



To: RPA 8 Tech and Policy Board Members

From: Dan Fox, Senior Planner, ECIA

Date: January 23, 2025

Subject: Proposed Revision to RCTP Scoring Criteria: Removal of Local Match Points

Purpose

Present the proposed changes to the Rural County Transportation Program (RCTP) scoring criteria.

Background

Clinton, Delaware, Dubuque, and Jackson Counties have offered RCTP programs since 2019. Through the RCTP programs, the counties award local county funds to cities to be used for local non-federal-aid transportation projects. The counties then receive federal funds from the RPA to use on their federal-aid transportation projects. The four counties contract with RPA (ECIA) staff to administer the program and help cities write applications. All four counties use the same criteria to evaluate RCTP applications.

Discussion

Following the completion of the Fiscal Year 2025 RCTP cycle, the RPA Technical and Policy Committees discussed the criteria used to evaluate applications. RPA board members expressed concerns that awarding points based on local match percentages may not accurately reflect project merit. In addition, awarding points based on local match may create an unfair situation if something changes with a project that causes local match percentage to go down after funding has been awarded.

The RPA committees instructed staff to conduct a review of the evaluation criteria with input from the cities that are eligible to apply for the program and, if necessary, recommend changes to the scoring criteria for the FY 2026 funding cycle.

Current Evaluation Criteria.

Applicants are currently required to provide a minimum 20% local match for their projects and additional points are awarded for local match percentages greater than 20%. Removing the possible 20 points in the local match category will require an update to the total point distribution.

The current scoring system allocates 100 possible points across 5 categories, each worth 20 points. In addition, points are deducted from applications based on previous RCTP funding awards, with larger deductions for cities that have received funding more recently.

Table 1 lists the points currently available by category and Table 2 shows how points are deducted based on previous funding awards.

Table 1. Current Evaluation Criteria

Category	Points
Traffic	20
Safety	20
Local Match	20
Community Support	20
Existing Conditions	20
Total	100

Table 2. Current Point Deduction Based on Previously Approved RCTP Award

Year RCTP Funds Awarded	Score Deduction
Awarded one year ago	-75 points
Awarded two years ago	-50 points
Awarded three years ago	-25 points
Awarded four years ago	-10 points
Awarded five or more years ago	No deduction

Proposed Evaluation Criteria

Staff propose removing the local match category and distributing its 20 points evenly to the remaining categories, resulting in four categories with 25 points each as shown in Table 3. Applicants will still be required to have a minimum 20% local match, but no points will be awarded for local match percentages greater than 20%. Staff propose keeping the same point deduction table for cities that have recently received RCTP funding awards.

Table 3. Proposed Evaluation Criteria

Category	Points
Traffic	25
Safety	25
Community Support	25
Existing Conditions	25
Total	100

City Input

Staff gathered input from cities on the proposed changes to the evaluation criteria. Initial feedback was collected during discussions with city officials at various meetings, including city clerks and mayors meetings in the fall of 2024. In December 2024, staff circulated a memo outlining the proposed changes to all eligible cities via email. The memo encouraged cities to review the proposed changes and provide feedback or ask questions. It also invited city representatives to attend a virtual question-and-answer (Q&A) session on the proposed changes.

The virtual Q&A session was held on January 7, 2025, with representatives from ten cities participating. The memo, meeting presentation, and video recording of the session were posted on the RCTP webpage along with a notice of the proposed change.

All feedback received supported the proposal to remove points for local match. Most commenters also agreed with staff's recommendation to redistribute points evenly across the remaining four categories, allocating 25 points to each. One commenter suggested that the RPA consider creating a new category to award points based on roadway functional classification.

Proposed Scoring Criteria

Local Match Recommendation

RPA staff recommends removing the local match percentage from the evaluation criteria and redistributing the 20 points evenly to the remaining four categories, making each category worth 25 points each. Applicants will still be required to have a minimum 20% local match. Updated evaluation criteria are provided as an attachment to this memo.

Safety Update

Staff also recommend updating the safety category. Previously, the criteria allowed the project ranking subcommittee to award five points in the safety category for Safe Routes to School (SRTS) projects. Staff recommend replacing SRTS points with a broader evaluation of additional safety benefits. The revised category will direct the committee to award points for safety improvements that are not directly related to a school and are not accounted for in the benefit cost analysis. For example, a project that enhances a pedestrian crossing to provide a safe walking route to a city park or library would qualify for these points as would a SRTS project. This change will give the committee the ability to award points for projects that address community safety priorities such as those identified through SS4A safety plans. Proposed new language for the safety category is provided in the attached evaluation criteria.

Optional Federal Functional Classification Category

The proposed scoring criteria include an optional category, suggested during the city input meeting, which the board may choose to adopt. This category would award up to 10 points based on a project's Federal Functional Classification (FFC). Projects classified as major or minor collectors would receive 5 points, while those classified as minor or principal arterials would receive 10 points. If the board opts to include this category, it can either add 10 additional points to the scoring system, increasing the total to 110, or redistribute the points by deducting 10 from other categories to maintain a total of 100.

Next Steps

Staff are presenting the RCTP guidelines with revised scoring criteria to the RPA board for review and approval.

If the revised criteria are approved, the target date for opening the FY 2026 RCTP application round will be January 30, 2025 and the target application deadline will be March 20, 2025.

