

*Committee Research Coordinator's Committee and Council
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TRB Committee Research Activities

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As the Transportation Research Board (TRB) reaches its centennial in the third decade of the 21st century, the Committee Research Coordinator's (CRC) Committee and Council are still less than a decade old. Even so, we are provided with an opportunity to reflect on the history, the current state, and the future of effectively supporting research activities within TRB committees.

History

The Technical Activities Council (TAC) recognized the need to provide TRB committees with assistance in moving their research needs through the entire research cycle. Many committees were identifying research gaps and needs, developing Research Needs Statements (RNS), and were entering these needs into the RNS Database; however, many were going no further in advancing their needs to the conduct of research and beyond. Also, there was varied success among committees and, even from year to year, within committees in generating relevant RNS that could transition into competitive research problem statements for limited transportation funding. Given this, and the fact that research is a core committee activity and TRB's middle name, the TAC partnered with both the Standing Committee on Conduct of Research (COR) (ABG10) and Standing Committee on Technology Transfer (T2) (ABG30) and launched the resulting Back-to-Basics: Fostering and Nurturing a Research Agenda Initiative at the 2011 TRB Annual Meeting. The objective of which is to provide TRB standing committees with the knowledge and tools they need to identify research needs within their scope of coverage, to enhance the probability that this research will be conducted, and to disseminate information on relevant ongoing and completed research.

The vision of the Back-to-Basics Initiative was for every committee to do the following on a systematic and continuing basis:

- Develop and maintain a set of peer reviewed RNS within the committee's scope of coverage that is robust, up-to-date, and reflects the committee's research agenda.
- Use an enhanced version of the TRB RNS Database to manage its set of research needs, set priorities, and coordinate needs with other committees.
- Assure that organizations and individuals that manage and conduct research are aware of the RNS Database and how to use it.
- Educate individuals on the deadlines and requirements for submitting research problem statements to appropriate research organizations and programs.
- Continuously monitor the status of research that is being conducted within the committee's scope of coverage, especially those projects it initiated or supported, and disseminate relevant project information to the committee's members and stakeholders.

- Use a variety of communication tools to make its stakeholders aware of the availability of recently completed research and foster discussions on the implications to practice and future research needs.

The strategy to implement this initiative consisted of two main efforts:

1. Enhancing the RNS Database and developing other tools to help committees achieve the above vision and
2. Providing ongoing guidance and training through the CRC Council and a community of Committee Research Coordinators (CRC) - similar to the model that was being successfully used for the Committee Communications Coordinators (CCC), with each committee being invited to appoint a CRC to manage its research portfolio.

The TRB CRCs are not expected to take on all of these tasks. Rather, they are the point people to help ensure their standing committee or task force, as a whole, accomplishes these activities, with each committee chair being responsible for ensuring these tasks are accomplished systematically and continually.

A working group composed of members from the TAC, COR, and T2 was formed to provide ongoing leadership and guidance for this initiative, including identifying and carrying out the steps necessary to kick-off this initiative, setting initial priorities, providing ongoing visioning and guidance, and monitoring to assure that progress is being made to achieve the goal and vision of this initiative.

Accomplishments

In early 2011, COR conducted a survey of committee chairs to identify committee research needs. Also, in 2011, each committee chair was asked to appoint a CRC for their committee. The introductory CRC webinar was held in December 2011 and the first workshop was held in January 2012.

In April 2012, the CRC Council was formed. This Council became the long-term entity to provide ongoing visioning, leadership, guidance, and training to the CRCs and chairs for this initiative. The CRC Council also serves as a liaison among the CRCs and chairs, and TRB and the TAC. With the formation of the CRC Council and with their tasks complete, the Working Group was disbanded. The Council consists of a representative from each TRB Group, as well as various at-large members, including a representative from the TAC, COR, and T2, and others interested in helping this initiative move forward. The first meeting of the CRC Council was held in September 2012. One of the first tasks the Council accomplished was the development of a branding statement.

