U.S. Department of Transportation

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Thriving Communities Program (TCP) Frequently Asked Questions

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This page

contains frequently asked questions about the FY 2023 Thriving Communities Program (TCP), with content organized by the:

- Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
- Letter of Interest (LOI)

NOFO FAQs

Eligibility to Apply

What is the difference between the Thriving Communities National Capacity Builder Program (TCP-N) and the Thriving Communities Regional Pilot Program (TCP-R)?

The TCP-N program will fund non-profit organizations, philanthropic entities, and other technical assistance providers to provide direct no-cost planning, technical assistance, and capacity building support to TCP communities selected by DOT and located across the country. As such, TCP-N applicants should have an extensive geographic reach; applicants with specific content expertise or geographic experience can create a Capacity Building team and explain how they will effectively provide technical assistance across the country.

The TCP-R program, on the other hand, will fund state, tribal, local, and regional entities to provide direct no-cost planning, technical assistance,

and capacity building to communities of their choice within their jurisdiction. For TCP-R, applicants should have deep experience within a specific region within their jurisdiction. Communities that are included as part of a TCP-R application are not required to submit a separate LOI, but may submit an LOI if they would like to be considered for participation in the TCP-N program as well. Communities will not be selected for participation in both programs but may be considered for TCP-N if their TCP-R Capacity Builder is not selected.

A primary difference between the two programs is that TCP-N applicants will support communities selected by DOT that are located nationwide, while TCP-R applicants support communities within a region that they have selected within their own jurisdiction or service area.

What is a Capacity Builder?

A Capacity Builder is an organization funded through TCP to provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support to selected recipient communities. DOT is encouraging applicants to form capacity building teams to enable a greater diversity of expertise needed to support a variety of communities with different needs and assets, types of transportation projects, and geographies.

Can a private firm, consulting entity, or for-profit company apply to be a Capacity Builder?

Yes. Private firms, including consulting firms and for-profit organizations, are considered eligible applicants to the TCP-N program. Private firms may apply either as the lead applicant or as part of a team. Private firms are eligible under "Other technical assistance providers with a demonstrated capacity to develop and provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building (i.e., private firms or consultants, private academic institutions, CDFIs)." Note, however, that private firms cannot earn a profit from a TCP grant and their indirect cost rate must be allocated at no more than a 10% De minimis or at a rate that is covered under a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA).

Can a university apply to be a Capacity Builder? (updated! 9/29/2023)

Academic institutions including universities, colleges, and vocational institutions are all eligible to apply as a National Capacity Builder if they can verify or demonstrate their experience as a "technical assistance provider with a demonstrated capacity to develop and provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building"; are a unit of state or local

government; or have tax-exempt status as a nonprofit organization. Academic institutions would also be eligible to apply as partner organizations for the TCP-R program.

Can an eligible firm or organization submit an application for both the TCP-N and the TCP-R programs?

It depends. Because the eligible applicants for the two programs differ, in most cases an applicant cannot submit an application for both programs. Some types of non-profit organizations are eligible for both programs; however, DOT recommends that applicants consider whether the non-profit applicant's area of focus is "national" in scope, or limited to a specific region, and decide accordingly between the TCP-N and the TCP-R programs.

What types of organizations are eligible to apply as a TCP-R partner? (new! 9/22/2023)

Any organization eligible for TCP under the FY 2023 NOFO is eligible to be a TCP-R partner. This includes all of those who are eligible to be a lead applicant:

- Organizations that would be eligible to apply as a lead applicant for TCP-R:
  - State governments and their agencies
  - Indian Tribes
  - Local governments and their agencies
  - Governmental planning, economic development, or transportation organizations working at the regional or metropolitan level
  - Regional, Tribal or Statewide planning non-profit organizations

- Organizations that would be eligible to apply as a lead applicant for TCP-N:
  - Non-profit organizations
  - Philanthropic organizations
  - Other technical assistance providers (including, for example, private firms and academic institutions)

Regional Non-Profit Planning Organizations are eligible applicants for the TCP-R Program. How does DOT define Regional Non-Profit Planning Organization for the purposes of TCP? (new! 9/22/2023)

For the purposes of TCP, DOT provides the following definition for Regional Non-Profit Planning Organization:

- A non-profit regional planning organization serves communities at a regional scale by developing, promoting, and implementing regional planning solutions. This can include non-profits, such as multi-sector partnerships or collaboratives that advise local, Tribal or state government agencies on planning, housing, transportation, climate, or economic development solutions and/or that include regional government partners as part of its membership.

How does DOT define "regional scale" for the purposes of TCP? **(new! 9/22/2023)**

For the purposes of TCP, regional scale refers to a geography that encompasses a specific region or geographical area larger than a single community or neighborhood but smaller than the entire nation. It can range from a few nearby cities to an entire state, US Territory or Tribal government.

Can an MPO apply to be a Regional Capacity Builder (TCP-R)? **(new! 9/29/2023)**

An MPO would be an eligible TCP-R Capacity Builder under the "governmental planning, economic development, or transportation organization working at the regional or metropolitan level" eligibility criteria. An MPO could apply as a lead or partner organization for TCP-R.

Could an eligible organization apply as a partner on multiple applications? **(new! 9/29/2023)**

Yes, but the organization should carefully consider its capacity to support multiple teams if both are selected.

What types of organizations are best suited to be a Capacity Builder?

In addition to confirming eligibility for the program, potential applicants should consider their capacity and ability to provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building to multiple communities over three years. For TCP-N, for example, applicants should be confident in their ability to provide support to diverse communities that may be located across the country and have unique and varied technical needs. For TCP-R, applicants must be able to coordinate and facilitate work on a regional scale, including peer learning opportunities, not just provide support to those within a local community. Local governments interested in receiving support as part of

the Thriving Communities Program are recommended to apply through the Letter of Interest.

