

# **Guidance For Preparing Environmental Assessments**

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# **National Environmental Policy Act**

## **Environmental Assessment Process**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (Pub. Law 91-190; 42 U.S.C. § 4321 *et seq*) establishes a national goal of protecting the environment. NEPA's requirements apply to Federal projects, decisions, or actions, including grants in aid, that might have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. For example, renovation and construction projects initiated by State or local law enforcement agencies with grant funding from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), U.S. Department of Justice are subject to NEPA. These projects are usually also subject to related environmental impact review and consultation provisions within the following environmental statutes and executive orders: Coastal Zone Management Act; Coastal Barrier Resources Act; Clean Air Act; Safe Drinking Water Act; Federal Water Pollution Control Act; Endangered Species Act; Wild and Scenic Rivers Act; National Historic Preservation Act; Farmland Protection Policy Act; and executive orders related to protection of wetlands, floodplain management, and environmental justice.

It is COPS' policy to minimize harm to the environment and we may reject proposals or encourage the modification of projects which have adverse environmental impacts. No grant funds may be awarded and/or expended for a specific proposal until an Environmental Assessment (EA) and/or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been completed and COPS has issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or has approved the EIS.

Generally, most small renovation or construction projects funded by a COPS grant will not significantly impact the environment. For such projects, compliance with NEPA's requirements is generally achieved by the preparation of an EA and the issuance of a FONSI. The EA is a decision document that provides the basis for a COPS official to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact. The following provides a brief overview of the steps and timelines in the EA process and who is responsible for implementation.

### **Project Planning and Identification of a Proposed Site(s) - Applicant**

During the planning phase of the project, the implementing agency or prospective applicant defines the need for the program, explores the various alternatives and identifies a proposed site for the construction or renovation project. In order to identify possible environmental concerns and reduce the likelihood of later opposition to the project, the implementing agency is encouraged to involve others at this stage through meetings at which affected or interested parties are made aware of the need for the action, the scope of the proposed action, and any alternatives being considered and are provided an opportunity to express comments or concerns about potential consequences of the action. Additionally, informing at this early stage any minority and low-income populations as well as Indian tribes that may be adversely affected by the proposal and obtaining their views on proposed sites and mitigation measures are particularly important steps in meeting the environmental justice goals of Executive Order 12898.

## **Preparation of Draft Environmental Assessment - Applicant**

COPS expects applicants to participate in the process of preparing an EA. The EA should be prepared when the applicant has identified a proposed site, but before it has determined that it will proceed with the effort. The applicant may prepare the EA or contract for the preparation of all or parts of the EA. In order to adequately assess all of the potential environmental impacts, a multi-disciplinary team should be used to perform the environmental analysis. The EA should be a brief discussion (10-15 pages) of :

- # the need for the project
- # alternatives
- # environmental impacts of the proposed action and the alternatives
- # a listing of the agencies and persons consulted.

The environmental impacts of the proposed project and the alternatives should be presented in comparative form, defining the issues and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision makers and the public. The alternatives should include a "No Action" alternative as a baseline for comparative assessment of impacts. If the EA identifies significant impacts, which could be reduced to insignificant levels with mitigation measures, the EA should describe the mitigating measures, how the applicant proposes to implement them and the proposed timeline for implementation. The applicant must submit the completed draft EA to COPS for review.

## **Review of Draft EA - COPS**

COPS will review the EA for the following:

1. Has the need for the proposed action been established?
2. Have the relevant areas of environmental concern been identified?
3. Have other agencies with an interest been consulted?
4. Have reasonable alternatives and mitigation measures been considered and implemented where possible, including the costs and resources to operate the facility?
5. Has a convincing case been made that the project as presently conceived will have only insignificant impacts on each of the identified areas of environmental concern?
6. Has the applicant adequately documented compliance with other related Federal environmental laws as well as similar State and local laws?

## **Issue Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or Require an EIS - COPS**

If the answers to all of the above questions are yes, COPS will issue a draft FONSI by having the draft EA circulated for review and comment. If the response to any of the questions but 5 is "no", the EA is incomplete and will be returned for further work.

