



Driving the Narrative

Communicating alternative fuel fleet impact in a policy-aligned way

Green Drives 2026 • Navigating Change • Wheaton, Illinois

U.S. Department of Energy • Clean Cities and Communities Coalition





Why this matters now

Messaging Can Affect Fundability

Current federal signals

- Cost-effectiveness, measurable benefits, and readiness now need to be explicit.
- Domestic energy, infrastructure reliability, and consumer choice are prominent themes.
- Projects compete better when they sound operational, not ideological.

What USDOT is telling applicants

- Define the transportation problem clearly.
- Provide clear, direct, data-driven benefits.
- Show significance, schedule, capacity, and why the project can move.

💡 **For fleet managers, the lesson is simple:** lead with business need, public benefit, and proof of performance.

Translate policy signals into fleet language



Cost discipline

Use total cost, payback, fuel stability, uptime, and maintenance planning.



Domestic energy

Frame fuel choice as resilience, redundancy, use of domestic resources and energy security.



Infrastructure modernization

Emphasize facilities, fueling, power, routing, and fleet-supporting assets.



Performance outcomes

Use miles, uptime, cost per mile, fuel use, incident reduction, and service reliability.



STRATEGIC LEXICON

What to say instead

Avoid leading with



- “Emissions reduction only”
- “Technology adoption”
- “Pilot project”
- “Sustainability initiative”
- “Innovation for its own sake”

Lead with



- Operational efficiency and lifecycle value
- Infrastructure modernization and fleet readiness
- Scalable deployment model
- Cost-managed fleet transition
- Risk-managed performance improvement

The point is not to hide results; it is to present results in the language reviewers and decision-makers are most likely to reward.



CASE STUDIES

Use a repeatable story structure

1 Operational challenge

What problem did the fleet need to solve: fuel costs, downtime, routes, facility limits, or service coverage?

2 Deployment approach

Describe vehicles, fuel, infrastructure, phasing, partnerships, and workforce preparation.

3 Quantified results

Show cost, uptime, route performance, fuel use, utilization, maintenance, and transferability.

4 Replicability

Why can another fleet use this model with similar routes, facilities, or duty cycles?



GRANT NARRATIVES

Write like a grant reviewer is scoring it



Key takeaway: Reviewers score specifics. Replace aspirational language with measurable outcomes, timelines, and replicable methods.

X Before

“This innovative clean transportation pilot will reduce emissions and demonstrate our commitment to sustainability.”

⚠ Vague, no measurable outcomes

✓ After

*“This phased fleet deployment **reduces fuel-cost exposure, improves route reliability, modernizes refueling assets, and produces measurable operating data** that can be **replicated across similar fleets.**”*

♦ Specific, measurable, replicable



FUEL-NEUTRAL FRAMING

Keep the strategy broad enough for real fleets

Alternative fuels and platforms

Frame EV, propane, CNG, LNG, RNG, renewable diesel, biodiesel, hydrogen, and mixed-fuel strategies as tools selected for

- route profile,
- duty cycle,
- infrastructure conditions, and
- cost-control goals.

Three messages to repeat

- 1. Use the right fuel for the right job.**
- 2. Show measurable fleet outcomes, not generic aspirations.**
- 3. Position deployment as scalable, domestic, and infrastructure-ready.**



Summary

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

01 Lead with business need, not ideology

Frame every fleet decision around cost discipline, operational performance, and public benefit — not environmental aspiration alone.

02 Translate policy into fleet language

Convert federal signals into terms fleets use: cost control, domestic energy security, infrastructure readiness, and measurable outcomes.

03 Use the strategic lexicon

Say "operational deployment," not "pilot project." Say "right fuel for the right job," not "emissions reduction." Choose words a grant reviewer would score highly.

04 Tell a repeatable 4-part story

Structure every case as: operational challenge → deployment approach → quantified results → replicability. This is the format reviewers and funders expect.

05 Stay fuel-neutral and scalable

Keep strategy broad enough for real fleets. Position deployment as scalable, domestic, and infrastructure-ready. Show measurable outcomes across any fuel type.



Usable Script

PRACTICAL LANGUAGE REFERENCE

Say

Operational need, cost control, energy resilience, readiness, and performance.

These terms signal competence and align with funder priorities.

Show

Metrics, schedule, partnerships, workforce preparation, and replicability.

Evidence-based proof builds confidence and scores well.

Avoid

Vague claims, ideological shorthand, and technology-first narratives without proof.

These undermine credibility with reviewers and funders.

 Handout included: one-page "What to Say / What to Avoid" guide for fleet teams, applicants, and partners.



QUICK REFERENCE

Better Phrasing Examples

Instead of...	→	Try...
<i>"Clean transportation pilot"</i>	→	"Scalable fleet deployment model"
<i>"Technology adoption project"</i>	→	"Infrastructure modernization and fleet readiness investment"
<i>"Sustainability initiative"</i>	→	"Cost-managed fleet transition with measurable performance outcomes"
<i>"Innovative fuel switch"</i>	→	"Risk-managed performance improvement using a route-appropriate fuel strategy"
<i>"Emissions reduction program"</i>	→	"Operational efficiency and lifecycle value improvement"



BEFORE YOU SUBMIT

Quick Self-Check



- ✓ Did we define the **transportation or fleet problem** clearly?
- ✓ Did we lead with **business need and public benefit** instead of advocacy language?
- ✓ Did we include **direct, data-based evidence** and not just intentions?
- ✓ Did we show **schedule, readiness, and capacity** to implement?
- ✓ Did we explain why the approach can **scale or transfer**?

Use the right fuel for the right job. Keep the message focused on readiness, cost, resilience, modernization, and measurable outcomes.



Your partners in clean transportation

Get Involved with IACT

The Illinois Alliance for Clean Transportation (IACT) helps Illinois fleets navigate alternative fuel deployment and grant applications with expert narrative review and feedback.

Fuel-Neutral Technical Resources

Access detailed fleet case studies and technical resources to guide your alternative fuel efforts.

Statewide Fleet Network

Join a network of fleets advancing cost-effective, resilient transportation solutions across Illinois.

Expert Grant Support

Get personalized support with grant applications, including expert narrative review and detailed feedback.

Accelerate Your Transition

Connect with IACT for resources to accelerate your fleet's sustainable fuel transition.

[Visit our website or contact IACT to learn more and get involved.](#)



Thank You

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

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