U.S.DOT Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Equity

Fact Sheet for KPI:

By 2025, increase by 5% the number of U.S. DOT discretionary grant applicants from disadvantaged communities who have not applied for U.S. DOT funding since prior to FY 2016.

The U.S. Department of Transportation ("DOT" or "Department") has identified several Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor implementation of the Department's FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan and the Equity Action Plan. **This KPI is included in both documents and is helping the Department understand whether more applicants from disadvantaged communities are getting in the door to access DOT funds.**

Current Status of this KPI

DOT calculates this KPI using applicant data from Grants.gov. DOT set a baseline for this KPI, shown in Table 1, by calculating the percentage of unique applicants from disadvantaged communities applying to USDOT's discretionary grant programs for the first time in 2022 and found that 28% of them were from disadvantage communities. In January 2024 DOT calculated applicant results from FY 2023 and found that 30% of unique applicants were from disadvantaged communities, a 2-percentage point increase.

DOT wants to see this metric increase by 5% by 2025, as this will be an indication that DOT has lowered the barrier to participate in grant programs such that more new applicants from disadvantaged communities are applying for grants.

DOT will continue to review grant applicants to monitor progress towards the target over time.

Table 1: KPI Status Summary

KPI	Baseline (2022)	Update (2023)	Target
Percentage of New Applicants from Disadvantaged Communities	28%	30%	33% by FY 2025 5% increase from baseline by 2025

Why it is important

DOT has traditionally played a critical role in maintaining and improving the transportation network across the Nation through Federal funding. Each year, the Department awards discretionary grants through a competitive process based on legislative and regulatory requirements, as well as published selection criteria. The discretionary grant funding process begins with Congressional legislation and

concludes with the closeout of the awarded process. DOT is committed to ensuring that historically overburdened and underserved communities in urban and rural areas benefit from access to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's (BIL) generational investment in the Nation's infrastructure and created this performance measure to help advance that goal. Barriers that currently prevent underserved communities from accessing DOT discretionary grants include lack of resources needed to develop successful discretionary grant applications and the complex environment of Federal grant opportunities.[1]

How the KPI was developed

In response to the unprecedented level of discretionary funding made available through BIL, DOT sought to ensure equitable distribution of funding opportunities and to improve access for historically disadvantaged and underserved communities. DOT identified several barriers to entry for new applicants and worked to proactively support their ability to apply for discretionary grant funding. This metric tracks how successful DOT is in its mission of reaching new communities and addressing barriers to applying for funds.

How it is calculated

DOT's method for calculating this KPI is summarized as follows:

1. Gather data from Grants.gov for all applicants to DOT Discretionary Grants across all Operating Agencies from Federal fiscal years 2016 through 2023.
2. Data Cleaning – DOT isolated the following fields from the records, standardized the data and removed duplicate records.
   - SAM_UEI
   - SAM_DUNS
   - DUNS_in_application
   - Legal_Business_Name
   - State
   - Zip_Code
   - Applicant_Type
3. DOT then identified the first time each applicant applied to a USDOT program using SAM UEI and application time stamp submittal data provided through Grants.gov.
   a. To establish the baseline DOT considered applicants that applied for the first time between 2016-2021 as "existing" and those applied for the first time in FY22 as "new."
   b. To calculate the FY 2023 update DOT considered those applicants that applied for the first time between 2016-2022 as "existing" and those applied for the first time in FY23 as "new."
4. Count how many "new" unique applicants applied for the first time.
5. Identify whether each applicant represents a disadvantaged community using the applicant's geographic location or if the applicant represents a disadvantaged population based on the "applicant type" selected in Grants.gov (see more on these definitions in next section).

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[1] U.S. Department of Transportation, *Equity Action Plan,* January 2022, https://www.transportation.gov/priorities/equity/actionplan

6. Count how many "new" unique applicants from disadvantaged communities applied for funding in the given year.
7. Calculate the percentage of new (unique) applicants from disadvantaged communities that applied for funding for the first time in the given year.

Please note – To identify Parent/child grantees, the only data available is on awarded grants. Because there could be an inherent difference in the grantees that are awarded compared to the universe of all applicants, DOT does not believe this subset is representative of all applicants and using this subset would introduce a bias. Therefore Parent/child grantees were not considered in the baseline calculation.

