

# MAKING THE TRANSITION IN LTAP/TTAP: SIX TASKS TO FOUR FOCUS AREAS

## OVERVIEW

LTAP/TTAP Centers have traditionally developed their annual work plans around the “six tasks” created in the mid 1980s. The Program now operates under a Strategic Plan implemented in 2004 that defines national Program efforts through four focus areas of impact and effectiveness. While the Strategic Plan calls for the collection of performance data on program operations under these focus areas, the Centers have continued to develop operational work plans around the dated six tasks. To help Centers meet the focus areas in the most efficient and effective manner, FHWA is working to shift work-planning emphasis from the six specific tasks to the broader focus areas. This action devolves planning and development of Program operations to the Centers, who are in the best position to determine how to provide services to their partners and customers.

This shift is consistent with the OMB Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) requirements that focus on program outputs and outcomes. The goal is to align Program activities with the purposes captured in the four focus areas and thus “connects the dots” as to why Centers engage in certain activities. For example, publishing four newsletters a year to satisfy a directive may result in a measurable outcome; however, planning the content of newsletters to educate personnel to produce enhanced safety outcomes is a more meaningful activity that supports a focus area. An overall communications activity that incorporates safety articles in newsletters is also a more accurate representation of the work of Centers.

This will not represent a significant shift in Center activities or level of effort. Many Centers are already developing work plans in this manner, and FHWA will be working with Centers and NLTAPA to capture best practices and develop guidance over the coming months and years. The goal is to provide a stronger emphasis on the national focus areas while lessening the emphasis on prescriptive operational techniques that can imply a “one size fits all” approach to center work plans.

New definitions of the old “six tasks” can still exist as measurable activities now aligned around the four focus areas, thus making the link between work and results clearer and simplifying the planning process. Performance reporting on the PAR and CAR will not change. We anticipate that the transition process will occur over the next 12 to 24 months, or the next one-to-two business planning cycles.

### Purpose of the Shift

- To align work plans and program performance reporting per the current Strategic Plan
- To give Centers greater ability to plan and link work activities to anticipated focus area outcomes in the Plan
- To bring Centers added flexibility that may lead to new opportunities
- To help Centers expand on activities that are important for their programs, thus:
  - bringing increased benefits both to individual Centers and the national Program
  - enabling continuous improvement of LTAP/TTAP programs

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### BACKGROUND

When the LTAP/TTAP program was initially established, FHWA required Centers to perform six tasks. Contracts and work plans were based on these six tasks, centered on the “how” of delivery. The six tasks are:

- Compile and Maintain a Mailing List
- Publish a Quarterly Newsletter
- Distribute Technology Transfer Materials
- Provide an Information Service
- Provide Training Courses
- Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Program

More recently, Centers have been reporting PAR/CAR data to FHWA based on the four focus areas from the current LTAP/TTAP Strategic Plan, or the “what” of service delivery. These areas are:

- Safety
- Workforce Development
- Infrastructure Management
- Organizational Excellence

However, most LTAP/TTAP work plans are still being framed around the six tasks.

The LTAP/TTAP Strategic Planning Committee recommends that each LTAP/TTAP Center transition their work plans from the six tasks to the four focus areas for alignment of the Strategic Plan, Center work plans and Center reporting. In addition, new technologies such as the Internet, e-learning, podcasts, etc. have emerged, and rather than narrowly define how Centers must operate (e.g. four newsletters per year), Centers need to plan what methods they will use to meet program objectives, such as how to best transfer information to their local agency customers. Having work plans center on the four focus areas should also provide opportunities for greater flexibility in how to provide service within the broadly defined areas of what is to be provided to local agencies.

The sixth task – Center evaluation – speaks to performance and capacity building within each Center. This task is captured in the fourth focus area – Organizational Excellence. This area also captures the important work LTAP Centers undertake through partnerships, as well as efforts for program and operational improvements.

This document provides guidance for LTAP/TTAP Centers in transitioning their work plans from the six tasks to the four focus areas.

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### **GUIDANCE FOR PREPARING LTAP/TTAP WORK PLANS AND BUDGETS**

This section is intended to provide LTAP/TTAP Center directors with general guidance in preparing work plans and budgets that more fully incorporate the four focus areas – Safety, Infrastructure Management, Workforce Development and Organizational Excellence – as the guiding objectives of the LTAP/TTAP program.

