

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

2024 PEER EXCHANGE



AT-A-GLANCE

DATES: September 24-26, 2024

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES:

California Department of Transportation
Idaho Transportation Department
Iowa Department of Transportation
Minnesota Department of Transportation
New Jersey Department of Transportation
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
Texas Department of Transportation
Utah Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

LOCATION: Des Moines, Iowa

FINAL REPORT: <https://publications.iowa.gov/51349/>

OVERVIEW

Iowa DOT welcomed seven other state DOTs and the FHWA to a peer exchange to discuss topics related to transportation research and innovation.

Attendees came prepared to share their own agency's experiences and insights in response to Iowa's two primary questions:

- 1. How is your innovation program structured and what are its challenges?**
- 2. How do you encourage and promote innovation within your DOT and across the state?**

Throughout the course of the peer exchange, two additional topics emerged as common areas of interest: **strategies for hiring communication specialists** and **developing innovation strategic plans**.

Based on these discussions, the participants identified the areas where Iowa DOT excels and opportunities for improvement, as well as the lessons learned to take back to their own agencies.



WHAT ATTENDEES SAID

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Programmatic Aspects of Innovation

- » Developing a **strategic plan** provides a good foundation for innovation initiatives and works best as a living document that evolves with the organization.
- » **Documenting success and quantifying the return-on-investment** of innovation within your organization through an innovation dashboard or an annual report is a great way to share innovations across the department as well as with legislators or other interested parties.
- » **Just do it:** Build your program, show people what you have done and let leadership respond to what you have accomplished.
- » Each of the participating state DOTs is **far more alike than different when it comes to encouraging innovation** within their department.
- » Don't get too caught up **defining innovation**. Some states do not define innovation at all, but rather let employees decide what is innovative.

Promoting Innovation Within a DOT and Across a State

- » **Innovation stewards** are an outstanding means of reaching out across the DOT, and especially into the maintenance areas.
- » Expand communications efforts to better reach employees in maintenance through use of **magazines, posters, televisions in maintenance sheds**, or perhaps even sending printed materials to their homes.
- » **Everyone is an innovator**, and **innovation is a core value** that empowers all employees to participate in the culture.
- » An **Innovation Challenge** can seek out innovative solutions and market the DOT as an innovative workplace to a future workforce.

STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Iowa DOT...

- » Is **doing more than it thinks it is and is on the right track** to supporting a successful culture of innovation.
- » Has an innovation council made up of a diverse group of staff from across the DOT. **Passionate, grassroots volunteers are an outstanding foundation** for promoting innovation.
- » Would benefit from more focused communications around innovation and from **dedicated communication staff**.
- » Could consider **developing a strategic plan or roadmap** that clearly identifies the purpose and end goals for innovation.
- » Could leverage its **existing tools, such as Microsoft Teams and the Qmarkets Ideas website**, to enhance communications, promote campaigns and document results.

“Iowa DOT has a diverse team with a strong desire to push innovation. They are not afraid to try new ideas to promote it.”