

WSDOT Projects - NEPA Documentation Roles

This table defines the specific roles and responsibilities of WSDOT project teams, Environmental Services Office (ESO) Discipline and NEPA Specialists, and the Federal lead agency at specific phases (work activity) of the environmental documentation process. The table mirrors the table outlined in Section E (Environment) of the 2008 Federal-Aid Highway Program Stewardship and Oversight Agreement (Stewardship Agreement). The table within the Stewardship Agreement lists WSDOT and FHWA project actions related to environmental process work activities. We reproduced and modified the Stewardship Agreement table to further explain and clarify how WSDOT completes NEPA documentation.

Roles and Responsibilities

The **Project Team – Environmental Coordinator** (Project Team) leads the environmental documentation effort. The main responsibility of the Project Team is to allocate resources, produce the document, schedule/coordinate environmental document review cycles, and resolve comments on document drafts. As document lead, the Project Team utilizes quality improvement tools to help it produce a high quality environmental document. One such tool, a Quality Assurance/Quality Control Plan, spells out how to coordinate document writers and reviewers; how to create an efficient communication strategy; and how to develop an appropriate schedule for the document that includes initial drafting, internal peer reviews, and technical editing.

As technical experts, **Discipline Specialists** ensure the accuracy and adequacy of the specific resource studies/reports written to support the analysis of potential impacts to the environment. Discipline Specialists serve two roles in the NEPA Documentation Process: Discipline Report *Writers* and Discipline Report *Reviewers*. Discipline Specialists may write studies and/or reports as part of the project team. The discipline specialist ensures the accuracy and adequacy of the information provided in the environmental document.

Through the review process, Discipline Specialists provide an independent evaluation of the technical accuracy and completeness of the draft and final report. The Discipline Specialist reviews the report to ensure that it is “right-sized” and that the author followed the required format and content discussion as outlined in the Environmental Procedures Manual (EPM) for each element of the environment under study. Discipline Specialists are not approvers of the environmental report. Their role in the review process is to advise and guide the project team/report author on the completeness of the report. Reviewers rate and explain their comments based on the instructions and priority system defined in the Standard Comment-Response Form (See the QA Framework).

It is very important that Discipline Specialists also review their respective section of the main NEPA document (EA/EIS) to ensure the author accurately summarized the discipline report information.

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ESO NEPA Specialists provide statewide experience and technical assistance to project teams. The NEPA specialist serves as a quality assurance reviewer before project teams submit their documents to the Federal lead agency for its review and approval. The NEPA specialist review focuses on the NEPA document as a whole and checks for required components such as:

1. Purpose and need; logical termini, independent utility;
2. Completeness of the alternatives analysis, (including the no-build alternative);
3. That the document is free of 'common issues' with environmental documentation (**insert link**);
4. Evidence of required coordination with Federal, state and local agencies, and appropriate discussion of public involvement; and,
5. Compliance with applicable NEPA procedures as defined in the EPM.

In addition, the ESO NEPA Specialist ensures topic discussions are adequate, technically accurate and defensible before the ESO Director signs EA and EIS documents as complete. He/she sets up pre-signatory meeting with the project team and is present at document signing to answer process questions, and summarize issues relevant to the ESO Director's concerns.

The **Federal Lead Agency**ⁱ receives environmental documents from project teams. The Federal Lead Agency approves the environmental documents when WSDOT demonstrates that the environmental document complies with all relevant federal requirements to receive federal funding and/or approval. Accordingly, the Federal Lead Agency coordinates with project teams on scope and findings of studies, and directs teams toward documentation completeness. The Federal Lead Agency serves as technical and documentation specialists, and document signatory. The Federal Lead Agency is the ultimate approver of the NEPA Documentation process. The Federal Lead Agency must assure the project meets all federal requirements before approving a NEPA document.

The **Document Signatory** role is split between state and Federal signatories. The Director of ESO serves in the role of SEPA "Responsible Official" for WSDOT EISs, ensuring project teams follow the SEPA process and documents are adequate and accurate. When WSDOT drafts NEPA/SEPA EISs, the Director of ESO signs those EIS documents as agency Co-lead. For NEPA EISs and EAs the Director of ESO signs the document to signify that WSDOT has reviewed and accepted that document according to the 2008 Federal Aid Highway Program Stewardship and Oversight Agreement. By signing a NEPA document, the Director of ESO indicates the document is complete and the documentation process meets established guidelines, formats, and environmental procedures.

