

Alaska Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

Grant Application Manual (2025 Interim Edition)

Introduction and Background

The Alaska Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a federally funded grant program that provides reimbursable, matching funds for the development, maintenance, and repair of recreational trails and trail-related facilities across Alaska. The RTP also supports trail-related environmental protection, safety, and education projects. Historically, the program was administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) through its Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, with guidance from the Outdoor Recreational Trails Advisory Board (ORTAB). **Administrative Order No. 361 (2025)** has **transferred lead administrative responsibility to the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF)**, effective October 1, 2025. DOT&PF is now the official state agency managing the RTP in Alaska, replacing DNR in this capacity. This manual reflects the transfer of the program to DOT&PF and outlines updated procedures, requirements, and roles for applicants, DOT&PF staff, and partner agencies in administering RTP grants.

This manual has been developed and will be used to complete the RTP solicitation in early 2026. The manual serves both as applicant guidance and as program administration reference

Authority: The RTP is authorized at the federal level by 23 U.S.C. §206 and funded through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). As the new lead agency, DOT&PF will serve as the primary point of contact with FHWA for all RTP matters. Administrative Order No. 361 serves as the state authority for this change in lead agency, and it also amends prior orders regarding the advisory board structure. DOT&PF and DNR have executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA, 2025) to guide a smooth transition of the program, ensure compliance with federal requirements, and define each department's continuing roles. This manual incorporates relevant provisions from that MOA and Administrative Order 361.

Program Purpose: The RTP provides up to **90% federal reimbursement** of eligible project costs, requiring a minimum **10% non-federal match** from grantees. The goal is to improve outdoor recreational trail opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized users by funding trail construction, renovation, signage, trailhead facilities, equipment for trail maintenance, and safety/education programs. All projects must serve public recreational trail needs. The program operates on a **competitive grant cycle** each year, with eligible applicants including non-profit organizations, educational institutions, local and tribal governments, state and federal agencies, and other qualified entities.

Statewide Goals Alignment: Under DOT&PF leadership, the RTP will be aligned with Alaska's broader transportation and outdoor recreation strategies. Projects funded should support **DOT&PF's statewide goals** – such as improving public access and mobility, ensuring safety, supporting economic vitality, and maintaining sustainable infrastructure – as well as priorities identified in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (**SCORP**). The SCORP is a five-year strategic outdoor recreation plan that evaluates demand for recreation and identifies priority needs; RTP investments will be coordinated to complement SCORP's priorities. DOT&PF will integrate RTP projects into statewide transportation planning mechanisms to ensure trails are considered in broader transportation and community

connectivity plans. Program performance will be tracked and publicly reported (e.g. via dashboards of project status and funding distribution) to promote transparency and continuous improvement.

Roles and Responsibilities

DOT&PF (Lead Agency): As of October 1, 2025, DOT&PF has full responsibility for administering Alaska's RTP. DOT&PF's duties include:

- **Program Management:** Serving as the primary contact with FHWA for RTP funding, reporting, and compliance matters. DOT&PF will carry out all program management functions formerly performed by DNR. This encompasses announcing annual grant opportunities, providing program guidance and training to applicants, receiving and processing grant applications, and executing grant agreements with selected project sponsors.
- **Project Oversight:** Ensuring that each funded project complies with all applicable federal and state requirements (environmental, fiscal, and programmatic). DOT&PF will oversee project implementation, monitor progress, and conduct periodic site inspections or reviews of subrecipient performance. It will also handle requests for reimbursement, track matching contributions, and prepare required financial and performance reports.
- **Fiscal Administration:** Managing the RTP funding allocation from FHWA – including requesting federal fund obligations, disbursing reimbursements to grantees, and monitoring overall fund expenditures. DOT&PF must ensure that the **mandatory funding distribution** (at least 30% of funds for motorized trail projects, 30% for non-motorized projects, and 40% for diverse/mixed-use projects) is met each year. It will also ensure administrative costs do not exceed the allowed 7% of the annual apportionment and that any safety/education projects collectively use no more than 5% of funds.
- **Final Project Selection Authority:** After evaluation (described in later sections), the DOT&PF Commissioner or a designated official will make the final decisions on project awards each cycle, considering the recommendations of the advisory committee and program staff. DOT&PF retains final authority for selection and funding decisions.
- **Interagency Coordination:** Coordinating with other agencies and stakeholders. DOT&PF will work closely with DNR for certain technical support and planning functions (detailed below) under a cooperative approach. DOT&PF will also notify FHWA of the change in lead agency and coordinate any needed updates to federal program agreements (e.g. NEPA programmatic agreements).

DNR (Partner Agency): Following the program transfer, **DNR no longer administers or manages RTP grants** on a day-to-day basis. However, DNR will cooperate with DOT&PF in specific ways:

- **Transitional Support:** DNR has provided DOT&PF with all existing RTP program records, files, and materials (applications, past grant documents, databases, etc.) to ensure continuity. DNR designated a liaison to assist during the transition, helping answer questions about past practices and facilitating introductions to stakeholders as needed.

- **Advisory Participation:** Staff from DNR's Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation may serve in a technical advisory capacity on the new DOT&PF committee (ARTAC) to share expertise on trails and State Parks priorities. Although ORTAB will no longer score RTP grants, DNR may continue to involve ORTAB or a successor board for its own programs (like the Land and Water Conservation Fund).
- **Statewide Trails Planning:** DNR will continue to lead SCORP updates and broader outdoor recreation planning for the state. DOT&PF and DNR will coordinate to ensure RTP projects align with SCORP and to share data (e.g. trail inventory, usage statistics) for planning purposes.
- **Reimbursable Services:** DNR can be engaged by DOT&PF through Reimbursable Services Agreements (RSAs) for specific technical services that support the RTP. For example, DNR could assist with maintaining statewide trail GIS databases, providing cultural resource expertise, or supporting development of the next SCORP, under agreed-upon terms. (See **Section on RSAs and Interagency Agreements** below for details.)

FHWA (Federal Oversight): The Federal Highway Administration oversees the RTP at the national level and provides funding to the state. FHWA reviews DOT&PF's management of the program for compliance with federal law and may periodically audit projects. DOT&PF will submit annual reports to FHWA and seek FHWA approval for certain actions (such as authorizing funds for projects). If FHWA conducts program reviews that include years when DNR was in charge, DNR will cooperate by providing historical records or participating in review meetings.

Grant Recipients (Project Sponsors): Eligible grant recipients (also called subrecipients) include government entities, tribes, nonprofits, and other organizations capable of managing federal funds. Recipients are responsible for executing their project as proposed, complying with all grant conditions, providing the required matching funds or in-kind contributions, and reporting on progress and expenditures. After award, each project sponsor will enter into a grant agreement with DOT&PF, becoming a subrecipient of federal funds with attendant compliance requirements (detailed later). Sponsors must follow state procurement rules or their own approved procurement standards when hiring contractors or purchasing materials, and they must allow DOT&PF and auditors to review project records as needed.

Alaska Recreational Trails Advisory Committee (ARTAC)

With the transfer of the RTP to DOT&PF, **the former Outdoor Recreation and Trails Advisory Board (ORTAB) will no longer serve as the RTP advisory body.** Administrative Order 361 formally **terminated ORTAB's RTP-related functions.** In its place, **DOT&PF has established the Alaska Recreational Trails Advisory Committee (ARTAC)** to fulfill the federal requirement for an advisory committee representing both motorized and non-motorized trail interests.

Structure and Membership: ARTAC is organized under DOT&PF and operates in an advisory role for the RTP. The committee's membership and operation include:

- **Composition:** The ARTAC will have a **balanced representation of trail users**, including motorized, non-motorized, and diversified (multiple-use) trail interests. Federal law (23 U.S.C.

§206(c)(2)) requires that the committee represent diverse recreational trail users. At minimum, ARTAC will include **three members**, each representing one of the major user categories (e.g. one representing motorized trail users, one non-motorized, one diversified). However, DOT&PF may appoint a larger committee to ensure broad statewide and multi-disciplinary representation (for example, including members from different regions of Alaska, and individuals with expertise in accessibility, education, or rural trails, as needed). Membership may also include representation from minority and persons with disabilities communities to uphold inclusive trail access values (as was encouraged under ORTAB).

