

Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) *what they are and what they mean for you*

Judy Chapman, Deputy Director of Planning, April 2024



Alaska's Regional Planning Organization (RPO) Pilot Program

Focus on **community-based**
transportation planning and
strong partnerships
between DOT&PF and communities

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a yellow cardigan with a floral pattern, and a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a blue t-shirt, are sitting at a wooden table. They are both looking down at a white document on the table. The man is holding a blue pen and appears to be writing or pointing at the document. The woman is looking on attentively. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an office or meeting room setting.

Existing pilot RPOs in Alaska

Copper Valley RPO

Established August 2022

FAST Planning (rural Fairbanks)

Established November 2022

Northwest Arctic Borough

Established March 2023



A scenic view of a winding road through a snowy mountain landscape under a cloudy sky. The road is dark and curves through the snow-covered terrain. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains covered in snow, with some peaks partially obscured by low-hanging clouds. The sky is a mix of blue and white, suggesting a bright but overcast day. The overall atmosphere is cold and majestic.

RPO Interest expressed by:

- Southeast Conference
- Bristol Bay Borough
- Delta Junction
- Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District
- Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Tribal Government

The power & potential of RPOs

- Local groups work together to decide on local transportation priorities
- Closer coordination with DOT&PF
- Ability to consider “bigger picture” of community needs



Why is this a pilot program?

- Pilot RPOs are helping to define what RPOs in Alaska are
- We want communities to have a say in what the regulations will be
- We plan to make this program formal with statewide regulations in the future – RTPOs.



How did this start in Alaska?

The **Alaska State Legislature** included “intent language” in the FY22 budget asking DOT&PF to **collaborate more closely** with local governments by establishing the RPO program.



What is the role of an RPO?

- Prioritize transportation projects in their region
- Long-range transportation planning
- Apply for funding for transportation projects (grants)
- Brings together multiple governments, agencies, and organizations



RPO Responsibilities

- Meet regularly
- Represent local needs
- Identify transportation needs, priorities, questions for DOT&PF
- Provide input on DOT&PF plans and products
- Consult with DOT&PF on local projects (through plan reviews, for example)
- Option to take on more transportation plans and planning duties



Why participate?

- Formal partnership with DOT&PF for transportation planning
- Community-driven long-range transportation planning
- Prioritize transportation projects in your own region
- Coordination with DOT&PF on federal grants



What is required?

- Act as fiscal & administrative agent to receive funding
- Comply with regulations for planning and public participation
- Represent the interests of your region in long-range transportation planning & project priorities
- Produce new transportation plans or adopt existing plans



What is expected?

- DOT&PF will provide ~\$30K in planning funds
- RPOs will fund a portion of planning and project development efforts
- RPOs will provide staff support





What is the commitment?

- Communities and regions are not required to participate in this program
- You can withdraw from the program at any time if you decide it's not right for your region

What are the next steps?

- Decide RPO boundaries and which organizations in your region will participate
- Work with DOT&PF to review laws and regulations
 - Specific requirements for public participation
- DOT&PF will create billing agreement for \$30K in base funding
- Develop operating procedures and bylaws
- Appoint RPO committee



How do RPOs affect DOT&PF?

MORE COORDINATION

- On projects
 - On plans
 - On programs
 - More relationships
 - More time
- MORE BUY-IN on PLANS

