

Memo

To: Federal Transit Administration and Interested Persons
From: Al Benedict, Technology Tools Lead, National RTAP
Subject: Cost Allocation Calculator Survey User Feedback
Date: August 28, 2025

The National Rural Transit Assistance Program (National RTAP) strives to improve its technology tools so that they continue to meet user needs and evolve alongside the mobility and technology sectors.

This memo reviews the Cost Allocation Calculator user survey responses and National RTAP next steps to address feedback on the calculator. The Two-Variable Cost Allocation Calculator is a tool to determine the fully allocated costs based on time and distance for providing transit service. The calculator determines the costs by individual route/service, mode, service area, type of service, sponsored type, primary funding source, and individual local sponsors (if applicable). For more information on the calculator visit the National RTAP [Cost Allocation Calculator Resources](https://www.nationalrtap.org/Technology-Tools/Cost-Allocation-Calculator) (<https://www.nationalrtap.org/Technology-Tools/Cost-Allocation-Calculator>).

The 2025 survey gathered feedback from 24 respondents, primarily rural and small urban transit providers, across the US. It captures details about user demographics, such as job roles and agency size, and how they discovered the calculator. A significant portion of the feedback focuses on user experience, including which version of the calculator was downloaded (Microsoft Excel being most common), the types of services it was used for (all respondents offered Demand Response), and its perceived ease of use compared to other methods. The survey also assesses the usefulness of supporting resources like instructional videos and manuals, and rates the difficulty of various calculator steps, with most users finding them easy or neutral. Finally, it records satisfaction with technical assistance and solicits suggestions for future improvements.

Survey Results

The following is an overview of what we learned and next steps on National RTAP's end to address user feedback.

The primary users of the Cost Allocation Calculator are predominantly rural transit providers, who make up 50% of the respondents to the survey. Small urban transit providers account for 21% of users, and State Departments of Transportation (DOT)/State RTAP agencies comprise 12%. Other organizational types using the calculator include urban transit providers and Metropolitan Planning Organizations/Council of Governments (MPOs/COGs).

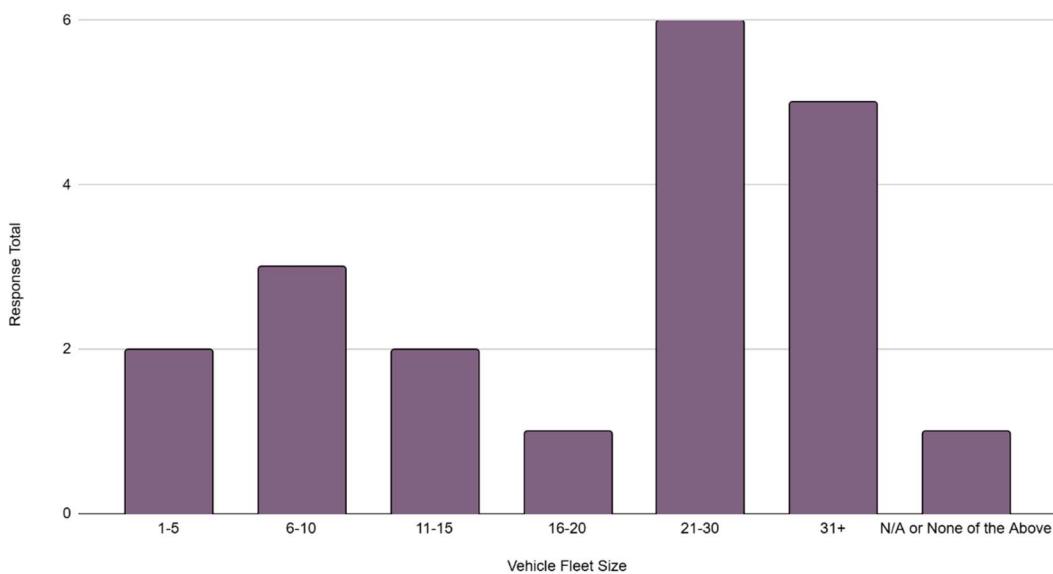
"I'm grateful I found the CAC. It's improved my reporting and it's a major component in my process"

Cost Allocation Calculator Survey, 2025

Within these organizations, the most common position utilizing the calculator is Administrator/Executive (50% of respondents), followed by Managers (17%), Administrator/Finance staff (17%), and Procurement staff (6%). For State DOTs specifically, three positions were noted, a 5311 Manager, RTAP Manager, and 5307 Manager.

The agencies that responded to the survey had a mix of vehicle fleet sizes, with 21 to 30 (30%), and 31+ (25%), together accounting for 55% of the total responses. The other survey responses were distributed across the vehicle fleet size categories, with 25% of the respondents operating fleet sizes with 10 vehicles or less (Figure 1).