If the only "no" is in the response to question 5, then an EIS will be required. Given the cost and time required to complete an EIS, the applicant may wish to explore another alternative site or design at this point.

## **Circulate Draft EA For Public Comment - Applicant**

The applicant must provide public notice of the availability of a proposed Finding of No Significant Impact. The notice must be timed so that interested agencies and the public have 30 days for review and comment on the draft EA. Involving the public in the decision process at this stage will facilitate development of a consensus through understanding of the proposed action, alternatives, benefits, and drawbacks; assist the implementing agency in identifying the best alternatives; decrease the risk of protest when the FONSI is issued and reduce legal challenges against the decision.

At a minimum, the applicant must publish on two consecutive days or publications a notice of the availability of the draft EA in the local newspaper. The notice should include a request for comments and establish a closure date for comments. The notice must be published at least twice in a newspaper of general circulation in the affected community, or if the area is not covered by regularly published local or areawide newspapers, the notice must be prominently displayed at the local post office. A copy of the draft EA must be sent to individuals and groups known to be interested in the planned project and to appropriate local, State and Federal agencies. Notices should be mailed directly to owners and occupants of nearby or affected property and should be posted in and near the location of the proposed project. The draft EA must be mailed to those who request it.

## **Review Comments and Modify Plans, as Appropriate - Applicant**

The applicant should review any public or agency comments received and modify its plans, if appropriate. Modification may include abandoning the proposed site and selecting an alternative which will have a less significant impact on the environment, or modifying the project to mitigate the environmental impact of the proposed project. The comments, the responses to these comments, and any revisions to the proposed plan should be submitted to COPS for review. If the applicant recommends proceeding with the project in light of adverse comments on the environmental impact, the applicant must include the rationale for its recommendation.

## **Final Action on EA - COPS**

Unless a significant environmental impact surfaces through the public comments or other means, COPS will issue a FONSI and consider the content of the EA in its remaining decision(s) on the application to include the incorporation of any necessary mitigation measures as a condition of the COPS grant award.

If significant environmental impacts are identified, COPS will require an EIS. The EIS must meet the timing, content, and format requirements specified in the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations For Implementing The Procedural Provisions Of The National Environmental Policy Act. See Parts 1500 through 1508 of Chapter 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations for these requirements.

For some proposals, for example, because of their large size or expected sensitive or controversial impacts, significant environmental impacts may be apparent and there is no need to prepare an EA. Rather, the EIS process will be initiated immediately in these cases.

### **Estimated Time To Complete the EA Process**

The following provides a rough estimate of the time that should be scheduled for the EA process between the identification of an **appropriate** proposed site(s), and the completion of the EA process. The time required to complete the process may be extended if the draft EA is incomplete or insufficient, if the proposed project would adversely impact the environment, and/or if there is significant public opposition to the project.

#	Preparation of an EA	30-60 days
#	Review of draft EA and issue draft FONSI	7-14 days
#	Circulate EA and draft FONSI for public comment	30 days
#	Review comments and modify plans, as appropriate	7-14 days
#	Issues final action on EA	7 days
<b>Total time to be scheduled</b>		<b>81-125 days</b>

## Significant Impact

Significant as used in the National Environmental Policy Act requires considerations of both context and intensity.

**Context** means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant.

**Intensity** refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following should be considered in evaluating intensity:

- # Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.
- # The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.
- # Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.
- # The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.
- # The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
- # The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.
- # Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.
- # The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
- # The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.
- # Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

## **Content of An Environmental Assessment**

An Environmental Assessment (EA) is a concise public document that provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Environmental Impact (FONSI). It is designed to help public officials make decisions that are based on an understanding of the human and physical environmental consequences of the proposed project and take actions, in the location and design of the project, that protect, restore, and enhance the environment.

In completing an EA, it is important to understand the comprehensive nature of the impacts that must be analyzed. Consideration must be given to all potential impacts associated with the construction of the project, its operation and maintenance, any related projects, and the attainment of the project's major objectives. The latter requires an analysis of the environmental impacts of the activities to be conducted by the occupants and users of a planned facility. For example, if radio communication activities will be operated from a planned communication tower, the potential impacts of these intended communication activities must also be addressed in the appropriate sections of the assessment.