RPA staff plan on holding a Zoom training session for cities on how to apply for an RCTP grant in early February 2025. Additional details on the training session and the RCTP application process will be provided to cities by email and will be posted on the RCTP program webpage.

https://eciitrans.org/grants_rfps/rctp.php

RCTP PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

The Project Ranking Subcommittee will award points in four categories: Traffic, Safety, Community Support, and Existing Conditions. Each category is worth up to twenty-five points. Points in each category will be combined for a total possible score of 100 points. The Subcommittee will also deduct points from applicants who have received RCTP awards in the last five years. Applications will be ranked from highest total score to lowest total score with the highest score being the most favored evaluation.

Before subcommittee members meet to evaluate and rank the applications, ECIA staff will provide a technical evaluation of each proposed project. ECIA staff will provide scores in the Traffic and Safety categories. ECIA staff will also provide the point deduction for each applicant based on RCTP funding awarded in previous years.

ECIA staff will provide members of the Subcommittee with all application materials and recommended scores prior to the ranking meeting. The Subcommittee will then meet and award points in each category based on their evaluation of all the information provided. The following section describes each of evaluation categories and criteria used by ECIA staff and the Subcommittee to calculate the scores.

Traffic (Maximum: 25 points)

The Project Ranking Subcommittee will award 0 to 25 points in the traffic category based on the current level of use of the infrastructure being improved by the proposed project.

ECIA staff will assign a score to each application based on a traffic count to city population ratio. $(\text{Traffic Count}) / (\text{Population of the City}) = \text{Ratio}$. For calculation of traffic scores, ECIA staff will use the most recent Iowa DOT traffic counts or estimates, or traffic counts produced by a third party using standard FHWA approved traffic count procedures. For population, ECIA will use the total city population from the most recent decennial census. ECIA staff will assign scores based on the evaluation criteria shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Traffic Evaluation Criteria

Ratio	Score
Greater than or equal to 0.20 and less than 0.40	5
Greater than or equal to 0.40 and less than 0.60	10
Greater than or equal to 0.60 and less than 0.80	15
Greater than or equal to 0.80 and less than 1.00	20
Greater than or equal to 1.00	25

Safety (Maximum: 25 points)

The Project Ranking Subcommittee will award 0 to 20 points in the Safety category based on the safety benefit created by the proposed project. The Subcommittee will evaluate each application based on the project's estimated benefit in reducing transportation-related property damage, injuries, and fatalities. The committee will give special safety consideration to projects that will provide safe routes to school and improve safety for children.

ECIA staff will assign a score to each application based on a safety benefit/cost ratio. For calculation of the safety benefit/cost ratio, ECIA staff will use the Iowa DOT Benefit/Cost Safety Analysis Worksheet, Iowa DOT crash data, and crash reduction factors from the Crash Modification Factors Clearinghouse. ECIA staff will assign recommended scores based on the evaluation criteria shown in Table 2.

The Project Ranking Subcommittee may also award an additional 5 points in the safety category if they determine that the project will have other safety benefits beyond those accounted for in the benefit cost ratio. Safety benefit projects may include improved pedestrian crossings and improved safety for children.

Table 2. Safety Evaluation Criteria

Benefit Cost Ratio	Score
Greater than or equal to 0.4 and less than 0.6	5
Greater than or equal to 0.6 and less than 0.8	10
Greater than or equal to 0.8 and less than 1.0	15
Greater than or equal to 1.0	20
Additional Safety Benefits	5

Community Support (Maximum: 25 points)

The Project Ranking Subcommittee will award 0 to 25 points in the Community Support category based on the level in community support demonstrated in the application. Applicants can demonstrate community support by submitting letters of support from citizens, businesses, schools, churches, or other organizations, signed petitions, meeting minutes, newspaper articles, or other relevant documentation.

Existing Conditions (Maximum: 25 points)

The Project Ranking Subcommittee will award 0 to 25 points in the Existing Conditions category based on conditions of the existing infrastructure and project area. The committee will also consider how effective the proposed project will be in addressing the deficiencies in the existing infrastructure. Applicants can demonstrate existing conditions through photographs, an engineer's evaluation, or other relevant documentation.

Point Deduction Based on Previous Approved RCTP Funding Award

The Project Ranking Subcommittee will deduct points from applications where the applicant has received RCTP funding in the past five years. ECIA staff will assign recommended score deductions based on the evaluation criteria shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Previous RCTP funding Evaluation Criteria

Year RCTP Funds Awarded	Score Deduction
Awarded one year ago	-75 points
Awarded two years ago	-50 points
Awarded three years ago	-25 points
Awarded four years ago	-10 points
Awarded five or more years ago	No deduction

Federal Functional Classification (Maximum: 10 points)

The Project Ranking Subcommittee will award 0 to 10 points in the Federal Functional Classification category based on the Federal Functional Classification of the project location. Using current Iowa DOT FFC maps, ECIA will determine functional classification of the project location and assign a score according to the criteria below.

Table 3. Federal Functional Classification Evaluation Criteria

Federal Functional Classification	Score
Minor or Major Collector	5
Minor or Principal Arterial	10

Commented [DF1]: Section updated to replace the previous safe routes to school section. The revision expands the definition allowing the committee to award extra points for a wider range of safety improvements beyond just safe routes to school.

Commented [DF2]: Optional category. Based on a suggestion from a city. If the board agrees, it can choose to add this category.