Do applicants need to provide a non-Federal match?

No, there are no non-Federal match requirements for this program. However, DOT will prioritize TCP-N and TCP-R applicants that demonstrate an ability to leverage other funding, including from philanthropy and other Federal funding sources (e.g., formula funds, State or local resources and in-kind contributions of staff, volunteer time, facilities, or other resources) to amplify program impact and support Thriving Communities Program goals and objectives in the long-term.

Can FY 2022 awardees apply for FY 2023? **(new! 9/29/2023)**

Yes, National Capacity Builders selected in FY 2022 can apply for the FY 2023 program. These applicants should demonstrate in their applications their capacity to support a new set of 15-20 communities without scaling down support for FY 2022 communities.

Are small businesses eligible to be Capacity Builders? **(new! 10/20/2023)**

Yes, small businesses are eligible to be a lead applicant or partner for the TCP-N program as long as they are technical assistance providers with a demonstrated capacity to develop and provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building to a range of communities located across multiple states and regions. Small businesses cannot be lead applicants for the TCP-R program but could be a partner on the capacity building team.

For the TCP-N program, the diversity of the capacity building team is a priority consideration. Teams that include one or more organizations that are small businesses (as defined by the Small Business Administration) will be prioritized. See Section E.1(e) of the [NOFO](#) for more information on priority considerations.

Eligible Activities

What are examples of eligible activities for Capacity Builders under the TCP?

The primary focus of support through the TCP is assisting individual communities—recipients include government agencies and their community partner organizations—to successfully advance projects identified through meaningful public involvement that deliver a broad set of transportation, climate, equity, housing, economic, and other community benefits. For more details on eligible activities, see section

A.1.a. of the NOFO for the TCP-N program and section A.1.b. of the NOFO for the TCP-R program.

Can Capacity Builders use the funding to construct or repair roads, bridges, bike paths, sidewalks, and/or sewers?

No. Funding awarded to Capacity Builders through TCP is meant to support the provision of technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support to selected communities and is not intended to finance construction of specific projects. Capacity Builder support may include, among other things, identifying and responding to funding opportunities, but the TCP funding itself cannot be used to pay for expenses associated directly with capital infrastructure.

Can TCP applicants apply to provide technical assistance through other DOT or Federal opportunities? Can applicants be selected for more than one?

Yes. There is no restriction from or prohibition on applying or providing technical assistance through other DOT or Federal opportunities. However, an application for one program does not automatically enable consideration for another.

If a consulting firm or nonprofit organization receives a TCP Capacity Builder cooperative agreement to provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support to a community or group of communities, can that same firm perform future planning, project design, and engineering support for projects that may be developed through TCP in the communities of support?

The specific limitations on participation in a later-funded project depend on the Federal funding source for that later-funded project. Generally, under 2 CFR 200.317 and 1201.317, if the recipient of funding for the later-funded project (receiving TCP technical assistance, planning and capacity building) is a state, then the recipient must follow the same policies and procedures it uses for procurements from its non-Federal funds, and the answer to this question is dependent on those policies and procedures.

If the recipient of funding for the later-funded project (receiving TCP support) is not a state, the answer is generally yes, the same firm or nonprofit organization may be hired if necessary, competition requirements are satisfied. Per CFR 200.319, all procurement transactions must be conducted in a manner that provides full and open competition, eliminates unfair competitive advantage, and ensures objective contractor performance. Project sponsors must avoid creating situations that would

unfairly favor the firm or nonprofit organization that helped develop applications for DOT discretionary grants or preclude other firms or organizations from competing. Additionally, if a Capacity Builder assists a community in drafting its solicitation for procurement proposals, it must be excluded from competing for that same procurement.

If the later-funded project is funded under title 23 (i.e., the Federal-aid highways program), then it will also be TCP funds are subject to the requirements of 23 CFR 172, including the restrictions at 172.7(a) for the procurement of engineering and design-related services through: competitive negotiation (qualifications-based selection) procurement, small purchases procurement for small dollar value contracts, and noncompetitive procurement where specific conditions exist allowing solicitation and negotiation to take place with a single consultant. Similarly, if the later-funded project is funded from the Federal Transit Administration, then it will be subject to the Architectural Engineering (A&E) and Related Services requirements described in FTA Circular 4220.1F § IV.2.h.

DOT is prioritizing Capacity Builder applicants that allocate the largest portion of their budgets for "targeted support" to communities. What types of activities count as "targeted support"?

As stated in the NOFO, "targeted support" includes activities that directly enable the community to advance efforts identified in their scope of work. This may include, for instance, direct subgrants to communities to allocate internally; funding to provide community stipends or pay for staffing, apprenticeship or fellowship positions located within the selected communities; access to mapping, design and engineering, modeling, civic participation or other data analytic or community engagement software tools; no-cost consulting services; Capacity Builder staff time dedicated to activities to advance individual communities' scopes of work, including travel; or other types of direct support.

Note that the NOFO also requires that at least 20 percent of the proposed budget be allocated for subgrants to communities and their partners. Subgrants to the communities counts as "targeted support." Specific activities that do not count as "targeted support" include program administration and grant management costs, as well as the costs associated with managing the Community of Practice and peer-learning elements of the program, which ultimately benefit more than one community and/or cohort.

Application Requirements

How does an eligible entity apply to be a Capacity Builder?

Eligible organizations, or teams of organizations, interested in applying must electronically submit an application by 4:59 PM ET on November 28, 2023 via Grants.gov. You can find the [NOFO on DOT's TCP webpage](#) or on Grants.gov by searching Opportunity Number DOT-TCP-FY23-01. To submit an application via Grants.gov applicants must register with SAM.gov and Grants.gov. Registration can take between a few business days to as long as four weeks. To avoid delays that may make your application ineligible, DOT strongly recommends that applicants start early and not wait until the approaching deadline date before logging in, registering, reviewing the application instructions, and applying. Visit the [How to Apply](#) webpage and the DOT Navigator's [How to Navigate Grants.gov](#) webpage for more information.

Further, applicants are required to provide a valid unique entity identifier (UEI) in the application; make certain certifications; and continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which they have an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.

What materials are needed for a complete application?

Those interested in applying to be a Capacity Builder should read closely the details for application submission included in the NOFO (see Section D.2). Complete applications must include all of the following:

- Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
- Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)
- Organizational Documentation (if applicable, depending on your organization type)
- Organization Descriptions
- Indirect Cost Rate (ICR) Documentation (if applicable)
- Executive Summary (see NOFO for what this must include)
- Narrative responses addressing Merit Rating Criteria Sub-Factors described in NOFO
- Letters of Commitment from Communities (TCP-R applicants only - see NOFO for details)
- Staffing Plan
- Budget Proposal

What requirements should be considered when developing a Budget Proposal?

The NOFO includes a set of requirements for applicant Budget Proposals, including:

- The budget must clearly show total program administration and grant management costs, which are not to exceed 25 percent of the overall budget
- The budget must identify costs associated with targeted support
- The budget must clearly allocate at least 20 percent to sub-grants to communities
- The budget must clearly delineate the support costs for the first two years of deep-dive targeted community support and peer learning support to the Community of Practice, and the third year solely focused on Community of Practice management and overall program reporting, knowledge sharing, evaluation, and transition planning
- For TCP-R Program applicants only, the budget should identify activities and funds allocated to meaningful public involvement activities

See Section D.2(i) of the NOFO for full budget requirements and format guidance.

Does each Capacity Builder partner need a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) for Grants.gov?

It depends. The lead applicant who will submit the application to the NOFO and be the primary recipient of the funds must have a current UEI. Each partner does not necessarily need to have its own UEI; however, if there is a subaward, the subrecipient must also have a UEI (2 CFR 25.300).

Can a TCP-N applicant submit to support more than one Community of Practice?

No. Applicants can only submit an application to support a single Community of Practice. DOT, however, reserves the right to assign a Capacity Builder to a different Community of Practice, with confirmation from the applicant, if it determines the applicant has the skills and experience necessary to serve communities in that cohort. Applicants must indicate which Community of Practice they are applying to support in their applications.

How should Capacity Builder applicants for TCP-N complete the budget narrative without yet knowing the communities they will be supporting?

Please refer to Section D.2(i) of the NOFO for information on budget proposal requirements. DOT recognizes that information provided will be a good faith estimate given that TCP-N applicants do not yet know which and how many communities will be selected for support. As such, the applicant is encouraged to provide as much information as possible to address the required elements. It is also allowable to provide a cost estimate or range or other qualifiers, as applicable. As stated in the NOFO, DOT will work with the selected Capacity Builders to finalize budget and milestones as part of the process to finalize the cooperative agreements to fund work supported through this program.

What if I experience technical issues when submitting my application?

Applicants should not wait until the last moment to submit their applications. If an applicant experiences a grants.gov systems issue (i.e., a technical problem or glitch with the website), the applicant must document and report the issue in advance of the application deadline (see Section D.6 of the NOFO for more information on documentation and reporting requirements). In the event of a confirmed systems issue, DOT reserves the right to accept an application in an alternate format. Technical issues related to an applicant's broadband or other personal systems issues will not be considered as reasons for late or alternative format submissions.

For TCP-R, do Capacity Builders need to choose communities to support before applying? (new! 9/29/2023)

Yes, TCP-R applicants must provide information about the communities they plan to support in their applications. TCP-R applicants are required to provide Letters of Commitment from these communities as part of their applications and are required to describe their reason and method for selecting these communities.

Can I submit additional supporting materials that are not required in the NOFO? (new! 10/11/2023)

DOT will not review any materials submitted by applicants that are not requested in the NOFO and/or fall outside of the prescribed page limit for each section. Applicants are encouraged to provide concise information, including as many specific examples and details as possible within the page limits.

Can applicants submit Letters of Support? (new! 10/20/2023)

For applications submitted in response to the NOFO; Letters of Support are welcome but not required. Letters of Support can be included in the

application package via Grants.gov or submitted to ThrivingCommunities@dot.gov and should clearly indicate the applicant to which they are related. These letters are not considered as part of the merit evaluation process.

Program Requirements

Are partnerships required for Capacity Builders, and will partnerships factor into application evaluation?

Partnerships are strongly encouraged, but not required. DOT will evaluate applications across a set of criteria including Approach to Technical Assistance and Capacity Building; Teaming Arrangement; Proven Success; and Program Management and Evaluation. The soundness of the proposed budget will be an additional consideration, and priority consideration will be given to applicants with experience in priority geographies; those with a diversity in their capacity builder teams; and those that are able to leverage additional funding sources. Section E.1 of the NOFO describes the TCP Merit Criteria.

Are there any reporting requirements for selected Capacity Builders?

Yes. All awards will be administered pursuant to the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards found in 2 C.F.R. Part 200, as adopted by DOT at 2 C.F.R. Part 1201. Section F.2 of the NOFO describes the performance and program evaluation reporting requirements. Each cooperative agreement lead organization must submit quarterly progress reports to monitor progress and ensure accountability and financial transparency in the grant program. Each contractor must collect and report to the Build America Bureau (Bureau) performance information on the technical assistance and advisory services being provided. The specific performance information and reporting period will be determined on an individual basis and communicated at the kick-off meeting of the cooperative agreement. It is anticipated that the Bureau and the contractor will hold regular, informal meetings or calls to review project activities, schedule, and progress toward the scope of work.

Are there certain milestones that Capacity Builders must meet if they receive funds?

Milestones are not prescribed for Capacity Builders. However, applicants must include a proposed set of tasks, a schedule, and major deliverables as part of their application. The proposed task organization and schedule will

serve as a starting point for cooperative agreement negotiations with the selected teams.

Can an applicant expand capacity building services after award? **(new! 9/29/2023)**

Yes, but the applicant will be evaluated based on the services it (and its team members) is able to provide at the time of application.

Funding and Awards

What type of funding is available for selected Capacity Builders under TCP?

TCP provides reimbursable project funding to selected Capacity Builders through cooperative agreements covering a three-year period of performance. The selected Capacity Builder must be financially able to pay their staff/consultants/contractors for hours billed and then invoice for reimbursement via the DOT grant financial process. All awards will be administered pursuant to the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards found in 2 C.F.R. Part 200, as adopted by DOT at 2 C.F.R. Part 1201.

How much funding is available for selected Capacity Builders?

In total, up to $22 million is being provided through the FY 2023 NOFO. The number and funding amount of individual cooperative agreements will be dependent upon the number of applications received and the number of communities selected to receive support but is estimated to range between $4 million to $5 million per selected TCP-N Capacity Builder and between $1 and $2 million for each TCP-R Capacity Builder. Each will be for a period of performance of three years.

Is there a minimum or maximum award size for selected Capacity Builders?

No. The size of awards will be determined by the number of awards given and informed by the selected applicant's budget.

Is there a set number of cooperative agreements to be made?

No. The number of cooperative agreements will be determined by DOT and informed by the applications received and by the number and type of communities selected to receive TCP support. DOT anticipates awarding at least three separate cooperative agreements to TCP-N Capacity Builders; and potentially as many as five, depending upon the needs of the selected communities informed by the LOI process and the number of TCP-R

cooperative agreements awarded. DOT anticipates awarding up to four separate cooperative agreements through the TCP-R.

Is there a funding match requirement for Capacity Builder applicants?

No; however, DOT will view more favorably applications that demonstrate leveraging of additional funding and other resources (whether public, philanthropic, or other private resources).

Are community partners eligible subgrantees without a competitive procurement process? **(new! 9/29/2023)**

No competitive procurement process is required to make subgrants to community partners. However, the community partner must agree to receiving the subgrant and be able to manage the subgrant according to 2 CFR 200.331-333, and it must be approved by DOT.

Can a TCP-R program applicant use a subcontractor to provide some of the support services? Does that subcontractor have to be selected at time of application? **(new! 9/29/2023)**

Yes, TCP-R Capacity Builders can use subcontractors for support services. The subcontractors do not need to be selected at the time of application; however, applicants should be clear in their applications which services will need to be subcontracted and propose a plan for securing subcontractors quickly to complete the work. To the extent possible, Capacity Builders should maximize the use of subawards to community organizations.

Does the $5 million cap include match funding? For example, if an applicant provides $1 million in match funds, will the total agreement be $6 million? **(new! 9/29/2023)**

Match funding is not a requirement for the Regional or National TCP. However, DOT will prioritize applicants who can demonstrate leveraging of other funding sources. Any additional funding provided by the applicant will be managed outside of the cooperative agreement with DOT.

Evaluation and Selection

What are DOT's evaluation criteria for each Capacity Builder application?

Applications will be evaluated against four overarching criteria: 1) Approach to Technical Assistance and Capacity Building; 2) Teaming Arrangement; 3) Proven Success; and 4) Program Management and Evaluation. The soundness of the proposed budget will be an additional consideration, and priority consideration will be given to applicants with demonstrated

experience in priority geographies; those with diverse capacity builder teams (for TCP-N applicants only); and those that are able to leverage additional funding sources. Additional details and sub-factors of each criterion are provided in the [NOFO](#) (see Section E.1). Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the criteria in developing their submissions.

Timelines

When will DOT announce awards for Capacity Builders?

DOT anticipates selecting capacity builders in spring 2024, at which time it will finalize scopes of work, budgets, and other project details through negotiation of cooperative agreements. DOT is hoping that TCP support to communities can begin by the summer of 2024.

Will selected Capacity Builders begin work with communities immediately after following award notification?

TCP funds selected Capacity Builders through cooperative agreements, which will be negotiated with DOT before the commencement of work with the communities. Once a cooperative agreement is signed, DOT expects that Capacity Builders immediately begin work with their communities to maximize impact during the full period of performance.

What is the period of performance?

TCP funding is for a three-year period of performance (2024–2027), with the first two years focused on focused technical assistance to individual communities and peer learning across the Community of Practice, or, in the case of TCP-R, among communities within the region. During the third year of the period of performance, Capacity Builders will continue to conduct peer learning activities, but will also focus on evaluation, reporting, and transition activities.

Resources for Potential Applicants

Are there networking resources to help Capacity Builders make partnership connections?

Applicants can view [FY 2022 TCP selected Capacity Builders](#) on the TCP website. The DOT [Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)](#) provides the small and minority business community with technical assistance and capacity building activities through its [Connections MarketPlace](#) (CMP) platform. The CMP matchmaking platform features an online community, roundtable sessions, and business matchmaking services to help provide insight and understanding for small business attendees on industry best practices.

