



**NOACA Equity Subcommittee
Meeting Minutes
March 28, 2025
NOACA Offices**

Present: Please see the attached attendance record.

Ms. Aria Johnson, Vice Chair of the Equity Subcommittee, convened the meeting on March 28, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

Meeting Minutes of June 14, 2024

Bishop Gerard Mirbel made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of June 14, 2024. Ms. Mary Cierebiej seconded the motion. Mr. Skip Claypool abstained from voting on the minutes. The motion passed by voice vote.

Meeting Minutes of September 20, 2024

Ms. Cierebiej made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 20, 2024. Bishop Mirbel seconded the motion. Mr. Claypool abstained from voting on the minutes. The motion passed by voice vote.

Meeting Minutes of November 6, 2024

Bishop Mirbel made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 6, 2024. Mr. Edwin Hubbard, Jr., seconded the motion. Mr. Claypool abstained from voting on the minutes. The motion passed by voice vote.

Meeting Minutes of December 20, 2024

Ms. Cierebiej made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 20, 2024. Ms. Keshia Chambers seconded the motion. Mr. Claypool abstained from voting on the minutes. The motion passed by voice vote.

Public Comments on Agenda Items

No public comments were made at this meeting.

Executive Director's Report

Director Grace Gallucci announced the following funding opportunities:

- 2025 Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) Program Applications now available
 - Applications due May 2, available at www.noaca.org/cmaq
 - Eligible Projects
 - Vehicle/Machinery Updates
 - Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities
 - Traffic Signal Timing/Connection Hardware
 - Applicant Webinar

- April 9 from 10:30-11:30 a.m.
 - Email projects@mpo.noaca.org to register
- Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) Program Project Solicitation
 - Provides support to transportation providers that offer coordinated transportation for seniors and individuals with disabilities
 - \$4.9 million available for SFY 2025-26, projects to be implemented in CY 2026-2027
 - Application and details at noaca.org/5310
- NOACA Climate Pollution Reduction Grants (CPRG) Program Community Projects Funding Opportunity
 - NOACA and the City of Cleveland allocated \$300,000 for local climate action planning and engagement (community projects) through CPRG Program
 - Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina County projects are eligible
 - Cuyahoga County will coordinate climate action planning (and funding) through the City of Cleveland’s CPRG planning budget
 - Applications are due April 14 at 4:30 p.m.
 - Application and webinar details: noaca.org/community-assistance-center/funding-programs/carbon-reduction-program-crp/cprg-solicitation

Action Items

No action items were presented at this meeting.

Presentation/Discussion Items

CY 2025 Equity Subcommittee Focus Areas

Ms. Liz Barlik presented information on the purpose, function, and the following CY 2025 Equity Subcommittee Focus Areas

CY 2025 Equity Subcommittee Focus Areas	
Implement the strategic workplan	Ongoing
Evaluate and measure how NOACA policies and actions impact equity in Northeast Ohio	Ongoing

Ms. Barlik stated that the meeting agendas and materials would be crafted to accomplish the identified focus areas.

Executive Orders Addressing DEI

Ms. Bev Burtzloff presented the following:

- Executive Orders
 - EO 14173 *“Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity.”*
 - Revokes previous executive orders promoting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA), equity, and environmental justice (EJ)
 - Eliminates equity considerations in federal programs and policies, personnel decisions, funding and grants, and contracting
 - *“Unleashing American Energy*
 - USDOT and USEPA have issued directives to implement these Eos
- Legal Challenges
 - Baltimore filed a lawsuit challenging EO 14173. U.S. District Court in Maryland initially blocked its implementation.
 - March 14, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, VA, issued a stay, allowing the Administration to proceed with implementing the EO while appeals continue

- Further legal appeals are expected, which may delay a final resolution as cases progress through the court system.
- MPO Response
 - NOACA is closely monitoring the situation and collaborating with partner MPOs through AMPO and NARC
 - NOACA is seeking to understand the real-world implications of the EO on its operations amid legal uncertainty.
 - Considering whether take proactive action, wait for court decisions, revise existing policies, or focus only on future plans and documents
- Shift focus to:
 - Title VI of the Civil Rights Act
 - Income and poverty data
 - Pavement/infrastructure conditions
 - Car ownership and demographic trends
 - Economic development and job access

Ms. Burtzlaff explained that, in general, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and communities receiving federal transportation funds are required to initially cover the costs of programs and projects and then request reimbursement through ODOT or federal agencies. She emphasized that NOACA will seek clear guidance to ensure it remains fully compliant with all federal funding requirements.

Ms. Burtzlaff stated that NOACA staff will continue to closely monitor the Administration's directives and keep the Subcommittee informed about developments related to the associated court cases.

Mr. Claypool inquired whether NOACA staff had taken steps to identify environmental justice projects listed in the TIP to evaluate the potential impacts on these projects considering President Trump's Executive Order, should it remain in effect. He noted that Congress is considering turning the Executive Order into law, as Executive Orders typically only last until a new President takes office. He emphasized that NOACA should take responsibility for identifying and tagging all relevant projects and their impacts, ensuring transparency and awareness of which projects are affected.

Director Gallucci stated that NOACA is cognizant of future developments and would begin tagging relevant projects if the Executive Order is upheld. She noted that NOACA has not done this in the past. Since the TIP has taken a year to develop, it would be difficult to adjust completed work. However, if the Executive Order prevails or Congress enacts it into law, NOACA would promptly update project criteria.

Mr. Claypool expressed appreciation for Director Gallucci's comment and acknowledged the work done on the TIP. However, he emphasized that if laws require changes, NOACA must comply. He advocated for a merit-based approach to project selection, suggesting that projects should be defensible based on practical needs rather than social justice criteria. He urged NOACA to prioritize essential infrastructure repairs—like potholes, bridges, and deteriorating roads—and to consider more objective criteria. He concluded by asking if NOACA staff had considered this perspective.

Director Gallucci explained that most of NOACA's project criteria are objective and data-driven, focusing on factors like infrastructure and pavement conditions, as well as access to interstates and regional assets. While projects located in Environmental Justice (EJ) areas may receive extra

consideration, the primary basis for evaluation remains grounded in measurable, condition-based data.

Mr. Claypool noted that, in theory, existing projects in the TIP can be justified because environmental justice criteria may carry less weight compared to other factors used to determine a project's importance and priority.

Director Gallucci stated that Mr. Claypool was correct.

Mr. Claypool suggested it would be beneficial to evaluate projects in the TIP, acknowledging that while NOACA staff would likely consider most projects to be sound, there might be a few that cannot be adequately defended.

Director Gallucci responded that she would be surprised if there were projects in the TIP that NOACA could not defend.

Loh mentioned that the Subcommittee had previously discussed the possibility of the current situation happening. At that meeting, she had recommended that the work could continue at NOACA without using the term "DEI."

Loh emphasized that NOACA has played a key role in supporting all communities, particularly those lacking the resources to submit competitive project applications. She explained that NOACA assists by clarifying project details and helping with the application process. This support is vital, she said, because discontinuing it would hinder progress across all five counties. Loh reiterated her belief that NOACA should maintain and integrate the focus areas into their future efforts, without using the term "DEI" to comply with Executive Orders or laws while ensuring equitable opportunities for all communities in the five-county region.

Equity Strategic Work Plan Implementation

Ms. Liz Roccoforte presented information on the following:

- Revocation of Environmental Executive Orders
- Key Impacts of Policy Changes
- Removal of EJ Screen Tool
- USDOT Policy Shifts
- Executive Order 13985: Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing

Ms. Cierebiej stated that she knows NOACA is an MPO that receives federal funding, but she wanted to know how NOACA would describe itself.

Director Gallucci stated that NOACA is a quasi-governmental agency that receives funding from the federal government but is not considered part of the federal government. MPOs were created by Congress, but NOACA, as an organization, is more than that.

Mr. Claypool stated that if NOACA does not comply with the Executive Orders or law, its federal funding could be pulled. NOACA relies on that funding.

Director Gallucci stated that Mr. Claypool was correct. NOACA could not exist without federal funding.

Ms. Roccoforte continued with the presentation:

- Legal Challenges and Court Rulings

Mr. Claypool stated that the injunction was lifted, so as of today, NOACA must comply with the law.

Ms. Roccoforte stated that she did not believe the Executive Order qualified as a law.

Ms. Barlik, an attorney (though not NOACA's legal counsel), noted that the Executive Order is currently in effect. She expressed uncertainty, however, about how NOACA would comply with it, given that its provisions have not yet been codified into law or regulation, which creates some tension around the issue of compliance.

