



**NORTH CAROLINA**  
Department of Transportation

# Exploring Federal Funding Opportunities

Local Programs Management Office

January 2026

Connecting people, products and places safely and efficiently with customer focus, accountability and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy and vitality of North Carolina

# Today's Presentation

- Introduction
- Strategic Prioritization of Transportation Projects  
*Gretchen Belk, Manager, SPOT*
- MPO Selection Process  
*Jennifer Stafford, Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization*
- Federal Grants Opportunities  
*Brittany Wilborn and Steven Hulse, Office of Strategic Planning and Programming*
- Questions/Wrap Up





**NORTH CAROLINA**  
Department of Transportation

# Exploring Federal Funding Opportunities – Strategic Prioritization Office

Gretchen Belk

1/21/2026

Connecting people, products and places safely and efficiently with customer focus, accountability and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy and vitality of North Carolina

# Topics

- *Transportation Funding Background*
- *STI Law*
- *Prioritization in Practice*
- *Takeaways*



# Transportation Funding Background

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Bicycle &  
Pedestrian



Rail



Public  
Transportation



Aviation



Ferry



Highway

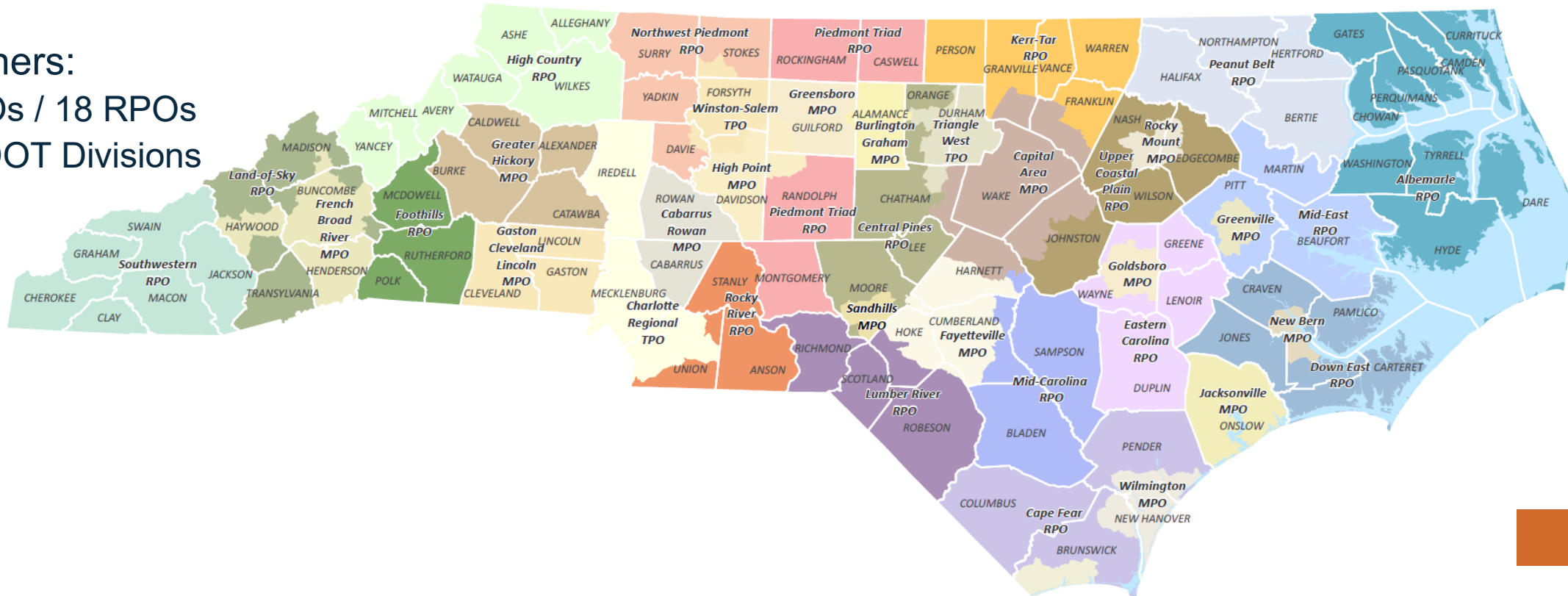
## Project Life Cycle



# STI Background

- NCDOT funds six modes of transportation
  - Highway, Aviation, Bicycle/Pedestrian, Ferry, Public Transportation, Rail
- NCDOT Annual Budget of approx. \$7.3B (\$3.9B for capital projects)
- Key Partners:

- 20 MPOs / 18 RPOs
- 14 NCDOT Divisions



# Project Selection Reform

Previous perception:

I'll agree to your project if you agree to mine...



Public wanted politics removed from decision-making

NCDOT needed transparency in project selection

This led to Transportation Reform...





2011 - 2012

**Prioritization Process is now in Law**

*“The Department shall develop and utilize a **process for selection of transportation projects** that is based on professional standards in order to most efficiently use limited resources to benefit all citizens of the State.*

*The strategic prioritization process should be a **systematic, data-driven process** that includes a **combination of quantitative data, qualitative input, and multimodal characteristics, and should include local input.***

*The Department shall develop a process for standardizing or approving local methodology used in Metropolitan Planning Organization and Rural Transportation Planning Organization prioritization.” - S.L. 2012-84*



**STRATEGIC  
TRANSPORTATION  
INVESTMENTS**

*Smart decisions to keep North Carolina moving.*

## Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) Law

- Prioritizes **capital** expenditures across all modes (Mobility/Expansion + Modernization)
- Needs-based, data-driven
- Directly ties funding to Prioritization results
- Funding comes from Highway Trust Fund and Federal Aid Program
- Workgroup used every cycle for improvement

# Prioritization and Programming

Article 14B.  
Strategic Prioritization Funding  
Plan for Transportation  
Investments.

§ 136-189.10. Definitions.  
The following definitions apply  
in this Article...