The amount of analysis and material that must be provided will depend upon the type and size of the project, the environment in which it is located, and the range and complexity of the potential impacts. The amount of analysis and detail provided, therefore, must be commensurate with the magnitude of the expected impact. The analysis of each environmental factor (i.e., water quality) must be taken to the point that a conclusion can be reached and supported concerning the degree of the expected impact with respect to that factor. Generally an EA can be completed in 10-15 pages in length, except in unusual cases where a proposal is so complex that a concise document may not be sufficient or where it is extremely difficult to determine whether the proposal could have significant environmental effects. In most cases, a lengthy EA indicates that an Environmental Impact Statement is needed.

The following describes the four required sections of an EA and what should be included in each section. Not every issue or potential impact will be relevant to each project. However, each environmental factor listed should be addressed with a brief explanation of the impact or why it is not relevant.

### **Purpose of and Need for the Project**

This section should briefly describe what the project is, to include a description of its major components and their size or design capacities, and why the project is needed. It should include a discussion of the activities to be conducted by any occupants or users of a proposed facility and indicate whether these are new activities or an increase/expansion of existing activities.

### **Environmental Impact**

This section provides the scientific and analytic basis for the comparison of alternatives. It should include a description of the project site and its present use, the surrounding land uses, and the directions and distances involved. The extent of the surrounding land to be considered depends on the extent of the impacts of the project, to include the activities to be conducted by any occupants or users of a proposed facility as well as

any related projects. For example, a related project would be a necessary extension or expansion of a water or sewer system or new road construction for access purposes. The environmental impacts of these related activities must also be assessed. Unique or sensitive areas must be pointed out, such as residential areas, schools, hospitals, recreational areas, historical sites, beaches, lakes, rivers, parks, floodplains, wetlands, dunes, estuaries, barrier islands, natural landmarks, unstable soils, steep slopes, aquifer recharge areas, important farmlands and forest lands, prime rangelands, endangered species habitats, or other delicate or rare ecosystems.

Attach location maps of the project area, as well as: a U.S. Geological Survey "15 minute" ("7 2 minute," if available,) topographic map which clearly delineates the area and the location of the project elements; the Federal Emergency Management Agency's floodplain map(s) for the project area; site photos; if completed, a standard soil survey for the project; and, if available, an aerial photograph of the site. When necessary for descriptive purposes or environmental analysis, include land use maps or other graphic information. All graphic materials should be of high quality resolution.

# **Air Quality:** Discuss the amounts and types of emissions to be produced from all aspects of the project and known indirect effects (such as increased motor vehicle traffic) which will affect air quality. Indicate the existing air quality in the area and if topographical or meteorological conditions hinder or affect the dispersal of air emissions. Evaluate the impact on air quality given the types and amounts of projected emissions, the existing air quality, and topographical and meteorological conditions. Discuss the project's consistency with the State's air quality implementation plan for the area, the classification of the air quality control region within which the project is located, and the status of compliance with air quality standards within that region. Cite any contacts with appropriate experts and agencies which must issue necessary permits.

Indicate whether silvicultural, agricultural, or other operations will employ open burning. If so, discuss whether local or State requirements exist for permitting such burning and generally discuss their content. If no permit requirements exist, discuss the type and quantity of burning to be undertaken and the methods to reduce smoke and to mitigate its adverse impacts.

# **Water Quality:** Discuss, in terms of amounts and types of effluents, all aspects of the project and known indirect effects which will affect water quality. Indicate the existing water quality of surface and/or underground water to be affected. Evaluate the impacts of the project on this existing water quality. Indicate if an aquifer recharge area is to be adversely affected. If the project lies within or will affect a sole source aquifer recharge area as designated by EPA, contact the appropriate EPA regional office to determine if its review is necessary. If it is, attach the results of its review.

Indicate the source and available supply of raw water and the extent to which the additional demand will affect the raw water supply. Describe the wastewater treatment system(s) to be used and indicate their capacity and their adequacy in terms of the degree of treatment provided. Discuss the characteristics and uses of the receiving waters for any sources of discharge. If the treatment system(s) are or will be inadequate or overloaded, describe the steps being taken for necessary improvements and their completion dates. Analyze the impacts on the receiving water during any estimated period of inadequate treatment.

