
	Provide engineering services to communities during project implementation	14	DE, FL, KY, MA, MI, MS, NH, NJ, NM, OH, PA, SD, VT, WA	9	DE, FL, MI, MS, NH, NJ, PA, VT, WA
	Assist with project implementation costs	7	DE, FL, MA, MI, NJ, SD, VA	5	DE, FL, MI, NJ, VA

Discussion & Policy Implications

- Awareness and education, provision of funding match, point priority, project administration services, and engineering services were the identified practices most frequently reported by states that were successful in funding low-income communities.
- The most frequently employed practice among states that funded low-income schools at a rate higher than expected in one or more funding cycle was the point priority.
- This study suggests that multiple practices can help ensure that low-income schools and communities are encouraged to apply for awards, that these applications have a likelihood of success, and that implementation of projects in low-income communities receive project administrative and engineering support and services.

Although states no longer receive federal set-aside funding for SRTS projects and programs, some states have taken steps to institutionalize the SRTS program in their DOT's, integrating a focus on low-income or disadvantaged communities. All states will need to identify new solutions to secure ongoing funding and institute key practices to ensure that more students can walk or bicycle to and from school safely, particularly in vulnerable communities.

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