

# SHORING UP THE GUIDEBOOK



U. S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation

*Decision Process Guidebook*

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# Afterthoughts Contents

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# Methodology

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## *Approach*

This guidebook is part of the Reclamation Manual system's discretionary guidance. Instead of citing chapter and verse for mandatory regulations, we explained rationales for actions. We organized the guidebook to provide flexible advice and explore concepts and steps involved in the decision process. This allows readers to use it in any way they see fit: as a framework for a study, a backup checklist, a way to explain the decision process, etc.

To create an informal approach, we avoided bureaucratic words, academic jargon, and technical phrases; used the first and second person where possible; and provided sidebars and comics which highlight and counterpoint key points.

## *Participants*

To develop this guidebook and the accompanying training, a manager, writer, and facilitator (social analyst) were assigned directly as a core team. This core team recruited a large group of "contributors" as a support network. Contributors serve in a variety of functions within the process used to produce a guidebook:

- Interviews: As discussed in "Methodology" below, contributors serve as respondents in interviews to gather insights and approaches in the decision process.
- Reviews: Contributors constructively review drafts, outlines, and illustrations.
- Development: Contributors help develop outlines and illustrations.
- Application: Contributing teams use the guidebook and suggest ways to update and improve it.

A partial list of contributors is attached in the contributor's list. Several contributors wished to remain anonymous, and we decided that granting anonymity and confidentiality when requested would allow the contributors to provide more honest and useful insights into the decision process.

## ***Methodology***

The worksheet on the following page shows some of our thought process for developing the guidebook. We went through a lot of reiterations and versions during our process. We used a separate worksheet for each stage of the process.

Our methodology also evolved throughout the process. Originally, we had a large team of experienced individuals from various disciplines. The writing process got bogged down in lengthy discussions of specific wording when we needed to focus on ideas. So we held a series of conceptual discussions, allowing the writer to produce a preliminary reactive draft. Then we held meetings to interactively suggest changes. The resulting reactive draft was then given to core team members and contributors for positive suggestions. This worked well, but we needed an even wider range of input.

We developed detailed but flexible outlines for each section and step. These outlines formed the basis for generating questions for interviews. We used the interview notes, tapes, written materials provided by contributors, course materials, and independent research to develop reactive drafts (a process often jokingly referred to as "knocking off the rough edges"). The core team and peer review process polished the material with constructive comments, which were incorporated into a demonstration draft. The demonstration draft was sent to contributors for comment. We then incorporated these comments into a distribution draft.

The guidebook is designed to be placed in three-ring binders for easy updates. We want to respond to our audience, so the back page contains a response form and LAN addresses, phone numbers, and addresses to invite specific comments.

## WORKSHEET FOR STEPS IN OUR DECISION PROCESS

Need	Objectives	Resources/ Constraints	Options	Criteria	Alternatives	Evaluate	Select	Implement	Monitor and Adapt
Follow a clear decision → process	Provide a decision process tool	<b>Resources</b> Core team	No Action Quit	Meet the needs of our customers: – Region	No Action			We will use a small team as this will better provide a uniform approach and we can make the guidebook usable and flexible.	
Work with partners →	Provide overall view of decision process to fit other guidance systems	Contributors with experience	Standardized training course	– Area – TSC – Washington – Other agencies	Use a small team: – Lots of contributors – Research	Priority stack: 1. Usability 2. Flexibility 3. Uniform approach 4. Diverse perspectives 5. Timeframe 6. Coordination		Interview contributors	Three-ring notebook makes it easier to incorporate new changes
Flexible decision processes →	Develop flexible, usable system	Washington support	Adaptable training courses (2 hours-2 days)	– Stakeholders – Interested publics	– Develop training guidebook together			We will integrate comments, insights, and suggestions from as wide a range of perspectives as we can.	Work with others to find out new information and ideas.
Flexible guidance		Other government guides	Get something off the shelf	Stay within time and budget				Write sections	Monitor Reclamation Manual and adapt guidebook
Need to explain the decision → process – Partners, other agencies – Decisionmakers – New participants – Team members – Implementors	Communicate decision process clearly	Computers	Use another government guide	Simple	Use a large team with each person contributing one part			Send out drafts	Keep getting comments from application contributors
		Internet	Use a consultant	Understandable				Incorporate comments	
		Graphics	Use the decision processes in place	Easy and friendly to use	Put a bare framework up on the Internet and have people contribute their successes			Develop and give training	
								The Internet approach can be adapted in the future.	Incorporate comments