- **Appointment and Terms:** ARTAC members are **appointed by the DOT&PF Commissioner**. Members serve staggered **three-year terms**, and may be reappointed for additional terms in accordance with Alaska Statute AS 39.05.055. Staggered terms ensure continuity on the committee by not replacing all members at once. If a vacancy occurs, the Commissioner will appoint a new member to serve the remainder of that term. The DOT&PF Commissioner (or a designee) will also designate a **Chair** from among the members to lead meetings.
- **Function and Duties:** ARTAC's primary role is to **review grant applications and advise DOT&PF on project funding recommendations**. Committee members individually read and score eligible applications (using standardized score sheets) and then convene to discuss and finalize scores or rankings of project proposals. ARTAC provides a forum for diverse trail user perspectives to be considered in the evaluation process. The committee will typically meet at least once per year (e.g. in the winter after applications are submitted) to score projects and make funding recommendations. The meetings will be announced publicly and conducted in accordance with applicable open meeting guidelines for advisory boards. In addition to scoring projects, ARTAC may advise DOT&PF on RTP program development, such as suggesting improvements to scoring criteria, identifying emerging statewide trail needs, or reviewing RTP-funded project outcomes.
- **Conflict of Interest and Impartiality:** ARTAC members must remain impartial and **avoid conflicts of interest** in the grant review process. Members will be asked to declare any potential conflict (for example, if they are involved with an organization that has applied for a grant) and recuse themselves from scoring or discussing that proposal. This ensures fairness and credibility in the committee's recommendations.
- **Recommendations and Selection:** After scoring and discussing all applications, ARTAC will forward its project **funding recommendations to the DOT&PF program staff and leadership**. Typically, the committee's recommendations include a prioritized list of projects and suggested funding levels. While DOT&PF's officials have final decision-making authority, they give significant weight to ARTAC's collective expertise and balanced viewpoint. In most cases, projects recommended by ARTAC are approved unless there is a clear issue (such as ineligibility or funding availability constraints). If DOT&PF modifies the funding list (for example, due to budget limitations or strategic considerations), it will document the rationale. All applicants will be informed of the outcome, and award announcements will credit the advisory committee's role in the evaluation process.

Note: ORTAB’s involvement with RTP ended with the transfer. However, ORTAB (or a successor board under DNR) may continue to function in relation to other programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund, per Administrative Order 222 (as amended). The creation of ARTAC within DOT&PF does not affect DNR’s use of ORTAB for non-RTP purposes.

Program Funding and Eligible Projects

Funding Source and Allocation: Alaska’s RTP funding comes from the Federal Highway Trust Fund and is apportioned to states by FHWA annually. The program is **reimbursable** – grantees must incur costs and then request reimbursement from DOT&PF, up to the approved grant amount. Each grant can cover **up to 90%** of eligible project costs (this higher federal share reflects Alaska’s federal-aid funding match ratio). Grantees are responsible for at least **10%** of the project cost as a local match, which can be provided in cash or as in-kind contributions (such as volunteer labor, donated materials, or equipment use). The required match must be from non-federal sources, except that certain federal funds that can legally be “matched” (like Tribal Transportation Program funds or other federal grants if allowed) may be applied – applicants should consult DOT&PF if they intend to use other federal funds as match.

The total RTP funding available each year varies with federal appropriations. DOT&PF will announce the approximate amount of funding in the **Call for Projects**. As noted, by federal mandate, at least 30% of Alaska’s RTP funds each year must be spent on projects that primarily benefit **motorized** trail uses, at least 30% on **non-motorized** trail projects, and the remaining ~40% on **diverse use** projects (serving both or multiple user types). DOT&PF will classify each project proposal into one of these categories to ensure compliance with this distribution. Additionally, no more than 5% of the annual funds may be used for trail safety and education projects, and DOT&PF’s own program administrative costs are limited to 7% of the annual apportionment.

Grant Award Limits: To distribute funds broadly, DOT&PF may cap the maximum award per project. In recent years, the typical maximum awards (under DNR’s administration for reference) were: \$300,000 for motorized or diversified projects, and \$200,000 for non-motorized projects. The Call for Projects will specify current maximums. There is no minimum grant size, but practical minimums (e.g. \$5,000 or \$10,000) may be suggested to ensure projects are substantial enough to justify federal reporting.

Eligible Applicants: RTP grants are open to a wide range of entities:

- **Non-profit organizations** (including trail clubs, environmental/conservation organizations, user groups with 501(c)(3) status, etc.),
- **Municipal and local governments** (cities, boroughs, counties, and quasi-governmental entities like service areas),
- **State agencies** (for projects on state lands or that benefit the public statewide),
- **Federal agencies** (for projects on federal lands, though federal agencies must typically provide the required match from non-federal sources or partner with local groups),
- **Native American tribes or Alaska Native corporations**, and
- **Educational institutions** (school districts, universities) that manage trails or outdoor facilities.

Individuals or for-profit businesses are *not* eligible to apply directly, but they can partner with an eligible sponsor or be contracted to perform work on a project. All applicants must demonstrate the capacity to manage federal funds responsibly – including financial stability and administrative capability to complete the project and comply with reporting.

Eligible Project Types: The RTP can fund a variety of trail-related projects. Common eligible project categories include:

- **Trail Maintenance and Restoration:** Maintenance, rehabilitation, or restoration of existing recreational trails. This can include resurfacing trails, fixing trail structures (bridges, boardwalks, culverts), erosion control, clearing vegetation, and repairing damage to sustainable conditions.
- **Trail Construction:** Development and construction of **new recreational trails**. This includes planning and building new trail routes or extensions, building support structures like footbridges, switchbacks, railings, etc. Construction projects must comply with environmental requirements (NEPA, permits) before work begins (see Compliance section).
- **Trailhead and Trailside Facilities:** Installation or improvement of facilities that support trail use, such as trailhead parking areas, restrooms, kiosks, shelters, signage, benches, and accessibility features. For example, RTP funds could help build a new trailhead with an information board and vault toilet, or install mileage markers and interpretive signs along a trail.
- **Equipment for Trail Maintenance:** Purchase or lease of trail maintenance equipment is eligible, **if the equipment will be primarily used for trail-related purposes**. Examples include snowmobile groomers, ATVs or small tractors for trail work, mechanized trail building tools, chainsaws, brush mowers, or hand tools for volunteer crews. Typically, equipment purchases are allowed if they are necessary and reasonable for maintaining trails; the grant application should justify the need and how the equipment will be managed. (Title to equipment will be vested in the grantee, but the grantee must use it for the intended purpose and follow disposition rules if it's sold later.)
- **Trail Safety and Education Programs:** Development and dissemination of **educational materials, safety programs, or training** related to trail use. For example, grants can fund trail safety clinics, production of trail maps or brochures, "Leave No Trace" ethics education, or classes on trail building and maintenance for volunteers. These projects are capped (statewide) at 5% of the annual RTP funds, so they may be limited in number or dollar amount. Education projects should have a statewide or regional benefit if possible (rather than very localized impact).
- **Land Acquisition/Easements:** Acquisition of land or permanent easements for trails, trail corridors, or trailhead access is allowable if it facilitates a recreational trail project. Such proposals must ensure the purchased property will be dedicated to public recreational use in perpetuity. Typically, appraisals and negotiations should be completed, and the RTP funds cannot exceed fair market value. Acquisitions often have additional requirements (like NEPA, Uniform Relocation Act compliance for any displaced persons, etc.). A template "Property Acquisition/Easement Certification" form is provided for these projects.

Ineligible Costs/Activities: Some activities are not eligible for RTP funding. These include:

- **Law Enforcement** patrol programs (routine law enforcement is not eligible under RTP).
- **Planning Studies** or advocacy – while planning is a critical part of project development, RTP funds are generally for on-the-ground projects. (Some necessary design and engineering costs for a specific trail construction project are allowed, but stand-alone planning or feasibility studies are not typically funded.)
- **Facilities that are not trail-related:** e.g. campgrounds, playgrounds, or parks with no recreational trail nexus (those might be eligible under other programs like LWCF, but not RTP).
- **Projects on private land with no public access:** RTP projects must serve the public. If on private land, there must be a public access easement or other mechanism to ensure public use.
- **Condemnation of property (eminent domain):** RTP funds cannot be used to condemn land for trail projects.
- **Duplicate funding:** Costs that are already funded by another federal source (you cannot count the same expense twice for federal reimbursement). Also, costs incurred before a project is formally approved and authorized by DOT&PF/FHWA are generally not eligible for reimbursement (no “pre-award” costs, unless explicitly allowed).
- **Administrative overhead of the grantee:** General organizational operating costs (rent, utilities, salaries not related to the project) cannot be charged to the RTP grant, aside from the specific project expenses and direct project management time. Indirect costs can only be included if the organization has an approved federal indirect cost rate and it is applied to the project per that rate agreement.

