District Department of Transportation

Peer Exchange

"Strategic Goals to Manage Research Programs:

Building a Premier Research Program"

Research, Development, &
Technology Transfer Branch

June 5-7, 2013

June 10, 2013

ONE CITY

Peer Exchange
Research, Development, & Technology Transfer Branch

Table of Contents

1 Purpose of Peer Exchanges

The use of peer exchanges was established to provide State departments of transportation (DOT) research, development, and technology (RD&T) programs with the opportunity to examine and evaluate their own programs through a collaborative team of peers, experts, and persons involved in the process, where the exchange of vision, ideas, and best practices could be fostered to benefit both their program and the program of the peer team participants.

The regulatory references in support of the peer exchange are as follows:

23 CFR 420.2031

Peer exchange means a periodic review of a State DOT's RD&T program or portion thereof, by representatives of other State DOTs, for the purpose of exchange of information or best practices. The State DOT may also invite the participation of FHWA and other Federal, State, regional, or local transportation agencies; the Transportation Research Board (TRB); and academic institutions, foundations, or private firms that support transportation research development or technology transfer activities.

23 CFR 420.205(b)2

The State DOTs must provide information necessary for peer exchanges.

23 CFR 420.209(a)(5)3

Procedures to determine the effectiveness of the State DOT's management process in implementing the RD&T program, to determine the utilization of the State DOT's RD&T outputs, and to facilitate peer exchanges of its RD&T Program on a periodic basis.

23 CFR 420.209(a)(7)4

Participation in peer exchanges of its RD&T management process and of other State DOT's programs on a periodic basis. To assist peer exchange teams in conducting an effective exchange, the State DOT must provide them the information and documentation required to be collected and maintained under this subpart. Travel and other costs associated with the State's peer exchange may be identified as a line item in the State DOT's work program and will be eligible for 100 percent Federal funding. The peer exchange team must prepare a written report of the exchange.

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State Planning and Research Guide for Peer Exchanges, Federal Highway Administration [Available] http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/spr/10048/10048.pdf

2 Objectives and Scope of DDOT RDT Branch Peer Exchange

2.1 Peer Exchange Objectives

The objectives of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) Research, Development, & Technology Transfer (RDT) Branch Peer Exchange were:

1. Receive peer input and perspective on RDT Strategic Plan.
2. Obtain assistance in assessing validity of the strategic plan goals, strategies, action items, and performance measures.
3. Gather peer feedback on implementing the action items, measuring performance, and achieving the goals.

As a result of having conducted the peer exchange, DDOT expected to have peer perspectives and input to the following questions:

- Will accomplishing these goals make a difference in rebuilding RD&Ts relevance, use, and credibility within DDOT? How, or if not, why not?
- Are the goals and their action plans and performance measures achievable within the time and with the available resources? If not what is needed?
- What will be the biggest barriers to implementing our goals and how do we overcome them?

2.2 Peer Exchange Scope

To prepare for the peer exchange, the team reviewed documentation describing Department initiatives; select materials describing the RDT Branch Research Program; the 2013 State Planning & Research Part II, Research, Work Plan; and the Draft RDT Branch Strategic Plan, 2013-2018. Team members participated in a pre-exchange telephone conference call that provided an opportunity for RDT Branch staff to answer team questions about the conduct and content of the exchange.

During the exchange meeting, the team:

- Participated in facilitated discussion regarding members' respective research programs
- Engaged with senior management from DDOT and the FHWA District Division Office regarding their experiences with and future expectations of the research program
- Made observations on the RDT Branch research program

- Provided comment on RDT program strengths and opportunities
- Discussed characteristics of a premier transportation research program
- Discussed and provided comment on elements of the Draft RDT Branch Strategic Plan including the four goals listed below, as well as performance measures, strategies and action items.

    Goal 1. Enhance the visibility of the research program.

    Goal 2. Enhance the research value proposition.

    Goal 3. Propel the agency's data-driven culture.

    Goal 4. Partner for success.

Each team member prepared and shared with the team specific observations and action items to investigate for applicability or put into practice in their respective programs. The team prepared its report of the exchange for the RDT Branch. As a final responsibility, the Peer Exchange Team presented a summary of its findings to DDOT executive management and the FHWA District of Columbia Division Administrator.

3 Peer Exchange Participants

3.1 Peer Exchange Team Members

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3.2   Peer Exchange University Partners/Event Coordination

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3.3   Peer Exchange Meeting Attendees

DDOT executives and the FHWA Division Administrator attended both the information seeking session at the beginning of the exchange meeting as well as the close out session when the team presented its findings.

