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Development and Technology
Washington, DC 20590

Operation Lifesaver, Inc. Process Evaluation



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METRIC/ENGLISH CONVERSION FACTORS

ENGLISH TO METRIC

LENGTH (APPROXIMATE)

1 inch (in)	=	2.5 centimeters (cm)
1 foot (ft)	=	30 centimeters (cm)
1 yard (yd)	=	0.9 meter (m)
1 mile (mi)	=	1.6 kilometers (km)

AREA (APPROXIMATE)

1 square inch (sq in, in ²)	=	6.5 square centimeters (cm ²)
1 square foot (sq ft, ft ²)	=	0.09 square meter (m ²)
1 square yard (sq yd, yd ²)	=	0.8 square meter (m ²)
1 square mile (sq mi, mi ²)	=	2.6 square kilometers (km ²)
1 acre = 0.4 hectare (he)	=	4,000 square meters (m ²)

MASS - WEIGHT (APPROXIMATE)

1 ounce (oz)	=	28 grams (gm)
1 pound (lb)	=	0.45 kilogram (kg)
1 short ton = 2,000 pounds (lb)	=	0.9 tonne (t)

VOLUME (APPROXIMATE)

1 teaspoon (tsp)	=	5 milliliters (ml)
1 tablespoon (tbsp)	=	15 milliliters (ml)
1 fluid ounce (fl oz)	=	30 milliliters (ml)
1 cup (c)	=	0.24 liter (l)
1 pint (pt)	=	0.47 liter (l)
1 quart (qt)	=	0.96 liter (l)
1 gallon (gal)	=	3.8 liters (l)
1 cubic foot (cu ft, ft ³)	=	0.03 cubic meter (m ³)
1 cubic yard (cu yd, yd ³)	=	0.76 cubic meter (m ³)

TEMPERATURE (EXACT)

$$[(x-32)(5/9)] \text{ } ^\circ\text{F} = y \text{ } ^\circ\text{C}$$

METRIC TO ENGLISH

LENGTH (APPROXIMATE)

1 millimeter (mm)	=	0.04 inch (in)
1 centimeter (cm)	=	0.4 inch (in)
1 meter (m)	=	3.3 feet (ft)
1 meter (m)	=	1.1 yards (yd)
1 kilometer (km)	=	0.6 mile (mi)

AREA (APPROXIMATE)

1 square centimeter (cm ²)	=	0.16 square inch (sq in, in ²)
1 square meter (m ²)	=	1.2 square yards (sq yd, yd ²)
1 square kilometer (km ²)	=	0.4 square mile (sq mi, mi ²)
10,000 square meters (m ²)	=	1 hectare (ha) = 2.5 acres

MASS - WEIGHT (APPROXIMATE)

1 gram (gm)	=	0.036 ounce (oz)
1 kilogram (kg)	=	2.2 pounds (lb)
1 tonne (t)	=	1,000 kilograms (kg) = 1.1 short tons

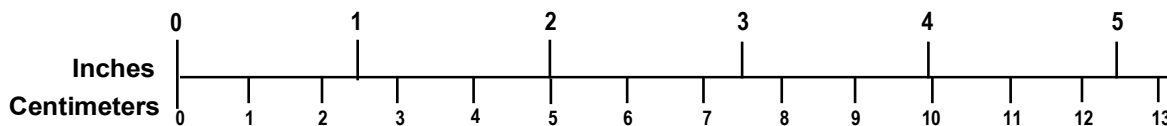
VOLUME (APPROXIMATE)

1 milliliter (ml)	=	0.03 fluid ounce (fl oz)
1 liter (l)	=	2.1 pints (pt)
1 liter (l)	=	1.06 quarts (qt)
1 liter (l)	=	0.26 gallon (gal)
1 cubic meter (m ³)	=	36 cubic feet (cu ft, ft ³)
1 cubic meter (m ³)	=	1.3 cubic yards (cu yd, yd ³)

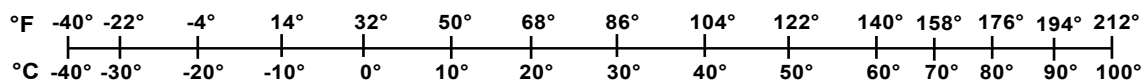
TEMPERATURE (EXACT)

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QUICK FAHRENHEIT - CELSIUS TEMPERATURE CONVERSION



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Executive Summary

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) contracted Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (Volpe) to conduct a process evaluation of Operation Lifesaver, Inc.'s (OLI) educational activities, with a focus on activities funded through an FRA grant agreement. The team conducted the evaluation from October 2022 through March 2024 using a mixed methods approach that included stakeholder interviews, logic model development, and document review. The team used three evaluation questions and made several findings on each. For each challenge, the team proposed one or more recommendations addressing those challenges.

Evaluation Question 1: How does OLI execute its mission?

The team found that OLI executes its mission through collaboration and cooperation with stakeholder partners, both individuals and organizations, and that volunteer support is a critical part of executing OLI's mission. OLI conducts activities using clear processes and procedures that are well-established and documented.

Evaluation Question 2: To what extent are the tasks in FRA's grant agreements being implemented as intended?

OLI navigates formal and informal expectations in complying with grant deliverable submission. The formal expectation is that OLI performs the tasking and submits deliverables as specified in the Statement of Work (SOW). The informal expectation is that OLI performs the tasking as specified but are not strictly required to submit all deliverables.

The team found that OLI implemented most of the tasking in Task Areas 1 and 3 according to the grant SOW. The FRA grant management team expressed satisfaction with OLI's final performance package.

Evaluation Question 3: What improvements can be made to increase the effectiveness of OLI's operations in carrying out FRA grant activities?

The team determined that FRA's grant to OLI is underfunded relative to the activities included in the FRA grant agreement, and that OLI is understaffed for the size and scope of their mission. Extending the FRA grant's period of performance would increase OLI's efficiency and support safety goals by increasing state programs' effectiveness.

The team found that DOT agencies use different grant reporting platforms, which increases the workload for organizations like OLI that receive grant funding from multiple DOT agencies. Also, the FRA grant agreement has remained relatively the same over many years and may be due for review and potential updates. The agreement also includes some Deliverable and Evaluation items that could be misunderstood and/or lack key information. And FRA's grant reporting forms (i.e., quarterly and final performance reporting forms) do not align well with the OLI grant.

Some FRA staff may, on occasion, interact with OLI as though they are contractors rather than a non-profit organization. And while the relationship between FRA and OLI, both at headquarters and in the field, continues to be positive, that relationship has evolved over time so that FRA field staff may have less involvement with OLI and know less about OLI.

In addition to discussing areas to consider for improvement, the team also determined what is working especially well so that adjustments based on challenge areas can be made with an eye toward also maintaining areas of strength.

The team found that OLI includes and effectively collaborates with major stakeholder groups (i.e., those with expertise, interest, and/or some shared responsibility in safety around railroad tracks) in all their major activities. OLI staff and partners are highly dedicated to the mission of preventing collisions, deaths, and injuries on and around railroad tracks and trains.

OLI has successfully structured their program to effectively use volunteers and maintains a high level of volunteer involvement. OLI effectively uses established and documented processes, procedures, training, and guidance to maintain the quality and consistency of their educational messaging. The organization demonstrates fiscal responsibility and accountability, and continues to look for ways to increase private funding that is not restricted in use.

The evaluation team also included considerations around two additional topics: (1) the impact of evolving media and (2) options for evaluating OLI impacts in the future.

1. Introduction

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) contracted Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (Volpe) to conduct a formative process evaluation of Operation Lifesaver, Inc.'s (OLI) educational activities. The team conducted the evaluation from October 2022 through March 2024 using a mixed methods approach that included stakeholder interviews, logic model development, and document review. The team determined how OLI operates and the extent to which it is operating as intended, documented the program benefits, and identified potential process improvements that support a sustainable, successful program.

1.1 Background

This section provides high-level background about OLI and the formative process evaluation documented in this report.

1.1.1 About Operation Lifesaver Inc.

OLI is a federated non-profit organization devoted to saving lives through rail safety education. OLI began in 1972 as a rail safety education program known as Operation Lifesaver and became incorporated in 1986. The group's mission is to prevent collisions, deaths, and injuries on and around railroad tracks and trains. OLI partners with state Operation Lifesaver programs (State OLs) along with federal and local government agencies, railroads, and highway safety organizations to support its mission and create public awareness campaigns targeting specific at-risk groups and the public.

1.1.2 Evaluation Background

Since 1988, FRA has awarded OLI an annual grant to support the shared mission of increasing safety along railroad rights-of-way (ROW) and highway-railroad grade crossings (HRGC). In the fall of 2022, FRA tasked Volpe to conduct an evaluation of the educational activities supported by OLI through these grants. To narrow the scope of the evaluation, the team met with FRA project stakeholders to understand their proposed goals for the evaluation. In consideration of stakeholder input and funding parameters, the evaluation team, in consultation with FRA, decided to pursue a *process evaluation* to understand whether program activities are implemented as intended. (See [Appendix A](#) for more information about these stakeholder conversations and related considerations about their interest areas.) While some FRA stakeholders expressed interest in identifying the safety impacts of OLI's education efforts, the complexity, budget, and project timeline did not permit the team to assess safety impacts. ([Section 6](#) addresses what it would take to evaluate the outcomes of OLI's efforts.)

1.1.3 Target Audience and Intended Use

The audience for this evaluation is the Grade Crossing and Trespassing Outreach Division within FRA's Office of Railroad Safety, the Office of Performance and Evaluation within the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, and the Human Factors Division within the Office of Research, Data, and Innovation. The audience can use this evaluation's findings to support programmatic decision-making and accountability reporting to oversight organizations.

1.2 Objectives

The objective of this process evaluation was to answer the following three questions:

- (1) How does OLI execute its mission?
- (2) To what extent are the tasks in FRA's grant agreements being implemented as intended?
- (3) What improvements can be made to increase the effectiveness of OLI's operations? (e.g., to FRA's grant agreements, to how OLI and FRA coordinate efforts, to OLI's operations, etc.)

1.3 Overall Approach

The approach included the following tasks and activities:

- Scoping activities including the following:
 - Interviewing FRA stakeholders to better understand their information needs
 - Identifying the information needs that could be addressed within the project budget and with the information available to evaluators
 - Deciding which FRA and OLI grant documents and grant tasking to sample for more detailed analysis
- Requesting and reviewing relevant documents
- Planning and conducting interviews
- Analyzing interview data and sampled grant information
- Documenting findings

1.4 Scope

The evaluation team reviewed 5 years of grant documents from 2017 – 2022. During initial evaluation scoping, the team reviewed the most recent FRA grant application documents and noticed that (1) the grant agreements included the same four task areas each year, with similar amounts of funding for each year and (2) two task areas (Task 1: States Assistance Program and Task 3: Communications Program) receive the majority of FRA's annual grant funding. For the five grant years included in the preliminary review (2017-2018 through 2020-2021), the combined average of those two task areas accounted for 70.6 percent of the grant budget. (Table 4 in Section 3.2.2 covers this in more detail.)

Each grant task area includes several subtasks. Further review of the subtasks within Task Areas 1 and 3 revealed that the tasking and deliverables were highly constant across grant years, except for Subtask 1.3, which changed only slightly across years. On any given year, Subtask 1.3 of the grant included one of two different items to accommodate training needs, as shown in Table 1.

Because grant agreement tasks and funding amounts do not measurably change across grant years, the team determined that evaluating one grant year period would sufficiently represent the grant agreement. The team focused the evaluation on the most recent grant year period for which a full set of grant documents, including closeout documents, were available at the start of

the program evaluation, which was grant year period 2021-2022, referred to as “the focal year” in this report. Within the focal year grant agreement, the evaluation focused on Task Areas 1 and 3, the most highly funded activities within the FRA grant.

Because this is a process evaluation, the findings described in the report do not address the impact or effectiveness of OLI’s operations.

Table 1. Grant Subtask 1.3 by grant year ending 2018 - 2022

Grant year	Subtask 1.3
2017-2018	State Coordinator's Regional Workshop for grade crossing managers
2018-2019	Coordinators Summit Training Seminar
2019-2020	State Coordinator's Regional Collaboration Workshop for FRA grade crossing teams, OLI and OL state programs
2020-2021	State Coordinators Summit Training Seminar
2021-2022	State Coordinators Summit Training Seminar

1.5 Organization of the Report

[Section 2](#) describes the methodology used in this research.

[Section 3](#) presents findings related to the first evaluation question: How does OLI execute its mission? This section introduces the logic model to describe OLI’s desired outcomes and the contextual factors that influence its ability to achieve these outcomes. Then this section introduces a stakeholder roles diagram and discusses the resources that support OLI’s activities and outputs.

[Section 4](#) presents findings related to the second evaluation question: To what extent are the tasks in FRA’s grant agreements being implemented as intended? The section provides a brief overview of the FRA grant award process and tasking and describes formal and informal expectations regarding grant deliverable submission. This section introduces two interpretations of the original evaluation question based on these formal and informal expectations and describes findings for each.

[Section 5](#) presents findings related to the third evaluation question: What improvements can be made to increase the effectiveness of OLI’s operations? These findings relate to challenges and recommendations that may support the increased effectiveness of OLI’s operations. The team shares findings related to processes or practices that have been working well and should not be changed.

[Section 6](#) discusses some additional considerations from the team, and [Section 7](#) provides the team’s concluding comments.

[Appendix B](#) restates the evaluation’s major findings (which are introduced throughout the report) and the team’s recommendations (which are introduced only in [Section 5](#)).

2. Methods

The process evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach that included stakeholder interviews, logic model and stakeholder diagram development, and a review of FRA grant-related and supporting documents.

2.1 Scoping Activities

Prior to beginning the evaluation, the team interviewed OLI stakeholders and reviewed FRA grant documents.

2.1.1 Interviews

The team conducted interviews with stakeholders in FRA's Office of Railroad Safety (RRS), Office of Railroad Development, Office of Performance and Evaluation, and Office of Research, Development, and Technology to identify the evaluation's goals and priorities.

2.1.2 FRA Grant Document Review

FRA's grant manager and project manager provided the evaluation team with grant documents including applications, quarterly reports, and the final reporting forms for the years 2017-2022. The team conducted a cursory review of these documents to determine the breadth of the grant agreements and the extent to which the agreements differ by grant year. The team used this review to determine the evaluation's scope.

2.2 Logic Model and Stakeholder Diagram Development

The evaluation team created two visual tools to support the evaluation: (1) a logic model and (2) a stakeholder diagram.

2.2.1 Logic Model

The evaluation team used a logic model to represent how OLI functions at the organizational level. It guided data collection throughout the evaluation (e.g., in creating interview question sets) and supports findings related to the first evaluation question of how OLI executes its mission.¹

The team created the logic model using information gathered from the OLI website, annual reports, and interviews with OLI staff that included probing questions about program elements. The evaluation team updated the logic model throughout the evaluation based on several rounds of OLI feedback and information gathered from document review and stakeholder interviews.

2.2.2 Stakeholder Diagram

The stakeholder diagram displays relationships between the roles and activities of major OLI stakeholder groups and how those groups interact to support OLI activities and outputs. This is information not provided within the logic model and is important for understanding findings

¹ For more information about logic models and how they are used in program evaluation, refer to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Evaluation Guide](#).

related to how OLI executes its mission. The evaluation team used information flow diagram methodology to illustrate the coordination and information flow among stakeholder roles. The team sent the stakeholder diagram to OLI for review and updated it based on OLI's feedback.

2.3 Stakeholder Interviews

Concurrent with creating the logic model and stakeholder diagrams, the team conducted interviews with representatives from six stakeholder groups:

- OLI (national office)
- OLI's Board of Directors (Board)
- OLI's National Advisory Council (NAC)
- State Operation Lifesaver Program (State OL)
- FRA RRS
- FRA Office of Railroad Development

Topics covered in stakeholder interviews included: stakeholder roles, coordination and activities, the FRA grant agreement (e.g., administrative items and activities, grant tasking and deliverables), and stakeholder perspectives relating to OLI's effectiveness (as an organization and in the context of the FRA grant).

Following completion of the interviews, the narratives were coded by theme and organized by the three evaluation questions. Within each evaluation question theme, the team identified additional categories, as needed.

