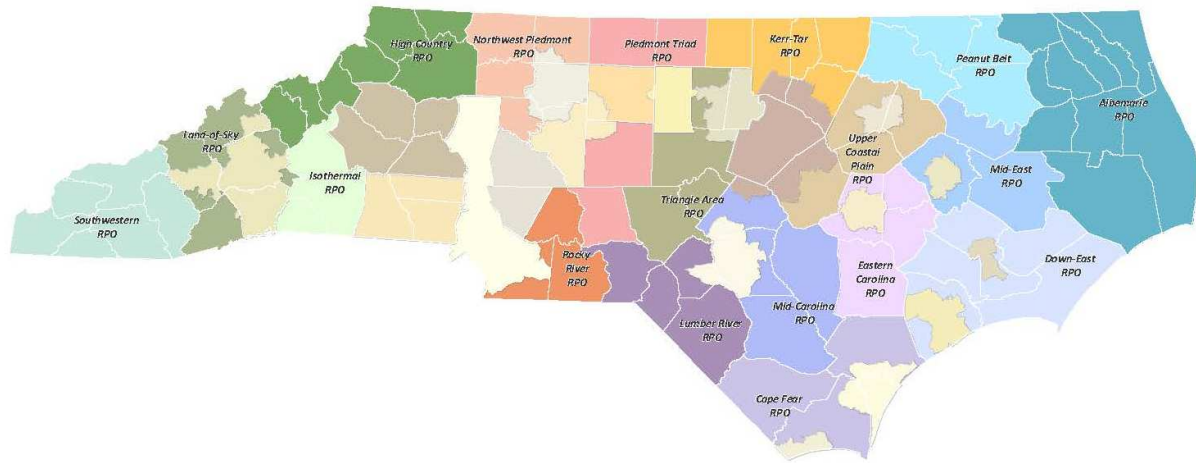


RPO Manual

2018



RPO Administrative Procedures Manual

**Updated Edition
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**Produced by the NCDOT Transportation Planning Division
In conjunction with the
North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations**

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I. RPO Manual

Section 1.01 The Manual

The purpose of this document is to provide each Lead Planning Agency (LPA) with the tools necessary to effectively manage a Rural Planning Organizations (RPO) program. The manual also provides North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) staff with the information and timelines for the effective oversight of individual RPOs. The manual is organized by work tasks with detailed timelines, guidance, document templates and examples where necessary. Templates are provided to be the basis for document submittals. Examples are provided to demonstrate the potential scope of a specific document. Revisions to the standard documents, when required, should consider the templates and examples provided in the manual. Dates given in this document should be interpreted as the nearest business day before the date if it happens to fall on a holiday or weekend.

(a) RPO Manual Updates

From time to time changes to document templates, procedures and timelines may occur and will be reflected in a timely manner in this manual. Proposed changes will be reviewed by designated NCDOT and RPO staff. The most current version of the manual will be made available on the NCDOT website: <https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/MPO-RPO.aspx>.

II. RPO Organization

Section 2.01 Authority

In 2000, the State of North Carolina recognized the need for more coordinated transportation planning in rural North Carolina areas not within a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) were developed in response to [Senate Bill 1195 by enacting amended General Statute 136, Article 17](#) which directed NCDOT to develop a plan to establish RPOs. NCDOT completed its report in early 2001 and 20 RPOs were established between 2001 and 2003.

The boundaries of a RPO may coincide with, but not overlap the boundaries of a MPO or another RPO.

GS 136-212 identifies four primary duties for RPOs:

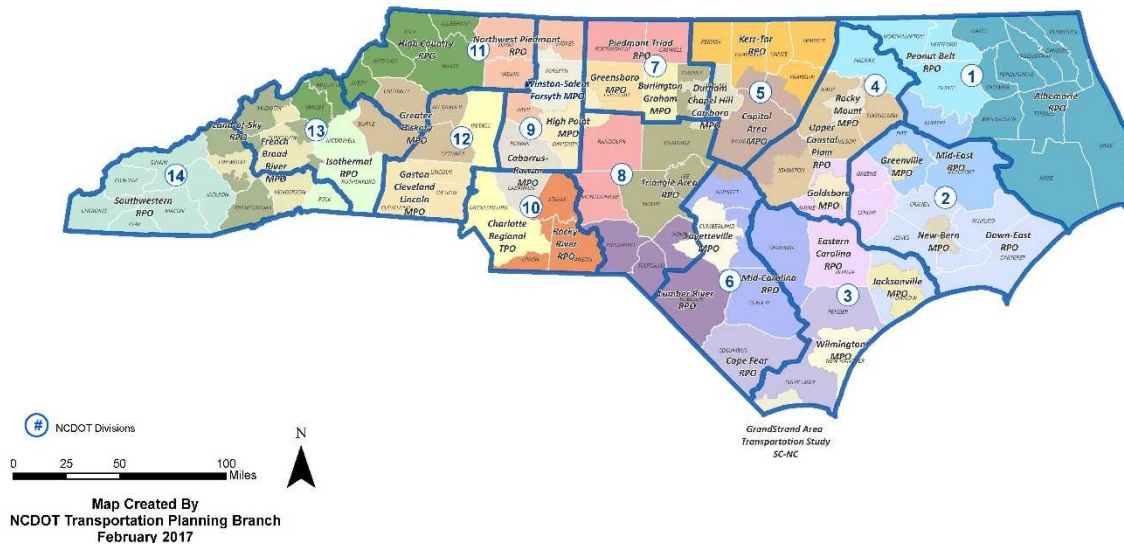
- (i) Developing, in cooperation with the Department (NCDOT), long-range, local and regional multimodal transportation plans;
- (ii) Providing a forum for public participation in the transportation planning process;
- (iii) Developing and prioritizing suggestions for transportation projects the organization believes should be included in the State's Transportation Improvement Program (STIP); and
- (iv) Providing transportation-related information to local governments and other interested organizations and persons.

