

TOP TEN TIPS FOR STREAMLINING NEPA

The new requirements to complete National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews within tight timeframes and strict page limits require some changes from the way these reviews have been done in the past. Here are some tips to successfully meet these new challenges.

Ask Tough Questions, Make Tougher Choices

Think seriously before starting a NEPA review and ask: do we need to do a NEPA review? What is the appropriate level of NEPA review (CE, EA, EIS)? Can we use an existing NEPA document or incorporate it by reference? Do other processes typically drive the NEPA schedule, and is it necessary to decouple those processes in order to meet the schedule?

Get Everybody on Board

Management (all levels) and solicitors can contribute to streamlining by expeditiously completing their tasks and not delaying the NEPA process with extended reviews or late decisions. Establish expectations early in the process by involving the entire team in creating the Project Management Plan (PMP).

Recruit a Streamlining Champion

Find a champion (or two) to keep the focus on streamlining. The champion(s) should be able to thrive under the condition of responsibility without direct authority or be given that direct authority. Have your champions message streamlining goals clearly and regularly to all, including your NEPA project manager.

Unleash the Power of Scoping

Scoping is not just an event; it is a process with an outcome. Internal and external scoping (little "s") can begin long before formal public Scoping (big "S"). Use scoping to help determine significance of issues.

Convey the Bottom Line

The comparison of alternatives (Chapter 2) could be the most important section in an EIS/EA, because it may be the one chapter that your audience fully digests. Concisely convey the salient points needed to show differences between alternatives.

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Mind Your Ps and Ts (Pages and Time)

Schedule and page management should start long before a Notice of Intent (NOI) is released and continue throughout with frequent and regular monitoring. Combat the tendency to think that more is always better. Maximize the one-year period after the NOI is released by identifying and conducting activities that could occur before NOI publication, such as scoping, planning, and drafting.

Engage Your Extended Team

Involve cooperating agencies, consulting agencies, and contractors early and often in the process. Address policy, legal, and contractual requirements. Set expectations to avoid rework late in a NEPA review.

Hone Your Focus

Before and during scoping, prepare to focus the EIS by developing a clear purpose and need statement, the criteria for reasonable alternatives, and a screening process to identify significant and non-significant issues. The EIS should focus on significant environmental issues and alternatives and exclude extraneous background discussions.

Picture It

Use figures, maps, graphics, and tables instead of text. Communicate important points visually when possible, and use brief text to explain.

Document the Details Elsewhere

Document processes and detailed analyses in the Decision File. Prepare white papers or online reports rather than in appendices.



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