

## Q&A: Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Project Selection

### *Solicitation & Application*

1. Will the project selection process be identical to what was done in the past?
  - No. The August 19, 2016, decision by FHWA mandates changes to the local/regional project selection process for non-TMA MPOs and RPAs. TMAs will continue to select projects through their own project selection process for the TMA sub-allocated funds. All references to MPOs in the remainder of this Q&A will refer to non-TMA MPOs unless otherwise noted. Although much of this Q&A is focused on the Local Projects TAP program, TMAs will find clarifications applicable to their process throughout. Iowa DOT is required to be responsible for the selection of non-TMA area local projects. The selection process for these projects within the geographic boundaries of MPOs and RPAs will hereinafter be called the Local Projects TAP program. However, Iowa DOT is allowed to consider geographic equity as a factor in selecting projects for funding in the non-TMA areas. Iowa DOT will annually calculate a regionally directed TAP funding target for each geographic area based on the MPO and RPA boundaries. These targets will initially be based on a region's per capita share of the annual population based TAP apportionment, but then may be adjusted based on actual awards from previous years. Further, we will be incorporating MPO and RPA recommendations of projects in their area into the Iowa DOT process of selecting projects for the Local Projects TAP program. The processes used by the MPOs and RPAs in the past to select projects may be used with minor modification to recommend projects for award by Iowa DOT under the new Local Projects TAP selection process.
2. Can a project from a TMA submit a request for Local Projects TAP funding?
  - No. Because Iowa DOT intends for TAP funding to be spread equitably across Iowa and TMAs receive their own direct sub-allocation of TAP funding, TMAs are not eligible to apply for Local Projects TAP funding. TMA projects are able to apply for consideration for SRTS or Iowa Byways related project funding through the Statewide TAP program. (Local Safe Routes to School and Iowa Byways project area addressed in questions 27-35.)
3. If the Iowa DOT is selecting projects for funding, why are the MPOs and RPAs reviewing applications?
  - Iowa DOT has long valued the regional transportation planning processes of the MPOs and RPAs. The overriding goal of the Local Projects TAP program is to result in the selection of regional projects based on regional priorities. This goal supports the view of the state's 2017 long range transportation plan, Iowa in Motion – 2045, that the most successful bicycle and pedestrian projects are often those local projects that seize on opportunities and have local organization, commitment, and momentum to see a project through to completion. The pre-screening of applications by the MPOs and RPAs will provide Iowa DOT with recommendations based on local priorities identified from regional planning efforts and informed by a regional understanding of how a project fits within the regional transportation system.

4. How will prospective project sponsors learn about application deadlines?
  - The MPOs and RPAs will be the first step for local project sponsors interested in applying for funding under the Local Projects TAP program. The MPOs and RPAs will solicit the initial applications on a schedule of their choosing that allows them to meet an October 1 deadline for providing funding recommendations to Iowa DOT. They will publicize the application deadline to prospective applicants in their area. MPO and RPA staff may also continue to work with prospective project sponsors in their area to identify proposals, consult with Iowa DOT on project eligibility, and provide guidance for the preparation of project applications. Aside from the Statewide TAP program, Iowa DOT will not solicit applications directly for local/regional projects. TMAs will continue to administer their own selection process and will solicit applications on a schedule they determine.
5. Will application deadlines be posted on the Iowa DOT website?
  - At this time, Iowa DOT intends to solicit application deadline information quarterly from the TMAs, MPOs, and RPAs and make this information available on the Iowa DOT website in addition to providing links to agency websites.
6. Can MPOs and RPAs view projects as ineligible for funding in accordance with their own policies?
  - No. The MPOs and RPAs may not adopt a policy further restricting eligible project types or place other restrictions on what types of applications may be submitted for consideration of award in the Local Projects TAP program. However, that is not to say that the priorities of all MPOs and RPAs will result in all applications being viewed equally. As with any competitive grant process, some applications may score higher or lower than others when the scoring or evaluation methodology of an individual MPO or RPA is applied. All project applications must be reviewed and forwarded to Iowa DOT, regardless of how favorably the MPO or RPA views the application. TMAs have wider latitude to determine the focus of their TAP project selection process.
7. What application form will be required?
  - All applications for TAP funding through the Local Projects TAP program or Statewide TAP program are required to be submitted using Iowa DOT *Form 240004 Request for Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Funds*. This form is available on the Iowa DOT website. MPOs and RPAs may also make this form available on their websites. The required application lists the minimum information required for an application to be considered for funding. MPOs and RPAs may require additional information be included as an addendum along with the required application to assess applications in their area for consistency with local/regional plans and priorities. TMAs may use an application form of their own creation, but are encouraged to use or mirror the application form developed for the Statewide and Local Projects TAP programs. Iowa DOT will still be reviewing TMA project applications for eligibility prior to the initiation of project development and will still require formal resolutions from the jurisdiction.