Mr. Claypool, though not an attorney, said he has worked with many of them in his life. He shared that in his experience, Executive Orders function like laws. He admitted that he could not distinguish them from acts of Congress but believed they carry similar authority and enforceability, despite his concerns about them.

Ms. Barlik stated that Mr. Claypool was correct.

Loh clarified that an Executive Order operates like a law but is temporary, staying in effect unless revoked, usually by a new President who may choose not to uphold it.

Mr. Claypool emphasized that current Executive Orders must be acknowledged and cannot be disregarded.

Loh recalled that at the prior meeting, she had recommended that NOACA eliminate specific language while continuing the related work.

Ms. Roccoforte cautioned that continuing the same work under a new name could violate the Executive Orders, which include safeguards against such actions. She stressed that merely renaming a committee while keeping its functions could likely breach the order, and Compass discourages this approach.

Dr. Tameka Taylor suggested that by slightly adjusting the focus to align with acceptable language, NOACA could continue its work with a different perspective.

Ms. Walker Minor explained that an Executive Order is a presidential declaration that bypasses the legislative process, which is why such orders are numbered. Although not a lawyer, she emphasized her experience as a political scientist and noted that many lawsuits arise from Executive Orders because they are declarations rather than laws.

Ms. Walker Minor stated that Mr. Claypool raised a great point. NOACA could review awards and funding for projects that include environmental justice language, viewing it as a strategic way for NOACA to approach its work through the lens of economic growth. She noted that efforts tied to DEI existed long before the term became popular, highlighting that such work has been ongoing, even without the label. She emphasized making investment decisions based on infrastructure conditions linked to income and poverty—issues central to environmental justice without needing to use that specific term. She emphasized that her involvement with NOACA is not about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as a concept because DEI is something she has lived with all her life, long before it became a recognized term in 2020.

Ms. Walker Minor said she was on the Subcommittee for fairness, equity, and opportunity around economic growth. When she is at the meetings, she mainly stands by the idea that the

Subcommittee should not be rushed. If the name changes, what should it become? She believed that it all comes back to the foundational principles of NOACA, which include income, poverty, and infrastructure conditions, ensuring fairness in their allocation of funding based on these conditions, so that economic growth can be achieved in regions like Avon, Maple Heights, Garfield Heights, and the Buckeye neighborhood, providing equal opportunities for all.

Ms. Walker Minor stated that, for example, Elyria should have the same opportunities as Avon because they are within a 10-mile radius of each other. The on- and off-ramps connecting the two cities have vastly different levels of access. When NOACA examines how dollars are allocated, Elyria should be included on the list, as its infrastructure limitations can be identified by comparing it to its peer and contiguous communities.

Loh noted that the remarks she made earlier were clarified by Ms. Walker Minor's example. Loh emphasized that even if people hold differing opinions, meaningful work can still be done without attaching a specific label to it. Loh reaffirmed NOACA's commitment to advancing progress throughout its five-county region.

Ms. Roccoforte continued with the presentation:

- Suggestions for NOACA's Response and Next Steps
- Proposed Equity Subcommittee Workshop
- Discussion Questions for the Equity Subcommittee

Ms. Roccoforte highlighted the difficulty of balancing NOACA's efforts to meet community needs while maintaining compliance with existing regulations. She stressed the importance of adapting strategies without disrupting the current framework and suggested forming new community partnerships to advance economic equity. Additionally, she posed questions about how the Subcommittee can contribute to these goals and how NOACA can more effectively communicate its commitment to stakeholders.

Mr. Claypool expressed a preference for merit-based approaches over equity-focused ones. He believed that in a merit-based system, individuals facing challenges—like those related to the off-ramp, can succeed if they present a strong case. The problem is that the government typically uses bad criteria in an equity world, leading to unfavorable outcomes. He gave an example of an unsuccessful Akron road plan from years ago. The city was forced to reinvest and reverse its past mistakes because it had failed to use objective, merit-based criteria in its decision-making process. Mr. Claypool contended that adopting a merit-based approach can lead to the same outcomes as equity-focused efforts, especially for low-income communities whose infrastructure is often in the worst condition. He emphasized that a strong, objective case can be made for investing in these areas based on need, rather than relying on fairness as an objective justification. He encouraged the Subcommittee to shift its mindset and focus on presenting data-driven, merit-based arguments to support investment decisions. A merit-based approach can lead to the Subcommittee's goals, but individuals must advocate for themselves and present strong cases. In a competitive world, the most capable rise to the top, which is seen as positive.