Are there resources available for TCP-N applicants to understand the needs of potential recipient communities?

To get an understanding of the needs of potential recipient communities and their needs, please see the TCP FY 2022 Select Recipients page.

How is Thriving Communities related to other Federal technical assistance programs? (updated! 9/29/2023)

DOT's Thriving Communities Program is part of the Thriving Communities Network, an interagency effort intended to facilitate collaboration across initiatives and target deployment of a full range of Federal place-based technical assistance and capacity-building resources to urban, rural, and Tribal communities experiencing a history of economic distress and systemic disinvestment. This effort includes resources to help disadvantaged communities with grant and financial management, pre-development assistance, community engagement, planning, and project delivery support. Visit the Thriving Communities Network webpage to learn more about partner agencies and their technical assistance programs.

Some Thriving Communities Network agencies have their own Thriving Communities Programs – for example, EPA's Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers. DOT coordinates with Thriving Communities Network agencies on their programs, but they are managed separately. Applicants are permitted to apply for multiple Thriving Communities Programs.

How is disadvantaged community defined? Is it the same as the Areas of Persistent Poverty or Historically Disadvantaged Communities? (new! 9/29/2023)

For the purposes of TCP, disadvantaged community is defined as "(1) Any tribal land or any territory or possession of the United States and (2) those census tracts (a) experiencing disproportionate effects (as defined by Executive Order 12898); (b) that contain areas of persistent poverty as defined in 49 U.S.C. section 6702(a)(1); (c) that are historically disadvantaged as defined by CEQ's Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool and DOT's USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer mapping tool for Historically Disadvantaged Communities; or (d) other federally designated community development zones."

LOI FAQs

Eligibility to Apply

Will applicants submitting an LOI be considered for participation in the TCP-N or the TCP-R program? (updated! 9/29/2023)

Applicants submitting an LOI will only be considered for support from the TCP National Capacity Builders Program (TCP-N). Capacity Builder applicants for the TCP-R program will identify the communities from within their own jurisdictions that they propose to support as part of their TCP-R applications. A community that is included in a TCP-R proposal may also apply for support under TCP-N but would only be selected for participation in TCP-N or TCP-R (not both).

Do I need to submit a separate application to receive technical assistance after submitting my LOI? (new! 9/29/2023)

No, communities interested in receiving support through TCP only need to submit the LOI through the simple webform. The LOI acts as your application for support and will be evaluated by the DOT team. If you are included in a TCP-R application (i.e., a Regional Capacity Builder is proposing to support your community in its application), you do not need to submit an LOI to be considered for support from the TCP-R applicant. If the TCP-R applicant is selected, your community will also be selected for support.

Who is eligible to submit an LOI to receive planning, technical assistance, and capacity building through the TCP?

Those eligible to submit an LOI are state or local governments; Indian Tribes; United States territories; metropolitan planning organizations or rural transportation planning organizations; transit agencies; or other political subdivisions of a state or local government (for instance, but not limited to, a regional economic development district, a school board, a public health department, a public housing authority, a water management district, a workforce development board, a Council of Government, a County Planning Commission, etc.).

DOT requires one of these eligible entities to be the lead LOI applicant and have an implementation role for current or future transportation projects in the identified area that will be supported through the TCP. The lead applicant must identify a staff person to serve as the primary point of contact to coordinate with community partners, the assigned TCP Capacity Builder, and DOT throughout the entire three-year period of support. The lead applicant must also identify a minimum of two key community partners in their LOI.

Are Houses of Worship eligible applicants to receive support through TCP?

Yes, Religious institutions, including houses of worship, are eligible to be considered as a key community partner, but are not eligible to be a lead applicant.

Can a community be too small to qualify to receive support through TCP? **(new! 10/20/2023)**

No, a community cannot be disqualified from participation because it is too small. The Main Streets Community of Practice is intended for Indian Tribes, US Territories, rural communities, and small towns, including communities that are not part of an MPO. As part of the Letter of Interest, applicants must describe the specific geography within which the program's activities for comprehensive community- and data-driven transformative infrastructure and community development activities will take place, which may be a neighborhood, corridor, census tract, or other similar small-scale geography. See Section E.2 of the [Call for LOIs](#) for more information on identifying your community.

Type of Support Provided

What type of support is provided?

Each selected community will be assigned a Capacity Builder funded by DOT to help them advance transportation projects and improve coordination of these projects with other community needs around housing, economic development, public health, environmental or other identified needs. The specific types of technical assistance and capacity building support will be co-designed with each community and its capacity builder. While support may vary, it could include the following activities:

- identifying and responding to funding opportunities that align with projects that implement local community mobility, access, climate, and community development goals and regional or statewide plans
- activities to support grant writing, project management, and compliance with grant administration requirements
- conducting project scoping, planning, and pre-engineering studies, market, and other technical analysis
- supplementing local staffing and workforce development capacity
- developing systems or structures that improve compliance with Federal grant management, including but not limited to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and procurement requirements

- supporting comprehensive community planning that better coordinates transportation with other land use, housing, climate, health, and other infrastructure
- implementing innovative public engagement strategies, particularly to involve traditionally underrepresented voices in the planning, project identification, and prioritization process.
- sub-granting to local technical assistance and capacity building partners who bring local expertise and capacity
- building organizational capacity to strengthen relationships between key stakeholders that deepen regional engagement and collaboration, position partners for future funding opportunities, and/or support inclusive planning processes
- evaluating and establishing emerging transportation and planning technologies, data systems, and software

Each community will also be assigned to a Community of Practice to facilitate learning over the three-year period between members of its team, and with other TCP-supported communities working to advance similar projects and community goals.

