



## **PEER REVIEW PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

**A Service of the  
American Public Transportation Association  
1300 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

For many years, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) has provided peer review services for its public transportation agency members. The concept of peer reviews is to assist the requesting agency in addressing issues through subject matter experts within the transit industry. Coordinated by APTA with the requesting agency, the subject matter experts, who typically are from peer agencies, convene at the requesting agency and conduct an intensive review of the issues to be addressed. Upon the conclusion of the review, the peer review panel provides a summary of observations, findings and recommendations to the senior management of the requesting agency, and subsequently formalizes those findings and recommendations in a written report. The peer review and reports are provided to the agency on a confidential basis and all reports are regarded by APTA as being proprietary to that organization.

Participation on peer review panels is voluntary and is regarded amongst APTA members as an honor and recognition of the knowledge and experience of our transit professionals and their respective transit agencies. The peer review process is not just a sharing of experience and lessons learned; it also supports the advancement and strengthening of organization, safety and operational effectiveness, and efficiency for our entire industry. Consequently, transit organizations acknowledge the mutual benefit of enabling their staff to participate as peer review panel members.

The APTA Peer Review Program is a cost-effective resource for a transit agency to address challenges and specific problems, and to benchmark practices against industry norms. Costs include a modest fee, based on the scope and complexity of the issues presented, and reimbursement of actual travel/incidental expenses of the peer review panel members.

# **PEER REVIEW**

## **PEER REVIEW REQUEST**

A request for a peer review is made in writing by the senior official of the requesting agency to the Vice President – Technical Services and Innovation of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

The letter should include the specific issues or focus of the review and the preferred dates for conducting the review. The letter should also note a staff liaison for the requesting agency who will be assigned to assist with the logistics coordination.

## **APTA STAFF SUPPORT**

For each peer review, an APTA facilitator with subject matter expertise in the desired scope will be assigned to coordinate the review. The facilitator will be responsible for the following logistics:

- ◆ Liaise with the requesting agency to review scope, arrange a schedule, agenda, and hotel accommodations
- ◆ Contact prospective panel members and send out invitations
- ◆ Acquire any relevant background documentation and disseminate that information to the panel members (i.e., reports, organization charts, etc.)
- ◆ Assist the panel on-site to guide the process and information gathering
- ◆ Assist in compiling review findings into an organized power point presentation for the exit conference and subsequent report
- ◆ Expense reimbursements to panel members
- ◆ Provide an invoice for the total expenses to the requesting agency as soon as all expense reimbursements for the panel members have been finalized

## **SELECTION OF PEER REVIEW PANEL MEMBERS**

A peer review panel typically consists of three to five members plus the designated APTA facilitator, but numbers can be fewer or greater depending on the needs of the requesting agency and the complexity of the issues to be addressed. The peer review members typically are experts from public transportation agencies but can include subject matter experts from private companies\* as required and approved.

\*additional fee may be required

Panel members will be selected on their subject matter expertise and capacity to assist in addressing the scope. The facilitator will consult with the requesting agency as to potential panel members and will subsequently contact the prospective panel members to determine their availability.

The APTA facilitator will provide the requesting agency with recommendations for appropriate panel members and the requesting agency may also indicate specific industry professionals that it would like to be included on the review team.

An invitation to participate in the peer review will be sent by the facilitator to the proposed panelist.

## PEER REVIEW TYPES

There are three levels of peer review, based on complexity: “**Narrow Scope;**” “**Wide Scope;**” and “**Complex Scope.**”

- A **Narrow Scope** review addresses a single problem area and the typical review team would be comprised of a 3-4 subject matter experts and an APTA Facilitator. The team is typically onsite for 3-5 days.
- A **Wide Scope** review addresses a larger systemic issue in the organization and has a wider focus than what can be completed under a Narrow Scope format. The Wide Scope review may require 3-5 subject matter experts. The length of time panel members will spend on site will be specific to the scope requested (typically 4-5 days).
- A **Complex Scope** review provides a flexible option for organizations where the review may be in conjunction with another larger study or in relation to other complex issues. Complex scopes may require different subject matter experts or those outside traditional transit knowledge and experience. The length of time panel members will spend on site will be specific to the scope requested.

In response to COVID-19 APTA can complete a fully virtual Peer Review. As you have discussions with the SME, the option for a Virtual Peer Review can be discussed.