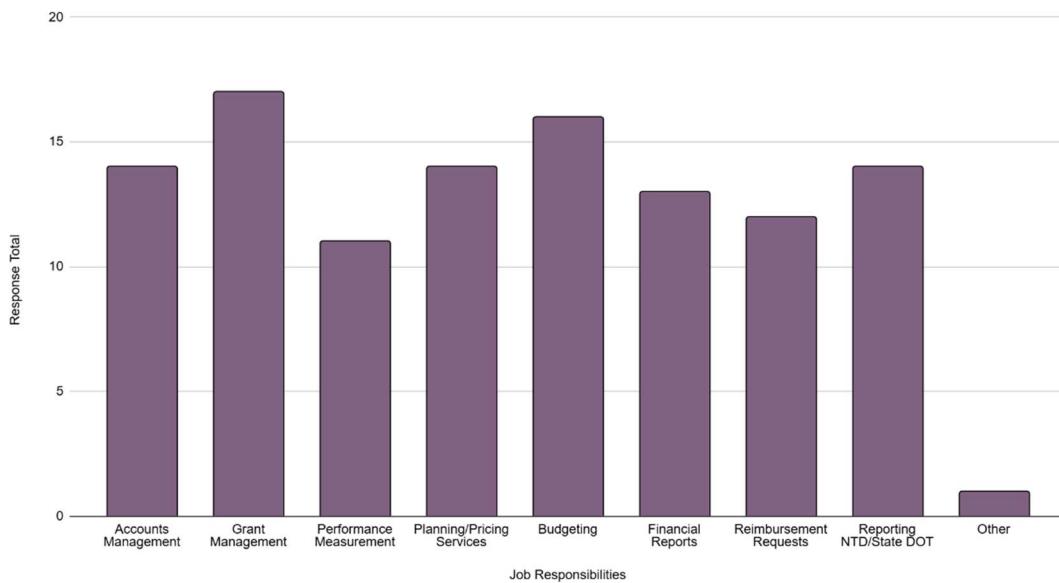
Figure 1: Cost Allocation Calculator User Vehicle Fleet Size



Of the survey respondents, 70% worked at agencies with 21 or more full-time equivalent employees indicating that the Cost Allocation Calculator is used more often by larger agencies. The remaining responses were split across agencies of varying employee sizes, 1 to 5 (5%), 11 to 15 (15%), and 16 to 20 (10%).

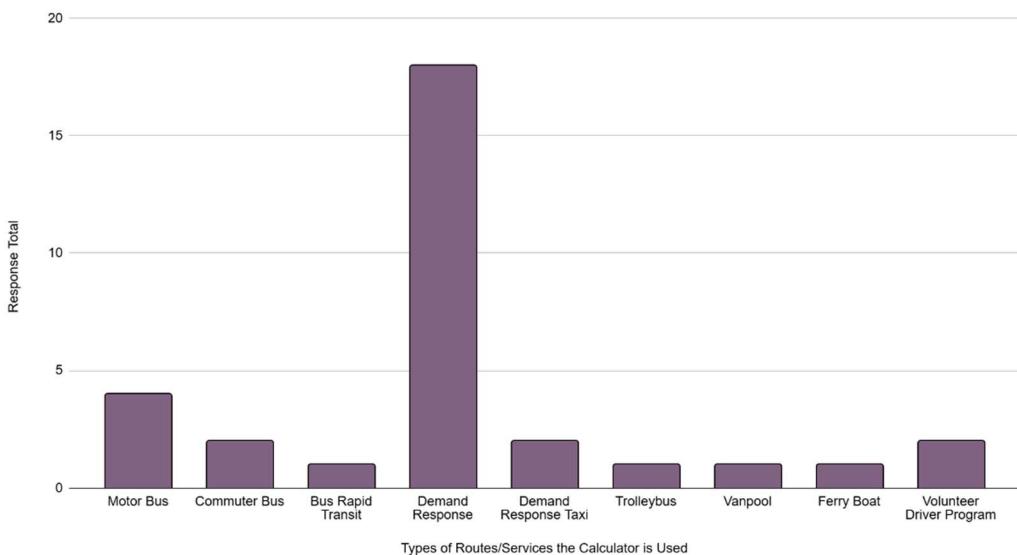
The survey also asked about the different work functions people assist with in their position. Here the responses were spread across multiple job responsibilities, as respondents could check all the functions that apply to their position, among the highest selections included Grant Management (85%), Preparing Annual Budgets (80%), Accounts Management (70%), and Reporting data to National Transit Database (NTD)/State DOT (70%). However, a number of other job functions also scored high across the survey respondents (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Cost Allocation Calculator User Job Responsibilities



Calculating the costs for Demand Response Transportation (DRT) services is the most common application of the calculator, with 100% of the respondents indicating they use it to calculate DRT service costs. This is followed by Motor Bus (22%) and receiving 11%, respectively, Commuter Bus, Demand Response Taxi, and Volunteer Driver Programs. Roughly 5% of the respondents use the Cost Allocation Calculator for Bus Rapid Transit, Trolleybus, Vanpool, and Ferry Boat. The wide range of transportation services demonstrates the versatility of the calculator.