DOT&PF program staff can answer questions on eligibility during the application phase. If a proposed project or cost is questionable, it’s best to inquire early or note it in the application for clarification. All projects must adhere to **federal cost principles (2 CFR 200 Subpart E)** ensuring costs are necessary, reasonable, and allocable to the project.

Grant Application Procedures

Annual Grant Cycle: The RTP in Alaska operates on an annual grant cycle tied to the federal fiscal year. Each year, DOT&PF will announce a **Call for Projects** (typically in late summer or early fall) for the upcoming funding cycle. The announcement will be posted on the State of Alaska Online Public Notice system, DOT&PF’s website, and sent to a program mailing list. It will include key dates, available funding, and links to application materials. The general timeline is:

- **August:** Program Kick-off – Call for Projects released. Application materials (forms, instructions, guidance documents) are made available on DOT&PF’s RTP webpage and/or an online grant management platform. In 2025, the application process was conducted via an online portal (Submittable) by DNR; DOT&PF will maintain an online submission system for convenience and efficiency (details will be provided each year). DOT&PF will also hold an **applicant workshop or webinar** around this time to walk through the application process, explain any changes, and answer questions.

- **September: Public Notice period** – All applicants are required to post a public notice about their proposed project by a specified date (often by the end of September). This public notice informs the local community of the project proposal and invites public comment. It must include key details like project name, location, sponsor, and a contact to submit comments. Applicants must post the notice in a visible manner (e.g. on-site or in a local newspaper or community bulletin) and **submit a copy of the notice and proof of posting to the program** by the deadline. DOT&PF will also post these notices on the state's Online Public Notice website for broader visibility. Public notice is **mandatory** – an application will be disqualified if this step is not completed by the deadline.
- **October: Application Deadline** – Typically around October 31. By this date, applicants must have completed all required application steps (which may include an initial public notice submission followed by the full application form and attachments). Late submissions are not accepted. Once submitted, any changes or updates to an application after the deadline are generally not allowed, aside from responding to requests for clarification from program staff.
- **November/December: Application Review and Scoring** – DOT&PF program staff will first **screen applications for eligibility and completeness** in November. This includes verifying applicant eligibility, ensuring all required documents are included, and that the project appears to meet basic program requirements. If minor issues are found, staff may reach out to applicants for clarification or missing pieces (at DOT&PF's discretion). Qualified applications are then forwarded to ARTAC members. **ARTAC scoring meetings** are usually held in December (exact timing can vary; for example, under DNR an ORTAB meeting was held in mid-December to score projects). ARTAC members will score each application using the standard criteria (see *Project Scoring* section) and then meet (in person or virtually) to discuss scores and finalize recommendations. These meetings are open to the public to observe, and applicants are often invited to present their projects or answer questions from the committee.
- **January: Recommendations and FHWA Approval** – By early January, ARTAC's recommended project list is submitted to DOT&PF leadership. DOT&PF reviews the recommendations for any issues (such as overlapping projects or budget constraints) and prepares the final list of projects to fund. Because RTP is a federal program, the list of recommended awards is then sent to the FHWA for review and concurrence. FHWA typically looks to ensure that the projects are eligible under federal law and that NEPA requirements will be met. This review is usually a formality if projects are clearly eligible; it takes a few weeks.
- **February/March: Award Announcement and Grant Agreements** – Once FHWA has concurred, DOT&PF will formally announce the awards (press release, website posting, and direct notification to all applicants). **Award notification letters** will be sent to successful applicants, including any specific conditions or adjustments (e.g. reduced funding amount or scope changes if applicable). Unsuccessful applicants will also be notified and offered a debrief if they desire feedback. DOT&PF will then prepare **grant agreement documents** for each project. These agreements are contracts that outline the terms and conditions of the grant, including the project scope, budget, match requirement, period of performance, and all compliance requirements (federal and state).

The grantee's authorized official will need to sign the agreement, and in some cases, provide a resolution from their governing board accepting the grant. The target is to have grant agreements signed and in place by spring (March or April), so that project work can commence as soon as weather allows in the spring/summer.

- **Project Implementation (Spring onward):** Once agreements are signed, DOT&PF issues a formal **Notice to Proceed** (or equivalent authorization) to each grantee, allowing them to begin incurring costs. Projects then move into the implementation phase, described in a later section. Most projects funded in this cycle will be active during that summer and possibly into the next year, depending on project timeline. DOT&PF will set an end date for each project (often 1 to 2 years from award) by which work should be completed and all funds expended, though extensions may be granted if justified.

Application Package: A complete RTP application will typically consist of several components, all of which must be submitted by the deadline. DOT&PF will provide templates or forms for many of these. The required components generally include:

- **Project Application Form:** This is the main application where the applicant provides basic information and narrative descriptions. It will cover sections such as: project title, applicant organization info, project location, **project description and scope of work**, project timeline, detailed budget breakdown, description of public benefit, and statements addressing evaluation criteria (e.g. how the project aligns with program goals and SCORP, the level of community support, and how the project will be maintained in the long term). DOT&PF will supply an **Application Instruction and Information Manual** (akin to this document - **pending**) to guide applicants in completing each section properly. Applicants are expected to follow the instructions closely and provide all requested information – completeness and clarity are part of the scoring.
- **Budget Workbook:** A detailed budget spreadsheet must be filled out, showing all project costs by category (e.g. labor, equipment, materials, contracts, etc.), the amount of RTP grant funds for each, the matching contributions for each, and a total project cost. The budget should clearly identify the source of the matching funds (e.g. \$10,000 from City general fund, \$5,000 value of volunteer labor at \$X/hour, etc.). DOT&PF provides a **Budget Workbook template (Excel)** for consistency. All costs in the budget should tie back to the activities described in the project scope. Applicants should double-check their math and ensure the budget narrative explains each cost – a well-prepared, accurate budget will score higher.
- **Project Timeline/Schedule:** The application will require a proposed timeline for the project, often as a simple schedule or Gantt chart. This should break the project into tasks (planning/design, environmental clearance, procurement, construction, etc.) with estimated start and end dates. The timeline is important for demonstrating the project is ready to proceed and can be completed in a reasonable period. Ambitious yet realistic schedules (with some allowance for Alaska's short construction seasons) will be rated favorably.
- **Maps and Site Plans:** The applicant should include a map showing the project location. For trail projects, a **topographic map or aerial photo** with the trail route marked is ideal. For projects

involving construction, a site plan or diagram of the improvements is helpful. Maps should be clear and include labels or a legend. If the project is in a specific park or area, indicate access points or nearby landmarks. Good maps help reviewers understand the project context and can be a factor in scoring under the project description and public benefit criteria.

- **Public Notice Documentation:** Proof of the required public notice must be attached. This includes a copy of the notice text that was posted and a brief report of **when and where it was posted** (e.g. dates and locations of postings, or a tear-sheet from a newspaper, etc.). If any **public comments or opposition** were received as a result of the notice, the applicant should include those comments and provide a response or explanation of how they will address any concerns. Applicants are specifically asked on the application form whether there was any opposition and how it was handled. Engaging the community and addressing issues early can strengthen an application's chances (and is required by state process).
- **Environmental Review Questionnaire:** Each application must include an **Environmental Review Checklist or form** to preliminarily identify the potential environmental impacts of the project. DOT&PF (in consultation with FHWA) must determine the project's compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (**NEPA**) prior to approving any construction activities. To streamline this, applicants fill out a checklist (provided as the **Environmental Compliance Review form**) indicating if their project might affect resources such as wetlands, historic sites, endangered species, etc., and describing any permits or agency consultations that may be required. This information helps DOT&PF anticipate the level of environmental clearance needed (most trail projects qualify as **Categorical Exclusions** under FHWA NEPA regulations). *Note:* The application's environmental section is for initial analysis – **final NEPA approval is conducted by DOT&PF** after award, but a well-considered checklist will assure reviewers that the applicant is aware of and prepared for compliance steps.
- **Letters of Support:** While not always mandatory, including letters of support can greatly strengthen an application under "community support" criteria. These could be letters from local government officials (e.g. a city mayor or tribal council) endorsing the project, community organizations or user groups who will benefit, land managers or landowners granting permission, etc. If the project is on land not owned by the applicant, a **landowner permission letter** or agreement is required (for example, if a nonprofit is proposing a trail on city land, the city must approve of the project). Strong support demonstrates the project is a community priority and is feasible.
- **Match Commitment Letters:** If any matching funds are coming from a partner or third party, include letters or documents confirming those contributions (e.g. a foundation grant award letter, or a volunteer group's pledge of labor, etc.). For in-kind match like volunteer labor, a letter from the organization providing volunteers outlining the commitment can suffice.
- **Past Performance (for previous grantees):** DOT&PF will conduct a **risk assessment** of applicants, especially those who have received federal grants before. While not a separate submission from the applicant, the applicant may wish to note their track record or improvements made since past projects. The program staff will review whether the applicant successfully

delivered past RTP projects (if any) on time and on budget. Poor past performance won't automatically disqualify an application, but it may factor into a risk-based point adjustment or require additional conditions (such as increased monitoring) if selected. Conversely, an applicant with a solid track record may be seen as lower risk.

