

Guidelines for Preparing  
Maryland Department of Transportation  
State Highway Administration  
Research Reports

Revised  
June 2020

**Prepared by:**  
Maryland Department of Transportation  
State Highway Administration  
Office of Policy and Research  
707 North Calvert St.  
Baltimore, MD 21202  
[research@mdot.maryland.gov](mailto:research@mdot.maryland.gov)

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Research Report Overview	1
General Requirements	4
Deliverable Requirements	6
Best Practices for MDOT SHA Reports	7
Appendix A – Report Cover	8
Appendix B - Technical Report Documentation Page	11
Appendix C – Two-Page Summary Example	13

## INTRODUCTION

This document provides guidance to universities and consultants who provide research services to the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA). It is MDOT SHA's goal to maintain consistency in the organization and presentation of all research reports and to ensure that all publications meet high standards for both content and presentation. MDOT SHA staff review draft reports to ensure that they are clearly written, well organized, and properly edited. Any report that is determined to be unacceptable will be promptly returned to the Principal Investigator. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to contact the Research Division for clarification of the guidelines prior to submitting a draft report.

## RESEARCH REPORT OVERVIEW

All Research Reports should include the following items in this order. Please note that the total report (not including the appendices and two-page summary) should not exceed **50 pages**.

- Report cover (provided by MDOT SHA, sample attached in Appendix A)
- Disclaimer Notice (provided by MDOT SHA)
- Technical Report Documentation Page (sample attached in Appendix B)
- Table of contents (including list of figures and tables if applicable)
- Acknowledgements (as appropriate)
- Executive Summary
- Body of the Report
- Glossary (as appropriate)
- References (as appropriate)
- Appendices (as appropriate)
- Two-page summary (included as a separate file, sample attached in Appendix C)

## **REPORT COVER**

The template for the cover page is provided by MDOT SHA. A sample is in Appendix A.

## **DISCLAIMER NOTICE**

The MDOT SHA requires a standard disclaimer notice. The disclaimer is located on the back side of the cover page and is included in the template.

## **TECHNICAL REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

The author completes the Technical Report Documentation Page. The document is used to help enter information about the project into research databases such as the Transportation Research Board's (TRB) Transportation Research Information Database (TRID). The Principle Investigator shall apply for an Open Research and Contributor ID ([ORCID](#)) number and include it on this page. Instructions for completing it are in Appendix B.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

The table of contents should include the executive summary, chapter or section titles, acknowledgements, a list of tables and figures, references, and appendix titles.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The acknowledgements section should include the names, titles, and affiliations of the individuals involved in the project and state how they contributed to the research.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Each report begins with an executive summary which provides a brief (or bulleted) overview of the report, focusing on the scope of work, principal findings, and recommendations. The executive summary should be no more than three pages.

## **BODY OF THE REPORT**

The body of the report should be written for the transportation professional whose primary concern is to put research results into practice. The following format should be followed:

- Introduction – background information on the subject and the research objective.
- Literature Review – review of previous research related to the subject.
- Methodology – method of collecting data, analysis of data, equipment used, procedures
- Research Findings/Discussion – presentation of results, validity of the research objective, factors affecting results, implications.
- Conclusions and Recommendations for implementation – opinions based on the results, suggestions for future work, and recommendations on how the research can be implemented by MDOT SHA.

## **GLOSSARY**

If appropriate, a glossary should be included to define technical terms used in the report that may not be familiar to the reader.

## **REFERENCES**

All references cited in the report should be listed in this section. Any style may be used as long as it is consistent, and all reference elements are included (author(s), title, publication number, publisher's name and city, publication date).

## **APPENDICES**

The appendices should include any supplementary material that is directly or indirectly related to the report and additional information for those interested in more technical detail. Appendices can include the following information:

- Forms
- Manuals and guidelines
- Documentation and further elaboration of research findings
- Formulas and mathematical analyses

## **TWO-PAGE SUMMARY**

The author completes the Two-Page Summary. Use of pictures and/or illustrations is encouraged which would enhance readers' appreciation of the findings. The document is used to announce the research results to other state DOTs, the AASHTO Research Advisory Committee (RAC), TRB, and other transportation organizations. The summary should be organized in four main categories: the need, the goal, what the research team did, the outcome, and how MDOT SHA will use the results, in 600 words or less. The Two-Page Summary template is provided in Appendix C.

