Mobility Manager Peer Roundtable: Grant Writing Summary

April 15, 2026

This peer roundtable focused on the emerging role of artificial intelligence (AI) in supporting grant writing for rural mobility initiatives. The session examined how AI tools can assist with drafting and structuring grant applications for:

- Mobility grant programs (local and state competitive funding models)
- Ford Mobility grant opportunities supporting innovative transportation and public–private partnership models

A key feature of the session was a hands-on applied exercise featuring an attending agency, The Arc Chemung-Schuyler / Schuyler County Transit, where participants used AI-assisted workflows to draft and refine elements of a real-world grant application.

In addition, the roundtable demonstrated the integration of marketing and visualization tools, including a service area infographic map, showing how AI and simple design tools can support stronger storytelling, clearer geographic context, and more competitive grant submissions.

The roundtable brought together fifteen transportation stakeholders.

National RTAP Peer Roundtables are designed as informal peer learning environments focused on shared practice, problem-solving, and replication of successful strategies across rural and Tribal transit systems.

Framing the Conversation: Why AI in Grant Writing

Participants identified several drivers for increasing interest in AI-supported grant development:

- Limited administrative and grant-writing capacity in rural and small transit systems
- Increasing complexity of federal, state, and philanthropic funding applications
- Need for faster turnaround during competitive funding cycles
- Growing emphasis on data-driven storytelling and measurable outcomes

- Expansion of public-private partnership (P3) funding models, including Ford Mobility initiatives

Participants emphasized that AI is emerging as a support tool for structuring ideas, accelerating drafts, and enhancing visual communication—not replacing professional judgment or local expertise.

Applied Exercise: Grant Writing with The Arc Chemung-Schuyler / Schuyler County Transit

A central component of the roundtable was a collaborative, AI-supported grant-writing exercise using a real agency context.

Working with **The Arc Chemung-Schuyler / Schuyler County Transit**, participants:

1. Developed a Project Narrative

- Used AI to structure a draft problem statement focused on rural mobility barriers such as healthcare access, employment transportation, and social isolation
- Incorporated local service area conditions and population need
- Refined narrative language to reflect agency priorities and community context

2. Strengthened Service Design Description

- Outlined coordinated transportation strategies including demand-response services and mobility management functions
- Developed phased implementation language for service expansion
- Aligned proposed services with grant objectives

3. Built Partnership Language

- Drafted coordination frameworks with healthcare providers, workforce agencies, and community organizations
- Strengthened language supporting cross-sector collaboration and resource sharing

4. Enhanced Outcomes and Impact Statements

- Translated operational goals into measurable community benefits
- Highlighted improvements in access to healthcare, employment, and essential services
- Reinforced framing aligned with funder priorities

5. Developed Innovation Narrative for Ford Mobility Alignment

- Framed scalable mobility solutions and partnerships

- Emphasized public-private collaboration and system innovation
- Strengthened positioning around technology-enabled service delivery

6. Demonstrated Marketing & Visualization Tools

Participants also reviewed and discussed the creation of a **service area infographic map**, which illustrated:

- Geographic coverage of transit service areas
- Key community destinations and access points
- Mobility gaps and connectivity corridors
- Visual alignment of service design with funding narratives

This demonstration highlighted how combining AI-assisted writing with simple visual storytelling tools can significantly strengthen grant competitiveness by making proposals more accessible and compelling to reviewers.

Topic 1: AI Use Cases in Grant Development

Participants discussed broader applications of AI across grant development workflows:

- Drafting needs assessments and service gap narratives
- Structuring grant applications aligned with funder priorities
- Summarizing operational data into narrative form
- Supporting logic models and theory of change development
- Identifying funding opportunity alignment across sectors

Topic 2: Grant Application Workflow (AI-Supported)

Participants reviewed how AI can support structured application development:

- Problem statement development grounded in rural mobility challenges
- Service design articulation across transit and mobility management functions
- Community impact framing tied to healthcare, employment, and outcomes
- Partnership development across transportation and human service networks
- Budget narrative support and justification language

