



TECHNICAL STEERING COMMITTEE REGIONAL SOLICITATION

January 28, 2025

Steering Committee Attendees:

Paul Oehme, Danny McCullough, Molly McCartney, Maddie Dahlheimer, Innocent Eyoh, Jeni Hager, Joe MacPherson, Lydon Robjert, Theresa Cain, Jillian Linnell, Reuben Collins, Jim Kosluchar

Other Attendees:

Steve Peterson, Bethany Brandt-Sargent, Elaine Koutsoukos, Robbie King, Charles Carlson, Cole Hiniker, Joe Barbeau, Steve Elmer, Amy Vennewitz, Heidi Schallberg, KC Adkins (Hennepin County), Lauren Dickerson (MPCA), Katie Caskey (HDR), Molly Stewart, Lydia Statz (SRF Consulting Group)

1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

In-Person Meeting – Met Council Building Conference Room 1A

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Paul Oehme welcomed committee members.

Molly Stewart provided an overview of the project background and process.

Member MacPherson provided some key feedback from the 1/8 TAC meeting. Molly Stewart provided key feedback from the Policymaker Working Group meeting on 1/15. Group discussion about how policymakers generally aren't aware of everything that goes into scoring and reviewing these applications. Most technical staff support simplifying the application process.

Member McPherson noted that the Policymaker Working Group is open to the Technical Steering Committee feedback on funding levels and minimums/maximums.

Molly provided a recap of the last Technical Steering Committee meeting (May 2024).

Regional Solicitation Structure Discussion

Molly Stewart presented an overview of current structure, and major questions and feedback that led to creation of hybrid structure. She walked through slides showing the progress of how project categories could change in a hybrid structure.

Member Eyoh noted that the categories currently shown under "Healthy and Safe" are focused on safety - not health. Cole Hiniker noted there are objectives related to air quality and public health, so there could be discussion around whether that should be its own category or a criteria across multiple categories.

Member Hager asked whether policymakers are looking for different types of projects than they've seen in the past. Member MacPherson noted that the climate and natural systems category is one example of the types of projects policymakers have requested. Member Eyoh noted that some of the public health projects he mentioned earlier could be part of that category.

Steve Peterson said policymakers have always been disappointed in what comes in through the "unique projects" category and have asked to fund planning grants in the past as well. Molly Stewart shared that policymakers have expressed concern about better tying projects to the TPP.

Elaine Koutsoukas noted that the process will also have to determine how to use the new active transportation funding. Member Hager and others shared some concerns about using federal funds for planning grants.

Dynamic and Resilient Discussion

The group discussed the reasoning behind why Dynamic and Resilient was split into modes. What if there are projects that reach across multiple modes, could that project take advantage of multiple funding sources?

The group discussed whether it would be possible or desirable to have projects that wish to submit in multiple categories respond to criteria for each application, then have the scoring committee decide on how funding is awarded. Molly Stewart noted this has been a longstanding discussion, and the challenge is doing that without making the application more complicated.

Member MacPherson noted that “Buy America” provisions may be going away and wondering how that might affect projects in this category.

Member MacPherson asked what feedback has been received about the active transportation funding. Steve Peterson noted that input so far has been to keep federal funding for active transportation and local funding sources separate, so that applicants apply for one or the other.

Member Hager asked if local active transportation funding is utilized in the future for only local bike/ped projects would there be enough regional bike/ped projects to maximize the federal active transportation funding? Could a review of past solicitations be done to determine this answer? Steve Peterson noted there is a federal minimum that the Met Council must allocate for bike/ped projects.

The group discussed if there should be a separate application cycle for local active transportation funding vs the federal funding? Potentially having an annual solicitation to allocate the local active transportation funding? Impacts on Met Council staff resources will need to be considered in future discussions.

Climate Change/Natural Systems Discussion

The group discussed whether there is state funding available for EV charging, and what the best way to fund these projects in the future will be. It was noted that these projects might be smaller and more challenging to use federal funding for. Steve Peterson noted that Met Council is beginning to think about that with the EV Gap Analysis currently in progress. Member McCartney noted that MnDOT is thinking more about EV funding and has seen many bundle projects together to make a larger project.

Member Eyoh wondered whether the two funding sources through this category will still be in effect, and what the conversation around that has been (Carbon Reduction and PROTECT).

Healthy and Safe Discussion

Member MacPherson said he supported adding a category that is for bike/ped safety separate from Safe Routes to School (SRTS). He noted there are many projects that specifically focus on that. Discussion about whether that project could be part of a reactive HSIP category, but whether it could compete against other roadway safety projects. Other solution would be to eliminate SRTS and just call it “Bike/Ped Safety”

The group discussed whether it would be possible to work with the HSIP program to streamline the whole category, rather than having multiple categories.

Member Dahlheimer said under this scenario, it could be difficult to determine whether a project should apply under safety or dynamic and resilient. Katie Caskey noted most applicants are already doing that for HSIP. Molly Stewart said applicants should think about the project’s purpose or intended outcome and then make that determination.

Steve Peterson asked whether there is was interest in a larger funding cap (HSIP currently at \$2 million).

Equity Discussion

Molly Stewart noted that the Policymakers supported having equity be a criteria across multiple categories, rather than a single application category.

General Structure Discussion

Member Dahlheimer asked what the request of the group today is. Molly Stewart clarified that the group should weigh in today on whether they approve of the overall structure and approve continuing to determine the details of specific categories.

Question about whether you need specific safety categories at all, or whether they could all be combined. Some in the group were concerned that proactive projects wouldn't compete against reactive projects.

Member Collins noted that there are multiple ways to simplify the process – he would prefer simplifying through shorter, streamlined applications rather than smaller number of categories. Member Hager agreed that narrowing the list of categories could have unintended consequences. The group should think about what structure will allow the region to better allocate funding and set funding levels for different goals.

The group discussed possible ways to combine and/or simplify the Healthy and Safe category. Molly Stewart noted that all project categories should be tied back to a TPP goal or objective. Some project categories might be able to fit in Healthy & Safe as well as Dynamic & Resilient.

Member Cain asked a question about TDM being lumped into Climate Change category, and how that would work. Steve Peterson noted that they are grouped under the same goal area but would have separate applications and be scored separately and not compete against each other. She noted that not all TDM projects reduce GHG. These details will be discussed with the Special Issue Working Groups in the future.

Member MacPherson asked whether the new structure would still have categories that aren't competitive through the regional solicitation process (e.g. ABRT) like the current structure. It was noted that there could be benefits to being able to fund large projects that have sat on the shelf for a long time. Molly Stewart noted that this is part of a future discussion.

Question about GHG mitigation projects that may be required through new MnDOT's GHG assessment requirements. Member Robjont noted that capacity-inducing projects will have to increase their costs, but also that climate change category could be a good fit for flood mitigation funding.

Elaine Koutsoukas noted that the focus of funding could shift with each cycle to emphasize different goals.

The final outcome was group consensus on the proposed hybrid structure with the note that additional details need to be worked out.

Next Steps

The next Technical Steering Committee meeting will be on February 25.

Some members asked whether some of the Special Issue Working Group meetings could take place before the next Technical Steering Committee meeting. This is not likely, but input from other previous touchpoints can be summarized and shared at the February meeting.

Action Item	Timeline
Share Technical Steering Committee feedback at the next Policymaker Working Group.	February 19