U.S. Department of Transportation

2024 Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Discretionary Grant Program

Recommended Outline for Project Readiness Narrative (*Capital Construction*)

July 2024

Overview

- This outline is intended to aid preparation of the Project Readiness section of the required RCP application Narrative. A Project Readiness section is required for all Capital Construction applications (it is <u>not</u> required for Planning applications).

- The narrative is a key part of every application where the applicant provides information on the project background, scope, and status, and states their case for meeting the RCP merit criteria.

- Following this outline is not required, but it reflects key information that DOT reviewers will use to assign a rating for each application's project readiness and environmental risk. Providing the information below in a clear, understandable manner will aid the DOT application reviewers in more accurately evaluating project risk. Omitting information or including unclear or inconsistent information may impact the risk rating. If desired, applicants may include readiness information beyond what is specified below.

Application Narrative Formatting Requirements

- For Capital Construction Grants, the narrative should not exceed 20 pages.

- The Narrative should be in PDF format, with font size of no less than 12-point Times New Roman, single-spaced, minimum 1-inch margins on all sides, and include page numbers.

- Title page and table of contents are not required, but if included, these parts of the document do not count against the page limit.

- Supplemental Project Readiness and Benefit Cost Analysis information for Capital Construction Grants may be included as hyperlinks, appendices, or additional attachments, and will not count against the page limit.

Recommended Outline

The recommended outline of the Narrative for Capital Construction applications is provided below. While most of the information used for assessing project readiness should appear in section D, sections A, B, and F may also contain information relevant to project readiness. See the following pages for detailed prompts on the recommended project readiness content in each section.

A. *Overview*

B. *Location & Map*

C. Response to Merit Criteria

D. *Project Readiness / Environmental Risk*

E. Benefit Cost Analysis

F. *Supporting Appendices / Attachments* (optional – does not count against page limit)

A. Overview

This section should provide an introduction to the scope of the project, describe the barrier(s), harm(s), or burden(s) posed by the eligible facility(ies) or transportation infrastructure, describe the history and character of the community(ies) most impacted by the facility(ies) or transportation infrastructure, describe how the proposed project will address any burden(s)/harm(s) consistent with the characteristics of the community, and any other high-level background information that would be useful to understand the rest of the application.

Following is a list of suggested section headings and prompts to assist the applicant in structuring the project overview discussion. Other headings may be added as desired by the applicant to provide a complete project overview.

1. Introduction

    Provide general background information on the applicant (and any partners), grant request, proposed improvements, and community(ies) where the project is located.

2. Project History

    Describe the history and character of the community(ies) and transportation facility(ies) relevant to understanding the transportation needs and proposed improvements.

3. Transportation Needs

    Describe the transportation need(s)/ barrier(s)/ harm(s) to be investigated and addressed. Where possible, include data, visualizations, and/or other evaluations that describe the transportation needs in greater detail; these may be hyperlinked, separately attached, or included as appendices, if desired.

4. Proposed Improvements

    Describe the overall project and each of the proposed transportation improvements that comprise the project. Describe how the proposed improvements will address the transportation need(s) identified above. Describe any related projects or improvements delivered in the recent past, present, or near future and any interdependencies between the related projects and the project covered by this proposal. Attach a project map that clearly identifies the project end points (i.e., logical termini), locations of key proposed improvements, and any related or interdependent projects. If desired, this may be integrated with the map described in section B, below.

B. Location & Map

This section should describe the location of the eligible facility that creates barriers to community connectivity, including to mobility, access, or economic development, as well as a description of the surrounding community(ies) impacted by the facility(ies). This section should include a detailed geographic description and map of the facility location and identify elements of the existing transportation network. The general location map may be integrated with the map of project termini and proposed improvements described in section A, above.

C. Response to Merit Criteria

The merit criteria section is not directly related to project readiness, and it will be reviewed in a separate merit criteria review. See RCP NOFO sections D.2.iv.c and E.1.i for more details on merit criteria.

D. Project Readiness

This section should include sufficient information for DOT to assess the project's likelihood of being included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) or equivalent (Metropolitan or Tribal Transportation Improvement Program – TIP or TTIP) by the time of award obligation, and in the Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan for transit projects. It should also demonstrate that the project can be reasonably expected to begin construction in a timely manner. As DOT will perform an Environmental Risk review, the applicant should provide a project schedule and address required approvals and permits, NEPA class of action and status, public involvement, right-of-way (ROW) acquisition plans, risk assessment, and risk mitigation strategies.

Following is a list of suggested section headings and prompts to assist the applicant in structuring the project readiness discussion to thoroughly describe the environmental risk. Other headings may be added as desired by the applicant to provide a complete description of readiness.

1. Planning & Constructability

    o   STIP / TIP / TTIP / TAM Plan: Is the project already listed in the STIP, TIP, TTIP, and/or TAM Plan (if applicable)? If so, provide links or attachments that show the project listing in the applicable plans/programs. If the project is not yet listed, describe any coordination that has/will occur to facilitate listing in the applicable plans/programs and the anticipated date when listing will occur.

    o   Consistency with Other Plans: Is your proposal listed in and/or consistent with any other plans (e.g., the Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan and/or Metropolitan Long-Range Plan)? If so, please summarize and provide a link to appropriate project listing.

    o   Property Acquisition / Right-of-Way (ROW): Who is the owner of the existing facility? Will any new ROW acquisition be required, and if so, from whom? If acquisition will be required, describe the status and anticipated schedule for the acquisition. Will any special ROW permits or approvals be needed? If so, please describe.

    o   Construction Techniques and Phasing: Will the proposed improvements require unique construction techniques, non-standard project delivery methods (e.g., approaches other than design-bid-build), and/or construction phasing? If so, please describe.