Need	Objectives	Resources/ Constraints	Options	Criteria	Alternatives	Evaluate	Select	Implement	Monitor and Adapt
<p>Evolving decision processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Reinvention efforts</li> <li>– Reclamation Manual system</li> </ul> <p>Solutions don't work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Skipped steps</li> <li>– Surprises</li> <li>– Politics</li> </ul>	<p>Promote an effective process</p> <p>Use as discretionary guidance under RM</p> <p>Show ways to avoid pitfalls</p>	<p>Editors</p> <p>Training materials</p> <p><b>Constraints</b></p> <p>Existing, changing regulations</p> <p>Time/staff days available</p> <p>Money</p>	<p>Combine with other efforts (NEPA handbook)</p> <p>Have a large team develop this</p> <p>Use existing decision process models</p> <p>Use a small team to write and develop</p> <p>Ask people what works</p> <p>Use what works from other models, works.</p> <p>Find the basic steps in the decision process</p> <p>Show how studies start</p> <p>Talk about overall issues</p> <p>Address difficult hurdles</p>	<p>Emphasize process</p> <p>Keep it flexible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Use as a group discussion</li> </ul>			<p>Keep people informed and follow up</p>	

# Glossary

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The following terms are common to many Reclamation activities. Understanding what they mean in the context of the decision process is not so common. Using these terms interchangeably or in ways that confuse the meaning will cause misunderstandings and delays at best. So take some time to think about what you mean and explain it to others.

**Acceptability:**

One of the "four tests of viability" (acceptability, completeness, effectiveness, and efficiency) that the Principles and Guidelines use as screening criteria. Principles and Guidelines define acceptability as "the workability and viability of the alternative plan with respect to acceptance by State and local entities and the public and compatibility with existing laws, regulations, and public policies."

**Action plan:**

A documented strategy for solving a problem. Updating action plans serves as a record for the problem solving effort and provides background for new players.

**Affected public:**

Groups, organizations, and/or individuals who believe that an action might affect them or who are otherwise involved in the decision process.

**Agenda:**

The sum of an individual's values, purposes, and goals, especially in relationship to your decisionmaking process.

**Alternative:**

A plan to meet one or more objectives. Alternatives are usually made up of two or more components or options that can work together to solve a complex problem.

**Analysis:**

Examining existing and/or recommended needs and their relationships to discover and display the outputs, benefits, effects, and consequences of a range of alternatives.

**Area:**

An area can be a range of: ideas, desires and needs, issues and concerns, causes and effects, or objectives and solutions. Areas can also be geographic, political, environmental, and technical.

**Area of influence:**

The area that either affects or is affected by the problem or solution (e.g., Settler Creek watershed, Settler Creek National Forest, townspeople, or Reclamation). See problemshed.

**Baseline:**

Conditions that currently exist.

**Baseline profile:**

Used for a survey of the environmental conditions and organisms existing in a region prior to unnatural disturbances.

**Beliefs:**

Long-held assumptions about the way needs are met (e.g., "people can change things through the system," or "politics drive decisions").

**Biological Opinion:**

Document which states the opinion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as to whether a Federal action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a threatened or endangered species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

**Budget:**

A statement of estimated funding needs in a certain time period to do a specified amount of work.

**California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):**

California's NEPA counterpart, with similar analysis, public comment, and reporting requirements.

**Community:**

A group that can act or influence.

**Comparison:**

Weighing the evaluated effects of alternatives to determine what best fits the needs. Comparison involves tradeoffs and priorities.

**Completeness:**

One of the "four tests of viability" (acceptability, completeness, effectiveness, and efficiency) that the Principles and Guidelines use as screening criteria. Principles and Guidelines define completeness as "the extent to which a given alternative plan provides and accounts for all necessary investments or other actions to ensure the realization of the planned effects. This may require relating the plan to other types of public or private plans if the other plans are crucial to realization of the contributions to the objective."



**Concern:**

A matter of importance to one or more individuals or groups.

**Consensus:**

Unanimous agreement and support. You can often build consensus through tradeoffs and compromises.

**Consent:**

Agreement not to actively oppose the process. You can often build consent by showing that there is a serious problem, the right groups are addressing it, and that the process to solve the problem is fair.

**Constraint:**

A limitation or restriction.

**Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ):**

A three-member council within the office of the President established by Title II of NEPA to provide overview capability of environmental conditions and recommend ways to achieve NEPA to the President. CEQ has published regulations (40 C.F.R. 1500-1508) implementing procedural provisions of NEPA.