Section 2.02 Formation

According to GS 136-211 (b) (updated by Session Law 2012-44 SB 889), an RPO shall consist of three to fifteen contiguous counties, or an area that has a total population of at least 50,000 people. Noncontiguous counties adjacent to the same Metropolitan Planning Organization may form an RPO. Figure 1.01 shows the MPOs and RPOs within North Carolina.

As defined in 136-66.210, an RPO is "a voluntary organization of local officials formed through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to work cooperatively with the Department to plan rural transportation systems and to advise the Department on rural transportation policy". An RPO consists of an administrative entity which provides the professional staff to the RPO, a Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) consisting of local staff from member governments and agencies and a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) made up of elected and appointed officials.

Figure 1.01 The Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations of North Carolina with NCDOT Divisions



Section 2.03 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The MOU establishes the membership and general purposes and responsibilities of the RPO. It also identifies the overall responsibilities of the RPO. All member counties must sign the MOU. Municipalities within the RPO may sign the MOU or adopt a resolution in support of the RPO. Any municipal resolutions must be submitted along with the MOU. A sample MOU may be found at the following link: [MOU](#)

(a) Revising an Existing Memorandum of Understanding

From time to time NCDOT, the LPA or any other MOU signatory may request a revision to the adopted MOU. Changing the LPA or the membership of RPO counties requires a revision to the MOU. Consultation between the LPA, NCDOT and MOU signatories is required to facilitate any revision to an adopted MOU. Following are the steps for making a revision to the MOU:

- (i) Review and revise the existing MOU to reflect the desired changes.
- (ii) Submit draft to designated NCDOT staff for review.
- (iii) Prepare final MOU document, reflecting any additional revisions.
- (iv) Present final MOU to the RPO TCC and TAC for approval.
- (v) Present final MOU to each county, the LPA and NCDOT for approval. Original signatures and seals must appear on a single page(s). Municipalities within the boundaries of the proposed RPO may adopt a resolution stating their support for the revised MOU within ninety (90) days of final approval.
- (vi) Submit the signed MOU and the municipal resolutions in triplicate to designated NCDOT staff, along with municipal resolutions. One original copy will be returned to the LPA with original signatures.

Section 2.04 Bylaws

RPOs are required to have [Bylaws](#) that define how meetings will be conducted within the RPO as well as outlining the procedure for various RPO processes. Bylaws govern the membership, voting structure, and meeting procedures of the TCC and TAC. Bylaws for the RPO may be adopted and revised by the TCC and TAC from time to time.

(a) Revising Existing Bylaws

A change to the bylaws is typically necessary when some aspects of the bylaws need to be clarified that were not explicitly stated in the bylaws, conflicting laws, a change in the LPA, or an MOU change. For the bylaws to have legal standing, the bylaws must be adopted by the appropriate Committee(s) impacted by the change (TCC and/or TAC and should be signed by the RPO Secretary and the impacted Committee chair).

Section 2.05 Lead Planning Agency (LPA)

The LPA serves as the administrative entity for the RPO and is the fiscal agent for the RPO. Eligible administrative entities include regional council of governments, regional economic development agencies, chambers of commerce and local governments. The LPA receives and expends funds on behalf of the RPO. The LPA provides at least one (1) full time equivalent professional staff member to carry out the duties of the RPO within the context of an adopted plan of work. The LPA is designated in the adopted MOU, and may be changed based on the agreement of the RPO member governments and NCDOT.

Section 2.06 Technical (or Transportation) Coordinating Committee (TCC)

The TCC consists of staff members from local government members, agencies and NCDOT. The TCC provides guidance and recommendations to the Transportation

Advisory Committee (TAC). The TCC membership is established within the adopted MOU.

Section 2.07 Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

The TAC consists of local elected officials and a North Carolina Board of Transportation member. The TAC is the policy board of the RPO who establishes the goals, priorities and objectives of the RPO and endorses/approves all official documents e.g. comprehensive transportation plans within its boundaries, resolutions, the annual plan of work, and transportation improvement projects for submission to NCDOT. The TAC membership is established in the adopted MOU. As of 2013, TAC members are subject to the State Government Ethics Act. Please review ethic requirements on <http://www.ethicscommission.nc.gov/>. Detailed information on ethics requirements for TAC members is listed in Section 2.09.

Section 2.08 Conducting RPO Meetings

It is recommended that each RPO conducts at least four (4) meetings per calendar year. Meetings may consist of separate or joint TAC and TCC meetings and should occur at a time and place that supports broad participation by its members. Electronic meetings are permitted as long as public notice is given and a location for public participation in the meeting is provided. A meeting must have a quorum to conduct businesses of any type. A quorum is defined as 51% of the voting membership as outlined in the RPO's adopted bylaws.

- (i) The TAC, TCC and any subcommittees are considered public bodies under North Carolina law and are subject to the [Open Meetings Law](#) and [Public Records Law](#).
- (ii) An alternate may be appointed to attend meetings should the member not be able to attend. Alternates should be addressed in the bylaws and identified by name in the membership roster. Vacant seats as defined in the bylaws will not count against the quorum.
- (iii) No secret ballot voting is allowed under North Carolina Law. However, written ballots are allowed provided they are signed by each voter and included in the meeting record after the vote is taken. Written ballots shall be available for public inspection immediately following the meeting at which the written vote took place until the minutes of the meeting are approved.
- (iv) A schedule of regular meetings should be kept with the clerk of the county in which the meetings are held, with the LPA's clerk, or as described in the adopted bylaws. If the schedule is changed, the changes should be given to the clerk at least one week prior to the meeting.
- (v) Notice for meetings not listed on the schedule, other than an emergency meeting, should be posted at the door of the usual meeting room(s), public notice bulletin board and delivered to each media outlet and any individual that has filed a written request for notice 48 hours prior to the meeting.
- (vi) For an emergency meeting, the committee shall provide notice to local media outlets that have filed a request. Notice for emergency meetings shall be given by the same method used to notify the members of the committee and shall be given immediately following notice to those members.

