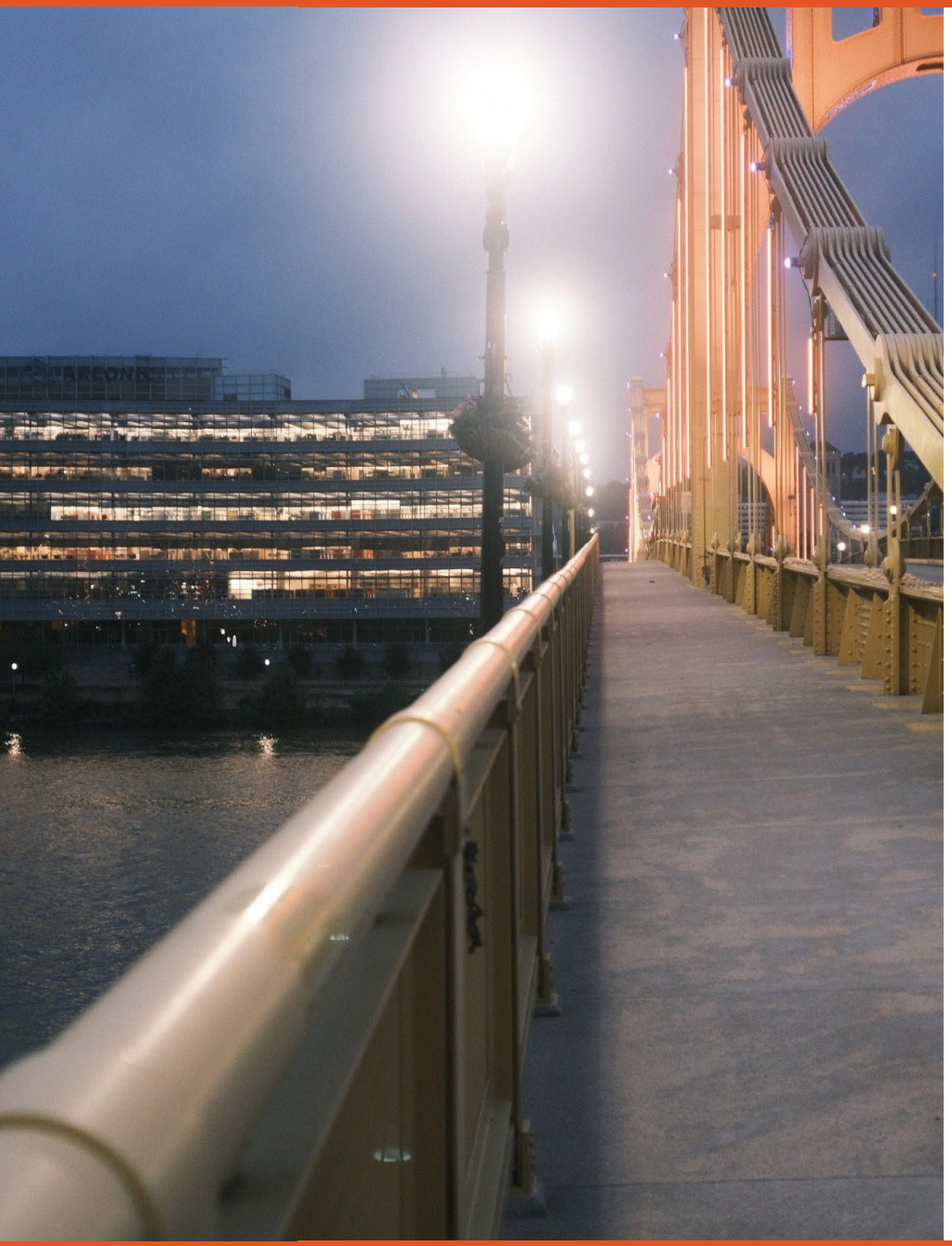

AASHTO RAC:
2026 Updates

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MONTANA
Department of Transportation