# Prioritization and Programming



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



STATE TRANSPORTATION  
IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (STIP)



JULY 2025





2026

2035







# STI Law and how it Structures what we do

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Bicycle &  
Pedestrian



Rail



Public  
Transportation



Aviation



Ferry



Highway

# STI Law

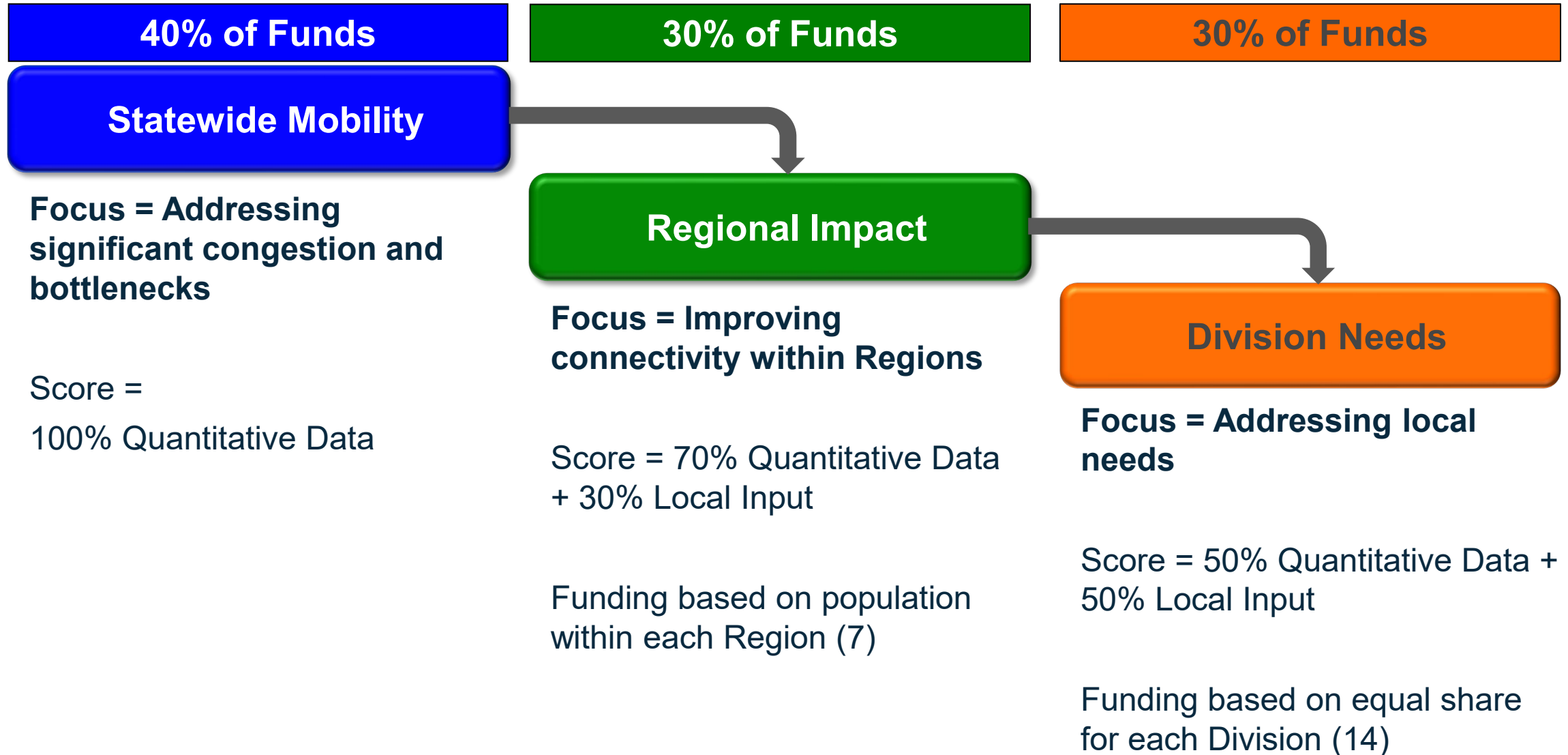
## STI Law (§ 136-189.11) defines:

- Funding Categories and Percentages
- Project Eligibility
- Highway Scoring Criteria Names
- Funding Constraints

## Recommendations developed by Workgroup and NCDOT BOT adopts:

- Scoring Process (timeframe, submittals, carryovers, etc.)
- Highway Measures and Weights
- Non-Highway Criteria, Measures, and Weights
- Normalization (funding allocation between modes)
- Local Input Points

## How STI Works







# STI Categories & Eligibility Definitions

Mode	Statewide Mobility	Regional Impact	Division Needs
Highway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interstates (existing &amp; future)</li><li>• National Highway System routes (as of 2013)</li><li>• STRAHNET <sup>1</sup></li><li>• Designated Toll Facilities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Other US and NC Routes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All Secondary Roads (SR)</li><li>• Federal-Aid Eligible Local Roads</li></ul>
Aviation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Large Commercial Service Airports</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Other Commercial Service Airports not in Statewide</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All Airports without Commercial Service (General Aviation)</li></ul>
Bicycle-Pedestrian	Not eligible	Not eligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All projects (\$0 State Highway Trust Funds)</li></ul>
Public Transportation	Not eligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Service spanning two or more counties</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All other service, including terminals and stations</li></ul>
Ferry	Not eligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vessel or infrastructure expansion</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Replacement vessels</li></ul>
Rail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Freight Service on Class-I Railroad Corridors</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rail service spanning two or more counties not in Statewide</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All other service, including terminals and stations (no short lines)</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> STRAHNET – Strategic Highway Network, system of roads deemed necessary for emergency mobilization and peacetime movement of personnel and equipment to support U.S. military operations



# STI Law Scoring

- Criteria:
  - Quantitative criteria (data-driven) – all categories
  - Qualitative criteria (Local Input Points) – Regional Impact and Division Needs categories
- 0 to 100 scale
- Selection of projects in ranked order
- Legislation provides the names of Highway quantitative criteria:

Congestion	Benefit/Cost	Safety	Freight	Economic Competitiveness <sup>1</sup>
Accessibility/ Connectivity <sup>2</sup>	Multimodal	Lane Width	Shoulder Width	Pavement Score

<sup>1</sup> Statewide Mobility only; <sup>2</sup> Regional Impact & Division Needs only