Section 2.09 RPO TAC Ethics Obligations

For TAC members, the State Government Ethics Act applies. Specifically, TAC members must complete a Statement of Economic Interest (SEI) and Real Estate Disclosure (RED) form annually. An individual appointed to a TAC may not assume his or her position on the TAC (and thus may not participate in TAC meetings as a member, including voting on matters before the TAC) until they have:

- 1) filed a complete Statement of Economic Interest (SEI); and
- 2) filed a complete Real Estate Disclosure Form (RED) with the State Ethics Commission (Commission); and
- 3) received the Commission's written evaluation of their filed SEI.

In addition, annually all voting TAC members and their alternates are required to timely file a complete SEI and a complete RED with the State Ethics Commission on or before April 15th. The yearly filing period commences January 1st and ends April 15th; electronic filing is encouraged. SEIs and REDs filed after April 15th are untimely and subject to penalties and sanctions. The LPA should ensure that new

TAC members, in addition to continuing TAC members, understand all the Ethics requirements. This can be accomplished by whatever method works best for the individuals involved: agenda item on a TAC agenda, volunteering to meet with members one-on-one, an orientation session that explains Ethics requirements, or other.

For further information on SEIs and REDs and TAC member filing requirements go to www.ethicscommission.nc.gov. For questions regarding SEIs and REDs and the filing requirements contact the State Ethics Commission at SEI@doa.nc.gov or by calling 919-814-3600. For information and questions regarding GS 136-200.2 conflicts of interest, contact Norma Houston at nhouston@sog.unc.edu.

As of October 1, 2014, failure to timely file the required SEI and RED will result in a \$250 fine for a TAC member for each late or incomplete form, resulting in a total fine of \$500 if both forms are filed late or are incomplete. In addition, as of October 1, 2014, failure to file the complete SEI and the complete RED within 60 days from receipt of notice of failure to file will result in referral to the State Bureau of Investigation for investigation and possible prosecution. (See official [NCEC notice](#)).

(a) [TAC members must avoid a conflict of interest.](#)

No member or their alternate may participate in any action as a TAC member if the action may result in a reasonably foreseeable financial benefit to the member, the member's extended family, or any business with which the member is associated. A TAC member or their alternate may participate in an action of the RPO if the action is ministerial only and does not require the exercise of discretion.

(b) [TAC members must disclose a conflict of interest in writing.](#)

TAC members and their alternates have a duty to promptly disclose in writing to the TAC any actual or potential conflicts of interest, using the [TAC Abstention Form](#). These disclosures are a public record and must be attached to the minutes of the meeting in which any discussion or vote was taken by the TAC related to that conflicts disclosure.

(c) [TAC members must not use or disclose confidential information.](#)

TAC members and their alternates shall not use or disclose any nonpublic information gained as a member in a way that would affect a personal financial interest of the member, the member's extended family or a business with which the member is associated.

A TAC member who is no longer serving on the board should be taken off the list, notification email should be distributed to the State Ethics Commission at SEI@doa.nc.gov.

III. RPO Resources

Section 3.01 NCID

The North Carolina Identity Management Service (NCID) is the standard identity and access management platform provided by the Department of Information Technology. NCID is a web-based application that provides a secure environment for state agency, local government, business and individual users to log in and gain access to real-time resources, such as customer-based applications and information retrieval. With an NCID account, users have access to many resources with one account. You use your NCID to sign-in to the [MPO and RPO Planning Grants site](#) to upload your PWP and quarterly invoices. To get an NCID, go to [ncid.gov link](#)

If you have an NCID problem, you can determine whether your NCID account is functioning by attempting to log in to the NCID website: <https://ncid.nc.gov>. If you are able to log in successfully and receive a "Welcome to NCID System" page, your NCID account is functioning properly. After that, if you are unable to access a certain application with your NCID account, please contact the DIT Service Desk at 919-754-6000 or 1-800-722-3946 and tell them you are having problems accessing the application. Be sure to tell them whether you were able to log in successfully to the NCID website with your NCID account or not.

For frequently asked questions go to this [link](#).

Section 3.02 RPO Listserv

There is a listserv used by NCDOT and RPO staff to share ideas, information, and questions relevant to RPOs. To subscribe to the NCRPO Listserv, send an email to: imailsrv@lists.ptrc.org. Leave the subject blank, but in the body of the email enter the following information: **subscribe ncrpolistserv Firstname Lastname**

Section 3.03 RPO Website

Since RPOs are established by North Carolina law, they are not under federal requirement for all content on their web page. They are, however, responsible for showing how they meet [federal requirements for Title VI, EJ, and ADA](#). In addition, it is recommended that all data used for planning purposes be maintained in a place where it can be accessed if requested by the public, e.g. TCC and TAC meeting minutes.

Also, at a minimum, NCDOT encourages each RPO to provide links to the following:

- All transportation related plans (all modes – highway, rail, transit, bicycle and pedestrian) in their planning region;

- the [State Transportation Improvement Program](#) (including [STI Prioritization Process](#) and local methodology);
- Statewide initiatives/plans e.g. [The Statewide Transportation Plan](#), [Public Transportation Statewide Strategic Plan](#), [Statewide Freight Plan](#), and [Strategic Transportation Corridors](#);
- and a list of TCC and TAC meeting dates.

IV. RPO Administration

Section 4.01 Prospectus

The [Prospectus](#) is a formal reference guide that provides a detailed description of the full range of potential work elements that are eligible for inclusion in a Planning Work Program.

Section 4.02 Planning Work Program (PWP)

The [PWP](#) is a standard document that consists of a funding table and narrative. The PWP is prepared on an annual basis to identify the planning priorities for the coming year and to define the planning work products and activities to be carried out by the RPO staff. These elements should all be found in the RPO Prospectus. Estimated expenditures for each major category of work are provided in the funding table.

(a) PWP Guidance

The use of private consultants by an RPO is permitted with prior approval (See Section 5.05, p. 15 for [Procurement procedures](#)). Funds which have not been expended at the end of the fiscal year **do not carry forward**. If no comments are received by the dates listed in Section 4.02(d), proceed with review and adoption process according to timeline in Section 4.02(d).