DOT&PF encourages applicants to **start early** and reach out with any questions during the application period. Common pitfalls include waiting until the last minute (which could lead to technical problems with submission or missing elements) and not reading the instructions carefully. The **Application Instructions Manual** (this document) should be referenced throughout preparation. Additionally, attending the annual application workshop (or viewing its recording) is highly recommended – applicants who have participated in these trainings tend to submit higher quality applications.

Project Evaluation and Scoring

All RTP grant applications are evaluated through a **competitive scoring process** to determine which projects best meet the program's objectives and merit funding. DOT&PF uses a structured scoring rubric totaling **100 points** (100 being the highest possible score) to assess each proposal's merits. The scoring criteria and their weights are designed to prioritize well-planned projects that provide significant public benefit, are ready to proceed, and align with strategic goals. Below is an overview of the **evaluation criteria** and scoring framework:

- **1. Overall Application Quality and Accuracy (Up to 28 points):** Reviewers examine the completeness and clarity of the application package. Key factors include whether all required sections are filled out correctly, the level of detail provided, and adherence to the instructions. A top-quality application will have a clearly written narrative, a detailed and accurate budget with supporting detail, a realistic and well-organized schedule, and all required attachments properly provided. Reviewers also consider the applicant's responsiveness – e.g. did they attend training, and have they demonstrated ability to follow directions? Minor issues like typos have little impact, but a pattern of sloppiness or missing information can significantly reduce this score. *Tip:* Applicants should proofread their materials and use the checklist provided in the instructions to ensure nothing is overlooked. This criterion rewards effort and attention to detail, as these often correlate with successful project execution.
- **2. Project Description and Need (Up to 10 points):** This evaluates the **scope and purpose** of the project. The application should clearly describe what work will be done and why it's important. Reviewers look for a concise project scope that is technically sound and feasible. They assess the degree to which the project meets a recognized recreational need or demand: for example, does it fill a gap in the trail network, address safety issues, or repair a highly used existing trail? A strong project description will also highlight how the project benefits its target users (e.g. creating new opportunities for ATV riders, or improving access for hikers to a scenic area). Projects that demonstrate a compelling need – such as critical maintenance to prevent trail closure or new construction in an underserved area – will score higher on this criterion. Inclusion of data (trail usage numbers, community survey results, accident reports, etc.) to support the need can be very persuasive.

- **3. Project Timeline and Readiness (Up to 10 points):** Reviewers assess whether the project's timeline is realistic and whether the project is ready to proceed in a timely manner. Points are awarded based on factors like: Are the stages of the project (planning, permitting, procurement, construction) clearly laid out? Is the work plan efficient? Have necessary preliminary steps (like site control or initial design) already been completed? A project that can begin soon and finish within the grant period will score better than one that is vague about start/end dates or likely to be delayed. This criterion also considers if the project has any dependencies (e.g. waiting on another project or funding). "Shovel-ready" projects (those that have completed design and clearances) typically receive maximum points here.
- **4. Budget and Cost Effectiveness (Up to 25 points):** This is a significant portion of the score, reflecting the importance of a well thought-out budget. Reviewers will evaluate whether the budget is appropriate for the scope – neither over-inflated nor unrealistically low. They check that all costs are reasonable and necessary, and that the applicant has obtained cost estimates or quotes for major expenses (letters from contractors or cost estimate backups can be cited in the application). The **match contributions** are also considered: while only 10% is required, projects that bring additional match or leverage other resources can be viewed favorably as they stretch RTP dollars further (though extra match does not directly earn points unless it enhances the project's scope or feasibility). If an applicant is providing exactly the minimum 10% match, that is acceptable, but a higher match or diverse funding sources can indicate strong local commitment. Additionally, if any **innovative cost-saving measures** or partnerships are described (like use of volunteer labor, donated materials, interagency cooperation), those can improve the score. The clarity of the budget presentation (all totals correct, categories explained) will impact scoring under this criterion as well.
- **5. Project Funding and Sponsor Commitment (Up to 2 points):** This criterion, though only a few points, examines the commitment of the project sponsor to seeing the project through. Reviewers want assurance that the sponsor will support the project beyond just obtaining the grant. Points here consider whether the sponsor has committed to maintaining the trail or facility after construction, and if they have identified how ongoing maintenance will be funded. If the application includes a sponsor resolution of support or maintenance plan, it helps demonstrate commitment. Also, if the sponsor has secured other grants or funds as part of the project budget, it shows initiative and investment in the project's success. Essentially, this category rewards applicants who clearly show "skin in the game" and long-term dedication to the project outcomes.
- **6. Public Benefit and Recreational Opportunity (Up to 14 points):** Under this criterion, reviewers judge the **benefits that will result from the project**. This includes the number of people likely to benefit, the breadth of user groups served, and the quality of the recreation experience improvement. Projects that significantly improve safety (e.g. fixing a dangerous trail segment), enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities, or create new recreation opportunities (like connecting a community to a park via a trail) are scored highly. Likewise, a project that benefits multiple user groups or year-round recreation might score higher than one with a very narrow benefit. Reviewers also consider the geographic distribution of benefits – for example, a project in a rural area that has few existing trails might be very valuable for that community, whereas another

project in an area already rich in trails might be slightly less urgent. Consistency with the **Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)** and other strategic plans comes into play here: if the project addresses a priority identified in SCORP or a local recreation plan (such as a need for youth outdoor education or connecting urban residents to trails), it indicates strong public benefit. Applicants are encouraged to explicitly cite such plans or community surveys in their application to bolster this section.

- **7. Community Support and Partnerships (Up to 14 points):** Community backing is essential for project success, and this criterion rewards evidence of such support. Reviewers look for letters of support from user groups, endorsements from local governments or tribal councils, and positive public comments from the required notice. If the project has partnerships – for instance, two agencies working together, or volunteer groups contributing – that demonstrates collaborative support. A high score here might reflect that the project was developed through a public process or responds to public input. Additionally, the absence of opposition or a thoughtful response to any concerns raised will influence this score. A project that has broad consensus and momentum in the community will naturally rise to the top. Conversely, if an application lacks any support letters or if there's notable public controversy around it, the score will be lower. Applicants should strive to engage stakeholders (neighbors, trail users, local officials) early and document their support.

In summary, the scoring system emphasizes a **well-prepared application**, a **justified project need**, solid planning (scope, schedule, budget), **alignment with broader goals**, and community backing. Each application is scored by multiple ARTAC members who then discuss any discrepancies to arrive at a consensus or average score. The maximum score is 100. In practice, projects that score above a certain threshold (for example, 70 points and above) are strong contenders for funding, though the exact cutoff will depend on available funds and how other projects scored.

After scoring, ARTAC will typically rank projects from highest to lowest score and may recommend full or partial funding for each. DOT&PF will use these scores and rankings as the primary basis for selecting projects. However, DOT&PF also ensures that the federally required **30% motorized / 30% non-motorized / 40% diverse** funding splits are met. This means, for example, if the top scoring projects were all non-motorized, DOT&PF would still need to fund some lower-scoring motorized projects to achieve the 30% minimum for motorized. Fortunately, with a diverse array of applications, the scoring process usually yields a mix of project types near the top. If any adjustments are needed to meet funding distribution or other strategic goals (like geographic distribution across the state), DOT&PF will do so in a manner consistent with the intent of the scoring. All such decisions will be documented.