- Workgroup flexibility in determining the methodology used to calculate criteria
- Non-Highway Modes must have a minimum of 4 quantitative criteria

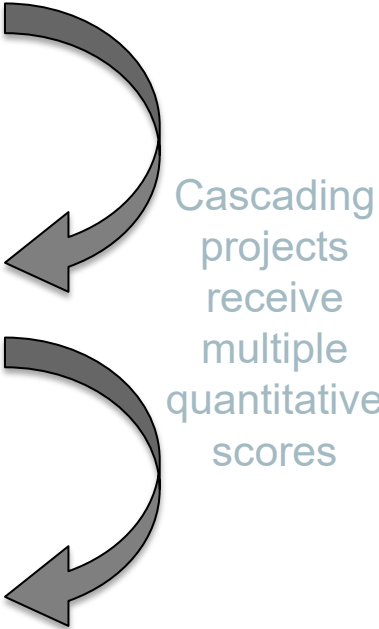


## P8 Bicycle and Pedestrian Scoring

Criteria	Measure Description	Statewide Mobility (100%)	Regional Impact (70%)	Division Needs (50%)
Safety	(Number of crashes x 40%) + (Crash severity x 20%) + (Safety / crash risk x 20%) + (Project safety benefit x 20%)	N/A	N/A	20%
Accessibility/ Connectivity	Points of Interest pts + Connections pts + Route pts	N/A	N/A	15%
Demand/Density	# of households and employees per square mile near facility	N/A	N/A	10%
Cost Effectiveness	(Safety + Accessibility/Connectivity + Demand/Density) / Cost to NCDOT	N/A	N/A	5%

# Quantitative Score vs. Local Input

Funding Category	<u>QUANTITATIVE</u>		<u>LOCAL INPUT</u>	
	Data		Division	MPO/RPO
Statewide Mobility	Criteria 1 = 30%	100%	--	--
	Criteria 2 = 25%			
	Criteria 3 = 15%			
	Criteria 4 = 10%			
	Criteria 5 = 15%			
	Criteria 6 = 5%			
Regional Impact	Criteria 1 = 20%	70%	15%	15%
	Criteria 2 = 20%			
	Criteria 3 = 10%			
	Criteria 4 = 10%			
	Criteria 5 = 10%			
Division Needs	Criteria 1 = 15%	50%	25%	25%
	Criteria 2 = 15%			
	Criteria 3 = 10%			
	Criteria 4 = 5%			
	Criteria 5 = 5%			



# Prioritization in Practice

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Bicycle &  
Pedestrian



Rail



Public  
Transportation



Aviation



Ferry



Highway

# Iterative Scoring & Programming Process

**Projects Submitted** by MPOs, RPOs, & Divisions

**SPOT Review**

1. Reviewed for eligibility
2. Data screened & developed
3. Quantitative scores calculated

**Statewide Mobility**  
40% of Funds

1. Projects programmed
2. Projects not programmed cascade to next category

**Regional Impact**  
30% of Funds

1. Local input points assigned
2. Total scores calculated
3. Projects programmed
4. Projects not programmed cascade to next category

**Division Needs**  
30% of Funds

1. Local input points assigned
2. Total scores calculated
3. Projects programmed

**Statewide Mobility Score =**  
100% Quantitative

**Regional Impact Score =**  
70% Quantitative +  
30% Local Input

**Division Needs Score =**  
50% Quantitative +  
50% Local Input

# Prioritization and Programming



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



STATE TRANSPORTATION  
IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (STIP)



