

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106280](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2009, DOT has awarded over \$14 billion through a discretionary grant program referred to by DOT as RAISE. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act authorized RAISE for fiscal years 2022 through 2026 and detailed requirements for DOT to use in administering the program.

The act also includes a provision for GAO to examine DOT's administration of the RAISE program. This report: (1) describes DOT's application evaluation process, (2) examines challenges applicants reported experiencing and how DOT addressed these challenges, and (3) assesses the extent to which DOT's implementation of its application evaluation process aligned with federal guidance.

GAO reviewed relevant laws and DOT documents, such as RAISE's evaluation plan and meeting minutes, and interviewed DOT officials. GAO also conducted a generalizable survey of eligible fiscal year 2022 RAISE applicants. The response rate was 67 percent.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations to DOT regarding the RAISE program: (1) address applicant challenges with developing a benefit-cost analysis, (2) implement additional oversight of evaluation teams, (3) consistently document specific evaluation decisions, (4) identify all selection factors, and (5) document specific rationales for selection decisions. DOT concurred with three recommendations, partially concurred with one, and did not concur with one. GAO continues to believe these recommendations should be fully implemented.

View [GAO-24-106280](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth Repko at (202) 512-2834 or [repkoe@gao.gov](mailto:repkoe@gao.gov).

November 2023

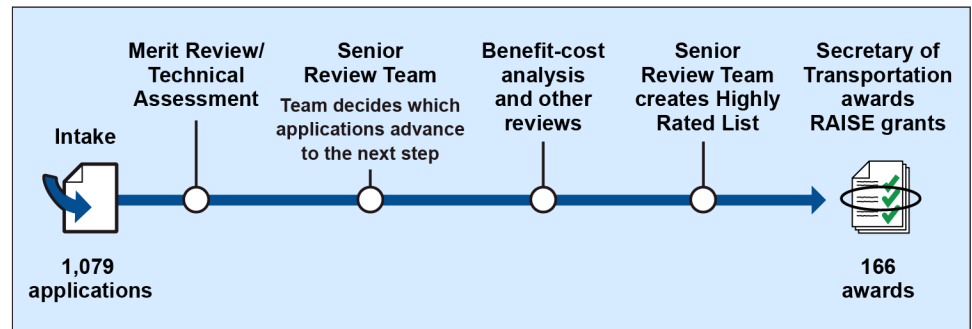
# DISCRETIONARY TRANSPORTATION GRANTS

## DOT Should Better Align Its Application Evaluation Process with Federal Guidance

## What GAO Found

In fiscal year 2022, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) awarded \$2.25 billion to 166 road, rail, and other surface transportation projects through a grant program known as Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE). DOT established a multiphase process which included evaluating applications against criteria in a merit review phase and evaluating applicant-submitted benefit-cost analyses. These analyses require applicants to show if a project expects greater benefits than costs.

### Fiscal Year 2022 RAISE Application Evaluation and Selection Process



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Transportation RAISE evaluation process, data and GAO (icons). | [GAO-24-106280](#)

In GAO's survey of RAISE applicants, 69 percent of capital grant applicants reported that they found developing the benefit-cost analysis very or moderately challenging. For example, some applicants told GAO they did not have the staff capacity or expertise to complete this analysis. DOT has provided guidance and webinars but has not fully reviewed if additional resources for applicants could more fully address their challenges. Addressing these challenges could help applicants more fully assess their projects' benefits and costs and give DOT the information it needs to make cost-effective award decisions.

DOT's implementation of its process for evaluating RAISE applications did not fully align with federal guidance for discretionary grant programs. Specifically, GAO found that DOT did not:

- sufficiently assess whether evaluation teams consistently applied the merit review criteria,
- consistently document decisions for advancing applications expected to have greater costs than benefits,
- publicly disclose two selection factors used to make award decisions, or
- consistently document a specific explanation for not selecting certain Highly Rated projects for funding.

Strengthening the RAISE evaluation process in these areas would position DOT to more fully demonstrate that it is implementing the program with enhanced transparency and making fair grant award decisions.