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The Federal lead signs environmental documents as the official NEPA lead agency approver. Although the federal lead requires WSDOT to sign EAs and EISs, the Federal Signatory is the NEPA Approver and signifies that the project complies with its established environmental procedures and the Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations.

NEPA Documentation Role Summary Table for WSDOT Projects – WSDOT and FHWA Roles

Work Activity	Project Team - Environmental Coordinators	Discipline Specialist	ESO NEPA Specialist	FHWA - Federal Lead & Document Signatory	State Document Signatory
Determination of NEPA Classification for all projects using Federal-aid funds and all those requiring an FHWA approval.	Make preliminary determination through Capital Program Development and Management Office and Project Summary Database. Consult with FHWA.	n/a	Provide guidance/input to project team as requested.	Make final decision on appropriate NEPA classification.	n/a
Categorical Exclusions (CE) delegated to WSDOT per the August 2009 MOU	Prepare and approve.	n/a	Provide guidance/input to project team as requested.	Periodic process reviews.	Region/Mode Environmental Manager reviews and signs.
Documented Categorical Exclusions (DCEs) not delegated to WSDOT per the August 2009 MOU	Prepare and submit for FHWA review and approval.	Assist project team to document disciplines, as requested	Provide guidance/input to project team as requested.	Review and approve.	Region/Mode Environmental Manager reviews and signs.

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Work Activity	Project Team - Environmental Coordinators	Discipline Specialist	ESO NEPA Specialist	FHWA - Federal Lead & Document Signatory	State Document Signatory
Develop Negotiated Timeframe (for EA or EIS)**	Prepare schedule, include in scoping notice to project stakeholders	Assist project team with schedule development as requested	Assist project teams as requested	Concur	n/a
Discipline Reports*	Prepare, review and submit to FHWA.	Prepare/review as requested.+	Provide guidance/input to project team as requested.	Review and comment.	n/a
Environmental Assessment (EA)	Prepare and submit to FHWA for approval.	Prepare or review sections of the EA as requested.	Provide guidance/ input to project team as requested. Review prior to signature.	Review and approve.	Review and sign as complete.
Standalone Section 4(f) and 6(f) Evaluations*	Prepare and submit to FHWA for approval.	Prepare or review section of the Section 4(f) or 6(f) document as requested.+	Provide guidance/ input to project team as requested. Review prior to signature.	Review and approve.	n/a
Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)	Prepare and submit to FHWA for approval.	n/a	Review comment responses to EA. Provide guidance/ input to project team as requested.	Review, revise, and issue FONSI.	n/a
Notification to Director of ESO for initiating an EIS.*	Prepare in coordination with FHWA Division.	n/a	Coordinate on compliance strategy with team.	Coordinate on compliance strategy with team.	Director of ESO receives letter from project team.
Project Initiation letter to FHWA*	Prepare and submit to Director of ESO for transmittal to FHWA.	n/a	Provide guidance/input to project teams as requested. Provide tools/examples.		Director of ESO - review, sign and send to FHWA.

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Work Activity	Project Team - Environmental Coordinators	Discipline Specialist	ESO NEPA Specialist	FHWA - Federal Lead & Document Signatory	State Document Signatory
Notice of Intent (EIS)	Prepare draft Notice of Intent and forward to FHWA.	n/a	Provide guidance/input to project team as requested Provide tools and examples. Report to ESO Director.	Review, revise, and sign Notice of Intent and forward for publication in the Federal Register.	n/a
Invitations to Cooperating and Participating Agencies	Prepare draft letters. Send invitation letters to state and local agencies.	n/a	Coordinates Statewide Advisory Group for Environmental Stewardship work group when EIS. Identify agency representatives, as requested. Report to ESO Director.	Send invitation letters to Federal agencies and tribal governments.	n/a
SAFETEA-LU 6002 (EIS projects) Comment Points – Purpose and Need, Range of Alternatives, Study Methodologies and Level of Detail.	Prepare requests for comments, coordinate any necessary meetings.	Provide guidance /input and/or review Study Methodologies and Level of Detail as requested.	Provide guidance/input and/or review as requested. Report to ESO Director.	Assist WSDOT in the process and participate.	n/a
DEIS Outline/(EA)*	Draft and coordinate with local, state and Federal agencies to address relevant issues.	Review/comment on discipline relevant sections of the outline as requested.	Review outline. Track relevant issues and assist, as needed, with process. Report to ESO Director.	Review and approve.	n/a
Preliminary DEIS	Prepare and submit to ESO NEPA Specialist for review. Address ESO comments, revise and submit to FHWA for review.	Prepare or review sections of the Pre-DEIS as requested. †	Provide quality assurance review prior to FHWA review. Report to ESO Director.	Review and comment.	n/a