(b) Preparing a Planning Work Program (PWP)

An adopted [PWP](#) must be submitted to NCDOT annually by May 31st to be eligible to receive reimbursement from NCDOT for RPO work activities in the fiscal year beginning July 1st of the same calendar year. Costs incurred on work activities outside an adopted PWP will not be reimbursed.

(c) Indirect Cost Allocation Plan

The PWP also requires a Fiscal Year Indirect Cost Allocation Plan with it. See Section 6.03 for more details.

(d) PWP Timeline

November	Consult with NCDOT staff, RPO member governments and agencies to identify work tasks, review financial assumptions for the upcoming fiscal year and develop PWP.
January	Funding Award Letter is received (digitally and by hard copy) detailing available funds and required local match. Prepare draft PWP for designated NCDOT staff review. Release Draft PWP for public review if required by an adopted Public Involvement Plan.
February	Submit Draft PWP and upcoming Fiscal Year Indirect Cost Allocation Plan and documentation to NCDOT by February 28 for review and comment. NCDOT will return comments and/or approval within 12 business days.
March	Prepare revisions to PWP as required.
April	Conduct TCC/TAC review and adoption process. Prepare revisions to PWP if required. An original signature of the TAC Chair must appear on the adopted PWP.
May	Transmit one (1) digital copy of the adopted and signed PWP (PDF format), one (1) digital copy of the PWP (Excel format) to Transportation Planning Division (TPD) Grant site by May 31st.
June	PWP Approval Letter issued by NCDOT.

Section 4.03 Changes to a Planning Work Program

Changes to the [Planning Work Program](#) may be required from time to time to detail major shifts in work activities that will impact funding allocations. Revisions to an adopted Planning Work Program are required if there is a significant change in budget, work tasks or expenditure allocation and could be processed throughout the fiscal year (as long as there will be adequate time for the public involvement and approval process through TCC, TAC and NCDOT before the end of fiscal year). There is no limit to the number of revisions in a fiscal year. All revisions to the adopted PWP must be completed by June 30th of the same fiscal year. No amendments will be processed past this date.

(a) PWP Amendment Guidance

Review adopted PWP to determine if changes to work tasks are considered Major or Minor revisions:

(i) Minor PWP Revisions

- 1) **A variance of up to \$5,000 compared to current programmed amount for any category** in the PWP is considered a minor revision and is allowed without amendment if approved in advance by the TPD RPO Coordinator.
- 2) NCDOT staff will send e-mail to RPO with revision approval.

(ii) Major PWP Revisions

- 1) **A variance of more than \$5,000 compared to current programmed amount for any category** in the PWP is considered a major revision and requires amendment. The revision must be reviewed and approved by both the TCC and TAC.
- 2) Prepare [Amended PWP](#) noting added or deleted work tasks. Submit revised PWP documents to designated NCDOT staff for review and approval.
- 3) NCDOT staff comments are returned to RPO within 12 business days. If no comments are received, proceed with review and adoption process.
- 4) Conduct public review of the revised PWP if required (as per RPO's [Public Involvement Plan](#)).
- 5) Conduct TCC/TAC review and adoption process. The original signature of the TAC Chair must appear on the [Planning Work Program Amendment Template](#).
- 6) Transmit one (1) digital copy of the [Amendment Table](#) of the revised PWP (PDF format) and signed [Planning Work Program Amendment Template](#) and one (1) digital copy of the amended PWP (Excel format) to designated NCDOT staff.

Section 4.04 Preparing a Quarterly Report Package

Reimbursement for planning expenses is facilitated through the submittal of a Quarterly Report Package each quarter to NCDOT. During the quarterly report package review, TPD may request deliverables as deemed necessary. An RPO has 10 business days to provide any requested deliverable(s).

(a) Quarterly Report Package

The quarterly report package is a standard set of documents consisting of the RPO [Invoice Cover Letter](#), RPO [Invoice](#), [PWP Expense Report](#) (with quarterly expenditure and narrative tabs filled out) and a current TAC Roster. The package is submitted through the [MPO and RPO Planning Grants Portal](#) on the connect.ncdot.gov site. During the quarterly report package review, TPD may request deliverables as deemed necessary.

The Quarterly Invoice details the LPA request for reimbursement of eligible RPO expenses for the quarter with a breakdown of direct and indirect costs. The PWP Expense Report, with narrative tab, contains highlights of the transportation

planning work accomplished by the LPA over the last quarter and identifies resulting planning work products.

Section 4.05 Quarterly Report Package Guidance

Reimbursement will only be made for qualifying expenses incurred in executing work tasks described in the PWP.

The Quarterly Report Package will not be processed without all the required documents.

If an RPO anticipates that the invoice cannot be submitted on time, contact designated NCDOT staff prior to the deadline or as soon as possible.

Final submittal of the Quarterly Report Package consists of one (1) digital signed copy uploaded on the [MPO and RPO Planning Grants Portal](#) on the connect.ncdot.gov:

- [Invoice Cover Letter](#) (PDF Format),
- [Invoice](#) (PDF Format)
- [Quarterly Expense Report](#) (Excel format)
- [Quarterly Narrative Report](#) (Excel format)
- RPO TAC Roster

TPD reserves the right to request deliverables at any time.

Revisions to the Quarterly Report Package may be required based on NCDOT review. NCDOT will request revisions within 10 business days. Requested revisions will be returned to the RPO within 10 days of request. (Process repeats if necessary, with 10 business days each time.) Revisions must be completed prior to the payment being processed.

Expenses cannot be charged against PWP categories on the PWP Expense Report without an amount budgeted.

No more than the total funding allocation shall be reimbursed during the fiscal year.

The final quarterly report package shall include the Final Yearly Narrative.