8. Must TMA area projects desiring to be considered for Statewide TAP funding submit Iowa DOT *Form 240004 Request for Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Funds* and all required attachments to Iowa DOT by October 1??
  - Yes.
9. Should project budgets be reflected in current dollars or in a projected future year?
  - Project budget information and funding requests should reflect estimates in accord with the expected timeline provided for the project. As a part of the Local Projects TAP program, the MPOs, RPAs, and Iowa DOT will not make adjustments to the project budgets or funding amounts from those provided by the project sponsor to adjust for inflation. Project applications are expected to have a realistic timeline and a budget reflecting construction or project implementation according to that timeline. Upon award, projects should be expected to be programmed in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) in a corresponding year to the timeline provided.
10. How will Iowa DOT receive the applications originally submitted to the TMAs, MPOs, and RPAs?
  - The TMAs, MPOs, and RPAs will provide all applications received for local/regional funding through the Local Projects TAP program to Iowa DOT digitally upon receipt or immediately following the TMA, MPO, or RPA application deadline. Local sponsors will not submit any applications directly to Iowa DOT unless they have prepared an application for the Statewide TAP program. (Local Safe Routes to School and Iowa Byways projects are addressed in questions 27-35.)
11. How will Iowa DOT perform the reporting requirements of 23 U.S.C. 133(h)(7)?
  - The applications provided by the TMAs, MPOs, and RPAs will be used to generate the required reporting Iowa DOT will provide to FHWA. This will eliminate the need for a separate compilation of this data as was done last fall.
12. How has Iowa DOT *Form 240004 Request for Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Funds* been changed?
  - Some general revisions were made to the application, but several changes were also made to address deficiencies we've seen over time and to incorporate some common items previously requested by the MPOs and RPAs.
    - Project categories have been eliminated except for boxes to check for SRTS and Iowa Byways projects. The other categories were no longer relevant.
    - Language has been added throughout to remind applicants to focus on the specific project phase that is the subject of the application rather than a larger, completed or future multi-phase build out.
    - The application narrative has been broken up into 8 parts with specific questions and helpful guidance provided for applicants. The narrative is also limited to 5 pages in length. We hope this focuses the narrative on the specifics of the proposal and removes a lot of extraneous information included by applicants which often makes relevant details hard to find for reviewers.

