

# PRO 400-a: Preparing an EA

*For projects with FHWA or FTA as federal lead agencies. If FRA is your federal lead agency, the procedures will be different, talk to the Rail Office for guidance*

**Effective Date: June 2012**

**See also:** [EM Chapter 400-470](#)

**Start procedure:** Transportation project identified as needing an EA assigned to Region/Modal Project Office. The [Project Initiation meeting](#) has been completed. Project or regulatory changes since the ERS was signed have been reconciled, project classification confirmed with Federal Lead Agency, and the ERS updated as needed. The Federal Lead Agency has been determined.

**End procedure:** FONSI issued for project.

Actor	Action
Region/Modal Project Office or Region Environmental Coordinator (REC)	1. <b>Assigned</b> project and reviews ERS/ECS database, project description, limits, schedule, and budget.
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	2. <b>Contacts</b> HQ ESO NEPA Specialist to discuss preliminary environmental information, proposed project timelines, and general schedule for completion. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinates on <a href="#">NEPA/SEPA compliance strategy</a>.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	3. <b>Develop</b> <a href="#">EA project initiation letter</a> (if FHWA is federal lead)
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	4. <b>Schedules</b> and conducts Project Initiation Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See <a href="#">TSK 400 ab1: Project Initiation Meeting</a>.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	5. <b>Meets</b> with local and resource agency staff and the public to discuss the project. (Optional depending on project complexity.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal scoping meetings are optional for an EA, but recommended for complex and controversial projects. If you choose to do formal scoping, then you may also choose to publish a Notice of Scoping in the Federal Register or local newspaper.</li> <li>• <b>Major Decision:</b> Documents results of meetings (if held) in the project file.</li> </ul>

Actor	Action
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	<p>6. <b>Creates</b> commitment file for the project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Records environmental commitments made during the life of the project.</li> <li>• Describes methods to ensure commitments are actualized.</li> <li>• Includes commitments in the file.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	<p>7. <b>Drafts</b> outline for the EA and sends it to the HQ ESO NEPA Specialist for review.</p>
HQ ESO NEPA Specialist	<p>8. <b>Reviews</b> and comments on the draft outline.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Project Office or REC addresses comments and revises outline as needed.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	<p>9. <b>Submits</b> revised outline to the Federal Lead Agency for review and comment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addresses comments and revises outline as needed.</li> <li>• Secures Federal Lead Agency approval of outline</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	<p>10. <b>Determines</b> what Discipline Reports are needed. See <a href="#">TSK 400-ab2: Determining What Discipline Reports Are Needed</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Major Decision:</b> Document the list of discipline reports and the rationale for choosing these disciplines for detailed study in the project file.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	<p>11. <b>Conducts</b> analyses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write Discipline Reports if needed. See <a href="#">TSK 400-ab3: Writing Discipline Reports</a>.</li> <li>• Topics that are not complex, significant, and/or controversial are addressed in the environmental document and do not require completion of discipline reports. Supporting documentation may be included in the appendix of the environmental document.</li> <li>• Collects all of the Discipline Reports, and pertinent analyses from subject matter experts.</li> <li>• Reviews findings with Federal Lead Agency and confirms that an EA is the appropriate level of environmental documentation. This may be done by email or with a formal meeting.</li> </ul>