Will selected communities receive funding through TCP?

Communities will not receive direct grant funding. However, Capacity Builders are required to provide sub-grants to selected communities that can be used by the lead applicant and its community partner organizations to build community capacity to successfully apply for Federal funds and advance infrastructure projects in the long term. TCP is not a grant program that funds infrastructure project construction directly.

Community Partnerships

Are partnerships required for the LOI?

Yes. TCP is focused on comprehensive community development with infrastructure at the core. This requires partnership by multiple partners— both those in government who play a key implementation role, and those outside of government who are located in or serve the disadvantaged communities that are the focus of TCP support. The LOI requires lead applicants to identify two key partner organizations who will be engaged during the three-year period of performance. Lead applicants will have the opportunity to add additional partners if selected for TCP support.

Partners can include any organization that is an eligible TCP recipient, but also non-governmental partners such as community-based organizations,

business employers or labor organizations, private sector firms or developers, educational or anchor institutions, workforce development boards, faith-based organizations, community development financial institutions, philanthropic and civic organizations, nonprofits, and community advocacy groups with ties to the focus area.

Lead applicants from larger metropolitan areas or who represent statewide or regional organizations will be viewed more favorably if they include more than the required two key partner organizations.

If selected as a TCP finalist, DOT will notify lead applicants and request that they submit Letters of Commitment electronically from the lead applicant and two key community partners within a determined timeframe. See Section F.1 of the Call for LOIs for more information on Letters of Commitment.

Can a Tribe's transportation department consider the Tribe's TDHE as a community partner, if the TDHE is a separate entity?

Yes. An organization that is eligible to be a lead applicant can partner with other government entities. For instance, a Tribe's transportation department could partner with a Tribally Designated Entity (TDHE) such as a tribal housing authority, tribal housing department, or a nonprofit organization.

My organization is quasi-governmental. Are we eligible to be a lead applicant on the LOI or would we have to find one who is eligible and then sign on as one of their key partners?

It depends. Units of local government are eligible to be a lead applicant or a key partner. For the purposes of TCP, a unit of government includes any agency, office or department of the state, city, county, district, commission, authority, entity, port, or other public corporation organized and existing under statutory law or under a voter approved charter or initiative, and any intergovernmental entity. If your organization status does not meet this definition, you are not eligible to be a lead applicant, but could be a community partner.

What is required from key community partners?

Those organizations identified as key community partners commit to working with the lead applicant and with others in the geographic focus area receiving support from TCP over the three-year period. Broadly speaking, these partnerships are designed to build community capacity

including for meaningful public involvement, to assist in the coordination of infrastructure and community development goals, and/or to help implement the projects and plans developed through the program. Community partners are not required to provide funding to participate, and they may be eligible for capacity building or subcontracting support through TCP.

Applicants selected as finalists for TCP support must submit Letters of Commitment from the lead organization and two key community partners within a timeline determined by DOT. These should be signed by the organization's executive director, commissioner, top elected official, or equivalent.

Partner letters should clearly demonstrate that the partner is aware of its commitment to participate in TCP and must clearly describe:

- The specific anticipated role of the partner organization and nature of the relationship between the lead applicant and partner organization, including a brief description of past formal or informal partnerships, if applicable.
- If applicable, indicate whether your organization may be providing technical assistance, planning or capacity building support that could be directly supported by the TCP.
- The partner organization's relationship to the identified disadvantaged community and, if applicable, its experience with engaging meaningfully with the community.

DOT will provide more instructions on submitting Letters of Commitment to selected finalists. DOT will make final selections for participation in TCP from the pool of finalists who submit eligible Letters of Commitment. DOT may not select all finalists.

Can a community partner with multiple teams under the regional program? (new! 9/29/2023)

Yes. However, given regional focus of the TCP-R pilot, carefully consider whether you want to submit as part of one application with multiple partners or apply as part of multiple applications for one region.

What are some examples of community partner organizations? (new! 10/20/2023)

A partner should be an organization that can help with implementation activities and community engagement. This partnership could include, but is not limited to, another government agency that may have regulatory,

planning, or funding tools it can contribute. Alternatively, it could be a church, local planning firm, or artist collaboration that can assist with inclusive community engagement activities. It could be a local business owner or health center from the identified focus area that will represent business and employer interests during planning processes. It may be a community development corporation, private developer, or neighborhood advocacy group that brings community finance and housing perspectives.

Would the community partner organizations have access to the same Capacity Builder Team as the lead applicant? (new! 10/20/2023)

Yes. The assigned Capacity Builder will work with the lead community applicant and its partners to provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support based on the co-designed scope of work agreed upon by the Capacity Builder and the community.

Letter of Interest Submission Materials

What materials are needed for a complete LOI?

The LOI is intentionally designed to be easy to complete and submit. A complete LOI includes responding to the required items listed on the application webform, which includes short responses to the narrative components; identifying at least two community partner organizations; identifying the geographic area of focus and describing its experience with disadvantages; and indicating organization capacity and experience with DOT funding. DOT has created a worksheet to help applicants prepare their submission. LOIs must be submitted through DOT's TCP webform.

How does an eligible entity submit an LOI?

Letters of Interest must be submitted using the Thriving Communities webform. If required, a paper copy of the LOI application can be requested via email ThrivingCommunities@dot.gov or by calling 202-366-7738.

The LOI must be submitted or postmarked no later than 4:59 PM ET on November 15, 2023.