- Christopher Lawson, FHWA District of Columbia Division Administrator
- Terry Bellamy, Director, DDOT
- Sam Zimbabwe, Associate Director, Policy, Planning & Sustainability Administration
- Ronaldo Nicolson, Associate Director, Infrastructure Project Management Administration

- John Thomas, Associate Director, Urban Forestry Administration
- Carl Jackson, Associate Director, Progressive Transportation Services Administration
- James Cheeks, Chief Traffic Engineer, Transportation Operations Administration
- Rezene Medhani, Supervisory Civil Engineer, QA/QC, Infrastructure Project Management Administration
- Jim Sebastian, Manager, Active Transportation Branch, Policy, Planning & Sustainability Administration
- Bill McGuirk, Supervisory General Engineer, Transportation Operations Administration
- Katie Crabb, Librarian
- Samantha Smith, Librarian
- Kyle Scott, Capital City Fellow, DDOT

4 Key Themes, Strengths, Opportunities, and Building a Premier Program

4.1 Key Themes

A number of key themes emerged during the Peer Exchange Team discussions. These themes provide a background upon which many of the program aspects were considered.

Context drives opportunities
- Small program in unique situation (DDOT is a state, county, and city)
- Resources not proportionate to level of complexity
- Balancing research with operations – research project activities are collateral duties for technical/operational staff

Results-oriented program will produce significant outcomes
- Bridging the gap between research product and implementation
- Identifying the right research
- Managing a diversity of resources and focusing on what is right for this program/the District

Collaborative research participation will enhance value

Research management/program evaluation is essential to maintain value
- How to determine success – well-done draft strategic plan, great foundation, but how are you going to define success?
- Using the strategic plan for strategic management of the program and maintain/update the plan

Goals and performance measures are good management practice

4.2 Program Strengths

The Peer Exchange Team noted significant strengths of the Research Program. These strengths are providing a remarkable foundation for developing solutions to the Department's most pressing problems and enhancing the effectiveness of DDOT's service delivery.

Organizational Support for Research

- Great culture that is receptive to research
- High level (executive) support is a huge plus that enhances the effectiveness of the research function
- Support to take appropriate risks necessary for finding solutions
- Access to executive management which provides needed input to the research program; strengthening relevancy and fostering implementation of results
- Lots of research needs put forth
- Encouragement of DDOT staff to attend the TRB Annual Meeting (free, nearby); training budget sufficient to allow attendance at other trainings and conferences

RDT Branch Staff

- **N**ew staff not tied to past program management; there is a clean slate to move forward
- Highly motivated, fresh, open-minded, capable, and productive staff
- Branch leadership has creditability within DDOT; expertise and experience
- The current staff has the capabilities and is currently meeting the FHWA requirements for SP&R program management
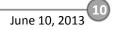
Available Internal Resources

- Communications and Public Information expertise available internally
    - Program marketing to internal and external customers and stakeholders
    - Communications guidance
- Six Sigma training within the Department influences performance management, data-driven decision-making, process improvement – all positive factors for fostering a culture predisposed toward research

Location, Location, Location

- DDOT is in close proximity to a diversity of research peers, partners, and stakeholders
    - FHWA and other USDOT administrations
        - FHWA Turner-Fairbank Highway Research Center (TFHRC)
    - Other governmental agencies, local, state levels
    - TRB, AASHTO, and other associations
    - Research institutes
    - International research focus such as FHWA TFHRC
    - Congress

Program Management

- Strategic Plan Development; vision with goals, actions, and performance measures are on the right track
- Customer input to program: interviews/talking with Branches to identify needs and inform them of research services is a big plus
- Presence of a quick response fund/task

Diversity of Partners

- Recognition of the importance of partners and the need to create or strengthen relationships, e.g., composition of the peer panel
- Participation in the program and knowledge and expertise of Howard University
  - o Howard University principal investigator knows DDOT well; can provide efficient and effective responses to DDOT needs
  - o Howard University's ability to network with other academics brings needed expertise to solve DDOT problems
- Strong intern program that does research

4.3 Program Opportunities

The Peer Exchange Team discussed opportunities associated with each of the four goals in the RDT Branch Draft Strategic Plan. The opportunities are presented for consideration by the Branch as it finalizes its plan.   We list the goals in a modified order from the plan by addressing, in our opinion, the most important goal first and then the three remaining goals given in order of importance.