**Cultural resource:**

Any building, site, district, structure, or object significant in history, architecture, archeology, culture, or science. This can extend to include a community's heritage and way of life.

**Decisionmaker:**

A participant who decides on a course of action. Who the decisionmakers are depends on the project, organizations involved, and jurisdiction.

**Decision process:**

A fluid, flexible process that solves problems step by step. Looking at each step in the decision process can lead to agreements, partnerships, actions, and policy to meet existing and future needs.

**Demographics:**

Study relating to the statistical study of human populations.

**Ecosystem:**

Complex system composed of a community of people, animals, and plants as well as the chemical and physical environment.

**Effect:**

An economic, social, environmental, and other consequence that can be reasonably foreseen from implementing an alternative.

**Effectiveness:**

One of the “four tests of viability” (acceptability, completeness, effectiveness, and efficiency) that the Principles and Guidelines use as screening criteria. Principles and Guidelines define effectiveness as “the extent to which an alternative plan alleviates the specified problems and achieves the specified opportunities.”

**Efficiency:**

One of the “four tests of viability” (acceptability, completeness, effectiveness, and efficiency) that the Principles and Guidelines use as screening criteria. Principles and Guidelines define efficiency as “the extent to which an alternative plan is the most cost-effective means of alleviating the specified problems and realizing the specified opportunities, consistent with protecting the Nation's environment.”

**Environment:**

Sum total of all biological, chemical, social, and physical factors to which organisms are exposed.

**Environmental analysis:**

NEPA defines this as a systematic process for considering environment factors in resource management actions.

**Environmental and Interagency Coordination Activities (EICA):**

An investigations line item in the General Investigations appropriation which funds internal and external technical studies and provides for coordination with agencies having primary responsibility for environmental and other matters. EICA provides funds to prepare studies prior to project investigations.

**Environmental assessment (EA):**

A NEPA compliance document used to determine if an action would have a significant effect on the human environment. If not, write a finding of no significant impact; if so, go through a more detailed analysis process and write an environmental impact statement (EIS). An EA covers the same ground as an EIS, only with less detail and research.

**Environmental impact statement (EIS):**

A NEPA compliance document used to evaluate a range of alternatives when solving the problem would have a significant effect on the human environment. The EIS is more than a document, it is a formal analysis process which mandates public comment periods. An EIS

covers purpose and need, alternatives, existing conditions, environmental consequences, and consultation and coordination.

**Existing conditions:**

Characteristics of the problemshed or planning area that exist at the time of the study.

**Failure:**

Not solving the problem or meeting the need. Continuing to spend money, time, and other resources on the problem without moving closer to solving it.

**Fatal flaw:**

Any problem, lack, or conflict (real or perceived) that will destroy a solution or process. A negative effect that cannot be offset by any degree of benefits from other factors.

**Finding of no significant impact (FONSI):**

A NEPA compliance document which affirms that an environmental assessment found that alternatives were evaluated and a proposed action would have no significant impact on the human environment.

**Future without:**

See “No Action Alternative.”

**Goal:**

An end or purpose.

**Go/No Go decision:**

A decision either to continue or terminate a process or action.

**Human environment:**

Natural and physical environment and the relationship of people with that environment including physical, biological, cultural, social, and economic factors in a given area.

**Impact:**

See “effect.”

**Implementor:**

A group, organization, or individual who helps carry out a plan.

**Implementation:**

Doing something. Translating a plan to action.

**Interrelationship:**

Any issue, project, action, or resource interacting with or directly or indirectly affecting something else.

**Issue:**

A perceived threat to long-held values. Concern is a related term.

**Iterate:**

To repeat. The problem solving process is iterative—you repeat the decision process steps at wider and broader levels.

**Measure:**

Defined unit or method you can use to analyze the relative desirability of an action.

**Milestone:**

A measurable action, state, or goal which marks a point of achievement on the way to solving the problem.

**Mitigation:**

NEPA defines mitigation as action taken to avoid, reduce the severity of, or eliminate an adverse impact. Mitigation can include one or more of the following:

- (1) Avoiding impacts
- (2) Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of an action
- (3) Rectifying impacts by restoring, rehabilitating, or repairing the affected environment
- (4) Reducing or eliminating impacts over time
- (5) Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments to offset the loss.

**Mythconception:**

A misconception that has evolved into a firmly held belief.

**Mythtruth:**

An idea (true or false) that has evolved into mythic proportions and beliefs. Rumors, reputations, half-truths, second guesses, unsupportable facts, etc. are myth-truths.