(a) Quarterly Report Package Timeline

September 30th	First quarter ends
November 10th	First quarter Report Package due to designated NCDOT staff
December 31st	Second quarter ends
February 10th	Second quarter Report Package due to designated NCDOT staff
March 31st	Third quarter ends
May 10th	Third quarter Report Package due to designated NCDOT staff
June 30th	Fourth quarter ends
August 10th	Fourth quarter Report Package and Yearly Narrative due to designated NCDOT staff

Section 4.06 Final Yearly Narrative

The Final Yearly Narrative is a standard document submitted in conjunction with the final quarterly report of each fiscal year. The report consists of a narrative review of the accomplishments of the RPO over the past year in comparison to the adopted planning work program. The document further describes any significant changes to the LPA, local membership or other concerns that impacted the RPO over the past year.

Section 4.07 Annual Review

The Annual Review allows RPOs and TPD staff an opportunity to have an open discussion on accomplishments over the previous year and discuss any challenges or opportunities for improvement for the RPO and TPD. This review will include the RPO planner and LPA Executive director as well as the TPD coordinator, Unit Head and RPO Administrator. If both the LPA and TPD feel there is no need for an in-person meeting, the TPD Unit Head and the LPA Executive Director must both agree to opt out. Meetings will be scheduled August-September.

Section 4.08 Public Involvement Plan or Policy (PIP)

The [PIP](#) is a formally adopted statement policy or plan regarding public involvement activities related to the work of the RPO. The PIP provides guidance to staff to ensure adequate public review techniques and opportunities are provided, based on specific activities, documents or processes.

Section 4.09 Title VI Plan

[Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) and related federal statutes provide that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, limited English

proficiency (LEP), sex, age or disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. As a federal-aid recipient, NCDOT must also ensure nondiscrimination and equal opportunity in all NCDOT programs (includes RPOs) and activities whether or not those programs and activities are federally funded, including associated activities performed by NCDOT's business partners. As a federal-aid recipient, RPOs are also responsible for developing programs, policies, and procedures to implement Title VI requirements. NCDOT's Title VI Program will work with the Department's Transportation Planning Division to provide Title VI, LEP and Environmental Justice resources and training to assist RPOs in fulfilling their responsibilities. NCDOT Office of Civil Rights (OCR) through the NCDOT Title VI Nondiscrimination Program is working to develop a Title VI Plan, and NCDOT will provide the template to the RPOs once it is complete. NCDOT OCR will do periodic audits of RPOs concerning how they carryout Title VI requirements.

Section 4.10 Environmental Justice (EJ)

Environmental Justice (EJ) at the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) means identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse public health or environmental effects – and interrelated social and economic effects - of the agency's programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations to achieve an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens. In the event that disproportionately high and adverse effects cannot be avoided, minimized, or mitigated, EJ guidelines support providing offsetting benefits and opportunities to enhance potentially affected minority and low-income communities, neighborhoods, and individuals. [FHWA Order 6640.23A](#) and [FTA Circular 4703.1](#) provide recipients with guidance in order to incorporate EJ principles into their plans, projects, and activities.

Section 4.11 Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan

In accordance with FHWA guidelines for complying with USDOT's "Policy Guidance Concerning Recipient's Responsibilities to Limited English Proficient (LEP) Persons," recipients of FHWA funds must develop an LEP Plan or "Language Assistance Plan," which outlines how the recipient will ensure meaningful access by LEP persons to its programs and activities. LEP persons are defined as individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. These individuals have reported to the U.S. Census that they speak English *less than very well*. The LEP plan will include a four-factor analysis, which USDOT guidance outlines should be applied to the various kinds of contact the RPO has with the public to assess language needs and decide what reasonable steps should be taken to ensure meaningful access for LEP persons. The four factors are as follows:

1. The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by a program, activity, or service of the recipient or grantee.
2. The frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program.
3. The nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the recipient to people's lives.
4. The resources available to the recipient and costs.

V. RPO Activities

Section 5.01 CTP Study Priorities

A Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) is a collaborative effort of NCDOT planning staff, RPO staff and local jurisdiction(s). Local jurisdictions may request a CTP or an update to an existing CTP through the RPO. Projects to be considered for funding through the NCDOT prioritization process come from CTPs.

TPD Management will send RPOs a CTP request form by the end of November. RPOs will have between December 1 and January 15 to submit CTP requests through the form. To request a CTP, each jurisdiction must have a land development plan approved within the last five (5) years or be willing to undertake a land development planning process in conjunction with the CTP. The listing of a jurisdiction on the priority list does not guarantee that the study will be assigned or initiated and CTP studies may not be assigned in priority order because of funding, staff resources or other constraints. TPD Management will make upcoming CTP assignments by February 1 so the information can be used for PWP development.

Section 5.02 Prioritization Workgroup Membership

Each Prioritization cycle requires the use of a Workgroup to continue improving the STI Prioritization process. NCARPO elects 4 representatives to participate in the Prioritization Workgroup for each cycle. These members are expected to provide input to the Workgroup on the overall scoring process, while representing the full range of interests from all NCARPO organizations. These members should also serve as a communication liaison from the Workgroup to NCARPO.

Section 5.03 Submitting Projects for Prioritization and Reviewing Scoring Data

The State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is typically developed by NCDOT every two years. Development of each STIP begins with the Prioritization Process, which is organized and overseen by the NCDOT Strategic Prioritization Office (SPOT). For more information regarding the overall Prioritization and STIP Process, refer to <https://www.ncdot.gov/strategictransportationinvestmentssti/> and <https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/PrioritizationResources.aspx>. Also contact the SPOT Office or STIP Unit at NCDOT with questions.

To begin each prioritization cycle, RPOs, MPOs, and NCDOT Divisions submit an allotted number of projects for each mode (Aviation, Bicycle/Pedestrian, Ferry, Highway, Public Transportation, and Rail). Submitted projects can come from previous prioritization cycles, long range plans, or other known transportation needs. Identification of these projects should include significant input from local officials and the public. Specific guidance for submitting projects for prioritization is provided by the SPOT Office separately.