Goal 2: Enhance the Research Value Proposition

- Maximize resources for producing solutions to DDOT's priority needs: investigate innovative and additional research funding opportunities, e.g., Enterprise Fund
- Continue the focus on producing quality, relevant research results
- Take advantage of the unique context through urban transportation research leadership
  - o Growth in District – research is an important asset to manage change
- Increase relevancy of research problem statements by enhancing connections between DDOT staff and university researchers
- Focus on maintaining effective management of the research portfolio
  - o Seek appropriate balance between longer-term requirement for research vs. the short-term needs; balancing the portfolio

- Consider programming unfunded research statements as continuation phases on existing projects where applicable and possible, enabling greater percentage of problem statements to be addressed
- Continue to seek opportunities to leverage research related activities being conducted in operational areas within the Department
- Manage expectations for the research program's funding and educate staff about what the program tends to fund; give feedback to proposers on why projects were not funded
- Realize and communicate that limited funding means that some project proposers will be disappointed
- Seek peer organization's input for guidance on contract efficiency improvements (in addition to input from the Peer Exchange Team) using the AASHTO Research Advisory Committee as a resource
- Facilitate growth and Department participation in the intern program

Goal 3: Propel the Agency's Data-Driven Culture

- There is a hunger for data within the agency
- Find partners internally – other data champions (opportunity to create a working group and a vision document to create a data center)
- Building a data center enables the RDT Branch to fulfill an incubator role with the ultimate goal of spinning off the center to an operator organizations that will maintain it after RDT sets the framework and the strategy (a great role for the research group)
- Mine the existing and available data resources
- Focus on quality data management and integration where relevant
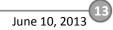
Goal 4: Partner for Success

- Capitalize on the strength of proximity to vital resources of/at universities
- Enhance/increase breadth of partnerships
  - Nurture relationship with the FHWA Turner-Fairbank Highway Research Center (TFHRC)
  - As applicable, seek participation in diverse programs, e.g., FHWA/TFHRC's work with the Forum of European Highway Research Laboratories
  - Investigate partnerships with private sector organizations (e.g. parking operators)
  - Investigate partnerships with non-profit research and transportation entities

- Exercise the existing capacity for leadership in urban transportation research
  - Consider initiating a pooled fund or collaborative study with urban focus (may do outside current venues such as FHWA Transportation Pooled Fund program or the AASHTO National Cooperative Highway Research Program), potentially lead through National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)
  - Investigate taking more of a leadership role within NACTO; there may be a role for collaboration with MPOs and city planning departments
- Encourage and nurture existing partnerships
  - Strengthen ties with local and regional agencies
  - Position the program to participate in future UTC opportunities (e.g. thinking about matching funding, partners)

Goal 1: Enhance the Visibility of the Research Program

- Market the benefits, research successes, and services of the research program
  - Develop a branding plan for the research program and implement it
    - With new RDT Branch leadership/staff and creation of a strategic plan for research, capitalize on the freedom and "clean slate" to identify a brand
    - Consider positive and creative taglines: "You have a premier research program, you just don't know it yet"
  - Use the booth at the TRB Annual Meeting to foster visibility and credibility of the DDOT research program with external peers, potential customers, and partners
- Strengthen existing and increase communications
  - Enhance the efforts to effectively communicate research results and successes; consider new communication vehicles and target audiences with appropriate media/messages
  - Partner with Communications/Public Information within the agency to market the program and communicate research results (capitalizing on the strength of having communications and public information expertise available)
- Consider more effective use of the internal research management infrastructure
  - Expand the role of the RAC using their expertise, knowledge of the Department, and influence for tasks such as accelerating implementation of research results; providing partnership research opportunities, and marketing research and innovation successes among peers
  - Investigate the synergies of integrating the roles and responsibilities of the Research Subcommittee and RAC, e.g., make the subcommittee a subgroup of the RAC in more than just name

- Promote research program credibility by building on successes, e.g., parking, streetlights, street trees; mine the data for asset management
- Continue promoting the services and capabilities of the Library
  - Develop a plan for enhancing the visibility and functionality of the library

4.4   Building a Premier Research Program

The Peer Exchange Team discussed characteristics of a premier research program and encourages DDOT RDT Branch to consider the following items:

Support the Strategic Plan Concepts – on the right track

- Relevancy of research; sharply focused on what can be done well, and capitalize on where the program is unique
- Accomplish quality research
- Be responsive to needs
- Focus on visibility of the research efforts and results; it is important to maintain and build credibility to increase use of research services
  - Goal is that "the Research Program is the *go-to* place to solve problems"
- Facilitate and use strong and complimentary partnerships
- Nurture the high level support – and pride in the research program at the executive level (the senior staff should brag about it)
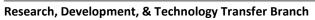
Implementation of the RDT Branch Strategic Plan