- A request for digital photographs has been added, but also limited to 5 photos. Guidance has been provided to help the applicant focus on the intended subject of those photos.
- The itemized breakdown of costs is advised to be prepared by a licensed professional, but it is not required. Requiring a professional to certify an opinion of probable costs may force some applicants to incur non-reimbursable costs when knowledge levels or the project scope may not require it. In those cases where a professional is not preparing the cost breakdown, it is up to the applicant to provide justification of the source and methodology of the breakdown provided and it is up to the reviewers to weigh whether the breakdown is reasonable. The opinions of the reviewers should be reflected in their scoring and the MPO or RPA recommendation.
- The time schedule and cost breakdown should be linked, reasonable, and accurate. A warning is given that failure of a project to proceed as planned after award may result in termination of the project by Iowa DOT.
- The requirement for an official endorsement of the project committing to maintenance and the provision of the required local match has been further clarified. In most cases, this will be a formal resolution from the city council, board of supervisors, or county conservation board. The application still needs to be signed, but the official endorsement should remove the possibility of an unauthorized application being submitted.
- Specific information required for SRTS projects has been included as a new Attachment B. Some of this information requires the use of resources provided by the National Center for Safe Routes to School.  
<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/data-central/data-collection-forms>
- The narrative discussing the public input process and public acceptance has been expanded to include a discussion of local and regional planning efforts, partnership, and stakeholder involvement. Applicants WILL NOT be required to show proof that property owners are in favor of a project that will require right-of-way acquisition. This is not advisable because acquisition cannot (in most cases) take place prior to NEPA, and requiring an early commitment by property owners puts the required Uniform Act procedures at risk as conversations would almost certainly slide toward price, appraisals may not yet be complete, etc.
- Projects that will be built on Iowa DOT right-of-way will need a letter of support from the Iowa DOT District Office (pre-design).

***Selection Process for the Local Projects TAP Program***

13. What will the MPOs and RPAs do when applications are received?

- All applications submitted to the MPOs and RPAs must be considered for funding and provided to Iowa DOT. MPOs and RPAs may individually craft a scoring system to determine the regional priorities for funding or may qualitatively weigh applications against each other to determine which applications to recommend for funding. Because different factors are valued differently across the state, the MPOs and RPAs may

consider factors important in their region in determining the regional priorities and will not be held to one statewide standard in determining their regional recommendations.

14. How will the MPOs and RPAs provide their recommendations to the Iowa DOT and how do they need to document their review process?
  - Documentation of the review process and the resulting MPO or RPA recommendation and prioritization of projects will be provided to the Iowa DOT by the MPOs and RPAs. The review process documentation should include information about the review of the applications, discussion by advisory groups (if any), and action by the MPO or RPA Policy Board. No projects will be programmed in a TIP until after award by Iowa DOT. An email will be provided to Iowa DOT by the MPO or RPA that explains the process completed, projects recommended for funding, and justification if awards less than that requested in a project application are being recommended for some projects.
15. How will the MPO and RPA recommendations be used?
  - The recommendations will order the submitted projects for each region's regionally directed TAP funding target.
16. Can an MPO or RPA recommend a lesser award than that requested by the project sponsor?
  - Yes. In their recommendations, an MPO or RPA may recommend a funding amount less than the request included in a project application. Justification must be provided and the MPO or RPA must get confirmation in writing from the project sponsor prior to making the recommendation that the project remains feasible and that a reduced award will not negatively affect the project timeline. This confirmation will also be provided to Iowa DOT along with the recommendation for award. MPOs and RPAs should make it clear to prospective applicants that they should not plan to make successive applications for funding in multiple grant cycles for the same project scope. One application should be submitted for a project requesting the funding amount required to accomplish the project. Once a project is funded, an additional award in a different funding cycle would be considered only in rare circumstances or for different phases of work e.g. acquisition of a rail corridor, design, and construction of a trail. Iowa DOT retains the right to determine which projects receive funding and the actual funding amount awarded.
17. What will the Iowa DOT do when applications are initially received from the MPOs and RPAs immediately upon the close of their regional application deadline?
  - Iowa DOT will review each application for eligibility and provide comments to the MPOs and RPAs regarding program eligibility, the reasonableness of assumptions used to derive the project budget, and any concerns with project feasibility among others. Comments may address concerns with entire projects or individual project elements. Any difficulties previously encountered by Iowa DOT in working with the prospective project sponsor may also be provided to the MPOs and RPAs.
18. What are the priorities in selecting projects for funding in the Local Projects TAP process?
  - Selecting projects that result in an equitable geographic distribution of TAP funding is the highest priority to Iowa DOT. As a result, Iowa DOT will direct funding regionally by targeting funding equitably to geographic areas across the state. The MPO and RPA

