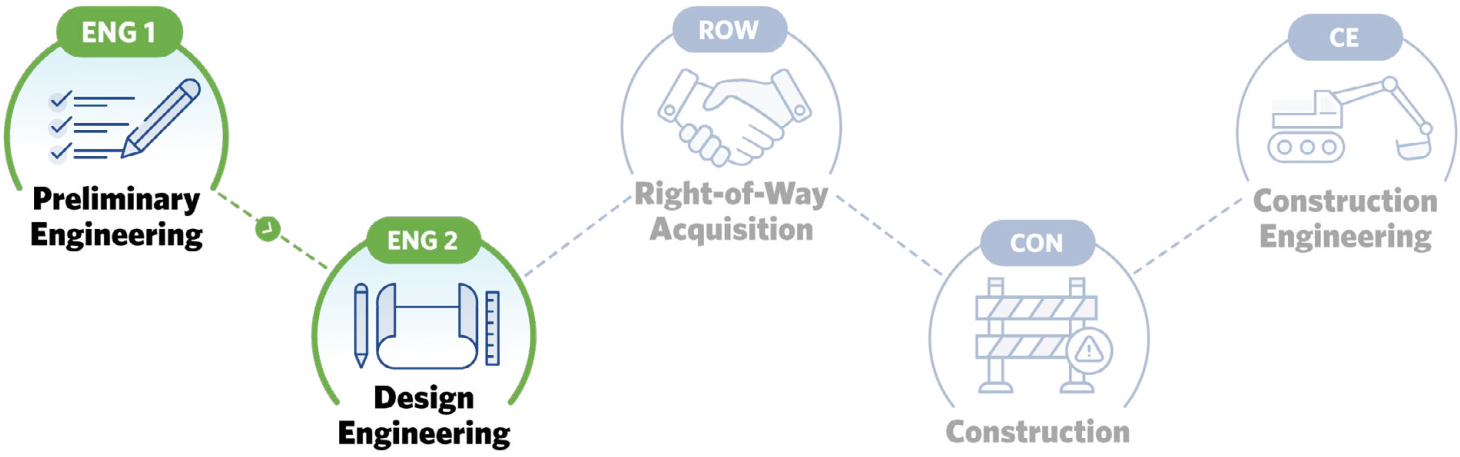
Navigating the federal process

Next steps for projects with federally funded Preliminary or Design Engineering phases

Securing funding is only one of many steps when implementing a project. Now that your project has been awarded funding, you might be wondering what's next. This document will guide you through the process to ensure your project reaches its anticipated milestones and letting date.

Projects that leverage federal funds have a set of requirements that must be fulfilled in order to use those funds for the awarded phase. Now that your project has been awarded Surface Transportation Program (STP), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program, or Transportation Alternative Program Local (TAP-L) funds for Preliminary (Phase 1) or Design Engineering (Phase 2), you must follow federal guidelines. By understanding these requirements and coordinating early in the process, sponsors can implement their projects on schedule and on budget. Not knowing these federal requirements and their requisite timing increases the risk that your project may be delayed or that the funding may be withdrawn altogether.

The steps in this document include many of the actions that need to be taken before, during, and after using your federally awarded funds. While most of these steps are required, they are not exhaustive. Under certain circumstances, your project may be subject to additional guidelines. Please work with your project team to identify these circumstances early on in the process.



Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

Note: This information is current as of August 2025 and is meant to be general guidance on the processes that apply to most federally-funded projects within the CMAP region. This document is not a substitute for the IDOT BLRS manual or any IDOT or other regulatory agencies' policies and procedures.

Program requirements for all projects

Before your project tackles the federal process, it must first fulfill requirements detailed under each program's active program management (APM) policies. There are also various deadlines outlined in the APM policies that project staff should be aware of to avoid delays. Lastly, no matter the phase being federally funded, all projects need to have an approved project program information form from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

Quarterly status update (QSU)

Project updates are required quarterly as outlined in both CMAQ/TAP-L and STP-SF /STP-L APM policies. After a project has been awarded this funding, an initial quarterly status update must be submitted to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) with estimated project milestone dates. When a milestone is reached, or there is a change in a milestone estimate, the next status update should reflect those dates. QSUs are required every March, June, September, and December until the project has been financially closed out. QSUs must be submitted by the technical or financial managers. Failure to submit a QSU can result in removal or deferral of project funding. More information can be found on the QSU instructions.

Project manager form

The project manager form accompanies your notice of award letter and designates a technical and financial manager for the project. The technical manager is the point of contact for ensuring implementation of the project, including the management of consultants. The financial manager — among other things — ensures the correct local match is included in the local public agency's (LPA) budget. These designations are required for all projects that receive funds from CMAP.

Project program information (PPI) form

The PPI form is the first step to initiate a project at IDOT District 1 and must be approved before initiating any funding agreements. The form must match the CMAP Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) in order to be approved and for federal funds to be authorized. More information about the PPI form can be found in step 3 below.

Engineering



1 Section 1440 process (*optional*)

Project sponsors should decide if they want to use the Section 1440 process early in project initiation. This is a processing technique granted through the FAST Act and leveraged by IDOT to allow an LPA to begin engineering work using locally sourced funds while agreement approvals are processing. Once approvals are obtained, the LPA can request federal reimbursement for costs incurred. If all federal guidelines are not followed, or approvals not received, the LPA risks not receiving reimbursement. Further, use of the Section 1440 process does not change obligation deadlines under APM policies. To ensure agreements are executed and federal funds are authorized by the assigned deadline, sponsors should initiate the process at least 12 months prior to their obligation deadline.

Additional information on the Section 1440 process can be found in IDOT Circular Letter 2021-10. If the process is not used, sponsors should expect approximately 9-12 months for approvals to execute the agreements.

2 Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS)

When engineering agreements are $40,000 or more using federal funds, LPAs are required to use the QBS. For engineering contracts that are below $40,000, the small purchase procurement method must be followed.

A QBS includes a competitive negotiation method of procurement for engineering and design related services. Required steps for the QBS are outlined in Chapter 5 of the Bureau of Local Roads and Streets BLRS Manual (5-5.06). There is an option for the consultant to perform one or more phases as part of the original selection to mitigate the need for multiple QBS processes for a project.

3 Project programming information form

A PPI form initiates a project at IDOT District 1 and must be approved before initiating any funding agreements. The form activates your project in the IDOT financial database. It summarizes a project's scope and funding, including phase allocations and local match requirements. The initial PPI form establishes the state job and federal project numbers for each phase of the project. It is the project sponsor's responsibility to complete the initial PPI form and any subsequent revisions.

The PPI form must match the CMAP TIP in order to be approved and for federal funds to be authorized. All PPI forms must be submitted and processed through the appropriate planning liaison (PL) or TIP programmer, who will then submit to IDOT. PPI forms submitted directly from the project sponsor or their consultants will not be accepted by IDOT.

Any time a project change that impacts information on the PPI form is made, the project sponsor needs to update and resubmit the form to their PL or TIP programmer for transmittal to IDOT. Always use the latest version of the PPI form from the IDOT website. Submitting an old version of the form will cause it to be rejected by IDOT and may delay the project.

Note: For projects located in Kendall, Grundy, or DeKalb counties within IDOT District 3, PPI forms are not required.

Timeline to prepare: After award notice and prior to the start of the year in which federal funds are programmed
Timeline for approval: Approximately two weeks
Final deliverable: Approved copy from IDOT

4 Funding and engineering agreements

Funding agreements

Following the initial PPI form approval by IDOT, project sponsors should prepare the appropriate funding agreements using the Bureau of Local Roads (BLR) 5310 form for submittal and send it to their PL for review and final submittal to IDOT. Funding agreements are project subaward agreements between the state DOT and the LPA that makes the funding available. There are two types of funding agreements:

- **BLR 05310PE:** for Engineering 1, Engineering 2, and Right-of-Way Acquisition
- **BLR 05310C:** for Construction and Construction Engineering

Note: Like the PPI form, engineering agreements need to be submitted to IDOT directly from the appropriate PL.

Engineering work is typically completed in three phases: Engineering 1 (Preliminary Engineering), Engineering 2 (Design Engineering), and Construction Engineering.

Engineering 1 includes initial cost estimates and environmental assessments, found in the BLRS Manual 18-2. It may also include preliminary design drawings. State job numbers assigned to items prepared during Preliminary Engineering start with a "P." The final product from Engineering 1 is a Project Development Report (BLR 22210), which may be as simple as a one-page form or as complex as a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), depending on the scope and potential impacts of the project. IDOT approval of the final form or report is known as Phase 1 Design Approval and is a critical milestone for project implementation.

Engineering 2 includes final design drawings, construction plans and specifications, cost estimates, utility plans, and construction bid packages. State job numbers assigned to items prepared during Design Engineering start with a "D." The final product from Engineering 2 is the plans, specifications, and estimates (PS&E) package. The PS&E should be submitted nine weeks prior to the scheduled letting date.

In most cases, each engineering phase is authorized separately. Note that agreements for Engineering 2 cannot be approved until Design Approval is received from IDOT. Additional information on Design Approval can be found in Chapter 22, Section 2 of the BLRS Manual. All agreement forms are available on the IDOT website.

Engineering agreement
If project sponsors hire a consultant to perform engineering services, regardless of the phase, a Local Public Agency Engineering Services Agreement (BLR 05530) is required. If the sponsor will complete federally funded engineering work using in-house staff, a Request for Engineering Services to be Performed by Local Public Agency Employees (BLR 05540 form) is required. The appropriate form should be completed by the project sponsor and sent to the PL for review and submittal to IDOT, along with the corresponding draft Local Public Agency Agreement for Federal Participation (BLR 05310 form) for the current phase of the project. IDOT will not accept agreement submittals directly from project sponsors; they must be made by the PL.

Timeline to prepare: After QBS is completed and before beginning any work
Timeline for approval: Approximately 9-12 months
Final deliverable: Executed agreement

5 Kickoff meetings

Kickoff meetings are required to initiate a project with IDOT. Most projects have both a Phase 1 and Phase 2 kickoff meeting, and the timing is determined by project funding. Attendance at kickoff meetings typically includes the project sponsor, PL, CMAP, and IDOT. Topics covered at the kickoff meetings include:

Phase 1: Discussion of the preliminary project scope, funding, and schedule with the IDOT field engineer. Additionally, a preliminary determination is made about the type of environmental processing required. The section number to be used for the project is also typically confirmed at the kickoff meeting.

Phase 2: Discussion of final project scope, funding, and schedule with the IDOT field engineer and review of commitments made as part of the Phase 1 Design Approval. If federal funds are being used for either phase, all agreements must be executed and a notice to proceed issued prior to the kickoff meeting. This ensures that expenses related to meeting attendance are eligible for reimbursement.

Note: To schedule a kickoff meeting, contact your PL who will coordinate the meeting with IDOT District 1 and the BLRS field engineer.

6 Coordination meetings

District coordination meetings involve the project sponsor, IDOT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), CMAP, and PLs. District 1 meetings are held monthly, always on a Tuesday (either the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd of the month), according to the schedule approved annually by the FHWA and IDOT. District 3 meetings do not follow a set schedule but typically occur every other month. The goal of coordination meetings is to determine early in the process the purpose and need, logical termini, environmental and public involvement requirements, and the class of action for a project (State Categorical Exclusion [CE], Federal CE, Environmental Assessment [EA], or EIS). See BLRS Manual Chapter 18 for more information.

IDOT and the FHWA serve as joint lead agencies during this process. The LPA is an active participant and is responsible for submittal of required final reports. The LPA is also responsible for project implementation. The information, discussions, and decisions made during this meeting are important as they impact the cost, scope, length of each phase, and the target letting date. TIP and conformity requirements are also routinely discussed at this meeting.

Coordination meeting minutes must be recorded by the LPA or their consultant. Once completed, the minutes are sent to the district which will then distribute them to IDOT Central Office BLRS and the FHWA for review.

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National Environmental Policy Act process

There are three types of environmental processing for projects: CE, EA, and EIS. The type that applies to each project is determined based on the likely impact a project will have on an area. A preliminary determination of the environmental processing will be made at the Phase 1 kickoff meeting by FHWA and IDOT. Final determination may not be made until the results of the Environmental Survey Request, if required, are received, and/or until a federal coordination meeting is held. Chapter 18 of the BLRS Manual covers general environmental procedures for federally-funded projects. Chapter 19 of the BLRS Manual details what qualifies as a CE and what processes and documentation apply. If any environmental studies are required, those requirements and processes are found in Chapter 20 of the BLRS Manual.

Timeline to schedule: Contact the field engineer no later than three weeks prior to the next scheduled meeting to have your project added to the agenda.

Questions?
Transportation@cmap.illinois.gov

Visit cmap.illinois.gov for more information

If you have questions on implementing your project, contact your council's PL, whose contact information can be found at cmap.is/CouncilofMayors.