RAC at a Glance

- **Research Advisory Committee** (RAC)
  - RAC is an AASHTO committee dedicated to promoting quality and excellence in research and in the application of research findings to improve state transportation systems.
  - Each AASHTO Member Department is represented on RAC
- **Relation to transportation libraries:**
  - RAC / Research Program priorities shape the environment many of our libraries work in
  - Knowing what RAC cares about can help DOT librarians frame their work / value
  - It can also show where libraries can best help, and how to insert ourselves into that work

1.) RAC Summer Conference

RAC Summer Conference: Pittsburgh, PA

July 7-9 in Pittsburgh, PA

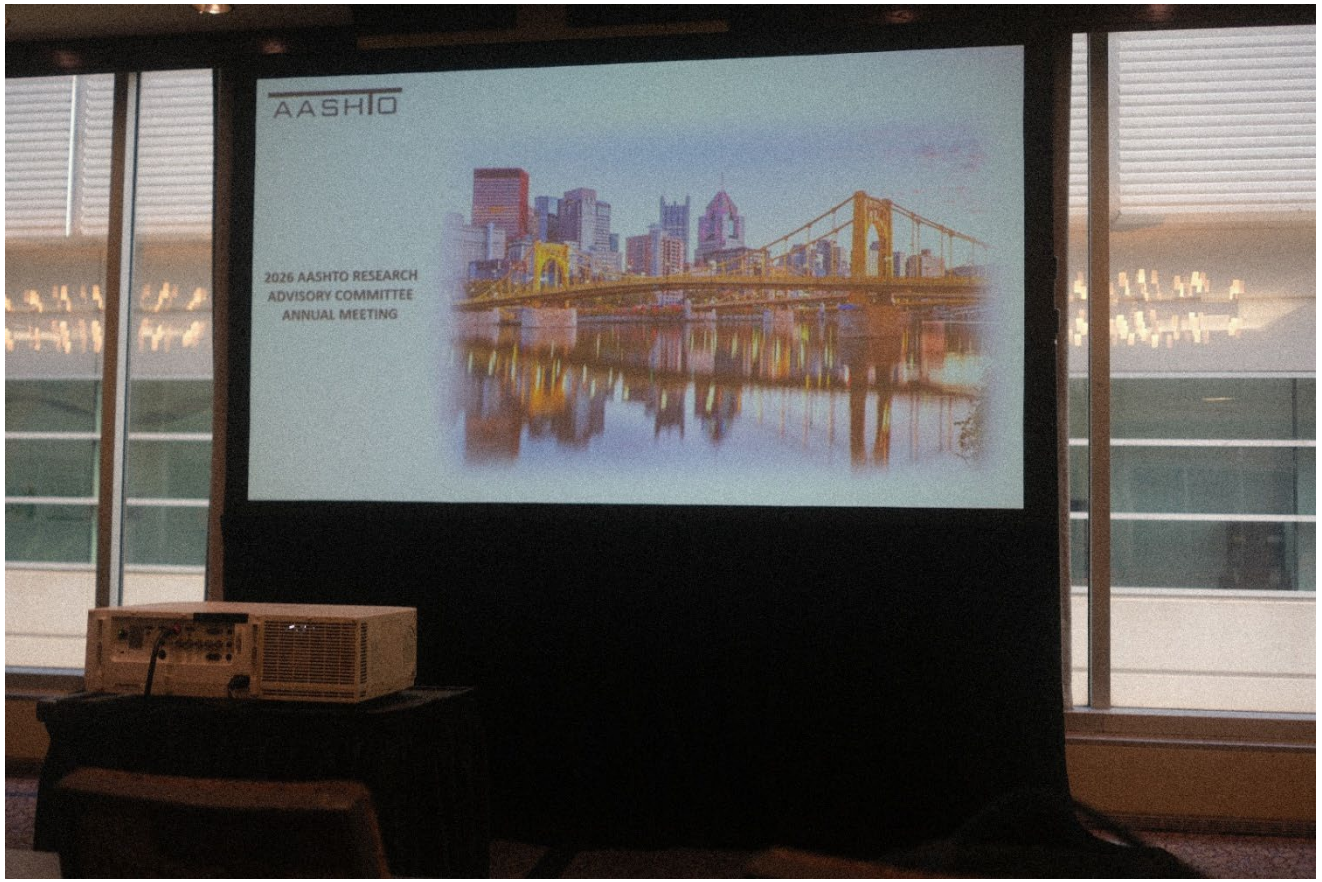
Wide Range of Different Topics:

- Research Workforce Development
- Strategic Planning for Research Management
- Research Implementation, Evaluation, and Tracking
- Innovation and Tech Transfer
- Communicating the Value of Research
- High Value Research (HVR) Presentation and Awards
- Breakout sessions: e.g., networking techniques



RAC Summer Conference: Highlights (1 of 2)

- **Research Workforce Development (OH, MD, FL)**
  - Training, SOPs, job shadowing, and knowledge management to keep know-how from walking out the door when staff move on or retire
- **Making the Most of TRB**
  - A good overview of TRID, RIP, and the TRT: familiar tools for most of us, but there's always something new when TRB librarian Bill McLeod presents
- **Tracking & Implementation**
  - Project tracking and implementation is a big concern for RAC: e.g., Utah weights half of its problem-statement scoring on likelihood of implementation
  - Update on the RPTS (Research Project Tracking System, more on this later)



RAC Summer Conference: Highlights (2 of 2)

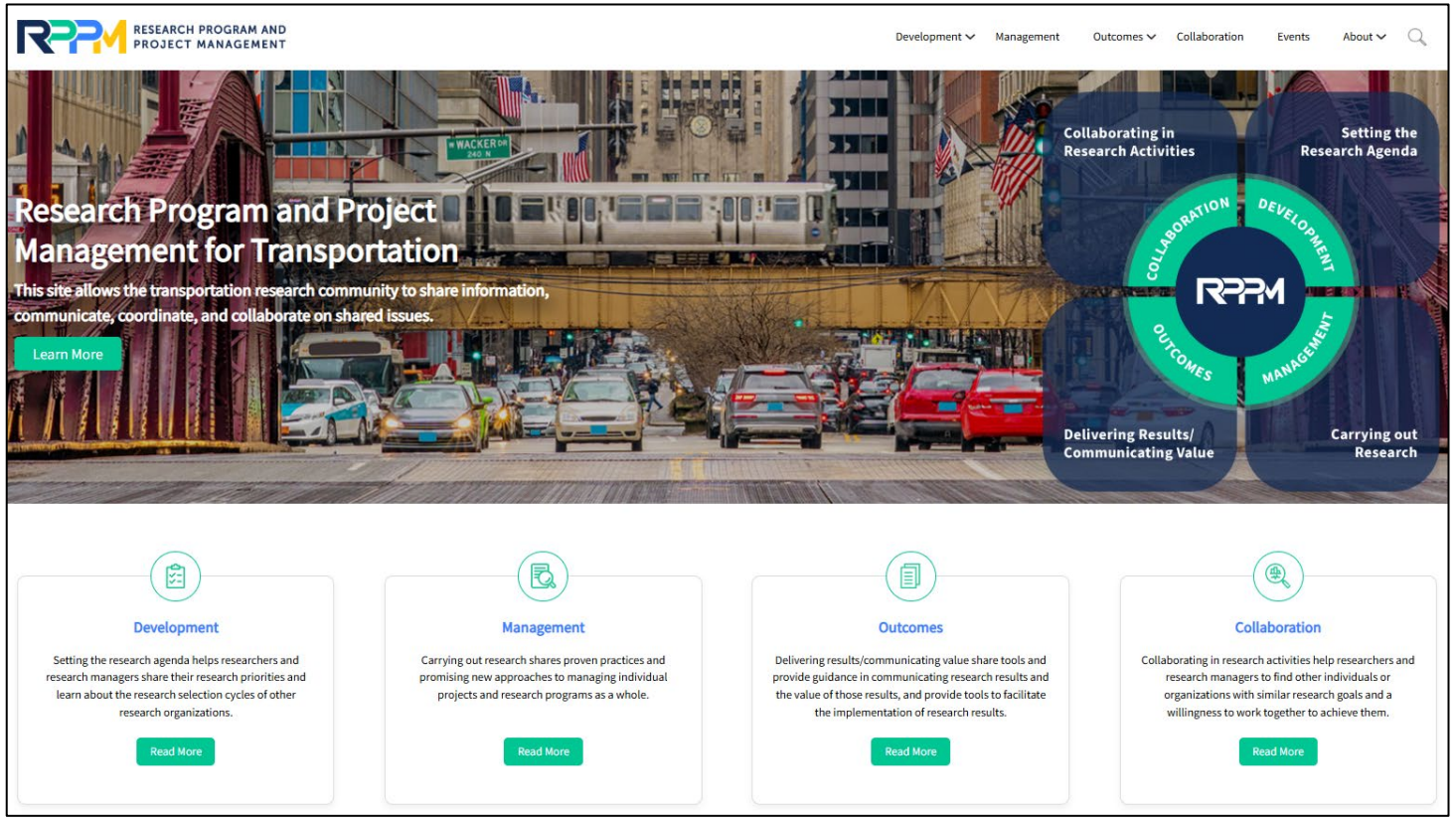
- **Innovation & Tech Transfer**
  - Bill McLeod: TRID supports tech transfer by making research discoverable; stay current with hot-topic searches, RSS feeds, and RIP alerts
  - ARA: Show value by answering “What did we do? Who cares? Now what?” with fact sheets, results digests, and videos
  - Iowa DOT: Brief leadership in plain, non-technical language
- **High Value Research Awards**
  - Texas: AMAZE, a robotic arm that automates asphalt lab testing
  - Utah: checking existing crash barriers against current MASH standards