## PEER REVIEW FEES

The Administrative fees and costs associated with each of the 3 Peer Review tiers are as follows:

- **Narrow Scope:** Administrative fee of \$15,500 plus travel expenses. Travel expenses include the actual travel expenses of the peer review panel members and the APTA Facilitator.
- **Wide Scope:** Administrative fee of \$20,000 plus travel expenses. Travel expenses include the actual travel expenses of the peer review panel members and the APTA Facilitator.
- **Complex Scope:** The administrative fee for a Complex Scope review will be based on a variable fixed fee that will be determined through discussions with the requesting transit agency but will not exceed \$45,000 plus travel expenses. Travel

expenses include the actual travel expenses of the peer review panel members and the APTA Facilitator.

## **PEER REVIEW LOGISTICS**

Appropriate hotel accommodations will be arranged by APTA. Panel members are responsible for their own travel arrangements, which include coach class fares at **as reasonable as possible** rates. Panel members will pay their own expenses and seek reimbursement from APTA through submission of travel expense report forms. Upon receipt of all travel expense reports, APTA will invoice the requesting agency for reimbursement for the total travel expenses of panel members and the APTA facilitator. Any conditions required by the requesting agency to be observed for expenses to be accepted by the agency (e.g., use of certain hotels that accept their corporate rate or government per diem, or other restrictions on reimbursement), should be disclosed in the signed agreement.

## **SCHEDULE AND AGENDA**

The scheduled dates for the peer review will be determined by the requesting agency and in consideration of the availability of panel members. The peer review panel will typically conduct a dinner meeting the evening prior to the commencement of the peer review in order to provide introductions and to discuss the review agenda, scope of work, and task expectations.

An agenda will be established by the requesting agency with assistance from the APTA facilitator and the requesting agency, and will typically include the following:

- Introductory meeting of the peer review panel and agency senior management
- Briefing by agency as to background for the peer review request and issues to be addressed
- Tour of agency or field visits if applicable
- Presentations and/or briefings by agency staff
- Private interviews with applicable agency personnel
- Adequate time is to be included in the agenda to allow opportunities for the panel to caucus in private.
- At the conclusion of the briefings and information gathering, the panel will caucus to organize its findings to be presented at the exit conference. Typically, the afternoon will be reserved the day before the report out, to also include any non-scheduled interviews the panel deems necessary.
- On the final day of the review, an exit conference will be conducted between the panel and the agency's senior management and a summary of observations, findings and recommendations will be presented (typically 9-11 am).

## **PREPARATION OF FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

During the team caucus at the conclusion of the review, the facilitator will facilitate a discussion of the peer review panel to compile findings and recommendations specific to each issue identified for the review. The purpose of this caucus is to develop a consensus amongst the team members that addresses the issues included in the scope of work. The compilation of consensus findings and recommendations will then form the basis of the peer review de-briefing that is provided at the exit conference. This information will be presented in a PowerPoint format.

## **EXIT MEETING**

The exit meeting will be conducted on the final day of the peer review and will consist of a presentation of findings and recommendations relative to each area defined in the scope for the peer review. Additionally, other relevant general observations will be provided at this time.

During the exit meeting, the facilitator will provide introductory comments noting the history and intent of peer review and will introduce the panel team members who will then provide an oral presentation of their findings and recommendations. The exit meeting is intended to be interactive and therefore any questions and requests for clarification are invited. Two hours typically is allocated for the presentation and discussion.

## **FINAL REPORT**

- Unless the agency requests differently, a draft report of the panel findings and recommendations will be submitted to the agency CEO or point of contact within 30 days following a *Narrow Scope* peer review. For *Wide Scope* and *Complex Scope* Peer Reviews, timelines for producing draft reports will be determined through mutual agreement between the requesting agency and APTA.
- Following any required corrections or additions to the final draft report, as requested by the agency, a final report will be issued to the agency CEO within 30 days.

The compilation of findings and recommendations gathered for the exit conference will form the basis for the subsequent written report. The report will typically be structured as follows:

1. Cover / title page
2. Executive Summary
3. Peer Review Panel Members Page
4. Table of Contents
5. Introduction
6. Observations, Findings and Recommendations
7. Conclusions
8. Appendix
  - A. Letter of Request for the peer review
  - B. Agenda
  - C. List of Documents

## **DOCUMENTATION**

A complete listing of all documentation reviewed (i.e., manuals, reports, etc.) will be maintained by the facilitator and will be noted in the Appendix of the report.