Actor	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Major Decision:</b> Include copies of all discipline reports and confirmation of level of environmental documentation in project file.</li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office or REC</b>	<p>12. <b>Prepares</b> the working version of EA. The EA typically includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An area map, vicinity map and site plan.</li> <li>● Photogrammetric maps (to depict the environmental setting).</li> <li>● Project Purpose and Need statement and logical termini.</li> <li>● Description of the existing environment, results of the environmental analysis, project benefits, measures taken to avoid and minimize impacts, and proposed mitigation measures.</li> <li>● All agency coordination letters required for the project, such as endangered species listings, prime and unique farmland determinations, Section 106 tribal consultation, archaeological/historic reports, and a summary of public involvement.</li> <li>● If the project involves Section 4(f) issues or is subject to USDOT approval, the draft Section 4(f) evaluation is included.</li> <li>● Authors should review the <a href="#">Comment Form Analysis Report</a> to assure that common document issues are addressed during writing.</li> <li>● HQ ESO Specialist is available to provide guidance and input on request.</li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office or REC</b>	<p>13. <b>Submits</b> the working version of the EA and discipline reports to appropriate technical specialist and assigned ESO NEPA Specialist for QA/QC review. A phased review of individual chapters and sections is often beneficial in expediting the process.</p>
<b>WSDOT Technical Specialists and ESO NEPA Specialist</b>	<p>14. <b>Reviews</b> for accuracy and consistency within document and sends comments to Project Office.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reviewers should review the <a href="#">Comment Form Analysis Report</a> to assure that common document issues are addressed during writing. This can expedite document review</li> <li>● Use <a href="#">WSDOT Comment Form</a>.</li> <li>● Return reviews and comments to Region/Modal</li> </ul>

Actor	Action
	Project Office or REC
<b>Region/Modal Project Office, REC, or Consultant</b>	<p>15. <b>Addresses</b> HQ ESO NEPA Specialist and subject matter expert's comments and revises document as needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If a consultant has been hired to write the EA, the Project Office reviews the comments first and provides guidance for responses.</li> <li>• <b>Major Decision:</b> File copy of documents comments and responses in the project file.</li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office</b>	16. <b>Submits</b> preliminary EA to Federal Lead Agency for review and comment.
<b>Federal Lead Agency</b>	<p>17. <b>Reviews</b> preliminary EA and returns document with comments to Project Office.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use <a href="#">WSDOT Comment form</a></li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office, REC, or Consultant</b>	<p>18. <b>Addresses</b> all of the federal lead agency's comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Returns revised copy to federal lead agency for legal sufficiency review.</li> <li>• Informs the HQ NEPA Specialist of comments received and changes made to the document.</li> <li>• <b>Major Decision:</b> Document changes in the project file.</li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office, REC</b>	<p>19. <b>Submits</b> preliminary EA to ESO NEPA Specialist for Federal Lead Agency legal review.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The review typically requires 30 days. More time may be required for very complex projects.</li> <li>• Receives comments from legal staff.</li> <li>• Sends comments to Project Office</li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office or REC</b>	<p>20. <b>Addresses</b> comments from legal review and revises EA as needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal Lead agency reviews documents and agrees that their comments have been adequately addressed.</li> <li>• Review may include additional review by legal staff. Repeat this step as needed.</li> <li>• The legal sufficiency review could determine that an EIS is required for the project. If so see <a href="#">PRO 400-b: Preparing an EIS</a>.</li> <li>• Major Decision: Document changes in the project file.</li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office or REC</b>	21. <b>Schedules</b> briefing with ESO Director through ESO NEPA Specialist.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See <a href="#">PRO 400-ab4: Conducting ESO Signature Briefing</a>.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	22. <b>Sends</b> the signed EA to the Federal Lead Agency for signature.
Federal Lead Agency	23. <b>Signs</b> the EA and returns it to the Project Office. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Federal Lead Agency signature date is the issuance date for the EA.</li> <li><b>Major Decision:</b> Include a copy of the signed EA in the project file.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	24. <b>Prints</b> and distributes copies of the EA and, if applicable, Draft Section 4(f) and 6(f) Evaluations and Draft Section 4(f) and 6(f) Evaluations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See the <a href="#">Environmental Document Distribution</a> Table.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	25. <b>Publishes</b> Notice of Availability of the EA and, if applicable, Draft Section 4(f) and 6(f) Evaluations for public review and comment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See <a href="#">REF 400-ab5: Notice of Availability</a></li> <li><b>Major Decision:</b> Document date NOA published in the project file.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	26. <b>Holds</b> Open House or Environmental Hearing* (if requested) – Environmental hearings are not required for EAs, but may be requested by an agency or organization. A hearing must be held if requested thus scheduling a hearing eliminates the risk of a project delay. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An open house or environmental hearing for the EA may be combined with another project hearing such as a design or access hearing as appropriate.</li> <li>See <a href="#">TSK 400-ab9: Environmental Hearing</a> and WSDOT <a href="#">Design Manual</a> Chapter 210 for hearing format and procedure.</li> <li>The Environmental Hearing cannot occur until 15 days after the NOA is published.</li> <li><b>Major Decision:</b> If a hearing is held, include a record of the hearing and comments received in the project file.</li> </ul>
Region/Modal Project Office or REC	27. <b>Revises</b> the EA to reflect changes in the proposed action, impacts, or mitigation measures resulting from agency review comments and the environmental hearing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe coordination efforts and summarize key</li> </ul>