Topic 3: Ford Mobility Grant Application Development

Discussion highlighted AI's role in innovation-focused proposals:

- Framing mobility innovation and scalability narratives
- Strengthening public-private partnership descriptions
- Supporting technology integration storytelling (dispatch systems, apps, data platforms)
- Enhancing sustainability and replicability messaging

Topic 4: Benefits of AI and Visualization in Grant Writing

Participants identified combined benefits of AI and visual tools:

- Faster production of structured draft narratives
- Improved clarity and consistency in proposals
- Stronger geographic storytelling through service area mapping
- Increased competitiveness for small and rural agencies
- Better translation of operational data into compelling visuals and narratives
- Enhanced ability to communicate complex service models to reviewers

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Topic 5: Risks, Limitations & Governance Considerations

Participants also identified key concerns:

- Risk of generic or non-localized AI-generated narratives
- Need for human validation of compliance requirements (FTA, ADA, Title VI, Buy America, etc.)
- Data privacy considerations when using AI tools
- Potential misrepresentation without careful review
- Importance of ensuring maps and visuals reflect accurate service data

Consensus reinforced that AI and visualization tools must be reviewed, validated, and contextualized by staff.

Topic 6: Best Practices for Responsible Use

Participants identified emerging best practices:

- Use AI for drafting, structuring, and summarizing—not final submission
- Pair narrative development with visual tools like maps and infographics
- Ground all outputs in local data and lived community experience
- Validate against NOFO requirements and compliance standards
- Maintain human oversight across all AI-generated and visual content
- Train staff on ethical, transparent use of AI in grant development

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Topic 7: Capacity Building Needs

Participants identified support priorities:

- AI-assisted grant writing templates for rural transit agencies
- Sample prompts for Ford Mobility applications
- Guidance on integrating maps and visual storytelling into grants
- Case studies from real-world agency applications (including The Arc Chemung-Schuyler / Schuyler County Transit)
- Training on combining AI, GIS, and simple design tools for grant competitiveness
- Compliance checklists for AI-generated and AI-assisted content

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Key Takeaways & Emerging Consensus

Across the discussion and applied exercises, several themes emerged:

- AI is most effective when paired with strong local knowledge and validation
- Real agency examples, such as The Arc Chemung-Schuyler / Schuyler County Transit, help ground AI outputs in practical applications
- Visual storytelling tools (such as service area maps) significantly strengthen grant competitiveness
- Public-private partnership applications benefit from AI-supported narrative structuring and visualization
- Compliance and accuracy must remain human-led responsibilities

Next Steps & Participant Recommendations

Participants recommended the following actions:

- Develop National RTAP guidance on AI-assisted grant writing and visualization tools
- Create sample AI prompts for rural transit grant applications
- Provide templates for service area maps and infographic integration
- Develop case studies from the roundtable exercise with The Arc Chemung-Schuyler / Schuyler County Transit
- Offer training on combining AI tools with GIS and simple design platforms
- Continue peer roundtables focused on applied AI use in rural transportation funding strategies

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Closing Summary

The roundtable demonstrated that AI, when combined with visual communication tools such as service area infographic maps, can significantly enhance rural and Tribal transit grant development.

The applied work with The Arc Chemung-Schuyler / Schuyler County Transit illustrated how AI can accelerate narrative drafting, while visualization tools strengthen geographic understanding and storytelling. Together, these approaches improve clarity, competitiveness, and accessibility of grant applications.

Participants emphasized that AI and visualization tools are most effective when grounded in local expertise, strong partnerships, and rigorous compliance review, ensuring that technology enhances—not replaces—community-centered transportation planning and grant development.

Examples:

Ford Mobility Grant Proposal
Project Title: Advancing Mobility in Rural Communities through Accessible Transit Innovation

Applicant: The Arc Chemung-Schuyler
Partner Organization: Schuyler County Transit
Funding Opportunity: Ford Fund – Mobility Grant Program
Funding Request: [Insert Amount]
Project Period: [Insert Dates]

Executive Summary

The Arc Chemung-Schuyler, in partnership with Schuyler County Transit, seeks support from the Ford Fund Mobility Grant Program to expand innovative transportation solutions in Schuyler County, New York.