- How do you go from 0-100?
  - Incrementally
  - Be proactive – personal face-to-face time, identifying potential projects
  - Build on your successes
  - Start with low-hanging fruit that will get you successes
  - Tell your story
- Organization of how and when action items of the plan are accomplished will be important
  - Put a timeline in the plan for the action items
  - Assign who will accomplish actions
  - Identify needed resources to complete the action items
  - Be aware of what you can achieve, and modify the plan if you need to

Additional Characteristics of a Premier Program to Consider

- Innovative funding – Enterprise funds, leverage the rest of the department, be aware of other research agency-wide (coordinate efforts)
- Positioned for success with realistic, achievable goals
- Being copied by peers is an indicator of success – DDOT Research Program can be a model
- Have a good peer network
- Well-managed: efficient, effective use of resources
  - Portfolio given funding and staffing
- Fosters a strong relationship with all parts of the agency, e.g., technology, data, public information
- Research program drives innovation – an innovation engine
- Understanding program strengths, the customers, and market for research -- niche well-defined

5 Peer Exchange Team Member Observations & Planned Actions

Stephen Arhin, Howard University Transportation Research Center

Observations:

- Contract model Montana DOT research program uses may be useful for DDOT
- Having the "ten minutes of face time" is an important element for understanding research needs and problems that will be used for developing research project statements

Robert E. Griffiths, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Observations:
- DDOT is on the cusp of building a premier research program
- I see DDOT developing and enhancing opportunities for collaborative research with national and local partners, and I would like to be a part of that collaborative research

Planned Actions:
- I want to make others in my organization aware of these opportunities (e.g.; make our staff aware of RDT website and common research needs such as trip and parking generation, time of day lane restrictions and performance measures)
- DDOT has established a strong partnership with Howard University and other local universities through Howard. I'd like our organization to begin to establish research partnerships with Howard and other local universities in the region.
- I'd like to establish periodic meetings with DDOT RDT staff to discuss our current and planned research projects to see how we could help each other achieve our desired research needs and objectives.

Barbara T. Harder, B. T. Harder, Inc. -- Facilitator

Observations:
The scope and caliber of the work of DDOT is remarkable. This was an excellent experience for me to gain knowledge about the Department. The more I heard about the Department, the

more I am convinced that the RDT Branch can be a national leader for urban transportation research.

Planned Actions:
- MDSHA advanced leadership training program: each program participant has an individual accomplishments plan. One of the items senior management encourages is to publish a paper, serve in some capacity within TRB or other professional association. Take this concept to other state DOTs looking to foster involvement in TRB and for enhancing expertise and credibility of staff. Similarly, Soumya has given his staff the option of including serving on a TRB or research project panel or preparing a paper as one of the self directed performance measures for staff evaluations
- Promote the concept of the research function within a state DOT as an incubator that can spin off start-ups.
- Consider the concept of adding a following phase to an existing research project using an applicable research need that was not able to be funded in the initial programming.
- When managing TPF projects, it is advisable to have access to FMIS, Business Object Report. Share this knowledge with others; Sue Sillick is a resource.
- For research problem statement submittals, give some grace time to those willing to provide a more robust problem description. DDOT deadline for problem statement submittals is x and for those having more robust descriptions x + 2 weeks. Share this concept with other program managers.
- The concept of having interns that are placed in operating units performing research tasks for the unit is an excellent use of this new talent. It promotes research program visibility as well as gives a product for the intern's academic requirements. Share this concept with other organizations.
- Montana uses a 10% contingency for reserving research project moneys within the SP&R research budget for research projects that may be initiated during the year
- Make sure that Soumya and Stephanie are on the TRB Conduct of Research Committee friends list and provide them with information regarding the upcoming mid-year meeting to be held at TRB (Keck Center) on June 20-21.

Allison R. Hardt, Maryland State Highway Administration

Planned Actions:
- Develop a brand for our research program.
- Encourage staff to spend "ten minutes of face time" with our customers.

- Develop a formal implementation plan for projects – a resource the research program can provide to operating offices.
- I really like the idea of the "Enterprise Fund." It would be very useful to have a small fund for developing innovative ideas, which could help leverage existing resources.

