

RPA 2 TA Set-Aside Program Information

The following information pertains to the RPA 2 TA Set-Aside program funds administered in the NIACOG Region. Most of the information pertains to the program across the State, but there are specific items that are specific to RPA 2 and are highlighted as such. RPA 2 TA Set-Aside applications are due to Chris Diggins at NIACOG by March 1, 2024.

Program Purpose and Basics

- The Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA Set-Aside) from the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (23 U.S.C. 133(h)) was authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) that was enacted in November 2021. In the published program guidance, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has several aims for the program:
 - To encourage the investment in projects that upgrade the condition of streets, highways, and bridges, and creates a modern transportation network safe for all users
 - To provide choice across all modes
 - To accommodate new and emerging technologies
 - To make the network sustainable and resilient
 - To ensure the network is more equitable
- TA Set-Aside funds should be used for the repair, rehabilitation, reconstruction, replacement, and maintenance of existing transportation infrastructure, especially the incorporation of safety, accessibility, multi-modal, and resilience features.
- Applicants should consider the safety of all users in project development and use TA Set-Aside funds to address safety whenever possible.
- Consideration should be given for projects and inclusion of project elements that proactively address workforce development and economic development or remove barriers to opportunity such as automobile dependence.
- Funds that have been selected through a competitive process can be “flexed” to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to fund projects for transit agencies and used for transit projects to further the goal of providing an equitable and safe transportation network for travelers of all ages and abilities.
- Funded projects will be carried out under the same rules and procedures as a federally funded highway project. This subjects all projects to Davis-Bacon Act prevailing wage requirements and other applicable federal-aid requirements (e.g., Build America, Buy America, planning, environmental review, letting, etc.). Project sponsors should expect to devote considerable time and resources toward following the federal requirements necessary for their project to be successfully completed.
- For construction projects, the project must be constructible as an independent project and identify a specific project location (including logical project termini where applicable).
- All applications must be accompanied by an official endorsement from the project sponsor (i.e., fully executed resolution by the elected body or board). The endorsement must provide written assurance that the project sponsor will adequately maintain the completed project for its intended public use following the project completion (for most construction projects, this will be a minimum of 20 years) and acknowledge the intent of the project sponsor to provide all funds required to complete the project beyond any TA Set-Aside award.
- RPA 2 TA Set-Aside program funds may be reimbursed up to 80 percent of eligible project CONSTRUCTION costs. Engineering Costs are NOT eligible for reimbursement with TA Set-Aside Program funds. A non-federal match is required to pay for a minimum of 20 percent of the remaining project costs PLUS all engineering costs.
- There is no minimum project cost required. However, applicants need to understand these are federal funds and the inherent costs associated with federal project development and administration.

Eligible and Ineligible Activities

- Eligible activities are described in 23 U.S.C. 101(1)(29) or 23 U.S.C. 213. Eligible activities include the following:
 1. Transportation Alternatives
 - a) Construction, planning, and design of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized forms of transportation, including sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian and bicycle signals, traffic calming techniques, lighting and other safety-related infrastructure, and transportation projects to achieve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq).
 - b) Construction, planning, and design of infrastructure-related projects and systems that will provide safe routes for non-drivers, including children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities to access daily needs.
 - c) Conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors for trails for pedestrians, bicyclists, or other non-motorized transportation users.
 - d) Construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas.
 - e) Community improvement activities, which include but are not limited to:
 - I. Inventory, control, or removal of outdoor advertising.
 - II. Historic preservation and rehabilitation of historic transportation facilities.
 - III. Vegetation management practices in transportation rights-of-way to improve roadway safety, prevent invasive species, and provide erosion control.
 - IV. Archaeological activities relating to impacts from implementation of a transportation project eligible under this title.
 - V. Streetscaping and corridor landscaping.
 - f) Any environmental mitigation activity, including pollution prevention and pollution abatement activities and mitigation to:
 - I. Address stormwater management, control, and water pollution prevention or abatement related to highway construction or due to highway runoff, including activities described in Title 23 sections 133(b)(11), 328(a), and 329; or
 - II. Reduce vehicle-caused wildlife mortality or to restore and maintain connectivity among terrestrial or aquatic habitats.
 2. Projects eligible under the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) under 23 U.S.C. 206. A “recreational trail” means a thoroughfare or track across land or snow, used for recreational purposes such as pedestrian activities including wheelchair use, skating or skateboarding, equestrian activities, nonmotorized snow trail activities, bicycling or use of other human-powered vehicles, aquatic or water activities, and motorized vehicular activities including all-terrain vehicle riding, motorcycling, snowmobiling, use of off-road light trucks, or use of other off-road motorized vehicles. Permissible uses include:
 - a) Maintenance and restoration of existing recreational trails
 - b) Development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages for recreational trails
 - c) Purchase and lease of recreational trail construction and maintenance equipment
 - d) Construction of new recreational trails
 - e) Acquisition of easements and fee simple title to property for recreational trails or recreational trail corridors
 - f) Assessment of trail conditions for accessibility and maintenance

