



POLICYMAKER WORKING GROUP REGIONAL SOLICITATION

July 17, 2024

Working Group Attendees:

James Hovland; Deb Barber; Glen Johnson; Chris Vaughan; Chris Giesler; Peter Dugan; Khani Sahebjam; Mark Steffenson; Brian Martinson; Debbie Goettel; Mark Windschitl; Reva Chamblis; Toni Carter; Anjuli Cameron; Jess Robertson; Jon Ulrich

Other Attendees:

Steve Peterson (Met Council); Elaine Koutsoukos; (Met Council); Joe Barbeau (Met Council); Bethany Brandt-Sargent (Met Council); Cole Hiniker (Met Council); Charles Carlson (Met Council); Amy Vennewitz (Met Council); Robbie King (Met Council); Kate Nelson (Office of CM Chamblis); Molly Stewart (SRF Consulting Group); Marie Cote (SRF Consulting Group); Madeleine Garces (SRF Consulting Group); Kiernan Maletsky (HDR)

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

390 Robert St N St Paul, MN 55101; Conference Room 1A

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Hovland shared the items on the agenda and reminded committee members that there were no decisions to vote on at this meeting. They are working toward an October timeline for making a decision on preferred solicitation structure.

Decision Point #1: Select preferred solicitation structure by October 2024

Molly Stewart began the conversation on the decision-making process for selecting the preferred solicitation structure. The approach would include looking at options for altering the overall structure (which would be discussed in this meeting) and looking at structural elements (application categories, criteria, and measures which will be discussed at the September meeting). A policymaker workshop is being planned for October. This workshop will include members from the Met Council board and the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB). The overall goal is to get to a new solicitation by 2026 – today the discussion will focus on what the structure of the solicitation will be.

Molly and Steve Peterson recapped the goals of the Regional Solicitation Evaluation and the guiding principles. These goals and principles were covered in more detail at the April meeting. This meeting would start to look at options for restructuring the process based on the current regional process and a dual-process model used by some peer Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). The opinions given at this meeting will impact further discussion and what finer details can be adjusted.

Limitations on Regional Solicitation Structures

Different models exist despite following the same limiting rules set at the federal level. For example, STBG funds cannot be suballocated. However, there is generally enough latitude in the rules so each region can make their process work for them.

Elements of the Regional Solicitation include inputs and activities. Eligibility is more complex than a regular grant application, and integration with other planning efforts and long-range planning is extensive. The Regional Solicitation has only ever been sent back once. There is a memorandum of understanding between MnDOT, Met Council, and Metro Transit (required by federal law) that TAB sub signs. The MOU lays out how each region is going to spend their federal funds. The intent is for this MOU to be updated at the end of the Regional Solicitation Evaluation process.

Regional Solicitation and the TPP

Members noted that decisions would need to be based on whether the goal (of the Regional Solicitation) is to get some money to all applicants or to target specific regional goals (reducing greenhouse gases for example). It was also noted to keep in mind how decisions impact something further down the road. Other members added that the goals should be forward thinking and recognize how the recent crisis (the COVID 19 pandemic) has changed needs across the region.

Ultimately, the Regional Solicitation must align with 2050 TPP which addresses changes to the transportation system including those stemming from the Pandemic. Members questioned whether there are specific parts of the TPP that the Regional Solicitation process should address? It was noted that it could be hard to cover all elements of the TPP equally and the group will need to discuss and make decision on priorities as the new Regional Solicitation structure is determined over the coming months.

Discussion of the Dual-Process Model

Kiernan Maletsky led the discussion of the dual-process model.

Dual-Process Model vs. Regional Model (Current)

One of the evaluation activities conducted to date has been a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) peer region evaluation which included a desktop review and more in-depth interviews with six selected MPOs. Key peer evaluation findings were presented, and additional details will be provided in the draft report and highlighted at future meetings when relevant. The question was asked if the Portland MPO was included in the peer interviews. This MPO was not selected for an interview, and it was noted that the decision on which MPOs were selected for interviews was discussed at the April Working Group meeting.

Peer regions are confronting the same issues we are. Half of the six peer MPOs used the same process at Met Council for their solicitation structures where the applications from all regions are submitted and evaluated against one another in their respective categories. The other half used dual-process models where projects were either scored all together or at subregional levels depending on their category.

In the dual process/subregional model scoring occurs largely within the subregion with guidance from the MPO and eligibility of projects is determined by the MPO. For regions that use the dual process regional/subregional model, the evaluation team asked about decision making and found that:

- The model created more specified scoring committees/groups
- Localities felt like they have more of a hand in the process
- Subregions were mutually exclusive from each other
- Scoring committees were staffed by subregions
- Applicants were encouraged to apply in both the subregion and in the whole region, though there were specific cases when this couldn't happen (if the regional and subregional solicitations happened concurrently)
- In some cases, with this model, projects get selected even if they don't look like the best based on description

For regions that use the centralized regional process (like ours), the team found that:

- Technical scorers end up in charge of application review and project selection
- MPO committees determine how much money to give, not what projects are selected
- The MPO board/governing body, MPO committees, and project sponsors were primarily responsible for scoring and selecting projects

Working Group members had follow-up questions about the dual process model. They wanted to know who would be the support staff at a subregional level if the model was applied to our region? How would the subregions be drawn? The group discussed one potential option to split the subregions by Met Council TAB Citizen Districts. It was noted that they split may not resolve the issue of creating subregions that focus on issues identified during the listening sessions (e.g. multiuse trail applications being highly competitive).

The group concluded that changing the model from a centralized regional process to a dual process/subregional model might not address the challenges the Regional Solicitation faces, but instead create a more complicated process. General feedback on the current process is that most feel it is generally a good and transparent process. It was noted during the listening sessions that some cities outside the urban core feel left out of the process and subregions would have to be very small to address this issue. The Twin Cities region also has more municipalities than any of the peer regions, subregions would need to be very small in some cases to make sure as many jurisdictions as possible are heard. Additionally, Working Group members questioned if there would be enough bandwidth to manage a subregional model. The subregional model would make the process more complex for citizens to understand even if it brings the process to a more local level.

The Working Group expressed interest in seeing a list of pros and cons of the models from different regions to help confirm the path forward (how does each model affect cost and effectiveness of the process). This would also help with determining if changing the structure could potentially help address the needs of stakeholders. Another question asked is if there were any examples where the region had focused areas each year, such as one year is focused on climate and the next year is a different focus.

Earlier this year, stakeholders expressed a need to feel like their projects were competitive. Changes to categories and measures could address this. There is a need to explore how making these changes could bring more applicants into the process. Competitiveness in areas outside of Minneapolis and Saint Paul could be increased without having to change to a subregional model.

There was consensus from the Working Group members to not continue to pursue a dual process model and maintain the existing centralized regional process.

Preview Structural Elements and Next Steps

Molly Stewart discussed the next step for this group which will be to look at the structural elements of the Regional Solicitation. The focus will be on modal categories vs other types of project categories, changing category names, and adjusting measures. Specifically, the conversation will focus on how changes to the elements can help align the goals and outcomes of the Regional Solicitation.

The group discussed having Working Group members potentially respond to a survey about priorities that will inform options that the evaluation team will present as options for discussion at the next meeting in September.

Action Item	Timeline
Share documentation of the MPO peer region evaluation with the Working Group	August/September
Send survey on priorities to Working Group Members to be filled out ahead of September meeting.	August/September