JULY 2025





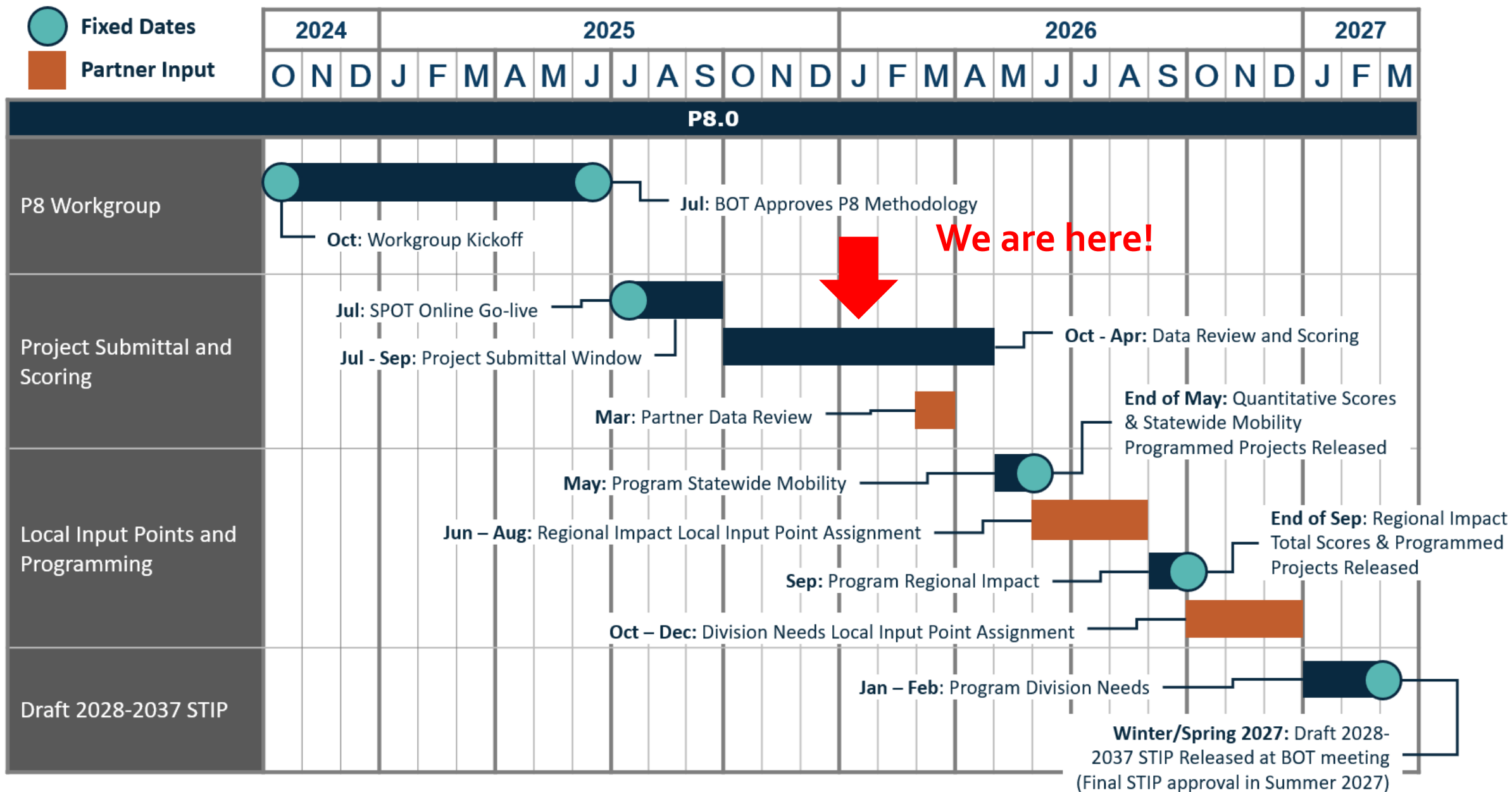
2026

2035









# Key Takeaways

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Bicycle &  
Pedestrian



Rail



Public  
Transportation



Aviation



Ferry



Highway



# Questions

- How do I get my project in the STIP through the Prioritization Process?
  - A project must be submitted by either an MPO/RPO or Division in the area the project is located
  - Project must score high enough to be programmed in STIP, match secured, etc
- Who do I need to work with to get my project funded?
  - Local support is crucial for matching funds (where applicable)
  - MPO/RPO AND Division Support is crucial for local input score
  - Submitters have methodologies to identify which projects to select- make sure your project will meet those methodologies!
- What questions should I ask about my project?
  - Is there political support for my project?
  - Do I have a match if applicable?
  - Have I had conversations about this project with important stakeholders?
  - Do I have a cost estimate? When was the last time it was updated?

# Thank you!

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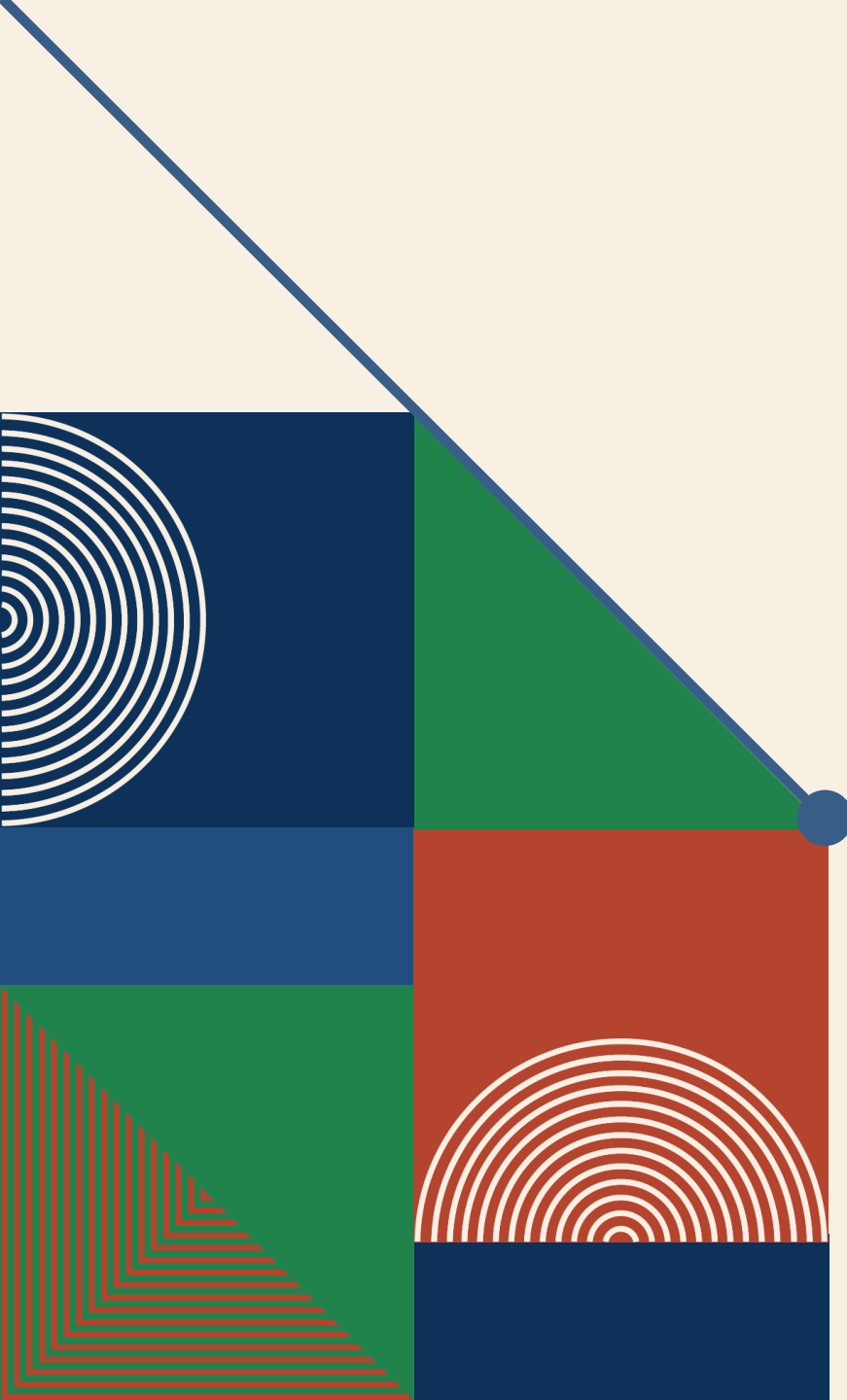
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**SPOT Manager**  
**[gvelk@ncdot.gov](mailto:gvelk@ncdot.gov)**  
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# FEDERAL FUNDING THROUGH YOUR METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Jennifer Stafford, CRTPO

[crtpo.org](http://crtpo.org)

- 
- **MPOs receive discretionary (grant) funds** to program, based on population size and air quality status:
  - MPOs serving populations **over 200,000** receive **Block Grant Direct Attributable** funds.
  - MPOs serving populations **between 50,000 and 200,000** received **Carbon Reduction Program** funds.
  - MPOs in **air quality attainment areas** receive **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)** funds.