2.) RAC Task Forces

Task Force: RAC Support

- **Purpose:** Administrative support for RAC and resources for research managers
- **2026 accomplishments:**
  - RPPM: website for research information
    - Contractor hired to revamp the site; a working group has been planning its structure and categories
  - Subject Matter Expert Mentoring Survey
  - Ahead of the Curve training resource: preparing completion (Revamp underway since 2024, more on this later).



Task Force: Communicating the Value of Research

- **Purpose:** Helping state DOTs show and share the value of their research and determine best practices for doing so
- 2026 accomplishments:
  - **High Value Research (HVR):** states nominate their most impactful completed research projects; each RAC region selects its top projects, plus Honorable Mentions
  - **2026 selections:** CT, NJ, PA, VT (Northeast) · GA, KY, LA, MS (South) · IA, KS, MI, WI (North Central) · ID, NE, TX, UT (West)
  - **At TRB:** HVR and Honorable Mention projects will be featured at the TRB Annual Meeting during a poster session, Jan. 10–14, 2027, Washington, DC

Task Force: Technologies

- **Purpose:** Exploring how emerging technologies such as AI and tracking systems can support or enhance research
- **2026 accomplishments:**
  - AI in Research Working Group
  - Emerging Technologies Working Group
  - Project Tracking System Group
    - **Research Tracking Survey (April):** 41 states responded
      - More than half have tracked research projects for 10+ years; about 3 in 4 expect to change their system soon
      - Spreadsheets are most common; about 20% have the pooled-fund RPTS
      - About 80% want to track research implementation next
    - **Workshop on DOT tracking systems (May 28):** 77 attendees
      - Utah, Idaho, and Colorado shared their tracking systems and dashboards
      - Next: a similar session on implementation tracking

Task Force: Implementation

- **Purpose:** Helping agencies put research into practice through tracking, best practices, and tools that support implementation
- **2026 accomplishments:**
  - Developed an Implementation Best Practice Guide containing 14 sections including appendices from NCHRP20-44 (49)
  - Established a resource table on implementation (70+ resources)
  - Established a list of Research Performance Measures (50+)
  - Published a W's on Implementation Brief



The W's of Implementation

A practical DOT framework for defining roles, timing, purpose, and deliverables.

Implementation of research results is not always the final goal, and non-implementation does not automatically mean failure. Some projects succeed by informing decisions, reducing risk, shaping future work, or preparing an agency for later adoption.

WHO

- **Core roles**
  Project champion, division or district engineer, technical lead, TAC, communications, and end-users.
- **Ownership**
  Define who decides, who monitors implementation, who keeps others informed, and who carries work forward.
- **Strengthen**
  Add succession roles and include external partners when implementation crosses agency boundaries.

