



Build a Better
MOUSETRAP

Planning Guide



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

Contents

Overview _____ 3

Participation _____ 4

Honoree Selection _____ 5

Photo and Spotlight Video Guidance _____ 6

Build a Better Mousetrap Entry Checklist _____ 7

Build a Better Mousetrap Entry Form _____ 8

Release Form _____ 10

Overview

What is Build a Better Mousetrap?

The Build a Better Mousetrap (BABM) national recognition program is an initiative designed to spotlight locally driven innovation in transportation and provide a national platform for sharing practical solutions to everyday challenges faced by local and Tribal transportation professionals. Focused specifically on local roads, the program celebrates creative problem-solving that strengthens the way transportation systems are planned, designed, constructed, operated, and maintained. These solutions may include new project delivery methods, improved design processes, or the development and modification of tools and equipment that enhance safety, increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve the overall quality of local transportation infrastructure.

The program operates through Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) Centers, which serve as coordinators within each State. Centers solicit nominations locally, evaluate submissions, and select the most impactful innovations to advance to the national level. The program also operates through the seven regional Tribal Technical Assistance Program (TTAP) Centers, which will conduct a similar process. Multiple nominations may be submitted across several categories, ensuring broad representation of innovative practices.

What are the five BABM entry recognition categories?

CATEGORY	DEFINITION	INNOVATION EXAMPLE
Innovative Project	Original and creative solutions addressing any phase of the project lifecycle, including planning, design and engineering, construction, operations and maintenance.	City of Moreno Valley, CA (CA LTAP) Innovation - "Slow and Safe, Save a Life"
SMART Transformation	Significant improvements to transportation activities or processes that is "Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound," resulting in measurable efficiency gains.	McKenzie County Highway Department, ND. (ND LTAP) Innovation - "Fifth-Wheel Quick Attach Sander"
Bold Steps	High-risk initiatives or processes that demonstrate breakthrough solutions with significant, high-reward outcomes.	West Lafayette Street and Sanitation Department, IN (IN LTAP) Innovation - "Street Sweeper Conversion to Leaf Vac Unit"
Pioneer	Locally developed products or tools that provide first-of-their-kind, home-grown solutions to maintenance challenges.	Town of East Hartford, CT (CT LTAP) Innovation - "Trackless Automated Loader"
Putting Families First Innovation	A new program, initiative, tool, or process that greatly enhances transportation and mobility for families in communities and within tribal areas	NEW CATEGORY FOR 2026!!

Participation

The Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) and Tribal Technical Assistance Program (TTAP) Centers shall host a local competition and select nominations they would like to enter the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) national recognition program:

- BABM is open to any government agency (town, borough, city, township, county, parish, state and Tribal) in the United States.
- Applicants must apply to their nearest LTAP/TTAP Center to qualify for the national recognition.
- **Multiple nominations in multiple categories may be submitted.** FHWA may ask for additional information during the evaluation process.
- **Photographs are required** to illustrate each entry, with owner's credit shown, and must be submitted as separate files.
- An **optional Spotlight Video can be submitted** to demonstrate the problem, development, and working solution.
- Centers **complete and submit their recognition form** to the Build a Better Mousetrap at CLAS@dot.gov.
- Applicants must respect Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) principles.

Previously submitted entries are not eligible for resubmission unless significant, unique, and innovative enhancements have been made to the entry. At its sole discretion, FHWA reserves the right to disqualify entries that fail to show that significant improvements have been made to a previously submitted product or technology.

Nominations are accepted only through the LTAP/TTAP Center and are due by [June 7, 2026](#).

Please submit electronically to CLAS@dot.gov or via the SharePoint form.

Honoree Selection

Honorees will be selected by an independent panel of judges and will be announced at the annual National Local and Tribal Technical Assistance Program (NLTAPA) Conference.

In each category, we are looking for original, innovative projects that provide long-term value to the transportation community. In selecting an Honoree, the following criteria will be considered:

- **Overall Impact**—Measure of the overall improvement, effectiveness, efficiency, savings, and/or benefit of the innovation as applied to the process or project where it has been implemented.
- **Community/Agency Benefit**—The extent and scope of the potential impact of the innovation on the transportation industry. Innovations that have the potential for broad/national impact beyond the local agency will be scored higher.
- **Originality**—Creativity of the innovation across the transportation industry.
- **Transferability to Others**—Extent to which the innovation may be easily adopted and implemented by peer local agencies and tribal communities.
- **Cost Effectiveness**—Cost savings (immediate and/or life cycle cost) of the innovation.
- **Time Savings**—Time, schedule, or efficiency savings of the innovation.
- **Quality of the Submitted Application**—Entries with a Spotlight Video will receive bonus points!

A top **Honoree** will be selected for each category. Honoree benefits include FHWA national recognition and promotion, exposure on the FHWA website, and the opportunity to have the innovation showcased at local and national transportation events. In addition, from the list of top Honorees, a **Best of Innovation** award will be made by casting votes at the annual NLTAPA conference.

All qualifying entries will be compiled into an electronic booklet and posted on the FHWA's Center for Local Aid Support (LAS) website at www.fhwa.dot.gov/clas/babm so that you and your peers and customers can learn more about the best practices from around the country. The recognition of any submission does not constitute FHWA endorsement or support of the submission. Patented and/or proprietary products are not eligible for inclusion/consideration.

The Build a Better Mousetrap program is produced under the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Transportation in the interest of information exchange. The U.S. Government assumes no liability for the use of the information provided.

The U.S. Government does not endorse products or manufacturers. Trademarks or manufacturers' names appear in the Build a Better Mousetrap program only because they are considered essential to the objective of the program. They are included for informational purposes only and are not intended to reflect a preference, approval, or endorsement of any one product or entity.

Photo & Spotlight Video Guidance

PHOTOGRAPHS

- Please provide most up to date Phone, Tablet, or DSLR available to your organization. high-resolution digital photos please!
- Photos should be interesting to view and should support and illustrate the ideas and activities described in your entry, and—whenever possible—should show people or equipment in action. Ensure that all photos respect OSHA principles and exhibit safe and appropriate actions, such as workers wearing hard hats and safety vests.
- Each photograph should include a detailed caption explaining what is shown and clearly identifying its relevance to the subject of the entry. Also, include a photo credit (photographer's name and/or organization) or source (agency or company name).

NOTE: If we receive images that are too low in quality, we may request additional images.

SPOTLIGHT VIDEOS

The Spotlight Video is an optional addition to your entry but highly encourages. If submitted, it should demonstrate your entry's problem, its development, and your entry's working solution. It should be no more than 5 minutes long and be in MP4 format. Submit it electronically Staff at CLAS can assist with these details. Standard Videos (1080p HD): Videos should have a resolution of at least 1920 x 1080 pixels

- Please record in a landscape format, as this will be our primary use. Kindly upload at least 5 video clips (more clips are welcome if available!)
 - Compose your shot. Place your scene in the middle. Avoid background distractions.
 - Lighting is critical. Avoid harsh sunlight, dark and light contrasts, backlights, and windows. A bright but cloudy day is great.
 - Shoot straight, slow, and close. Match the height of your image. Gently glide in for close-ups.
 - Sound matters. Background noise is distracting. Shut down motors, fans, hammers, and conversations.
- * Please request a Release Form (see the next page) from each person you photograph, record, or video. Include a copy along with your entry.**

Build A Better Mousetrap Entry Checklist

*required

- Entry Form***
- Photographs (*two minimum*)***
- Spotlight Video (*not required*)**
- Image Release Form(s)***
- Photo/Video Ownership Release Form(s)***

The Build a Better Mousetrap program is produced under the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Transportation in the interest of information exchange. The U.S. Government assumes no liability for the use of the information provided.

The U.S. Government does not endorse products or manufacturers. Trademarks or manufacturers' names appear in the Build a Better Mousetrap program only because they are considered essential to the objective of the program. They are included for informational purposes only and are not intended to reflect a preference, approval, or endorsement of any one product or entity.

Build A Better Mousetrap Entry Form

Agency Name: _____

Agency Contact Person: _____

Agency Contact Person Phone #: _____

Agency Contact Person Email: _____

LTAP/TTAP Center: _____

LTAP/TTAP Contact Name: _____

LTAP/TTAP Contact Number: _____

LTAP/TTAP Contact Email: _____

LTAP/TTAP Address: _____

Innovation Title: _____

Category (check one):

Innovative Project Award

Bold Steps Award

SMART Transformation Award

Pioneer Award

Putting Families First Innovation

1. What was the challenge (i.e., problem) or objective you set out to solve?

Fully describe the challenge (up to 500 words max):

Provide specific details on the issues you faced and why it needed to be addressed.

Build A Better Mousetrap Entry Form

2. How did you develop and implement your solution? (Up to 500 words max.)

Provide details on how you developed, built, and implemented your solution to meet your objective(s). Address the originality of the solution and why you selected this solution.

3. What labor, equipment, plans, or materials did it take to make the solution work?

What did it take to make this solution a reality? Include design sketch, drawing, and materials list as applicable.

4. What was the cost of implementation?

Add supporting data, such as cost of materials, equipment used, etc.

5. What was the positive impact/results/outcome of your efforts (e.g., long-term benefits, productivity, financial, personnel performance, benefits to the community, safety, etc.)?

Include a discussion of data or evidence to support the outcome and/or the revised level of effort upon implementation to complete the job or process. Has this been shared? With whom? Results?

**U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)**

Name: _____

Location: _____ Date: _____

I hereby grant to the FHWA, U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), its agents, contractors, and employees the absolute and irrevocable right and permission, in respect of the photographs or audio or video recording and their transcripts, that it has taken or has had taken of me, _____, or in which I may be included with others, to use, reuse, publish, and republish, and otherwise reproduce, modify, and display the same, in whole or in part, individually or with other photographs, in any and all media now or here after known, for illustration, promotion, art, advertising and trade, or any other purpose whatsoever, and to use my name and identity therein or by descriptive text or commentary in connection therewith if it so chooses.

I hereby release and discharge FHWA, DOT, its agents, contractors, and employees from any and all claims and demands arising out of, or in connection to, the use of the photographs taken on and ending on _____ in whatever media format used, including without limitation any and all claims for libel or invasion of privacy. I also understand that there will be no financial or other remuneration for recording me, either for initial or subsequent transmission or playback.

I am of full age and have the right to contract in my own name. I have read the foregoing and fully understand the contents thereof. This release shall be binding upon me and my heirs, legal representatives, and assigns. I further release the FHWA from any responsibility for injury incurred during the photography or audio or video recording session.

I represent that I have read and understand the foregoing statement and am competent to execute this agreement.

Signed _____

(If a minor, a parent, or legal guardian must sign and indicate both the child's name and the parent's name in the line below to constitute consent.)

Printed Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Fax Number: _____ Email Address: _____

Date: _____