

Call for Letters of Interest to Participate in the Thriving Communities Program (FY 2023)

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) invites Letters of Interest (LOIs) from eligible organizations seeking technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support through the Thriving Communities Program. **LOIs must be submitted no later than 4:59 p.m. ET on November 15, 2023**, through a [fillable web-based form](#) available on [DOT's Thriving Communities Program page](#).

A. What is the Thriving Communities Program?

The Thriving Communities Program (TCP)—established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L.-117-103 Division L, Title I) and funded for FY 2023 in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (PL-117-328 Division L, Title I)—is designed to provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support to advance a pipeline of transportation¹ and community revitalization activities that increase mobility, reduce pollution from transportation sources, expand affordable transportation and housing options, improve health outcomes, facilitate efficient land use, preserve or expand jobs, and enhance connections to health care, education, and food security to benefit disadvantaged populations and communities. The TCP will also support and build local capacity to accelerate projects, access and manage federal funding, and deploy local hiring, workforce development, and inclusive community engagement practices. [View the FY 2023 TCP NOFO](#).

Note that the FY 2023 TCP NOFO also includes a Thriving Communities Program Regional Pilot (TCP-R) for states, U.S. territories, Tribes, and regional planning organizations to apply for funding to provide technical assistance to communities they select and identify in their application. Communities that respond to this LOI will only be paired with Capacity Builders selected through the National program (TCP-N), not Capacity Builders selected through the TCP-R.

DOT is using this LOI process to select at least 45-60 recipients of comprehensive planning, technical assistance, and capacity building support. Community recipients will be composed of coalitions of organizations from a geographic region. Selected recipients will be matched with TCP National Capacity Builders to receive targeted support over two years; and participate in their assigned Community of Practice for peer learning and knowledge sharing across three years.

Participation in DOT's TCP is voluntary and does not obligate the awardee or recipients to apply for DOT grants or credit programs in the future, nor does participation offer preferential treatment to future applications or a guarantee of federal funding. Communities that are selected for TCP participation are still eligible to apply for all other DOT technical assistance and discretionary grant programs.

¹ This includes pre-application planning and technical assistance for capital projects eligible under titles 23, 46, and 49, United States Code.

B. What does the Thriving Communities Program offer?

Over a three-year period (calendar years 2024-2026), TCP recipient communities will have access to:

1. Targeted, individualized deep-dive technical assistance and planning support, including assistance with grant applications, project scoping, planning and pre-development activities, pre-engineering studies, and other activities as determined by selected communities (years one and two).
2. Capacity Building support, including financial, staffing, or resource support – including through subgrants – to lead applicants and their identified community partners to grow local capacity and build local technical expertise (years one and two).
3. A Community of Practice comprised of local and national partners to advance policies, practices, and projects informed by meaningful public involvement and partnership (years one, two, and three).

DOT believes that communities best know the specific challenges and opportunities they face. TCP Capacity Builders will utilize a community-centered approach to work with selected recipients and their community partners to refine areas of focus and tailor technical assistance needs.

The TCP is one of several technical assistance programs administered through DOT's Build America Bureau and included in the interagency [Thriving Communities Network](#) to coordinate and leverage federal place-based technical assistance and capacity building initiatives that align with TCP goals to provide comprehensive support to selected recipient communities. DOT staff from its regional, division, or headquarters offices will serve as federal liaisons to recipient communities.

C. What Types of Communities Does the TCP Support?

Eligible applicants include states; local or Tribal governments including pueblos or villages; United States territories; metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs); transit agencies; regional planning organizations; or other political subdivisions of state or local governments. TCP will prioritize support to disadvantaged communities (see Appendix A for how DOT defines these) and others that face capacity challenges such as limited budgets and staff. Applicants will identify a specific geographic area of focus for TCP, described in more detail in Section E.2 below.

The TCP is focused on helping communities develop and deliver transportation projects that support and align with broader community goals. As such, the lead applicant must form partnerships with other organizations working with or located in the identified focus area to collectively advance technical, organizational, and community capacity to advance a pipeline of comprehensive, community-driven infrastructure and community development projects. The composition of these community partnerships will be at the discretion of the lead applicant, and could include nonprofits, private sector and community-based organizations, labor unions, advocacy groups, other government entities, chambers of commerce and major employers, academic or other anchor institutions, and philanthropic organizations.