Ms. Walker Minor responded by acknowledging that Mr. Claypool's point would be fair if everyone started from the same place, but she emphasized that disinvestment in certain communities is a real and ongoing issue. She expressed concern about how the word "equity" has become emotionally charged and politicized, despite being a fundamentally American term meant to address disparities and lack of investment. She pointed out that, in essence, she and Mr. Claypool were expressing similar ideas, both focusing on where and when investments happen, but from different perspectives, especially when considering unequal starting points.

Mr. McIntosh supported a "wait and see" approach, suggesting it is wise to assess how things develop before moving forward. He emphasized the importance of reviewing guidance, understanding the intent behind NOACA's work, and avoiding premature decisions that could lead to unclear outcomes. He recommended evaluating current projects for potential risks or needs for further review but cautioned against acting too soon.

Loh emphasized the need for NOACA to be proactive due to upcoming application deadlines. While waiting may feel safe and avoid regret, action is still necessary to support communities in time. A balanced approach is needed between caution and timely decision-making.

Ms. Cierebiej, a member of the NOACA Board and several Committees, explained that project approvals are based on scoring criteria, with equity and environmental justice as small components. NOACA has a merit-based process. For example, equity and environmental justice are only one component of the overall scoring for pavement condition ratings.

Ms. Cierebiej acknowledged Ms. Walker Minor's concern about avoiding repeated funding in the same areas, noting that disinvested communities often lack staff to seek funding. NOACA tries to support these communities by identifying suitable programs, but this is the extent of its assistance. She clarified that the Equity Subcommittee aims to include equity considerations in decision-making, though no projects are solely designated for environmental justice or equity.

In response to Ms. Walker Minor's comment, Mr. Claypool said he did not understand the concept of starting point.

Responding to Ms. Cierebiej, Mr. Claypool contended that instead of focusing on equity criteria, NOACA should use its planning resources to help under-resourced communities develop strong project proposals. He suggested removing equity from the equation and instead supporting these communities through technical assistance, enabling them to compete fairly based on merit—one of NOACA's core purposes.

Ms. Cierebiej emphasized that the term *equity* does not need to be used. She clarified that NOACA staff would not offer assistance to well-resourced communities like Avon, but would help places like East Cleveland, which has pressing needs such as deteriorating roads and inadequate signal systems. The assistance would be based on the real conditions and lack of investment in the community, not just for the sake of equity but due to practical need and existing conditions.

Mr. Claypool clarified that NOACA is only responsible for federalized roads, not all roads in the region. Local cities and counties are responsible for maintaining their own infrastructure. For instance, Geauga County uses levies to fund maintenance of its county roads. Overall, communities must handle their own road upkeep, except for federally designated highways.

Ms. Dawn Calvert asked Mr. Claypool to clarify what he meant by "merit" in the context of what he values in funding applications. She also wondered if the Subcommittee was considering merit through a different lens.

Mr. Claypool stated that he believes NOACA's process is largely merit-based, using objective criteria such as the number of potholes, road conditions, and the lifespan or cracking of bridges. These metrics help determine funding priorities across the region. He acknowledged that while there are additional criteria related to fairness, the core merit-based system relies on measurable infrastructure needs. He also noted that external factors like location and weather can impact road longevity, and those elements are considered in funding decisions.

Mr. Claypool emphasized that available funding must be prioritized to determine how many projects can be supported. He agreed that NOACA can and should assist under-resourced communities by providing planning support or identifying other resources, recognizing this as a legitimate and important need.

Mr. Claypool expressed that it is unfortunate that some communities are led by Township Trustees, Mayors, or Council members who lack the competence to manage projects, develop plans, or engage with organizations like NOACA effectively. He suggested that such issues often stem from electing the wrong leaders, but believed these problems can be corrected over time through new leadership. He emphasized that addressing these challenges is complex and contended that objective thinking should guide decisions, rather than relying on what he described as “soft” or emotionally driven criteria.

