



REGIONAL SOLICITATION TECHNICAL STEERING COMMITTEE

Meeting #1 Agenda

May 17, 2024

12:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams

Technical Steering Committee Members

- Paul Oehme (Chair, TAC, Lakeville)
- Danny McCullough (TRPD)
- Aaron Tag (TAC F&P, MnDOT)
- Lyssa Leitner (TAC, Washington Co)
- Innocent Eyoh (TAC, MPCA)
- Jeni Hager (TAC Chair, Minneapolis)
- Brian Isaacson (TAC Vice-Chair, Ramsey Co)
- Joe MacPherson (TAC, Anoka Co)
- Lyndon Robjert (TAC, Carver Co)
- Melissa Madison (494 TMO)
- Matt Fyten (TAC, MVTA)
- Jillian Linnell (Metro Transit)
- Patrick Boylan (Met Council Land Use Planner)
- Reuben Collins (St. Paul)
- Jim Kosluchar (TAC, Fridley)
- Doran Cote (Rogers)
- Chris Hartzell (TAC, Woodbury)

1. Welcome and Introductions (Paul Oehme, Chair)
2. Role of the Technical Steering Committee (Paul Oehme, Chair)
3. Regional Solicitation Background and Current Process
 - a. History and Current Regional Solicitation Process (Elaine Koutsoukos)
 - b. Federal Funding Source Review for Regional Solicitation (Steve Peterson)
 - c. National MPO Peer Review desktop review findings on federal funding distribution (Katie Caskey) – See Attachment 1
4. Regional Solicitation Evaluation Process
 - a. Regional Solicitation Evaluation Process (Molly Stewart)
 - b. Open Discussion on Evaluation Goals (Paul Oehme, Chair)
 - c. Upcoming meetings and goals (Molly Stewart)

- d. Decision Point #1: Select Preferred Solicitation Structure for 2026 Solicitation by October 2024
 - i. Solicitation Structure Elements (Molly Stewart)
 - ii. Listening Session summary with agency stakeholders through May 17 (Katie Caskey)
- 5. Closing Thoughts? (Paul Oehme, Chair)
- 6. Next Steps (Molly Stewart)
 - a. Thursday July 25, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.?
 - b. Thursday September 12, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.?

Note: Meeting materials including notes can be found here <https://metro council.org/Transportation/Planning-2/Transportation-Funding/Regional-Solicitation/Regional-Solicitation-Evaluation-Active-Transporta.aspx>



REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION

National Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Peer Review

Understanding and Background

Decision-making for Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) funding programming models is driven by the need to balance regional and subregional priorities, ensure equitable distribution of resources, and align projects with long-term regional goals.

This peer review included two phases: a desktop analysis phase focused on gathering a high-level inventory of strategies employed by MPOs across the country to distribute federal funds and an interview phase will focus on follow-up interviews with select peer MPOs to gain deeper insights and inform recommendations of the overall regional solicitation process.

Desktop Review

Methodology

The first step involved identifying a pool of peer Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) for desktop analysis. The candidates include those identified in past Met Council peer reviews for the Regional Solicitation, along with others representing similar sized metropolitan areas (see Table 1).

A matrix was then developed to document the overarching structures that peer MPOs employed in the distribution of federal funds. This matrix extended the findings from the previous Regional Solicitation Before and After Study, Phase 2, offering qualitative assessment of the role of regional planning, geographical distribution, and the processes surrounding calls for projects. The matrix is included as a separate Excel file.



REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION

Table 1: Selected Peers for Desktop Analysis

	MPO	Location
1	North Carolina Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO)	Raleigh, NC
2	Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG)	Denver, CO
3	Metro Portland	Portland, OR
4	Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)	San Francisco, CA
5	Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG)	Detroit, MI
6	New York Metropolitan Transportation Commission (NYMTC)	New York, NY
7	North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG)	Dallas, TX
8	East-West Gateway Council of Governments (EWG COG)	St. Louis, MO
9	Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BALTOMETRO)	Baltimore, MD
10	Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)	Seattle, WA
11	Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning	Chicago, IL
12	Mid-America Regional Council	Kansas City, MO
13	Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments	Cincinnati, OH
14	Broward MPO	Fort Lauderdale, FL
15	Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission	Columbus, OH
16	Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization	Austin, TX
17	Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission	Philadelphia, PA
18	Atlanta Regional Commission	Atlanta, GA

Summary Observations

The Transportation Advisory Board's (TAB) current procedure stands out among peers for its sophistication and transparency. This complexity might pose challenges for some stakeholders, and create limitations for achieving overarching goals, but the existing methodology does offer a justifiable approach to project selection, seeking alignment with regional objectives and prioritization studies, efforts, and networks.

Scoring/Prioritization Approach

Policy documents frequently revisit the challenge of balancing quantitative assessments and deliberative processes in prioritizing project types aimed at achieving specific outcomes. The distinction between "deliberative" and "quantitative" approaches in the context of project selection and funding allocation by MPOs highlights two fundamentally different methodologies used to assess and prioritize projects.

Quantitative Approach: This methodology leverages objective, measurable criteria to evaluate and rank projects. Metrics might encompass a range of factors, from the anticipated reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and cost-benefit ratios to improvements in traffic flow, public transit ridership increases, and safety enhancements. The strength of this approach lies in its objectivity and transparency, permitting a straightforward comparison of projects through numerical scores based on set criteria. However, its limitation is evident in potentially overlooking broader project impacts or strategic values, particularly those benefits that defy



REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION

easy quantification, such as fostering community cohesion or promoting long-term environmental sustainability.