2.4 FRA Grant Document Analysis

The team conducted a thorough review of grant documents for the focal year 2021-2022. The full list of FRA grant documents the team reviewed is included in [Appendix C](#).

As described in [Section 1.4](#), this review included an analysis for grant Task Areas 1 and 3. The analysis compared the grant agreement's deliverables to the deliverables submitted in OLI quarterly and final reports (i.e., the final performance package). To determine whether deliverables not provided in the final performance package were completed, the team requested missing deliverables and reviewed them for completion.

[Section 4.3](#) contains more information about this analysis and includes three tables detailing the results for Task Areas 1 and 3. [Appendix D](#) presents tables associated with the analysis.

2.5 Document and Website Review

Throughout the evaluation, the team received relevant documents from FRA, OLI, a State OL Coordinator, as well as members of the NAC and Board. Documents such as OLI Annual Reports and federal audit reports are publicly available. The team also reviewed the OLI website² for general information about the organization and to review the OLI digital library.

² <https://oli.org>

For a full list of sources reviewed during this evaluation, see [Appendix C](#).

2.6 Limitations

Limitations of the current work include the following:

- **Small number of interviewees:** The evaluation relied heavily on interview data. However, the team's budget limited the number of individuals interviewed within each stakeholder role. For example, the team was only able to speak with one member of the Board and one State OL Coordinator.
- **Differences in State OL programs:** Much of OLI's mission is executed by State OLs. OLI provides structure, training, materials, and guidance to state programs for continuity in the higher-level aspects of educational messaging and the corresponding activities. However, State OLs are also independent organizations that may differ in some ways. It was not feasible to compare numerous state programs. Therefore, it was not possible to present in-depth evaluation findings related to how activities are conducted at the state level.
- **No ability to collect quantitative data:** This evaluation did not include the collection of quantitative survey data from multiple stakeholder groups (e.g., NAC members, State OL Coordinators) due to the project's budget and timeline.

3. Q1: How Does OLI Execute Its Mission?

The evaluation team's research supports the following findings regarding how OLI executes its mission:

- *Q1-Finding 1. OLI executes its mission through collaboration and cooperation with stakeholder partners, both individuals and organizations.* At the organizational level, safety partners contribute funding and/or participate in activities promoting OLI's messaging and outreach materials (e.g., FRA contributes grant award funding and promotes OLI rail safety education material). At the individual level, stakeholder partners (e.g., members of the Board, individuals providing presentations to the public) often volunteer their time and expertise to support OLI's mission.
- *Q1-Finding 2. Volunteer support is a critical part of executing OLI's mission.* The majority of OLI's educational activities rely on volunteer support: identifying and prioritizing safety messages, scoping new education materials, reviewing and approving new material, and disseminating OLI's educational materials and safety campaigns. Oversight and strategic planning also rely heavily on volunteers.
- *Q1-Finding 3. OLI conducts activities using clear processes and procedures that are well-established and documented.* Two examples are (1) a checklist to guide review of new materials, and (2) evaluation criteria to guide the review of competitive grant subawards.

The remainder of [Section 3](#) provides detailed information supporting the team's findings about how OLI executes its mission.

3.1 Logic Model of OLI's Program Processes and Intended Outcomes

The team developed a logic model to depict OLI's processes and intended outcomes (see [Section 2.2](#) for more information about logic model development, elements, and uses.) As shown in [Figure 1](#), the logic model describes process elements including the resources that support the program (e.g., staff, funding), the activities supported by those resources (e.g., developing and disseminating education materials), and the outputs of those accomplished activities. Those process elements then lead to the intended program outcomes.

The first short-term intended outcome is for OLI's rail safety education to improve public knowledge of safety behavior at HRGCs and along railroad ROW. This means communication campaigns reach the target audience and those audiences demonstrate knowledge acquisition. The second intended short-term outcome is for OLI activities to be effective and efficient. This means sustaining and increasing partnerships, ensuring state programs receive the needed funding and materials from National OLI, and OLI successfully completing educational activities, including FRA grant activities and deliverables.

The first intended long-term outcome is for OLI to maintain a large variety of educational and outreach materials for state programs and the general public. The second intended long-term outcome is for improved safety outcomes through reduced fatalities and incidents around railroad property and ROW.

Process	Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OLI Staff • Board of Directors • National Advisory Council • State OL programs • DOT and other safety partners • Funding • Work tools (e.g. grant software)
	Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and maintain partnerships; apply for grant awards • Support to state OL programs; award state grants • Provide stakeholders with training and conference activities • Identify and prioritize safety messages • Develop new education materials and public awareness campaigns • Disseminate education materials and campaigns to educate the public • Maintain communication support services (e.g. social media, website)
	Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships created and maintained; grants applied for • State OL programs supported; grants awarded • Training courses and conferences held • Safety messages identified and prioritized • New education materials and public awareness campaigns developed • Education materials and public awareness campaigns disseminated • Communication support services maintained
Outcomes	Short-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rail safety education improves audience knowledge • Effective and efficient practices for OLI
	Long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain public education materials for state OL programs and the public • Reduce fatalities and incidents around railroad property and railroad rights-of-way

Figure 1. OLI logic model

In addition to the process and outcome elements shown in [Figure 1](#), there are at least two contextual factors beyond the program’s control that impact its ability to achieve these intended outcomes:

- *Multiple influences on behavior:* OLI’s educational efforts represent only one of many factors influencing motorist and pedestrian behavior at crossings or along railroad ROW. Additional factors include grade crossing design, site characteristics, law enforcement efforts, and motorist and pedestrian motivations.
- *Shared responsibility for safety:* Multiple organizations have a role in creating and managing safety at HRGCs and railroad ROW. Federal, state, and local governments may share responsibility for aspects of roadway design and operation at highway-railroad grade crossings. This shared responsibility is reflected in OLI’s partnerships with multiple stakeholders to educate a diverse audience about safe behavior around the HRGC and along ROW.

Using the logic model, the team identified information related to OLI’s (1) program resources and (2) activities/outcomes pertinent to this research. The remainder of this section discusses these process elements, which support OLI’s work toward achieving its desired outcomes.

3.2 Resources Supporting OLI

This section describes the resources that support OLI. These include OLI staff members and stakeholders, funding, and the work tools OLI uses to carry out its activities.

3.2.1 OLI Staff and Stakeholders

Figure 2 provides a simplified overview of OLI’s stakeholder roles and how they interact to accomplish OLI’s mission. Each box represents a major stakeholder role. The arrows convey the activities of these roles in relation to each other. More detailed information follows the figure and describes specific stakeholder roles.

An important point not reflected in Figure 2 is that some individuals and organizations may be active in more than one stakeholder role. For example, FRA is both a funding partner and a messaging partner and is represented on the NAC. Another example is that one of the co-chairs of the NAC is a member of the Board and the other is a regional representative of the state programs, with the state programs being a messaging partner.

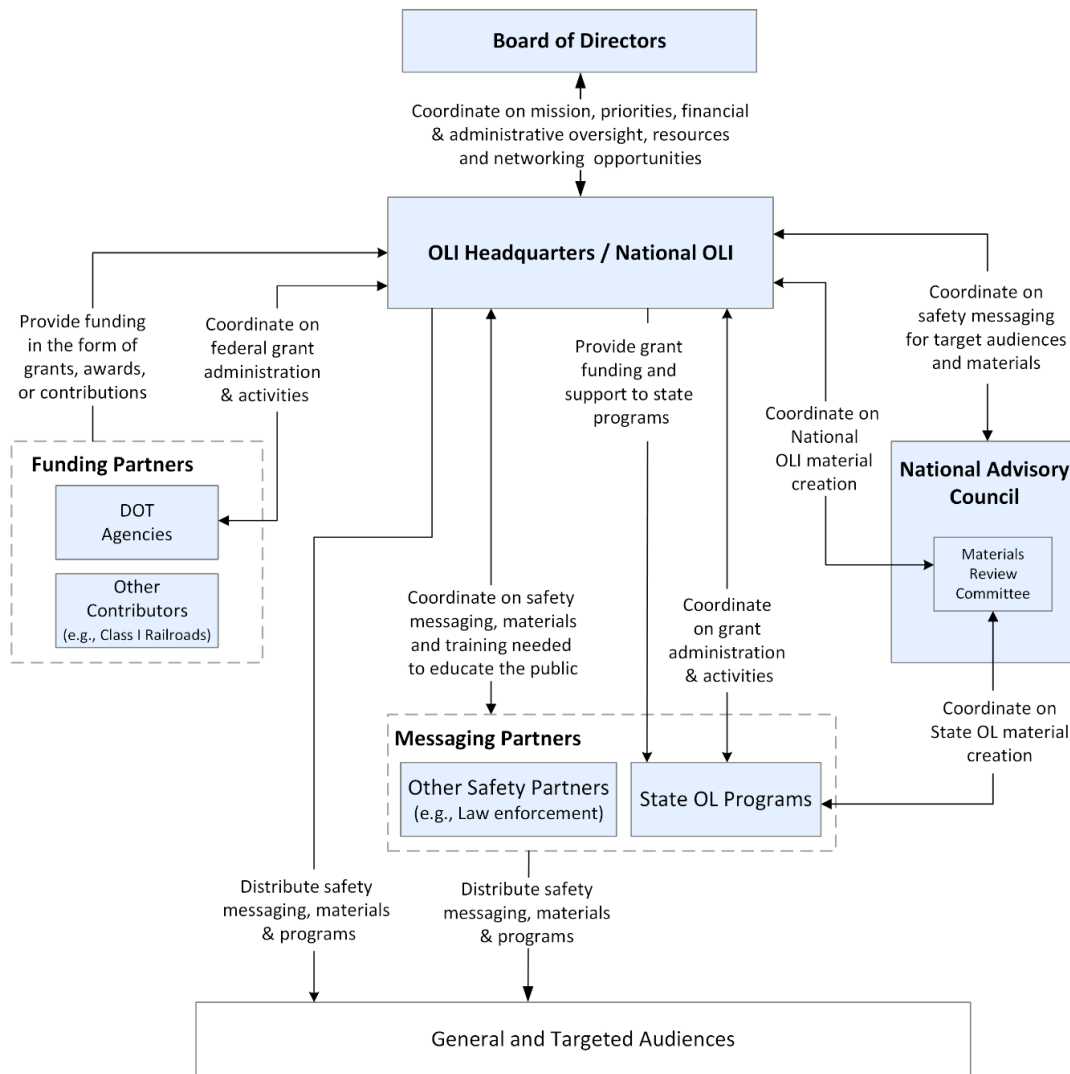


Figure 2. Relationships between the activities of major OLI stakeholder roles

3.2.1.1 Board of Directors

The Board is OLI's governing body. Board members come from a variety of organizations and represent the interests of OLI stakeholders. Board members include the following industry stakeholders:

- Class I, short line, and passenger railroads
- Industry organizations (e.g., the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, the Association of American Railroads, the American Public Transportation Association, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and the American Bus Association)
- State Coordinator for a State OL
- OLI Executive Director – ex-officio, non-voting member

The Board's responsibilities include:

- Providing direction by determining OLI's mission and developing the strategic plan that informs OLI's priorities
- Ensuring effective programs and services by providing oversight in direction (i.e., monitoring strategic goal progress), finances,³ and messaging
- Ensuring that OLI has adequate resources (Board members' organizations provide financial contributions)
- Promoting OLI's public standing

3.2.1.2 National OLI Staff

OLI's National Office, referred to as OLI in this report, leads the activities of Operation Lifesaver according to the mission and strategic plan as determined by the Board. OLI's website describes the role of the National Office in saying it "supports state programs, developing rail safety education videos and other materials for audiences of all ages."

OLI has a small staff, consisting of just four full-time paid positions:

- Executive Director
- Vice President
- Director of Communications and Marketing
- Manager of Education, Training, and Volunteer support

OLI also has seven contractors providing support in the following roles:

- Finance Manager

³ Whereas the OLI Treasurer keeps track of funding on a day-to-day level, the Board's Treasurer ensures that OLI's resources are managed with appropriate financial controls.

- Transit Consultant⁴
- Database/ Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteer (OLAV) Consultant, and Meetings/events Coordinator
- Railroad Investigation and Safety Course (RISC) Consultant
- Legal Counsel
- Project Manager
- Media Consultant

Many others also work under OLI’s guidance to support the mission, but they are generally volunteers and/or part of other organizations. The team describes many of these individuals in the remainder of [Section 3.2.1](#) and their role in carrying out OLI educational activities. The role of FRA in grant administration will be covered in [Section 4](#).

Working Groups

To help support the work of their small national staff, OLI creates working groups of approximately 6-12 people to help create their projects and programs. Working groups are led by an OLI staff member who is also the liaison with any vendors needed to complete the work (e.g., graphic designers, videographers, photographers). Other working group members include NAC and Materials Review Committee (MRC) members, 1-2 State OL Coordinators, 1-2 railroad representatives, and 1-2 subject matter experts with particularly strong expertise relevant to their working group’s tasking.

Grant Review Committee

The Grant Review Committee assists OLI with reviewing State OL competitive grant applications. The committee, which is comprised of the OLI Executive Director, a Board member representative, and two subject matter experts, follows OLI’s clearly defined evaluation metrics to objectively evaluate grant applications.^{5,6}

3.2.1.3 National Advisory Council

The NAC is an advisory body that assists OLI in establishing priorities for educational materials and programs.

NAC members are selected for their expertise in “the three Es of traffic safety” (i.e., education, enforcement, and engineering) and/or HRGC safety and railroad trespass prevention. The NAC rules of operation specify a wide variety of organizational representatives as well as certain OLI-related roles that should be included in membership during each two-year term.

⁴ OLI only contracts with a transit consultant when there is a current Federal Transit Administration (FTA) cooperative agreement.

⁵ The Grant Review Committee historically included a representative from each of OLI’s DOT partnering stakeholders. This changed in recent years after it was deemed to be a conflict of interest.

⁶ [Appendix E](#) provides information regarding the process by which OLI reviews and awards applications for state assistance grants. The review criteria show that all funded projects must include evaluation metrics.

- The two co-chairs that form NAC’s leadership should include:
 - One OLI Board member
 - One State Coordinator Regional Representative (SCRR)
- NAC general membership includes:
 - Eight State OL Coordinators who serve as regional representatives
 - Representatives from each participating Class I railroad, who are not on the OLI Board of Directors
 - Representative from a short line railroad or organization
 - Representative from transit (light rail or commuter rail)
 - Labor representative
 - Representative from federal partners who support the work of the National Office
 - Representatives from the education, engineering, and enforcement fields
 - Two at-large representatives from other organizations with an interest in HRGC safety or railroad trespass prevention
 - Communication/Marketing representative
 - International representative
 - Executive Director of OLI, as an ex-officio member

Materials Review Committee

The MRC is the part of the NAC responsible for reviewing and approving any rail safety educational materials that contain the OLI logo (e.g., those published by OLI and State OLs) to ensure that they are technically sound and of high quality.

The MRC is primarily comprised of NAC members, including the NAC co-chairs. It may also include a small number of Emeritus NAC members that are invited to extend their time on the MRC for an additional year or two because of their particular expertise. The NAC co-chairs appoint MRC members in consultation with the Executive Director.

OLI has a clear and established process for when the MRC must review and approve new and modified materials. OLI created a flow chart providing an overview of the major considerations and steps in this process (see [Figure 3](#)). OLI provides this flow chart to stakeholders where it can be helpful, e.g., linking to it in documents shared with stakeholders.

Materials are submitted to the MRC using an official submission form. The form both provides the information needed to review materials and assists in submission preparation by asking for the information in the following areas:

- Content (e.g., project goal, how materials will be used, the primary audience for the materials)
- General Quality Control (e.g., if fonts are used consistently, if the accuracy of contact information was confirmed)
- Process and Other Considerations (e.g., if the materials can be used/co-branded by other states, if submission was approved by their State OL Board)

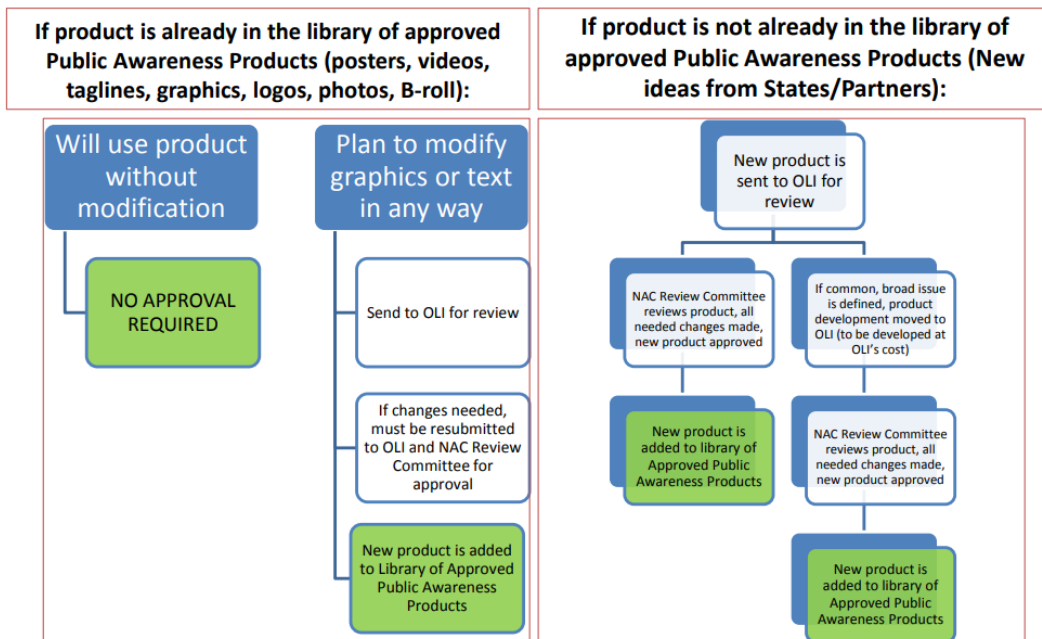


Figure 3. OLI Public Awareness Product Clearance Process Flow Chart

Social media posts do not need to be reviewed and approved by the MRC in the same way as materials. However, OLI has guidelines for social media posts regarding images, image use, and phrasing.

OLI also has a Member Checklist to guide the MRC in reviewing materials. It contains information related to the following:

- Content (e.g., if it is correct and appropriate for the target audience)
- General Quality Control
- Other Considerations (e.g., messaging/images that may unintentionally encourage suicidal ideation)
- Background on Correct Messaging and Terminology, including links to safety presentation speaker notes, a document explaining correct terminology, a glossary of terms, and a chapter of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices

The MRC meets on a regular basis to review materials, typically once a month unless an expedited review is needed. One interviewee offered that “they do a great job at turn around – no one waits too long.”

3.2.1.4 State OL Programs

State OLs are independent affiliates of OLI that have their own officers, rules, and Boards of Directors providing oversight. There are State OLs in 47 states as well as Washington, DC. Most are independent, non-profit organizations, but some have a different type of structure (e.g., part of their state DOT, safety council, or public utilities). OLI noted that “all programs are somewhat different.”

Although State OLs are not chapters of the national office, they work with OLI in a symbiotic partnership. For example, OLI creates tools and resources that the State OLs use and distribute locally on the state level.

State OLs sign a partnership agreement with OLI that outlines the relationship between OLI and the State OLs and helps facilitate these organizations working together toward their shared rail safety goals. The agreement includes the State OL's responsibilities (e.g., following OLI policies, filing an annual report with OLI, and using only OLI-approved products). It also includes OLI's responsibilities to the State OLs (e.g., developing and maintaining the materials OLs use, training and access to grants, legal counsel, insurance for OLAVs, and general support from OLI).

State OLs receives funding from a variety of sources.

- OLI: All State OLs in good standing can apply for and receive competitive and non-competitive grant funding from OLI.
- The OL-affiliated state: State OLs may apply for and receive funding from their affiliated state and local agencies (e.g., state grants).
- Railroads and transit agencies: State OLs often receive funding from railroads and transit agencies that operate in their state through a flat donation amount or based on a certain amount per track mile. Some Class I railroads and other large railroads donate to OLI to distribute to the states because of the ease of a single transaction, but the railroads still determine how much funding each state receives. State OLs generally request funding directly from short line railroads and transit agencies.

Some State OLs have restrictions in terms of the federal funding they can receive due to their affiliations. For example, if the State OL is part of the state DOT, they cannot accept federal funding. This may also impact states' ability to receive OLI's FRA-grant sponsored state subaward grants.

Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteers

OLAVs conduct rail safety outreach programs. They are managed by their State OL office but the program is "owned" by OLI (i.e., OLAVs are authorized by OLI, receive support from OLI, must use the materials provided by OLI, and provide updates to an OLI system used to track their activities).

OLAVs may conduct a variety of educational activities (e.g., presentations, booths) but they all receive the same training – an introductory online training followed by a longer in-person training. The State OL in-person training staff also receive direction from OLI on how to train OLAVs.

State Coordinators

Every State OL has a State Coordinator. Some State Coordinators are volunteers. Others are state DOT employees whose State OL work is paid through their DOT employment. The State Coordinator interviewee in this research said they are "the face of rail safety in my state."

State Coordinators, and the team larger programs may direct, conduct a wide variety of activities. These include fundraising, media outreach, training OLAVs, communicating with OLAVs about educational needs, and serving in other OLI roles (e.g., on the NAC).

3.2.1.5 Other Safety Partner Roles

In addition to the stakeholder roles already discussed, OLI also receives support from other safety partners who share OLI’s mission of improving rail safety education and reducing fatalities along railroad ROW. These safety partners include those that support OLI in messaging and outreach, such as DOT agencies, railroads, industry, law enforcement organizations, and the State OLs.

OLI also receives support from funding partners who provide financial resources for OLI’s mission through grants, awards, or other types of contributions. These funding partners include many of the organizations participating in the Board and NAC (e.g., DOT agencies, railroads), as well as some partners that primarily serve in a funding role (e.g., private foundations). [Section 3.2.2](#) provides more information about funding (i.e., resources and expenses) for OLI overall and specific to the FRA grant.

3.2.2 Funding

3.2.2.1 Overall Funding for OLI

Funding Resources

OLI receives funding from federal government partners, industry, and other private organizations.

Funding that OLI receives in the form of federal grants, such as the funding from FRA, has some use restrictions. FRA grant funding cannot be used to pay for salaries, although a small percentage of it can be used for “program administration” money to administer the grant. Other federal grant funding does allow a small percentage of funds to be used for salary, but only when working on that agency’s projects. Obtaining unrestricted funding (e.g. from private industry and organizations) is critical to pay for these expenses.

The evaluation team used OLI’s annual reports to pull information about OLI’s funding sources and amounts. The most recent annual report available to the evaluation team was from 2022, so the team reviewed data from the 5-year period from 2018-2022 to help provide a summary of recent OLI financials.

[Table 2](#) displays OLI’s total revenue and support for the years 2018-2022. It also displays the breakdown of how much funding came from each source type.

Table 2. Summary of revenue and support amounts from 2018-2022

Revenue and Support	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Contributions	\$615,218	\$745,726	\$649,875	\$782,742	\$730,763
Government Grants/ Awards	\$1,262,863	\$1,310,508	\$1,349,510	\$1,690,129	\$1,792,360
Foundation Grants	\$100,000	\$125,000	\$125,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
Royalties			\$20,191	\$26,950	\$52,526
Interest	\$2,663	\$5,481	\$1,465	\$460	\$6,732
Total	\$1,980,744	\$2,186,715	\$2,146,041	\$2,700,281	\$2,782,381

Figure 4 provides a snapshot summary of this same information. It displays the percentage of OLI’s total revenue and support that comes from each major source category, averaged across the years 2018-2022. The “other” category combines royalties and interest.

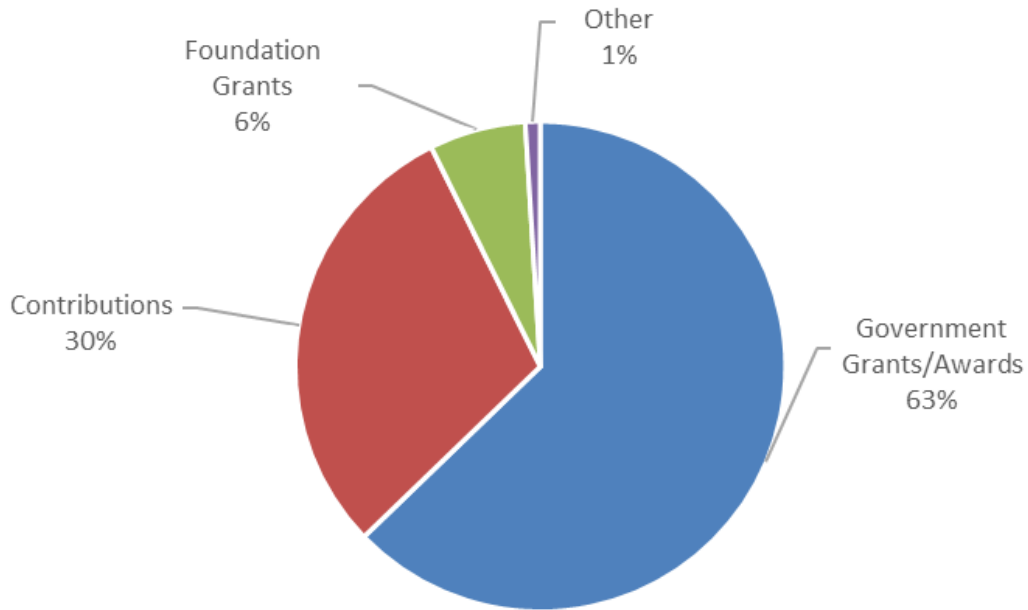


Figure 4. Percentage of OLI’s revenue and support from each source category, averaged across 2018-2022

Funding Expenses

Interviewees shared that OLI has received clean audits for four years in a row, which the evaluation team was able to verify using Federal Audit Clearinghouse reports. Additionally, OLI maintains audit-ready financials, meaning their books are ready to be audited at any time.

Table 3 displays OLI’s total expenses for the years 2018-2022. It also displays the breakdown of how much OLI spent in each funding category.

Table 3. Summary of Expenses from 2018-2022

Expenses	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Government Grants/Awards	\$1,262,863	\$1,313,514	\$1,349,517	\$1,690,129	\$1,792,360
Other Programs	\$279,570	\$515,736	\$457,661	\$555,144	\$625,802
General and Administrative	\$164,131	\$159,053	\$172,992	\$113,507	\$117,286
Fundraising	\$15,300	\$33,516	\$38,327	\$22,843	\$43,893
Total expenses	\$1,721,864	\$2,021,819	\$2,018,497	\$2,381,623	\$2,579,341

Figure 5 provides a snapshot summary of this same information. It displays the percentage of OLI’s total expenses in each major spending category, averaged across the years 2018-2022.

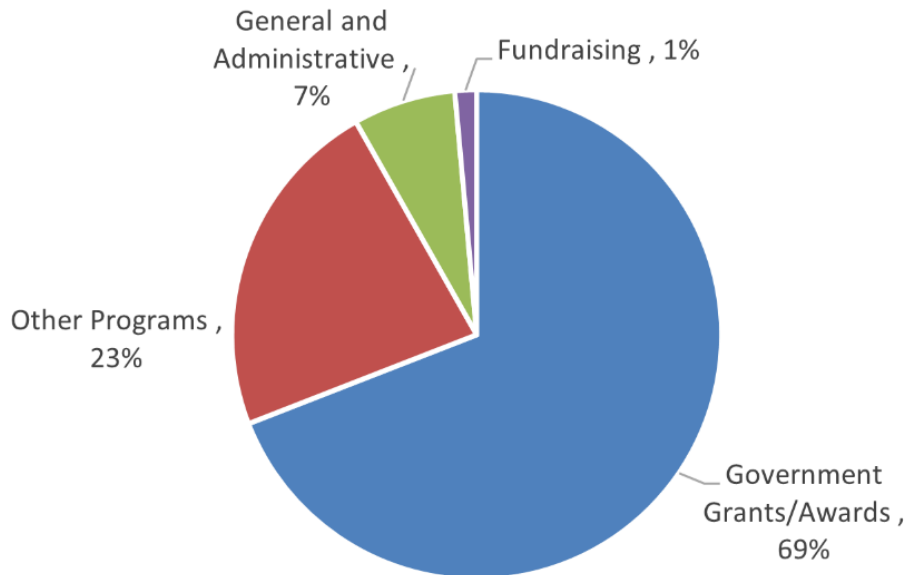


Figure 5. Percentage of OLI's expenses in each spending category, averaged across 2018-2022

3.2.2.2 FRA Grant Funding

This section provides information about the funding resources (i.e., funding inputs) that OLI uses to execute FRA grant tasks.⁷ It also explains how FRA funding is allocated to each of these grant task areas.

FRA Grant Funding

FRA began funding OLI in 1988 at \$69k. That amount increased over time until the year 2000 when FRA funding reached approximately \$1 million (\$950k). Since that time, FRA funding increased slightly and then decreased to a flat \$1 million in 2017 where the funding level has remained since that time. [Figure 6](#) illustrates changes in FRA grant funding levels over time from the inception of the grants to date. See [Appendix F](#) for actual funding amounts by year.

The roughly flat levels of grant funding for the past 24 years should also be considered along with inflation. To illustrate the impact of inflation during this length of time, consider that the total inflation rate from January 2000 to January 2023 was 77.23 percent. When considering inflation, it would take an approximate *additional* \$772,300 (i.e., \$1,772,334) in 2023 dollars to achieve the same buying power as \$1 million in the year 2000.⁸

⁷ OLI also uses some funding outside of FRA's grant funding to accomplish FRA-grant tasks, given that federal grant funding cannot be used for salaries nor overhead costs, both of which are necessary to accomplish FRA grant activities.

⁸ This calculation was made using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' "[CPI Inflation Calculator](#)" which uses the Consumer Price Index.

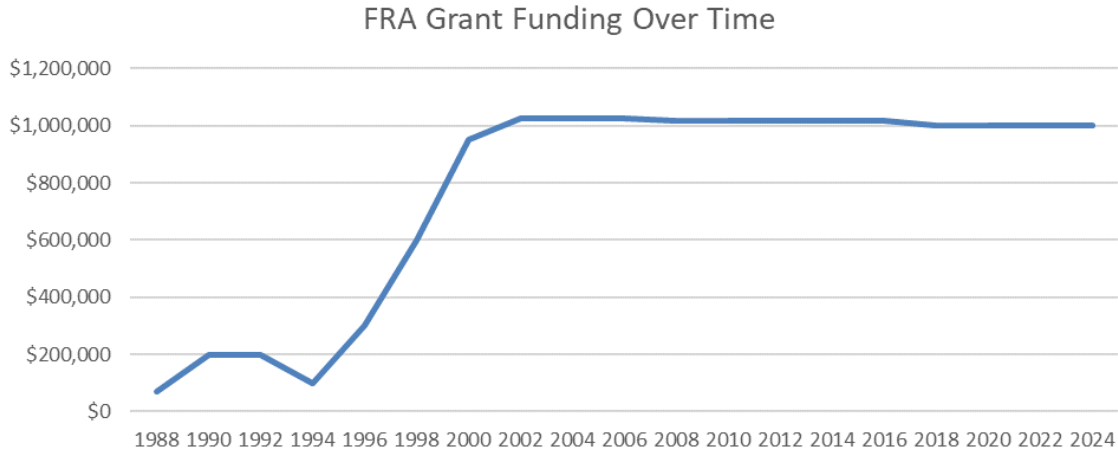


Figure 6. Changes in FRA funding levels since inception of FRA grant to OLI

OLI’s grant funding comes from FRA’s RRS. RRS uses 1-year funding to award the OLI grant, which means that the funding must be awarded and obligated in the year it was appropriated. One-year funding does not need to be spent by the grant recipient during that fiscal year, so the determining factor in when OLI’s funding must be spent is the grant’s period of performance (POP).

The standard POP for FRA’s OLI grant was historically one year. In recent years, FRA extended this POP at OLI’s request. The current POP for the grant is 15 months. However, FRA may prefer a shorter grant period to align with the annual budget from which the OLI funding comes.

FRA Grant Expenditures

As discussed earlier, the task areas of the FRA grant have been consistent for many years, as has the total FRA grant funding (see [FRA Grant Funding](#), above). The team looked across several years to understand the change in funding allocated to each major grant task area. [Table 4](#) displays the approximate distribution of FRA grant funding expended across each task area in the most recent five years (Operation Lifesaver).

Table 4. Percent of FRA grant funding per task area by grant year (2018-2022)

Grant task area	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Task 1: States Assistance Program	38.0%	38.4%	38.1%	37.4%	39.1%
Task 2: Training and Education Program	13.2%	15.6%	14.0%	17.1%	16.9%
Task 3: Communications Program	34.4%	31.6%	33.5%	31.1%	29.6%
Task 4: OLI Program Administration	14.4%	14.4%	14.4%	14.4%	14.4%

The percentage of funding applied to each of the 4 task areas has remained relatively consistent over the last five years. [Figure 7](#) displays the average funding for each task area over that same 5-year period.

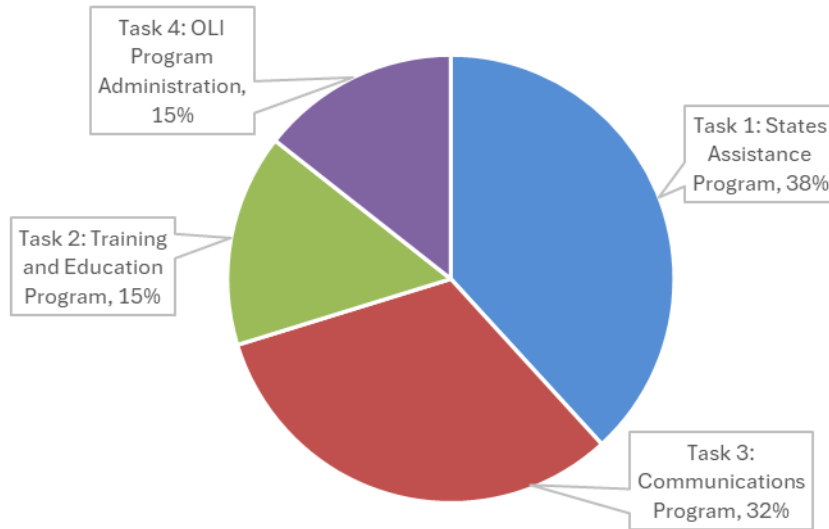


Figure 7. Five-year average of the percentage of FRA funding for each grant task area

3.2.3 Work tools

OLI uses work tools to support its administrative work and to create and publish its educational messaging and outreach materials. Three significant categories of work tools are:

- (1) Grant management tools: OLI uses multiple tools to support grant management (Grant Solutions and TrAMS) as part of the Federal grant award process. OLI uses a separate grant management system (Common Grant) to award and manage the sub-award grants to State OLs. OLI uses Delphi, a financial management system used by FRA, for invoice submission and payment processes for federal grants.
- (2) Messaging tools: OLI also uses tools for creating educational materials and public service announcements, tools for outreach of these materials (e.g., social media applications), and e-learning host sites to support training initiatives.
- (3) Materials storage and sharing tools: OLI uses platforms for storing the three tiers of educational messaging and training materials they provide (e.g., the OLI.org website).

3.3 OLI Activities and Outputs

The logic model in [Figure 1](#) lists the intended activities and outputs for the OLI program at the organizational level. These activities are briefly described below.

3.3.1 Create and Maintain Partnerships

This activity pertains to creating new funding and safety partnerships and maintaining existing partnerships (see [Section 3.2.1](#) for information about existing partnerships), and involves networking with current stakeholder partners and the public (e.g., participating in stakeholder events, attending speaking engagements to share the program’s mission, etc.), and requesting or collecting funding contributions. This activity also includes finding grant opportunities and applying for new and recurring grant funding. For grants that are recurring, OLI tasks also include providing interim deliverables and grant closeout documents using the appropriate grant

management tool as specified in the grant agreement. The output to this activity is that OLI creates new partnerships, maintains its current partnerships, and receives new and existing grant awards.

3.3.2 Provide Stakeholders with Training and Conference Activities

National OLI provides training for various safety partnering stakeholders, and hosts new State OL Coordinator orientation training and OLAV coach training yearly. OLI also brings stakeholders together for conference or workshop events to share best practices, hear from keynote speakers, and learn about new and updated OLI materials. Some of these activities occur yearly, while others occur as needed. One example of this activity is the summit training seminar. This two-and-a-half-day seminar occurs every two years and provides State OL Coordinators with professional development opportunities and updates on new programs, materials, and OLI policies. OLI also hosted a virtual leadership conference in 2021 called “Safety Partnerships: Together Toward Tomorrow” which brought stakeholders together to network and share lessons learned through panel discussions. The resulting output for this activity is that training courses are provided to partnering stakeholders and conferences and workshops are held.

3.3.3 Support State OL Programs and Award State Grants

This activity refers to the grants that OLI awards State OLs and the resources, informal guidance, and support OLI provides to State OLs.

Grant awards are the mechanism by which OLI provides State OLs funding. OLI awards competitive and non-competitive grant funding to State OLs to support state projects/educational campaigns or state administrative activities. The Grant Review Committee supports OLI in reviewing competitive grant applications to determine which grants will be awarded. See [Section 3.2.1](#) for more information about the Grant Review Committee.

Also included in this activity is the sharing of OLI educational materials and training resources. OLI created a resource library for State OL Coordinators that may be used for messaging and outreach activities. Separate from the State OL Coordinator library, OLI has also created a resource page specifically for OLAV trainers and coaches containing volunteer training materials.

Informally, OLI also provides operational guidance and support to State OLs and remains in regular communication with the programs. The resulting output from this activity is that OLI provides State OLs with grant funding, educational materials, and operational support.

3.3.4 Identify and Prioritize Safety Messages

Every year OLI focuses on different safety messages and audiences within the overarching theme of rail safety. This activity, which is done in conjunction with the NAC, includes identifying and prioritizing the specific safety messages and target audiences that OLI will focus on in their upcoming Statement of Work (SOW). This activity impacts the types of new materials and public awareness campaigns OLI will develop. The resulting output of this activity is that safety messages are identified and prioritized with input from partners and subject matter experts from across the country. For more information about the NAC and their role in this activity, see [Section 3.2.1](#).

3.3.5 Develop New Education Materials and Public Awareness Campaigns

This activity describes the work OLI does each year in conjunction with the NAC, the MRC, and project working groups. OLI develops an SOW for each safety project using information gathered by the NAC. Working groups help to create these new education materials and public awareness campaigns which can include video campaigns, news, tv, and radio advertisements, and message creation for billboards and pamphlets. The MRC is responsible for reviewing and approving the created materials. The resulting output of this activity is that new education materials and public awareness campaigns are developed. For more information about the MRC and working groups see [Section 3.2.1](#).

3.3.6 Disseminate Education Materials and Campaigns to Educate the Public

This activity describes the dissemination of OLI's rail safety education materials and public awareness campaigns. This activity is performed by OLI and its safety partners including State OLs. Safety partners support OLI by disseminating educational materials and campaigns to local and target audiences. Some examples of the ways in which OLI disseminates educational materials include the following:

- Digital platforms (e.g., social media)
- TV and radio
- News/print articles, billboards
- Presentations and safety exhibits
- Training efforts, e.g., Railroad Investigation and Safety Course (RISC)
- Community events and safety blitzes, including “See Tracks? Think Train! Week” (ST3)⁹

RISC and ST3 are two of the largest coordinated efforts in this activity. RISC is training geared toward teaching law enforcement and first responders how to remain safe while investigating or responding to incidents at HRGCs or ROW. ST3 is a concentrated week of rail safety education across the country and is OLI's largest coordinated effort in this activity. During ST3, OLI holds Operation Clear Track, a day that includes crossing enforcement and awareness exercises at high incident crossings and track results.

The resulting output of this overarching activity is that education materials and public awareness campaigns are disseminated.

3.3.7 Maintain Communication Support Services

As part of its safety messaging and outreach, OLI maintains an active presence on social media applications, including the maintenance and updating of these social media accounts. OLI also maintains and updates three separate resource webpages for various audiences. These include libraries that contain (1) rail safety education material available to the general public, (2) rail

⁹ During the grant focal year, “See Tracks? Think Train! Week” (ST3) was called Rail Safety Week (RSW). Throughout this report when referencing grant tasking and deliverable items from the focal year 2021-2022, ST3 is referred to as RSW.

safety education resources available to State OL Coordinators and (3) OLAV training materials available to trainers and coaches. The resulting output of this activity is that OLI's communication support services are maintained.

4. Q2: To What Extent are the Tasks in FRA’s Grant Agreements Being Implemented as Intended?

The evaluation team’s research supports the following findings:

- *Q2-Finding 1. OLI navigates formal and informal expectations in complying with grant deliverable submission.* The formal expectation is that OLI performs the tasking and submits deliverables as specified in the SOW. The informal expectation is that OLI performs the tasking as specified but is not strictly required to submit all deliverables (i.e., when it is not practical or desirable to do so). However, with this informal expectation is a shared understanding that FRA may request items not included in the final reporting form at any time.
- *Q2-Finding 2. OLI implemented the overwhelming majority of the tasking in task areas 1 and 3 according to the grant SOW.* OLI provided most deliverable items in task areas 1 and 3 to FRA in the final performance package. Items not included in the final performance package were available upon request, except for one. OLI implemented all but one of the evaluations in Task Areas 1 and 3 as specified.
- *Q2-Finding 3. The FRA grant management team expressed satisfaction with OLI’s final performance package.* The FRA grant management team indicated that OLI’s approach of including deliverable items upon request is preferable to receiving an impractically large final performance package. OLI indicated a desire for continuous feedback to ensure they continue to provide effective information in the reporting forms.

The remainder of [Section 4](#) provides a brief overview of the FRA grant award and tasking, and discussion around the team’s initial assumptions regarding grant compliance. This is followed by the two new evaluation questions and related findings considering the team’s working assumptions around the formal and informal expectations of grant compliance.

4.1 Overview of FRA Grant Award and Tasking

This section provides an overview of the current grant award administration process and OLI’s tasking as described in the SOW for focal year 2021-2022.

A grant manager from FRA’s Office of Railroad Development and a project manager from FRA’s RRS (i.e., “FRA grant management team”) oversee FRA’s grant award with OLI. The grant manager’s role is to oversee the grant award process, including obligating the funds and overseeing the scope, schedule, and budget. The project manager’s role is to review progress reports and deliverables.

The grant award process begins when FRA and OLI begin to work on scope, schedule, and budget for the grant. Once complete, FRA posts the application in the grant management tool Grant Solutions and OLI submits the grant application, which includes the SOW (see [Section 3.2.2](#) for a discussion of FRA grant award funding). The SOW is separated into four task areas: States Assistance Programs; Training and Education; Communication Programs; and Program Administration. See [Table 5](#) for a summary description of tasking (as described in the SOW) for the four task areas. Budget, schedule, and tasking within the grant application have not changed in a meaningful way from year to year according to the grant documents the team reviewed. See [Appendix C](#) for a full list of documents reviewed.

Table 5. Major Task Areas in the FRA Grant to OLI

Grant Task Area	Summary Description of Tasking
Task 1: States Assistance Programs	Provide state programs with: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) the opportunity to apply for competitive grants for local safety projects [Subtask 1.1] (2) program support (i.e., grants for administrative expenses [Subtask 1.2] as well as support services for online tools and state web sites [Subtask 1.5]) (3) training and workshops for state coordinators [Subtasks 1.3 and 1.4]
Task 2: Training and Education Programs	Support training and education program through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) providing training and support for new OLAV coaches/trainers [Subtask 2.1] (2) developing and make available new educational materials [Subtask 2.2] (3) providing ongoing support services for existing and new educational products and programs [Subtask 2.3]
Task 3: Communication Programs	Promote safety message communication through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Two projects aimed at material creation and dissemination for general and targeted audiences and OLI Rail Safety Week [Subtask 3.1] (2) Subaward funding to State OL programs [Subtask 3.2] (3) Ongoing communication support services [Subtask 3.3]
Task 4: Program Administration	OLI administers the programs in the other FRA task areas

As shown in [Table 5](#), each of the grant task areas except Task 4 comprise subtasks that break down the work in more detail. Subtasks include information about purpose, target audience, evaluation criteria, deliverable components, and task schedule, as applicable.

OLI begins the tasking described in the SOW after the grant is awarded. FRA does not direct OLI’s individual tasking beyond what is described in the SOW.

Quarterly reports are the primary mechanism by which OLI provides FRA with status updates during the grant award period. OLI is responsible for providing FRA with five reports, according to FRA’s quarterly progress reporting period schedule. Quarterly reports must be submitted using FRA’s grant/cooperative agreement quarterly progress reporting form ([Appendix G](#)). OLI also must submit a Federal Financial Report detailing cumulative and actual expenditures to date. The FRA grant management team reviews these items for compliance. The project manager communicates with OLI on a quarterly basis and as needed (e.g., when clarification or additional information is needed by either FRA or OLI).

OLI must submit a final performance report to FRA within 120 days of the grant’s POP end date using FRA’s grant/cooperative agreement final performance reporting form. The final performance report includes information about activities conducted under the grant and deliverable items specified in the SOW. [Appendix G](#) provides a summary of the information

requested in both the quarterly and final performance reporting forms. For the remainder of this report the evaluation team refers to the quarterly reports and the final performance reporting form as the “final performance package.”

To answer the evaluation question of whether tasks in FRA’s grant agreements with OLI are performed as intended, the evaluation team reviewed items included in the final performance package and compared them to the tasks specified in the SOW, and reviewed qualitative data gathered from stakeholder interviews and additional documents (see [Appendix C](#)).

4.2 Formal and Informal Expectations of Grant Compliance

Q2-Finding 1. OLI navigates formal and informal expectations in complying with grant deliverable submission.

4.2.1 Evaluator Assumptions

To evaluate the extent to which OLI conducted SOW tasking as intended, the evaluation team defined “as intended” to mean “as specified in the grant’s SOW.” The team reviewed supporting documents (i.e., the 2021-2022 final performance package and other documents) and gathered qualitative data to examine the extent to which tasking was performed as described in the SOW.

The team compared grant deliverables and evaluation data included in the final performance reporting package against the deliverables and evaluation items specified in the SOW. Findings from this analysis prompted discussions with OLI and the FRA grant management team, who both indicated a shared understanding that there are formal and informal expectations regarding grant deliverable submission.

- The **formal expectation** is that OLI performs the tasking, including deliverable submission, as specified in the grant award SOW.
- The **informal expectation** is that OLI performs the tasking but may not submit all deliverable items in the final performance report because it is neither practical nor desirable to do so. This informal expectation includes an understanding that the FRA grant management team may request deliverable items not provided by OLI in the final performance report.

Under this new working assumption, the grant task analysis is only useful in determining compliance with the formal expectations of the grant agreement ([Section 4.3.1](#) discusses the grant task analysis in more detail). In consideration of this finding, the team presents two interpretations of the original evaluation question and discusses the findings for each ([Section 4.3](#) and [Section 4.4](#)).

4.3 To What Extent Does OLI Implement Tasking According to the Grant’s SOW?

Q2-Finding 5. OLI implemented the overwhelming majority of the tasking in task areas 1 and 3 according to the grant SOW.

The formal expectations of grant compliance are that OLI implement the task, perform the evaluation, and submit deliverables as described in the SOW. To examine this evaluation question, the team conducted a grant task analysis that compared the deliverables described in

the grant application with the deliverables submitted in the final performance package. Because task deliverables often included multiple items, the team indicated whether all items were submitted in full, submitted in part, described as “available upon request,” or not submitted. [Table 6](#) shows the grant deliverable analysis results for subtasks in Task Areas 1 and 3. Subtask deliverables 1.1 and 1.3 are indicated as both “submitted in part” and “available upon request” because OLI provided some of the specified deliverable items in the final performance package and indicated the remaining items as “available upon request.”

Table 6. Grant deliverable submission status by task area (2021-2022)

Grant Task #	Submitted in Full	Submitted in Part	"Available on Request"	Not Submitted
1.1	-	X	X	-
1.2	-	X	-	-
1.3	-	X	X	-
1.4	-	X	-	-
1.5	X	-	-	-
3.1 (1)	X	-	-	-
3.1 (2)	X	-	-	-
3.1 (3)	X	-	-	-
3.2	-	X	-	-

Next, the team sought to verify that OLI was able to produce the missing deliverable items for the five partially submitted deliverables. The team requested the missing item(s) from OLI; if OLI was able to produce the requested items in a two-week period, the team determined that the deliverable tasking was completed. [Table 7](#) includes the team’s findings regarding grant deliverable completion status for subtasks in Task Areas 1 and 3.¹⁰

Table 7. Grant deliverable completion status by task area (2021-2022)

Grant Task #	Completed in Full	Completed in Part
1.1	-	X
1.2	X	-
1.3	X	-
1.4	X	-
1.5	X	-
3.1 (1)	X	-
3.1 (2)	X	-
3.1 (3)	X	-
3.2	X	-

¹⁰ Following a review of a draft version of this report, OLI provided the missing Grant Task 1.1 item (described as “completed in part” in [Table 7](#)) to the evaluation team. OLI indicated that this deliverable item included readily available information that OLI does not typically compile.

Finally, the team sought to determine the extent of OLI compliance in implementing evaluation activities, as described in the SOW for each subtask. Evaluation items do not specify deliverables. The team requested documentation about OLI’s evaluation activities for each subtask within Task Areas 1 and 3, and reviewed documentation to verify compliance. [Table 8](#) summarizes the findings from this activity. For a full list of sources reviewed as part of this activity, see [Appendix C](#).

Table 8. Evaluation implementation by task area (2021-2022)

Grant Task #	Implemented in Full	Implemented in Part
1.1	X	-
1.2	X	-
1.3	X	-
1.4	X	-
3.1 (1)	X	-
3.1 (2)	-	X
3.1 (3)	X	-
3.2	X	-

A detailed review of deliverable submission and evaluation implementation for the subtasks in Task Areas 1 and 3 is provided in [Appendix D](#).

4.4 To What Extent Does OLI Implement the Tasking According to the Shared Understanding Between OLI and FRA Regarding Grant Compliance?

Q2-Finding 6. The FRA grant management team expressed satisfaction with OLI’s final performance package.

Qualitative data that supports this finding is included below. These data include quotes related to the FRA grant management team’s assessment of OLI as a grantee and OLI’s perspectives regarding grant tasking and deliverables.

4.4.1 FRA Grant Management Team Expectations and Perspectives

The FRA grant management team indicated high levels of satisfaction with OLI’s grant compliance and with OLI as a grantee.

OLI’s current approach is to submit most of the deliverables to FRA, either in full or in part, and formally (i.e., written into the final reporting form) or informally provide the remaining deliverable items as “available upon request.”

Although the project manager reviews each item in OLI’s final performance package, the FRA grant management team indicated that they may not always have a use for certain items beyond reviewing them for completion (e.g., a list of participants that attended a training activity). The FRA grant management team also indicated that OLI has a large volume of deliverables in the grant award, which is not typical of the other grants they manage.

The FRA grant management team reported that some deliverable items may be “holdovers” from earlier years when OLI provided FRA a hard copy binder full of all deliverable items. FRA may want to request that OLI no longer provide these deliverables if they do not provide any benefit for grant management (See [Recommendation 6](#)). FRA may want to consider removing deliverable items from the grant award that are not necessary for assessing OLI’s grant compliance. However, the FRA grant management team noted that any changes to the deliverables specified in the grant agreement would need to be approved by the project manager in conjunction with FRA’s RRS.

The FRA grant management team indicated that they were supportive of OLI’s approach of including certain deliverable items as “available upon request” rather than incorporating them into the final performance package, as it keeps the performance reporting package manageable but allows the management team to request items as needed. The FRA grant management team indicated that historically OLI has been able to produce items at FRA’s request.

The FRA grant management team reported that OLI submits all quarterly and final reports on time and expressed their positive perception of OLI as an excellent grantee. They described OLI as experienced, responsive, and aware of their compliance obligations. The FRA grant management team stated that they did not experience any challenges in carrying out the grant agreement with OLI.

4.4.2 OLI perspective

OLI’s reported that they appreciate the opportunity to share deliverables with FRA for grant compliance, but it is not practical to include all of OLI’s many deliverables because the final performance reporting form is not designed for these types of deliverables.

In past years, OLI provided the FRA grant management team with a large binder filled with 500-600 pages worth of deliverable items. At some point, the process changed whereby instead of providing deliverables in hard copy format, FRA provided grantees with the FRA grant/cooperative agreement quarterly and final performance reporting forms.

OLI indicated that deliverables do not fit neatly within the formatting confines of this reporting form in part due to the quantity of deliverables OLI is tasked with and in part due to the types of deliverables. For example, including 12 State OL grant final reports would be cumbersome and impractical within the final performance reporting form’s open-ended feedback format. FRA should consider whether modifications can be made to the quarterly and final performance grant forms to better align with OLI’s grant (See [Recommendation 8](#)).

OLI has asked for feedback from FRA regarding the type and amount of information the management team would like them to include in the final reporting forms. In the “Grantee Feedback” section of the 2020-2021 final performance report ([Appendix C](#)), OLI requested feedback regarding the level of reporting, writing that:

“Any feedback on this new final reporting form would be appreciated...not sure if I am reporting too much, too little, or the right amount.”

Similarly, the following grant year (the focal year) OLI included a similar request, writing that:

“Any feedback on this final report is always welcome. I hope I am providing effective feedback.”

OLI indicated that they are satisfied with the FRA grant management team in terms of grant management and supporting OLI's overall mission, and indicated that the current level of support from the team was "exceptional." OLI described the management team as "always available" and has provided positive feedback in the "Grantee Feedback" section of each of the final performance reports for grant years 2017-2022 (see [Appendix C](#)).

5. Q3: What Improvements Can Be Made to Increase the Effectiveness of OLI's Operations?

The evaluation team's research supports the following findings, sorted into Challenges and Strengths.

5.1 Challenges

Q3-Finding 1. FRA's grant to OLI is underfunded relative to the activities included in the FRA grant agreement.

FRA's OLI funding has remained relatively constant since the year 2000, as discussed in [Section 3.2.2](#). During this period, inflation reduced the purchasing power of these funds while grant tasking has remained largely unchanged. Doing the same work with less spending power each year continually increases the strain on OLI.

Recommendation 1. If FRA desires to have the same audience reach as it did in 2000, FRA should allocate more funding to support their grant tasking, with consideration for inflation. This may require seeking additional congressional funding (for related information, see [Recommendation 3](#) about no-year funding and the consideration shared in [Section 6.1](#) regarding how to determine the funding needed to reach FRA's grant goals). The increasing diversity of communications channels and the smaller audience attending to those channels means that OLI must commit more resources to reach their target audience.

Q3-Finding 2. OLI is understaffed for the size and scope of their mission.

Interviewees noted that the small size of the national staff presents a challenge. For example, one Board member said "We have a small staff of four. ... The team is doing the max they can do."

OLI's staffing challenges may be less apparent to some due to their positive grant performance. An FRA Monitoring Report from January 2021 indicated that "OLI has consistently demonstrated that staffing is adequate to complete the scope of work." During interviews, FRA grant managers indicated that this assessment was based on OLI's timely and accurate submission of required items (e.g., reimbursement requests and deliverables).

In addition to a need for increased funding, an additional challenge is that most of OLI's federal funding cannot be used for salary or overhead. Therefore, even if FRA and other Department of Transportation (DOT) agencies increased OLI's grant funding, this would not address their staffing resources. OLI must rely on private funding to cover staffing costs. However, as a Board interviewee observed, obtaining additional funding to support increased staffing is challenged by the existing staffing limitations: "Looking at other foundations that can be less restrictive certainly helps. But we don't have a grant writer on our team and for those competitive ones we need a grant writer. And we don't have the resources to do that."

Recommendation 2. FRA should explore whether alternative funding mechanisms could contribute to OLI staff salaries.

Q3-Finding 3. Extending the FRA grant's period of performance would increase OLI's efficiency and support safety goals by increasing state programs' effectiveness.

OLI's current 15-month grant cycle results in a greater administrative burden than a longer duration grant cycle. If the administrative tasking associated with grant application and grant closeouts could be completed less frequently, it would reduce the amount of overall administrative tasking for OLI staff and allow that time to be put toward other activities. It would also reduce administrative workload for the FRA grant management team.

Additionally, the FRA grant's POP results in the State OLs having a relatively short timeframe to use OLI grant funding. Multiple stakeholder groups raised this concern regarding the state assistance competitive grants that OLI awards and funds through FRA's grant to OLI (see [Appendix D](#) for more information about this OLI grant task). OLI announces awardees in late April and all grant activity must be completed by the end of September, allowing time for State OL programs to provide final reports and receive the remaining 25 percent of their grant obligation before the OLI grant POP ends. This gives states just six months to complete their work, which limits the types of projects states can conduct. It excludes projects centered around certain times of the year (e.g., a campaign centered around football season or the winter holidays). It also limits campaign lengths even when a project could have continued for months longer with the same or similar amount of funding, which reduces FRA's return on investment for that funding.

Recommendation 3. FRA should explore whether no-year funding can be used for OLI grants.

Recommendation 4. FRA should explore whether it can award a grant with a multi-year POP to minimize the administrative burdens for OLI and FRA and allow OLI to roll over unexpended funding across fiscal years.¹¹

Q3-Finding 4. DOT agencies use different grant reporting platforms, which increases the workload for organizations like OLI that receive grant funding from multiple DOT agencies.

FRA, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) all contribute funding to OLI. Each of these federal agencies uses a different grant management software, none of which are compatible with each other. Each federal agency also has different reporting requirements. This increases administrative time and costs for organizations like OLI and reduces the funding that could be used to accomplish tasking directly related to its safety mission.

Recommendation 5. DOT should consider whether a common grant management platform might reduce grantees' administrative costs and better support their safety mission. If so, DOT should consider which platform may best support DOT needs, including supporting the work of their grantees.

¹¹ As discussed in [Section 3.2.2](#), FRA may prefer shorter POPs to align with the annual budget from which the OLI funding comes.

Q3-Finding 5. The FRA grant agreement has remained relatively the same over many years and may be due for review and potential updates.

The current agreement includes deliverables that FRA grant administrators say they do not need. This creates an unnecessary administrative burden for OLI staff which diverts staff time away from other activities that productively support their mission. It also unnecessarily increases the complexity of the grant that FRA must manage. Additionally, some tasking may not be of a nature to support straightforward and meaningful evaluation items.

Recommendation 6. FRA and OLI should jointly review FRA grant tasking to determine whether updates should be made to the Notice of Grant Award (NGA) to more accurately reflect FRA’s current needs. FRA and OLI should review grant deliverables for efficacy and determine which grant deliverables should be required as part of the NGA and which grant deliverables can be removed. [Table 6](#) in [Section 4.3.1](#) provides a starting point for this review.

Q3-Finding 6. The FRA grant agreement includes some Deliverable and Evaluation items that could be misunderstood and/or lack key information.

In the NGA, most subtasks include Deliverable and Evaluation items (see [Section 4.3](#) and [Appendix D](#) for more about the Deliverables and Evaluation items in the FRA grant). In most cases, these are clear and have sufficient information. However, in some cases, the wording could be improved. To illustrate this finding, [Table 9](#) provides several examples.

Table 9. Examples of how to increase deliverable and evaluation item clarity

Subtask	Item	Specificity and/or Clarity Considerations
Subtask 1.1	Evaluation: “...each state funded project will be evaluated on an individual basis based on their submitted required final report that is part of their grant requirement.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who will conduct the evaluation? Will OLI evaluate state grant projects? Or is the state grantee required to evaluate their own project? - What is the nature of the evaluation (i.e., on what kind of information will the evaluation be based)? Is this an informal check to see if certain criteria are met? - Does the evaluation just need to be done or is there evaluation output? If there is output, who receives it, if anyone?
Subtask 1.1	Deliverable: “OLI will provide to FRA: ...2) a list of projects funded and the amount; ...”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does “the amount” refer to the total amount of funding going to states for this grant? Or does it refer to the amount of funding for each state grant?
Subtask 3.1, Project 1	Evaluation: “OLI will evaluate the engagement of key audiences on digital platforms in response to new trespass prevention materials and track media coverage of trespass prevention initiatives.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do “key audiences” refer to audiences that are specific to the platform (e.g., for the Facebook platform, evaluate engagement of Facebook users), or OLI’s target audiences within the general population (e.g., bus drivers, children, law enforcement)? - What is the nature of the evaluation (e.g., what kind of information will the evaluation be based on)? - Does the evaluation just need to be done or is there evaluation output? If there is output, who receives it, if anyone?

Recommendation 7. OLI should review deliverable and evaluation items to find places where they can increase clarity, and OLI and the FRA grant management team should discuss what changes, if any, they would like to make to the wording of these statements.

Q3-Finding 7. FRA’s grant reporting forms (i.e., quarterly and final performance reporting forms) do not align well with the OLI grant.

The evaluation team found that FRA’s grant reporting forms (i.e., cooperative quarterly and final performance reporting forms) are not aligned with OLI’s tasking and deliverables, likely because FRA’s OLI grant is unlike the grants FRA typically awards. For example, Section D of the quarterly reporting form (“Major Milestones”) appears more applicable to construction contracts. Therefore, the majority of OLI’s quarterly reports within Section D are indicated as “N/A” (not applicable).

The OLI grant contains four tasks specified in the SOW, most of which have several substantial, project-like subtasks. However, the final reporting form appears designed for grants or contracts with one project. It specifies mostly open-format feedback, including separate sections for detailed descriptions about project activities, outputs, outcomes, and other public benefits. This reporting format means that grantees with multiple projects or large tasks, such as OLI, must discuss each grant project or subtask item in a fragmented way. OLI must provide detailed descriptions in each section of the reporting form for each of the 15 subtask items in Task 1 through Task 3. For example, in the “Project Activities” field, OLI presents a detailed description of each activity starting with Subtask 1.1 through Subtask 3.3. The next section, “Project Outputs,” includes detailed descriptions of outputs for each subtask, starting with 1.1 through 3.3. The following section, “Project Outcomes,” similarly begins with outcomes for Subtask 1.1 through Subtask 3.3. With this current reporting form, it is cumbersome to get the “full picture” for each subtask because of the disjointed nature of the final reporting descriptions.

See [Appendix G](#) for more information and links to FRA’s grant/cooperative agreement quarterly and final performance reporting forms.

Recommendation 8. FRA should explore whether modifications can be made to the quarterly and final performance grant reporting forms to better align with the tasking and deliverables described in OLI’s NGA.

Q3-Finding 8. Some FRA staff may, on occasion, interact with OLI as though they are contractors rather than a non-profit grantee.

Although OLI receives funding from FRA, OLI is a non-profit *grantee*, not a contractor. This is an important distinction because different rules apply to grantees and contractors. For example, an FRA *contractor* could have an agreement in place that allows FRA to direct its ongoing activities. However, as a non-profit *grantee*, FRA must specify OLI’s tasking in advance within the NGA. OLI must accomplish that grant tasking under the direction and oversight of OLI’s governing board. Most FRA staff, including the FRA grant management team, do understand and remember this. However, some FRA staff not involved in grant management may inadvertently try to direct OLI’s work by suggesting additional work activities outside of the NGA. Those individuals may not understand that OLI’s activities must fall within the scope of the year’s NGA and be aligned with the OLI Board’s vision.

Rules of communication also apply differently to contractors and grantees. While there may be limits around who contractors can talk to, this is not the case for grantees. Grantees may communicate with whomever they deem necessary to accomplish their work.

Recommendation 9. All FRA employees (from regional field staff to FRA management) that interact with OLI should be made aware (1) that OLI is a non-profit *grantee* and not a contractor; and (2) that OLI completes work as specified in an NGA monitored by a grant management team.

Q3-Finding 9. The relationship between FRA and OLI, both at headquarters and in the field, continues to be positive. Over time, that relationship has evolved so that FRA field staff may have less involvement with OLI and know less about OLI.

OLI, State OL Coordinators, and OLAVs work collaboratively with FRA field staff to promote the OLI mission (e.g., by sharing promotional materials). However, stakeholders indicated that more FRA involvement in OLI processes may foster additional understanding of OLI's current challenges and limitations. For example, in the past, FRA staff have served on committees to evaluate the competitive grant applications that State OL programs submit to the OLI national office. However, FRA staff no longer participate in reviewing grant applications, so they lack understanding of the impact current funding levels have on operations. Similarly, an OL State Coordinator suggested that it may be helpful to have FRA field staff serve on State OL boards if they do not already. This type of involvement could provide FRA field staff with a full understanding of what OLI can and cannot accomplish and the challenges they face. It also reinforces strong communication and collaboration between OLI and FRA.

Recommendation 10. FRA and OLI should meet to discuss ways to foster collaboration between their respective staff at all levels. This may include identifying (1) ways to promote communication about OLI's mission, (2) synergies between the safety concerns of FRA's field staff and OLI's safety mission, and (3) OLI's strengths and limitations so FRA staff understand how to help OLI serve its mission.

Recommendation 11. FRA should continue to support FRA employees' involvement with OLI (e.g., by participating in the OLAV program and serving on State OL boards). In addition to supporting FRA's goal of improved rail safety, FRA employees' involvement with OLI supports those employees' understanding of OLI, what they do, and how they do it. This includes the understanding that OLI is a federated non-profit organization.

5.2 Strengths

The team developed findings related to what is working especially well. Any adjustments based on challenge areas should be made considering maintaining these areas of strength. The team did not provide recommendations related to areas of strength.

Q3-Finding 10. OLI includes and effectively collaborates with major stakeholder groups (i.e., those with expertise, interest, and/or some shared responsibility in safety around railroad tracks) in all their major activities.

One of the reasons OLI can accomplish their activities despite their funding and staffing challenges is due to their network of stakeholder partners, which include both individuals and organizations. At the organizational level, stakeholders provide support through funding and/or

by promoting OLI's messaging and outreach. At the individual level, volunteers contribute their time and expertise to support OLI in achieving its mission.

Q3-Finding 11. OLI staff and partners are highly dedicated to the mission of preventing collisions, deaths, and injuries on and around railroad tracks and trains.

As one interviewee said: "The people just care. They believe in it." Additionally, OLI staff and partners put a great deal of personal time into the mission. Many volunteer roles require substantial time and energy, and OLI staff consistently work far above the typical work week to accomplish the mission.

Q3-Finding 12. OLI has successfully structured their program to effectively use volunteers and OLI maintains a high level of volunteer involvement.

OLI's many volunteers include subject matter experts in major stakeholder groups (e.g., railroads, labor, government, researchers, State OL programs). Volunteers provide critical support in areas such as providing oversight and direction, creating and reviewing safety programs and materials, establishing priorities, and conducting educational programs and outreach campaigns.

Q3-Finding 13. OLI effectively uses established and documented processes, procedures, training, and guidance to maintain the quality and consistency of their educational messaging.

OLI has detailed processes and procedures for the many activities occurring as part of its mission that enable OLI to work successfully with its many volunteers by providing clear guidance and establishing consistency. For example, OLAVs receive training and a handbook to guide them in their outreach activities. OLAVs also have access to detailed guidance related to presentations, such as PowerPoint slides and speaker notes.

Q3-Finding 14. OLI demonstrates fiscal responsibility and accountability.

OLI has an "audit-ready culture," keeping its financial information up to date and being prepared for an audit on any given day. This practice is reflected in four sequential government audits with no findings. Additionally, OLI seeks to minimize operating costs where possible. For example, they currently operate remotely and when they did have physical office space, it was donated by the Association of American Railroads.

Q3-Finding 15. OLI continues to look for ways to increase unrestricted private funding.

Funding remains a challenge for OLI (as discussed in [Section 5.1](#)). However, OLI has also made progress in this area, increasing its non-federal funding contributions and expanding to new funding sources (e.g., Posner Foundation). Maintaining and increasing non-federal funding is critical since it has fewer restrictions on use.

6. Discussion

This section contains the team's comments on two OLI program evaluation topics.

6.1 Considerations on the Impact of Evolving Media

The way people consume media has changed since 1988 when FRA first awarded grant funding to OLI. The number of people consuming broadband media decreased as the number of channels for communication and media increased. Digital media, such as websites, streaming services, and social media have exponentially increased the available content for consumers. In the current media environment, OLI can better target a narrower audience than it could in the past. However, that effort requires additional resources to develop this messaging.

FRA's trespass statistics are trending upward. There's an increased need for organizations like OLI to tailor its safety messages to the risky behaviors that occur on railroad ROW, in addition to safety at HRGCs.

OLI has adapted to these changes by developing materials to address these diverse media channels; however, their ability to do so is dependent on increased resources. As discussed in [Section 5.1](#) the purchasing power of OLI's funding has shrunk by 34 percent. At the same time, the challenges for OLI in meeting their educational mission have changed. These challenges have meant that OLI, in concert with the NAC and safety partners, have had to make difficult choices about which educational efforts to address and which communication channels to use.

If FRA wants OLI to continue to reach the same level audience they were able to reach in 2006, consider working with OLI to calculate the funding levels required and recommend that Congress allocate this amount.

6.2 Options for Evaluating OLI Impacts

During the evaluation team's initial meetings with FRA to identify this study's goals, several stakeholders expressed interest in an outcome evaluation (see [Appendix A](#) for more discussion on this). Funding and time constraints limited the current work to a process evaluation. However, future work may consider an outcome evaluation of OLI's impacts.

In considering a future outcome evaluation of the FRA grant to OLI, the team proposes two options:

- 1) **Examine the level of learning.** To demonstrate effectiveness, this type of outcome evaluation would identify the learning that took place following the OLI educational campaign. Such an evaluation might focus on questions such as:
 - Given the education materials, training, and messaging received, to what extent does the audience understand how to interact safely at HRGCs and along the ROW?
 - To what extent does the public understand railroad safety laws and their legal obligation for safe behavior?

Evaluators could measure performance by conducting knowledge tests before and after the campaign(s) to measure an audience's learning. An example of this type of evaluation is a study by Horton et al. (2014) examining online interactive training for commercial truck drivers developed by OLI. One benefit of this approach is that OLI

itself could benefit from user testing of its messaging prior to beginning a campaign which could help OLI target the audience to maximize learning and retention of the message.

- 2) **Examine learning transfer.** This option would examine learning transfer from OLI's messaging to real-world behavior. For example, this type of evaluation might focus on a question such as "Does the learning translate into safer behavior at the HRGC and/or along the ROW?"

An outcome evaluation focused on learning transfer would be more challenging than one focused on learning level because of the difficulty in showing that the behavioral outcome was the result of the OLI messaging. Examining learning transfer may require a control condition in which researchers observe an audience with similar characteristics at the HRGC or near the ROW. In the case of trespassing, staying away from the ROW would indicate safer behavior, but may not be observed.

These types of evaluation studies may pose significant methodological hurdles. To be useful, they should be tailored to a specific type of OLI education campaign.

Additional evaluation question such as those listed below would be informative, but may face insurmountable methodological hurdles:

1. Which educational campaigns or messaging strategies are most effective?
2. What percentage of a particular demographic is being reached?
3. How long is the message retained?
4. How effective is OLI messaging in combination with enforcement and engineering measures?

7. Conclusion

OLI executes its mission using a small staff of four full time employees, seven support contractors, and a large national network of volunteers across multiple stakeholder organizations. The work that OLI accomplishes is carried out with formalized roles, allowing for shared understanding of the responsibilities associated with each role. OLI documents the processes and procedures for how its activities should occur and provides guidance in other areas where more flexibility is required. This allows those taking on OLI activities to have a clear understanding of the expectations for how work should be accomplished.

OLI conducts its grant related activities within the constraints of the federal funding it is provided. One challenge is that FRA grant funding has been constant for many years, meaning it has not kept up with inflation. At the same time, FRA's grant tasking has remained constant, meaning OLI must accomplish the same amount of work with less purchasing power. Despite these challenges, stakeholders interviewed, including the FRA grant management team, reported satisfaction with OLI's work.

Overall, tasks in FRA's grant agreements are implemented as described in the NGA. However, not all deliverables specified in the grant award are submitted to FRA as the agreement specifies. OLI and the FRA grant management team expressed a shared understanding that it is neither practical nor desirable to include all deliverables in the final performance package. This is due to the large volume of materials, the large size of some deliverable files, and the fact that some deliverables are not items for which FRA would have a direct use (e.g., a list of participants that attended a certain training class). FRA expressed satisfaction with OLI's current approach of indicating selected deliverable items as available upon request. The evaluation team verified that the items "available upon request" were, in fact, completed and available with one exception.¹²

There are several challenges that provide opportunities for increased effectiveness of OLI's operations in the future, both in general and regarding the execution of FRA grant tasking. Some of these challenges and related recommendations address areas such as OLI's funding and staffing levels, the grant reporting platform and reporting forms, grant tasking, and the grant period of performance. The team also provides suggestions to enhance collaboration and communication between FRA and OLI.

OLI should maintain its processes that are working well, namely stakeholder and volunteer collaboration and dedication, the use of documented processes and procedures across stakeholder groups to maintain consistency and quality in messaging, and demonstrating fiscal responsibility.

¹² Following review of a draft version of this report, OLI provided the missing item. Notably, it is not clear if this item is one that would be useful to FRA.

8. References

- Horton, S., DaSilva, M., & Ngamdung, T. (2014). *Evaluation of Education and Outreach Methods and Strategies: A Case Study of a Web-based Rail Safety Education Initiative*. Washington, DC: Federal Railroad Administration. Retrieved from <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/evaluation-education-and-outreach-methods-and-strategies-case-study-web-based-rail-safety>
- Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (n.d.). *Annual Reports*. Retrieved from <https://oli.org/about-us/mission-impact-and-history/annual-reports>

Appendix A.

Considerations Shaping Evaluation Type and Questions

FRA directed the evaluation team to align this project with the interests of stakeholders as well as the funding available for evaluation. This appendix discusses the decisions made to align with that guidance and related considerations.

FRA Stakeholder Interests

To help focus the project, the evaluation team interviewed key stakeholders within FRA's RRS, Office of Performance and Evaluation, and Office of Research, Development and Technology to identify goals and priorities of the OLI evaluation. The following questions guided these interviews:

- What would you like to learn from this evaluation?
- How would you like to use the lessons the evaluation team learns from this evaluation?
- What are the outputs you'd like to see – full technical report, briefings, other?
- Who do you see as the stakeholders for this evaluation (e.g., railroads, law enforcement, the public, others)?
- Who else should the team talk to in planning this evaluation?

The team reviewed stakeholder input and found that the things stakeholders want to know could be grouped into 3 broad areas:

1. OLI process: How does OLI execute its mission?
2. OLI effectiveness: How effective is their outreach? Can the team identify measurable safety outcomes?
3. Suggestions for improvement

Decision Regarding Evaluation Type

The team determined that, given project resources, the evaluation would focus on the following two interest areas: evaluating the OLI process and suggestions for improvement (i.e., items 1 and 3 from the list above).

Although it is an important area to evaluate, there is no existing data available to support an evaluation of OLI effectiveness. Such data collection would have required more time and funding than was available, particularly given that OLI:

1. Serves many different target populations, as shown in [Table 10](#)
2. Delivers services through State Coordinators which could vary in their implementation of services
3. Much of their education work happens through grants that OLI awards to others

Table 10. Audiences for OLI public campaigns as reflected in OLI’s free digital resource library

OLI Audiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General adults • Drivers (general) • New drivers • Professional drivers • School bus drivers • Teachers • Students (in 4 different age categories) • Farmers • First responders • Law enforcement • Hunters and fishermen • Pedestrians • Rail passengers • Photographers

The complexity of how OLI implements its services was another reason to support a process evaluation that can help FRA better understand how the organization does its work and look for areas of strength and identify potential improvements.

Stakeholders also expressed interest in having the evaluation team identify metrics to monitor the effectiveness of the OLI program in the future, which could be part of what’s known as an impact evaluation to determine whether a program or organization “works” or is having the desired impact. This type of evaluation requires assessing the *causal impact* of a program. Determining the appropriate metrics to measure impact and/or effectiveness, even without doing the data collection, would be a significant effort, in part due to the complexity of the organization and its multifaceted educational approaches targeting a broad range of groups. Given that the team had to conduct the evaluation within the available budget and timeframe, identifying these metrics could not be a primary task in this project.

Appendix B.

Summary List of Major Findings and Recommendations

This appendix lists all the findings and recommendations presented in the body of the report for easy reference. Only the third evaluation question resulted in recommendations.

Q1: How does OLI execute its mission?

Q1-Finding 1. OLI executes its mission through collaboration and cooperation with stakeholder partners, both individuals and organizations. At the organizational level, safety partners contribute funding and/or participate in activities promoting OLI's messaging and outreach materials (e.g., FRA contributes grant award funding and promotes OLI rail safety education material). At the individual level, stakeholder partners (e.g., members of the Board, individuals providing presentations to the public) often volunteer their time and expertise to support OLI's mission.

Q1-Finding 2. Volunteer support is a critical part of executing OLI's mission. The majority of OLI's educational activities rely on volunteer support: identifying and prioritizing safety messages, scoping new education materials, reviewing and approving new material, and disseminating OLI's educational materials and safety campaigns. Oversight and strategic planning also rely heavily on volunteers.

Q1-Finding 3. OLI conducts activities using clear processes and procedures that are well-established and documented. Two examples are (1) a checklist to guide review of new materials, and (2) evaluation criteria to guide the review of competitive grant subawards.

Q2: Are the tasks in FRA's grant agreements being implemented as intended?

Q2-Finding 1. OLI navigates formal and informal expectations in complying with grant deliverable submission. The formal expectation is that OLI performs the tasking and submits deliverables as specified in the SOW. The informal expectation is that OLI performs the tasking as specified but is not strictly required to submit all deliverables (i.e., when it is not practical or desirable to do so). However, with this informal expectation is a shared understanding that FRA may request items not included in the final reporting form at any time.

Q2-Finding 2. OLI implemented the overwhelming majority of the tasking in task areas 1 and 3 according to the grant SOW. OLI provided most deliverable items in task areas 1 and 3 to FRA in the final performance package. Items not included in the final performance package were available upon request, except for one. OLI implemented all but one of the evaluations in Task Areas 1 and 3 as specified.

Q2-Finding 3. The FRA grant management team expressed satisfaction with OLI's final performance package. The FRA grant management team indicated that OLI's approach of including deliverable items upon request is preferable to receiving an impractically large final performance package. OLI indicated a desire for continuous feedback to ensure they continue to provide effective information in the reporting forms.

Q3: What improvements can be made to increase the effectiveness of OLI's operations in carrying out FRA grant activities?

Q3-Finding 1. FRA's grant to OLI is underfunded relative to the activities included in the FRA grant agreement.

Recommendation 1. If FRA desires to have the same audience reach as it did in 2000, FRA should allocate more funding to support their grant tasking, with consideration for inflation. This may require seeking additional congressional funding (for related information, see Recommendation 3 about no-year funding and the consideration shared in Section 6.1 regarding how to determine the funding needed to reach FRA’s grant goals)

Q3-Finding 2. OLI is understaffed for the size and scope of their mission.

Recommendation 2. FRA should explore whether alternative funding mechanisms could contribute to OLI staff salaries.

Q3-Finding 3. Extending the FRA grant’s period of performance would increase OLI’s efficiency and support safety goals by increasing state programs’ effectiveness.

Recommendation 3. FRA should explore whether no-year funding can be used for OLI grants.

Recommendation 4. FRA should explore whether it can award a grant with a multi-year POP to minimize the administrative burdens for OLI and FRA and allow OLI to roll over unexpended funding across fiscal years.

Q3-Finding 4. DOT agencies use different grant reporting platforms, which increases the workload for organizations like OLI that receive grant funding from multiple DOT agencies.

Recommendation 5. DOT should consider whether a common grant management platform might reduce grantees’ administrative costs and better support their safety mission. If so, DOT should consider which platform may best support DOT needs, including supporting the work of their grantees.

Q3-Finding 5. The FRA grant agreement has remained relatively the same over many years and may be due for review and potential updates.

Recommendation 6. FRA and OLI should jointly review FRA grant tasking to determine whether updates should be made to the Notice of Grant Award (NGA) to more accurately reflect FRA’s current needs. FRA and OLI should review grant deliverables for efficacy and determine which grant deliverables should be required as part of the NGA and which grant deliverables can be removed.

Q3-Finding 6. The FRA grant agreement includes some Deliverable and Evaluation items that could be misunderstood and/or lack key information.

Recommendation 7. OLI should review deliverable and evaluation items to find places where they can increase clarity, and OLI and the FRA grant management team should discuss what changes, if any, they would like to make to the wording of these statements.

Q3-Finding 7. FRA’s grant reporting forms (i.e., quarterly and final performance reporting forms) do not align well with the OLI grant.

Recommendation 8. FRA should explore whether modifications can be made to the quarterly and final performance grant reporting forms to better align with the tasking and deliverables described in OLI’s NGA.

Q3-Finding 8. Some FRA staff may, on occasion, interact with OLI as though they are contractors rather than a non-profit grantee.

Recommendation 9. All FRA employees (from regional field staff to FRA management) that interact with OLI should be made aware (1) that OLI is a non-profit grantee and not a contractor; and (2) that OLI completes work as specified in an NGA monitored by a grant management team.

Q3-Finding 9. The relationship between FRA and OLI, both at headquarters and in the field, continues to be positive. Over time, that relationship has evolved so that FRA field staff may have less involvement with OLI and know less about OLI.

Recommendation 10. FRA and OLI should meet to discuss ways to foster collaboration between their respective staff at all levels. This may include identifying (1) ways to promote communication about OLI's mission, (2) synergies between the safety concerns of FRA's field staff and OLI's safety mission, and (3) OLI's strengths and limitations so FRA staff understand how to help OLI serve its mission.

Recommendation 11. FRA should continue to support FRA employees' involvement with OLI (e.g., by participating in the OLAV program and serving on State OL boards). In addition to supporting FRA's goal of improved rail safety, FRA employees' involvement with OLI supports those employees' understanding of OLI, what they do, and how they do it. This includes the understanding that OLI is a federated non-profit organization.

Q3-Finding 10. OLI includes and effectively collaborates with major stakeholder groups (i.e., those with expertise, interest, and/or some shared responsibility in safety around railroad tracks) in all their major activities.

Q3-Finding 11. OLI staff and partners are highly dedicated to the mission of preventing collisions, deaths, and injuries on and around railroad tracks and trains.

Q3-Finding 12. OLI has successfully structured their program to effectively use volunteers and OLI maintains a high level of volunteer involvement.

Q3-Finding 13. OLI effectively uses established and documented processes, procedures, training, and guidance to maintain the quality and consistency of their educational messaging.

Q3-Finding 14. OLI demonstrates fiscal responsibility and accountability.

Q3-Finding 15. OLI continues to look for ways to increase unrestricted private funding.

Appendix C. Sources Reviewed

The following list displays the information sources that the team reviewed as part of the program evaluation. Some sources are grouped together for increased clarity.

Operation Lifesaver

- <https://OLI.org>
- <https://oli.org/about-us/mission-impact-and-history/annual-reports> (grant years 2017-2018 through 2021-2022)
- 2022 Rail Safety Week Report (https://oli.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/OLI_RSW_ResultsReport_2022_11_29_22_WEB%20%282%29.pdf)
- MRC Member Checklist – document to guide MRC members in their review of OLI materials
- MRC Submission Form (2022) – aids in preparing submission for materials review and assists the committee while reviewing
- NAC Rules of Operation (2021)
- Railroad Investigation and Safety Course training flyer (https://s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/downloads.oli.org/RISC/RISC+Program+Flyer_FINAL_10.05.2020.pdf)
- OLI virtual leadership conference (<https://oli.org/safety-partnerships-together-towards-tomorrow>)
- OLI Strategic Plan 2021-2023: Status Update (March 2022) – presentation made to the Board of Directors at the Board Meeting and Retreat in Omaha, Nebraska
- OLI Partnership Agreement (October 2018) – agreement between State OL programs and OLI
- OLI subaward grant programs handout (2023) – provides information about available grants (including those awarded as part of FRA grant Subtasks 1.1 and 1.2)

FRA Grant Documents (“Final Performance Package”)

- 2017-2018 Grant application, 5 quarterly reports, final reporting form
- 2018-2019 Grant application, 5 quarterly reports, final reporting form
- 2019-2020 Grant application, 5 quarterly reports, final reporting form
- 2020-2021 Grant application, 5 quarterly reports, final reporting form
- 2021-2022 Grant application, 5 quarterly reports, final reporting form
- 2021-2022 NGA and attachments

OLI Grant Task Deliverable and Evaluation Documents (documentation provided upon Volpe request, not included in final performance package)

Task 1.1

- States assistance competitive grant application (grant year 2021-2022), including scoring information (PDF of online application)
- States assistance competitive grant documents (grant year 2021-2022) for three states (CA, IN, SC) including:
 - Project applications
 - Project final reports
 - Receipts documenting spending
- State assistance competitive grant summary document (grant year 2021-2022) – list and description of grants awards
- States assistance competitive grant funding spreadsheet (grant year 2021-2022) – details all entities that applied for the grant and specifies amount awarded

Task 1.2

- State program benefit spreadsheet (grant year 2021-2022) – grant funding amount organized by state and category
- State program benefit grant documents (grant year 2021-2022) for three states (AL, MN, MO) including:
 - Subaward applications
 - Receipts documenting spending
 - Spreadsheet documenting spending amounts by benefit category

Task 1.3

- State Coordinator Summit Training post-summit survey results (grant year 2021-2022)

Task 1.4

- State Coordinator Orientation Training post-orientation survey results (grant year 2021-2022)
- State Coordinator orientation training agenda (2021-2022)

Task 3.2

- State program public awareness spreadsheet (grant year 2021-2022) – grant funding amount organized by state and category
- State program public awareness grant documents (grant year 2021-2022) for three states (CT, MI, WA) including:
 - Subaward applications
 - Receipts documenting spending

- Public awareness spreadsheet documenting spending amounts by vendor and purpose

Appendix D.

Deliverable and Evaluation Implementation by Subtask for Task Areas 1 and 3

This appendix includes more detailed information about deliverable submission and completion and evaluation implementation items for each subtask in Task Areas 1 and 3.

For each subtask in Task Areas 1 and 3, a table is included with the task description, evaluation, and deliverables as they are written in the 2021-2022 grant application, followed by a description of the findings related to OLI compliance with evaluation criteria (including a description of evaluation process, where available). Summary data describing OLI’s subtask deliverable submission status (i.e., *yes, no, partial*) and completion status (i.e., *yes, no, partial*) follows.

Subtask 1.1: States Assistance Competitive Grants

States Assistance Competitive Grants is the first subtask within Task 1, States Assistance Programs. OLI awards FRA grant funding to community and state education campaigns and events.

Table 11. Subtask 1.1 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	<p>OLI provides up to 75 percent matching awards to Operation Lifesaver (OL) state programs in good standing* for HRGC safety or railroad trespass prevention projects. OLI will administer the competitive grant process using an online application. A grant review committee will review grant applications and OLI will select the projects that will best help accomplish OLI’s overall mission.</p> <p>*A “program in good standing” is a state OL program that: 1) has a signed agreement between OLI and the state program; and 2) adheres to the policies and stipulations in that agreement.</p>
Evaluation	Upon completion, each state funded project will be evaluated on an individual basis based on their submitted required final report that is part of their grant requirement. ¹³
Deliverables ¹⁴	<p>OLI will provide to FRA:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) a list and brief description of each application received 2) a list of projects funded and the amount 3) the final report of each funded project

¹³ This evaluation item is referenced in [Section 5](#). The grant agreement’s evaluation item for this subtask should be reviewed for clarity (Recommendation 7). The evaluation is passively phrased (i.e., does not specify who will be performing evaluation activities) and vague in scope (i.e., does not specify what is being evaluated). As a result, the team documented its assumptions about the evaluation as written. Regarding who is performing the evaluation activities, the team deduced that this could refer to OLI or the state itself. Due to this ambiguity, the team included findings for OLI-performed compliance evaluations and state program-performed effectiveness evaluations.

¹⁴ The deliverable items in this subtask are referred to in [Section 5](#). The “list and brief description of each application received” deliverable item should be reviewed for efficacy (Recommendation 6). OLI has the information required to complete the item but does not currently compile as described in the SOW. The “list of projects funded and the amount” deliverable item should be reviewed for clarity (Recommendation 7). It is not clear whether “the amount” refers to an itemized list of the funding provided to each state, or the total amount of grant funding OLI provided to all states combined. OLI provided the evaluation team with both items.

Evaluation

Q2-Sub-Finding 2(a): State projects are evaluated by OLI and by the states themselves. OLI verifies that states submit final reports and evaluates them for compliance in terms of work performed, invoices provided, and state funding match fulfilled. State OL final reports must include information evaluating the project’s effectiveness. The team reviewed three state program final reports and verified that they provide the required evaluation data.

OLI provides states with 75 percent of the grant funding within 30 days of announcing acceptance of their applications. States receive the remaining 25 percent after OLI receives the required documents (i.e., final report, invoicing documents, and match funding data) and verifies that these documents are complete. If a state grant awardee does not complete the grant tasking as described in the application, OLI withholds the final 25 percent of grant funding and requires the state to return the previously provided 75 percent. Grant terms specify that grant activity must be complete by September 30 of the grant year, and final reports are due one month later, on October 31. Reports submitted after November 15 of the same year may result in the state not receiving the final payment.

OLI’s grant agreement with State OL programs specifies that states must provide an evaluation plan as part of the application process that describes at least one metric that can be used to show how effectiveness will be evaluated during and/or after the project. The final report for each state grant project must then provide information documenting the results of the project and the results of their evaluation of the project, using the metric described in the application.

The team requested grant applications and final reports for three random state programs. The team reviewed the grant applications and verified their inclusion of evaluation metrics. For example, an evaluation metric for a grantee that runs digital advertisements could be impressions across advertising platforms. The team reviewed final reports for the three state programs and verified that the final reports included the evaluation data.

Deliverables

Submitted to FRA in grant closeout documents: <i>Partial</i>	Completed: <i>Partial</i>
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The team reviewed deliverables and verified that they comply with grant specifications. OLI was unable to produce one item in this deliverable. The SOW states that OLI will provide FRA with “a list and brief description of each application received.” OLI does submit the list of state program applications received but does not provide descriptions for each of these applications. OLI indicated that they have available, and can provide, the applications for grants not awarded.

Additional findings related to tasking

Because States Assistance Grants are competitive, the SOW specifies that applications be reviewed as part of the grant application review process. The team reviewed the applications and verified that OLI has an established review process with appropriate criteria. See [Appendix E](#) for more about how applications are reviewed.

Subtask 1.2: State Program Benefits

State Program Benefits is the second subtask within Task 1, States Assistance Programs. OLI awards FRA grant funding to state OL programs in good standing to be used for program benefits (e.g., legal, payroll, tax preparation).

Table 12. Subtask 1.2 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	State program benefits funding is intended to strengthen the integrity, accountability, and effectiveness of each state program. OL state programs in good standing may apply for funding to help cover the costs of consultants and technical professionals. Funding will be awarded in the form of grants to fund administrative expenses. Legal, computer, payroll, audit, tax preparation, and training are examples of the types of costs covered under state benefits. The list of benefits may change from time to time, based on need.
Evaluation	OLI reviews each state’s receipts for funds provided under this task to ensure that the funds are appropriately used.
Deliverables	OLI will provide to FRA a report listing the administrative grants made, their amounts, and the benefit categories funded.

Evaluation

Q2-Sub-Finding 2(b): OLI requires that State OL programs applying for state program benefit grants provide an Administrative Grant Application Spreadsheet and receipts for eligible expenses. The team reviewed 3 state program spreadsheets and receipts and found that funds were appropriately used.

The state program benefit grant application specifies the eligible expense categories for grant funding reimbursement. The team requested spreadsheet and receipt documentation for three state programs to (1) check for OLI compliance with collecting receipts required to complete this evaluation and (2) review receipts to evaluate whether funds were spent on eligible expenses (as specified in the grant application).

OLI provided the following documents for three state programs:

- subaward grant application showing the amount of funding requested and approved
- receipts submitted by the state
- administrative grant application spreadsheet

Deliverables

Submitted to FRA in grant closeout documents: <i>Partial</i>	Completed: <i>Yes</i>
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The team reviewed the deliverables completed and verified that they comply with the grant specifications.

Subtask 1.3: State Coordinator’s Summit Training Seminar

State Coordinator’s Summit Training Seminar is the third subtask within Task 1, the States Assistance Programs part of the grant. Summit Training Seminar is a two-and-a-half day training that provides State Coordinators with professional development and gives State Coordinators a chance to network, learn from each other, and hear about new educational materials and outreach created by OLI.

Table 13. Subtask 1.3 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	This 2 ½ day training seminar is devoted to professional development of OLI State Coordinators through media training, policy updates, current trends and FRA statistics, national reports by Federal partners, legal update training by OLI’s legal counsel, and updates on all new programs and OLI policies by staff, etc.
Evaluation	OLI will conduct a post summit survey to assess the effectiveness of the summit and to determine what additional training needs may be needed.
Deliverables	OLI will provide to FRA a list of participants, agenda, and the results of the post-summit survey.

Evaluation

Q2-Sub-Finding 2(c): OLI conducted a post summit survey that included questions about effectiveness and additional training needed. OLI indicated that survey summary data is used extensively to determine whether changes should be made to the training seminar.

OLI provided the full summary of post-summit survey questions and responses (see [Appendix H](#) for post-summit survey questions). Anecdotally, the State Coordinator indicated that feedback to OLI regarding summit training is well-received. The State Coordinator noted that there have been instances in the past where OLI made changes based on feedback.

Deliverables

Submitted to FRA in grant closeout documents: <i>Partial</i>	Completed: <i>Yes</i>
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The team reviewed the deliverables completed and verified that they comply with the grant specifications.

Subtask 1.4: State Coordinator Orientation

State Coordinator Orientation is the fourth subtask within Task 1, States Assistance Programs. New State Coordinators attend OLI’s State Coordinator Orientation to train on running efficient and effective programs. This training is conducted in-person when there are a minimum of four participants; otherwise, OLI conducts the training virtually for each new State Coordinator.

Table 14. Subtask 1.4 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	The orientation provides training for new State Coordinators to be efficient and effective at running an OLI state program. This will include training State Coordinators on finding and using FRA statistics, applying for FRA state grants, and how to best effectively [sic] use FRA funded material. The training covers OLI policies, practices, and procedures; media training; state member program legal training; OLAV training; approved messaging; and state program financial responsibilities.
Evaluation	OLI will, via a post-orientation survey, assess the effectiveness of the orientation for use in planning future orientations.
Deliverables	OLI will provide FRA with a list of participants, an agenda, the results of the survey, and their assessment of the survey.

Evaluation

Q2-Sub-Finding 2(d): OLI conducted a post-orientation survey that included questions about effectiveness and future topics to include. OLI indicated that evaluations are reviewed by the OLI staff and the State Coordinator Facilitators that help OLI train new State Coordinators, and that data from the survey results are used to adjust future training.

OLI provided the full summary of post-orientation survey questions and responses (see [Appendix H](#) for survey questions).

Deliverables

Submitted to FRA in grant closeout documents: <i>Partial</i>	Completed: <i>Yes</i>
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The team reviewed the deliverables completed and verified that they comply with the grant specifications.

Subtask 1.5: Ongoing website/OLI Online Support Services

Ongoing website/OLI Online Support Services is the fifth subtask within Task 1, States Assistance Programs. This subtask describes OLI’s work to maintain and support website services for the public and State OL programs.