## **GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

### **TYPE ARRANGMENT AND TYPE FACES**

- The font for main text is 12 point Times New Roman and no larger than 18 point Times New Roman for headings. Cursive, italic, or ornamental faces are appropriate only for emphasis of specific words or for headings.
- Margins must be at least one inch on all sides, including pages with graphics.
- Spacing should be uniform throughout the report. Single line spacing is preferred in most cases, with double spacing between paragraphs.
- Right margins should not be justified. Type with ragged margins is easier to read and edit.
- The heading or first or last line of a paragraph should not be alone at the top or bottom of a page.

### **PAGE NUMBERING**

Page numbers should be vertically centered or right justified, ½ inch above the bottom of the page in at least 10 point Times New Roman font. Page numbering begins with the Executive Summary and continues to the final page, including appendices. Table of Contents pages can be numbered with Roman numerals starting at “ii” (technical documentation page is counted as Page i).

### **TENSE**

As the report writes about events which have already happened, the tense should be mainly past tense. However, in some parts of the document, it may be appropriate to use present or future tense. For instance, if the author is covering facts that were, are, and forever shall be true, the facts may be referred to in present tense. If the author is writing about experiments or activities yet to come, future tense is appropriate.

### **POINT OF VIEW**

The third-person point of view (he, she, it, one, they) is the standard for professional writing and as such, should be used for all MDOT SHA research reports. For example, words such as “I” or “we” should not be used; instead, use “the principal investigator” or “the research team.” This ensures that the emphasis is put on the subject rather than the writer or the reader.

### **ACRONYMS**

Acronyms are always spelled out the first time they are used in the report. When using an acronym to refer to the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration, always use “MDOT SHA.” Do not use “SHA,” “MSHA,” or “MDSHA.”

## **MEASUREMENT**

Measurement in MDOT SHA reports are in standard English units (inch-pound). Authors may provide equivalent metric units in parentheses if so desired.

## **GRAPHICS**

Graphics include maps, tables, figures, and photographs. They may be color but where possible, should be designed so that they will be clear and legible when reproduced in black and white. They should also be placed on the page so they can be viewed without turning the page sideways. If the graphic must be placed sideways, the page number location should be consistent with the other pages, i.e., at the bottom of the short side of the page.

All graphics are numbered in a single sequence (Table 1, Table 2) from the beginning through the end of the report and have a caption which identifies it. These captions are brief and are centered on the page. A brief description of the information presented is provided directly below the graphic to ensure that the report can be read using assisted reading devices.

In order to keep the report file size as small as possible the following guidelines should be used:

After you copy the graphics, use the “Paste Special” command in the “Edit” menu.

- If the original graphics is a bitmap image, paste it as a "Device Independent Bitmap" (DIB) which is best viewed under different machines and video modes.
- If the original graphics is a drawing, i.e. vector image, paste it as a “Picture” or “Enhanced Metafile Picture” for best quality and compatibility.
- ❖ Please note that exceptions to the guidelines for graphics must be approved by MDOT SHA. Please contact the Research Division to discuss alternative options.

## **COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL**

Authors are responsible for obtaining permissions for the use of copyrighted materials. Copyright release statements should be included in the text. Legal liability for failure to do so falls on the author.

## **DELIVERABLE REQUIREMENTS**

Researchers are required to prepare a final report that incorporates all reviewers' comments and reflects editing by a competent technical editor to ensure compliance with these guidelines. The following standard requirements apply:

- Provide an electronic Microsoft Word file of the final report. The file should be emailed to the administrative lead, or, if the file size is too large to be emailed (i.e. over 8MB), the Principal Investigator should upload it to a secure file sharing website.
- Provide a separate electronic file of the two-page summary in Microsoft Word. The two-page summary should also be emailed to the administrative lead or uploaded to a secure file sharing website.

Acceptance of the final report is based on the following criteria:

1. Fulfillment of the project objectives
2. Adequacy of documentation
3. Clarity of presentation
4. Confirmation that MDOT SHA's comments have been sufficiently addressed
5. Adherence to the guidelines in this document.

The Research Division and MDOT SHA technical office make the decision to accept and publish the final report and two-page summary using the criteria. Both are posted on the [Research Projects Page](#) on MDOT SHA's website.



## **BEST PRACTICES FOR MDOT SHA REPORTS**

- Remember the audience for the report. The report should not read like a thesis or dissertation. It should be written for a transportation professional, be concise, well-organized, and easy to read.
- Do not use terms that the reader would not understand.
- Avoid redundancies. Do not repeat the same information over and over.
- Length matters. The report should be long enough to achieve its purpose but not a word longer.
- Appearance matters. Remember, the report is for practitioners who want to benefit from and use the information provided. Make it visually appealing and include only useful and easy to view graphics.
- Do not include mathematical equations in the body of the report. If the researcher feels that it is important to include that information, place it in the appendix and refer to it in the report.
- Hire a professional technical editor to review the report thoroughly before it is sent to MDOT SHA. Too often reports have to be returned to the researcher because there are significant errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

**APPENDIX A**  
**REPORT COVER**



Larry Hogan  
Governor  
Boyd K. Rutherford  
Lt. Governor  
Gregory Slater  
Secretary  
Tim Smith, P.E.  
Acting Administrator

---

**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION**

**RESEARCH REPORT**

**REPORT TITLE**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR AND RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS**

**University or consultant name**

**FINAL REPORT**

**Month Year**

This material is based upon work supported by the Federal Highway Administration under the State Planning and Research program. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Federal Highway Administration or the Maryland Department of Transportation. This report does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **TECHNICAL REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

### Technical Report Documentation Page

1. Report No. <b>MD-YR-Contract&amp;Task#</b>	2. Government Accession No. <b>LEAVE BLANK</b>	3. Recipient's Catalog No. <b>LEAVE BLANK</b>	
4. Title and Subtitle Enter title and subtitle (use mixed case with initial caps for first word in title and subtitle) with volume and part numbers, if applicable.		5. Report Date Enter same date as is on the report cover. Enter full publication date, including month and date, if available, and full year. Example: April 5, 2018 or April 2018.	
		6. Performing Organization Code <b>LEAVE BLANK</b>	
7. Author/s Names of Research team members. Primary author is listed first. After each author name, enter ORCID ( <a href="http://orcid.org">http://orcid.org</a> ) URL, when available. Example: Josiah Carberry, Ph.D. <a href="http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1825-0097">http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1825-0097</a>		8. Performing Organization Report No.  <p style="text-align: center;"><b>UTILIZE WHEN POSSIBLE</b></p>	
9. Performing Organization Name and Address  Name Street Address City, State, Zip Code		10. Work Unit No. <b>LEAVE BLANK</b>	
		11. Contract or Grant No.  <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Contract &amp; Task#</b></p>	
12. Sponsoring Organization Name and Address Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration Office of Policy & Research 707 North Calvert Street Baltimore MD 21202		13. Type of Report and Period Covered <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Final Report</b></p>	
		14. Sponsoring Agency Code <b>(7120) STMD - MDOT/SHA</b>	
15. Supplementary Notes			
16. Abstract  The abstract should provide a brief summary of the report including the objective, methods, and conclusions of the study. For guidance, please see ANSI/NISO Z39.14-1997(R2015) Guidelines for Abstracts ( <a href="https://www.niso.org/publications/ansiniso-z3914-1997-r2015-guidelines-abstracts">https://www.niso.org/publications/ansiniso-z3914-1997-r2015-guidelines-abstracts</a> ).			
17. Key Words List terms or phrases that identify main subjects covered in the report. When possible, terms should be selected from the Transportation Research Thesaurus (TRT) ( <a href="http://trt.trb.org">http://trt.trb.org</a> ) in addition to terms not found in the TRT.		18. Distribution Statement: No restrictions <b>This document is available from the Research Division upon request.</b>	
19. Security Classification (of this report) <b>None</b>	20. Security Classification (of this page) <b>None</b>	21. No. Of Pages <b>All pages including the cover</b>	22. Price

**Form DOT F 1700.7 (8-72) Reproduction of form and completed page is authorized.**

**APPENDIX C**

**TWO-PAGE SUMMARY**

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

### PROJECT TITLE

#### WHAT WAS THE NEED?

*Describe in three or four sentences the problem examined and why it was an important problem for study.*

#### WHAT WAS THE GOAL?

*State the primary objective of the study, the expected outcomes, and deliverables in 50 words or less.*

#### WHAT DID THE RESEARCH TEAM DO?

*Briefly highlight how the study was conducted. Include basic assumptions, data gathering methodology, data analysis strategy and tools or instruments used in the study. This section should be limited to one or two paragraphs and if possible, should include a photo or easy to understand diagram, drawing or illustration, which shows a primary focus of the study.*

**PUBLICATION MONTH,  
YEAR**

**REPORT NUMBER:**  
MD-xx-SHA/xx/x-xx

**START DATE:**  
Notice to Proceed Date

**COMPLETION DATE:**  
Contract End Date

**PRINCIPAL  
INVESTIGATOR:**  
Name  
Organization  
Email address



## WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

*Identify the major findings, recommendations, benefits of the research, and how the results will be applied by MDOT SHA.*

## HOW WILL MDOT SHA USE THE RESULTS?

*The Project Manager in the Research Division will add this information.*

## LEARN MORE

*The Project Manager in the Research Division will add this information.*  
To view the complete report, [click here.](#)