Back to Basics: Fostering and nurturing TRB committees' contributions to transportation research.

Through Committee Research Coordinators (CRC) and the CRC Council, this initiative helps committees identify, formulate, prioritize, and promote research needs and the conduct of research, turning research needs into results.

The CRC Council meets quarterly and maintains an Activities and Accomplishments action plan with a running tab on tasks including begin and completion dates.

The CRC Council has accomplished much over the past nearly seven years. Initially, action items were taken from the 2011 and a 2012 CRC and chairs survey as well as from the

CRC/chairs meetings, webinars, and workshops. However, beginning in 2016, the CRC Council began surveying the CRCs and chairs annually to identify needs and annual work plan action items. In addition, there have been meetings and/or workshops held at each TRB Annual Meeting since the kick-off workshop in January 2012. Needs are identified through these events as well. Since TRB committee membership regularly rotates, the CRC Council must address the needs of the CRCs at their individual level from very basic to advanced. Accomplishments to date include the following.

- Development of a CRC website within TRB's website in 2012. This website was moved to a Google site (<https://sites.google.com/view/trbcrc>) in 2018.
- Development and presentation of a CRC 101 webinar (<https://sites.google.com/view/trbcrc/home/webinars>): This webinar was initially developed and presented in 2012; it was updated in 2016.
- Presentations and meeting notes for every meeting and workshop (<https://sites.google.com/view/trbcrc/home/workshops-and-meetings>) held for the CRCs and chairs.
- Development and presentation of various webinars (<https://sites.google.com/view/trbcrc/home/crc-workshops-and-meetings>) on the Back-to-Basics Initiative, CRC 101, various funding program webinars, and a CRC Q&A session.
- Resources (<https://sites.google.com/view/trbcrc/home/resources>) in general and on the various stages of the research cycle. The importance of moving research needs through the entire research cycle has been stressed to CRCs and chairs. To facilitate understanding of the research cycle, this page is organized as such, with the following sections: General, Information for New CRCs; Generating Participation and Research Ideas within Your Committee; Coordination and Collaboration Among Committees and Others; Prioritizing Research Ideas; Developing and Prioritizing Research Needs Statements (RNS); Obtaining funding and Funding Program Feedback; and Monitoring Research, Sharing Results, Implementation, and Value of Research. Some specific resources, most developed by the CRC Council, include the following:
 - What do TRB Committee Research Coordinators (CRC) Need to Know – Top 10 or so?
 - Research Cycle Help Guides: A 2019 TRB Annual Meeting Workshop was dedicated to sharing and discussing these guides. In addition, webinars will be held on these guides beginning in 2019. Topics include:
 - Committee Approach to Research
 - Incorporating Research in Your Committee's Triennial Strategic Plan and Developing Action Plans
 - Writing Research Needs Statements and Research Problem Statements
 - Obtaining Transportation Research Funding
 - Sharing Research Results
 - Implementing Research Results
 - Determining and Communicating the Value of Research
 - Monitoring Research and Results
 - CRC Resources Quick Guide: You have a Research Idea – What do you do?
 - From Research Need to Research Result Guide
 - Blue Ribbon Committee Success Story Presentations on Advancing Research