After project submittal, the SPOT office generates all data needed to score projects. This data is released to all RPOs, MPOs, and NCDOT Divisions for a data review period. It is the responsibility of each reviewer to ensure the data to be used for scoring all projects in their area is as reasonable and accurate as possible, and potential corrections should be provided to the SPOT Office.

Section 5.04 Local Input Point Assignment

Each RPO, MPO, and NCDOT Division is required to have an adopted Local Input Point Assignment Methodology that is approved by NCDOT. It is the responsibility of each organization to develop and update their methodology for each prioritization cycle, as well as to have the methodology approved by NCDOT and adopted by their organization.

The SPOT Office releases the quantitative scores for all projects along with the draft list of projects receiving Statewide Mobility funding. RPOs, MPOs, and NCDOT Divisions receive an allotted number of Local Input Points to assign to projects in the Regional Impact category and are responsible for the assignment of these points to their desired projects. Local Input Point assignment should follow each organization's Local Input Point Assignment Methodology and include significant input from local officials and the public.

After Regional Impact points, the SPOT Office releases the total scores (quantitative + local input points) for all Regional Impact projects (including those that cascaded from Statewide Mobility) along with the draft list of projects receiving Regional Impact funding. RPOs, MPOs, and NCDOT Divisions receive an allotted number of Local Input Points to assign to projects in the Division Needs category and are responsible for the assignment of these points to their desired projects. Local Input Point assignment should follow each organization's Local Input Point Assignment Methodology and include significant input from local officials and the public.

After Division Needs points, the SPOT Office releases the total scores (quantitative + local input points) for all Division Needs projects (including those that cascaded from Statewide Mobility and Regional Impact) along with the draft list of projects receiving Division Needs funding.

The draft list of Statewide Mobility, Regional Impact, and Division Needs funded projects are combined with projects from other processes to create the Draft STIP, which is released by NCDOT for public comment.

Specific guidance for developing Local Input Point Assignment Methodologies and assigning local input points is provided by the SPOT Office separately.

Section 5.05 STIP Review and Comment

After a draft STIP is released by NCDOT for public comment, the RPO reviews all information for projects within its region and makes comments as necessary regarding the accuracy of the information and any local issues or concerns.

Section 5.06 Merger Process

RPOs participate in the Merger process as concurring members. Concurring members have signature authority for Merger projects in their areas and will attend Merger project meetings and adhere to the Project Team Member roles and responsibilities. Merger meetings are scheduled to discuss the progression of the project, the issues, and the steps going forward. For more information regarding the process please refer to: <https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/Environmental/Pages/default.aspx>.

Section 5.07 Apply for State Planning and Research Funds (SPR) Funds for specific projects

RPOs may apply for SPR funds to be used for specific projects. NCDOT TPD management will send a letter to all RPOs by the end of January calling for requests. The request period will be from February 1-March 15. TPD Management will notify RPOs sometime in July once the planning budgets have been finalized.

VI. RPO Finances

Section 6.01 Funding

The RPO program is currently funded on a reimbursement basis using Federal State Planning and Research Funds (SPR), with a 20% local match required. Allocations vary based on population and number of counties in the RPO.

(a) Funding Agreement

Each RPO is required to adopt an agreement that establishes rules for disbursement and accounting of RPO grant funds. The Agreement for Disbursement and Accounting of Rural Transportation Planning Funds is the continuing agreement between the LPA and NCDOT. NCDOT may provide reimbursement to the designated LPA only. The LPA may enact sub-agreement(s) pertaining to the local match. A [Funding Award Letter](#) is provided to the LPA detailing the available RPO funding for the coming fiscal year. The fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30.

(b) Revising an Existing Funding Agreement

From time to time NCDOT and the LPA may request a revision of the existing Funding Agreement. Changing the LPA or changes in the level of RPO funding would trigger a revision to the Funding Agreement.

- (i) Request the TPD RPO Program Manager to provide the LPA with the latest copy of the Funding Agreement.
- (ii) Discuss with NCDOT management the revisions being considered.
- (iii) NCDOT management will provide the LPA with the revised Funding Agreement for approval and signatures.
- (iv) Present final Funding Agreement to the RPO TCC and TAC.
- (v) TAC approves the revised funding level.

Section 6.02 Accounting

The LPA shall establish a separate account for the RPO Funds for each fiscal year and shall record all transactions in accordance with acceptable accounting procedures, as approved by the NCDOT. The account established for planning funds will be included in the annual audit of the agency. [2 CFR Part 200](#) outlines standards for grantee financial management systems. Time spent for staff services on work provided for in the PWP should be recorded by work task standard time sheets for each individual and filed for audit purposes. All expenses must be allocated upfront or a method developed to assess costs, based on time spent on the RPO program. Invoices must conform to [RPO Audit Procedures](#).

Pursuant to Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Regulations, the LPA must furnish its Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) to the State. If this number is not provided, the RPOs may be subject to a 20% withholding on each payment. To avoid this 20% withholding and to ensure that accurate tax information is reported to the Internal Revenue Service and the State, the RPOs must use [W-9](#) form to provide the requested information exactly as it appears on file with the IRS.

Section 6.03 Audits

NCDOT will review audit reports of the RPO maintained with the Local Government Commission for any audit findings associated with federal and state funds. Once the final payment has been made for the fiscal year, the contract for the year will be closed and no further payments may be made. The contract may be updated from year to year. Refer to the [NCDOT External Audit Section](#) for current procedures and to [RPO Audit Procedures](#) for reference. Please check the [NC Department of State Treasurer website](#) for the latest information on audit procedures.

(a) Indirect Cost Allocation Plan

Each RPO is required to annually submit current fiscal year's Indirect Cost Allocation Plan to designated NCDOT staff by February 28th, along with draft PWP. This plan is different for each RPO. The fiscal director for the RPO should know what this plan is and work with you. Indirect costs are allowable with the submittal and approval of an indirect allocation plan. NCDOT will accept the indirect cost rate of the RPO approved by the cognizant agency. The Indirect Percentage Rate approved for use in the PWP cannot exceed the percentage rate approved by the Cognizant Federal Agency. If an RPO does not have a cognizant agency letter, NCDOT will approve or negotiate an indirect cost rate based upon the indirect cost plan. An LPA may choose to not charge indirect costs.