Discuss the project's consistency with the water quality planning for the area, such as EPA's Section 208 areawide waste treatment management plan. Discuss the project's consistency with applicable State water quality standards to include a discussion of whether or not the project would

either impair any such standard or fail to meet antidegradation requirements for point or nonpoint sources. Describe how surface runoff is to be handled and the effect of erosion on streams.

Evaluate the extent to which the project may create shortages for or otherwise adversely affect the withdrawal capabilities of other present users of the raw water supply, particularly in terms of possible human health, safety, or welfare problems.

For projects utilizing a groundwater supply, evaluate the potential for the project to exceed the safe pumping rate for the aquifer to the extent that it would (1) adversely affect the pumping capability of present users, (2) increase the likelihood of brackish or saltwater intrusion, thereby decreasing water quality, or (3) substantially increase surface subsidence risks. For projects utilizing a surface water supply, evaluate the potential for the project to (1) reduce flows below the minimum required for the protection of fish and wildlife or (2) reduce water quality standards below those established for the stream classification at the point of withdraw or the adjacent downstream section. Cite contacts with appropriate experts and agencies that must issue necessary permits.

# **Solid Waste Management:** Indicate all aspects of the project and known indirect effects which will necessitate the disposal of solid wastes. Indicate the kinds and expected quantities of solid wastes involved and the disposal techniques to be used. Specify if any of these wastes are hazardous, toxic, or radioactive. Evaluate the adequacy of the disposal techniques especially in relationship to air and water quality. Indicate if recycling or resource recovery programs are or will be used. Cite any contacts with appropriate experts and agencies that must issue necessary permits.

# **Land Use:** Given the description of land uses as previously indicated, evaluate (a) the effect of changing the land use of the project site and (b) how this change in land use will affect the surrounding land uses and those within the project's area of environmental impact. Describe the existing land use plan and zoning restrictions for the project area. Evaluate the consistency of the project and its impacts with these plans.

# **Transportation:** Describe available facilities such as highways and rail. Discuss whether the project will result in an increase in motor vehicle traffic and the existing road's ability to safely accommodate this increase. Indicate if additional traffic control devices are to be installed. Describe new traffic patterns which will arise because of the project. Discuss how these new traffic patterns will affect the land uses described above, especially residential, hospitals, schools, and recreational. Describe the consistency of the project's transportation impacts with the transportation plans for the area and any air quality control plans. Cite any contact with appropriate experts.

# **Natural Environment:** Indicate all aspects of the project including construction, and known indirect effects which will affect the natural environment including wildlife, their habitats, and unique natural features. Cite contacts with appropriate experts. If an area listed on the National Registry of Natural Landmarks may be affected, consult with the National Natural Landmarks Program within the National Park Service of the Department of Interior and document these consultations and any agreements reached regarding avoidance or mitigation of potential adverse impacts.

# **Human Population:** Indicate the number of people to be relocated and arrangements being made for this relocation. Discuss how impacts resulting from the project such as changes in land use, transportation changes, air emissions, noise, odor, etc. will effect nearby residents and users of the

project area and surrounding areas. Discuss whether the proposal will accommodate any population increases and, if so, describe the potential impacts of these increases on the area's public and community services such as schools, health care, social services, and fire protection. Cite contacts with appropriate experts.

# **Construction:** Indicate the potential effects of construction of the project on air quality, water quality, noise levels, solid waste disposal, soil erosion and siltation. Describe the measures that will be employed to limit adverse effects. Give particular consideration to erosion, stream siltation, and clearing operations.

# **Energy Impacts:** Indicate the project's demand on the area's existing energy supplies. This discussion should address not only the direct energy utilization, but any major indirect utilization resulting from the siting of the project. Describe the availability of these supplies to the project site. Discuss whether the project will utilize a large share of the remaining capacity of an energy supply or will create a shortage of such supply. Discuss any steps to be taken to conserve energy.

