Quality Environmental Documents
Resource List

Primary Resources

- **Examples of Effective Techniques for Improving the Quality of Environmental Documents** (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials [AASHTO] and Federal Highway Administration [FHWA], 2014)

  This report provides techniques for improving environmental documents for transportation projects and real-world examples of those techniques. The report explains techniques such as effective use of page layout, writing style, and graphics as well as effective ways to address National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, such as purpose and need, alternatives analysis, methodologies, and mitigation. Each chapter includes an excerpt from recent Environmental Impact Statements (EISs), including annotations.

- **Every Day Counts Quality Environment Documentation Fact Sheet 21st Century Solutions v4** (FHWA, 2012)

  This fact sheet describes FHWA's initiative to implement quality environmental documentation through its Every Day Counts program. It promotes existing recommendations and current best practices to simplify and expedite the development of environmental documents. The initiative focuses on appropriately and effectively documenting the project purpose and need, consideration of alternatives, and impacts. More information about this initiative is available at the FHWA Every Day Counts website at http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/everydaycounts/edctwo/2012/doc.cfm.

- **Keys to Efficient Development of Useful Environmental Documents** (Federal Transit Administration [FTA], 2007)

  This handbook provides guidance on preparing environmental documents for FTA. It focuses on techniques to better consider and address three issues:

  1. **Compliance:** Do environmental documents satisfy the content requirements of NEPA-implementing regulations and relevant guidance?
  2. **Utility:** Are environmental documents written to be useful to the public and decision makers?
  3. **Practicality:** Are procedural techniques to reduce paperwork and delay being effectively employed?

- **Improving the Quality of Environmental Documents** (AASHTO, FHWA, and the American Council of Engineering Companies, 2006)

  This report identifies three core principles of quality NEPA documents:

- Principle 1 - Tell the story of the project so that the reader can easily understand the purpose and need of the project; how each alternative would meet the project goals, and the strengths and weaknesses associated with each alternative.
- Principle 2 - Keep the document as brief as possible, using clear concise writing; an easy-to-use format; effective graphics and visual elements; and discussion of issues and impacts in proportion to their significance.
- Principle 3 - Ensure that the document meets all legal requirements in a way that is easy to follow for regulators and technical reviewers.

- **Synthesis of Data Needs for EA and EIS Documentation—A Blueprint for NEPA Document Content** (National Cooperative Highway Research Program [NCHRP], 2005)

  This research project laid the foundation for the subsequent reports published by AASHTO and FHWA (listed above). The report identifies a range of effective practices for improving environmental documents. It reviews several Environmental Impact Statements and recommends techniques as well as a possible "Blueprint" for creating improved NEPA documents.

- **Legal Sufficiency Considerations** (NCHRP, 2005)

  This is an excerpt from the NCHRP 2005 report, which was also reprinted in the 2006 joint report. It lists recommendations for complying with legal requirements; while explaining complex information in a way that is easy to follow for agency reviewers, courts, and the public.

Plain Language

- **Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Plain Language Training** (FAA, 2011)

  FAA provides a one-hour video course teaching the basic concepts of writing in plain language. The course is available at:
  http://www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/plain_language/basic_course/

- **Plain Language Toolkit** (FAA, 2011)
  This two-page document contains helpful material for using plain language techniques. The first page contains links and references with more information about plain language. The second page contains guidance about word choices and formatting tips for writing more clearly.

- **Writing User-Friendly Documents** (US Department of Transportation, 2013)

  This handbook provides techniques for writers of US Transportation documents to achieve three goals:
  - Engage the reader
  - Write clearly
  - Write in a visually appealing style