regions will be used as the basis to calculate regionally directed TAP funding targets. The second highest priority for funding decisions is that the projects selected be highly valued by the local regions as a funding priority. Iowa DOT values the regional transportation planning process and desires to continue to ensure that local/regional projects selected for funding through the Local Projects TAP process are projects that are consistent with local/regional plans and priorities. For this reason, recommendations for funding from the MPOs and RPAs will weigh heavily in the selection of projects for award. The selection of projects will be a multi-step process and in later steps in the process Iowa DOT may rely on additional factors such as project readiness, feasibility, connectivity of trail projects, and excess availability of funds sub-allocated per 23 U.S.C. 133(d).

19. When will the project sponsors, MPOs, and RPAs be notified of the awards?

- Iowa DOT will notify project sponsors, MPOs, and RPAs once the selection process is complete. While the Statewide TAP program will still be formally awarded by the Transportation Commission, projects awarded through the Local Projects TAP program will not. The Transportation Commission will be notified of the total amount of Statewide TAP funding awarded to SRTS and Iowa Byways projects, but the projects will not be individually awarded by the Transportation Commission. Statewide TAP awards are typically introduced to the Commission in December following the October 1 deadline with final action taking place in January. We anticipate notice of Local Projects TAP awards to follow a similar schedule with award letters being sent out to recipients in the December/January timeframe.

### ***Programming and TAP-flex Funds***

20. How is the TAP-flex (available to any area) funding going to be addressed?

- The process that use to distribute TAP-flex to the TMAs, MPOs, and RPAs for their information to make decisions on use of these funds (keep as TAP or use as STBG) is no longer allowed as this is considered a sub-allocation of funds prior to project selection. Moving forward, all TAP-flex will be automatically transferred to STBG by Iowa DOT and referred to as STBG TAP-flex. A separate STBG TAP-flex target amount will be provided to the TMAs, MPOs, and RPAs along with the regular STBG targets. Each TMA, MPO, and RPA will then determine how to use this STBG TAP-flex target. Choices continue to include any STBG eligible activity including transit and any TAP eligible activity. A TMA, MPO, or RPA is allowed to carve off a portion of STBG or the STBG TAP-flex amount to be used exclusively for TAP activities or select projects on a project-by-project basis. A TMA, MPO, or RPA may award STBG TAP-flex funds through their existing STBG project selection process. If desired, a TMA, MPO, or RPA may use the solicitation of TAP applications for the TMA project selection process or Local Projects TAP process to select projects for STBG or STBG TAP-flex funds. Selecting projects for STBG TAP-flex through in this way may require a revision of the STBG selection process as described in the TIP. If STBG TAP-Flex funds are awarded to a project application submitted as part of the Local Projects TAP process or TMA project selection process, the application would still need to be reported as an application for the Local Projects TAP program or TMA project selection process. The MPO or RPA would not recommend that project for a Local Projects TAP award through the Iowa DOT project selection process. The project may still be eligible for SRTS or Iowa Byways funding through the Statewide TAP

program, as applicable. The TPMS programming for projects awarded STBG TAP-Flex funds should reflect STBG funding and not TAP unless a separate TAP award has been made through the Statewide, Local Projects TAP program, or TMA project selection process. If a project is awarded both STBG and TAP funding, both funding types should be indicated in TPMS.

21. What happens if a region does not recommend funding for the full amount of regionally directed TAP funding targeted to it?
  - Once recommendations are received from the MPOs and RPAs, Iowa DOT will initially review these recommendations within the context of the regionally directed TAP funding targets. Some regions may recommend projects for award in an amount more or less than the funding target. Following an initial analysis of the regional recommendations, Iowa DOT will determine how funding is awarded over all the regions statewide based on these priorities in addition to the other program criteria.
  