- **Contact your MPO** to confirm whether funding is available for your project.
- **Start early and choose strategically**—federal funds typically require a longer delivery timeline than local funds (we program projects five years out).
- **Review the scoring criteria** and focus on projects positioned to score well.
- **Plan your local match**—check whether a larger match earns additional points.



This presentation provides an overview of the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization's (CRTPO) call-for-projects process.



- **Discretionary Grants Program Policy Guide** — adopted by the Board

- The Policy **guides the annual call for projects**

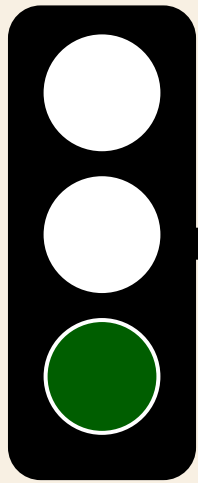
- **Data-driven scoring**: all projects are scored and ranked

- **CRTPO funding split**:

- **80%** awarded to **highway** projects

- **20%** awarded to **non-highway** projects (bike/ped, transit, air quality)





Each August:  
**Annual Call Opens**

- Announce the call's opening at TCC and Board meetings.
- Provide a preview of funding availability.







By Mid-October  
**Pre-Submittal  
Meetings**



End of October  
**Annual Call  
Closes**



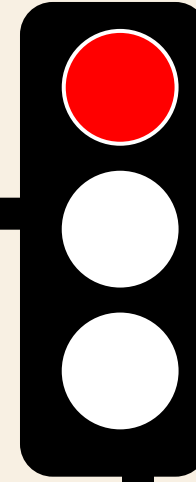
- Schedule and meet with NCDOT and other staff for pre-submittal meetings.
- Provide a brief 30–60 minute jurisdiction project preview.



By Mid-October  
**Pre-Submittal  
Meetings**



End of October  
**Annual Call  
Closes**



- The call closes, and a list of jurisdiction projects is shared with the TCC and Board.



- TCC workshop:
  - Review applications
  - Review staff-calculated scores using the policy guide
  - Review funding availability
  - Develop a draft recommended project list



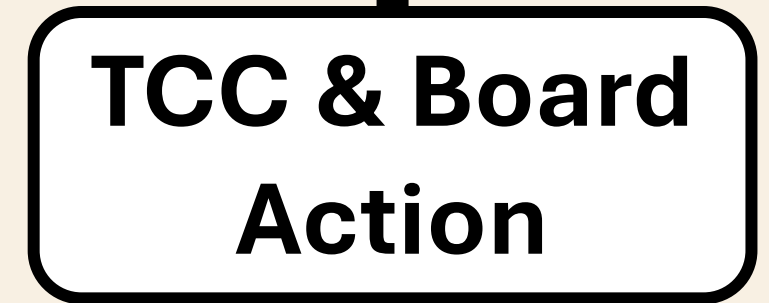
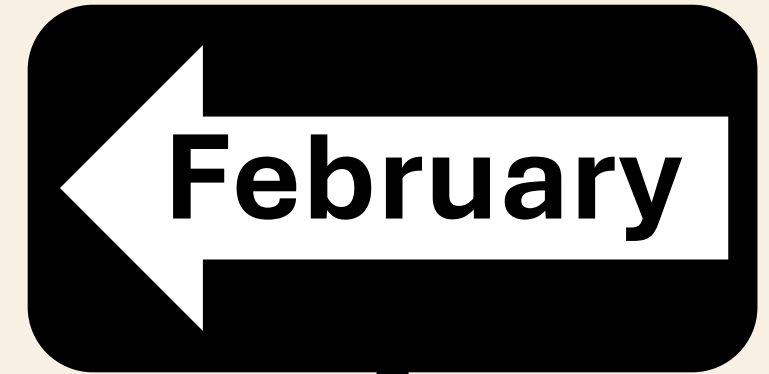
**January**

**TCC & Board  
Information**

- The TCC Workshop's recommended project list is presented to the TCC and the Board for information.