The TCP recognizes that not all communities have the same needs, and that peer learning across communities works best when there are shared challenges and goals. Accordingly, the TCP is organized into three different Communities of Practice. Each is described further in Section E.3. Interested TCP recipients should identify to which one (1) of the following three (3)

Communities of Practice they are applying to receive support and participate:

- **Main Streets** – Focused on Tribal and rural communities and the interconnected transportation, housing, community, and economic development issues they face.
- **Complete Neighborhoods** – Focused on urban and suburban communities located within metropolitan areas working to better coordinate transportation with land use, housing, and economic development.
- **Networked Communities** – Focused on those communities located near ports, airports, freight, and rail facilities to address mobility, access, environmental justice, and economic issues including leveraging their proximity to these facilities for wealth-building and economic development opportunities.

Across all three Communities of Practice, the TCP will support selected communities 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.

D. Who should consider applying?

Consider applying to receive planning, technical assistance, and capacity building support if:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	You are a state; local or Tribal government; United States territory; MPO; transit agency; regional planning organization; or other political subdivision of a state or local government (e.g., rural planning transportation organization, economic development authorities (see note in webform), public health department, etc.) committed to advancing the goals of the TCP to support disadvantaged communities; and are prepared to act as a lead applicant (<i>see more information on lead applicant responsibilities in Section E.1</i>).
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	You have a team, or can assemble a team, of community partner organizations committed to working with your organization over the three-year TCP period to grow local capacity.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Your organization or community faces challenges advancing project planning, development, and/or delivery activities needed for transformative infrastructure projects.

E. How do I apply?

Those interested in receiving technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support through the TCP must submit an LOI no later than 4:59 p.m. EST on November 15, 2023. LOIs must be submitted by [completing the fillable webform](#) on the [DOT Thriving Communities webpage](#).

A complete LOI responds to the steps outlined below. Interested applicants can prepare for online submission by utilizing the [preparation worksheet](#) and by following the steps described below.

1. Form a Thriving Communities Team

One of DOT's equity goals is that individuals and communities have a greater voice in transportation decisions affecting them. The TCP framework is organized around collaborative local capacity building to support comprehensive and integrated infrastructure and community development approaches. Those submitting an LOI for TCP assistance must identify a lead applicant and an additional two key community partners. A key partner is one who can help with implementation activities and community engagement and must be a different organization than the lead applicant. For instance, 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. These are merely illustrative examples.

Applicants may assemble a team of more than two community partners if doing so supports the team's ability to meaningfully engage with the community to identify, plan, and deliver comprehensive and transformative transportation projects. For those applicants working in larger communities or metropolitan areas, DOT will view more favorably LOIs that include more than two partners and those with demonstrated skills, relationships, and experience engaging with or directly representing community interests. Applicants are **not** required to identify more than two partners in the LOI submission, and lead applicants and partners are **not** required to provide funding. If selected for TCP support, applicants may **not** replace or otherwise modify their two key community partners listed in the LOI. However, if selected, lead applicants may add additional members to their team over the two-year period of intensive support.

If selected as a finalist for participation in TCP, the lead applicant will need to submit letters of commitment from its own organization and from both key community partner organizations identified in its LOI by the deadline DOT provides (see Section F.1 for more details).

Community partners are **not required** to make any financial commitments to participate in TCP.

Lead Applicant Role and Responsibility	Who Can be a Community Partner Organization?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lead applicant must be a state; local, or Tribal government; a United States territory; an MPO or rural transportation planning organization; a transit agency; or other political subdivision of a state or local government. • The lead applicant must 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 the assigned TCP Capacity Builder, community partners, and the Bureau throughout the entire three-year period of support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any entity that is eligible to be a lead applicant. • Eligible non-governmental partners include 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. • Any of the above entities who will specifically provide local or regional technical assistance, planning and capacity building support.

2. Identify your community

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, MPO, 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 specific city neighborhood(s) or area(s) of the county along a transportation corridor experiencing high rates of air pollution, or that are 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 United States territories have the option to identify their entire political geography or identify a more focused area for participation in TCP.

Community definitions do not need to align exactly with census tracts; however, applicants will be asked to identify the census tract(s) that the geography receiving support falls into. This will enable DOT to understand and verify locations and disadvantaged status. Applicants may use the [Census Geocoder](#) tool to identify the relevant census tract(s).

3. Describe your community’s experience with disadvantage

DOT will prioritize for selection communities experiencing transportation insecurity or disadvantage and those with low capacity to advance transportation project planning, development, and delivery activities that are necessary for the transformative projects that will help a community thrive. 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 the 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.

4. Identify your transportation phase for support

TCP support is ideal for applicants seeking support to advance a specific project or plan within the geographic area described above. Applicants must describe the relevant project(s) or plan(s) and define which phase of development the project or plan is in, whether “Project Planning and Scoping,” “Project Development and Design,” or “Project Delivery.”

DOT recognizes that some communities seeking TCP support may be considering a project or plan and recognize there are community needs and barriers that may be addressed through planning and/or project development. In these cases, the applicant must describe the key challenge(s) the community is facing that could be overcome through TCP technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support. In this case, the applicant would identify that they are in the “Project Planning and Scoping” phase.

Applicants should describe efforts that have taken place thus far to develop or plan the project or, for communities that don't yet have a plan or project, describe the community's experience studying a problem and considering solutions. Finally, they should also note barriers to continued progress in planning or developing the plan or project, and how TCP support will help the community overcome such barriers.

The transportation phases are described below:

Project Planning and Scoping

Technical assistance in this phase will support communities in efforts to identify and scope projects that address a problem or set of challenges in the community and assist with 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, community engagement, 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 and permitting; equity analysis; travel forecasting; mapping and data analysis; Title VI, Americans with Disabilities Act, 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; environmental analysis and permitting; coordination with housing and community development, including anti-displacement strategies; zoning and land use reforms; data and technology deployment; and other project delivery activities.

5. Identify your Thriving Communities Community of Practice

Each lead applicant and its community partners must determine which Community of Practice it seeks to participate in based upon the community size, location, needs, and priorities. Each Community of Practice will focus on advancing equity through transportation improvements by addressing environmental injustice, mobility, housing choice, public health, pollution, workforce development, labor issues, and economic development through meaningful public involvement and other inclusive community engagement efforts. Below is an overview of the three Communities of Practice.

Main Streets

The Thriving Communities Main Streets cohort consists of eligible rural recipients from Tribal governments, US Territories, rural communities, and small towns, including communities that are not part of an MPO. Less dense populations, longer travel distances, older and changing demographics, declining or transitioning economies, and smaller government budgets and insufficient staff capacity are just a few of the shared challenges faced by this cohort, which also impact the ability of government to deploy innovative workforce development, climate resilience, equity, and technology solutions.

Illustrative of the possible transportation issues that this cohort may address are road network improvement and safety projects; resiliency and climate related improvements; improving infrastructure condition alongside strategies to support economic and community revitalization with investments in high-speed internet deployment, water and sewage lines, and electric vehicle charging stations; rural transit, micro mobility and transportation alternatives including multimodal trails; context sensitive design solutions that will improve mobility and access particularly for disadvantaged populations and populations of older adults, people with disabilities, youth, and those without access to a personal automobile; transportation worker recruitment and training strategies; and place-making strategies to leverage local cultural, natural and community assets. State DOTs are a critical partner, facility owner, and funder in these communities.

Complete Neighborhoods

The Complete Neighborhoods cohort consists of eligible urban and suburban recipients that are included in a metropolitan planning organization's (MPO) planning area. This cohort is focused on comprehensive strategies to enhance community connectivity, improve coordination of land use, housing, economic development, and transportation, and to accelerate innovation specifically for disadvantaged communities or neighborhoods. Areas of persistent poverty and declining economies or property values create challenges for some, while other communities in this cohort may be experiencing market-induced or climate-induced gentrification and displacement. Technical assistance and capacity building can advance equity by addressing the inequities and systemic barriers created by decades of discrimination, segregation, urban renewal, and suburban sprawl impacting these communities.

Illustrative of the possible transportation issues that this cohort may address are increasing accessibility to affordable and reliable multi-modal transportation options to reach regional jobs and community facilities, such as health care centers, libraries, public schools and grocery stores; deploying transit-oriented and walkable development policies; reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality; and improving safety for all users of the transportation system including bicyclists, pedestrians and people of all ages and abilities. This cohort will look to leverage planning, project development and transportation projects that serve community and economic development goals and promote revitalization including strategies, such as street level retail and community space, urban place-making, and local and economic hiring preferences to support community wealth building in economically disadvantaged communities within the region. MPOs and other types of regional planning bodies are important infrastructure implementation partners, especially to coordinate transportation with housing and economic development planning and advance projects benefitting disadvantaged communities.

