

## **NEPA Project Classification Process**

### For Local Public Agency (LPA) Federal-aid Projects

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) mandates that federal agencies consider the environmental consequences of their actions. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has delegated NEPA document preparation to the Iowa DOT, but the final approval of NEPA project classification and the NEPA document is the responsibility of the FHWA.

Submittal of the Concept Statement (Form 517001) marks the beginning of the NEPA classification process. There are three main NEPA project classifications as listed in [23 CFR 771.115](#). These classifications describe the level of documentation required to satisfy the procedural requirements of NEPA. They are described below from the simplest to the most complex level of required documentation. Note: These descriptions only provide a general framework for evaluating anticipated project impacts. Each project will be evaluated individually according to the specific types of impacts that may occur.

**Categorical Exclusion (CE)** Projects in this classification do not individually or cumulatively have a significant environmental impacts. There are two types of CEs.

1. **Programmatic CE**: This type of CE is for non-controversial projects with no potential for environmental impacts. The project fits the Programmatic CE Agreement between Iowa DOT Office of Location and Environment (OLE) and FHWA. Projects meeting the Programmatic CE criteria do not require review and concurrence by FHWA. However, FHWA does periodic audits of the Iowa DOT's Programmatic CE process to ensure it functions in accordance with the Programmatic Agreement for CEs.

Examples of a Programmatic CE would include rehabilitation, resurfacing or restoration (3R) projects or bridge replacement projects with minor right-of-way needs.

2. **Individual CE**: This type of CE is for non-controversial projects containing unusual environmental circumstances (such as a 4(f) property or other environmental issues). It would also include projects that do not fit the programmatic CE agreement, but from past experience do not have potential for significant environmental impacts. An individual CE requires FHWA approval.

Examples of an Individual CE would include: 3R projects, bridge replacement projects with minor right-of-way needs and / or minor alignment shifts, projects that involve an historic bridge, or projects that involve minor impacts to parks or recreational areas.

**Environmental Assessment (EA)** This classification is used for projects where it is uncertain if there will be significant environmental impacts. The purpose of the EA is to find out if there will be significant impacts to the environment. If the EA reveals that significant impacts are likely, an EIS will be required.

Examples of an EA might include capacity improvements with alignment shifts requiring residential relocations and / or other potential environmental impacts, such as historic properties, parks or wildlife areas.

**Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)** This classification is for projects that will likely result in significant environmental impacts. The purpose of an EIS is to inform the general public, the appropriate State and Federal resource agencies, and the decision-makers of reasonable alternatives to minimize harm to environmental resources. The EIS also provides a thorough public record of the project decision-making process.

Examples of an EIS would include conversion of a two-lane highway to a four-lane highway or construction of an all new roadway on a new alignment.

The OLE submits its determination of Individual CE, EA, and EIS project classifications to FHWA for concurrence. Upon concurrence, a notification is sent to the project sponsor indicating the requirements of the classification. If the classification is for an EA or EIS project type, the project sponsor will need a project manager (typically a consultant) who is experienced in preparing environmental documents and thoroughly understands the process for developing these types of projects in accordance with FHWA procedures and standards.