22. Do the TMAs, MPOs, and RPAs still need to detail their project review process in their TIPs?
  - Yes. All planning agencies will continue to document their unique efforts associated with the TAP process and document their project selection process. MPOs and RPAs will include specifics regarding how they prioritize local project applications submitted for the Local Projects TAP program. MPOs and RPAs should take note that the previous TIP passages on this topic will be required to be revised to remove references to the selection of projects. Iowa DOT is now responsible for administering the project selection process; not the MPOs and RPAs.
  
23. When will the awarded projects be programmed in the TIP and in what year should they be programmed?
  - Once a project is awarded either by Iowa DOT or by a TMA, the TMA, MPO, or RPA may program the project in any program year they desire in accordance with TIP development guidelines otherwise provided by Iowa DOT. Although the funding to be made available in this round will be Federal FY 2021 and 2022 funds, the awarded projects are not required to be programmed in the 2021 or 2022 program years. The projects may be programmed in the appropriate execution year based on the project timeline.
  
24. Is there a deadline for the project sponsor to obligate the funds?
  - Upon award, each project sponsor of a project awarded through the Local Projects TAP program will receive an award letter from Iowa DOT. After the initial program year is determined and the project is programmed in the TIP/STIP, a project funding agreement will be provided for execution by the project sponsor which requires the obligation of funds (letting) within 2 years of the first day of the original program year or the date an amendment is approved by FHWA to add the project in the current TIP/STIP. If a project does not meet this deadline, the award will be withdrawn and incorporated into the next TMA project selection or Local Projects TAP award process and awarded to a new project. Projects should be programmed according to a feasible project schedule to avoid funds being withdrawn. Allowing project sponsors to bank awards for projects that are not expected to obligate funds beyond the programming window (next 4 years)

is not advised and will result in project sponsors failing to adhere to the agreement terms and funds being withdrawn.

25. Do TMAs, MPOs, and RPAs need to demonstrate TAP fiscal constraint in the TIP document?

- Yes. TMAs will still be required to demonstrate TAP constraint within their TIP document. All other agencies are still required to document fiscal constraint by adding the following text in their TIPs:

TAP funding programmed in this document has been awarded through the Iowa DOT's Local Projects TAP Program. The programmed funding amounts are based on the region's regionally directed TAP funding target as calculated by the Iowa DOT. The TAP program funding is fiscally constrained on a statewide basis by the Iowa DOT by limiting available Local Projects TAP Program funding to estimated federal aid apportionments. Programmed TAP funding is consistent with awards made through the statewide Local Projects TAP Program and as such meets the fiscal constraint requirement.

26. What approval process is needed for amendments to programmed Local Projects TAP projects?

- Projects that were originally programmed prior to August 2016 will require only MPO or RPA approval for project amendments to the scope aside from the necessary Iowa DOT approval within the formal process of TIP amendments. This also applies to local projects in TMAs. For Local Projects TAP projects initially programmed after August 2016, any requested amendments to the scope will require MPO or RPA recommendation for approval. Formal action of the MPO or RPA policy board to approve the TIP amendment may serve as the recommendation. Iowa DOT will confirm this recommendation prior to approving the amendment in the formal TIP amendment process. No TAP funding may be added to any Local Projects TAP project (regardless of when it was initially programmed) based solely on the decision of the MPO or RPA from this point forward. All funding decisions for Local Projects TAP projects must run through the full Local Projects TAP project selection process available annually to all non-TMA MPOs and RPAs.

***Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and Iowa Byways Projects***

27. How does a SRTS or Iowa Byways project access TAP funds?

- A local SRTS or Iowa Byways project (not statewide or multi-regional in scope) must access funds by submitting an application to their local TMA, MPO, or RPA for review as part of the TMA project selection process or Local Projects TAP selection process. If recommended for TAP funding of at least 50 percent of total eligible project costs through the Local Projects TAP process by the MPO or RPA or through a TMA project selection process, the project will be eligible to be awarded up to 30 percent funding (for a total TAP award of up to 80 percent of total eligible project costs) from the Statewide TAP program. A Local Projects TAP application recommended for funding will automatically be included in the selection process for the concurrent Statewide TAP program funding cycle. A second application is not required to be submitted to Iowa DOT. Submittal of a separate project application for the Statewide TAP program by the October 1 deadline is required for those projects first awarded up to 50 percent through



a TMA project selection process. SRTS and Iowa Byway projects that have been awarded Local Projects TAP funding or have received funding through a TMA project selection process are high priorities for funding through the Statewide TAP program.