# **Coastal Zone Management Act:** (*Complete only if coastal or Great Lakes State.*) Indicate if the project is within or will impact a coastal area defined as such by the State's approved Coastal Zone Management Program. If so, consult with the State agency responsible for the program to determine the project's consistency with it. The results of this coordination shall be described.

# **Historic Preservation:** The preparer shall detail the steps taken to comply with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations for implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and entitled, Protection of Historic Properties. (See pages 27043 through 27084 of volume 64 of the Federal Register dated May 18, 1999.) First, indicate that the National Register of Historic Places, including its monthly supplements, has been reviewed and whether there are any listed properties located within the area to be affected by the project. Second, indicate the steps taken, such as historical/archeological surveys, to determine if there are any properties eligible for listing located within the affected area. Summarize the results of the consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and attach appropriate documentation of the SHPO's views. If the proposed site is either located on Indian tribal land or an Indian tribe attaches religious and cultural significance to the proposed site, summarize the results of the consultation process with the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) or, if there is not a designated THPO, a representative designated by the affected Indian tribe. Attach appropriate documentation of the Indian tribe's views. Discuss the views of any other experts contacted. Based upon the above review process and the views of the SHPO and THPO, as appropriate, state whether or not an eligible or listed property will be affected.

If there will be an effect, discuss all of the steps and protective measures taken to comply with the Advisory Council's regulations. Describe the affected property and the nature of the effect. Attach to the assessment the results of the coordination process required by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations.

# **Wild and Scenic Rivers:** Indicate whether the project will affect a river or portion thereof which is either included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System or designated for potential addition to the system. This analysis shall be conducted through discussions with the appropriate regional office of the National Park Service or the Forest Service when its lands are involved, as well as the appropriate State agencies having implementation authorities. A summary of discussions held or

any required formal coordination must be included in the assessment and considered in completing the environmental impact determination for the project.

- # **Endangered Species:** Indicate whether the project will either (1) affect a listed endangered or threatened species or critical habitat or (2) adversely affect a proposed critical habitat for an endangered or threatened species or jeopardize the continued existence of a proposed endangered or threatened species. This analysis should be conducted in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service, when appropriate. Any formal or informal consultations conducted with these agencies as well as any State wildlife protection agency will also address impacts to Category I and Category II species. The results of any required coordination shall be described along with any completed biological opinion and mitigation measures to be required for the project. These factors shall be considered in completing the environmental impact determination.
  
- # **Floodplain Management and Protection of Wetlands:** Indicate whether the project is either located within a 100-year floodplain (500-year floodplain for a critical action) or a wetland or will impact a floodplain or wetland. If so, determine if there is a practicable alternative project or location. If there is no such alternative, determine whether all practicable mitigation measures are included in the project and document as an attachment these determinations and the steps taken to inform the public, locate alternatives, and mitigate potential adverse impacts. For more specific guidance, see the U.S. Water Resource Council's Floodplain Management Guidelines starting at page 6030 of volume 43 of the Federal Register dated February 10, 1978.
  
- # **Farmland Protection:** In consultation with the local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, indicate whether the project will either directly or indirectly convert important farmland identified in the Farmland Protection Policy Act and as further defined by the Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR Part 658. If a conversion may result, determine if there is a practicable alternative to avoiding it. If there is no such alternative, determine whether all practicable mitigation measures are included in the project. Document as an attachment these determinations and the steps taken to inform the public, locate alternatives, and mitigate potential adverse impacts.
  
- # **Coastal Barrier Resources:** *(Complete only if the project is in a State with components of the Coastal Barrier Resources System.)* Indicate whether the project is located within the Coastal Barrier Resources System. If so, indicate whether or not the project meets an exception criteria under the Coastal Barrier Resources Act and the results of any consultation with the appropriate regional office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior regarding the project's qualification as an exception.
  
- # **Other Impacts:** Discuss any of the following areas which may be relevant: noise, vibrations, safety, seismic conditions, fire-prone locations, radiation, fuel, electrical and aesthetic considerations. Cite any discussion with appropriate experts.
  
- # **State Environmental Policy Act:** Indicate if the proposed project is subject to a State environmental policy act or similar regulation. Summarize the results of compliance with these requirements and attach available documentation.
  
