



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Transportation Planning Board  
**FROM:** John Swanson, Transportation Planner  
**SUBJECT:** Upcoming Solicitations for Applications for the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program  
**DATE:** March 11, 2021

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## SUMMARY

The federal Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA Set-Aside) Program is used to fund a variety of smaller-scale transportation projects such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities, trails, safe routes to school (SRTS) projects, community improvements, historic preservation, and environmental mitigation.

Under federal law, the TPB is responsible for selecting some TA Set-Aside projects using sub-allocated funding for Suburban Maryland, Northern Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The TA Set-Aside Program, which is part of the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, was previously known as the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and that name is still commonly used.

The next solicitation periods for TA Set-Aside applications have been scheduled as follows:

- District of Columbia  
Late March through May 2021  
See [ddot.dc.gov/page/transportation-alternatives-program](https://ddot.dc.gov/page/transportation-alternatives-program).
- Maryland  
April 1 - May 17, 2021  
See <https://roads.maryland.gov/mdotsha/pages/Index.aspx?PagelId=144>
- Virginia
  - Pre-applications: May 17 – July 1, 2021  
(Note: Pre-applications are mandatory)
  - Applications: Due October 1, 2021  
(Note: Virginia is on a two-year funding cycle)See [www.virginiadot.org/business/prehancegrants.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/business/prehancegrants.asp).

Past recipients of technical assistance through the TPB's Transportation Land Use Connections (TLC) Program are encouraged to consider seeking funding through the TA Set-Aside Program. The TPB also encourages TA Set-Aside applications that support policies highlighted in Visualize 2045, our region's long-range transportation plan.

## BACKGROUND

The federal surface transportation legislation known as MAP-21 first established the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) in 2012. The program, however, has its roots in the Transportation Enhancements Program first set up in 1991 under the landmark transportation bill known as ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act). The FAST Act of 2015 renamed the program as the Transportation Alternatives *Set-Aside* Program, but the key features of the program largely remain the same.

Information on the program is available from FHWA at:  
[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation\\_alternatives/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_alternatives/).

The program provides sub-allocated funding for large metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) like the TPB (those classified as “Transportation Management Areas” or TMAs) to fund local projects. In addition to these sub-allocated funds, a portion of the TA Set-Aside funding is reserved for statewide project selection, which is conducted by the state departments of transportation.

For the National Capital Region, the program offers an opportunity to support and enhance regional planning activities. At the direction of the TPB, our region’s TA Set-Aside is framed as a complementary component of the TPB’s Transportation Land-Use Connections (TLC) Program, which provides technical assistance for small planning studies to TPB member jurisdictions. Past recipients of technical assistance through TLC are encouraged to consider seeking funding assistance through the TA Set-Aside Program.

The TA Set-Aside offers the region the ability to fund projects that support regional priorities and goals. Applicants from the National Capital Region are asked to show how their projects will serve regional criteria when they seek TA Set-Aside funds.

The TPB’s selection criteria, which are expected to be used this year, are rooted in TPB Policies and programs. They include:

- Focus on expanding transportation options;
- Support for Regional Activity Centers;
- Access to high-capacity transit, especially in Transit Access Focus Areas (TAFAs);
- Support for the National Capital Trail Network; Access in Equity Emphasis Areas; and
- Increased access for people with disabilities.

## PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

Since the establishment of the program in 2012, the TPB has combined its solicitations with the state departments of transportation in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. In each state, the state DOT conducts the solicitation through its website. Each state application includes a supplementary form requesting information about how projects respond to the TPB’s regional priorities.

The following entities in the TPB's planning area are eligible to apply: local governments (county, city, or town); regional transportation authorities; transit agencies; natural resource or public land agencies; school districts and agencies; and any local and governmental entity with oversight of

transportation or recreational trails. Nonprofits are eligible to partner with any eligible entity on an application, if state or local requirements permit.

Applications must adhere to all federal requirements for the program, including providing a minimum 20 percent match.

The selection process is conducted separately for each state. Upon receipt of the applications, state staff screen the submissions for eligibility and conduct preliminary assessments of the proposed projects. Once applications are determined eligible, they are forwarded to the TPB for consideration and selection.

Working with the states, TPB staff conducts research on the proposed projects, which may include site visits and interviews with applicants. TPB staff convenes a separate selection panel for each state's applications. The panel members include COG/TPB staff as well as representatives from the state DOTs whose applications are not under consideration. Representatives from the DOTs in the states whose projects are under consideration are invited to participate in the selection process as technical resources.

Panel members individually review and score applications based on each reviewer's professional assessment (50 points) and regional selection criteria (50 points). The regional criteria are rooted in TPB policies and programs, with the understanding that some projects will not meet all criteria.

For each state, the panel's recommendations are forwarded to the TPB for approval. After that, the TPB's decision is forwarded to the DOT to include in the state's capital improvement program.

In addition to the funding allocated by the TPB, each DOT has responsibility for a statewide allocation of TA Set-Aside funding. The statewide funds represent half of the state's total allocation under the program. Project selection using these funds usually occurs after the TPB makes its selections, although a portion of Virginia's statewide funds are reserved for project selection by the district member of the Commonwealth Transportation Board. In recent year, the CTB member's selection process has been conducted in coordination with the TPB's project selection.

## CONTACT

For information about program details at the state level, contact:

- District of Columbia: Kelsey Bridges, DDOT, [kelsey.bridges@dc.gov](mailto:kelsey.bridges@dc.gov).
- Maryland: Christy Bernal, MDOT, [CBernal@sha.state.md.us](mailto:CBernal@sha.state.md.us).
- Virginia: Pamela Liston, VDOT, [pamela.liston@vdot.virginia.gov](mailto:pamela.liston@vdot.virginia.gov).

For more information about the TPB's role in this program, please contact John Swanson at [jswanson@mwcog.org](mailto:jswanson@mwcog.org) or 202-962-3295.