Actor	Action
	<p>issues received from the public and agencies and how they were addressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conclude the Section 4(f) process and prepare the final evaluation for distribution with the revised EA or FONSI. Section 6(f) will conclude after the FONSI is issued.</li> <li>• If changes are significant, the ESO Director of Environmental Services will need to sign the title page of the revised EA.</li> <li>• If changes are minor and do not require the issuance of a Revised EA, the region and Federal Lead Agency may choose to issue an “erratum” as part of the FONSI, referencing minor changes in the EA.</li> <li>• The Federal Lead Agency may decide that the environmental impacts are significant and warrant completion of an EIS. If so see <a href="#">PRO 400-b: Preparing an EIS</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Major Decision:</b> document changes in the project file.</li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office or REC</b>	<p>28. <b>Prepares</b> draft Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See <a href="#">REF 400-a1: Typical Content of a FONSI</a></li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office or REC</b>	<p>29. <b>Sends</b> the draft FONSI to the federal lead agency for review and completion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FTA/FRA may choose to complete the FONSI and review it with WSDOT before signature.</li> <li>• FHWA usually requests WSDOT to revise the FONSI as directed and return it for signature.</li> </ul>
<b>Federal Lead Agency</b>	<p>30. <b>Prepares</b> and issues the FONSI by signing document and returns a signed copy to the Project Office.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Major Decision:</b> Document in project file.</li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office or REC</b>	<p>31. <b>Distributes</b> the FONSI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prints final copies of the Revised EA and the Final Section 4(f) Evaluation as appropriate, and FONSI.</li> <li>• Sends a copy to HQ ESO</li> <li>• Sends a copy to HQ Access and Hearings Office if an IJR was conducted either prior to, or as part of the analysis.</li> <li>• WSDOT practice is to circulate the FONSI and the Final Section 4(f) Evaluation in the same manner as the EA.</li> <li>• <b>Major Decision:</b> Document who received copies of the</li> </ul>

Actor	Action
	documents and notices in the project file.
<b>Region/Modal Project Office or REC</b>	<p>32. <b>Publishes</b> the Notice of Availability of the FONSI and the final Section 4(f) Evaluation in the same newspapers previously used on the project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If there is a significant risk of litigation consider posting issuing a NAT. See <a href="#">PRO 400-ab6: Legal Considerations</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Major Decision:</b> Record NOA and NAT dates in the project file.</li> </ul>
<b>Region/Modal Project Office or REC</b>	<p>33. <b>Documents</b> the decision by including the FONSI, the EA and supporting documentation in the project file and the administrative record. See <a href="#">TSK 400-ab7: Creating a Project File to Support the Administrative Record</a>.</p>

- 23 CFR 771.119(e) describes this as a “public hearing”. The WSDOT Design Manual calls it an “Environmental Hearing” to differentiate the event from the many different types of public hearings conducted by our agency. The purpose, format, and goals of an Environmental Hearing complies with all of the requirements of 23 CFR 771.119(e).