

## **Guidance for selection of AASHTO RAC annual high-value research projects**

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AASHTO Research Advisory Committee  
Value of Research Task Force

### **Overview**

Acting on the strategic plan of the AASHTO Standing Committee on Research, the AASHTO Research Advisory Committee (RAC) each year asks states to identify and document recently completed “high-value” research projects. RAC publishes an annual compilation of all of these projects.

In addition, each RAC state reviews and vote on the projects to determine an annual “Sweet 16” list. These projects are then featured in AASHTO events and publications and are also the subject of a poster session at the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Annual Meeting.

This document provides guidance for how states should determine which projects to submit and how to evaluate the projects for inclusion in the Sweet 16.

### **Qualifying projects**

States must nominate projects by March 31 of a given year. Review and voting for the Sweet 16 takes place from April 1 through April 30 and is conducted at a regional level. The Sweet 16 projects are identified by May 15 so that the states may make preparations to present projects and be recognized at the RAC / TRB State Representatives Annual Meeting that typically is held in July.

States may nominate any research project with the following qualifications:

1. The project must be completed by March 31 of the year it is submitted. Projects may have been completed in prior years as long as they have not been previously submitted.
2. A state may submit research projects on which it served as the lead contracting agency, regardless of the funding source. This includes projects fully or partially funded through SPR, UTC, state, local or pooled funds or any other sources.
3. States may combine multiple related or phased projects into a single entry, provided that at least one of the projects fits both qualifications #1 and #2.

### **Criteria for submission and selection**

States should submit projects and evaluate potential Sweet 16 projects based on the following criteria, in no specific order:

1. The project addresses a demonstrated need, answers specific questions or deals with documented problems relating to the state transportation agencies and its practices.
2. The project clearly identified and fulfilled its objectives.
3. The research results are technically valid and directly support the project recommendations.

4. The state or other appropriate agencies are making demonstrated progress in implementing the results of the research or otherwise following the project recommendations.
5. Implementation of the research results will lead to defined benefits (quantified or qualified) for the sponsor agency that outweigh the cost of the research and implementation.
6. Project implementation is leading to significant changes in agencies, positively impacting the conduct of business. The changes may also be adapted to other agencies across the local, state or federal levels.
7. Research results and implementation activities display innovation. If a nominated project is similar to parallel or past efforts, the nominee should note how the project promotes advancement beyond other results.

### **Other considerations**

Aside from the selection / evaluation criteria, states should also take these factors into consideration when submitting or rating projects:

1. Projects may address areas of expertise that are not common to all state DOT research managers. Research managers may have backgrounds in engineering, safety, planning, finance, public administration or other fields. Project applications should be written for a wider audience beyond a technical practitioner level.
2. Similarly, research managers should be careful not to be naturally biased when rating projects that fall into their own expertise. To help address this concern, research managers may want to seek the advice of others in their agency to review and rate projects.
3. Projects may address topical or business areas that are not represented in all state DOTs. For example, only a portion of state DOTs handle motor vehicle functions, but some DOTs fund policy or safety-related research that relate to motor vehicle activities. Applications should underscore the impact of the research on the sponsoring agency, even if that business function is not common to other state DOTs. Evaluators should take this into account and review projects based on the merit to the sponsor agency, even if their own agency may not have an application for the research.
4. Evaluators should understand the impacts of projects considering both breadth and depth. For example, one project may have a minor impact across a wide range of applications. Another project might have a major impact in a single or small set of applications. Either project may be considered to have high value.

### **Research Makes a Difference brochure**

The AASHTO RAC Sweet 16 projects may also be featured in the annual “Research Makes a Difference” brochure produced by NCHRP. The separate guidance for how this document is structured may also provide guidance for state DOTs in submitting or reviewing high value research projects.