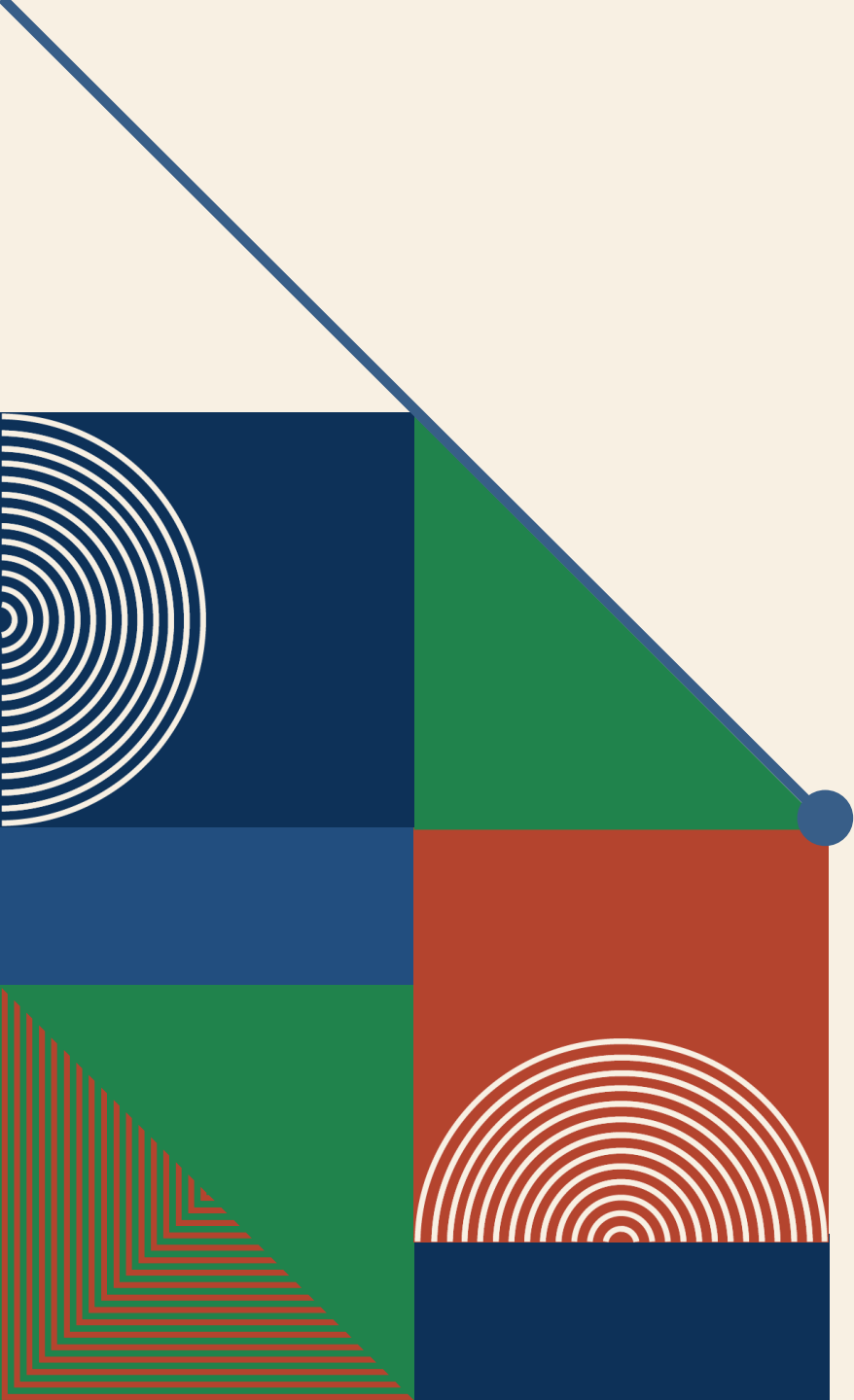
- The Board is requested to act on the TCC recommended project list



An illustration of a gray car with two black silhouettes of people in the front seats. The car's license plate is white with blue and red text: "First in Flight" at the top, "CRTPO1" in the middle, and "NORTH CAROLINA" at the bottom. To the right of the car is a black vertical pole supporting a white triangular yield sign with a red border. The sign contains the text "Amend TIP and STIP" in bold black letters.

**Amend  
TIP and  
STIP**

- The CRTPO TIP is amended to reflect the approved list of funded projects.
- Amendments are submitted to NCDOT for Board approval and incorporation into the STIP.

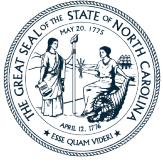


**Thank you**

**Jennifer Stafford, CRTPO**

**[Jennifer.Stafford@charlottenc.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Stafford@charlottenc.gov)**

**CRTPO.org**



**NORTH CAROLINA**  
Department of Transportation



# Federal Grants Management at NCDOT

Guidance when Applying for Federal Transportation Competitive Grants

January 21, 2026

Connecting people, products and places safely and efficiently with customer focus, accountability  
and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy and vitality of North Carolina





## Disclaimer

The information in this presentation is NCDOT's best understanding of Federal transportation grant applications and grant delivery, as it exists today.

There is no guarantee that this information will remain accurate in the future.

Some information pertains to both NCDOT projects as well as local projects where divisions or business units may be involved.

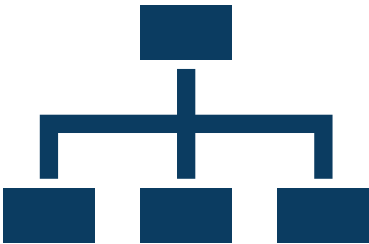
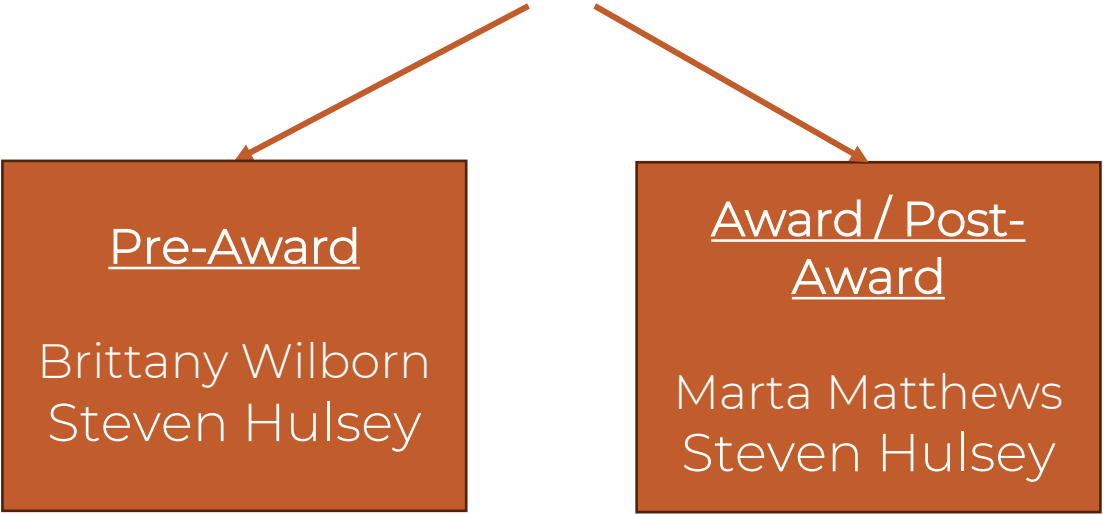
The presentation is meant to provide some resources and useful contacts for future use.





# NCDOT Grants Management

Competitive Grants Committee  
Division/Business Unit Sponsors  
Grants Management Team





## **What is a Competitive Grant?**

- Competitive grants are awarded to applicants through a merit-based process.
- Most eligible applicants are state, tribal, and local governments.
- Although “grant” implies that the funding is available up front, the program works on a cost-reimbursement basis.

RESOURCE: <https://www.transportation.gov/grants/dashboard>



## What are some typical grant programs available to local governments?

### *Grant Programs*

- BUILD (Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development)<sup>1</sup>
- WCPP (Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program)
- PROTECT (Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation Program)
- Bridge or BIP (Bridge Investment Program)
- NSFLTP (National Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects)
- SS4A (Safe Streets and Roads for All)

<sup>1</sup> formerly RAISE (Rebuilding American infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) and TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery)





# Grants Pursuit (Pre-Award)

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## Grants Pursuit (Pre-Award)

*What is involved?*

- *Registration*
- *Application Development*
- *Outreach*





## PRE-AWARD

1

**Applicant** registers on [SAM.gov](#) and [Grants.gov](#) in advance\* of application.  
\*registration is not immediate

2

**Applicant** searches for [USDOT grants](#) on Grants.gov where all USDOT grants are posted with a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) outlining program eligibility criteria and requirements.

3

**Applicant** applies for funding for a project that meets program requirements before the end of the application window.

4

**USDOT** reviews submitted applications and selects programs to award funding based on the stated criteria in the NOFO.



## Grants Pursuit – Pre-Award

### *Registration*

- *Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)*
- *Grants.gov registration to apply*
- *Local Governments and Tribal Organizations need to have their own registration*







## Grants Pursuit – Pre-Award

Where to Find Grant Information?

- *Grants.gov*
- *Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs)*

Best Practices:

- *Consider an engineering firm*
- *Coordination with NCDOT and Letters of Support*





## Grants Pursuit – Pre-Award

### Grants Outreach

- *Direct*
- *Indirect*
- *Guidance for Local Partners*

[SIPGrants@ncdot.gov](mailto:SIPGrants@ncdot.gov)





## Grants Pursuit – Pre-Award

### *Grants Outreach (letters of support)*

NCDOT utilizes Smartsheet application to collect and manage letters of support (LoS) requests. The link is:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/23d0a43975444309806847fcfaaca982>





## Grants Pursuit – Pre-Award

### Evaluation of Project and Commitment

- Q Is there a clearly defined scope or does the project make sense?
- Q Who owns the facility being improved? Locally owned? State owned?
- Q Will NCDOT be involved in the project? At what level will they be involved?
- Q If the local government plans to apply and administer the project, do they have adequate staffing?
- Q Is there a good estimate of the project? Identified sources of funding including any local funds? Is the funding flexible as to when it can be used?
- Q What happens if the award is reduced from what was requested? Gap funding?
- Q What happens if the actual costs exceed the estimated budget? Where will the additional funding come from?
- Q Could a local project impact any of NCDOT's projects, if awarded?







## Grants Management – Grants Pursuit

### *Grants Application Development (continued)*

- *Review by Federal Agency*
- *Continuing Coordination*
- *Debriefing*





# **Grants Administration (Award)**

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## Grants Administration (Award and Post-Award)

*Who is involved?*

- *Local Government*
- *USDOT Modal Agency*
- *NCDOT (If applicable)*

*What is involved?*

- *Programming in the TIP and STIP*
- *Agreement Execution*
- *Reporting*





## AWARD

5

**USDOT** notifies all applicants of the final award decisions, including application not selected for award.

Those not select may receive a letter of encouragement to apply in future application opportunities or seek alternative grant opportunities.

6

**USDOT** and **Applicant** negotiate and sign a grant project agreement and **USDOT** disburses funds.

7

**Grantee** implements the awarded project and adheres to all necessary conditions of the award.





## Grants Administration – Award

### *Grants Award*

- *Award Notification – Full Award*
- *Award Notification – Reduced Award*





## Grants Administration – Award

### *Grants Award*

Just because an award is announced,  
work cannot begin on a project.





# Grants Administration – Award

*Programming in the TIP and the STIP*

★★ Fifty Years of STIP • Since 1973 ★★



STATE TRANSPORTATION  
IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (STIP)  
Current STIP



2024 - 2033

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

January 2



## Grants Administration – Award

- *Grants Agreements must be executed before work is performed\**
- *Kickoff Meeting*







## Grants Administration – Award

### *Grants Agreements*

- *Terms and Conditions (T&C)*
- *Exhibits*



## Grants Administration – Award

### Grants Agreements (local governments)

- *Direct Recipient*
- *Subrecipient*
- *NCDOT Administered*





# **Grants Administration (Post - Award)**

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## POST-AWARD

8

**USDOT** monitors the project's progress and provides technical assistance and customer support to **grantees** as needed.

9

**Grantee** reports progress to **USDOT** throughout the project lifecycle through applicable Project Progress Reports (PPRs) and Federal Financial Reports (SF-425s) as required by **USDOT**.