Deliberative Approach: Contrasting with the quantitative method, the deliberative approach prioritizes stakeholder discussions, consensus-building, and expert judgment in the decision-making matrix. It champions the diverse knowledge, experiences, and viewpoints of regional partners, local communities, and other stakeholders, employing debates and negotiations to determine project prioritization and funding. Recognizing that not all project benefits and impacts are quantifiable, this method underscores the importance of stakeholder consensus in aligning projects with overarching regional objectives and community needs.

By integrating quantitative metrics with deliberative processes, MPOs can ensure project selection is not only grounded in measurable benefits but also in alignment with broader regional ambitions.

The review of various methodologies shows an effort to balance these elements, mitigating the risk of undue influence by dominant committee members while acknowledging the constraints of a purely quantitative framework. For instance, the Atlanta MPO's adoption of a three-tiered process delineates technical evaluation from the ultimate decision-making, a practice mirrored in other MPOs. This interplay warrants further exploration in subsequent interviews.

Funding Process

The "dual-model" approach to funding is employed by several MPOs, where a portion of funds is earmarked for regional projects meeting specific outcomes, and another portion is distributed to subregions, often at the county level, for more localized projects. About one-third of peer entities employ this model in various forms. The approach is defined by several critical decisions:

- Determining the allocation between regional and subregional funding.
- Allocating funds within each subregion, usually based on formulas incorporating population, employment, vehicle-miles-traveled, and other relevant metrics.
- Evaluating and prioritizing projects, typically through a standardized application or scoring method established by the MPO, with subregions conducting the analysis and making funding recommendations.

In all cases, the decision-making and funding allocation within this model are guided by the MPO to comply.

Set-Asides

Many MPOs employ a set-aside process, earmarking funds for specific types of projects. This strategy spans from narrowly to broadly defined categories, including but not limited to Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. This tailored approach allows MPOs to direct funding with precision, ensuring that priority areas such as equity, active transportation, and rural development receive the necessary resources.



REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION

A notable example of this practice is the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) in Seattle, which has implemented set-aside programs specifically designed to support equity initiatives and projects in rural corridors and centers. Such targeted funding mechanisms often lead to a streamlined evaluation process, particularly for projects that, while vital, may not significantly impact regional air quality modeling or align perfectly with broader federal program criteria.

The strategic adoption of set-asides facilitates focused investment in areas deemed critical by regional stakeholders, potentially simplifying the review and approval processes by establishing clear, dedicated funding streams for these priorities. However, the applicability and effectiveness of set-asides within the Transportation Advisory Board's (TAB) framework requires further examination, with considerations including the compatibility with existing priorities and the availability of funding to support such designated allocations.

Limitations & Topics for Interview Phase

This review, based on publicly available documents from peer MPO websites, encountered challenges in fully understanding certain process aspects. The following dimensions should be explored further in follow-up interviews:

Platforms

Determining the back-end platforms used by MPOs for application processing and scoring was challenging through desktop review alone. Available information was included, but a deeper understanding of the tools' effectiveness may require follow-up interviews.

Resulting Project Lists

The nature of project lists resulting from each peer's process, including the number of projects, balance of modal project types, and average project costs, was not easily determined. Many regions employ multiple solicitation calls and set-aside programs, leading to numerous project lists under different processes and timelines. A comprehensive view of a region's funded project program project lists will be advanced during interviews, where the information can be more easily organized.

Amount of Money in MPO Model Structure

The desktop review did not identify the specific monetary amounts allocated to MPOs within their model structures. Follow up interviews and analysis could explore this further in the context of funding distribution structures, helping to assess the viability of a given distribution approach given the funding available to Met Council.



REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION

Recommendations for Interview Phase

Based on the desktop review, the following MPOs may be best for follow-up discussions. These recommendations include the high-level process elements that could be explored.

- **Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG):** Adoption of the dual-model process, and a shift towards a more qualitative approach in application scoring.
- **San Francisco Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC):** Streamlined application process refined over several recent calls for projects.
- **Seattle Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC):** Set-aside programs, particularly for equity and rural areas, implementing targeted funding streams to address unique regional needs.
- **Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC):** Three-step project evaluation process, which offers a framework for integrating different project evaluation methodologies.
- **Detroit Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG):** Process that involves integrating plan development with project selection.
- **Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP):** Introducing need-based prioritization to a dual-model process.

Conclusion

The desktop analysis conducted as part of the Metropolitan Council's Regional Solicitation Evaluation has uncovered a range of strategies employed by peer MPOs for distributing federal transportation funds. The findings reveal a dynamic landscape where MPOs employ a blend of quantitative and deliberative approaches in project scoring and prioritization, alongside innovative solicitation models such as the dual-model approach and targeted set-aside programs.

These methodologies underscore the critical balance between objective, measurable outcomes and the engagement of stakeholders to ensure projects align with broader regional goals. Successful funding allocation strategies seek tailored and flexible approaches to meet diverse regional needs.

This desktop review sets a foundation that will be further explored through in-depth interviews with selected peer MPOs. These interviews are expected to add nuance to the understanding of various funding distribution models, their challenges, and best practices, thereby informing the development of recommendations to refine the Metropolitan Council's fund allocation strategies.