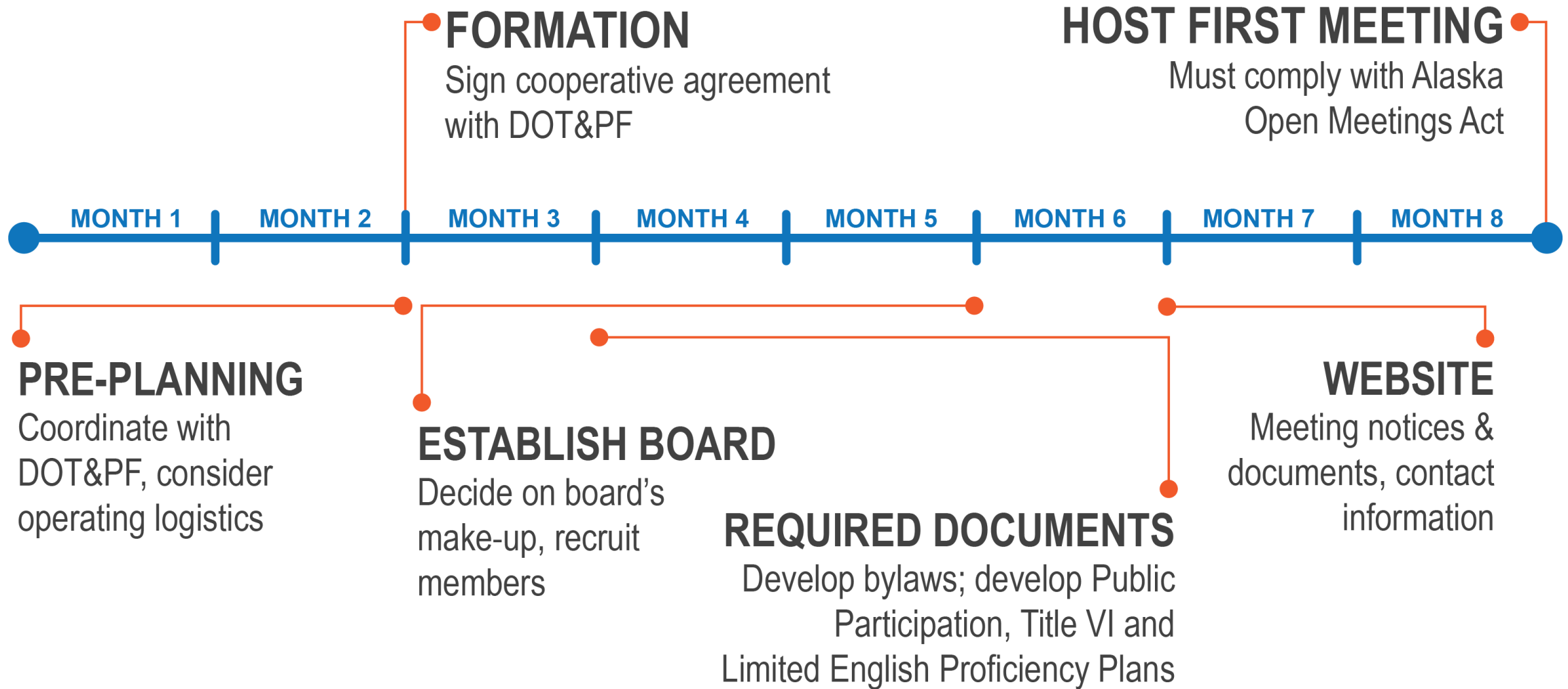




Considerations:

- RTPPO designation does not come with dedicated funding for projects
- Process is formal, so actions and decisions take longer to make (more process)
 - Where communities are already aligned generally, this may seem to create redundant process
- Generally the planning work requires more funding than DOT&PF can offer, so the organization will chase grants

Typical RPO Timeline



RPO Resources...



RPO TOOLKIT: FIRST STEPS

GUIDANCE FOR NEWLY FORMED REGIONAL PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS (RPOs) IN ALASKA

What can you expect after an RPO has been formed in your region or community? This document outlines the first steps the RPO will need to take from formation to the first public meeting.

1. PRE-PLANNING

The first step to forming an RPO is to do your research. Ask your DOT&PF representatives to provide you information on the benefits of becoming an RPO, and begin to consider where it would be housed, what area it would ideally represent, and what it will do. Coordinate with the DOT&PF on setting up a cooperative agreement for the new RPO's initiation.

2. FORMATION

The next step consists of signing a cooperative agreement between the RPO's fiscal agent and the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF). A fiscal agent is an organization (usually a government agency or non-profit) that can accept federal grant funding on behalf of the RPO. Planning staff at DOT&PF can work with you to develop and sign the cooperative agreement. Schedule a time for RPO agreement signatures.

3. ESTABLISH A BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS/POLICY COMMITTEE

The RPO's Board of Commissioners (sometimes referred to by other names such as Policy Committee) is the governing body that drives the actions of the RPO. The Board is comprised of regional members that represent a variety of interests including members of local governments, local transportation planners, business or industry representatives, stakeholder groups, or members of the public. The RPO will propose its members, but be sure to consider wide representation throughout your region. Each RPO will be different, but it is important that Board members are knowledgeable about transportation issues in the area.

4. DRAFT BYLAWS

Unless you are already operating under the fiscal entity's bylaws, the RPO board will need to craft its own. Bylaws are the internal rules that define how the RPO operates. They outline things like how commissioners are selected, the length of their terms, how often the RPO meets, and how decisions are made. The bylaws must be formally adopted by the Board of Commissioners as one of the first actions of the RPO.



Looking for more info?



Check out our website!
dot.alaska.gov/stwdplng/rpo/

Contact us for more information

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