

EDC Locally Administered Federal-Aid Projects

Stakeholder Partnering



PROGRAM CASE STUDY

This Program Case Study highlights Florida's efforts to use Stakeholder Partnering as a platform for communication, coordination and cooperation in streamlining and improving project delivery and compliance. This is just one example of how stakeholder partnering can operate within the realm of possibilities for each state. It is meant as an aid to those who are refining similar activities or enhancing existing programs.



Florida's Local Agency Program Community of Practice

Florida's Local Agency Program Community of Practice (LAP CoP) is a partnership of transportation experts from different disciplines throughout the state who come together to address Local Agency Program (LAP) technical process issues and improve the guidelines and documentation available for administering Federal-aid projects. Since the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is a decentralized agency with seven district offices and more than 250 local agencies, the LAP CoP helps provide a consistent, statewide approach to these streamlining efforts based on communication and understanding among the different groups.

The LAP CoP began in 2010 when FDOT's Director of Design, Duane Brautigam, who was then Manager of the Specifications and Estimates Office, observed the Virginia DOT's concept for creating a Community of Practice and decided to apply it in Florida. A member of the Florida Association of County Engineers and Road Superintendents (FACERS), Brautigam enlisted their support in identifying representatives from local agencies to join with FDOT in the partnership. He and Cheri Sylvester, who was the previous FDOT Quality Assurance Administrator, reached out to those locals and to internal FDOT staff to get the LAP CoP started.

Florida's Stakeholder Partnering Model

The LAP CoP initially included representatives from FDOT's Central and District Offices, local agencies, and a representative from the Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP). Within a couple years, it grew to also comprise representatives from the Florida Institute of Consulting Engineers (FICE) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

BENEFITS OF FLORIDA'S LOCAL AGENCY PROGRAM COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Communication	Coordination	Cooperation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The LAP CoP provides a forum for the DOT to explain their methods and for the LPAs to ask questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ An open dialogue has led to streamlined processes and requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Mutual understanding of stakeholder roles and responsibilities has increased through vetting of issues and concerns.

Kurt Lieblong, State Project Review Administrator, said that both FDOT and local representatives were identified based on areas of expertise ranging from planning and design through materials, production and construction. The experts serve as long-standing members, and therefore do not rotate on or off the committee.

"We have representatives from some of the districts, but not every district is represented because the idea behind the LAP CoP is that everybody does not have to be there," he said. "There are representatives or experts from certain areas, and if that person does not have an answer on an issue, they will go back to their expertise group, disseminate the information, and bring the resolution back to the LAP CoP."

As an example, Lorraine Hunter, the State LAP Administrator, is on the LAP CoP team, and she takes any issues that she and the District LAP Administrators and Coordinators need to deal with back to her group so they can work on them.

At the first meeting, representatives expressed interest in serving on subgroups focused on specific topics or issues in each of the following four areas: design and plan review; construction, construction submittals and construction compliance; specifications; and project selection and scheduling.

Communication Strategy

Face-to-face meetings are currently held two times per year at FDOT's Turnpike Headquarters, which is centrally located northwest of Orlando, so there are no meeting room costs, and members or their organizations cover travel costs. Ben Lewis, FDOT Quality Assurance Administrator, schedules the meetings typically two to three months in advance and creates an agenda based on a list of current issues or goals that he maintains. The meetings are arranged in a workshop format that includes breakout sessions for the subgroups.

Teleconferencing is used as needed in between the face-to-face meetings. Communication and document reviews are handled through email, as FDOT's SharePoint site is for internal use only and there are external stakeholders involved. Also, Brautigam regularly attends FACERS quarterly meetings as an

Keys to Success

- ▶ Select meeting topics with the understanding that those involved will have different missions, points of view, knowledge bases and expectations.
- ▶ Create subgroups to focus on specific topics.
- ▶ Educate members on how projects and their phases are programmed at the DOT level.

FDOT representative, speaking and providing updates on LAP issues and obtaining feedback on local agency concerns, which serves to further disseminate information to and from the LAP CoP.

In addition, FDOT LAP maintains a LAP CoP web page that includes a section called Asked & Answered. Questions that arise through the LAP CoP, but could have come from locals anywhere, are posted here as answered by either FDOT LAP or members of the LAP CoP. If the question regards an issue that is subsequently addressed by incorporation into a LAP Resource, the question is retired off the list.

Topics Addressed

While the initial goal of FDOT's Specifications and Estimates Office in forming the LAP CoP was to assist locals in working through technical issues in their preparation of their plans, specifications and estimates (PS&E) packages, they soon found that the locals wanted to work on LAP administrative processes as well. Lieblong said that one of their primary concerns was that, as FDOT staff reviewed LAP projects, they sometimes applied DOT standards and specifications that were not always required.

"We told the locals that if it is a Federal requirement, required by the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), they will have to follow it," he said. "However, if it is an FDOT requirement, and the FDOT is adding requirements on top of the Federal ones, then we can look at our processes to see if there are possible ways to ease some of the burden on them."