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Work Activity	Project Team - Environmental Coordinators	Discipline Specialist	ESO NEPA Specialist	FHWA - Federal Lead & Document Signatory	State Document Signatory
Review of Camera-Ready Draft Environmental Impact Statement	Prepare and submit to Lead and Cooperating agencies for review. Suggest review within 30 days.	n/a	Provide independent, internal review. Report to ESO Director. Set up pre-signatory meeting.	Request review by FHWA legal counsel.	n/a
DEIS	Prepare and submit to FHWA for approval. Print, publish and distribute.	n/a	Review for completeness, and assure initial review comments have been addressed.	Area Engineer reviews and approves.	Director of ESO reviews and approves.
Pre-FEIS	Prepare and submit to ESO NEPA Specialist for review. Address ESO comments, revise and submit to FHWA for review.	Prepare or review sections of the Pre-FEIS as requested.	Provide independent, internal review prior to FHWA review. Report to ESO Director.	Review and comment.	n/a
Review of Camera-Ready Final Environmental Impact Statement	Prepare and submit to FHWA.	n/a	Provide independent, internal review prior to FHWA review. Report to ESO Director.	Request legal sufficiency determination by FHWA legal counsel.	n/a
FEIS	Prepare and submit to FHWA for approval. Submit to EPA for Notice in Federal Register.	Prepare or review sections of the FEIS as requested.	Review for completeness and that comments have been addressed.	Division Administrator reviews and approves.	Director of ESO reviews and approves.
Record of Decision (ROD)	Prepare Draft ROD and forward to FHWA.	n/a	Review for completeness and to assure process was followed. Report to ESO Director.	Review, revise, and issue ROD.	n/a

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Work Activity	Project Team - Environmental Coordinators	Discipline Specialist	ESO NEPA Specialist	FHWA - Federal Lead & Document Signatory	State Document Signatory
Supplemental Draft or Final Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS or SFEIS)	Prepare and submit to FHWA for approval. Supplement follows same process as document it is supplementing.	Prepare or review sections of SDEIS or SFEIS as requested. ⁺	Review for completeness, and to assure comments have been addressed.	Area Engineer for SDEIS and Division Administrator for SFEIS reviews and approves.	Director of ESO reviews and approves.
Re-evaluation*	Coordinate with Document signatories to determine if new information exists, changes have occurred to project, and completeness of information.	Prepare or review sections of the re-evaluation as requested.	Provide independent, third party, internal review, as requested.	Area Engineer reviews and approves.	Region Environmental Manager provides informal approval unless evaluation leads to new findings/determination.
Statute of Limitations Federal Register Notice (applies to any Federal project approvals – ROD, FONSI, Corp Permit, CE, etc.)	Consult Attorney General's Office and FHWA regarding decision to publish notice. Draft notice and submit to FHWA.	n/a	Review and contribute, as requested. Provide tools and examples. Report to ESO Director.	Consult FHWA legal counsel if necessary. Publish notice.	n/a

ⁱ WSDOT has a lot of experience working with FHWA as the Lead Federal Agency. While generally stated, this table largely describes WSDOT's relationship with Federal lead agencies based upon our experience with FHWA.

*Work Activity not listed in Stewardship Agreement.

** No longer required by FHWA.

⁺ Although project teams typically request reviews of discipline specialists, there are a number of technical subjects that can best be handled by technical discipline specialists. WSDOT Noise policy requires review by ANE Program prior to finalizing document.