# STARTING OFF WELL

## Decision Process Guidebook

U. S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation

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# Foundation Contents



**Use the *Foundation* as a guide for studies to determine whether or not to proceed with full-scale work (e.g., appraisal studies).**

**Use the *Foundation* as a checklist for studies that are already authorized and funded.**

# *Part 1: Figure Out the Problem*

*Before initiating the study*

# Part 1: Figure Out the Problem

Most of the time, you will be working under a directive to solve an already-identified problem from a sponsor, the Congress, or the Administration. However, it is incumbent upon you as a problem solver to clearly define the problem and identify other, related problems. Get together with others to lay a foundation for their solutions, too.

## WHY?

Reclamation needs to anticipate and address problems as (if not before) they emerge. In this way, we can solve problems before they become so entrenched that people become polarized and actions can't be taken. The more extreme the problem, the easier it is to get locked into extreme positions.

Problems don't exist in a vacuum but occupy a **problemshed**—so solving one problem is a little worse than useless if other problems sabotage that solution. A holistic, coordinated approach is often necessary to ensure that all solutions work together to effectively meet interrelated needs. The problemshed's context of related actions, influences, and concerns provides the background against which the problem will be analyzed and in which the solution will operate.

## WHO?

Who should identify problems and get studies started? Each person in every level and discipline has an opportunity to identify problems. Successful decisionmaking will provide a forum for expressing these unique perspectives. **Funding** for early problem identification and scoping of potential investigations is usually available in general administrative accounts. In the General Investigations budgets, for example, these activities are funded by the Environmental and Interagency Coordination Activities or General Planning studies.

Leaders identify and prioritize problems that fulfill Reclamation's mission so that funds can be allocated to solve them. Also, they decide how to work on problems (either within a partnership, as a cooperating agency, or as a lead agency). They follow up on problems that don't fit Reclamation's role by referring these problems to others.

**PROBLEMSHED:**

**A geographical, social, or conceptual area of related actions, influences, and needs (e.g., a watershed basin). To determine a water quality problem's problemshed, for example, you might ask: What is the watershed basin (e.g., geographic, physical boundaries)? Who and what use the water (e.g., farmers, trees, fish)? What functions do those users serve (e.g., agricultural, ecosystem, etc.)?**

**Thus, to look at the water quality problem, you have to interact with water supplies to users, economic parameters, downstream water flows, upstream land use and impacts, etc.**

**FUNDING:**

**Funding for preliminary scoping is available from several general funding authorities, depending on the program.**

**Talk with people "in the know" about problems you've identified.**

This followup helps maintain relationships, trust, and credibility with process participants, organizations, and other agencies.

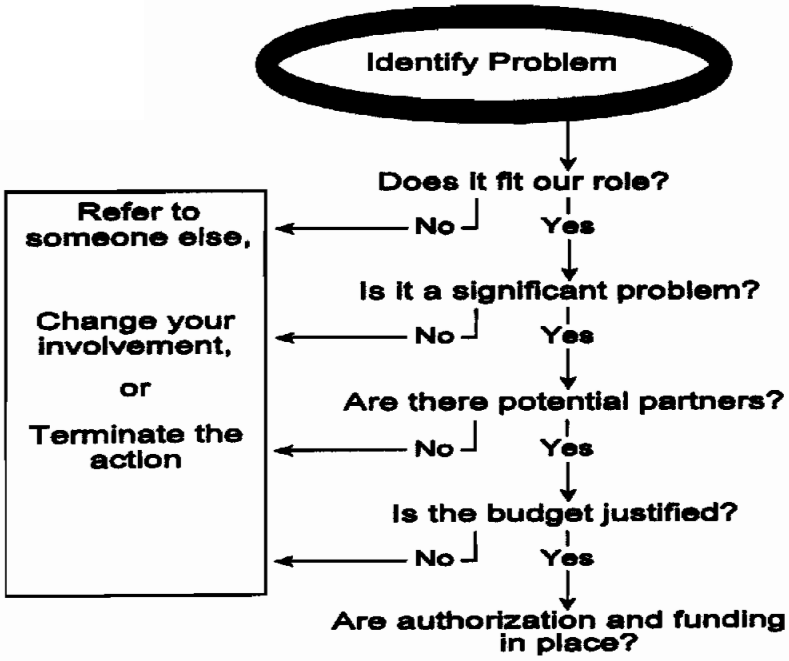
Technical professionals are generally in the best position to identify and address problems within the context of current studies. When related needs in the problemshed are addressed, solutions will be supported, the team will gain credibility, and other groups will be more willing to work with the team. Following up on these related needs will help ensure that the current solution continues to work.

## WHAT HAPPENS?

**To get effective solutions, daily invest the minutes needed to:**

- **Identify and address problems**
- **Keep communications and information up-to-date**
- **Inform others who can help direct the problem**

Identifying the problem and determining Reclamation's role does not necessarily entail actively addressing the problem. We see if a problem is significant and within our role. Then we choose to address or ignore it. Ignoring the problem avoids the immediate cost of problem resolution but may create more problems and incur more costs later on. Addressing the problem entails the courage to implement the alternative finally selected. Without that courage, we should not begin the study. The flow chart below shows the go/no go decision points of getting started.



# *Action 1: Identify Issues and Problems*

## PURPOSE

- To consciously recognize issues and concerns
- To address potential needs before they grow to be unmanageable
- To identify all related problems so solutions can work

**If you don't look at the whole picture, you could solve a problem one place and make it worse somewhere else.**

## WHY?

Once a particular problem is identified, it can take years to work through the budget cycle for funding (see "Context" in the *Overview).* Constantly looking far ahead so that we can start addressing concerns before they become crises is essential!

More importantly, you can't solve a problem in a vacuum. Identifying issues and concerns that influence your solution will improve the odds of implementing a sustainable solution that meets current and future needs.

**Problems arise from a series of interconnected events, actions, and needs in the area. The context thus reaches far beyond the local community.**

## HOW?

Chances are that the issues and concerns will find you. Participants, organizations, and agencies have already seen an ongoing/future problem or opportunity and are working on finding ways to address it. Open **communication** lines are the most effective way to identify problems early:

- *Internal.*—Keep your antennas plugged into the Secretary's and Commissioner's offices to become aware of what issues they want to address and how they want to address them. Use their objectives and the agency mission as guidelines to identify problems. Also, communicate with other offices and teams to keep track of the atmosphere where the problem is. Talk with colleagues to see if similar problems keep cropping up—perhaps you can identify patterns and address issues more effectively in a comprehensive program..

**COMMUNICATION:**

**You may not have the resources necessary to do everything on a study. However, skimping on building communication bases and rapport will erode relationships and ultimately the entire study. You won't get the information you need for your activity, and you will close down an invaluable early warning system.**

**Make local contacts and daily communication a priority that gets funded. See "Communication" in the *Overview.***

**Our staff begins at ground zero, but the problems have a long history before we get involved.**

- *External.*—Other Federal, State, and local agencies; partnerships; organizations; and interest groups can help identify problems. If you have a working relationship with employees in these organizations, it is easier to communicate with them, share details of problems, and discuss the background contexts or problemsheds. Participants, technical experts, affected publics, and interested observers will help identify problems and fill in the context. You may want to look at newsletters and records from government and private organizations. At times, you may be able to refer issues to other agencies (and vice versa); or you may want to bring that agency into a partnership to cooperatively solve the related problem.

**GRASSROOTS RELATIONSHIPS:**

**Forging grassroot relationships is like building an interstate highway system—making it easier to move information and develop effective partnerships.**

- *Grassroots.*—Local organizations and people may also identify problems. Develop **grassroots relationships** with key people through consistent, frequent communication. Then people will be more likely to talk about problems that we may have a role in solving. Grassroot relationships are also vital to promoting an honest and open atmosphere where you can work together to identify and address problems.

- *Study analyses.*—Within ongoing studies, analyze related concerns, physical interrelationships, ecosystem dynamics, and human influences within the problemshed.

- *Projections.*—Economic development, demographics, and biological and physical resource trends will help highlight potential problems.

- *Legislation.*—Keep an eye out for legislative actions that may identify problems, mandate or affect other solutions.

Use every means of communicating and keeping in touch that you have. If the method has some practical or purposeful use in identifying activities which would be appropriate for us to be involved in, then the method is well worth keeping.

# *Action 2: Determine Our Role*

## PURPOSE

- To find out who can most effectively solve the problem
- To determine if the problem fits within Reclamation's mission, role, and current policy

## WHY?

Determining Reclamation's role in a study is the first step to ensure a good return on our investment. Figure out who is best equipped to handle the job to reduce wasted efforts and find more efficient solutions.

## HOW?

The Federal role is defined as the set of activities that we are best suited to carry out or that are in the interests of the Nation as a whole under a Federal agency's authority.

### *Define Reclamation's Role*

First, determine what Reclamation's role would be. Reclamation provides a service—to manage, develop, and protect water and water-related resources. This role encompasses a great many technical activities (e.g., ensuring that dams are safe, exploring new technologies for groundwater recharge) and many ways of doing business (e.g., working formally and informally with partners, other agencies, and water users).

This mission is the foundation to determine Reclamation's potential roles, such as:

- Partners working with other stakeholders to solve complex, interconnected problems
- Participants bringing something to the table to help define and resolve problems

**Choosing the right problem to solve is the halfway mark to success.**

**Work with others to identify places where we can contribute.**

- Facilitators promoting both formal and informal communication among diverse participants
- Leaders with a broad perspective
- Technical experts providing needed expertise
- Compliance experts, ensuring actions adhere to Federal regulations

**Reclamation provides both a broad expertise to work with the larger picture of ecosystems and watershed and a focused expertise to work on specific tasks.**

## *Determine Appropriateness*

Reclamation's involvement is justified when real needs fall within the scope of our mission and authority. Go beyond the surface concerns to uncover the real reasons why we would be involved. Communicate with groups with similar roles.

Other questions are:

- Is there a need for Federal/Reclamation involvement?
- Does it relate to managing water and related resources?
- Is it tied to something we've done in the past?
- Is it a matter of national, regional, local interest?
- Can we offer technical assistance and expertise?

**The point is to solve the problem—not whether you are the solo star or a voice in the chorus.**

These clues by themselves do not mandate a Federal role, but they may indicate the need for participation. This role must be considered on a case-by-case basis. You will need to be flexible enough to change your involvement as policy changes and you know more about the issues.

### *Go/No Go*

If other participants do not believe that Reclamation has a role, you still need to determine if, indeed, there is a role. If you determine Reclamation has a role or if the role is mandated by the Congress or the Administration (e.g., safety of dams, authorizing legislation), stay at the table and explain why it would be irresponsible to leave. Conversely, if the role is optional (others can solve the problem and we are not mandated to do so), bow out of the process.

If you determine that the problem does not fit Reclamation's role, don't just walk away. Find out **who can deal** with it and follow through to ensure that the problem is being addressed. People who brought the problem forward are then more likely to work with you in the future.

**WHO CAN DEAL:**

**It may not be Reclamation's role, but it is someone's role.**

## *Action 3: Understand the Problem*

### PURPOSE

- To provide a preliminary idea of what the problem is
- To see what you want to do about it

### WHY?

Without a clear definition of the problem, no one can take actions to solve it. Carefully defining the problem will focus your efforts and reduce waste.

**This is the first step toward getting funding. Decisionmakers at every stage of the budget process confront a plethora of problems to address, so they must weed out the ones that are poorly defined or are not a priority.**

### HOW?

At this point, remember you need to seek official sanction to address the problem. Keep in touch with decisionmakers to make sure that you can continue to pursue the problem and find funding sources. See if you can help others justify their involvement at this point by showing the significance, the current and future impacts of the problem, and the potential benefits of solving the problem.

## *Define the Problem*

At this stage, you simply need a ballpark definition you can shape and redefine later. This does not mean that you are taking a wild guess, nor does it mean that you are seeing only part of the picture. Clearly defining the problem now will build a foundation that will be immensely valuable later.

**Being aware of what is happening in the area will help you see the problem's context and identify the root causes.**

### ☑ Communicate

Everyone sees the problem differently, so pull in a wide range of perspectives from all stakeholders at all levels. Listen to existing partnerships—they will have an idea about this and related problems.

Get involved in defining the problem early. This way you will be able to determine how people perceive the priorities and needs—to determine what is important to them.

**Preventative checkups are cheaper than emergency care, and less of a risk for everyone involved.**

### ☑ Extrapolate

Extrapolate from what you know. Compare your action with other similar problem-solving efforts. Where there are similarities, see how far they go. Where there are differences, think about what these differences might mean for the study (e.g., if this particular selenium problem involves an additional source of selenium or affects commercial recreation on a reservoir where the other study didn't, then what affect might that have?)

### ☑ Document

Document the findings so far to allow decisionmakers to determine whether or not to pursue the problem. This document should include:

- *The overall picture.*—Define the problemshed. Determine what the demands are on the resources and how you will meet those demands. Consider both the local context and the interrelationships with other influences, actions, and problems on a wider scale.

- *Needs to address.*—Define the problem in terms of the number of people who may be involved (and who may gain or lose). Will the solution address one need or many? Some descriptions will be general (e.g., river basin management, water use allocation) while others may be quite specific (e.g., improve flows in Alfalfa National Wildlife Refuge, power rewinds).

- *Unique aspects.*—Every decision is driven by unique, finite facts. Cookbook approaches and automatic assumptions can prove deadly at this point. Consciously looking for what IS different about this problem will help you identify key issues, concerns, and resources early.

- *Future projections.*—To manage resources effectively, look at the long term. Talk to demographers, economists, and other experts to predict what the resources and demands on the resources will be.

- *Reclamation's role.*—To showcase this problem as a priority that Reclamation needs to fund, show how the problem relates to our mission.

**Preconceived definitions of the problem will invariably miss the real problem.**

## *Refine the Objectives*

Objectives will change and develop as the process progresses. But starting out with an idea of where you are going will help focus the study and allow others to react to something concrete—thus providing better, more useful input early in the process. Find standards or measurements that mean something:

- **Numerical** measurements (water quality, instream flows)

- **Political** measurements (support, potential partners)

Lay out some clear planning objectives: what, when, where. The more specific the measurements and timeframes, the better. (These can always change later when you get more information.)

**EXAMPLE:**

**Problem: Water quality deteriorating in aquifer**

**Objectives: Improve water quality to meet X standards**

**Constraints: Recharge laws, farming activity, hydrologic recharge rates, availability of well data, etc.**

**PRIORITY:**

**Priority boils down to the amount of pressure from decisionmakers that you are under to get the job done. Higher priorities command more attention, staff, and money at a given time. Lower priority items aren't dropped completely, but they have fewer allocated resources.**

**Remember that there will always be another effort with a higher priority.**

**SIGNIFICANCE:**

**"Unless you can argue convincingly that failure to solve the *problem* in question will reduce someone's *quality of life* significantly, below what it is, or below what it *could be*, or below what it *ought to be*—you'll have great difficulty convincing the American public that the *problem* in question is a serious one."**

***Citizen Participation Handbook***

### *Look at Constraints*

Examining constraints at this early stage will help shape the study and steer clear of fatal flaws. Check out existing regulations. Look at the constraints on similar actions. Chances are they will apply to your process as well.

### *Determine the Priority*

**Priorities** determine funding and actions. While the Administration and the Congress will make the final call on funding and priority, your first cut will provide a useful perspective.

Priority starts at a local level as community-based issues consistent with Reclamation's mission are listed. This list provides a backdrop to determine which watershed issues and regional needs are most pressing or important. Check out public involvement efforts on projects, public affairs offices, and other internal resources as well as news media and local organizations.

Issues are then examined on an increasingly larger scale to determine priority (local, regional, national). Examine the Administration's (President's, Secretary's, and Commissioner's) statements of public policy and programs as well as the Congress' mandates to determine the issues that are being emphasized (e.g., wetlands, water conservation, waste water reuse, and water quality). Call letters and previous appropriations will also point out priority work.

## LOOK FORWARD

Ask yourself: if we solve this problem here, will we just create one in another area? Keep this question on your desk—you'll probably want to re-answer it throughout the process.

Take yet another look to make sure that what you have defined actually is **significant**. If not, be willing to say so. It may be that a special interest group has a specific agenda or that circumstances have changed. If not, you might want to refer it to other local agencies who can deal with it on a smaller level or to a partnership dealing with

similar problems. Always look around and see if this small problem is part of a larger issue within the watershed.

If it is significant, keep going to Action 4. Emphasize why addressing the problem is important by showing the depth and breadth of the need that the solution would meet. Use the problem description to explain why resources should be spent to address these problems, needs, and opportunities to help decisionmakers effectively set priorities.

Make sure the people who identified the problem know the status of actions.

## *Action 4: Identify Potential Partners and Funding*

### PURPOSE

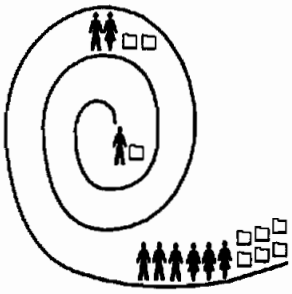
- To find potential sources of **support**, funding, and participation
- To identify participants

**People *support* what they understand and understand what they are involved in.**

### WHY?

Solutions only work if enough people want them to. Sharing the investment promotes a more effective process. Participants who invest in the process with information, time, resources, and funding are less likely to stop the process and more likely to negotiate so that a solution can be reached. For example, a group promoting ducks might be interested in providing duck habitat. Approach those most likely to oppose your project with possible cooperative ventures in areas they care about. The more potential partners and cost sharers, the more chances of being funded.

**People will commit to solving a problem only when nearly all participants agree the problem is worth solving, worth investing *their* resources in solving, and isn't going to go away in "a reasonable amount of time."**



**Start small and gather more people and data through each iteration.**

## HOW?

### *Identify Potential Partners*

Energy spent locating potential partners will be amply repaid. Find traditional and nontraditional partners by:

#### ☞ Researching

Directories of existing partners, organizations, and government entities; media; universities; and Internet are just some sources of potential partners. Meet with potential partners to determine their level of interest—and ask them to identify still more potential groups. Work with grant writers and funding experts in these groups to find funding sources (e.g., public and private grants, cost sharing, and cooperative agreements).

#### ☞ Getting the Word Out

Workable solutions need local participation. Turn to experts in Reclamation (public affairs, public involvement, etc.) to identify avenues of communication. Get articles in local papers and contact local groups to find participants who know the particular area and can help identify who should/could be involved. Legislative representatives from that district may also help.

### *Get People Involved*

Getting the commitments you need for money, resources, staff, and data (both internally and externally) may be difficult. You need to get decisionmakers and people with resources to understand the issues and their importance.

**Get players involved early.**

#### ☞ Involvement Strategies

- *Expanded assumptions.*—Talk to participants as equals. Don't assume that their assumptions are set in stone—or even that they have a set of assumptions about the activity. Groups you see as adversaries may be potential partners.

- *Common ground.*—Find something that potential participants can all agree on. This will focus the study, give people something concrete to work on, think about, and get excited about solving.

- *Worth the risk.*— People risk personal or organizational credibility if the process fails. Understand these risks, paint a realistic picture, and explain why you think it is still worth their risk.

**Getting many perspectives now will cut down chances of missing something later.**

- *Show-me.*—Bring them out to see the problem first hand. Working a trip into their travel schedule provides a concrete idea of what you are trying to do.

- *Mission.*—Find their values and motivate through talking informally and looking at their other activities. Either demonstrate how your solution fits within their agenda or look elsewhere for commitments.

**People get involved because they believe something is at stake that will change the way they live.**

- *Involvement.*—Get them personally involved. If you send something up to them, it's just another idea. If they develop the idea, they have ownership in it. Have them make suggestions on what to do about the problem and act on those suggestions.

- *Other pressures.*—Look at the potential partners' other pressures to understand their positions. These could include pressure from strong State water resource agencies, public outcries, and lobbying efforts from organizations and groups. Developing an ongoing rapport with these organizations will help you coordinate efforts to work within those pressures.

### ☑ Participation Strategies

Once participants agree that action would be a good idea, meet with everyone (either individually or all at once—depending on the scope and complexity of the action). Clearly lay out what you will do and ask what they will do. (If they won't commit to an action, try for a letter of principle saying that they support your effort, that your agenda is consistent with their agenda.)

**Keep a list of participants and keep them informed of major developments.**

**To assume that Reclamation should maintain the lead on every effort is arrogant, unfounded, and counterproductive. To help effectively solve problems, we must work with other governmental and nongovernmental entities.**

### *Draft Agreement*

Set up a draft agreement, contingent on funding (both Federal and non-Federal). This may range from a formal agreement among many parties to an informal one between two groups. Make sure everyone understands the implications of these agreements. Allow room for the inevitable changes and communicate those changes quickly. At least cover purpose, roles, time and resources needed, timeframes, responsibility, and approaches to cost sharing. This draft agreement can form the backbone of the action plan discussed in Part 2, Action 5.

### *Go/No Go*

If you cannot find anyone willing to think about participating, rethink the problem. Have you defined it well? Is it that significant? Could someone else handle it more effectively?

If you can't get another entity interested in cost sharing, then the action may not be necessary or may lack the necessary support.

**Your budget will drive how much you can do.**

## *Action 5: Estimate Needed Resources*

### PURPOSE

- To give decisionmakers and participants an idea of what is needed to solve the problem
- To get a basis for requesting funds from potential partners, the Congress, and other entities

### WHY?

Carefully estimating the amount of work and resources needed to develop workable solutions is probably the most crucial step in getting funding. A low estimate may stop the study halfway through (thus solving nothing) or require more money (thus eroding the agency's credibility and

reputation for being able to get things done). A high estimate may be reduced or passed over in favor of more "economical" problems to solve. A high budget for one problem may also preclude addressing other important problems.

## HOW?

Forecasting tools, budget computer software programs, and research are important tools to use in estimating a budget. People already involved in the problem are your most important tools. Their ideas on the extent of the problem, the necessary research, and potential solutions will help clarify what needs to be done and how many resources will be needed to do it. Also, they will be able to identify others who may be involved and who may contribute to the effort—a vital piece of the estimating puzzle.

**Budgets are intuitive (but practical) guesses that come out of the air.**

### *Base Budget on Needed Work*

Start with your definition of the problem and brainstorm what work might be involved. Look at the actual and proposed budgets for some similar processes. While your process will be unique, you can use this information to create a rule of thumb. Check your estimates with decisionmakers and professional experts who have worked on similar estimates.

**Budgets are manifestations of problems and opportunities.**

Consider how much staff time (technical, coordination, and support), money, and equipment (computers, sensors, etc.) will be required. What actions will you have to take? What will they cost?

### *Use Realistic Measures*

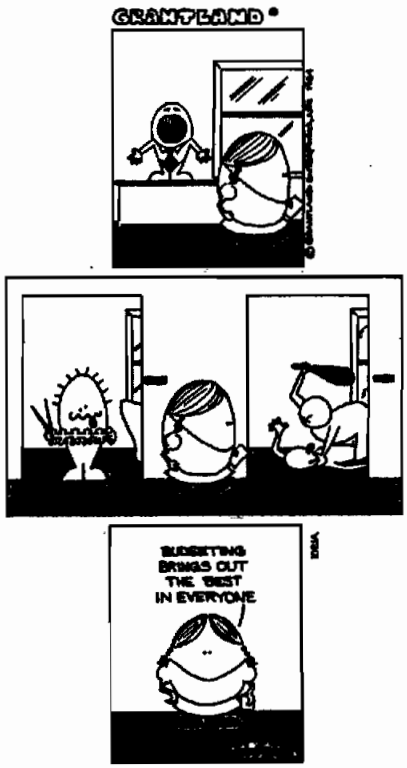
There will always be more data and questions to research and solve. Figure out what information you can address and what you really need to solve the problem.

### *Consider Political Realities*

Planning budgets must be in sync with political realities. Find out what kinds of actions are doable in the current political climate. Future bills in the Federal, State, and local legislatures may shed light on this or similar processes. Show how your process would interact with processes in the same general location—which may be funded already. External interests may lobby legislatures for funds.

### *Find Low-Cost Options*

Many government agencies, private organizations, and universities already have the data you need. Universities may provide credit for a student to do the study. Internet news groups and data bases are a powerful source of data. Make looking for existing data a way to involve everyone.




## LOOK FORWARD

Make sure that the budget is proportional to the problem.

If you can't justify spending the money to help accomplish Reclamation's mission, you may need to refer the problem elsewhere, redefine the problem, or re-examine Reclamation's role in participating in solving the problem.

Remember, this is a preliminary estimate. The budget will need to be reexamined and refined at regular intervals throughout the process. These periodic checkups will help keep the budget on top of new developments and changes in scope, partners, actions, and problems.

# *Action 6: Obtain Authority and Funding*

## PURPOSE

To get consent from the public (through congressional authority and funding) to proceed with the solution.

## WHY?

Without this step, the entire decision process is moot. Without authority, Reclamation cannot proceed. Without funding, Reclamation cannot provide the resources to act in a given area. Funding and authority are tools which express what decisions have been made and which track how decisions are carried out.

## HOW?

### *Authority*

Either the Administration or an individual senator or representative can propose legislation to authorize a program, study, or activity. The **authorization** can be limited to studying a problem and potential solutions rather than implementing a solution, with the implementation to be determined and submitted for a separate authorization. Authorization may be under the umbrella of a larger program.

**AUTHORIZATION**

**A Federal law that grants Reclamation permission to do something. It is NOT an appropriation, a requirement, a state law, or a supervisor's instruction.**

An authority is a Federal law that grants permission to Reclamation. It is NOT an appropriation, a requirement, a state law, or a supervisor's instructions.

Section 10 of the P.L. 89-72 Federal Water Project Recreation Act of July 9, 1965 requires specific authorization of feasibility reports to Congress. If you are doing an investigation which will require congressional approval (a law) or a Federal appropriation to implement the results of the study, you are doing a feasibility study. Look at the site-specific authorization. Consult with your solicitor.