28. What if a SRTS or Iowa Byways project was awarded at least 50 percent of total eligible project costs from the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program?
  - This project would be eligible to be awarded up to 30 percent funding (for a total federal aid award of up to 80 percent of total eligible project costs) from the Statewide TAP program; however, a project application must be provided to Iowa DOT by October 1 separately from the STBG project selection process to be considered for the Statewide TAP program funding.
29. Can a SRTS or Iowa Byways project receive funding from both the Local Projects TAP process and the Statewide TAP process during the same cycle?
  - Yes. Recommendation for award through the Local Projects TAP process is required before a SRTS or Iowa Byways project may be eligible for funding through the Statewide TAP program. An application recommended for funding under the Local Projects TAP process is automatically entered into consideration for the Statewide TAP program. A local SRTS or Iowa Byways project is not eligible for the Statewide TAP program without first having received a recommendation from an MPO or RPA for funding through the Local Projects TAP process or having already been awarded STBG funding.
30. Must a SRTS or Iowa Byways related project be recommended to receive a full 50 percent award from the Local Projects TAP process, TMA project selection process, or STBG program before being viewed as eligible to be awarded through the Statewide TAP program?
  - Yes. A project recommended for less than 50 percent funding through the Local Projects TAP process, TMA project selection process, or from STBG funds is not eligible for consideration in the Statewide TAP project selection process.
31. What funding request should a SRTS or Iowa Byways application make?
  - It is appropriate for a SRTS or Iowa Byway project to request a full 80 percent of total eligible project costs in the application. If recommended for award, the MPO or RPA will recommend 50 percent funding as part of the Local Projects TAP program and will request the Iowa DOT to include the application for consideration of 30 percent funding from the Statewide TAP program. If awarded through a TMA project selection process, a separate application must be submitted to the Statewide TAP program for consideration of 30 percent funding.
32. What if a SRTS or Iowa Byways project was awarded TAP funding from a TMA, MPO, or RPA before August 2016?
  - If the award was for at least 50 percent of the total eligible project costs, an application should be submitted to Iowa DOT for consideration in the Statewide TAP program to be considered for the additional 30 percent of funding. If the award was for less than 50 percent of the total eligible project costs, the project sponsor may either seek additional funding to reach the minimum 50 percent funding threshold through the TMA project selection process, Local Projects TAP program (requiring a new application to be submitted to the TMA, MPO, or RPA) or STBG program which will then make the project

eligible for the Statewide TAP program, or the project sponsor may choose to develop the project with only the funding already awarded prior to August 2016.

33. Is there a limit to how many SRTS or Iowa Byways projects may be awarded Statewide TAP funding in a year?

- Not at this time. Iowa DOT anticipates available funding to exceed initial demand. The program may be adjusted if demand proves to exceed available funding.

34. What is a SRTS project?

- A SRTS project is a project that was eligible under section 1404(f) of the SAFETEA-LU. Any sidewalk project is not automatically considered a SRTS project. Iowa DOT *Form 240004 Request for Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Funds* has been modified to require certain information to allow Iowa DOT to verify eligibility for SRTS funding like tallies of student travel. A SRTS construction project must be located within 2-miles of one or more primary or middle schools serving grades K-8 and address an identified hazard to safe walking or bicycling for students in the neighborhood served by the school(s).

35. What is an Iowa Byways project?

- An Iowa Byways project is a project located immediately adjacent to a designated Iowa Byway that has received the endorsement of the local byway organization. These projects should be identified in the adopted Corridor Management Plan for the byway or otherwise deemed to be consistent with the goals and objectives of the plan. Documentation is required to be submitted as part of the application for TAP funding.