- g) Development and dissemination of publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection, (as those objectives relate to one or more of the uses of recreational trails, supporting non-law enforcement trail safety and trail use monitoring patrol programs, and providing trail-related training)
- 3. The Safe Routes to School program including:
 - a) Infrastructure-related projects eligible under 23 U.S.C. 208(g)(1)
 - b) Non-infrastructure-related activities eligible under 23 U.S.C. 208(g)(2)
- 4. Planning, designing, or constructing boulevards and other roadways largely in the right-of-way of former Interstate System routes or other divided highways.

- Ineligible activities include the following:

- 1. RPA 2 administrative activities.
- 2. Promotional activities, except as permitted within an eligible safe routes to school project.
- 3. Routine maintenance and operations, except trail maintenance as permitted by the RTP.
- 4. General recreation and park facilities, playground equipment, sports fields, campgrounds, picnic areas and pavilions, or other facilities that do not serve an eligible TA Set-Aside, RTP, or safe routes to school purpose.

The RPA 2 Region has approved nearly \$9,000,000 in Enhancement/TAP/TA Set-Aside funds since the early 1990's. While there have been many types of projects funded over the years the majority of the projects over the last approximately 20 years have been trail projects. When looking over the project eligibilities above, please keep in mind the competitiveness of a given project application as well.

Eligible Applicants

- Each application must identify an eligible project sponsor that will assume all responsibility for implementing the project, guarantee the necessary funds are delivered to the project, and is accountable for the use of program funds.
- Projects involving more than one entity must identify a single project sponsor that will be required to enter into a project agreement with the Iowa DOT and will ensure compliance with all local, state, and federal laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.
- The project sponsor will designate a full-time employee to be the Person in Responsible Charge who will supervise all project administration duties, oversee the work performed by consultants and contractors, and coordinate the development of the project with the Iowa DOT.
- Entities eligible to receive TA Set-Aside funds (23 U.S.C. 133(h)(4)(A), as amended by the IIIA) are:
 - 1. A local government.
 - 2. A regional transportation authority or transit agency.
 - 3. A natural resource or public land agency.
 - 4. A school district, local education agency, or school.
 - 5. A Tribal government.
 - 6. The Region 2 Transit System.
 - 7. A nonprofit entity.
 - 8. Any other local or regional governmental entity with responsibility for or oversight of transportation or recreational trails that the State determines to be eligible, consistent with the goals of 23 U.S.C. 133(h).
 - 9. The State of Iowa, at the request of an eligible entity listed above.

TA Set-Aside Application (All Applicants MUST use the IDOT application in the links below)

- Applications must include the following:
 - TA Set-Aside Application Form (in Word format) will all parts completed
 - Detailed Map identifying the location of the project
 - Sketch Plan of the project, including cross section (construction projects only)
 - Digital Photographs (limit to 5)
 - Itemized Breakdown of the total project costs
 - Official Endorsement of the project from the project sponsor
 - Letter of Support from the local byway organization board (if applicable)
 - Letter of Consent to Submit the application from the Iowa DOT District Engineer (if applicable)
 - Part G – Checklist and Certification (in PDF format) signed by an official authorized by the project sponsor
 - Completed Minority Impact Statement (in PDF format)
 - <https://iowadot.seamlessdocs.com/f/CO19101000125171775>
- The *Application for Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program Funds Parts A through F, Application Part G Checklist and Certification, and Minority Impact Statement* can be accessed at https://iowadot.gov/systems_planning/Grant-Programs/Transportation-Alternatives
- Incomplete applications may not be considered for funding.
- Applications received past the deadline will not be considered for funding.
- Applications will be reviewed by Iowa DOT staff for program eligibility prior to the project ranking and programming process.
- Two (2) hard copy and one (1) digital copy of the completed application should be mailed and emailed to Chris Diggins at 525 6th St. S.W., Mason City, IA 50401 or cdiggins@niacog.org.