**National Register of Historic Places:**

Federally maintained register of districts, sites, buildings, structures, architecture, archeology, and culture.

**Needs:**

Demands on resources required to sustain values or standards (e.g., a safe, secure water supply, protection of ecosystem or species, economic stability).

**NEPA:**

National Environmental Policy Act. An act requiring analysis, public comment, and reporting for environmental impacts of Federal actions.

**No Action Alternative:**

A description of what would happen if you didn't take any actions to solve the problem. This description is used as an alternative as a base of comparison for action alternatives. This is also called the future without.

**NPDES:**

A National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit under section 402 of the Clean Water Act. This permit may be required if water quality could be affected by the proposed action.

**Objective:**

A specific statement of what the solution hopes to accomplish. A specific, measurable, timely goal to meet the need (e.g., ensure water from Settler's Creek at x gauge meets y standards).

**Opportunity:**

The potential to manage, conserve, develop, or re-allocate available resources to meet needs.

**Participants:**

Organizations, groups, or individuals who take part in the problem solving process.

**Partnership:**

Two or more groups, organizations, governmental entities, or individuals working together to achieve a defined purpose.

**Policy:**

A philosophy behind the actions.

**Principles and Guidelines:**

*Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies* from the Water Resources Council, March 10, 1983. This work provides the principles and guidelines for planning Federal water resources projects.

**Priority stack:**

The relative importance of activities or issues involved in a project, action, or situation.

**Problem:**

Situation where needs go unmet, issues are not addressed, or values are threatened (e.g., mine discharge in Settler's Creek).

**Problemshed:**

The content and context of a problem: a geographical, social, or conceptual area of related actions, influences, and needs (e.g., a watershed basin).

**Professional judgment:**

A decision made by a person knowledgeable in the relevant field of expertise, and generally based on that person's experience and all information reasonably available at the time. Available data and rationale for the decision should be documented.

**Purpose:**

Reason for doing something.

**Record of Decision (ROD):**

A NEPA compliance document that states the decision made, describes the environmental factors considered, the preferred plan, and the alternatives considered in the environmental impact statement.

**Resource:**

Something that is needed to solve or is affected by a problem.

**Round table review:**

A brief meeting between a few key players.

**Round tuit:**

A small round button with the letters "tuit." This token can be given when someone says "I'll do it as soon as I get around to it."

**Scoping:**

Consulting with affected and interested publics to define the extent of a study. The process of identifying issues, participants, areas to cover, available resources, and constraints.

**Scoping:**

Identifying the area, issues, and groups affected or involved by a given activity or subject.

**Screening criteria:**

A factor that determines whether an option, element, or alternative can solve a problem.

**Standardized methodology:**

Comparing all alternatives in the same way. Document the comparison.

**Success:**

Solving a problem, meeting current and future needs.

**Tradeoffs:**

Relative comparison of desirability associated with all alternatives. Tradeoffs consider the impacts on factors and resources significant to the decision. Then tradeoffs are measured by a standardized methodology to compare all alternatives to a no action alternative.

**Values:**

Principles, standards, or qualities of life considered worthwhile or desirable (e.g., freedom from fear of disease or drought).

**Weight:**

How important a decision factor is when compared with other factors.

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Note: Grantland cartoons are used by permission from Grantland Enterprises Inc., 460 Bloomfield Avenue, Montclair, New Jersey 07042, (202) 509-7688.

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## **Contributing Offices**

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Montana Area Office

Phoenix Area Office

Platte River Area Office

Program Analysis Office

Texas-Oklahoma Area Office

Upper Colorado Region

Washington Office

### ***Other***

Environmental Protection Agency, Region 8, San Francisco

International Association for Impact Assessment

International Association of Public Participation

Office of Environmental Compliance, San Francisco

Office of Personal Management

Water Environmental Federation

World Bank

## **COMMENTS INVITED**

This guide is intended to be interactive. We would welcome your comments. We would particularly like to know:

- Does this guide fit your concept of appropriate guidance for the decision process?
- How can we improve it?
- Who might benefit from this guide?
- What are some of the difficulties you have faced in participating in decision activities? How did you resolve these difficulties?
- What tips for successful processes and solutions would you pass on to others?
- How much experience have you had in collaborative decisionmaking?

Please send comments to:

Guidebook Comments  
Bureau of Reclamation  
Attention: D-8250  
PO Box 25007  
Denver CO 80223-0007

*We appreciate your taking the time and effort to let us know what you think about this series. You can also call directly:*

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