Figure 3: Types of Routes and Services by Number of Use Cases



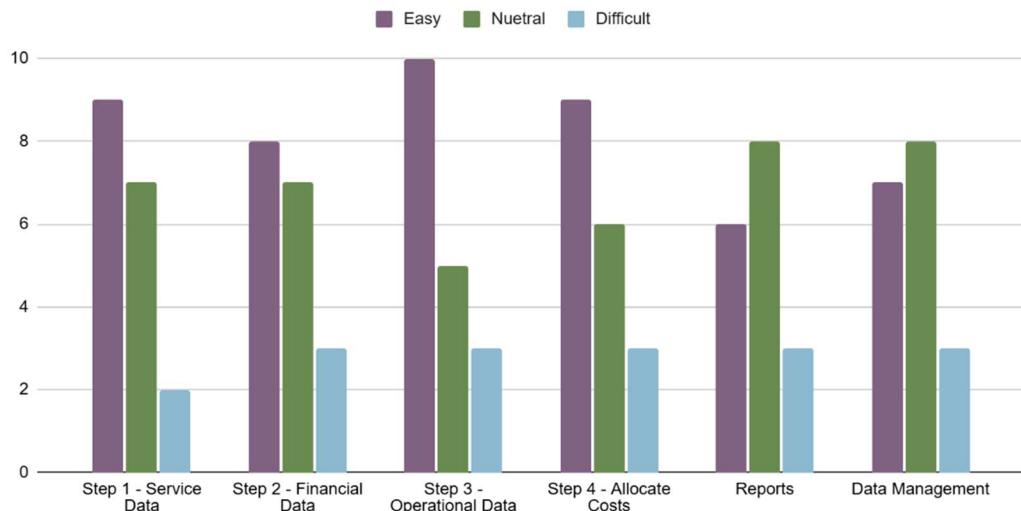
When asked how people use the reports and performance measures created by the calculator, planning and pricing transportation services is the most common application of the calculator, with 56% of the respondents using the tool to determine the costs of their planned or current transit services. One user notes that it provides “indisputable evidence” for cost points. Beyond planning and pricing, NTD reporting and preparing annual budgets (22% each) are also widely used. A handful of people indicated that the calculator supports performance measurement, accounts management, and research.

The survey also asked about the ease of use across the different calculator steps. Roughly 50% of the respondents found the four calculator steps easy to use (Four Steps: Service Data, Financial Data, Operational Data, and Allocating Costs). Approximately 40% reported neutral, leaving around 17% that found the steps difficult. Figure 4 reviews all of the user responses by Cost Allocation Calculator steps. These findings parallel the number of respondents that seek National RTAP technical assistance, roughly 8%, with the vast majority of users choosing to navigate the calculator on their own or with the assistance of recorded webinars and other resource guides. The two survey respondents who sought National RTAP technical assistance rated it as excellent. And overall, the calculator met (78%) or exceeded (17%) user expectations.

"We have so much visibility with the CAC. I wouldn't want to run projections without the calculator. We use it often for various financial reporting and I'm excited to see if another version drops. It's given me confidence in the reporting I'm providing to my director"

Cost Allocation Survey, 2025

Figure 4: Cost Allocation Calculator Ease of Use by Steps Involved



While many of the respondents indicate that the calculator has improved their reporting and is a major component in their financial processes, the survey has also given us some areas where we want to improve.

Some respondents found the Microsoft Excel version of the calculator to be unwieldy and difficult to edit data inputs. Other users report that they prefer the Microsoft Access version, but the calculator users are generally more familiar with Microsoft Excel versus Microsoft Access, so that tends to be the version that is used more regularly.

National RTAP Next Steps

The Cost Allocation Survey provided a wealth of information for National RTAP to understand how the calculator is used, along with its strengths and areas for improvement, particularly around its functionality and increased user engagement.

- Review the supporting resource guides to make sure that they clearly address user reported pain points, particularly around editing data inputs.
- Update the tutorial videos so that they align with the latest features of the Cost Allocation Calculator.
- National RTAP will increase its user support and technical assistance to build awareness and address ongoing user questions.
 - The survey indicates that the biggest Cost Allocation Calculator users operate 20+ vehicle fleet size and have 21 or more full-time equivalent employees. National RTAP will target outreach toward smaller agencies through our newsletter and in-person trainings to build awareness and highlight the calculator benefits.
 - Conduct a half-day Cost Allocation Calculator workshop at the December National RTAP Conference in Austin.
 - Host quarterly calculator user group meet-ups to give users a chance to learn from peers and share lessons learned across similar agencies. The user group meet-ups will likely combine some programming (such as hearing from an agency's experiences using the calculator or digging into a particular topic) but will provide ample space for open discussion and questions. The target audience for these user group meetings are prospective users, looking to learn more about the calculator, and seasoned users who might still have questions and/or may be in a position to offer peer support.
 - National RTAP is planning open office hours so users of the tool can receive direct support from the calculator maintenance and technical assistance team at the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). These meetings will give users the opportunity to ask questions and work through issues that they are experiencing.