Networked Communities

The Networked Communities cohort consists of eligible recipients from urban, suburban, and rural communities that are located near intercity transportation facilities, such as ports, airports, and freight or passenger rail facilities. These communities may face local environmental justice, economic development, and mobility access issues exacerbated by their proximity to large-scale regionally or nationally significant transportation projects. Networked Communities have a distinct need to work with a range of stakeholders to advance equity by addressing both existing and future mobility, health and safety, and workforce development and labor opportunities from locally disadvantaged communities given the context of each hub.

Illustrative of the possible transportation issues that this cohort may face are community access and connectivity; roadway safety and design improvements including of major arterials and service roads; strategies to reduce air and noise pollution including transitioning to decarbonization technologies and clean economies; or preparing for new or extended passenger rail service. Private sector partners may play a critical role as utility and facility owners, rail operators, port and airport authorities, whose interests are generally broader than those of the surrounding community. The technical assistance priorities for this cohort can include advancing equity by addressing environmental injustice, mobility, pollution, public health, economic development, and land use planning through meaningful public involvement for communities, particularly those that are lower income and/or have a higher proportion of people of color, that reside near multimodal hubs.

The table below summarizes the target applicants for each cohort. For more information on the transportation areas of focus for each cohort, view the [Thriving Communities Program FY 2022 Selected Communities Fact Sheet](#).

TCP Community of Practice	Target Applicants
Main Streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible applicants located in or working with Tribal lands, United States territories, rural communities, and small towns, including communities that are not covered by an MPO. Use this MPO database to identify whether your community is covered by an MPO.
Complete Neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible applicants located in or representing metropolitan areas with an MPO. Use this MPO database to identify whether your community is covered by an MPO.
Networked Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible applicants in or representing communities of any size that are located near intercity transportation facilities such as ports, airports, and freight or rail facilities

6. Complete LOI Worksheet

A set of additional questions are included in the [LOI submission form](#). To help prepare, review the [LOI worksheet](#) that includes all the questions that will be asked of lead applicants. The worksheet can be downloaded and saved to be used as a working draft in advance of submission of the webform.

7. Prepare Short Answer Responses

Applicants are required to respond to a series of short questions to describe their community partnerships, needs and experience with disadvantage, and anticipated outcomes of receiving TCP support. These short responses will be evaluated as part of the Merit Review. Applicants will prepare answers to the following six prompts:

Community Partnerships

- Describe the relationship between the lead applicant and the two key community partners included in the LOI, including a description of how the partners have worked collaboratively in the past (if applicable); and how they anticipate working together with TCP support to address transportation, equity, environmental, health, safety, housing and or/or other economic issues in the community.
- Describe the lead applicant and key community partners' experience building relationships to meaningfully engage with or represent community interests, particularly experience that demonstrates a commitment to including people with Limited English Proficiency, tribal communities, and/or those with disabilities, and/or other under-represented groups.

Community Needs and Challenges

- Describe the key challenges or needs (transportation, equity, environmental, health and safety, housing, and/or economic) that the identified community faces, including those caused by harmful historic or current policies (e.g., displacement, discrimination, segregation, exclusionary zoning) that could be addressed through the TCP.
- Describe the technical or capacity challenges the applicant or community has faced when seeking federal or other funding or delivering transportation projects, or in trying to coordinate infrastructure projects with broader community and economic development efforts. Please note if there are challenges you have faced in trying to apply for federal grants or that have made past applications unsuccessful where TCP support could help to address.

Community Vision and Goals

- Describe the community's plan(s) or project(s) for which TCP support is being sought to advance. Please include information about how the plan(s) or project(s) align with other non-transportation efforts, how the plan(s) or project(s) support specific community and/or organization goals, and any work that has been undertaken related to the project(s) or plan(s). Alternatively, if no formal project or plan exists, describe key community challenges that may be addressed through TCP support and the efforts undertaken to

study the problem and potential solutions, and how those solutions support community goals.

- Describe the community and/or organizational core competencies to be gained through participation in the TCP, including the anticipated outcomes of longer-term capacity building for broader community goals. Capacity building activities could include activities designed to improve the ability of an organization to design and implement the necessary technical, financial, business, data analysis, and management skills of grantees to access federal funding, meet federal requirements, undertake statewide and metropolitan long-range planning and programming activities, and implement other activities that broadly support project development and delivery.

8. Submit your Letter of Interest Online

The lead applicant must submit the LOI by 4:59 p.m. ET on November 15, 2023 via [the webform](#). Late submissions will not be reviewed.

Please review your LOI to ensure all fields have been completed before submitting the form. Please do not submit the webform more than once. If an applicant inadvertently submits the webform more than once, DOT will evaluate the latest submission unless otherwise directed.

Potential applicants can request paper copy materials at:

Telephone: (202) 366-7738
Mail: U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
W12-412
Washington, DC 20590

Applicants may also submit paper copy LOIs to the same mailing address listed above. Submissions must be postmarked no later than November 15, 2023.

In the event of any technical challenges, please contact Monica Guerra at ThrivingCommunities@dot.gov in advance of the application deadline. Note that extensions due to technical challenges will not be considered for technical issues reported after the deadline noted above. Please attempt to submit your LOI form early, and do not wait until the last moment.

F. Additional Program Requirements

1. Obtain Letters of Commitment

DOT anticipates selection of finalists in early 2024. If selected as a finalist to participate in the TCP, DOT will notify the lead applicant and request letters of commitment from the lead applicant and the two key community partners to be submitted electronically as a condition of participation in the program. DOT will provide additional instructions at that time for the process to submit letters.

REQUIRED IF NOTIFIED AS A FINALIST: Lead Applicant Letter of Commitment

The lead applicant letter of commitment should be signed by the organization's senior executive committing the organization to playing the lead coordinating role for its community team if selected as a finalist. The letter should clearly demonstrate that the senior executive is aware of its commitment of staff resources for the three-year period of performance, including to:

- Coordinate with the assigned Capacity Builder and engage in the TCP Community of Practice.
- Coordinate with and meaningfully engage with the identified community partners and with other staff or departments in the lead applicant agency.
- Coordinate and submit the required reporting detailed in section F.2 of this LOI.
- Participate in annual meetings with Capacity Builders and DOT.

REQUIRED IF NOTIFIED AS A FINALIST: Community Partner Letters of Commitment

The two key community partners identified in the LOI must also submit a letter of commitment signed by the organizations' executive director, commissioner, top elected official, or equivalent if the team is selected as a finalist to participate in TCP. 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.

2. Reporting and Evaluation

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.

DOT is interested in the opportunities for broader outreach and shared learning to inform future program design. This may include an annual 1.5-day TCP convening organized by DOT for capacity builders, recipients, and their community partners. Funding will be provided through TCP to enable up to 3 individuals total from the lead applicant organization and/or community partner organizations to participate, if required.

3. Administration Priorities

It is the policy of DOT to reflect Administration priorities related to Title VI and Civil Rights and Performance and Program Evaluation, to the extent possible and consistent with law. Those applicants selected for participation in the TCP are expected to advance these priorities via the planning, capacity building, and technical assistance they receive during the three-year period of engagement.

G. How will Community Partners be selected?

DOT anticipates selecting at least 45-60 communities to receive intensive support through the FY 2023 program; with each community assigned to a specific Community of Practice and National Capacity Builder. The exact number of communities selected will be dependent upon the LOIs received, the number of Capacity Builder teams selected, and the design of each Community of Practice.

DOT may share publicly the information submitted through the LOIs to promote broader awareness of the challenges faced by disadvantaged communities and their related technical assistance needs and to facilitate connections with other federal or non-governmental technical assistance resources.

1. Eligibility Review

An Eligibility Review Team comprised of DOT and contractor staff will review all LOIs to confirm eligibility. The Eligibility Review Team will disqualify from consideration any LOI that:

1. Does not identify an eligible entity as a lead applicant.
2. Does not identify two key unique and eligible community partners.
3. Does not submit all required LOI information, including providing substantive responses to all questions in the LOI form.
4. Is not submitted or postmarked by November 15, 2023, with the exception of those that encounter technical issues that are documented in advance of the deadline.

LOIs determined to be eligible will be advanced to a Merit Review Team for evaluation based on the Needs-Based Selection Criteria and Priority Considerations described below.

2. Merit Review

An Evaluation Team comprised of DOT, inter-agency federal staff, and contractor staff will evaluate each eligible LOI based on the following evaluation criteria. Please read each criterion carefully.

