

Why use the NEPA readiness tools?

The use of NEPA readiness tools can help streamline the environmental review process and expedite the project delivery process while conforming with the applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, including timeframes. Use of various tools facilitates early identification of participating and cooperating agencies, development of a project's purpose and need statement, identification and development of alternatives and elimination of unreasonable alternatives, early coordination with resources agencies and the public on project elements and potential impacts to resources, and identification of potential mitigation measures.

Early engagement by federal and state agencies can also help to identify the cooperating and participating agency roles; determine the permits, approvals, and applicable environmental analyses needed; establish a realistic project schedule; outline project expectations; and receive buy-in from the stakeholders to avoid delays and surprises during the later phases of the project development.

What FTA NEPA readiness tools are available?

FTA has outlined current information on NEPA readiness tools or approaches below. These tools and approaches are available online and assist in streamlining environmental reviews and accelerating the project delivery process.

[Project Initiation and Determining NEPA Class of Action \(SOP 2\)](#): This SOP provides guidance on how to ensure the project has undergone sufficient planning, connects logical termini, sufficiently addresses environmental effects, and has independent utility. SOP 2 aids in determining whether the FTA has sufficient information for assessing the environmental effects for the project to start the NEPA process.

- **[Preliminary Class of Action Determination](#)**: This tool is referenced in SOP 2. A preliminary class of action determination can be used by FTA's Regional Office to set expectations about the level of environmental review anticipated for a project prior to a formal decision as to whether a categorical exclusion (CE), EA, or EIS would be required for the project. A preliminary class of action can help the project sponsor plan for the upcoming environmental review (e.g., drafting statements of work, developing the NEPA schedule, or setting expectations with decisionmakers).

[Planning and Environmental Linkages \(PEL\)](#): PEL is a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision-making that considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process, and uses the information, analyses, and products developed during planning to inform the environmental review process required under NEPA. These approaches can assist in achieving efficient environmental review and permitting timelines. The FTA and FHWA planning regulations under [23 CFR §§ 450.212](#) and [450.318](#), emphasize the importance of linking transportation planning and decision-making to the project development and NEPA processes. Appendix A to Part 450, "Linking the Transportation Planning and NEPA Processes," provides further guidance.

[Early Scoping \(SOP 3\)](#): This SOP provides guidance on performing preliminary data analysis and requesting input from the public and stakeholders to narrow the scope of a project prior to initiation of NEPA. Through this early data collection and public input, the project can be refined before entering NEPA. This can affect the class of action determination, purpose and need statement, reasonable range of alternatives, significant environmental issues, and potential mitigation measures, or identify fatal flaws or the need for feasibility studies.

[Annotated Outline \(SOP 8\)](#): This SOP provides a framework for preparing environmental documents and managing content in early NEPA document planning. An annotated outline is a useful tool in identifying what the environmental document will cover, eliminating the resource areas that are not being impacted, where incorporation by reference can be applied, reducing the duplication of discussions within the document, noting page lengths for each section, and identifying the strategic use of graphics.