

What Makes a Good Scan Topic Proposal?

The NCHRP project panel for the Domestic Scan program developed the following guidance for AASHTO member agencies on identifying and formulating good scan topics and proposals.

What Makes a Good Scan Topic?

An NCHRP domestic scan is a tool for accelerating innovation within the community of transportation agencies by facilitating information sharing and technology exchange. The tool brings scan-team members—typically highly experienced mid-career and senior agency professionals—into direct personal contact with new ideas and the people involved in applying these new ideas to advance the state of practice.



The scan yields two primary products. First, the scan report identifies new ideas that have produced good results and are likely to be beneficial to other agencies. Second, the collegial exchange among scan-team members and the people they meet during the scan form the roots for a professional network that continues to grow well after the scan report is completed, speeding dissemination of good ideas and leading practices within and among agencies.

A scan is not a synthesis to survey current practices in use among agencies; it is an effort to discover the most recent and productive new ideas that can advance the state of practice. A scan is not a review of current research; the ideas a scan team explores will have been successfully applied. A scan is not an opportunity for relaxed travel; scan teams always find it is hard work but professionally rewarding.

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A good scan topic presents an innovative transportation's agency's leading-edge practices that could offer widespread benefits if adopted by others. The scan's products will be the sharing of practices, advice and guidance from agencies successful in addressing a crosscut issue of concern with other agencies that could benefit from knowledge of those successful practices as well as how the agency dealt effectively with the complexities and uncertainties that can obstruct deployment of the successful approach.

What Makes a Good Scan Topic Proposal?

As discussed above, a good scan proposal starts with a good topic, stating clearly and succinctly the reasons that a scan is the appropriate approach to study an issue. To further support the proposal, the submitter should include:

- 1) Clear examples of recently demonstrated leading-edge ideas that might be observed by a scan team.
- 2) It should identify the innovative agency that deployed the idea proposed to be studied.
- 3) The proposal should describe the scale and breadth of benefits that could be accrued by others through sharing of the findings of the proposed scan.
- 4) The proposal should explain how the person-to-person contact between the scan team and the early adopters of new ideas is appropriate and productive for accelerating dissemination and deployment of successful ideas identified by the scan.

Remember, the program has limited resources to conduct a small number of scans each year. We select the proposals that we judge most likely to yield the best payoffs from our investment.

Who Proposes Scans? What Role Does the Proposer Play?

In response to questions about the role of the agencies that propose scan topics, the following guidance is provided to supplement the panel's comments.

An AASHTO committee or an individual from an AASHTO member (a state DOT) or an individual from FHWA may submit a scan topic for consideration. Proposers usually suggest leading-edge topics that they and other states or FHWA offices would like to learn more about in through an exchange by practitioners within the community of practice that is the focus of the scan topic. That commonly involves recently developed technologies or approaches that are not widely adopted but that some states or agencies—including possibly the submitter's—are pioneering. The proposal process is an opportunity to present a thoughtful case for a scan, especially if the topic hasn't been explored by previous scans.

If a proposed topic is accepted as one of the two to four funded scans per fiscal year, the proposing state may volunteer someone from that state to participate on the scan team.