TCP Rating Factor	
Community Partnerships	
A	Strength of Lead-Partner Relationship
B	Experience with Meaningful Public Engagement
Community Needs and Challenges	
A	Community Challenges Aligned with TCP Support
B	Evidence of Technical or Capacity Challenges
Community Vision and Goals	
A	Description of TCP Project(s) or Plan(s)
B	Outcomes of Capacity Building Support

Community Partnerships

Merit reviewers will evaluate:

- The depth of the relationship between the lead applicant and the two key community partners, including how the partners have worked collaboratively in the past to address transportation, equity, environmental, health, safety, housing, and/or other economic issues in the community.
- The lead applicant and key community partners’ experience building relationships to meaningfully engage with or represent community interests.

Community Needs and Challenges

Merit reviewers will evaluate:

- The key challenges (transportation, equity, environmental, health and safety, housing, and/or economic) that the identified community faces, including those caused by harmful historic or current policies (e.g., displacement, discrimination, segregation, exclusionary zoning), including how the challenges align with issues addressed through the TCP.
- The technical or capacity challenges the applicant or community has faced when seeking federal or other funding or delivering transportation projects, or in trying to coordinate infrastructure projects with broader community and economic development efforts.

Community Vision and Goals

Merit reviewers will evaluate:

- The description of the planning or project (s) underway for which TCP support is being sought, including how the plan(s) or project(s) align with other non-transportation efforts, and how the plan(s) or project(s) support specific community and/or organizational goals.
- The community and/or organizational core competencies to be gained through participation in the TCP, including the anticipated outcomes of longer-term capacity building for broader community goals.

The Evaluation Team will assign a rating of ‘High,’ ‘Medium,’ or ‘Low’ to each of the three categories of criteria described above.

Rating Scale	High	Medium	Low
Description	The LOI is substantively and comprehensively responsive to all elements of the criterion. It makes a strong case for its partnerships, needs, or vision.	The LOI is moderately responsive to all elements of the criterion. It makes a moderate case for its partnerships, needs, or vision.	The LOI is minimally responsive to all elements of the criterion. It makes a weak case for its partnerships, needs, or vision.

The Evaluation Team will assign an overall LOI rating based on the individual criteria category ratings. The overall LOI rating may be ‘Highly Recommended,’ ‘Recommended,’ or ‘Not Recommended.’

Overall LOI Rating	Individual Criteria Ratings
Highly Recommended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least two ‘High’ ratings, and • Zero ‘Low’ ratings
Recommended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or more ‘High’ ratings, and • No more than one ‘Low’ rating; or • Three ‘Medium’ ratings; or • Two ‘Medium’ ratings and one ‘Low’ rating
Not Recommended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than one ‘Low’ rating

The Evaluation Team will advance Highly Recommended LOIs to the Senior Review Team (SRT), which is comprised of DOT and HUD senior leadership as determined by the Under Secretary of Transportation for Policy (“Under Secretary”). At its discretion, the SRT will also consider ‘Recommended’ LOIs, to the extent that these applications fulfill Administration goals.

3. Team and Community Verification

DOT will notify lead applicants if their team has been selected as a finalist and will request that the lead applicant submit the required letters of commitment by a deadline to be determined by DOT, as noted in Section F.1 of this document. DOT will provide additional instructions on the process to submit letters. For those that fail to submit by the deadline, DOT may follow-up with a second and final request to submit letters. If letters are not submitted as requested per DOT instructions, the team will not be considered for selection to receive support through TCP.

4. Senior Review Team

The SRT will review all eligible ‘Highly Recommended’ and select ‘Recommended’ LOIs and anticipates selecting at least 45-60 applicants for participation in the TCP. The SRT will develop a list of applicants for consideration and final selection by the Under Secretary of Transportation for Policy, who may consult the Secretary of Transportation on those selections.

The SRT will consider the following when making final decisions:

- Diversity of geographies, community types, and lead applicant types.
- Communities and/or lead applicants and community partners with the greatest demonstrated need and/or lowest level capacity and resources. This includes communities with the greatest history of harm, existing socioeconomic disparities (including historically disadvantaged and persistent poverty), environmental burdens and risks, and/or those with disproportionate rates of pollution and poor air quality.
- Communities that share similar challenges, project elements, and/or goals as other applicants for technical assistance that can fit well into a specific Community of Practice supported by a particular National Capacity Builder.
- Alignment with regions and communities identified for priority consideration through other federal technical assistance initiatives such as, but not limited to, those included in the interagency Thriving Communities Network (e.g. the Department of Agriculture's Rural Partners Network, the Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plan Communities and Economic Revitalization, the Economic Development Administration's Economic Recovery Corps, and the Government Services Administration's Land Port of Entry Program); and other Build America Bureau technical assistance programs (Regional Infrastructure Accelerators, Rural and Tribal Technical Assistance Pilot Program, and Innovative Finance Technical Assistance).

The SRT will view more favorably LOIs that include more than two partners if the defined geographic area of support is large and those with demonstrated skills, relationships, and experience engaging with or directly representing community interests.

APPENDIX A. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of the TCP, DOT has defined the following definitions.

Areas of Persistent Poverty: An area of persistent poverty is a county with 20 percent or more of the population living in poverty over the 30 years preceding the date of enactment of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, November 15, 2021, as measured by the 1990 and 2000 decennial census and the most recent Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates. Alternatively, data to support eligibility may also be from any census tract with a poverty rate of at least 20 percent as measured by the 2013-2017, five-year data series available from the American Community Survey of the Census Bureau.

Capacity Building: Activities designed to improve the ability of an organization to design and implement the necessary technical, financial, business, data analysis, and management skills of grantees to access federal funding, meet federal requirements, undertake statewide and metropolitan long-range planning and programming activities, and implement other activities that broadly support project development and delivery. This includes developing long-term community capacity to sustain partnerships and engage non-governmental partners, leadership and workforce development, and program evaluation.

Community-based organizations: The term "community-based organization" means a public or private nonprofit organization of demonstrated effectiveness that (A) is representative of a community or significant segments of a community; and (B) provides educational or related services to individuals in the community.

Disadvantaged Community: (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.

Equitable development: Equitable development is a development approach for meeting the needs of all communities, including underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering livable places that are healthy and vibrant for all.

Historically Disadvantaged Community: Any tribal land or any territory or possession of the United States, or certain census tracts census experiencing disadvantage when its overall disadvantaged index score places it in the 65% (or higher) of all US census tracts in the [USDOT Equitable Transportation Community \(ETC\) Explorer](#).

Indian Tribe: For the purposes of this NOFO, Indian Tribes include federally recognized Tribal Governments (as defined by the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#)) and state-recognized Tribal Governments.

Location-efficient housing: Housing that benefits from being located in communities near work, schools, services, and amenities and has accessibility to public transportation networks.

Meaningful Public Involvement: A process that proactively seeks full representation from the community, considers public comments and feedback, and incorporates that feedback into a project, program, or plan when possible. The impact of community contributions encourages early and continuous public involvement and brings diverse viewpoints and values into the decision-making process. This process enables the community and agencies to make better-informed decisions through collaborative efforts.

Place-making: A multi-faceted and collaborative approach to the planning, design, and management of the public realm to re-activate or co-create active, accessible and inviting public spaces that promote the well-being of people.

Planning: Efforts that support inclusive and meaningful public participation and community engagement in developing and implementing a range of activities to identify, assess, and evaluate community needs, including but not limited to environmental reviews, data and mapping visualization, market and mobility studies, health and safety impacts, and climate vulnerability assessments. Planning assistance may involve developing or designing for a program or project that aligns with the goals of the DOT Strategic Plan: <https://www.transportation.gov/dot-strategicplan>.

Rural: For the purposes of this LOI, communities are in rural areas if:

- The community is not located in a 2020 Census Bureau designated urban area, or;
- The community is located in a 2020 Census Bureau designated urban area with a population of 50,000 or less

A community is not in a rural area if located in a 2020 Census Bureau designated urban area that has a population of more than 50,000 people. Applicants may use [TigerWeb](#) to determine if their community is located in a 2020 Urban Area. A list of urban areas with corresponding populations for the 2020 Census is available in the [Federal Register](#).

Technical Assistance: Programs, processes, and resources that provide targeted support, knowledge or expertise to a community, region, organization, or other beneficiary to help them access and utilize federal funding to develop, analyze, design, and deliver transportation plans and projects.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): A prioritized listing/program of transportation projects covering a period of 4 years that is developed and formally adopted by an MPO as part of the metropolitan transportation planning process, consistent with the metropolitan transportation plan, and required for projects to be eligible for funding under title 23 U.S.C. and title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53.