Project Ranking and Programming (This is specific to RPA 2)

- Projects will be prioritized and recommended for funding by the Transportation Alternative (TA) Committee. The criteria listed below will provide a point of discussion and comparison of potential projects and are not listed in order of importance. As project types may not provide apples to apples comparison, final funding determinations will be based on Committee discussion and how well a project has addressed these criteria in a direct or indirect manner. The Committee reserves the right to recommend or not recommend funding for all applications submitted. If it is necessary, review and prioritization shall be by an averaging of priority ranking by County, so that the Committee is not monopolized by an individual applicant or entity. This determination will be made by NIACOG staff.
 - **Alignment with Local, Regional, or Statewide Planning Documents:** What is the relationship of the proposed project to local, regional, or statewide plans?
 - **Connectivity and Completion of Bikeway Linkages:** To what degree will completion of the proposed project provide connectivity to existing facilities or develop bikeway linkages?
 - **Federal-aid Highway Project Development Process, Understanding, and Capacity:** What previous experience does the existing project sponsor staff have with the federal-aid highway project development process? Has past performance resulted in successful projects that delivered the projects in a timely and compliant manner? Does existing staff have the capacity to administer the proposed project? Has the project sponsor demonstrated an understanding of the program rules? What strategies will be implemented to deliver the proposed project successfully?

- **Contribution Toward Safety for All Transportation Modes:** How would the proposed project address the safety of all users such as those who walk, bike, drive, ride transit, or travel by other modes? To what degree will the proposed project address any existing safety needs or concerns?
 - **Enhancement of Local Tourism Benefits:** How will the proposed project enhance tourism in the region? What are the economic benefits of the proposed project to the region and the state?
 - **Need for the Proposed Project:** Why is the project needed in the area and what population will it serve? How will the proposed project satisfy that need?
 - **Address High-Need Areas:** How does the project impact a high need area such as low-income, transit-dependent, rural (less than 5,000 population), or other areas? How will the proposed project improve the overall mobility of these areas and how has this population been engaged in the planning for the proposed project?
 - **Improve Accessibility:** What efforts have been made to go beyond compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 to ensure the proposed project will be accessible and usable by individuals with disabilities?
 - **Long-Term Maintenance Plan:** What arrangements have been made to continue operation and maintenance of the proposed project after the project is complete? Has a maintenance fund or an endowment been established?
 - **Project Readiness:** How has the project sponsor demonstrated the project is ready for development? How has the project sponsor prepared for the proposed project by resolving any potential obstacles? Will the project proceed without delay upon award of funding?
- Projects will be ranked via a comparison process. All projects will be directly compared to each other.
 - The TA Committee shall recommend projects for funding based upon the project rankings and funding constraints.
 - Projects recommended for funds will be incorporated into the draft RPA 2 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), distributed to the Policy Board for review, and taken out for public comment. The draft document will also be submitted to the Iowa DOT, FHWA, and FTA for review. Comments from these agencies and the public will be incorporated into the final document and presented to the Policy Board for adoption.
 - The Policy Board has the ultimate decision-making authority. The Policy Board shall review and approve the allocation of all TA Set-Aside funds within the final TIP.
 - Upon approval of the final TIP by the Policy Board, the RPA shall forward a *TA Set-Aside Award Letter* to the recipient.

Iowa DOT Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program

https://iowadot.gov/systems_planning/Grant-Programs/Transportation-Alternatives

Application for Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program Funds Parts A through F

https://iowadot.gov/systems_planning/pdf/TASA-Application-A-F.docx

Application Part G Checklist and Certification

https://iowadot.gov/systems_planning/pdf/PartG-Checklist-and-Certification.docx

Minority Impact Statement Form 105101

<https://iowadot.seamlessdocs.com/f/CO19101000125171775>