2. Proposed Schedule

    o   List the completed and/or anticipated dates (month and year) for the following key milestones (include additional milestones if desired). Dates provided should reflect a realistic amount of time to complete each milestone. Ensure that dates provided here are consistent with dates provided elsewhere in the application. A more detailed graphical schedule may be attached, but at a minimum, it should include the following milestones in month and year format. ***Note: the recommended obligation deadline for FY 2024 RCP funds is September 30, 2027.***

        ▪   Start and end of preliminary design

        ▪   Start and end of the NEPA process

        ▪   Start and end of obtaining permits/approvals (if required)

        ▪   Project listed in STIP, TIP, TTIP, and/or TAM Plan (as applicable)

        ▪   Start and end of final design

        ▪   Start and end of ROW acquisition (if required)

        ▪   Anticipated finalization of RCP grant agreement (if awarded)

- Anticipated obligation of grant funds (if awarded)

- Start and end of construction

o Project Development Phases to be Funded with RCP: Describe the project development phase(s) proposed to be funded with RCP funds (if awarded), and whether RCP funds are proposed to be used for phases other than ROW acquisition and construction (e.g., for design, NEPA, etc.). Note: typically, milestones for establishing the grant agreement and obligation of funds should be scheduled before any activities/phases that will use RCP funds.

3. NEPA & Permitting

o NEPA Class of Action: List the class of action/type of document that has already been or will be prepared to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (e.g., a categorical exclusion, an environmental assessment, an environmental impact statement, or class of action not yet determined). If multiple NEPA documents are being prepared for this proposal, briefly explain why, and complete the prompts below for each document.

o NEPA Status and Milestones: Briefly describe the status of NEPA compliance (e.g., not started, underway, or complete), the anticipated project impacts, and proposed mitigation measures. If the NEPA process has been completed, provide the final approval date for the NEPA document. If the NEPA process has not yet been completed, list the key remaining milestones for the NEPA process, their status, and their anticipated completion dates. Identify any anticipated challenges to timely completing the NEPA process.

o Link to NEPA Documentation: If draft or final NEPA documentation is available, provide it as a hyperlink, attachment, or appendix.

o Reevaluation and Post-Approval Changes: Describe any planned and/or completed efforts to reevaluate the NEPA documentation between the final NEPA approval and beginning of construction. Reevaluation may be warranted based on the passage of time and/or changes in the project scope, setting, impacts, or applicable requirements since the final NEPA approval.

o Permits and Approvals: List any federal, state, or local permits and approvals anticipated to be needed for the project (e.g., Clean Water Act Section 404 permit, Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation, etc.). Provide the status of each permit or approval and the date that the permit or approval was obtained or is anticipated to be obtained. Summarize and attach relevant correspondence or documentation of consultation with permitting agencies.

o Coordination with DOT: Identify the federal lead agency for the NEPA process and any joint-lead agencies. Describe any coordination that has occurred with an agency or operating administration of USDOT regarding the project proposal and/or NEPA analysis. Describe any coordination with state, county, or local transportation agencies regarding preliminary design and the NEPA process.

4. Project Support

o Public and Agency Involvement Process: Summarize the key events and techniques used to engage the public and other stakeholders during the NEPA process. Highlight efforts to engage disadvantaged communities and communities likely to be affected by the project, including details on compliance with environmental justice requirements and access for persons with disabilities and limited English proficiency. These efforts may include public meetings, a public website, presentations to community groups, newsletters, online outreach, etc.

- o Public and Agency Involvement Results: Summarize the support, opposition, and/or other notable feedback related to the project from the following groups and describe how stakeholder feedback has been integrated into project development and design:
  - The public, including members of communities affected by the proposal,
  - Elected officials and/or bodies (e.g., federal and state legislators, city and county councils and boards, etc.),
  - Other entities (e.g., members of business or industry, community organizations, advocacy groups, etc.), and
  - Federal, state, or local agencies (reference any relevant information provided in the Permits and Approvals section above).
- o Attach and reference documentation of support as applicable (e.g., letters of support, letters of commitment, resolutions, summaries of public comments, etc.)

5. Risk & Mitigation

   Describe the process used by the applicant to assess risks to project development and delivery. Briefly summarize any risks identified and strategies proposed or implemented to mitigate those risks. Describe the potential effects (if any) of each risk on meeting the key project delivery schedule milestones presented in the Proposed Schedule.

E. Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) for Capital Construction Grants

The BCA section is not directly related to project readiness, and it will be reviewed in a separate BCA review. See RCP NOFO section D.2.iv.e and E.1.iv for more details on BCA.

F. Supporting Appendices / Attachments

Consider including the following kinds of documents as appendices to the project narrative, hyperlinks to an external site, or as separate files included with the application. This list is not exhaustive.

- Additional figures, maps, and/or plans showing the project area, existing conditions, and proposed improvements
- Planning studies or documentation that detail the existing needs, early scoping and screening activities and decisions, and preliminary coordination with the public and relevant agencies
- Pages from the TIP, STIP, TTIP, and/or TAM Plan demonstrating project listing in those documents (as applicable)
- Detailed/graphical project schedule (at a minimum, the schedule should include the milestones identified in section D.2, above)
- Draft or final NEPA documentation for the project (if available)
- Detailed project risk analysis
- Letters and other documentation of support from key stakeholders (e.g., resolutions, letters of financial commitment, letters demonstrating coordination with permitting agencies, etc.)
- Summaries of public feedback received in support of and/or in opposition to the proposal