Key Definitions

Existing Applicants: Applicants who submitted an application for any DOT-sponsored discretionary grant program in Grants.gov between-

- FY2022 Baseline- 2016-2021
- FY2023 Update- 2016-2022

New Applicants: Applicants who submitted an application for any DOT-sponsored discretionary grant program on Grants.gov for the first time in-

- FY2022 Baseline- FY22
- FY2023 Update- FY23

Disadvantaged Communities: As set forth in Executive Order (EO) 14008 on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, disadvantaged communities are those that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. Disadvantaged individuals or groups may be more likely to experience negative outcomes such as unemployment, poor health, or reduced access to services and opportunities. In the context of transportation, disadvantaged individuals or communities may also experience negative impacts from lack of transportation sources, which can impact health, or receive fewer benefits from transportation services, which can limit their ability to access jobs, healthcare, education, and other essential services.

DOT used the following criteria to identify applicants from Disadvantaged Communities for the purposes of this KPI:

- **Disadvantaged Community by Geographic Location:**
  - County Level-
    - 50% or more of Census tracts in the county are DACs, and/or
    - 50% or more of the county's population is in DAC Census tracts.
  - Municipality and Township Level-
    - 50% or more of Census tracts intersecting the locality are DACs and/or
    - 50% or more of the locality's population is in DAC Census tracts.

(*Intersection between Census tracts and localities was identified with Census Bureau block-level crosswalks between Census blocks and larger geographies, using 2020 Census population at the block level*).

  - All Other Categories (Assigned by Zip Code)-
    - 50% or more of Census tracts intersecting the ZCTA are DACs and/or

▪ 50% or more of the ZCTA's population is in DAC Census tracts.

(For organizations that did not fall into disadvantaged by applicant type, County Level or Municipality and Township Level, DAC status was assigned based on their ZIP Code. This was done using the Census Bureau's 2020 ZIP Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) geographies, which approximate the areas with addresses in a given ZIP code to sets of Census blocks.)

- **Disadvantaged Applicant by Applicant type:** The population(s) served by the applicants is identified by DOT as an historically underrepresented group-[2]
  o Native American and Alaskan Native tribal governments, tribally-owned corporations, and organizations.
  o All territorial governments (Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa) and local governments within these territories.
  o All minority-serving institutions of higher education (HBCUs, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, and Native American tribal colleges).
  o Public housing/Indian housing authorities.

Non-Disadvantaged Communities: DOT used the following criteria to identify applicants from non-Disadvantaged Communities. Generally speaking, "Applicant by Applicant type" non-disadvantaged entities often serve populations or are themselves spread over large areas, and it was not possible to assign them usefully to a small area.

- Non-Disadvantaged applicant by Geographic Location: Applicants located in zip codes where less than 50% of the census tracts are identified as disadvantaged in the Equitable Transportation Community Explorer.
- Applicant by Applicant type:
  o State governments
  o For-profit organizations **other than** small businesses and those owned by Native American/Native Alaskan tribes.
  o Institutions of higher education **other than** minority-serving institutions and community colleges, since they often draw student bodies from large areas with demographics not closely connected to the areas where they are located.

The following applicant types were dropped from our analysis:

- Private individuals – ineligible applicant to USDOT's programs
- Non-US entities – ineligible applicant to USDOT's programs
- Other – Due to difficulty in determining DAC status we dropped this category from our analysis but are working on a methodology to classify them in the future.

Tools and Data Sources

Key tools and data sources used to calculate this KPI include:

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[2] "Executive Order 14008 of Jan 27, 2021, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad", 86 FR 7619 (2021), https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/01/2021-02177/tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad

- **ETC Explorer Tool**: DOT's Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer is an interactive web application that uses 2020 Census Tracts and data, to explore the cumulative burden communities experience, as a result of underinvestment in transportation, in the following five components: Transportation Insecurity, Climate and Disaster Risk Burden, Environmental Burden, Health Vulnerability, and Social Vulnerability.   The ETC Explorer Tool is used for this KPI to identify DAC communities based on U.S. Census Bureau tract-level data.
- **GRANTS.GOV** application data.