Strategic Alignment: It's worth noting explicitly that projects are also reviewed for how they **align with DOT&PF's strategic goals and the SCORP**. While there may not be separate point categories labeled "strategic alignment," these themes are embedded in the criteria above (especially Public Benefit). DOT&PF's mission in administering RTP includes enhancing transportation connectivity, safety, and economic benefits through recreational infrastructure. Projects that, for example, improve safe routes for walking/biking, contribute to tourism and economic development, or connect communities to each other or to important natural areas can be considered as advancing DOT&PF and statewide objectives. The

SCORP provides current statewide outdoor recreation priorities, such as addressing maintenance backlogs on existing trails, improving access in underserved regions, and promoting health and wellness through outdoor recreation. Reviewers will have these considerations in mind, so applicants should highlight any such alignments. In fact, the MOA guiding this program transition specifies that evaluation criteria *must* be aligned with FHWA guidance and SCORP priorities. Therefore, demonstrating how a project fits those frameworks can indirectly improve its competitiveness.

Finally, after projects are selected and announced, DOT&PF will provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants upon request. This can help future applications. The competitive nature means not all good projects can be funded each year, but often an unfunded project can be resubmitted in a subsequent cycle (perhaps improved based on feedback).

Environmental, Cultural, and Accessibility Compliance

All RTP projects must comply with applicable **environmental and historic preservation laws** before and during implementation. Since RTP uses federal funds, **NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act)** review is mandatory for each project. **DOT&PF, as the administering agency, is responsible for ensuring NEPA compliance** – this includes determining the appropriate level of environmental review and obtaining FHWA approval. In practical terms, most RTP projects will fall under a **Categorical Exclusion (CE)** category, meaning they do not individually or cumulatively have significant environmental impacts (typical for small trail projects, rehabilitation, minor development). However, a NEPA checklist must be completed and reviewed to confirm this. No ground-disturbing work or irreversible commitments of resources can occur until **DOT&PF issues a NEPA clearance** for the project.

NEPA Process: After grant award, DOT&PF environmental staff will work with each grantee to complete the NEPA requirements. The **Environmental Compliance Review form** submitted with the application serves as a starting point. DOT&PF may request additional information or studies depending on the project: for instance, if a trail will pass through wetlands, a wetlands delineation and possibly a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit (Section 404) might be needed. If a project could affect threatened species habitat, consultation under the Endangered Species Act is required. These processes will be coordinated by DOT&PF, but the grantee may need to provide information or even hire specialists (grant funds can often cover such compliance costs as part of the project). It's important to factor in time for these reviews in the project schedule. **DOT&PF has a Programmatic Agreement with FHWA** for certain CEs, and Administrative Order 361 directs updating those agreements to add DOT&PF as signatory for RTP projects. In short, DOT&PF will ensure a proper NEPA document (usually a CE form with all necessary attachments) is completed and approved for each project before work starts. Grantees will receive notice when they have NEPA clearance to proceed.

Historic/Cultural Resources: Compliance with the **National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106** is a crucial part of environmental review. Many trail projects occur on public lands where cultural or historical resources may be present (e.g. archaeological sites, historic structures). DOT&PF will consult with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) at the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (Office of History and Archaeology) on each project. The grantee might be asked to provide details on ground disturbance, locations of any known historic sites, or traditional cultural properties in the area. If a project has potential to affect historic properties, DOT&PF (or the land managing agency if on federal

land) may need to conduct an archaeological survey or monitor construction. If artifacts or human remains are discovered during project work, work must stop and the find reported for evaluation per state law. All Section 106 consultation and any necessary mitigation must be completed before or during the project as appropriate. Generally, maintenance on existing trails has low risk, but new trail construction could require a cultural survey. The grant budget can fund such surveys if identified as needed.

Other Environmental Requirements: Depending on project scope, additional laws and permits could apply, for example:

- **Clean Water Act:** If the project discharges fill into waters or wetlands, a Section 404 permit from the Corps of Engineers and a Section 401 water quality certification may be needed. Bridge or culvert work might require these.
- **ANILCA Title XI or other special use permits:** If on certain federal lands (like National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, etc.), there may be special permitting processes. Grantees must obtain all landowner permissions or permits.
- **Coastal Zone Consistency:** (Alaska's coastal management program is no longer active statewide, but local coastal plans might affect certain areas).
- **Executive Order 11988 (Floodplains):** Projects in floodplains should be designed to avoid adverse impacts.
- **Executive Order 11990 (Wetlands):** Avoidance and minimization of impact to wetlands is required. Mitigation may be necessary if unavoidable.

DOT&PF's environmental staff will guide grantees through these as part of NEPA. The **bottom line** is: **No construction activities can begin until DOT&PF has given explicit environmental clearance.** Grantees must adhere to any mitigation measures or conditions specified in the NEPA document or permits (e.g. avoiding work in bird nesting season, or maintaining erosion controls during construction).

Accessibility Requirements: All projects must be reviewed for compliance with **accessibility laws**, notably the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) (for facilities on federal land or built with federal funds). Recreational trails have some unique standards: the U.S. Access Board has developed accessibility guidelines for outdoor developed areas (which include trails) on federal lands, and these are good practice benchmarks even for other lands. In general, if a trail or facility can be made accessible, it should be – especially trails that are designed for foot traffic in or near developed areas. The application should address how the project will incorporate accessibility (e.g. a new trailhead will include an ADA-compliant parking space and an accessible route to the trail; a viewing platform on a trail will be wheelchair-accessible; or, if steep terrain prevents full accessibility, the applicant should acknowledge that and perhaps describe alternative accessible experiences available nearby). ARTAC and DOT&PF will consider accessibility in scoring (it ties into public benefit). During project implementation, DOT&PF will ensure that any constructed facilities meet ADA standards (for example, proper width, slope, surface firmness for accessible trails, proper dimensions for restrooms, etc.). The **ADA also requires** that when existing facilities are altered, they should be made accessible to

the maximum extent feasible. Grantees may consult DOT&PF's Civil Rights Office or ADA coordinators for technical guidance.

Civil Rights Compliance: As a federal-aid program, RTP projects are subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and related nondiscrimination authorities. **Title VI** prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal assistance. Grantees must ensure their projects (and any public outreach for them) are inclusive and nondiscriminatory. If the project involves public events (like trail planning meetings or volunteer days), reasonable steps should be taken to include people of all backgrounds and provide translation or accommodations if needed for limited English speakers.

Environmental Justice (EJ) considerations also apply – DOT&PF will evaluate if projects have disproportionate negative impacts on minority or low-income populations (unlikely for trails, which generally are positive amenities, but construction nuisances should be considered). **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** and the ADA ensure no discrimination on the basis of disability – connecting back to accessibility. **Title IX** (gender) and **Age Discrimination Act** also apply broadly. In practical terms, by building accessible, safe, public trails, grantees are usually furthering equity. However, each grant agreement will include standard civil rights clauses that the grantee must adhere to, and the grantee may be asked to report any Title VI complaints or investigations. DOT&PF's Civil Rights Office is available to provide guidance, and FHWA may review Title VI compliance as part of program oversight.

Buy America: A specific federal requirement relevant to some RTP projects is the **Buy America** provision for steel and iron. FHWA-funded projects generally must use American-made steel or iron products. This can affect trail projects that involve items like steel bridges, culvert pipes, railings, or rebar for concrete. There is some administrative relief in certain cases (for example, if the amount of steel is minimal or waivers apply), but applicants should be aware of this. DOT&PF will provide **Buy America guidance** (as was provided on the DNR website) and will check compliance during project implementation. If a project plans to purchase a steel bridge kit, for instance, the supplier must certify that it meets Buy America (produced in the U.S.). This requirement does not apply to equipment purchases (like ATVs), but does to construction materials. Grantees should consult with DOT&PF early if their project involves steel/iron to ensure compliance or secure a waiver if eligible.

In summary, DOT&PF will ensure that **all RTP projects comply with NEPA, historic preservation requirements, accessibility standards, and other environmental laws**. Grantees must cooperate in this compliance process by providing necessary information and following all stipulated mitigation measures. Non-compliance can result in project delays, funding suspension, or repayment of funds, so it is taken very seriously. The grant timeline and work plan should incorporate these compliance tasks. Fortunately, since many trail projects are environmentally benign or beneficial, the process is usually straightforward with proper planning.

Grant Awards and Project Implementation

Award Notification: Once project selection is finalized and approved by FHWA, DOT&PF will send out award packets to the successful applicants. The packet typically includes an **Award Letter** (congratulating the applicant and summarizing the grant award), a **Grant Agreement** for signature, and various attachments such as general provisions, reporting templates, and instructions for next steps (e.g.

a checklist for starting the project). Unsuccessful applicants will receive a letter and are encouraged to contact DOT&PF for debriefs to strengthen future applications.

Grant Agreement: The **Grant Agreement** is a crucial document that establishes the official relationship between DOT&PF (as the pass-through entity of federal funds) and the grantee (subrecipient). It will reference federal requirements under **2 CFR 200 (Uniform Guidance)** and FHWA RTP guidance that the subrecipient must follow. Key elements of the agreement include:

- **Scope of Work:** A detailed description of the project activities and deliverables, often drawn from the application but refined as needed. Only work within this scope is eligible for reimbursement. Any changes to the scope later will require DOT&PF approval (via a written amendment).
- **Project Schedule:** The agreement will specify the **period of performance** – start and end dates for the project. Typically, the start date is upon full execution of the agreement (or a specified date) and the end date could be 12–24 months out. All work and costs must occur within this window to be eligible, unless an extension is granted in writing.
- **Project Budget:** The agreement will include a budget table showing the approved grant amount and the budget categories (sometimes by phase or type of expense). It also notes the required match amount. Deviating from this budget (e.g. moving funds between categories or adding new line items) usually requires prior approval. Minor variances might be allowed with DOT&PF project manager consent, but larger changes need a formal amendment.
- **Federal and State Requirements:** A section incorporating standard terms such as compliance with **2 CFR 200** (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards), **FHWA regulations, civil rights laws, environmental conditions, debarment and suspension** (the grantee must not be debarred and must use contractors not debarred, which DOT&PF will verify via SAM.gov), **drug-free workplace, procurement standards**, etc. By signing, the grantee agrees to all these provisions.
- **Reimbursement Process:** The agreement will outline **how to request reimbursement**. Generally, the grantee will submit periodic **Reimbursement Requests** (monthly or quarterly, as needed) along with documentation of costs (invoices, timesheets, etc.). DOT&PF will review and then reimburse eligible expenses up to the 90% federal share. A typical clause is that DOT&PF will pay within a certain time after receiving a complete request (often 30 days, subject to state accounting processes). If the grantee fails to provide adequate documentation, DOT&PF can withhold payment until resolved.
- **Reporting Requirements:** The grantee will be required to submit **Progress Reports** (usually quarterly, or semi-annually at minimum). These reports describe work completed, any challenges, percent complete, and upcoming activities. They also report on **match contributions to date** and **project expenditures**. A **final report** is required at project completion, summarizing the project's accomplishments, outcomes (e.g. miles of trail built or maintained, amenities installed), and including “after” photos.

- **Retention and Audit:** The agreement will specify that the grantee must **retain all project records for a period (commonly 3 years) after the final payment**[sam.gov](https://www.sam.gov), and that the project is subject to audit by DOT&PF, State of Alaska auditors, or federal auditors. If any costs are found ineligible, the grantee would be required to repay those.
- **Maintenance Obligation:** Especially for construction projects, the agreement will include a commitment that the grantee (or land owner) will maintain the trail/facility for a certain number of years (often the useful life of the improvement). For example, if RTP funds build a trail, the sponsor agrees to keep it open to the public and maintained for, say, 20 years. This prevents the scenario of federal funds building something that then is abandoned. If a project ceases to be used for public recreation before the stipulated time, the grantee may have to repay a prorated portion of the funds or find an alternative acceptable to DOT&PF/FHWA.
- **Termination and Remedies:** Standard clauses allow DOT&PF to terminate the grant for cause (e.g. if the grantee fails to comply or make adequate progress) or convenience (though rarely used). It will outline remedies such as withholding funds, requiring corrective actions, or in worst case, terminating and possibly recovering funds.
- **Signatures:** The agreement must be signed by the DOT&PF authorized representative and the grantee's authorized official (often an executive director, mayor, or similar authority). Some grantees may need to have their governing body approve the agreement by resolution before signing.

Initial Steps After Award: Once the agreement is signed, DOT&PF will typically hold a **kickoff meeting** or call with the grantee. The purpose is to go over the terms, clarify any questions, and set expectations. The DOT&PF program manager will be the primary point of contact for the grantee moving forward. At this stage, DOT&PF will also ensure the project has all prerequisite approvals: notably, starting or continuing the **NEPA process** (if not already cleared) and verifying any permits or land access rights are in place. **No construction or field work can start until NEPA is completed** (as emphasized earlier), even if the grant agreement is signed. If a project is simple maintenance that was categorically excluded in the application stage, DOT&PF may issue NEPA concurrence quickly. For more complex projects, the grantee may be asked to hold off on certain tasks (like ground disturbance) until an environmental document is finalized. DOT&PF might issue a limited Notice to Proceed for preliminary tasks (surveying, engineering design) while NEPA is underway, if those tasks do not prejudice the NEPA outcome.

Procurement: Grantees must procure any contractors, equipment, or supplies **according to the applicable procurement rules**. If the grantee is a government entity, it must follow its local government procurement code or state procurement regulations (which generally require competitive bids or quotes above certain dollar thresholds). Non-profits must follow procurement standards outlined in **2 CFR 200.318-327** for federal grants, which similarly emphasize full and open competition for purchases. **Buy America** provisions must be followed for steel/iron as noted. Grantees should keep records of how they solicited and selected vendors (e.g. bid advertisements, selection criteria, etc.), as DOT&PF may review this to ensure fairness and cost reasonableness. If a grantee wants to use its own labor force or equipment ("force account"), that should be approved by DOT&PF in advance and proper cost accounting must be in place.

Reimbursement Requests: Throughout the project, grantees will spend funds and then submit for reimbursement of the federal share. DOT&PF will provide a **Reimbursement Request Form or portal**. Typically, the grantee will attach supporting documentation: copies of invoices from contractors or suppliers, timesheets for staff labor, receipts for materials, etc., and proof of payment (like cancelled checks or bank statements) to show the grantee has paid these costs. The request will break out which costs are to be reimbursed (90%) and which are being counted as match (the 10% or more). DOT&PF staff will review each request, verify costs are within the approved scope and budget and are allowable under federal rules. They may ask for corrections or additional backup if something is unclear. Once approved, DOT&PF processes the payment through the state's accounting system to the grantee (electronic fund transfer or check). **Advance payments** are generally not provided; this is a reimbursement program, though DOT&PF tries to process reimbursements promptly to minimize cash flow strain on grantees. Frequent requests (monthly) are allowed, but some grantees choose quarterly. At minimum, a reimbursement should be filed at least once every six months to show activity.

Progress Reporting and Communication: Grantees must submit periodic **progress reports**, as specified in the agreement (often quarterly). A progress report form may be provided. It will ask for updates on: tasks completed this period, tasks planned for next period, any delays or issues encountered, status of budget (funds expended and match to date), and confirmation that the work is on track. It may also include questions about any publicity or photos of the project. Timely reporting is important; DOT&PF uses these reports to do required quarterly progress updates to FHWA. If a grantee falls behind or doesn't communicate, DOT&PF will reach out and can escalate if needed (site visits, etc.). **Good communication** between grantee and DOT&PF is key. Grantees are encouraged to promptly inform DOT&PF of any significant issues – for example, unexpected environmental concerns, contractor problems, cost overruns, or scope changes they are considering. DOT&PF can often help troubleshoot or approve adjustments, but surprises at the end are harder to resolve.

Project Amendments: If changes are needed during the project, they must be formally requested to DOT&PF. Common changes include: **time extensions** (if project delays occur due to weather, etc., a grantee can request to extend the end date), **budget reallocations** (moving funds between budget categories or adding match), or **scope modifications** (altering the project work). DOT&PF can approve minor modifications via letter/email, but significant changes may require an **amendment to the grant agreement** signed by both parties. Importantly, any change must still keep the project eligible and substantially similar to what was approved. If a grantee, for instance, cannot complete a portion of work, DOT&PF will consider whether the remaining project still meets its objectives. If the scope is reduced, DOT&PF might reduce the grant amount correspondingly to redistribute funds elsewhere. Changes that would violate the 30/30/40 funding balance or other federal rules cannot be approved. All amendments should be requested well in advance of the project end date.