All documentation provided for the peer review will be either be returned or destroyed within six months of the issuance of the Final Report.

Both the draft report and the Final Report are required to go through a quality review check by APTA staff to ensure the report meets the criteria for format, style and content before it is made available to the requesting agency

## **INFORMATION RELEASE**

The peer review reports are proprietary to the requesting agency as such will only be released to that organization. APTA and peer review panel members will not release the report in whole or in part without the direction and permission of the organization for which the peer review was provided. As well, any comments regarding the peer review to any other sources (such as media, etc.) will only be provided by the organization for which the peer review was provided, or as otherwise agreed upon by that organization. Peer Review Team members sign both a confidentiality and a non-disclosure statement as a requirement for serving on a panel. Restrictions imposed on peer review and APTA participants are reviewed during a Peer Review Orientation conference call covering the basics of conducting peer reviews.

## Appendix A

### APTA PEER REVIEW PROGRAM AGREEMENT

This is to acknowledge that the \_\_\_\_\_  
(transportation organization) has requested the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) to provide for *Transportation Organization Peer Review* services through APTA's wholly owned subsidiary, the North American Transit Services Association (NATSA) in accordance with the APTA Peer Review Program Guidelines.

*APTA's Peer Review Program is designed to assist transportation organizations in addressing public transportation-related needs and issues through subject matter experts within the public transportation industry. Through the coordination by APTA and NATSA and the support of their respective own organizations, the subject matter experts convene at the requesting public transportation organization and conduct an intensive review of the issues to be addressed. Peer Review participation is conducted by mutual consensus and through industry acknowledgement that this service is an extremely valuable resource to strengthening and enhancing public transportation functions and effectiveness. The APTA Peer Reviews follow the format as described in the APTA Peer Review Guidelines.*

*The observations and recommendations as provided through the APTA Peer Review process are provided in good faith and as based upon the experience and skills of the Review panelists. The APTA Peer Review does not, nor is it meant to, represent a full organizational review. The Peer Review is intended to be used as a resource that, in conjunction with other assessment tools, can assist the requesting organization to evaluate their particular needs and issues.*

**Indemnification:** To the extent permitted by law, the Public Transportation Organization agrees to indemnify and hold harmless APTA and NATSA, its officers and employees, and any Peer Review panelists and their respective agencies in the conduct of their activities for claims of any kind (including attorney fees) arising out of the provision of this Peer Review, except to the extent such claims arise or are caused by the gross negligence or willful misconduct of APTA, NATSA, its officers and employees, or Peer Review panelists.

**Schedule:** Schedule will conform to the following, unless amended by mutual agreement between the Requesting Agency and APTA:

On Site Peer Review Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

The program period will consist of a \_\_\_-day on-site visit, with an additional travel day including a preliminary report out the last day of the on-site peer review, with a draft report to follow in 30 days, and a final report due out to the Public Transportation Organization no later than 30 days from draft approval.

Draft Report due date: \_\_\_\_\_



Final Report: TBD from draft approval

**Scope:** (write in agreed scope here)

**Panel Members:** Panel Members with the requisite expertise in regard to the Scope required, will be selected from APTA member transit agencies. From time to time, a Transportation Organization will request panel members who are not affiliated with an agency but rather a consulting firm or other “for profit” private organization. In such cases, any resulting costs of bringing on such a panel member will be borne by the Public Transportation Organization.

**Cost:** The Public Transportation Organization shall bear all costs associated with panel member’s travel including the APTA facilitator, in addition to an administrative fee of \$\_\_\_\_\_ This administrative fee is due before the panel is convened, within 30 (thirty) days of invoice receipt. In the event any of the non-agency panel members require a fee as a condition of their participation, that cost should be fully reimbursed by the Public Transportation Organization. If the Transportation Organization has any requirements or limitations regarding their reimbursement process, it is incumbent upon the Transportation Organization to forward such requirements to APTA before any expenses are incurred.

The undersigned, duly authorized representative of the Public Transportation Organization agrees to the terms of the provision of this Peer Review service.

## **Transportation Organization**

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature - Name and Title of  
Authorized Representative

**APTA PEER REVIEW PROGRAM NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT**

Consistent with the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Peer Review Guidelines, I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand and acknowledge that I may not disclose information related to this peer review, the results, report, recommendations, or my own observations and opinions related to this peer review without the expressed permission of the reviewed public transportation organization.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Name and Title of Peer Review Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_