Andrew Lemer, Transportation Research Board

Observations:

1. As a small program, DDOT research has limited staff resources as well as funding. A strategic emphasis on providing useful information to the agency and its external stakeholders that will improve agency and program performance and positive public recognition will likely be more productive than trying to perform substantial exploratory or developmental research. In other words, being a "premier provider of leading edge information and advice" is a more plausible and practical vision than developing a "premier research program."
2. Nevertheless, the unique portfolio of issues confronting DDOT offers opportunities for the "surgical strike," the sharply targeted research effort that can make a big difference to the operating administrations. In addition, the understanding that will support definition of these high-value research efforts will also give the research staff the capability to add value to the operating programs by attracting external resources, increasing complementarity or synergy among programs, and communicating the agency's leadership among agency management and to the broader world.
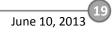
Sue Sillick, Montana Department of Transportation

Planned Actions:

1. Complete development and documentation of implementation process, policy, forms, and, especially, follow-up. Post materials from states to the Research Program and Project Management (RPPM) website when the website is transferred to an AASHTO server.
2. Document performance measures (output and outcome) tracked and follow through. Use RPM and d. draft strategic plan/peer exchange, include:
    a. PI technology transfer efforts: presentations, papers, posters, etc.
    b. Research staff technology transfer efforts
    c. Invitations to speak, present posters, write articles
3. As a closure to the annual solicitation process and feedback effort, send information on projects selected to all who submitted research ideas.
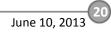
4. Consider meeting with staff to identify issues/problems and translate those that can be solved through research into problem statements.

5. Send requested items to peer exchange team:
    a. Contract boilerplate
    b. Library needs assessment questions

6 Appendices

Appendix A Peer Exchange Agenda

![District Department of Transportation logo]

District Department of Transportation Peer Exchange
Strategic Goals to Manage Research Programs:
Building a Premier Research Program at DDOT
June 5 – 7, 2013

AGENDA

WEDNESDAY – June 5, 2013

| 8:45 – 9:00 am | **Welcome** | RD&T |
| | Brief self Introductions | All |

| 9:00 – 9:15 am | **Overview of the Peer Exchange and Objectives** | Harder |
| | Participants' Expectations for the Peer Exchange | All |

9:15 – 10:15 am	**DDOT Organization, Services, Research Experience**	RD&T
	Perspectives on research from DDOT Executives and	DDOT
	FHWA Division Representative	FHWA

| 10:15 – 10:30 am | **Break** | |

| 10:30 – 11:00 am Dey, Dock | **RD&T Organization and Program Description** | RD&T - |
| | Howard Univ - Arhin | |

11:00 – 11:30 am Dey, Dock	**RD&T Strategic Plan**	RD&T –
	Development, status, intended use, goals, action plans, performance measures presentation (~30 minutes)	
	Team discussion and clarifying questions	All

| 11:30 – 12:00 noon | **Identify questions from morning discussion** | Harder All |

| 12:00 – 1:00 pm | **Lunch** | |

1:00 – 1:30 pm	**Use of Strategic Goals to Manage Research Programs**	Harder
	Concept discussion – purpose, use, value, successes	All
	Review of peer exchange objectives	Harder

| 1:30 – 2:45 pm | **Goal 1. Enhance the visibility of the research program** | All |
| | Review goal statement, performance measures, and action plan elements | |

Team discussion and clarifying questions

2:45 – 3:00 pm	**Break**	
3:00 – 4:15 pm	**Goal 2. Produce quality and relevant research** Review goal statement, performance measures, and action plan elements Team discussion and clarifying questions	All
4:15 – 5:00 pm	**Identify questions and issues**	Harder
5:30 pm	**Group Dinner**	

THURSDAY – June 6, 2013

8:30 – 9:00 am	**Recap of Wednesday** Comments	Harder All
9:00 – 10:15 am	**Goal 3. Propel the agency's data-driven culture** Review goal statement, performance measures, and action plan elements Team discussion and clarifying questions	All
10:15 – 10:30 am	**Break**	
10:30 – 11:45 am	**Goal 4. Partner for success** Review goal statement, performance measures, and action plan elements Team discussion and clarifying questions	All
11:45 – 1:00 pm	**Lunch**	
1:00 – 3:00 pm	**Identify priority items that emerged from presentations and discussion**	All
3:00 – 3:15 pm	**Break**	
3:15 – 5:00 pm	**Draft elements and contents of team report** **Including team key takeaways**	All
6:00 pm	**Dinner**	

FRIDAY – June 7, 2013

8:30 – 10:30 am	**Report finalization**	Harder
10:30 – 11:30 am	**Close-out presentation to DDOT Management**	All
11:30 – 11:45 am	**Peer exchange wrap-up**	RD&T – Dey, Dock