"Most local projects are sidewalks and trails that probably do not need the same level of construction

LAP CoP Objective: Simplify Construction Project Closeout Requirements

- *FDOT had specific processes and requirements for closing out construction projects, and some of those requirements were above and beyond the Federal-aid requirements. Inputs from LAP CoP local agency representatives helped FDOT streamline those efforts.*

LAP CoP Objective: Review Process Maps for Design and Construction

- *In this current effort, local agencies wanted to learn how FDOT design and construction requirements correlate with those in the CFR. Lorraine Hunter and Ben Lewis coordinated and identified the requirements within the CFR and sent the report out to the LAP CoP as a draft for discussion at the next meeting.*

administration and materials testing that we use in building our interstates,” said Lieblong. “They do not get the traffic and wear and tear that an interstate does. So when we review projects, we want to apply appropriate guidance in those cases.”

One of the solutions worked through the LAP CoP were modifications to the “Big Four” set of specifications that simplify construction for certain local projects. These are specifications in four technical areas – asphalt, earthwork, concrete and landscaping – developed by FDOT for off-system LAP projects. Local agencies can modify them, with approval, to meet varying technical needs. They also provide simplified testing processes and criteria.

The LAP CoP has also worked on trying to further ease the specification process by creating a local agency section for Specs on the Web, a web application that FDOT and consultants use to prepare specifications packages.

Challenges and Solutions

One of the first challenges encountered in this formal partnering effort was determining which topics to address at the kickoff meeting in the fall of 2010. Through preliminary interviews with the FACER members on the LAP CoP, the FDOT developed an initial set of topics to get the team started. These topics were then paired down to focus on technical issues identified prior to the initial meeting. Non-technical issues related to process improvement

areas, which were important to the FACER members, were identified and added at the initial meeting.

Since Florida’s LAP CoP is a large and diverse group, representatives arrived with different issues, points of view, knowledge bases, understandings and expectations. This made it difficult, in the beginning, to focus the group on individual issues. They solved this initial challenge by dividing everyone into subgroups and paring down the number of DOT staff who needed to be involved.

The original goal was to have quarterly face-to-face meetings, but setting those up proved challenging due to schedule conflicts. They have found that a more workable solution is to have in-person meetings twice per year and schedule teleconferences in between.

Chad Thompson, Program Operations Team Leader for the FHWA Florida Division and the LAP CoP’s FHWA representative, said that the local representatives are very time constrained not just to attend meetings, but also to review anything in advance of the meetings. “It is basically a case where the people who are really knowledgeable and can contribute the most are also some of the busiest local representatives,” he said.

The solution so far has been to remain flexible. For example, FDOT is currently rewriting their LAP manual and, since it can be a challenge for LAP CoP members to review and provide feedback on

documents as they are being developed, they asked the local representatives to review items when they could, and if a deadline is missed, it may still be possible to address comments later as updates.

The formal stakeholder partnering process has also necessitated that FDOT invest time in additional education and training for members not familiar with programming and funding processes. Understanding how projects and their various phases are programmed provided a big learning curve for not only locals, but also some internal FDOT staff from particular functional areas.

Summary of Benefits

Florida's transportation community has realized several benefits from their partnering effort, the main one being better communication. The LAP CoP provides a forum for vetting issues, such as conflicting priorities and differing approaches to resource allocation, to achieve a greater mutual understanding of each agency's different roles and responsibilities.

The LAP CoP also serves as a channel for receiving local inputs on FDOT processes. It provides FDOT staff with the opportunity to explain the reasons behind their program requirements to stakeholders, and it gives local agencies the opportunity to question why the department asks for certain things. This communication has led to a better understanding among the groups and to feedback that FDOT staff uses to examine requirements and identify areas where they can provide local agencies with more flexibility in meeting Federal requirements. Giving local agencies the opportunity to ask questions, and having FDOT answer their questions and explain the reasons behind the Department's requirements, has ultimately been useful in several streamlining efforts.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Florida's Local Agency Program Project Review website includes links to the LAP CoP web page and to their Questions "Asked & Answered" page: <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/officeofdesign/ProjectReview/LAP/>
- ▶ EDC-2 Local Public Agency Exchange on Locally Administered Federal-Aid Projects Initiatives: What's in it for You? The recorded Exchange can be found on the FHWA's Accelerating Innovation website: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/everydaycounts/edctwo/2012/localaid_131124.cfm
- ▶ Federal-aid Essentials is a resource of online videos on Federal-aid regulations and requirements applicable to States and Local Public Agencies: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federal-aidessentials/>
- ▶ The FHWA Federal-aid Program Administration Local Public Agency Web page provides links to Federal-aid reference guides, training resources, and field contacts: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federalaid/lpa/index.cfm>

For additional information about this EDC Initiative, please contact:

EDC2 Locally Administered Federal-aid
Projects Innovation Lead

Michael R. Smith

Project Management Engineer/Team Leader
Construction Project Management Technical Service Team
FHWA Office of Technical Services/Resource Center
michael.smith@dot.gov

EDC2 Stakeholder Partnering
Strategy Lead

Robert S. Wright

National LPA Coordinator
FHWA/Office of Infrastructure/Office of Program Administration
robert.wright@dot.gov



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