- Successful Practices and Tools – General and on each stage of the research cycle.
- Committee Successful Practices and Tools Examples – General and on each stage of the research cycle.
- Slide Presentation and Talking Points for CRCs and chairs to discuss committee roles and responsibilities in regard to research activities.
- Section and Group CRC guidance: A number of Section and Group chairs have appointed CRCs for their Section and Group. Based on this grass-roots effort, the CRC Council developed guidance for these CRCs, mostly around communication, coordination, and collaboration.
- AASHTO-TRB Committee Connections: The CRC Council initiated a year-long effort to develop cross walks between AASHTO and TRB Committees to encourage making connections. A webinar on successful collaborations is being planned for 2019.
- Literature Searches and Reviews Guidance
- Why Should Your Committee Use the RNS Database?
- RNS suggestions and Frequently Asked Questions
- Good Example of Problem Statements from the TRB Cooperative Research Programs (CRP)
- Funding Guidebook providing information on various funding programs
- Communicating the Value of Transportation Research Guide
- Metrics (<https://sites.google.com/view/trbcrc/home/metrics>): Listing of potential metrics that can be used by committees in their research activities
- FAQs (<https://sites.google.com/view/trbcrc/home/faq>)
- CRC Council (<https://sites.google.com/view/trbcrc/home/council>) information
- CRC Contacts (<https://sites.google.com/view/trbcrc/home/contacts>) information

A large part of success in TRB committee research activities includes communication, coordination, and collaboration. To this end, the CRC Council partners with the CCC Council. We hold joint events and participate in each other's events, as appropriate. We have liaisons to and from one Council to the other. We encourage the CCC's and CRC's to work together in a number of ways, such as documenting research activities on each committee's website to prevent knowledge loss as committee membership rotates; facilitating communications within committees, with other TRB committees, and with others engaged in transportation research activities; gathering research ideas; sharing information on active research; and sharing the results and value of completed research.

What does the Future Hold?

The CRC Council needs to remain nimble to respond to CRC and Chair's needs, continually pushing information and resources out for all levels of CRCs. TRB staff and the CRC Council chair need to work toward each Group being represented on the Council to ensure Council membership remains full, vibrant, and active to "be there" for the CRCs and chairs. Likewise, the Council must facilitate the continued expansion of the number of committees with an appointed CRC and help CRCs to remain engaged. The Council must continue to encourage that every committee chair appoints a CRC for their committee.

Currently, only a few committees have memorialized their research activities on their website. This activity is incredibly important to manage committee knowledge and ensure it is there for future committee members. A third of each committee rotates off every three years, with a three-year term-limit; this is an incredible turnover rate. This task is well-suited for collaboration between a committee's CCC and CRC, who need to be continually encouraged to post their research activities on their website, not only the what, but also the why, so that future time is not wasted rehashing past discussions and decisions. There is no need to "reinvent the wheel." In posting research activities on a committee's website, it gives each new CRC the background of how the committee arrived at its current status in regard to research activities; it provides a baseline and a point from which to move forward.

Continuing the annual CRC and Chairs survey identifies the research support needs of committees, provides the Council with a work plan for each year, and helps to ensure the Council develops and shares the most critical resources, so that CRCs and chairs are getting what they need to manage their research portfolios.

Communication, coordination, and collaboration are critical, arguably the most important functions, in conducting a committee's research activities. Each committee's CCC and CRC must work together to ensure continued communication, coordination, and collaboration in all aspects of the research cycle.

While some initial enhancements were made to the RNS database at the beginning of the Back-to-Basics Initiative, further enhancements are needed, particularly in regard to facilitating coordination and collaboration. Coordination and Collaboration is important as the breath of the topics considered are often multimodal and multidisciplinary. Implementation has continued to emerge as a hot topic within the transportation community. The RNS tool needs to be able to show the link between RNS statements that have been funded, and thereby moved one step closer to being put into practice. The CRC Council is well positioned to help TRB understand the needs and the importance of the needed improvements.

Since the inception of the Back-to-Basics Initiative, the definition of success has been broadened. While a committee is certainly successful if it is able to move its most pressing

research needs through the entire research cycle, a committee can be successful in other ways as well. A couple of other examples of success include calls for research papers resulting in TRB Annual Meeting sessions and workshops, and developing and hosting specialty conferences related to research activities.

Finally, research is a core committee function, not the conduct of research, but moving critical research needs through the entire research cycle and advancing the state of the art and practice. Through the Back-to-Basics initiative, committees have assistance and resources to effectively accomplish this core committee function.

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