To get authority to do a feasibility study:

1. Ask if you need it.

   Carefully consider whether you are really doing a feasibility study. What is the purpose of the study? What are the results going to be? Are you going to ask Congress for funds to translate these results into reality?

**LEGAL SOURCES**

**An introduction to general laws is available on the internet at http://ww.usbr.gov/laws.**

**Blue books — Contain Reclamation laws through 1982.**

**Green books — Contain early construction and feasibility authorizations (memoranda from the Secretary and President)**

**You need to keep your own file of laws since 1982.**

2. See if you already have it.

   Look at specific authorizations and appropriations for projects to see if authorizations have been provided or rescinded. For example, if you are doing a water conservation study on the Green Apple Reservoir, look at the Green Apple Dam authorizations.

3. If you need it, ask Congress for it.

   Congress will have to pass a law authorizing this study. Make your request as broad as possible to allow flexibility and not eliminate options prematurly. Ask for a study by location—not by partner, purpose, or specific solution. Avoid seeking authority through a law that appropriates money (this can limit your options and may only be valid for length of the funding).

## *Budget*

You have a preliminary definition of what the problem is, how much it will take to solve it, and how important it is in the overall scheme of Reclamation activities. Funding determinations will now be made through the budget process. (See "The Federal Budget" in the *Overview* for details on this process.)

**Be flexible to change with changes in congressional philosophies and methods.**

Knowing fund allocation procedures will help you determine how and when funds should be spent and help find ways to provide flexible responses to change. Educate managers at all levels so that managers understand what you are doing with the current budget and can incorporate these approaches in future budgets.

## *Go/No Go*

Everything that Reclamation does is determined by authority and funding. Your course of action will depend on whether or not you receive authority and funding:

### With Both

If the situation changes significantly or if you determine that other actions are needed, go back through the Commissioner's Office to the committees that appropriated the money and propose a new course of action. Be sure to justify this change—explain why things have changed and why you think it would be better to do something else.

**The budget structure does not shape decisionmaking—decisionmaking shapes the budget structure.**

### Without Authorization

Not getting authority (either under a general or specific program) means that the Congress and the Administration have decided that there is no Reclamation role. Risk communicating with decisionmakers—ask direct questions about why the authorization was not granted.

**Keep in mind that your primary purpose is to help solve problems.**

### Without Funding

If a specific activity or program was authorized but not funded, you might seek outside funding to show the support for continuing. A paper that documents the problems and issues will provide a paper trail for future efforts. Other participants may ask the Congress for additional funds.

**Reclamation's *Planner's Survival Guide, 2002*, has specific and detailed information for getting funding and authority and working in Reclamation's planning structure.**

# *Part 2: Build the Study Foundation*

## *Planning the study*

# Part 2: Build the Study Foundation

Funding and authority are now in place. Take some time to build a strong study foundation.

The clear need for a solution is not enough to solve the problem. A deliberate, well planned approach is vital to garner the support you need. With a solid study foundation, participants will be able to see where you are going and how you will get there.

**Scoping** (finding out the actions needs to cover) provides a base map, or context, for the problem. Scoping will continue throughout the decision process to expand that base map and fill in details. This initial scoping provides a rough outline to identify key players, driving issues, and basic study boundaries. Ensure that all potential stakeholders know about the scoping and that everyone is involved who wants to be. This will provide the local and broad perspectives needed for an accurate and comprehensive beginning.

**SCOPING:**

**Scoping is identifying issues, participants, areas to cover, available resources, and constraints. While this term is usually associated with NEPA processes, it actually applies to all decision processes. See "scoping" in the *Overview*.**

**You need to file a *Federal Register* notice when you start formal NEPA scoping.**

## WHY?

Often, the urge is to jump right in with a vague idea of what to get, who to ask, and what to do to solve the problem. This seems to be the fastest way to get things done; but in reality, it is the slowest. Regulations to adhere to, needs to consider, methods to effectively analyze the situation, and people to bring into the process are often left trampled. These can trip you up later.

## WHO?

Much of the foundation is built before Reclamation ever gets involved. Others may have already identified the problem; thought about causes, effects, and related influences; and formulated possible solutions. Work with the people who have been struggling with the problem.

**People who have not participated yet are more likely to question the analysis, definitions, and procedures (and, therefore, the solutions).**

Listen to what they have found so far—and show what resources Reclamation can bring. This will help establish working relationships.

# *Action 1: Contact Players*

## PURPOSE

- To begin working with cooperators, partners, interested parties, and the public
- To assemble a **core team**

## WHY?

**EXTERNAL PLAYERS INCLUDE:**

- **Anyone who expresses an interest**
- **Anyone who represents an interest that might be affected**
- **Anyone who could be affected**
- **Anyone who thinks they might be affected**

External players help:

- Acquire perspectives and insights
- Gain resources
- Avoid conflicts later
- Build an open process to promote credibility

Assembling a core team will help reserve internal resources for your activity. The core team will help identify other experts that may be needed and will help coordinate interdisciplinary activities.

## HOW?

### *Identify the Players*

Work through the network of participants you have already identified and who are already involved to broaden your base of contacts—they will know what community participants, political leaders, and technical experts need to be contacted.

**Public outreach and involvement is a CRITICAL component of the decision process—you aren't going anywhere without these folks.**

Think about key players and opinion makers in the following groups:

Within Reclamation (Who has the expertise?)
Cooperating partners (Who can help?)
Other Federal agencies (Who is mandated to help?)
State and local governments (Who has jurisdiction?)
Organizations (Who has an interest?)
Individuals (Who has expressed interest?)
Community (How can you reach others in the community?)

Water districts, utilities, etc. (How do they perceive the issues?)
Local associations (What are their interests?)
Consultants (What other help will you need?)

## *Assemble a Core Team*

The core team consists of technical experts and decisionmakers. You may have people from cooperating agencies and partners on the team. This team will do most of the analysis and evaluation. The core team will probably change as the study evolves. To make an initial cut, talk with many experts, who can help determine what analyses and skills will be involved. Based on this, estimate the level of involvement for various groups at various times.

**Don't raise expectations unduly now. People might quit in disgust if nothing happens soon enough.**

### ☑ Interrelationships

Consider and define the interrelationships of staffs involved—particularly if they are coming from different sources (e.g., partners, Area Offices, Technical Service Center, Washington, and contractors). Meeting with counterparts in different agencies would be very helpful here.

**Informal rapport within the team and with other groups and teams is *probably the most important ingredient in a study.* Don't take your role on the study so seriously that you forget to be human.**

### ☑ Input

At times, participants don't understand the value or place of other contributions, or they consider their own area exclusively. It is important to show everyone the larger picture so that participants can interact with others and contribute to the whole effort.

### ☑ Cross-Fertilization

If participants can get beyond their narrow expertise, they can offer a great deal to others. For example, a fisheries biologist can offer insightful ideas on hydrologic models from a different perspective.

## Include Mandated Participants

Some publics have a mandate to be involved (e.g., if Indian Trust Assets might be involved, contact the affected Native Americans; if endangered species might be involved, contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or National Marine Fisheries Service). Contact the solicitor early on to identify other mandated participants.

## Begin Interacting with Participants

**Notify local groups of your action through media, notes at the problem site, Internet, articles, neighborhood institutions, etc. See "Communication" in the *Overview* for more information.**

Methods of interaction vary with each decision process. Holding meetings, conference calls, setting up electronic bulletin boards are only a few of the possible methods. When you meet with groups, make it easy for them to participate—consider providing transportation, translators for non-English speakers, and other special accommodations if needed. Holding meetings when it is convenient for most participants will increase participation, build credibility, and reduce conflicts.

Get back with participants on a regular basis—ask how they want to interact with the process (e.g., How much information do they want to receive, when, and in what format? How do they want to be involved?).

## Identify the Decisionmakers

**Players will change throughout the process—groups may become interested or may leave. Making sure that new players are kept up to date by providing updated information packets and meeting with them will help them understand what has happened so far—allowing them to participate fully and helping to obtain their consent for the process.**

Look back at the objectives and make a broad determination of what **decisions** will be needed—and at what stage of the process. Then meet with the participants to hammer out which decisions will be made when, how they'll be made, and which decisionmakers will have the authority to make them. If participants can agree on who will make the ultimate decision that solves the problem, they are much more likely to support the solution. Decisionmakers will probably be both internal and external, and they will vary with the actions and participants involved. Communicate and confirm this preliminary identification with the decisionmakers. These decision points will be refined throughout the process.

Make sure decisionmakers support the action—or the study will die here. Keep managers informed and seek their advice on what resources are needed and how to proceed at key junctures.

# *Action 2: Define the Boundaries*

## PURPOSE

- To identify and define the problem
- To determine the scope and boundaries of the problem-solving effort

**If you do not find a problem, or if the consequences are minor, stop the action. There are enough problems in the world without creating more.**

## WHY?

This step will shape the entire journey toward a solution. Vague ideas about what needs to be analyzed, who needs to be involved, and what is being solved simply invites trouble. This will force you to spend time and resources fixing problems that have grown larger while they've been ignored or even to go back and redo analyses or steps to accommodate what was glossed over at the beginning. Skipping this step will also needlessly confuse participants.

## HOW?

You may think the problem is already outlined for you—after all, the Congress and the President have given funds and authorization to solve a particular problem. But you need to clearly understand what the problem is, who and what it affects, and how it came to be. Figure this out by asking:

- Why are people worried about the problem?
- What will happen if we don't act? If no one acts?
- Are these consequences serious, and if so, why?

Take the authorization's statement as a guide.

### *Explore Related Actions and Studies*

Look at studies within the area, on the particular problem, and on similar problems. Examining their conclusions, resources, and actions will provide an invaluable data base for your process and reduce duplicate efforts. This will help delineate the problem and the playing field and thus help define what you can—and can't—accomplish.

**People may find it hard to distinguish which action is which—clarify when necessary.**

### Other Processes

Scout the area and ask other agencies and other participants to inventory other related actions. Then talk to the key people in those actions to determine how they will affect you. Look also at how they may affect the environment—will your solution compound those effects? You may not need to coordinate closely, but you do need to understand how the other activities relate to your solution.

### Physical Interactions

Communicate with others and look at previous studies on this and similar situations to begin to get a sense of the physical resources and how they interact (e.g., hydrologic, biological, and economic). Consider several levels: large watershed, basin, river reach, point place. Ask for information from the Internet, academic, and other private or governmental entities. Find out who has the data already and who can get the data most readily.

### Resources

Look at the resources you have already identified in terms of limits on the study. This will provide a measure of what you can and can't do. Work with other participants throughout this process to ensure that everyone gets the chance to participate and that resource gaps are filled. Consider your defined scope of the problem and related issues to ensure that you aren't overlooking something that might trip you up later.

### Constraints

All of the participants have both internal and external constraints. Identifying these constraints and ensuring that everyone is aware of them will let you focus on what your effort can accomplish.

### ☑ Legal Framework

At times, you may need to propose solutions that may conflict with the existing legal infrastructure. However, it is a lot easier and more effective to work within the framework provided by legal and organizational requirements. Seek out legal advice from involved communities and organizations. These constraints may include:

- Court judgments
- Water and land use rights
- Federal, State, local, tribal laws
- Organizational regulations, charters, and guidance
- International laws and agreements

**Politics may also create constraints that need to be taken into consideration. These may include issues and concerns to address or solutions to consider or avoid. Communicate with politicians to clarify these constraints and assumptions.**

## *Determine Priority*

To further focus what you can address, consider how much internal and external priority your problem-solving effort has. Priority translates into pressure to get the job done. This pressure may be internal (e.g., decisionmakers in Washington or elsewhere see this action as an important plank in the overall program) or external (e.g., this action is driven by a court or congressional mandate).

Ask who wants what done when. Find out how much authority you have to request the necessary resources. Also look around to see what other actions are occurring and how much priority they have. This context will help determine how much you can accomplish—and when.

## *Document*

Clearly and concisely document what you have found out in a working file. This will provide a basis for creating an action plan, briefing decisionmakers, and updating participants. Having a file that defines the purpose, why, and how of a problem early on is a keystone in the study foundation.

**If you don't know where you are going, you'll never know if you got there.**

# *Action 3: Agree on Purpose*

## PURPOSE

- To build consent on what needs to be done—and why
- To determine who will work on what
- To define what needs fit within Reclamation's role

## WHY?

Defining and agreeing on the purpose builds the path for your entire action. Staying on this path will save time and money. This also becomes a ready-made measure of success. As new information and players come to the fore or elements change, the purpose can change. However, the more clearly defined the purpose, the easier it is to refine and change.

## HOW?

### *Report the Context*

Use the definition of the problems and boundaries you developed in earlier steps to ensure that every participant has a rough idea of the context. Continue to refine the context and problem through scoping and communicating with participants.

**Agree on the purpose now to prevent surprises later. See "Agendas" in the *Overview*.**

### *Understand Everyone's Purpose*

People usually are willing to state their positions on issues, but they are often less willing to state their underlying interests and expectations—what they hope to accomplish as a result of these positions (e.g., preserve a rural way of life, recover endangered species, and promote economic growth). Yet, stating these underlying expectations is a vital step toward reaching a solution and compromise. Most people would agree that if their underlying expectations can be met, it is perfectly acceptable to make tradeoffs so that other's underlying expectations can be met as well. For example, farmers might be willing to conserve water to preserve their way of life rather than to use all the water they are entitled to and ultimately lose that way of life.

Meet and define these underlying purposes as much as possible. Then, write out all these purposes. This will provide participants with a more comprehensive view of the issues and concerns.

## *Build Consent*

Meet with everyone and hammer out a purpose. Make sure it is specific and detailed enough (e.g., "improve juvenile salmon passage at Green Apple Dam by 50 percent" is a much more measurable, doable purpose than "improve fish passage in the Apple River").

**If you decide that Reclamation has no role in the process, then stop your participation here. Look at how much you are going to lose if you continue rather than how much you have already spent. Back out gracefully by explaining why Reclamation should not be involved.**

Decisionmakers and key players need to agree on the general purpose at this point—or at the very least, agree not to actively oppose the purpose. You can build this consent through communication and compromise. A wide variety of tools can help communicate the diverse purposes and settle on a narrow set.

Make sure that management and other participants are comfortable with what you have so far.

## *Look at Everyone's Role*

Once the purpose is sketched out, participants need to figure out what the activity is and how they fit in. Roles will depend on the problem and the other participants. Clearly defining these roles will help avoid confrontations and misunderstandings later, as well as help focus the study and actions. This can be done formally or informally. Formal ways to do this include holding meetings to outline everyone's role, developing "statements of purpose" which detail roles and purposes for each group, and having key representatives from key groups draft a purpose and role statement for comment and revision.

## *Do a Reality Check*

Check back with the participants and with the data to make sure that this first cut on purpose and objectives fits the reality of the situation. Use the "Take Stock" questions to identify and incorporate changes.

**Use the purpose for your mission statement—put it in clear view every time you meet.**

# *Action 4: Establish Ground Rules*

## PURPOSE

- To agree on and communicate how the process will work
- To manage and plan for changes

## WHY?

**Work critiques and evaluations of the process into the ground rules.**

No situation is static—problems, issues, players, and objectives will change. To provide a base for managing change, settle on a basic understanding of how the process will be conducted. This foundation will also help build credibility by ensuring a clear and open decision process.

## HOW?

**Rules may range from a formal document to an informal discussion over coffee.**

What form the ground rules take will depend on the problem you've defined, the actions needed, and the people involved.

### *Develop Your General Approach*

Lay out how the study will be conducted, what will be considered, when participants can enter or leave, how new participants will be incorporated, what decisions will need to be made and when. Look at your expectations (the good you hope to accomplish) and the problem's context to predict the kinds of problems or hurdles you may encounter. (See "Hurdles" in the *Overview*.) Determine how you will comply with constraints. Let participants determine priorities.

### *Determine How to Work With Decisionmakers*

**The more partners a process has, the broader the scope of decisionmakers becomes.**

Outline what decisions will be needed and who will make them. Determine the best method of approaching these decisionmakers. How will you work with them? How will they be involved in the process? What will they need to make a balanced decision. Clarifying positions, agendas, and roles now will help provide support for your actions

later. You may need to explain the concepts behind what you want to do and show how you are going to do it. See "Decisionmakers" in the *Overview*.

Hint: Figure out how each decisionmaker approaches risk (e.g., "I'll say yes and see how it works later" to "I'll say no; if you can prove later that there is no risk, I'll change my answer"). This is an important key to determining how to approach and communicate with particular decisionmakers.

## *Determine the Timeframe*

Lay out the process of steps and analyses you need to go through to reach and implement a balanced, workable solution. A reasonable, well-thought out schedule will not only let everyone see and understand the decision process but will also help to shape the analyses and actions. Consider and display the interrelationships (e.g., the economic analysis relies on the cost estimates, the cost estimates rely on detailed alternatives, alternatives rely on the needs assessment. . .) Also, build in some contingency plans (e.g., if we can't get x by September, we will do y).

**See the *Overview* for a more detailed discussion of schedules and milestones.**

Set priorities to help ensure that the most important work gets done and to provide more flexibility by identifying actions that can slip or go undone.

**Without a flexible schedule, people will start to think that "there is never time to do it right, but always time to do it over."**

Identifying milestones (points that mark accomplishment, such as agreements reached, analyses accomplished, and decision points) and due dates will provide a way to keep the study and schedule on track. Gantt charts, timelines, preliminary analyses, and discussions with participants are just a few of the tools available to develop schedules.

## *Plan for Communication*

**Affected publics don't want to be potted plants that you sometimes water—they want and need to participate in substantive discussions.**

Determine and document how you will communicate with everyone involved. This will help ensure that communication does take place, so that the process can accommodate conflicts, unexpected problems, changes in participants and decisionmakers, new revelations from the analyses, etc. Public involvement plans can be incorporated into an overall communications plan to show the interactions between the core team and the publics.

You may want to create a matrix table that lists actions and methods of communication:

| Milestone | Communication method | Objective |
|---|---|---|
| Analysis | Technical memorandum | Show model |
| Public meeting (before) | Notices, fact sheets | Introduce action |
| Public meeting (after) | Follow-up newsletter | List comments |
| Decision point | Decision document | Show rationale |

## *Plan for Changes*

Without flexibility, the study can become an all-or-nothing proposition. Any snag will derail the process. (See "Changes" in the *Overview*.) To overcome this, break the study into phases. This allows flexible joints to change players and directions.

Internal procedures for changing team members will minimize disruptions. Even if the team functions well, a new team member means that the team is not the same anymore, and it takes time to regroup.

External procedures for updating new participants and transferring responsibilities when participants leave will also smooth relations, build credibility, and ensure the work is carried out.

## *Determine the Level of Detail*

**The ground rules are by no means set in stone. Changes may occur, analyses may change the process, and you may develop better ways to work. Reassess the ground rules at set intervals so that everyone can agree on changes.**

Getting too much detail wastes money and time, and getting too little may overlook something that will jeopardize the solution. Re-examine the objectives you have defined and see what you can really get done and what the decisionmaker really needs. Ask specific questions. (Why is the water quality model necessary to decide how to handle fish passage?)

## *Assure Tasks are Assigned*

Assigning tasks helps avoid duplicating efforts, establishes who will do what, and focuses energy and action where it is needed. Work with other participants throughout this process to ensure that everyone gets the chance to participate and that resource gaps are filled. Consider your defined scope of the problem and the related issues to ensure that you aren't overlooking something that will trip you up later.