Indirect Costs Annual Requirements due with draft PWP (February 28)

- 1) Cognizant Federal Agency Letter approving/acknowledging Indirect Cost Rate
- 2) Cost Allocation Plan (or documentation/worksheets supporting the calculation of the Indirect Cost Rate)
- 3) Certificate of Indirect Costs

Section 6.04 Expenditures

Expenditures will be reimbursed based solely on the provisions of [General Statute 136, Article 17 \(Rural Transportation Planning Organizations\)](#) as they relate to planning requirements. Reimbursement will only be made for qualifying expenses incurred in executing work tasks described in the PWP. Expenses fall into two categories: direct and indirect. Indirect items must be identified in the approved LPA indirect cost plan as directed by [2 CFR Part 200](#). Items not addressed below in Sections 5.04(a) (b) (c) and (d) will be considered on a case by case basis.

(a) Permitted Expenditures

- Salaries and payroll additive costs, transportation expenses, office expenses and expendable supplies related to executing work tasks within an approved PWP.

- Printing, advertising, copying, computer processing, mapping and aerial photography costs as related to executing work tasks within an approved PWP.
- Auditing costs associated with fulfilling State requirements.
- Reimbursements to other LPA agencies, local governments or state agencies for eligible expenditures incurred in executing work tasks within an approved PWP.
- The purchase of special equipment and materials required to execute work tasks within an approved PWP. A [request form](#) should be sent to NCDOT TPD RPO Coordinator for approval prior to the purchase. Purchases for the exclusive use of the RPO must be made in accordance with NCDOT requirements related to minority business enterprises (MBE). If equipment is to be used by other units within the LPA, then expenditure must be allocated upfront or a method developed to assess costs based on usage, as they occur.

(b) Permitted Expenditures, with Prior Approval by NCDOT

Computers/Tablets (See RPO Equipment Section 6.06)	Software
Training/Conferences (See Travel/Training Section 6.07)	Capital Expenditures
Equipment (See RPO Equipment Section 6.06)	Professional Services
Overnight Travel (See Travel/Training Section 6.07)	
Building Space & Related Facilities	

(c) Unacceptable Expenditures

Food/Beverages for Meetings	Fines & Penalties	Entertainment
Management Studies	Legislative Expenses	Proposal Costs
Contributions & Donations	Commuting Expenses	Contingencies*
Interest & Other Finance Costs	Pre-Agreement Costs	Bad Debt
Under-Recovery of Costs on Grant Agreements		

*From 2 CFR Part 200.433: Contingency is that part of a budget estimate of future costs (typically of large construction projects, IT systems, or other items as approved by the Federal awarding agency) which is associated with possible events or conditions arising from causes the precise outcome of which is indeterminable at the time of estimate, and that experience shows will likely result, in aggregate, in additional costs for the approved activity or project. Amounts for major project scope changes, unforeseen risks, or extraordinary events may not be included.

Section 6.05 Procurement, Suspension and Debarment

For any contracted services, each RPO is required to follow [NCDOT procurement procedures](#).

Each LPA is required to comply with [2 CFR Part 200.212](#) (Suspension and Debarment) which requires entities to not make any award or permit any award at any tier to any party which is debarred or suspended or is otherwise excluded from

or ineligible for participation in Federal assistance programs under Executive Order 12549, "Debarment and Suspension." The LPA must maintain conflict of interest statements with respect to purchases of goods and services.

Each RPO is required to have procedures in place to annually verify that vendors providing goods and services under a project to the RPO have not been suspended or debarred by the [Federal](#), [State](#) or City/County Government. The adherence to the procurement, suspension and debarment procedure will be reviewed through the annual auditing process.

Section 6.06 RPO Equipment

Prior to the purchase of equipment, the RPO should send in the [equipment request form](#) to NCDOT TPD RPO Coordinator. Any equipment purchased for the sole benefit and use of the RPO shall be maintained through its useful life as defined by the LPA. RPO must include price quote when seeking approval for purchase of equipment. An [equipment inventory](#) must be kept current. If the LPA is changed, all RPO equipment must be transferred or the agreed upon dollar value of RPO equipment must be transferred to the new LPA.

Section 6.07 Travel/Training

Travel compensation will be based on the General Services Administration (GSA) <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates> rates for mileage, meals, lodging, etc. These rates are set by fiscal year, effective October 1 each year, except for the mileage rate which is set by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) on January 1 each year.

NCDOT TPD worked with MPOs, RPOs, and FHWA to develop Training Pre-approval Guidance (TPD will provide link as soon as the Training Pre-approval Guidance is finalized) for training and conference attendance. A [Travel/Training Eligibility Verification Form](#) must be submitted to NCDOT unit head (copy TPD coordinator on email) five (5) business days prior to training or overnight travel for verification of eligibility of funds, unless already included in approved PWP or is on the list of activities not needing pre-approval in the "Training Pre-approval Guidance". Expense is permitted if no response is received within five (5) business days.

Section 6.08 RPO [Retention of Records](#)

Records related to RPO activities and work products must be retained by the LPA for 3 years after NCDOT has submitted the final voucher to FHWA and FHWA has closed the project in their FMIS system. If the LPA is changed, all records must be transferred.

Any records pertaining to the RPO must be made available to the public for free or for a minimal fee that represents the actual cost of copying. Membership records, meeting minutes showing attendance and voting outcomes, documents, electronic

files, GIS layers, recordings and any other documentation are subject to public inspection unless they meet criteria for exemption as described by the Public Records Statutes.

