



MEMORANDUM

To: CMAP Board and Committees

From: CMAP Staff

Date: March 1, 2017

Re: Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program

The purpose of the Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program is to implement GO TO 2040 by providing assistance to communities in aligning their local plans and regulations with the regional plan. Since its initiation, the LTA program has been a major CMAP activity, devoting approximately \$20 million in consulting contracts and staff resources to assist communities with planning. CMAP maintains a separate webpage for each completed project and many ongoing projects on the [LTA website](#).

During January and February, CMAP staff met with working committees to update them on the current status of the LTA program, and to cover two items in particular: the LTA call for projects, which will identify new projects to begin in late 2017 and early 2018; and advancing implementation of completed projects. At the Board meeting in March, staff will discuss both of these items with the Board.

New call for projects

The LTA program faced significant challenges in 2016, mainly due to state fiscal issues. The annual LTA call for projects was cancelled due to financial uncertainty, and consultant-led projects were paused for the first half of the year, as CMAP was unable to pay invoices. CMAP's financial position has stabilized in the second half of 2016, with receipt of state funding and a restructured dues program, so the LTA program can now be reinvigorated.

CMAP will conduct a call for new LTA projects in 2017, with a process and schedule similar to previous years. The call for projects will begin in early May, with applications due in late June or early July, and project selection complete by October. As usual, CMAP will coordinate with the RTA on the call for projects and project selection.

The call for projects will be highly publicized, as it has been in the past. CMAP will host a one-day workshop on May 16 to publicize the program, provide an opportunity for past project sponsors to describe their work, highlight implementation successes, and help to generate ideas and form partnerships for new applications. This will be the largest single activity to publicize

the program, but CMAP will also present to COGs and other groups of prospective applicants, send email updates, and hold an information session with both call-in and in-person attendance options. The review of applications will involve CMAP committees, Counties and COGs, transit agencies, nonprofit partners, and similar groups.

While the general structure of the new call for LTA projects will remain consistent, there are some new areas of emphasis. Project types have evolved over the years, with fewer comprehensive plans and more projects that address development regulations, build local capacity, and otherwise move toward implementation. The new call for projects also provides an opportunity to link to emerging priorities of ON TO 2050, including community capacity, inclusive growth, stormwater management, climate resilience, and freight.

As in the past, project types are constrained by funding eligibility. While CMAP's federal transportation funds provide broad eligibility for projects that affect transportation and land use, some specialized projects require outside funding to cover all or part of their cost. CMAP currently has grants to address many of these, from sources like the IEPA (water quality and watershed planning), NOAA (climate resilience), Cook County CDBG-DR (stormwater), and the Chicago Community Trust (housing). Other funding sources are currently being pursued.

Implementation of completed plans

The purpose of the LTA program is not simply to produce good plans, but to achieve actual results, making implementation an important follow up activity. As part of an [evaluation of the LTA program](#) in 2014, several changes were made to support implementation of completed projects. These have been helpful, but have raised additional questions about CMAP's role in implementation.

Current practice

Currently, CMAP supports implementation through the following methods:

- Implementation relies most strongly on local commitment. A local match was put in place in 2015 to ensure local commitment, and a screening of commitment now occurs in the evaluation of the project proposals.
- Implementation updates on projects completed recently (within two years) are prepared quarterly, and updates on all completed projects are prepared each July.
- Staff resources are devoted to small-scale implementation activities. Staff roles typically include linking communities with other public agencies, nonprofit organizations, or private developers; CMAP can effectively act as a “matchmaker,” aligning local needs with organizations with the resources to address them. Other common roles have included conducting trainings or small research projects, or assisting communities with pursuing grant funding. These are small-scale activities, and have been accomplished with limited time by staff.
- The involvement of partner organizations – particularly those with implementation resources to commit – is also important to advance implementation. Partner involvement in each project is tracked and updated regularly, with new partners added as implementation priorities are identified. CMAP staff regularly discuss the LTA program with common implementers, like IDOT, transit agencies, and nonprofit partners.

- Other implementation activities are larger in size, such as a zoning ordinance update that follows a comprehensive plan, and these require the community to submit a separate follow-up LTA application. Projects of this magnitude fall outside of the small-scale implementation assistance that CMAP regularly provides.

Questions about future implementation involvement

The current level of staff resources devoted to implementation allows staff to push progress in small ways, without excessive time expenditure. However, questions remain concerning the expenditure of resources other than staff time – namely, funding – on project implementation. To date, all implementation activities have been achieved by staff, or by partner organizations at no cost to CMAP.

From one perspective, there is an argument for CMAP to commit resources of all types to project implementation, just as it does for the LTA program overall. Staff may lack necessary expertise or time availability to effectively advance implementation. On the other hand, commitment of funding for implementation to consulting firms, or directly to the community, opens the agency to difficult decisions. There will be great interest in receiving financial implementation assistance, and implementation activities are typically shorter-term and more opportunistic than a full plan, making a regular competitive selection process ineffective. Unless there is a clear way of determining what activities to fund in what communities, concerns about fairness will emerge.

Over the past few months, staff have asked working committees to respond to questions on this subject, including: Are there any overall flaws or problems in the agency's approach to LTA implementation to date? Is there value in committing financial resources to implementation beyond staff time – namely, direct grants to communities or contracts with consulting firms? If so, what kinds of standards might be used to make funding decisions?

In their discussions, working committee members strongly favored CMAP taking a role in helping to implement LTA plans. However, there were some caveats and concerns about funding implementation, such as:

- Committee members noted that CMAP should retain some control over the use of funds that are given as grants. Implementation funding should be project-specific, not unrestricted.
- Committee members supported small-scale implementation activities that are closely related to planning, but several committee members had concerns about moving beyond planning-related activities to fund engineering or construction or other major capital costs.
- There was strong interest in ensuring local commitment, and providing implementation funding only as a match, contingent on significant funding from the local sponsor. However, there was also discussion of the limited ability of lower-income or smaller communities to contribute funding.
- Several committee members were comfortable with funding implementation activities if the program were small, and considered a pilot, rather than a major activity that would redirect significant resources from new LTA projects.

- Finally, it was noted that RTA, one of CMAP's major partners in the design and management of the LTA program, had been devoting resources to implementation for years and had positive experiences.

Recommendations

Based on committee feedback and internal staff discussions, staff recommends beginning to devote small amounts of funding to assist with implementation of completed LTA projects. To try this idea as a pilot, staff recommends setting aside \$50,000 of the funding available for new LTA contracts in FY 18. Each individual grant will be in the range of approximately \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Rather than doing a formal call for implementation ideas, staff proposes to evaluate funding opportunities as they arise. Proposals will be evaluated according to several criteria: consistency with the adopted plan and with GO TO 2040; demonstrated local commitment (including local match or non-monetary commitment); community need; feasibility of the proposed activity and likelihood of success; eligibility of the proposed activity within the restrictions of CMAP's funding sources; and size of funding request.

ACTION REQUESTED: Discussion

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