

What is a Purpose and Need Statement?

Background

A Purpose and Need Statement is a fundamental requirement when developing a proposal that will require future National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation - an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment. In addition, some other federal processes, such as granting a 404 permit for wetlands, also require the generation of a Purpose and Need Statement in order to apply for the permit. Clarity of purpose and confirmation of need are in themselves sound practices when developing large-scale proposals requiring public expenditure.

Writing the Purpose and Need Statement

The Purpose and Need Statement sets the stage for consideration of the alternatives. It has three parts: the Purpose, the Need, and Goals and Objectives. The Purpose defines the transportation problem to be solved. The Need provides data to support the problem statement (Purpose). The Goals and Objectives describe other issues that need to be resolved as part of a successful solution to the problem.

The Purpose and Need Statement is intended to clarify the expected outcome of public expenditure and to justify that expenditure - what you are trying to accomplish and why you think it is necessary. As such, it should be the first step in the project development process. It will be used to guide the development of alternatives, and it will be a fundamental element when developing criteria for selection between alternatives.

Purpose

- The Purpose is analogous to the problem. It is the “what” of the proposal.
- The Purpose should focus on the transportation system. Other important issues to be addressed by the project such as livability and the environment should be identified as Goals and Objectives.
- The Purpose should be stated in a single sentence.
- The Purpose should be stated as the positive outcome that is expected. For example, the purpose is to reduce congestion in the interstate corridor.
- It should avoid stating a solution as a purpose as in - the purpose of the project is to build a bypass.
- Where appropriate, it should be stated broadly enough so that more than one transportation mode can be considered and multi-modal solutions are not dismissed prematurely.

- Where appropriate, it should be stated broadly enough so that more than one alternative can be considered and alternatives are not dismissed prematurely.
- The Purpose should be stated in a manner so that a suite of intermediate steps could be posed as the solution, scaled to the needs of the community, if appropriate.

Need

- Should establish the evidence that the problem exists, or will exist if projected population and planned land use growth are realized.
- Should be factually and numerically based.
- Should support the assertion made in the purpose statement. For example, if the purpose statement is based on safety improvements, the need statement should support the assertion that there is or will be a safety problem to be corrected.

Goals and Objectives

Issues that will be addressed by the project beyond the transportation issues identified in the Purpose should be included in the Purpose and Need Statement as Goals and Objectives. The Goals and Objectives should balance environmental and transportation values. They should support early and effective interagency involvement in environmental issues to improve the outcome of each natural and cultural resource agency's mission while minimizing costs and delays. In addition, the Goals and Objectives should consider equally the project's schedule, cost, quality, cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat, public input, and regulatory input.

The Goals and Objectives will be different for each project and may include the following:

- Broad community goals, for example - improving air quality, economic development, or creating an uncongested, pedestrian friendly downtown business district.
- Environmental goals such as avoidance and minimization of impacts and enhancement opportunities, for example - avoiding impacts to nesting migratory birds or improving riparian habitat beyond what is required for mitigation.
- Regulatory compliance, for example - protecting wetlands or complying with the Oregon Highway Plan.