Aligned with Ford's commitment to freedom of movement, community connection, and smart mobility innovation, this project will deploy accessible vehicles, integrate technology-driven scheduling tools, and pilot flexible, on-demand transit options for individuals with disabilities, seniors, and underserved rural residents.

Alignment with Ford Mobility Priorities

This proposal directly supports key priorities of the Ford Fund:

- **Mobility Innovation**: Introduces demand-responsive transit and digital scheduling platforms
- **Access**: Expands access for individuals with disabilities and transportation-disadvantaged populations
- **Community Impact**: Strengthens rural mobility infrastructure and economic participation
- **Sustainability** (optional if applicable): Potential integration of fuel-efficient or hybrid vehicles

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Statement of Need

Rural communities like Schuyler County face persistent transportation gaps that limit access to employment, healthcare, education, and social engagement. Individuals supported by The Arc Chemung-Schuyler are disproportionately affected due to mobility challenges and limited transit availability.

Current barriers include:

- Lack of flexible, on-demand transit options
- Insufficient accessible vehicles for growing demand
- Limited service hours for non-traditional work schedules
- Transportation deserts in outlying rural areas

Without intervention, these gaps will continue to restrict independence and economic mobility.

Project Description: Smart, Accessible Mobility Pilot

This project will launch a Mobility Innovation Pilot Program combining accessible transportation with smart technology solutions.

1. Accessible Vehicle Deployment

- Acquire or retrofit ADA-compliant vehicles
- Explore integration of fuel-efficient or alternative-fuel vehicles aligned with Ford's sustainability goals

2. On-Demand Transit Pilot

- Implement a flexible, app-assisted demand-response system
- Enable same-day or advance ride scheduling
- Provide phone-based access

3. Smart Scheduling & Data Integration

- Deploy routing and dispatch software to optimize efficiency
- Collect data to improve service delivery and scalability

4. Mobility Coordination Hub

- Establish centralized coordination between The Arc Chemung-Schuyler and Schuyler County Transit
- Align transportation with employment programs, healthcare providers, and community services

5. Community Engagement & Training

- Provide rider education on new technology tools
- Train drivers in accessibility, customer service, and technology use

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Goals and Measurable Outcomes

Goal 1: Expand access to transportation

- Increase rides for individuals with disabilities by 30% within 12 months

Goal 2: Improve mobility efficiency through innovation

- Reduce average wait times by 20% using smart scheduling tools

Goal 3: Enhance economic and community participation

- Increase access to employment and workforce programs for riders

Goal 4: Pilot scalable mobility solutions

- Develop a replicable rural mobility model aligned with Ford Mobility initiatives

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Evaluation Plan

The project will track both quantitative and qualitative outcomes, including:

- Ridership growth and trip frequency
- On-time performance and route efficiency
- User satisfaction and accessibility feedback
- Employment and healthcare access indicators

Findings will be shared with the Ford Fund to inform future mobility innovation efforts.

Budget Overview

Funding from the Ford Fund will support:

- Accessible vehicle acquisition or retrofitting
- Mobility technology (software, tablets, dispatch systems)
- Personnel (drivers, dispatchers, program coordinator)
- Training and community outreach
- Pilot program operations

A detailed, line-item budget can be provided upon request.

Sustainability and Scalability

This pilot is designed to be sustainable and replicable, with long-term funding supported by:

- Integration into existing transit funding streams
- Public-private partnerships
- Local and state transportation grants

The model developed through this project has the potential to be replicated in similar rural communities, aligning with Ford's broader vision for innovative mobility solutions.

Conclusion

Support from the Ford Fund will enable The Arc Chemung-Schuyler and Schuyler County Transit to transform transportation access in Schuyler County.

By combining accessible vehicles, smart technology, and community-centered design, this project advances a future where mobility is not a barrier—but a bridge—to opportunity and independence.

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