

Review of the Engineering Design Review Guideline to better align technical reviews to project complexity

Reclamation has experienced an increase in the number of engineering and design projects being performed by partners/stakeholders using private Architect-Engineering (AE) firms. This project delivery method is expected to increase under SO 3446. The Bureau of Reclamation Technical Service Center (TSC) has recognized a need to expand the internal technical guidance for reviewers to a broader framework that is both consistent and transparent in what types of projects are favorable for partner-lead engineering and design, and descriptive of the type and level of design reviews a non-Reclamation design partner can expect by Reclamation through the life of a project, from preliminary design through construction.

To meet this need, and to increase responsiveness and accountability, the TSC posted a draft concept for a *Review Guidelines for Design Activities Performed by Non-Reclamation Entities*, on the www.usbr.gov/SO3446 website in December 2025. This document aims to help Reclamation reviewers move from very thorough technical reviews for all designs, to one that defines the level of review based on project complexity and clearly defining roles and responsibilities for the project Engineer of Record and the Reclamation design review team to help streamline the review process. The proposed framework will culminate in new guidelines that define roles and responsibilities and set consistent expectations for Reclamation’s level of review, submittal requirements, and design requirements for designs performed by non-Reclamation entities. The TSC AE design review guideline team has considered the following factors when defining the level of design review:

- Asset ownership responsibilities
- Structure type
- Design Stage
- Funding Source
- Political importance
- Asset function
- Technical rigor
- Risk to the public

		Level of Review		
Type of Structure	A	2	3	3
	B	1	2	3
	C	1	1	2
		<i>Tie-into BOR Assett</i>	<i>BOR Title-Transferred Works</i>	<i>BOR Title-Reserved Works</i>
Figure 1		Ownership		

An initial matrix to determine the level of design review effort is shown in Figure 1, with emphasis on ownership responsibilities and the type of structure being designed.

The TSC plans to streamline the development of *Review Guidelines for Design Activities Performed by Non-Reclamation Entities* though a stepped, parallel approach. The first full draft will be posted in April 2026 for stakeholder review and feedback concurrently with the internal Reclamation review period, and will allow external partners to shape the guidelines and ensure alignment with on-the-ground local experience. A second draft, incorporating first draft comments, will follow. This will allow for progressive development and consensus-building opportunities between Reclamation and partnering entities.

systems to provide accurate, real-time data on staffing and financial resources. This digital approach eliminates duplicate data entry, improves transparency, and enables data-driven decisions about project scope and scheduling before commitments are made.

Together, these improvements allow TSC to adapt quickly to changing priorities, optimize resources, and forecast future needs. By modernizing workload management and resource planning, TSC is delivering technical services more efficiently and providing greater agility to meet the evolving needs of water and power users.