Focus on what needs to be done to solve the problem. Your problem description and objectives will fashion the requirements for the study (e.g., if physical facilities might be involved, an engineer will be needed for a cost estimate; if fish flows are involved, a biologist and a hydrologist will be needed). So examine this and then work with the other participants to see what resources are already available, what will be needed, and who can best provide those resources.

Examine the resources already available in the area. Look at regulatory and mandatory data requirements (e.g., endangered species, Indian Trust Assets, and cultural resources). Discuss the types of data, expertise, and analysis that might be necessary. Make sure that this analysis is specific to your problem—a water supply problem will involve different people and analyses than a water quality problem would. Armed with this assessment, participants can determine who could best provide those resources. Explain what Reclamation can offer and work with participants to decide what Reclamation will provide.

Look at your budget to determine what resources you can provide and how many staff days you can allocate. Fiscal reality requires careful consideration of funding availability and expenditures. You may not have the money you want for all of the immediate study needs. Prioritizing and scheduling tasks and using non-Federal resources can help you stay within budget.

Keep everyone (even nonparticipants) up to date on the study so that they can point out potential fatal flaws and avoid delays and "catch up time" later.

**SUCCESS:**

**You can avoid duplicating existing efforts as well as a reputation for "steam rolling" through the process if you consider:**

- **What you have**
- **What the other participants have**
- **What each participant sees as necessary to solve the problem**

**Managers often rely on past experience—either their own or others. Past mistakes burn themselves on the backs of your eyeballs—encouraging you to try a different approach or to avoid the problem on future activities.**

# *Action 5: Develop an Action Plan*

## PURPOSE

**An action plan is any documen-tation developed to guide a specific study or activity.**

- To document what you will do
- To track and document:

  What you learn
  What changes have occurred
  What decisions have been made

## WHY?

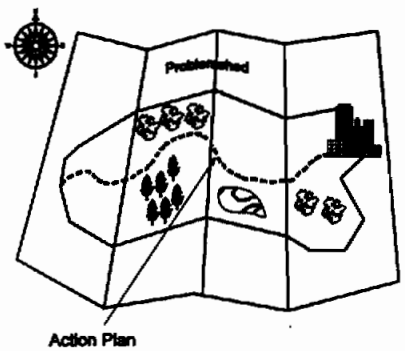
**The simpler the action, the easier it is to explain and coordinate. If you have a complex action, try to break it into simpler parts.**

The action plan, outlined in the *Overview*, will:

- Document the foundation you have built
- Clearly communicate intended actions, rationales, resources, and timeframe
- Become a touchstone for players to measure actions and events against
- Provide a handy background for new players

## HOW?

Gather what you have developed so far into an action plan and fill any remaining gaps. Disseminate the action plan to all participants for comments. Meet with participants to reconcile comments. Set up a procedure to modify the action plan as changes occur and the process develops. (For example, add pages to explain the changes and periodically update and circulate the plan.)



## *Contents*

At a minimum, the action plan should cover:

### ☑ Introduction

- **Background.**—Provide the necessary amount of detail needed to understand the problem: location, physical details, a short history, etc.
- **Problem.**—Define the problem. Show why it is serious and should be addressed.
- **Purpose.**—Briefly describe why you are doing something—show that it would be irresponsible not to act.
- **Funding and authority.**—Briefly describe the funding sources for both Reclamation's involvement and other governmental and nongovernmental agencies. Citing the authority under which Reclamation is operating will help communicate Reclamation's role in the process.
- **Existing relationships and constraints.**—Document these to help everyone understand the parameters of the study.
- **Participants.**—List who is involved and what they are contributing to help provide an overall picture of the process and encourage players to communicate and interact.

**Focus your action plan on actually solving the problem.**

### ☑ Actions

- **Expectations.**—List what you expect to address and achieve. This helps focus the study and prevent surprises down the road. (But I thought we were going to address x, not y!) Be sure to list opportunities available.
- **Actions.**—Show who will do what, when, and why to provide the backbone of the study. Participants will be able to refer back to the proposed actions and agree on what actions need to change in

**SUCCESS:**

**Take off your blinders to look beyond what is authorized (or even reasonable). Other participants in the process can address what you can't.**

response to external and internal changes. Be sure to list the resources committed, payment method, and timeframe.

- **Timeframe.**—Although schedules slip, show a timeframe for events to keep participants and decisionmakers on track. Show how each action is a step toward solving the problem by including milestones, decision points, and places to re-examine the process. Make sure everyone understands how events are connected (time charts and flow charts can help).

- **Communication.**—Lay out when and how you will communicate to help identify potential changes early and prevent misunderstandings and delays.

- **Training.**—Training can build the team up to function productively and show team members new, effective methods of working with others to solve problems.

- **Documents to produce.**—Documents are the primary vehicle for formally communicating with the team and participants. Note what documents you will need to explain analyses, share participant's and public's comments, show decisions and rationales, and fulfill legal and Reclamation requirements.

- **Agreements.**—Outline what agreements will need to be reached with whom to help reduce future misunderstandings and effectively pool participants' resources.

**Tailor the action plan to fit your process (e.g., a hazardous waste study may include very specific details on proposed actions and constraints; a watershed initiative may take a broad, overarching approach). A well written action plan removes many of the opportunities for misunderstandings after agreements are made and the study is underway.**

### ☞ Decisions

- **Decisions to make.**—List the decisions to be made, when they'll be made, and who will make them. This helps keep decisionmakers involved and aware of what is going on and what they need to do. This will also help smooth decisionmaker and administration transitions.

- **Level of detail.**—Describe briefly the level of detail needed for decision points to reduce technical conflicts and promote credibility for the data and decision.

## UPDATES

Keeping the action up-to-date by recording what actions have occurred will turn the action plan into an effective tool to help keep new participants informed.

Listing changes in study direction, participants, and actions will provide a basis for determining the future directions of the study.

## REVIEW

Allow for time at appropriate intervals to consciously re-examine and revise the action plan:

- What changes have occurred?
- What have the analyses and interactions among participants uncovered?
- How do these changes and revelations affect what you are trying to do?
- Who needs to see and comment on the action plan?

See the yellow "Take Stock" section in the *Decision Process Steps* for more detailed questions.

**Throughout the study and after implementing the solution, examine the process and apply what you have learned through the process. Using 20/20 hindsight, ask what worked and figure out what to improve for the next step—and the next action.**

**If you don't build internal consent, the problem won't be solved—no matter how well you work with external participants.**