



## Focus on: What is an EIS?

An environmental impact statement (EIS) is a comprehensive scientific evaluation that helps Washington agencies, applicants, and the public fully understand the likely, significant, and adverse environmental impacts of a project. It also analyzes if those impacts can be reduced or eliminated by exploring reasonable alternatives and mitigation measures that would minimize environmental impacts.

A lead agency prepares an EIS when they determine a proposal is likely to result in significant adverse environmental impacts. This tool identifies and analyzes:

- Probable adverse environmental impacts.
- Reasonable alternatives.
- Possible mitigation.

### There are two types of environmental impact statements:

A **project EIS** for proposals with physical changes to one or more environmental elements, such as:

- New construction.
- Facility operation changes.
- Environmental cleanup projects.
- Demolitions.
- Purchases, sales, leases, transfers, or exchanges of natural resources.

A **nonproject EIS** for planning decisions. This type of EIS provides the basis for later project review. It includes adopting plans, policies, programs, or regulations that include standards to control environmental use or regulate a series of connected actions, such as:

- Comprehensive plans.
- Watershed management plans.
- Shoreline master programs.
- Development regulations.

An EIS gives agencies important information to consider when making project decisions, which can help them decide how to protect people and the environment from project impacts. It isn't a project approval or a permit.

#### ADA Accessibility

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## What's the value of an EIS?

The EIS process:

- **Allows others to participate.** The EIS process includes opportunities for the public, Tribes, and local, state, and federal agencies to provide input.

This input helps identify:

- A proposal's significant adverse environmental impacts.
- Reasonable alternatives.
- Possible mitigation measures.
- Methods to analyze impacts.

Public participation during different phases of the process helps interested parties understand the proposal and provide input for the lead agency to consider.

- **Improves proposals from an environmental perspective.** The EIS process helps identify:
  - Adverse environmental impacts, reasonable alternatives, and potential mitigation measures that meet the proposal's objectives.
  - Areas of controversy and other significant issues early, when we have the most opportunity to consider a broad range of solutions.
- **Provides decision-makers with environmental information.** An EIS is a science-based, thorough discussion of:
  - The proposed project.
  - Existing site conditions.
  - Probable significant adverse environmental impacts.
  - Reasonable alternatives and mitigation measures to avoid, minimize, or counter adverse impacts.
- **Provides necessary information for conditioning or denying a proposal.** Based on information in the EIS and an agency's adopted [State Environmental Policy Act \(SEPA\) policies](#),<sup>1</sup> SEPA substantive authority allows an agency to:
  - Deny a proposal when impacts cannot be reasonable mitigated.
  - Place conditions on the project to protect the environment.
  - Approve the proposal without further mitigation.

## What's the process?

The EIS process includes:

- **Scoping.** The lead agency initiates participation by asking the public, Tribes, and other local, state, and federal agencies to comment on a proposal's alternatives, impacts, and potential mitigation measures to decide what should be studied in the EIS.
- **Preparing the draft EIS.** The lead agency analyzes the probable impacts of a proposal, reasonable alternatives, and potential mitigation measures. It may include studies, modeling, and other information.

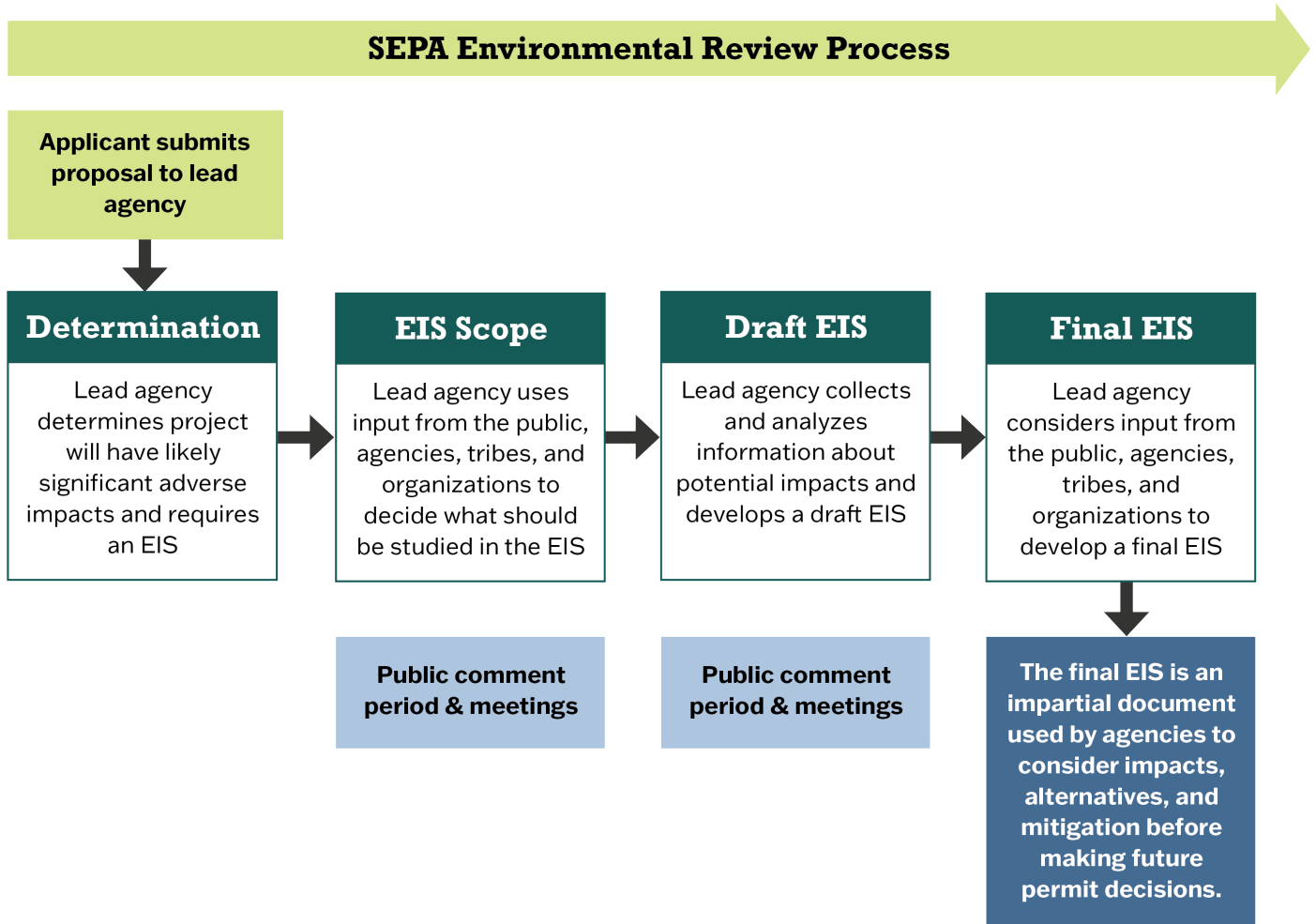
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<sup>1</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/Regulations-Permits/SEPA/Environmental-review/SEPA-guidance/Basic-overview>

- **Issuing the draft EIS for review.** The public, tribal governments, and other local, state, and federal agencies can submit their feedback.
- **Preparing the final EIS.** The lead agency analyzes and responds to substantive comments received on the draft EIS. They may include additional studies and modeling to evaluate probable impacts.
- **Issuing the final EIS.** The agency uses the information in decision-making.

SEPA requires agencies to involve the public during scoping and issuing the draft EIS for review periods.

Figure 1: A diagram of the EIS process.



### Where can I learn more?

See our [SEPA Handbook, Chapter 3](#)<sup>2</sup> to learn more detailed information about preparing an EIS. See state [Chapter 197-11 WAC](#),<sup>3</sup> Sections 400 to 460 for more information about EIS procedures.

### How can I participate in Ecology’s work?

Visit our [public input and events webpage](#)<sup>4</sup> to learn about projects open for public comment. Join our [mailing lists](#)<sup>5</sup> to be notified of progress on our various topics.

<sup>2</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/DOE/files/4c/4c9fec2b-5e6f-44b5-bf13-b253e72a4ea1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=197-11-400>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/Events/Search/Listing>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/About-us/Who-we-are/News/Email-lists>