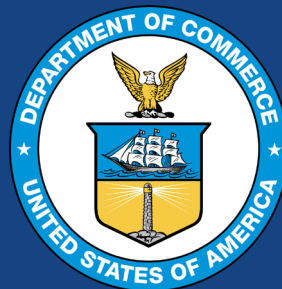




NEPA Review: Environmental Assessments

February 2023



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WHAT IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT?

An environmental assessment (EA) is a detailed statement that documents the potential impacts of a proposed Federal action (e.g., a BEAD funded project) **to determine if the project would significantly affect the environment**, including potential impacts to historic or cultural resources. Actions are documented and analyzed in an EA when:

- It is determined that the proposed action does not qualify for a categorical exclusion,
- The significance or environmental impacts of the action are unknown, or
- The proposed action does not require a more substantial environmental study (such as an Environmental Impact Statement).

An EA assists NTIA in determining the extent to which the project may impact environmental, cultural, or historic resources, and it may also identify ways to minimize those impacts through mitigation or identification of a more environmentally preferable alternative.

EA PREPARATION

An acceptable EA must be sufficiently detailed to enable NTIA to:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Understand the purpose and need for the Grantee’s proposed action | Assess the significance of those environmental effects listed |
| Determine if all reasonable alternatives have been considered | Specify mitigation measures, if necessary |
| Evaluate the environmental effects of the proposal and any reasonable alternatives | Conclude that interested agencies, tribes, and the public were given adequate opportunity to participate in, review, and comment on the proposal |

While each EA must be project-specific, there are standard areas of analysis and content that will enable NTIA to ensure that the appropriate steps have been taken to comply with applicable Federal environmental and historic preservation laws, including:

- The purpose and need for the proposed action
- An evaluation of alternatives to the proposed action
- The environmental impacts of the proposed action and the alternatives
- A listing of agencies and persons consulted during the preparation of the EA

BEST PRACTICE

Hire qualified environmental professionals or qualified contractors to complete the EA if you do not have staff with experience writing EAs and consulting with environmental regulators.

EA PROCESS, REVIEW & DETERMINATION

NTIA will review each EA to determine whether the document sufficiently addresses the resource areas of concern and adequately identifies the potential areas of impact associated with the project. If NTIA determines that the proposed project does *not* significantly impact the human or natural environment, the Federal decision is documented in a **Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**. The FONSI summarizes the reasons why an action does not have a significant effect on the environment, and therefore, why further studies are not required. Proposed actions that do not receive a FONSI or are determined to have significant environmental impacts will require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement, which is more comprehensive than an EA.

Once it has been determined that an EA is required, Grantees can expect to partake in the following steps to complete the EA process.

- 1 NTIA provides an EA template and guidance
- 2 Grantee, or a qualified consultant, begins development of their EA, including initiating any required consultation
- 3 Grantee notifies NTIA of the primary contact for consultation and communication. For example, a qualified consultant may engage directly with NTIA on behalf of the grantee
- 4 Grantee provides a draft EA to NTIA, and cooperating agencies/consulting parties if appropriate, for review
- 5 NTIA provides comments to Grantee
- 6 Grantee resolves comments from NTIA, concludes consultations, prepares final EA, and submits the final EA to NTIA
- 7 NTIA reviews the final EA to ensure comments have been addressed appropriately
- 8 NTIA publishes the final EA on website for 30 days for public comment
- 9 At the conclusion of the comment period, comments are addressed and if NTIA determines that the action will not have significant environmental impacts, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is drafted by NTIA and published.
If the EA determines that the environmental impacts of the action will be significant, an Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared.