

Key components of the NEPA process

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need statement is a full and honest explanation of why an agency, or project sponsor, is considering an action and is essential in establishing a basis for the development of the range of reasonable alternatives that will be considered (strategies). It is a statement of the problem and evidence that supports that the problem exists.

Alternatives (Strategy) Analysis

The alternatives analysis is a basic requirement of NEPA and describes the process that was used to develop, evaluate, and eliminate potential alternatives to addressing the problem identified in the purpose and need. Agencies are not required to consider every potential alternative; however, they are responsible for developing the full range of alternatives. Agencies must provide opportunities for the involvement of participating agencies and the public in developing the alternatives and must consider the input provided by these groups.

- The “no-build” alternative is included as a benchmark against which the impacts of other alternatives can be compared.
- The preferred alternative is the alternative which the agency believes would fulfill the purpose needed.

Environmental Assessment

NEPA requires consideration of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of a proposed action and its alternatives on the environment. Potential measures to mitigate adverse environmental effects also must be considered.

Interagency Coordination

The NEPA process includes requirements for interagency coordination and cooperation. The lead federal agency works cooperatively with other federal and state agencies during the environmental review process.

Public Involvement

Handled correctly, public participation in the NEPA process will improve acceptance of the final decision and, at minimum, provide agencies with the best information possible for making a decision. The amount and type of public involvement will vary depending on the complexity and degree of controversy involved in a project. Elements include:

- Scoping meetings and public hearings.
- Early and continuing opportunities for the public to be involved in the identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts, as well as impacts associated with relocation of individuals, groups, or institutions.
- Reasonable notice to the public of public information meetings, a public hearing or the opportunity for a public hearing.