The differences between how LTAP/TTAP Centers are organized and operated will dictate how current work plans and budgets are developed. The diversity among individual Centers defies a one-size-fits-all approach. The weight and importance of the written work plan may vary from Center to Center depending on administrative requirements. However, it is assumed that all Centers must submit a work plan annually to describe the program of work to be completed under a contractual or organizational agreement and to document allocation of resources and budgets. It is also assumed that the process of preparing a work plan often serves a variety of purposes such as:

- Strategic planning opportunities
- Program planning and activity prioritization
- Resource and budget justification tool
- Documentation of operational activities to meet customer needs
- Confirmation of administrative and reporting requirements
- Marketing and promotion of LTAP/TTAP to funding and/or oversight agencies

The potential and ultimate uses of a work plan will determine the amount of detail to be included in the plan for each Center. In addition, administrative or reporting requirements may also require certain elements specific to individual Centers. Each director will have to determine how to best incorporate the four focus areas into a work plan that meets the needs of their Center, the funding sources, stakeholders, customers, administrative oversight agencies, and so on.

Transition to a work plan more fully reflecting the four focus areas of the national LTAP/TTAP program is not meant to be a prescriptive or burdensome task. It is an opportunity to allow each Center to more fully participate in the focus areas and to more easily document the new and varied activities and services that have evolved in each Center over the 25 years of the Program. The six tasks no longer reflect the extent and diversity of most LTAP/TTAP programs. Consideration of the four focus areas along with any other specific requirements may allow for greater flexibility and acknowledgement of the varied services provided through an LTAP/TTAP Center. This alignment provides Centers the opportunity to better support program priorities through these numerous specific activities, including the traditional six tasks.

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### Considerations

- Confirm with funding sources and administrative oversight that the work plan format will be changing
- Discuss the required elements of the work plan and the transition to the new format
- Include the six tasks as continuing activities to advance the four focus areas during transition.

### Task Alignment

Some of the six tasks will likely serve to advance all four focus areas. These may be addressed in an introductory portion of the work plan explaining the purpose of such activities (i.e. the six tasks) and how they relate to the objectives of the Center as a whole. Examples of these tasks are:

- Mailing list
- Advisory Board
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the program

Other tasks may serve several but not all of the focus areas, such as:

- Newsletters
- Conferences
- Workshops

Still other tasks may apply to only a single focus area:

- Workshops
- Providing technology transfer materials
- Providing technical assistance
- Participating in local, regional, and national organizations, such as NACE or APWA

As work plans are drawn up with the four focus areas as their organizational basis, Centers are encouraged to assess what tasks might best be used to accomplish the goals laid out by the focus areas. As demonstrated above, not all of the tasks performed by Centers may be appropriate to every focus area. When preparing work plans, try to address and describe the various tasks that are best able to promote each of the focus areas. Also keep in mind that a variety of tasks will help fulfill the objectives of several focus areas.

Ultimately, the goal of modifying work plan formats is to provide both those who plan Center activities and those who read work plans and assess program direction with a more comprehensive view of how a Center accomplishes its mission.

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### **Sections of a Work Plan**

Introductory sections covering aspects such as the history, vision, and mission of a Center will continue. The role of an advisory board and the composition of its members will be an overarching element of Center operations as a whole. These elements of the work plan may be viewed in a slightly different light in the context of the four focus areas, and this may be addressed in the description of such sections; fundamentally, however, they should not be significantly affected by the move to the four focus areas.

Sections of a work plan addressing the four focus areas should consist of relatively independent plans to achieve the goals of each focus area.

### **Preparing Budgets**

Every Center needs to prepare budgets acceptable to those overseeing their activities, and each Center will need to tailor their budgets differently. As budgets by their nature are task oriented, it may be difficult to break budgets out by focus area. In discussions of the four focus areas, it should become apparent which tasks will fulfill each of their goals. For this reason, budgets will not need to be broken out into the four focus areas.

### **NEXT STEPS**

After extensive discussions at the last SPC meeting, it was agreed that it was appropriate for FHWA to ask all Centers to incorporate the four LTAP/TTAP focus areas when preparing their 2010 work plans. However, both the SPC and FHWA recognize that there is no “one size fits all” solution. Therefore, there should only be broad guidelines for Centers to follow incorporating the four focus areas into their work plans. In fact, due to individual state situations, some Centers may find it best to temporarily continue with their existing work plan formats while making modifications and additions to incorporate aspects of the four focus areas.

To accomplish these modifications to their 2010 work plans with relatively little effort, Centers should begin preparing for the transition sooner rather than later. Included below are some suggestions for an implementation plan for the four focus areas.

### **LTAP/TTAP Strategic Planning Committee Initiative**

The members of the SPC will play an active role in implementing the transition to focus areas, and this initiative should not be viewed as an exercise in paperwork. The SPC believes that the best course of action is to incorporate the four focus areas as a means of:

- program alignment;
- establishing a national identity for the LTAP program; and,
- better positioning the program to respond to upcoming reauthorization legislation.

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The SPC will be able to provide broad assistance to Centers. In addition, FHWA has also provided this guidance to its Division Offices who have shared it with state highway authorities, who obtained their assistance in the transition.

### **Regional and National Meetings**

Many Centers participate in regional meetings; they provide an opportunity to discuss this initiative with Centers as well as this Guidance document. As part of the implementation process, this Guidance document will be promoted as a best management practice.

### **Peer Resources**

Since a number of Centers have already implemented the four focus areas into their work plans, the LTAP community should take advantage of this resource. A number of options are available for information exchange among the LTAP/TTAP; these include, but are not limited to, conference calls, peer exchanges, webinars, and best-practice success stories. The important first steps in any of these peer efforts is to determine those Centers that have already implemented the four focus areas and engage them to share their lessons learned. Contact FHWA and/or NLTAPA to determine Centers that have already implemented the four focus areas and can help your Center.

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## APPENDIX A: GENERAL WORK PLAN OUTLINE

- ❖ Introductory
  - History and Background
  - Mission and Vision
  - Work Plan Organization
- ❖ Operations – bullet points, perhaps with some statistics where appropriate
  - Personnel and SOQs
  - Activities – this may be a simple list including the six tasks when appropriate
    - Compile and Maintain a Mailing List
    - Publish a Quarterly Newsletter
    - Distribute Technology Transfer Materials
    - Provide an Information Service
    - Provide Training Courses
    - Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Program
    - Assistance
    - Participation in local, state, regional and national efforts
      - list specific organizations and efforts
  - Advisory Board/Steering Committee
    - List members
- ❖ Four Focus Areas
  - Safety – Describe how the goal of improving safety is to be met
    - List planned safety-specific training, for example:
      - Work Zone safety
      - Intersection design
      - Road Safety Audits
      - Heavy equipment safety
    - Describe incorporation of safety into other training programs, for example:
      - Discussion of trenching hazards in a culverts workshop
      - Discussion of the inspector’s responsibility for contractors’ laborers’ safety in a construction inspection workshop
    - Describe other activities, for example:
      - Newsletter articles
      - Library materials
      - Working with locals on the High Risk Rural Roads program
      - Performing Road Safety Audits
      - Working with safety organizations

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- Infrastructure Management
    - List planned infrastructure-specific training, for example:
      - Pavement maintenance
      - Heavy equipment operation
    - Describe roles as a technical assistance provider, for example:
      - Newsletter
      - Library
      - Links from website
      - Site visits
      - Referring locals to various resources and experts
    - Describe other infrastructure-specific activities, for example:
      - Assisting locals with establishment of an asset management program
      - Developing technical materials, videos, and so on
  - Workforce Development
    - List planned workforce development-specific training, for example:
      - Leadership and Management
      - Succession planning
    - List other workforce development activities, for example:
      - Construction Career Day
      - School outreach
      - Provide training at local events such as APWA Chapter Meetings
      - Hosting or attending meetings such as with State NACE chapters
    - Annual conferences hosted
  - Organizational Excellence
    - List organizations, efforts, and other positions of Center employees, for example:
      - Membership on an NLTAPA workgroup
      - Sit on boards and other organizations representing local governments
      - Attending and giving presentations at TRB and other conferences
    - Attending train-the-trainer sessions
    - List recent publications by Center employees
    - Center evaluations
      - Workshop evaluations
      - Advisory boards
      - National performance reporting
    - Describe any special projects
    - Other activities
- ❖ Conclusions and Summary

Appendix: Budget