Table 15. Subtask 1.5 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	OLI will provide the following services as needed to maintain, upkeep, and support ongoing website services for the public and OL state programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website maintenance includes updating and provision of technical support to www.oli.org and to the volunteer reporting system. This also includes website hosting and domain fees.• OLAV Database Support – Database maintenance and updates for the OLAV program and for the reporting of state OL activities to OLI. Online grant application system for state grant applications, monitoring, and reporting.
Evaluation	N/A
Deliverables	OLI will provide to FRA quarterly progress reports to include analytics. These metrics will detail traffic to OLI’s website and will include both public use/hits and internal use/hits.

Evaluation

Task 1.5 does not specify an evaluation component.

Deliverables

Submitted to FRA in grant closeout documents: <i>Yes</i>
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Subtask 3.1 Project 1 Public Awareness and Social Media

Subtask 3.1 describes New Communication Projects, which is the first subtask in Task 3. This subtask uses FRA funding to promote OL safety messages through various communication methods and development of public awareness materials. Subtask 3.1 is comprised of three projects. The work that the NAC does to identify and prioritize messaging needs supports OLI’s

decisions regarding which projects to include in this subtask. Working groups determine the project task descriptions. For more information about the role of the NAC and working groups in supporting project creation see [Section 3.2.1](#).

The first project in Subtask 3.1 is Public Awareness and On-Going Social Media. This project describes OLI’s work to distribute trespass prevention and grade crossing safety messages to the public.

Table 16. Subtask 3.1 Project 1 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	OLI will continue to use trespass prevention public awareness materials and grade crossing materials to distribute safety messages to the public in areas of the country that have higher incident rates/statistics. OLI will utilize mobile advertising and peer-to-peer social sharing to amplify the messages for hard-to-reach teen and young adult audiences, and to reach a majority of the public on different social media platforms.
Evaluation	OLI will evaluate the engagement of key audiences on digital platforms in response to new trespass prevention materials and track media coverage of trespass prevention initiatives. ¹⁵
Deliverables	OLI will provide to FRA a copy of each of the materials and links to campaign elements and the outreach results will be included in the required quarterly reports.

Evaluation

Q2-Sub-Finding 2(e): OLI provided engagement data for public awareness and grade crossing materials published on 11 digital platforms and a Times Square video ad.

OLI provided engagement data for Vimeo, YouTube, Oli.org, Google ads, Facebook, X (formerly twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, internet publications, and television and radio. OLI provided engagement metrics about website and video views for the grant year, percent change in views from previous year, duration of time spent per page and per session, social media impressions, and data about the number of ‘followers’ (social media platforms only). OLI did not specify audience when providing engagement data beyond noting audiences specific to a social media platform (e.g., Twitter followers vs. Instagram followers vs. Facebook likes).

Deliverables

Submitted to FRA in grant closeout documents: *Yes*

The team reviewed the deliverables completed and verified that they comply with the grant specifications.

¹⁵ This evaluation item is referred to in [Section 5](#). The grant agreement’s evaluation item for this subtask should be reviewed for clarity (see Recommendation 7). Specifically, the term “key audiences” in the evaluation is not clear. Clarify whether “key audiences” refer to audiences that are specific to the platform (e.g., for the Facebook platform, evaluate engagement of Facebook users), or OLI’s target audiences within the general population (e.g., bus drivers, children, law enforcement).

Subtask 3.1 Project 2 Amateur and Professional Photographers and Social Media Influencers

Amateur and Professional Photographers and Social Media Influencers is the second project in Subtask 3.1, New Communication Projects. Project 2 includes safety messaging targeted at photographers and influencers working on or near railroad tracks.

Table 17. Subtask 3.1 Project 2 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	OLI will design and develop a new PSA and supplemental educational materials that focus on the dangers of photography on or near railroad tracks and the negative impact a social media influencer can have on disseminating bad/illegal information about being on or near tracks.
Evaluation	OLI will evaluate video views and engagement on social media and digital ad campaigns. Additionally, OLI will work with our FRA working partners to determine if there is any area where photography around tracks and trains happens more often and focus some outreach of the new materials in that area.
Deliverables	OLI will provide to FRA a link to the final PSA and any materials developed.

Evaluation

Q2-Sub-Finding 2(f): OLI provided data for organic (i.e., unpaid) YouTube views and paid iHeart views. OLI indicated that the working group for this project included a representative from FRA along with subject matter experts. However, FRA did not provide trespass data that was specific to photography or filming because it may not exist.

OLI indicated that this campaign’s ads were part of the trespass assets used in Rail Safety Week digital campaigns on YouTube and Facebook/Instagram. OLI provided engagement data (impressions and views) inclusive of all trespass assets for paid YouTube and Facebook/Instagram campaigns. OLI did not have performance data for the Photographer and Influencer PSAs broken out from the total trespass assets.

Related to the evaluation item that specifies that OLI will work with FRA working partners to determine locations where photography frequently occurs, OLI indicated that FRA did not provide (and to OLI’s knowledge does not collect) this type of data.

Deliverables

Submitted to FRA in grant closeout documents: <i>Yes</i>
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The team reviewed the deliverables completed and verified that they comply with the grant specifications.

Subtask: 3.1 Project 3 Rail Safety Week 2022

Rail Safety Week is the third project in Subtask 3.1, New Communication Projects. This project describes OLI’s work to organize and conduct RSW, including new creation of material, distribution of new material, and coordination with stakeholders to promote Operation Clear Track. OLI coordinates this project with State OL programs that facilitate these events locally. This project does not change year to year.

Table 18. Subtask 3.1 Project 3 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	<p>OLI will organize and conduct a 2022 Rail Safety Week (RSW), including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OLI will provide updated RSW materials. OLI will determine the material and exact messaging based on 2020 and preliminary 2021 FRA statistics, 2021 Rail Safety Week engagement metrics and emergent safety issues and incident trends. • OLI will place safety messages across paid platforms and donated spaces, leveraging safety partnerships and radio and television stations to increase reach. • OLI will work with Amtrak, State OL programs and law enforcement to again promote Operation Clear Track, a day during RSW with crossing enforcement and awareness exercises at high incident crossings, and track results. <p>OLI will coordinate the event with state programs and railroads.</p>
Evaluation	OLI will track news stories generated through events and news/media press releases; audience impressions and engagement through digital ad campaigns; and enforcement efforts results related to Operation Clear Track to determine effectiveness.
Deliverables	OLI will provide to FRA a copy of all creative material developed, engagement metrics and a summary report of activities.

Evaluation

Q2-Sub-Finding 2(g): OLI provided extensive engagement data for the specified items in the evaluation description.

In the final performance report OLI included engagement data for the items specified in the evaluation description. OLI also provided a link to the RSW 2022 Results Report that provides more detailed engagement data for these items, including historical, current, and percent change data for media coverage average value equivalent (AVE), Operation Clear Track broadcast stories, social media impressions, and online, print, and newswire stories. The RSW Results Report also specified OLI.org website pageviews, data on the average length of time spent on the website as compared to the previous year’s data, and the number of interview requests received.

Deliverables

Submitted to FRA in grant closeout documents: <i>Yes</i>
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The team reviewed the deliverables completed and verified that they comply with the grant specifications.

Subtask 3.2: Public Awareness State Funding

Public Awareness State Funding is the second subtask in Task 3, Communication Programs. This subtask describes the non-competitive grant awards OLI provides State OL programs in good standing. This grant award is for funding used to communicate safety messages (e.g., paid advertisements).

Table 19. Subtask 3.2 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	OLI will provide funding to state member programs in good standing to be used to promote OLI’s safety messages through various communication methods. Public Awareness funding is capped at \$1,500 per state and is not competitive but is instead awarded to each OL state program in good standing that submits the required application materials.
Evaluation	OLI will review each state member program’s State Annual Report to monitor how the funds were used and identify the benefits achieved.
Deliverables	OLI will provide FRA with a report summarizing how the funds were organized by subject/material, category, and amount spent.

Evaluation

Q2-Sub-Finding 2(h): OLI requires that State OL programs applying for public awareness grants provide a public awareness spending spreadsheet and receipts showing eligible expenses. The team reviewed three state program spreadsheets and receipts and found that funds are appropriately used.

The public awareness grant application specifies the eligible expenses for grant funding reimbursement. The team requested spreadsheet and receipt documentation for three state programs to (1) check for OLI compliance in collecting the required items to complete this evaluation and (2) review receipts to evaluate whether funds were appropriately used (as specified in the grant application “eligible expenses” list).

OLI provided the following documents for three state programs:

- subaward grant application showing the amount of funding requested and approved
- receipts submitted by the state
- public awareness spending spreadsheet

Deliverables

Submitted to FRA in grant closeout documents: <i>Partial</i>	Completed: <i>Yes</i>
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The team reviewed the deliverables completed and verified that they comply with the grant specifications.

Subtask 3.3: Ongoing Communication Support Services

Ongoing Communication Support Services is the third subtask in Task 3, Communication Programs. This subtask refers to the work OLI does to ensure communication and public relation services are maintained.

Table 20. Subtask 3.3 description, deliverables, and evaluation criteria.

Information Type	Information from 2021-2022 Grant Application
Description	OLI will ensure and maintain the provision of communication and public relations services. This effort includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Media outreach and response, statistics, and writing• Media monitoring• Video, photo, social media subscriptions, and microsite domain
Evaluation	N/A
Deliverables	N/A

Evaluation

Task 3.3 does not specify an evaluation component.

Deliverables

Task 3.3 does not specify a deliverable component.

Appendix E.

States Assistance Grant Application Evaluations

This appendix presents additional information regarding the process by which OLI reviews and awards applications for state assistance grants.

Evaluations to Determine Project Awardees

The committee grant review committee assigns each application a score out of 100 possible points. [Table 21](#) shows the categories considered when scoring and the number of points they are worth. Grant applications also include further details about some categories not covered in this table.

Most categories are areas in which applicants can accrue points. However, there is also one category for which points may be subtracted, as indicated in the table.

Table 21. Criteria and Point Values for Scoring State Assistance Grant Applications

Point Categories	Points (+/-)
Defined Safety Need: Description of the safety need that the project will address, with supporting data, including current statistics.	+20 (up to)
Project Plan: Description to include: (1) a clear project goal, (2) a listing of project activities, (3) locations (if applicable), and (4) a time frame.	+20 (up to)
Project Budget: Budget listing funding sources for project activities and elements, in-kind matching funds, and other items. Points are awarded based on completeness and specificity.	+15 (up to)
Non-federal Funding Match: Amount of non-federal matching funds (including in-kind services) dedicated to the proposed project. The match must be at least 25 percent.	Up to 15 points awarded
Evaluation plan: Points are awarded based on the grant seeker’s description of how the project will be evaluated after its completion, including meaningful metrics for measuring effectiveness and how they will determine whether the project met its goal. Metrics <i>must</i> be included.	Up to 20 points awarded
High-Incidence States: Additional points added if the grant seeker is in either the Top 15 list for rail crossing collisions or for trespassing casualties.	5 points awarded if criterion is met
Rail Safety Week: Additional points awarded if the project features outreach related to US Rail Safety Week.	5 points awarded if criterion is met
Non-repeat Awardee: If the grant seeker received an OLI Competitive State Grant the year prior, points are <i>subtracted</i> from the total score. This gives non-repeat grantees an edge in the evaluation process.	-3 if criterion is met

Appendix F.
FRA Grant Funding by Year

Table 22. Yearly FRA Grant funding to Operation Lifesaver, Inc.

Year	Grant Funding Amount
1988	\$69,000.00
1989	\$200,000.00
1990	\$200,000.00
1991	\$200,000.00
1992	\$200,000.00
1993	\$150,000.00
1994	\$100,000.00
1995	\$150,000.00
1996	\$300,000.00
1997	\$600,000.00
1998	\$600,000.00
1999	\$600,000.00
2000	\$950,000.00
2001	\$1,022,745.00
2002	\$1,025,000.00
2003	\$1,025,000.00
2004	\$1,025,000.00
2005	\$1,025,000.00
2006	\$1,025,000.00
2007	\$1,015,000.00
2008	\$1,015,000.00
2009	\$1,015,000.00
2010	\$1,015,000.00
2011	\$1,015,000.00
2012	\$1,015,000.00
2013	\$1,015,000.00
2014	\$1,015,000.00
2015	\$1,015,000.00
2016	\$1,015,000.00
2017	\$1,000,000.00
2018	\$1,000,000.00
2019	\$1,000,000.00
2020	\$1,000,000.00
2021	\$1,000,000.00
2022	\$1,000,000.00
2023	\$1,000,000.00

Appendix G. Grant/Cooperative Agreement Quarterly Progress Report and Final Performance Report Summary Information

This appendix includes more information about FRA’s grant reporting forms – FRA’s Grant/Cooperative Agreement Quarterly Progress and Final Performance Reporting Form – along with screengrabs of the reporting forms.

Figure 8 shows a page from the Cooperative Agreement Quarterly Progress Reporting Form. This image illustrates that there are some sections that do not apply to OLI (e.g., those regarding construction and rolling stock).

D. Major Milestones					
<i>If your project contains one or more of the following components, please report on all that apply:</i>					
		Completion Date mm/dd/yy			
27. Milestone Name	28. Status	29. Planned	30. Actual	31. Change to Status?	32. Status Notes
All Projects					
27 a. Award of Sub-Contract(s)	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
27 b. Project Work Begun	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
27 c. Project Substantially Complete	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
Projects with a Construction Component					
27 d. Construction Notice to Proceed Issued	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
27 e. ROW Acquisition Complete	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
27 f. Construction Ground-Breaking	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
27 g. Construction Substantially Complete	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
27 h. Environmental Mitigation Substantially Complete	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
27 i. Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
27 j. Commencement of Service	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	
Projects with a Rolling Stock Component					
27 k. Test Vehicle Complete	Off-Trac <input type="button" value="v"/>			N/A <input type="button" value="v"/>	

Figure 8. A page from the Grant Cooperative Agreement Quarterly Progress Reporting Form

Figure 9 shows an image of the first page of the Final Performance Reporting Form. It includes a modest amount of space for open-ended feedback responses for Project Overview, Project Activities, Project Outputs, Project Outcomes, and other public benefits. OLI must include information about each of the subtask deliverable items within each section. Recall that the grant agreement has 12 subtask areas, many of which have multiple deliverables.

Federal Railroad Administration
Grant/Cooperative Agreement Final Performance Report

If the Final Performance Report requires more space than available on this form, please attach a separate document to this report.



A. Award Information	
1. Agreement Number:	2. Project Title:
3. Project Type:	4. Program Name:
5. Grantee:	6. Point of Contact (POC) Name and Title:
7. POC Email:	8. POC Phone:
9. Report Submission Date:	10. Grant Manager:
B. Final Performance Report	
11. Project Objectives:	
12. Project Activities:	
13. Project Outputs:	
14. Project Outcomes and Other Public Benefits:	

Figure 9. A page from the Cooperative Agreement Final Reporting Form

Appendix H.

Post-Summit and Post-Orientation Survey Questions

This appendix includes the questions from surveys distributed by OLI following Tasks 1.3 and 1.4, as indicated per the evaluation criteria for these subtasks.

Subtask 1.3 Evaluation Item: Post-Summit Survey Questions

1. Which session or sessions were most helpful to you? Why?
2. Which session or sessions were least helpful to you?
3. List any topics you would like to see addressed in future summit meetings.
4. Please feel free to include any other comments on this year's State Coordinator Summit below.

Subtask 1.4 Evaluation Item: Post-Orientation Survey Questions

1. What were the most beneficial sessions that will help make you a more effective State Coordinator?
2. What sessions were least helpful?
3. What would you add to the State Coordinator Orientation training?
4. Comments?

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACRONYM	DEFINITION
Board	OLI Board of Directors (<i>Referring to the Board for the National Office</i>)
DOT	Department of Transportation
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
HRGC	Highway-Railroad Grade Crossing
MRC	Materials Review Committee
NAC	National Advisory Council
NGA	Notice of Grant Award
OL	Operation Lifesaver
OLAV	Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteer
OLI	Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (<i>Referring to the National Office</i>)
POP	Period of Performance
PSA	Public Service Announcement
RISC	Railroad Investigation and Safety Course
ROW	Rights-of-way
RRS	FRA's Office of Railroad Safety
RSW	Rail Safety Week
SOW	Statement of Work
State OLs	State Operation Lifesaver Programs
ST3	See Trains? Think Track! Week
TrAMS	Transit Awards Management System