What if I experience technical issues when submitting my LOI?

DOT emphasizes that applicants should not wait until the last moment to submit their applications. Should technical issues arise, however, DOT must be notified of the issue before the application deadline and will consider how to accommodate the applicant's technical issues. Any notifications regarding technical issues received after the deadline will not be considered.

Are letters of support different than letters of commitment? (new! 10/20/2023)

Yes. Communities submitting a Letter of Interest are welcome, but are not required, to have Letters of Support submitted from community organizations, community officials, or others. Letters of Support can be submitted to ThrivingCommunities@dot.gov and should clearly indicate which Community or Organization Letter of Interest to which they are related. These letters are not considered as part of the merit evaluation process.

DOT does require Letters of <u>Commitment</u> from the lead organization as well as its two key community partners only if selected as a finalist. Applicants do not need to provide Letters of Commitment until notified by DOT that they are finalists.

Program Requirements

How does DOT define community in the Thriving Communities program?

The TCP is designed to support an identified community within which the program's activities for comprehensive community- and data-driven transformative infrastructure and community development activities shall take place. It is not intended to support an entire state, metropolitan planning organization, or transit service area or other similar large-scale geographies but rather those communities and targeted geographies where technical assistance, planning, and capacity building needs are greatest.

Applicants should identify the geographic area that will receive the TCP support based upon locally understood boundaries and transportation patterns and needs. For example, this could be the town, pueblo, or suburb in need of basic transportation infrastructure improvements or located near a major freight facility, or it could be the specific city neighborhood(s) or area of the county along a transportation corridor experiencing high rates of air pollution, or that is wanting to promote more development near transit stations, or where traffic safety and long-term community disinvestment challenges exist. The identified area is referred to as the "community" for the purposes of this program. Lead applicants who are Tribal governments or U.S. territories have the option to identify their entire political geography or identify a more focused area for participation in TCP.

How do I describe the phase of development for which the lead applicant needs technical assistance?

Applicants should note the phase of development that their idea, plan, or project is in. For very early ideas that still require planning and scoping, the applicant would be in the "Project Planning and Scoping" phase. For plans that have been created but need implementational assistance (securing funding, conducting analyses, etc.), the applicant would be in the "Project Development and Design" phase. Finally, applicants with thoroughly planned, specific, project ideas that mainly need help constructing a project would be in the "Project Delivery" face. More descriptions of each phase are below:

- **Project Planning and Scoping**: Technical assistance in this phase will support communities in efforts to identify projects that address a problem in the community and complete planning activities to move these projects toward development and implementation. Examples of areas of technical assistance in this phase include, but are not limited to environmental planning, transportation planning (e.g., corridor studies, pre-engineering studies), visioning and goal setting, feasibility studies, and other planning and scoping activities.
- **Project Development and Design**: Technical assistance in this phase will support communities that have completed planning and scoping activities for one or more projects and who need assistance with completing relevant analyses and identifying and securing funding for project delivery. Specific types of technical assistance that could be provided for communities in this phase include, but are not limited to environmental analysis (e.g., NEPA); equity analysis; mapping and data analysis; Title VI, ADA, and other regulatory compliance; benefit-cost analysis; grant/funding identification and planning; grant writing; and other pre-construction activities.
- **Project Delivery**: Technical assistance in this phase will support communities that have received funding for one or more projects and who need assistance administering funding to successfully deliver projects. Examples of technical assistance activities that could support communities in this phase include but are not limited to project and grant management; value engineering; right of way acquisition; coordination with housing and community development, including anti-displacement strategies; data and technology deployment; and other project delivery activities.

Can you provide additional guidance on how to define the geographic area to be served in the LOI? For example, if an MPO applies, could their entire metropolitan region qualify?

Applicants should identify the geographic area that will receive the TCP support based upon locally understood boundaries and transportation patterns and needs. The region should focus specifically on an area or areas that most need support aligned with the goals of the program (i.e., most disadvantaged or under resourced; severe transportation cost burden or lack of mobility options; safety concerns; sustained disinvestment). The area cannot be an entire state, MPO, or transit service area, but it can be an entire Tribal area or U.S. territory. Tribal and U.S. territory applicants may also consider applying to the Regional capacity building program (TCP-R), where they can receive funding to provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support to communities within their jurisdictions.

How is disadvantaged community status determined and is this an LOI requirement?

DOT requests that applicants describe the way(s) in which the community that would receive TCP support is experiencing disadvantage using data and information from the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)](#), [Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer Tool](#), and/or other local sources.

The CEJST tool demonstrates disadvantage at the census tract level, defining disadvantage as meeting the thresholds for at least one of the tool's categories of burden. A community is disadvantaged for the transportation burden category if it is within a census tract that is:

- At or above the 90th percentile for diesel particulate matter exposure, transportation barriers, or traffic proximity and volume; and,
- At or above the 65th percentile for low income.

The ETC Explorer tool helps communities understand how they are experiencing burdens related to transportation underinvestment by demonstrating community burden in five categories: Transportation Insecurity, Climate and Disaster Risk Burden, Environmental Burden, Health Vulnerability, and Social Vulnerability. The Transportation Insecurity indicator considers transportation access, cost burden, and safety.

Applicants should prioritize communities using these tools to describe and demonstrate transportation-related disadvantage, but may also demonstrate disadvantage in other relevant categories, if applicable and helpful to describe the existing challenges and goals.

Please note that use of CEJST and/or the ETC Explorer to demonstrate disadvantage is strongly encouraged but not required. Applicants may use

locally available data and information to support their application narratives. DOT will provide technical assistance and resources to assist communities in navigating and using data from these tools.