VII. Reorganizing an RPO

- 1) Identify three to fifteen contiguous counties, or an area that has a total population of at least 50,000 people. Noncontiguous counties adjacent to the same Metropolitan Planning Organization may form an RPO.
- 2) Contact the NCDOT Transportation Planning Division (TPD) and prospective LPA to discuss the formation or revision of the RPO.
- 3) Review and revise standard [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) to reflect the desired RPO structure. Submit draft to designated NCDOT staff for review.
- 4) Prepare final MOU document, reflecting any additional revisions.
- 5) Present final MOU to each county, the LPA and NCDOT for approval. Original signatures and seals must appear on a single page(s). Municipalities within the boundaries of the proposed RPO may adopt a resolution stating their support for the formation of the proposed RPO within ninety (90) days of final approval.
- 6) Submit the signed MOU in triplicate to designated NCDOT staff, along with municipal resolutions. One original copy will be returned to the LPA with original signatures.
- 7) Submit documentation to designated NCDOT staff to verify the LPA has been authorized by its Board to receive funds on behalf of the RPO.
- 8) Conduct a chartering ceremony in cooperation with NCDOT and participating local officials.
- 9) Complete the Funding Agreement Process returning all signed copies to NCDOT. One original copy will be returned to the LPA.
- 10) Present TCC/TAC with a draft [Prospectus](#) and [Planning Work Program](#) for consideration and approval. Approval of these documents is required prior to receiving reimbursement by NCDOT.

VIII. Appendix

Section 8.01 Standard Documents: Examples

- (a) Funding Agreement – This example will be added once the new funding agreements are completed.
- (b) [Funding Award Letter](#)
- (c) [Prospectus](#)
- (d) [Planning Work Program](#)
- (e) [Planning Work Program Approval Letter](#)
- (f) [Quarterly Invoice Cover Letter](#)
- (g) [Planning Work Program Amendment](#)
- (h) Quarterly Report Package: See Planning Work Program and Planning Work Program Approval Letter for examples until this example is added after the FY19 1st Quarter
- (i) [Final Yearly Narrative](#)

Section 8.02 Standard Documents: Templates

- (a) [Planning Work Program](#)
- (b) [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#)
- (c) [Bylaws](#)
- (d) [Public Involvement Policy \(PIP\)](#)
- (e) [RPO Audit Procedures](#)
- (f) [TAC Abstention Form](#)
- (g) [W-9 Form](#)

Section 8.03 Web links and Reference Documents

- (a) [Senate Bill 1195](#)
- (b) [TIP Prioritization](#)
- (c) [Merger Process](#)

- (d) [Open Meetings Law and Open Records Law](#)
- (e) [NCDOT External Audit Section](#)
- (f) [Federal Debarment](#)
- (g) [State Debarment](#)
- (h) [CFR – Code of Federal Regulations \(2 CFR Part 200\)](#)

Section 8.04 Transportation Acronyms

AADT	Annual Average Daily Traffic
AASHTO	American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)
AFV	Alternative Fuel Vehicle
AMPO	Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations
APTA	American Public Transportation Association
AQ	Air Quality
BOT	Board of Transportation (NCDOT)
3-C	Continuing, Cooperative, Comprehensive
CAA	Clean Air Act (1970)
CAAA	Clean Air Act Amendments (1990)
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations (Federal Register)
CIP	Capital Improvement Program
CMAQ	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality
CMS	Congestion Management System
CO	Carbon Monoxide
CO2	Carbon Dioxide
CTP	Comprehensive Transportation Plan
CTPP	Census Transportation Planning Package
DBE	Disadvantaged Business Enterprise
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
EA	Environmental Assessment
EAC	Early Action Compact (EPA)
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency (Federal)

FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FAST ACT	Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act
FFY	Federal Fiscal Year (Oct 1 – Sept 30)
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FMCSA	Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration
FR	Federal Register
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GARVEE	Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle (NC Bond)
GIS	Geographic Information System
HOV	High Occupancy Vehicle (Lane)
HOT	High Occupancy Toll (Lane)
HRRR	High Risk Rural Road
HSIP	Highway Safety Improvement Program
ILT	Interagency Leadership Team
ISTEA	Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (1991)
ITRE	Institute for Transportation Research and Education (NC State)
ITS	Intelligent Transportation System
LOS	Level of Service
LPA	Lead Planning Agency
L RTP	Long Range Transportation Plan (MPO)
MAP-21	Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21 st Century Act
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
MTIP	Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program
MUTCD	Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices
NAA	Non-Attainment Area
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NADO	National Association of Development Organizations
NCAMPO	North Carolina Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations
NCARPO	North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations
NCDOT	North Carolina Department of Transportation
NCPTA	North Carolina Public Transportation Association

NCTA	North Carolina Turnpike Authority
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act (1969)
NHS	National Highway System
NOx	Nitrogen Oxide
PDEA	Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch (NCDOT)
PM 2.5	Particulate Matter, 2.5 micrometers
PPP	Public Involvement Plan
PTD	Public Transportation Division (NCDOT)
PWP	Planning Work Program
RGP	Rural General Public (Transit)
ROAP	Rural Operating Assistance Program (Transit)
ROW	Right of Way
RPO	Rural Planning Organization
RSA	Road Safety Audit
SAFETEA-LU	Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (2005)
SFY	State Fiscal Year (July 1 – June 30)
SIP	State Implementation Plan (Air Quality)
SPOT	Strategic Planning Office of Transportation (NCDOT)
SRTS	Safe Routes to School
STAA	Surface Transportation Assistance Act (1982)
STIP	State Transportation Improvement Program
STP	Surface Transportation Program
SOV	Single Occupancy Vehicle
TAC	Transportation Advisory Committee (Local Elected Officials)
TAZ	Transportation Analysis Zone
TCC	Technical Coordinating Committee (Local Staff)
TCM	Traffic Calming/Control Measure
TDM	Transportation Demand Management
TEA	Transportation Enhancement Activity
TEA-21	Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (1998)
TIA	Traffic Impact Analysis
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
TMA	Transportation Management Area (population of 200,000+)

TOD	Transit Oriented Development
TPD	Transportation Planning Division (NCDOT)
TRB	Transportation Research Board
USDOT	United States Department of Transportation
UAB	Urbanized Area Boundary
USC	United States Code
VMT	Vehicle Miles of Travel
VOC	Volatile Organic Compounds