Mr. Claypool described the evaluation and funding process used by the Geauga County Engineer for road repairs. The County’s process involves assessing the condition of roads and then pursuing the necessary funding to carry out the required maintenance or improvements.

Ms. Roccoforte explained that some communities may lack leadership, face challenges, or have limited capacity and, therefore, might need support to reach the same level as others when applying for funding. She emphasized that this is not about giving certain communities an advantage but rather about ensuring accessibility for those with different levels of ability. She noted that part of the challenge is that language around these issues has been weaponized. She suggested that NOACA could play a role in helping resource-limited communities navigate the application process.

Mr. Claypool questioned whether any community was restricted from applying for funding, stating he could not identify one in Northeast Ohio that could not have a project included in the TIP to compete for funding. He contended that, from a fairness standpoint, all communities have equal opportunity to submit projects to NOACA for consideration.

Mr. Claypool stated that years ago, County Engineers met at NOACA to decide which projects would receive funding. While some projects were good, they were not shovel-ready. He noted that some engineers were incompetent and did not put their community’s projects together correctly, so they did not get any funding. Communities need highly competent individuals who can get their project in the TIP and do it in a way so they can compete effectively. Everybody has the same opportunity. NOACA should not help incompetent engineers. It is up to the voters to correct the situation, not NOACA.

Ms. Roccoforte expressed that Mr. Claypool’s example does not represent fairness in her view.

Ms. Walker Minor recommended that Ms. Roccoforte continue the presentation, emphasizing that the discussion had been productive and highlighted the range of perspectives. She supported Mr. McIntosh’s suggestion to adopt a wait-and-see approach, acknowledging that the Subcommittee has significant work ahead. She stressed the importance of using terminology accurately and urged members to avoid criticizing past or current leaders. She reminded the group that they are the current leaders and must make decisions and recommendations within a structure that serves NOACA effectively.

Loh expressed appreciation for Mr. Claypool's guidance but noted that Mayor John Marra of the Village of Timberlake would likely disagree with some of his comments. She recalled that Mayor Marra had previously attended a NOACA meeting to raise concerns about his community lacking a means to submit applications.

Mr. Claypool inquired about the next steps moving forward.

Ms. Roccoforte explained that Compass Consulting was initially brought in to guide the direction of NOACA's Equity Subcommittee, but the situation has since shifted. Despite this, Compass is still interested in working with the Subcommittee to continue discussions. She suggested that a workshop or training might help move the conversation forward. Ms. Roccoforte supported a "wait-and-see" approach, given the evolving circumstances, and emphasized the importance of ongoing dialogue and monitoring developments related to the executive order.

Reports/Updates

No reports or updates were presented at this meeting.

Old Business

No old business was discussed at this meeting.

New Business

Director Gallucci thanked members for coming to the meeting, helping the Subcommittee reach a quorum, and contributing to a productive discussion. She expressed appreciation for their time and participation.

Adjournment

Bishop Mirbel made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:18 a.m. Ms. Chambers seconded the motion. The motion passed by voice vote.

The next regular Equity Subcommittee meeting will be at the NOACA offices on Friday, June 27, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

Note: Additional information on the agenda items can be found on [NOACA's website](#) and [YouTube channel](#)



**Equity Subcommittee
2025 Attendance Record**

MEETING DATES	3/28/25	6/27/25	9/26/25	12/5/25
BLACKWELL , Annette Geoff Englebrecht, Alternate				
BEVERAGE III , Morris W. Morgan McIntosh, Alternate	A			
BRUBAKER , Kevin Dawn Calvert, Alternate	A			
CHAMBERS , Keshia Alternate not Designated	X			
CIEREBIEJ , Mary Nichole R. Laird, Alternate	X			
HAMMONS , Marsalis Alternate not Designated				
HARRISON , Aaron M. Stephen D. Hambley, Alternate				
HUBBARD , Jr., Edwin Alternate not Designated	X			
JOHNSON , Aria Alternate not Designated	X			
MIRBEL , Gerard Derrick Abney, Alternate	X			
SNYDER , Timothy Alternate not Designated				
SPIDALIERI , Ralph Walter "Skip" Claypool, Alternate	A			
TERRY , India L. Birdsong Natoya J. Walker Minor, Alternate	A			
TBD , Representative of EJ Area				

X = Member A = Alternate