What is a "Community of Practice" and how are they determined?

The TCP recognizes that not all communities are the same, and that peer learning works best when engaging with others who are working in similar types of communities and on similar issues. As such, TCP support is organized into three different Communities of Practice: (1) Main Streets targeted to rural and Tribal communities; (2) Complete Neighborhoods targeted to urban and suburban communities; and (3) Networked Communities located near ports, airports, freight, and rail facilities. Those interested in being a TCP recipient should indicate in their LOI which specific Community of Practice they are seeking to join so that they can be matched with appropriate capacity builders.

Applicants should choose the one that they feel best aligns with their community's goals. For instance, a rural community located near a land port of entry may have more in common with the other Networked Communities working to address freight access and logistics than with another rural community that is more focused on retrofitting its main street. Similarly, a Tribal community located in a large urban metropolitan area may have more in common with other urban neighborhoods trying to promote transit-oriented development than with those located in rural areas working to improve basic infrastructure on Tribal lands. Every community, regardless of which Community of Practice it belongs, will be supported to advance projects and processes aligned with DOT's Strategic Plan and Equity Action Plan priorities for meaningful public involvement, workforce development, labor and hiring preferences, small business development and procurement, climate and decarbonization, safety, and technology transformation.

Are there any reporting requirements for technical assistance recipients?

As a condition of receiving technical assistance, participants are required to participate in program evaluations undertaken by DOT or by the Capacity Builders funded through this program. The evaluation may include an implementation assessment to help identify outstanding technical assistance needs, lessons learned from effective delivery models, and progress toward programmatic and community-identified goals. DOT anticipates that to meet these annual evaluation reporting requirements,

community recipients should spend no more than three hours annually providing qualitative and quantitative input. The lead applicant will also be invited to review and provide input to the final report developed by the Capacity Builder, which will be made publicly available by DOT.

What do you mean by "sub-granting to communities"? (new! 10/20/2023)

Communities will not receive grant funding directly from DOT through the Thriving Communities Program. However, Capacity Builders are required to subgrant at least 20% of their budgets to communities to undertake technical assistance, planning, and capacity building work with the goal of helping to build long-term capacity. The exact amounts and recipient organizations of the subgrants will be negotiated between the Capacity Builder and their assigned communities.

Selection for Participation

How many communities will DOT select to receive support through TCP?

DOT anticipates selecting at least 45-60 communities for deep dive technical assistance support, assuming 15-20 communities are selected per Community of Practice. This number may increase based on the number of highly rated applicants and the number of Capacity Builders selected to provide support.

Will the selected communities be regionally connected or spread out across the U.S.?

Communities that apply and are selected for participation in the TCP-N program are likely to be located across the U.S. Regionally focused TCP efforts will occur through the TCP-R program; TCP-R Capacity Builders will select their own communities to support, in a process separate from this LOI.

Is any support available for those who are not selected for direct technical assistance?

DOT will synthesize the information provided by all eligible LOIs to help inform and tailor DOT's broader technical assistance efforts. DOT may publish information on submissions received to also inform other Capacity Builders within and outside of government working to support communities. Additional support through TCP will be dependent on future Congressional appropriations.

Timelines

When is the LOI submission deadline?

Letters of Interest must be submitted by 4:59 PM ET on November 15, 2023, via the webform. If requested, applicants may submit a paper LOI, but these must be postmarked by November 15, 2023. Late submissions will not be reviewed.

When will DOT announce selected communities?

DOT anticipates selecting communities in spring 2024, with TCP support beginning once cooperative agreements with Capacity Builders are finalized.

When is the scope of work outlined? **(new! 10/20/2023)**

The Capacity Builder works directly with its assigned communities to develop the scope of work. DOT anticipates work with communities will begin approximately four months following the announcement of selected recipients, as DOT must negotiate and execute cooperative agreements with all Capacity Builders before work can begin.

Resources for Potential Applicants

How is Thriving Communities related to other Federal technical assistance programs? **(updated! 9/29/2023)**

DOT's Thriving Communities Program is part of the [Thriving Communities Network](#), an interagency effort intended to facilitate collaboration across initiatives and target deployment of a full range of Federal place-based technical assistance and capacity-building resources to urban, rural, and Tribal communities experiencing a history of economic distress and systemic disinvestment. This effort includes resources to help disadvantaged communities with grant and financial management, pre-development assistance, community engagement, planning, and project delivery support. Visit the [Thriving Communities Network webpage](#) to learn more about partner agencies and their technical assistance programs.

Some Thriving Communities Network agencies have their own Thriving Communities Programs – for example, EPA's Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers. DOT coordinates with Thriving Communities Network agencies on their programs, but they are managed separately. Applicants are permitted to apply for multiple Thriving Communities Programs.

How is disadvantaged community defined? Is it the same as the Areas of Persistent Poverty or Historically Disadvantaged Communities? **(new! 9/29/2023)**

For the purposes of TCP, disadvantaged community is defined as "(1) Any tribal land or any territory or possession of the United States and (2) those census tracts (a) experiencing disproportionate effects (as defined by Executive Order 12898); (b) that contain areas of persistent poverty as defined in 49 U.S.C. section 6702(a)(1); (c) that are historically disadvantaged as defined by CEQ's Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool and DOT's USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer mapping tool for Historically Disadvantaged Communities; or (d) other federally designated community development zones."

Do you have examples of what communities were selected in the first year of the program? (new! 10/20/2023)

Yes, you can find information about the selected FY 2022 Capacity Builders and communities on the FY 2022 TCP Selected Recipients webpage.

Last updated: Friday, October 20, 2023

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