How DOT is advancing this KPI

This KPI supports DOT Strategic Objective 3.4: Proactive Intervention, Planning and Capacity Building, which seeks to ensure that equity considerations for disadvantaged and underserved communities are integrated into the planning, development, and implementation of all transportation investments. DOT tracks progress toward Strategic Objectives through the annual performance report.

It also supports the DOT Equity Action Plan "Proactive Intervention, Planning and Capacity Building" pillar, which aims to ensure historically overburdened and underserved communities in urban and rural areas benefit from access to generational investment in the nation's infrastructure through direct, hands-on technical support for transportation projects with local impact. DOT tracks progress toward the Equity Action Plan through annual updates shown on the website.

Other DOT efforts that support or are supported by this KPI

This KPI relates to the Justice40 and Thriving Communities initiatives and several program-specific goals including "Pilot a new approach that will reduce administrative burden for applicants considering applying for multiple discretionary grant programs."

What DOT is doing to achieve this KPI

To encourage more applicants and increase awardees from disadvantaged communities, the Department has been providing and will continue to provide technical assistance and planning grants to enable disadvantaged and under-resourced communities to advance infrastructure projects that will help them thrive.

DOT has increased its efforts to announce grant opportunities through wide distribution via the Federal Register, press releases, social media posts, and emails to DOT subscription lists. DOT created two new web resources that post current and future grant announcements - the DOT Navigator website, which is a comprehensive resource providing tools and information to help communities understand how to apply for grants and the different requirements within a grant opportunity, as well as the Discretionary Grants Dashboard, which is linked through the Navigator and other USDOT websites. DOT is conducting quarterly DOT Navigator webinars to share information on successful grant writing strategies and spotlight new resources to assist those considering applying for grants, and reducing burdens for low-capacity communities through streamlined grant application processes and match flexibility. This work will also help identify potential beneficiaries of targeted technical assistance and other interventions to increase first-time applicants from disadvantaged communities and help them successfully access and complete the DOT grant process.

In addition to the DOT's Navigator's resources, DOT provides information on how to apply to funding opportunities on individual grant announcements, funding program webpages, and the DOT Navigator

website. Additionally, DOT has created specialized information resources such as FHWA's BIL and Federal Requirements Guidance for Local & Tribal agencies and FTA's Guidance for New Applicants, to provide customized information for different entities that may be seeking Federal grants.

Numerous and varied technical assistance resources have been created by DOT to help those seeking to advance local projects and access federal funding, including but not limited to:

- The Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative was codified in BIL to provide technical assistance to rural and Tribal communities and elevate awareness of rural funding and financing programs. Guided by an executive leadership council, the ROUTES Initiative develops user-friendly toolkits and online information sources, such as webinars, to solicit input and support equitable access to an estimated $44 billion in BIL transportation funding available for rural communities. Dedicated rural technical assistance has led to DOT announcing twice as much discretionary funding to rural applicants in 2022 and 2023 than in the previous 4 years combined.

- The Thriving Communities Program (TCP), which funds local organizations ("Capacity Builders") to provide no-cost technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support to disadvantaged and under-resourced communities, enabling them to advance transportation projects that support community-driven economic development, health, environment, mobility, and access goals. To date U.S.DOT announced more than $44 million in cooperative agreements with seven national and six regional Capacity Builders that are supporting a total of 176 communities in 48 states, including 66% rural communities and 7% tribal communities. In 2023, 39% of Thriving Communities had never received a DOT grant. Today, 62% of those communities are now first-time DOT grant awardees.

- The Reconnecting Communities Institute (RCI), funded through the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program provides training and technical assistance to build organizational or community capacity in transportation planning and identify innovative strategies and solutions for reconnecting communities that are bifurcated by transportation infrastructure that creates barriers. To date, RCI has provided support to 780 communities through writing clinics and 67 communities during office hours. RCI's technical assistance and training is available to selected RCP Program grantees and prospective grantees.

- In January 2024, DOT released a new Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) Spreadsheet Template for Discretionary Grant Programs. This is a resource for applicants to help them get started on their BCA when applying to a DOT grant opportunity with a BCA requirement. The DOT Navigator hosted a webinar on this resource, and many specific funding programs provide tailored webinars to help potential applicants understand BCA requirements and how to utilize this template when developing their applications.