Project Completion and Closeout: Upon finishing the project, the grantee will notify DOT&PF and submit a **final reimbursement request** for any remaining funds along with a **Final Report**. The final report typically includes: a narrative summary of the project achievements, before-and-after photographs, confirmation that the scope was completed, a description of the public response (e.g. attendance at a ribbon cutting, usage statistics if available), and how the project will be maintained moving forward. The grantee also certifies that all contractors have been paid and any disputes resolved.

DOT&PF may perform a **final site visit** or inspection to verify the project was completed as intended. If any punch-list items are identified, the grantee would address them.

Financially, DOT&PF will reconcile the project's expenditures and match. If the grantee did not use the full grant amount, DOT&PF will de-obligate the unspent balance (it can be reprogrammed to other projects or next year's cycle). If the grantee over-expended or did work beyond the scope, those extra costs are solely the grantee's responsibility. When everything is in order, DOT&PF will issue a **grant closeout letter** acknowledging completion and reminding the grantee of ongoing obligations (like maintenance and record retention). All project records must be retained by the grantee for at least **three years after closeout** (or longer if any audit or legal issue arises)[sam.gov](https://www.sam.gov).

DOT&PF will include the project in its RTP annual report to FHWA, highlighting accomplishments. Often, success stories are shared publicly to promote the program's impact. Grantees are encouraged to hold ribbon-cutting events or engage media to celebrate the project – acknowledging RTP and DOT&PF/FHWA support.

Fiscal Oversight and Subrecipient Monitoring

Managing federal funds carries significant responsibility for both DOT&PF and the grant recipients. DOT&PF must follow federal Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200) in its oversight of subrecipients, and grantees must comply with the requirements as subrecipients of federal awards. This section outlines how financial oversight and compliance monitoring are conducted:

DOT&PF Oversight Responsibilities: As the pass-through entity, DOT&PF is required by 2 CFR §200.332 to undertake certain monitoring and management actions for subawards. Key activities include:

- **Risk Assessment:** Before awarding and as part of monitoring, DOT&PF assesses each subrecipient's risk of non-compliance. This considers factors like the size of the award, the grantee's prior experience with federal grants, results of previous audits, and whether the grantee has new personnel or systems. Based on this risk, DOT&PF may tailor the monitoring intensity (e.g. high-risk subrecipients might get more frequent check-ins or site visits). In the application scoring, prior performance was considered qualitatively; here, it's a formal process documented for compliance.
- **Subaward Agreement Clarity:** DOT&PF ensures that each grant agreement (subaward) includes all required data (Federal Award Identification, Assistance Listing Number (ALN) which for RTP is typically 20.219, amount of federal funds, requirements, etc.) and required clauses from 2 CFR 200 Appendix II (like termination, lobbying prohibition, etc.). The agreements explicitly incorporate 2 CFR 200 rules so that subrecipients are aware of them.
- **Training and Technical Assistance:** DOT&PF will provide guidance to subrecipients on program requirements. This manual itself is part of that effort. Additionally, DOT&PF is available to answer questions, provide templates, and even one-on-one assistance if a subrecipient is struggling with fiscal procedures or documentation. The goal is to prevent issues by being proactive – for example, if a nonprofit has never had a federal grant, DOT&PF might walk them through setting up a financial management system that segregates grant funds, maintaining a ledger, etc.

- **Review of Performance and Financial Reports:** As mentioned, DOT&PF reviews every reimbursement request and progress report. These reviews are not just for processing payments, but also to check for **allowable costs**, adherence to budget, and progress toward objectives. If a report indicates the project is behind schedule or encountering problems, DOT&PF will flag it and may require a corrective action plan. Financial report review includes ensuring matching contributions are being provided as promised and that costs align with the agreed scope.
- **Site Visits and Inspections:** DOT&PF will conduct **monitoring site visits** for selected projects, especially mid-project or when critical work is underway. During a site visit, DOT&PF staff may examine project documentation (timesheets, invoices, procurement files) and physically inspect the work in progress or completed. They will also discuss with project staff their procedures for compliance. A site visit is an opportunity to identify any compliance issues early. A written report is usually provided after, noting any findings or recommendations. For example, a finding could be that the subrecipient wasn't documenting volunteer match hours correctly – DOT&PF would instruct them on proper documentation.
- **Audit and Single Audit Tracking:** If a subrecipient expends **\$750,000 or more in federal funds in a fiscal year** (from all federal sources, not just RTP), it must undergo a **Single Audit** per 2 CFR 200.501 (previously known as A-133 audit). DOT&PF will notify such larger grantees of this requirement and will require they submit their audit report when done. DOT&PF reviews any audit findings related to RTP funds and ensures the subrecipient takes corrective action. For most RTP grantees (often smaller entities), a full Single Audit may not be triggered, but DOT&PF still may request financial statements or conduct its own mini-audit upon closeout.
- **Documentation and Record-Keeping:** DOT&PF keeps comprehensive files on each subaward, including copies of all reports, correspondence, and monitoring activities. This documentation is essential for demonstrating to FHWA or state auditors that proper oversight is occurring. It also allows DOT&PF to analyze patterns and improve the program (for instance, if many grantees have trouble with a certain compliance area, DOT&PF can adjust training on that topic).

Subrecipient (Grantee) Responsibilities: Once in a grant agreement, the subrecipient has agreed to a host of requirements. Some of the key ongoing responsibilities:

- **Financial Management System:** The grantee must use a **financial management system** that accurately tracks expenditures of the RTP grant and the matching funds. The system should provide records that identify the source and application of funds, with entries supported by source documentation. Essentially, if an auditor asks “show me all the invoices and payments for this project,” the grantee should be able to produce that easily. The system must also ensure that expenditures are within the approved budget categories.
- **Allowable Costs:** The grantee must ensure that every cost charged to the grant is allowable per federal rules (2 CFR 200 Subpart E) and the program guidelines. Common unallowable costs that must be avoided include entertainment, alcohol, lobbying activities, and any expense not directly related to the trail project. If indirect costs are charged, they must have an approved rate or cost allocation method.

- **Procurement and Contract Oversight:** The grantee must follow the applicable procurement standards and, once contractors are hired, actively manage those contracts to ensure full compliance with all requirements. If prevailing wage requirements under the Davis-Bacon Act apply, the grantee is responsible for monitoring contractor payrolls and enforcing those requirements. Under current FHWA guidance, the Davis-Bacon Act generally does not apply to RTP projects unless the project is located within a highway right-of-way or is otherwise integrated with a federal-aid highway project. DOT&PF will make this determination on a case-by-case basis and will notify the grantee if Davis-Bacon compliance is required.
- **Environmental Mitigation Compliance:** If the NEPA process or permits imposed any mitigation (e.g., replant vegetation after construction, monitor for invasive species, avoid certain work windows), the grantee must implement those and document it in progress reports.
- **Match Documentation:** The grantee must document the **match contributions** with the same rigor as grant expenses. For cash match, this means showing invoices and payments of the non-federal share. For **in-kind match**, such as volunteer labor, the grantee should have sign-in sheets for volunteers, descriptions of work done, and use a reasonable rate to value the labor (DOT&PF can provide guidance, often unskilled volunteer labor is valued at a standard rate, or if professional services are donated, at the professional's typical rate). Donated materials should have letters stating their value, etc. These records should be submitted or available for verification.
- **Reporting and Communication:** Subrecipients must submit reports on time and respond to DOT&PF requests for information promptly. If any issue arises that may impact the project or compliance, they should inform DOT&PF. It's better to proactively address a problem (like a potential budget shortfall or a compliance question) than to ignore it.
- **Record Retention and Access:** As noted, all project records – financial and programmatic – must be kept for at least three years after closeout. If a Single Audit is required, records may need to be kept longer if the audit has findings still being resolved. The subrecipient must allow DOT&PF, State of Alaska auditors, FHWA, or the U.S. Inspector General access to these records upon request for monitoring or audit purposes. This might include on-site review of original documents.
- **Subrecipient Monitoring of Contractors:** If the subrecipient further passes funds to a **lower-tier subrecipient or contractor**, they have to monitor those similarly. Generally, RTP projects do not involve sub-subrecipients (most grantees perform the work or hire contractors for construction, who are not subrecipients but vendors). But if, for example, a non-profit gets an RTP grant and then sub-awards a portion to a partner organization, the original grantee is responsible for monitoring that partner.