WHEN

- **Start early**
  Address implementation at scoping, problem statement, and project approval—not only at closeout.
- **Flexible timing**
  Engage people before, during, after, or simultaneously depending on project risk and application.
- **Funding**
  Bring TACs and business owners in early enough to plan budgets, staffing, and implementation resources.

WHY

- **Agency value**
  Ask why this matters to operations, customers, safety, asset management, or decision-making.
- **Strategic fit**
  Projects tied to agency goals and strategic priorities are more likely to survive turnover.
- **Buy-in**
  A clear reason for implementation helps leaders remove barriers and support adoption decisions.

WHAT

- **Expected product**
  Clarify whether the outcome is a pilot. SOP, spec change, training, tech transfer, or partial adoption.
- **Barriers**
  Identify challenges such as funding, staffing changes, procurement, policy, IT, contracts, and communications.
- **Success options**
  Document full implementation, phased rollout, demonstration, deferred action, or informed nonimplementation.

Implementation reminders

- **End-users are not "anyone else"**
  They should help shape the plan early because they will adopt the procedure or spot flaws.
- **Plan for turnover.**
  Keep at least two accountable contacts and define what happens if a champion changes roles.
- **Look outside the DOT when needed.**
  Programs such as INDOT DamageWise depended on law enforcement and other partners.

3.) Pooled Funds for Research Programs

Ahead of the Curve: TPF-5(536)

- **Ahead of the Curve (AOTC):** TPF-5(536), led by Louisiana DOT
- **What it is:**
  - A training program for managers of state DOT research programs: 4 core courses and 12 electives
  - Dormant since 2019, when NCHRP funding ended
- **What the pooled fund does:**
  - Moves AOTC from NCHRP to AASHTO's Technical Training Solutions (TTS) platform as self-study courses for RAC members and state DOT research staff
  - Updates the courses for CFR changes and current best practices, and makes them all Section 508 accessible
- **Participants:** 30 partner agencies; about $620K committed
- **2026 progress:** Updated training delivered to AASHTO; contractors are adding the content to AASHTO's website (nearly finalized)

Research Project Tracking System: TPF-5(467)

- **Research Project Tracking System (RPTS):** led by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, 2021?
- **What it is:**
  - A shared, modern system for tracking active and completed research projects, so no single state has to fund one on its own
  - Features include a dashboard, project and task tracking, financials, documents, Gantt charts, and a report builder
  - Phases: common requirements → software build (each partner gets a license and training) → shared ongoing support
- **Participants:** 25 partner agencies; about $1.1M committed
- **2026 status:**
  - Already in use: about 20% of states surveyed have RPTS, and about 15% plan to make it their main system
  - E.g., Colorado uses it as a day-to-day tool for project managers alongside its other systems

Regional Research Consortiums

- **Western Transportation Research Consortium (WTRC):** TPF-5(526), led by UDOT
  - 18 western states, including Montana; about $1.27M committed
  - Researches high-priority topics of shared interest where member states have relevant expertise
  - **2026 highlights:**
    - Webinar (Feb. 26): “AI Safeguards for Research Program and Project Management,” organized by CTC & Associates; recording posted on *westerntrc.org*
    - Annual meeting and peer exchange, May 2026, Boise, Idaho
    - Completed projects include wildlife fencing effectiveness and bridge scour during extreme weather; 2-page “Research Points” briefs
    - Next: May 25–27, 2027, Anchorage, Alaska
- **Other regional consortiums:**
  - **Northeast Transportation Research Consortium (NTRC):** TPF-5(549), led by VTrans; 11 partners; member meetings and annual multi-state peer exchanges
  - **Southeast Transportation Consortium (STC), Phase II:** TPF-5(488), led by Louisiana DOTD; 12 partners; sets research priorities, shares findings, and holds peer exchanges

Conclusion

- RAC Winter meeting in person at the TRB Annual Meeting
- TRB Poster session for High Value Research winners
- 2027 Summer Conference: Asheville, North Carolina