10

**Grantee** completes all closeout requirements and submits final financial and technical reports.

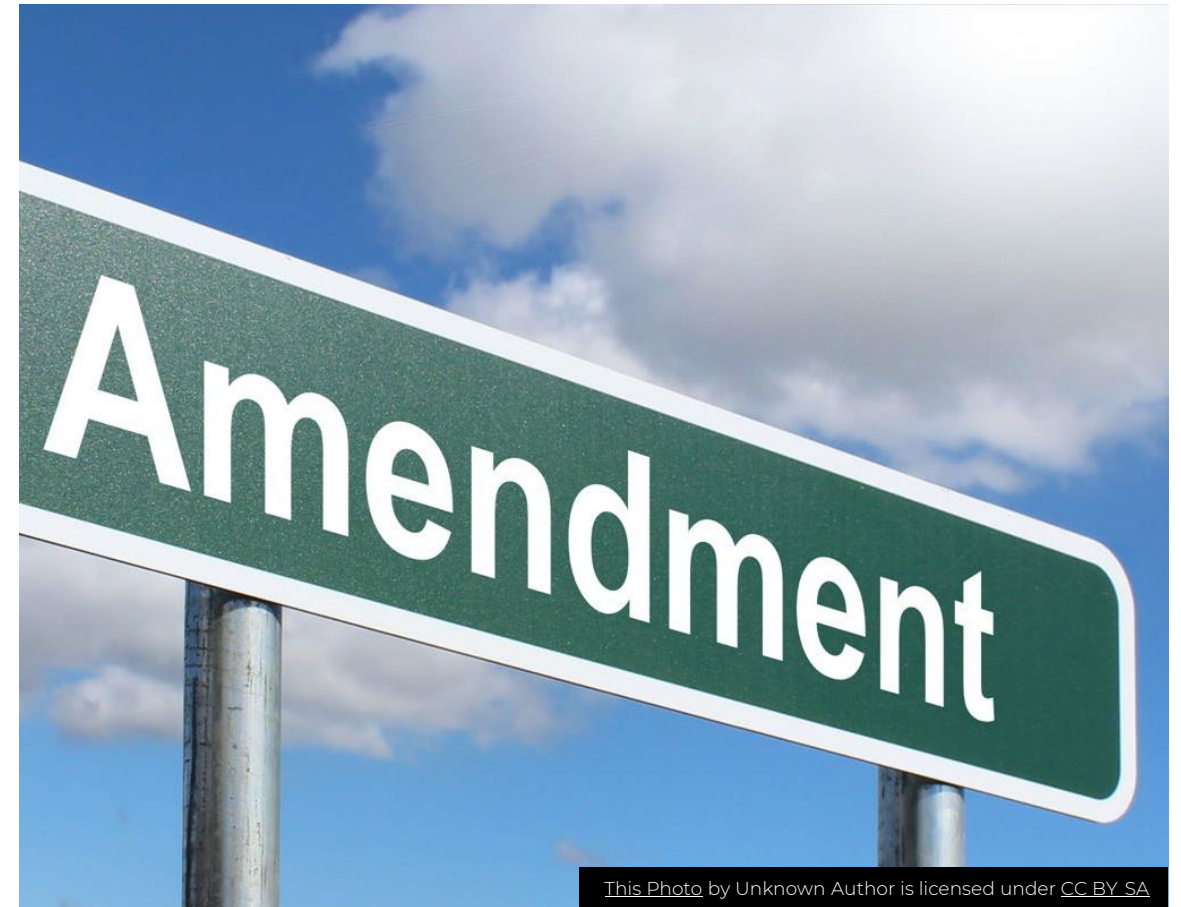




## Grants Administration – Post Award

### *Changes to Executed Agreement*

- *Scope*
- *Funding*
- *Schedule*



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## Grants Administration – Post Award

### *Grants Reporting*

- *Pre-quarterly*
- *Post-quarterly*
  
- ☐ Quarter 1 – January-March
- ☐ Quarter 2 – April-June
- ☐ Quarter 3 – July-September
- ☐ Quarter 4 – October-December





# Schedules

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## Schedules

The grant process requires time throughout its entire lifecycle from preparing a competitive application to receiving award notifications and executing agreements.

- **Application Preparation:** Developing a strong application often takes 6–8 weeks or more, along with identifying a consulting firm and gathering the necessary stakeholders.
- **Award Notification:** After submission, expect a waiting period. Some programs, like the BUILD grant, are legally required to announce selections by a specific date, while others may not announce awards until the following year or even later.
- **Agreement Execution:** Even after an award is granted, it can take 6-12 months to execute an agreement depending on the review time.



Plan and consider how these timelines may impact your budget.

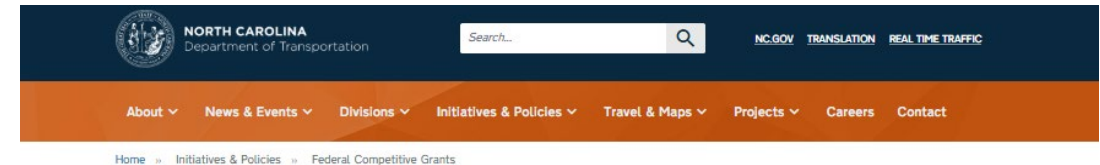


## Federal Competitive Grants – NCDOT Webpage

- *Up-to-date information*
- *Grant application resources*
- *Guidance on engaging with NCDOT*

### Website Features

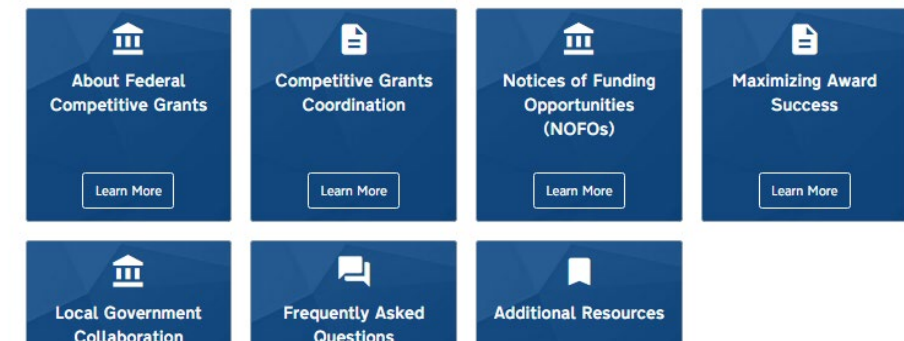
- *About Federal Competitive Grants*
- *Competitive Grant Coordination – STIP unit and LPMO*
- *Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs)*
- *NCDOT Letter of Support Request Form*
- *Local Government Collaboration*
- *FAQs*
- *Links to Additional Resources*



### Federal Competitive Grants



#### Grant Application Support





# Contact Us

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For all grant-related inquiries, please contact us at [SIPGrants@ncdot.gov](mailto:SIPGrants@ncdot.gov).

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 [NC DOT](https://www.linkedin.com/company/NC DOT)

 [NC DOTcommunications](https://vimeo.com/NC DOTcommunications)

 [View All Channels](#)

# Questions?

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February 18, 2026



## PROGRAMMING IN THE STIP

- When does this occur?
- What information is needed?
- Time Frames
- New policies on programming STI projects
- And more...



**Thank you!**