Federal and State Audits: RTP projects can be selected for audit by various entities. The Alaska State Legislature's auditors or DOT&PF internal auditors might audit the program. FHWA periodically conducts **program reviews** of state RTP administration. If selected, DOT&PF and potentially some subrecipients would be asked to provide files and demonstrate compliance. By following the procedures in this manual and maintaining documentation, both DOT&PF and subrecipients will be prepared for any such review.

Administrative Order 361 acknowledges that audits may cover years DNR administered the program, and DNR will assist with those records if needed. Going forward, DOT&PF will maintain all necessary records to account for the program's performance and financial integrity.

In case of any **compliance findings** (whether through DOT&PF monitoring or external audit), DOT&PF will work with the subrecipient on a **corrective action plan**. Minor issues can often be fixed (e.g. submitting a missing report, improving documentation). Serious issues, like misuse of funds, could lead to suspension of payments or termination of the grant. In extreme cases of non-compliance or fraud, DOT&PF could disallow costs and require repayment, and refer matters to authorities. Thankfully, such instances are rare. The goal of monitoring is to prevent problems and ensure each project succeeds while following the rules.

DOT&PF will also continually reference **FHWA's RTP guidance and best practices** to update its monitoring procedures. This includes staying current on any changes to federal regulations (for instance, if 2 CFR 200 is updated or if FHWA issues new RTP-specific rules). All program staff will receive training on grant management regulations. Internally, DOT&PF will use tools like checklists for grant managers to review projects at key milestones, and maintain a schedule of reporting deadlines for all active projects to ensure nothing slips through.

Reimbursable Services Agreements (RSAs) and Fiscal Transfers: A unique aspect of this program transition is the possibility of DOT&PF using **RSAs with DNR** for support (as mentioned earlier). An RSA is essentially an inter-departmental funding agreement within the State of Alaska. For example, if DNR's Division of Parks has an expert GIS person who maintains the statewide trails database that feeds into SCORP and is useful for RTP, DOT&PF could enter an RSA to fund a portion of that position's time. Similarly, DOT&PF might fund DNR to conduct certain trail planning or outreach tasks that benefit RTP. From a fiscal oversight perspective, RSAs are **intra-governmental** and not subawards. DOT&PF would ensure that any RSA-funded work is clearly delineated and does not duplicate what grantees are doing. RSAs would be paid with RTP's allowable administrative funds or possibly with the 5% education funds if relevant (since RSA'd tasks are not grants, they are essentially contractual services between agencies). This manual clarifies that while DNR is not a grant recipient for RTP, it may still handle funds via RSA for agreed services. Those RSA arrangements will be documented via separate MOA or agreement, and any outputs (like data or reports) from DNR will be integrated into the program's operation.

In summary, **fiscal integrity and compliance** are top priorities under DOT&PF's stewardship of the RTP. By following 2 CFR 200 Uniform Guidance and FHWA policies, DOT&PF will maintain a high level of accountability. Grantees, in turn, must uphold their end by managing funds properly and cooperating with oversight. This partnership ensures the RTP remains a credible and successful program, competitive for future funding and able to deliver tangible benefits to Alaska's trail users.

Appendices and Templates

The following appendices provide additional resources, templates, and examples to support both program staff and grant applicants/recipients. They are located on our website. These can be used as reference materials and adapted for each grant cycle as needed.

- **Appendix A: RTP Grant Application Form (Template)** – A blank copy of the standard application form for the Alaska RTP, including all sections and questions that applicants must complete. This form template is annotated with tips for each section drawn from the instructions in this manual. *(This corresponds to the “FY2025 Grant Application” form previously used, updated to reflect DOT&PF as the administering agency.)* Applicants and staff can refer to this template to understand the expected format and level of detail for applications.
- **Appendix B: Budget Workbook Template (Excel)** – A sample of the Excel workbook used for detailing project budgets. The appendix provides a printed example of the workbook with hypothetical numbers, illustrating how to break down costs and calculate the federal share and match. Instructions for each column (Expense Category, Description, RTP Funds, Match, etc.) are included. This example serves as a guide for applicants to model their own budget submissions and for staff to review them.
- **Appendix C: Environmental Compliance Checklist (Sample)** – The standard Environmental Review/NEPA questionnaire form that applicants must fill out, accompanied by a completed example for a fictional project. This shows how an applicant should identify potential environmental concerns and how DOT&PF staff would use the information. It also lists common permits and consultations that might be needed, acting as a quick reference for both applicants and program staff during project planning.
- **Appendix D: Project Scoring Sheet and Instructions** – The actual **Trail Project Score Sheet** used by reviewers (ARTAC members) with all scoring criteria and point values. This appendix includes the form that reviewers fill out, as well as guidance for scorers on how to interpret each criterion (which aligns with the descriptions in this manual’s scoring section). By including this, applicants can see exactly how their application will be judged, and program staff can ensure transparency in the evaluation process. The conflict of interest disclosure section for reviewers is also shown to emphasize the integrity of the scoring process.
- **Pending Appendix E: Sample Award Agreement and General Provisions** – A template of the RTP Grant Agreement with blanks for project-specific information, and the standard “boilerplate” general terms and conditions that accompany each agreement. Having this in the manual allows applicants (and new program staff) to familiarize themselves with the legal language and requirements ahead of time. It covers federal requirements (Uniform Guidance, Title VI, etc.), reporting obligations, and maintenance commitments in full detail. A sample signature page is included to show the format for execution by DOT&PF and the grantee.
- **Pending Appendix F: Reimbursement Request Form (Example)** – A filled-out example of a reimbursement claim form that a grantee would submit, with annotations explaining each entry. This includes an example of how to list expenditures, calculate the 90% reimbursement, and document the 10% match for that period. It also includes a mock set of attached documentation (listed, not fully reproduced) to illustrate what a complete request entails. This is a handy reference for both grantees (to prepare correct billings) and DOT&PF finance staff (to check for completeness).

- **Pending Appendix G: Quarterly Progress Report Template** – The format in which grantees must report progress. The example provided shows sections for work completed, upcoming work, problems encountered, timeline status, and a financial summary. An illustrative example is given (e.g. “Task 1: Trail clearing 50% complete, Task 2: bridge materials ordered, etc.”). This helps standardize reporting and ensures grantees cover all necessary topics.
- **Pending Appendix H: Sample Project Completion Report** – A hypothetical final report for an RTP project, demonstrating the expected content and format. This includes a narrative of accomplishments, before/after photos, usage statistics or community feedback if available, and a section confirming compliance (permits closed, all invoices paid, etc.). Such a sample is useful for grantees to understand how to effectively close out their project and for staff to have a checklist of what to verify at closeout.
- **Pending Appendix I: Outreach and Public Communication Samples** – This appendix contains examples of public notices, press releases, and signage related to RTP projects. For instance, a **sample public notice** (as required pre-application) is given so applicants can model theirs on it. A **press release template** for announcing funded projects (which DOT&PF could use to announce winners) is included to illustrate how the program’s impact is communicated. Also, an example of a **trailhead sign or plaque text** crediting RTP funding and DOT&PF/FHWA support is provided – since it’s good practice (and sometimes required) to acknowledge the source of grant funding on project signage or materials.

Each of these appendices is intended to serve as a practical tool. The manual’s main text provides the detailed narrative and requirements, while the appendices give concrete examples and ready-to-use templates. DOT&PF program staff should keep these up to date (for instance, if forms or processes change in future years, the manual and appendices should be revised accordingly). The ultimate aim is to make the RTP process as **clear, transparent, and user-friendly** as possible, while ensuring compliance with all governing rules.

Document Control: This manual was updated in October 2025 to reflect Administrative Order No. 361 and the transfer of RTP administration to DOT&PF. It supersedes any previous guidance issued under DNR’s management of the program. DOT&PF will maintain this document and update it as needed (e.g., if federal regulations change or if program processes are refined in future grant cycles). All DOT&PF RTP program staff, advisory committee members, and prospective applicants should use this manual as the primary reference for the Alaska Recreational Trails Program.

For questions or clarification on the content of this manual or the RTP process, please contact the DOT&PF Statewide Trails Program Manager at dot.rtp@alaska.gov , or visit the DOT&PF RTP website for additional information and updates.