- # **Intergovernmental Review:** Attach the comments of State, regional, or local agencies (if this

review process is required for the project) and responses to all comments that deal with the subject matters discussed in this assessment or are otherwise of an environmental nature.

- # **Other Federal Agency Reaction to Project:** Indicate if another Federal Agency is participating in the project either through the provision of additional funds, a companion project, or a permit review authority. Summarize the results of the involved Agency's environmental impact analysis and attach available documentation.
- # **Cumulative Impacts:** Summarize the cumulative impacts of this project and any related projects. Give particular attention to land use changes and air and water quality impacts. Summarize the results of the environmental impact analysis done for any of these related projects and/or your discussion with the sponsoring agencies. Attach available documentation of the analysis.
- # **Adverse Impacts:** Summarize the potential adverse impacts of the proposal as pointed out in the above analysis.
- # **Mitigation Measures:** Describe any measures which will be taken to avoid or mitigate the identified adverse impacts. Analyze the environmental impacts and potential effectiveness of the mitigation measures. Such measures shall be included as special requirements or provisions to the offer of financial assistance or other appropriate approval document if the action does not involve financial assistance.
- # **Environmental Justice:** Describe the composition of the area affected by the proposal in terms of the presence of minority populations, low-income populations, and Indian tribes. Of the proposal's projected adverse environmental impacts, including adverse human health effects and project related social, cultural, and economic impacts, indicate which adverse impacts will affect any minority or low-income population(s) or Indian tribe(s) that may be present. Indicate whether any of these adverse impacts will be disproportionately high on a minority or low-income population(s) or Indian tribe. Describe any mitigation measure(s) that has been included in the proposal to lessen an adverse impact on an affected minority or low-income population or Indian tribe. Describe any special or targeted steps or procedures that were used to (1) inform affected minority or low - income populations or Indian tribes of the proposal; (2) obtain their views on the proposal; and (3) receive their input in the consideration of alternative sites or the development of any mitigation measures. Highlight any strategies being used to overcome linguistic, cultural, institutional, geographic or other barriers to these groups participation in the NEPA process. (For additional guidance in implementing Executive Order 12898 entitled, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, see the Council on Environmental Quality's publication entitled, Environmental Justice, Guidance Under the National Environmental Policy Act.)

## Alternatives

An important part of the planning for a facility is an investigation and evaluation of alternatives to the proposed project or action to assist decisionmakers in selecting the best alternative. This section is the heart of the EA. It should describe all **reasonable** alternatives **and their environmental impacts**. The alternatives might include alternative locations, alternative designs, and alternative projects having similar

benefits. Briefly describe alternatives which were eliminated from detailed study, and the reasons for their elimination. Consideration of a "No Action" alternative is mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act and provides a basis for comparison.

The alternatives should be presented in comparative form, thus sharply defining the issues and providing a clear basis for choice among the options for decisionmakers and the public. Identify the agency's preferred alternative or alternatives, if one or more exists.

## **Agencies and Persons Consulted**

The preparer should consult with appropriate experts from Federal, State, and local agencies, universities, and other organizations or groups whose views could be helpful in the assessment of potential impacts. In so doing, each discussion related to the degree of an impact should be summarized in the assessment as accurately as possible and include the name, title, phone number, and organization of the individual contacted, plus the date of contact. Related correspondence should be attached to the assessment.

Discuss any negative comments or public views raised about the project and the consideration given to these comments. Indicate whether a public hearing or public information meeting has been held and include a summary of the results and any objections raised. Indicate any other examples of the community's awareness of the project, such as newspaper articles or public notifications.

## **Recommendation and Signature(s)**

The assessment should be signed and dated by the preparer. For a draft EA prepared by an applicant, the preparer's title and relationship to the applicant must be indicated. If the preparer is not the same authorized representative of the applicant who executed the application or proposal to the agency, the latter individual must also sign the draft assessment but in the capacity as a reviewing official who is attesting to the accuracy of the project information presented as opposed to the adequacy of the environmental analysis conducted.

The scope of the recommendation to be provided is whether or not the proposal will have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment.