

Nomination Received by Council on Environmental Quality, Executive Office of the President
For the CEQ NEPA Pilot Project Program
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/nepa/nepa-pilot-project-nominations>

PART I. NOMINATOR

First Name:	Susan
Last Name:	Bromm
Organization:	US Environmental Protection Agency
Project Title:	<i>NEPAssist</i> , an Innovative GIS Tool Developed to Assist with Environmental Reviews and Compliance with NEPA
Submitted by:	Susan Bromm
Date Received:	6-15-11

PART II. SHORT ANSWERS

I. What Federal agency or agencies will be involved in this pilot project?

EPA hosts the *NEPAssist* application, which is currently available for use by all Federal Agencies. EPA hopes that through this pilot, additional Agency NEPA Practitioners will utilize *NEPAssist* during the development and/or review of NEPA documents. EPA would also like to partner with Agencies already using *NEPAssist* to identify new data and expanded functionality for the tool that can be used during NEPA reviews.

II. What is the Federal action to which this NEPA pilot project applies?

The purpose of this pilot is to promote the use of *NEPAssist* as a best practice for NEPA practitioners, and to continue to develop the tool for use by the public to increase transparency in the NEPA process.

III. How will this pilot project reduce the costs and time needed to complete the NEPA process?

NEPAssist employs a standardized, data-driven approach using consistent federal, state, and local data sets that allows EPA to perform reviews much more quickly and accurately, thereby maximizing the use of limited staff resources.

IV. How will this pilot project ensure rigorous environmental protection?

NEPA practitioners have used *NEPAssist* to direct project locations to the least environmentally-sensitive areas. They have also used the application to identify areas where impacts should be avoided or minimized, as well as potential areas where mitigation might be most helpful. In addition, *NEPAssist* can improve communications and help NEPA practitioners focus on the same data during early project discussions, which has been shown to result in project improvements and increased commitments for environmental mitigation.

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V. How will this pilot project improve the quality and transparency of agency decisionmaking?

In FY 2012, EPA plans to launch a publicly available website that will greatly expand the *NEPAssist* user base and increase transparency in the Federal decision-making process.

VI. Will this pilot project develop best practices that can be replicated by other agencies or applied to other Federal actions or programs? Please describe?

Yes. All Federal Agencies can use *NEPAssist* to assist with their environmental reviews. *NEPAssist* provides EPA, as well as other federal, state, and local agencies, with access to a wealth of environmental information and analysis that supports compliance with NEPA.

PART III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

(See attachment on following page.)

Council on Environmental Quality NEPA Pilot Project Description

Project Title: *NEPAssist*, an Innovative GIS Tool Developed to Assist with Environmental Reviews and Compliance with NEPA

The purpose of this pilot is to promote the use of *NEPAssist* as a best practice for NEPA practitioners, and to continue to develop the tool for use by the public to increase transparency in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. *NEPAssist*, a web-based GIS application that provides EPA, as well as other federal, state, and local agencies, with access to a wealth of environmental information and analysis that supports compliance with NEPA. It is a powerful tool with great potential to help access, interpret, and present geospatial data relevant to environmental decisions. *NEPAssist* directly supports two of the Administration's Priorities through the development of an innovative approach that will increase Transparency and Open Government.

EPA developed *NEPAssist* to assist with its environmental reviews given increasing workloads and time constraints. Since 2008, EPA has greatly expanded the use of *NEPAssist*, making it available to all Partner Federal, State, Local, and Tribal Agencies to promote collaboration and early involvement in the NEPA process. The tool has proven effective at saving time and resources at EPA, and has received broad acclaim from the user community of NEPA practitioners. All NEPA practitioners can gain these same benefits through the use of the tool.

NEPAssist employs a standardized, data-driven approach using consistent federal, state, and local data sets. It is a distributed application that accesses this real-time data to display customized regional analysis reports through geospatially enabled web-services. Using a combination of EPA data and web services allows the data be maintained by the source, thereby ensuring the *NEPAssist* has access to the most current data and updates available, and saving EPA time and resources.

Using *NEPAssist* is a "best practice" that allows agencies to perform environmental reviews much more quickly and accurately. Testimonials from EPA's NEPA practitioners verifies that the use of *NEPAssist* reduces the amount of time to review federal agencies' scoping notices and projects at early stages of development by 75%. These practitioners are now able to respond to many more scoping notices than they have in the past, and to improve the quality of their responses, thereby providing federal stakeholders with environmental data to meet their needs and accelerate project planning. Moreover, the use of *NEPAssist* has dramatically reduced the time needed to prepare NEPA environmental assessments (EAs) for EPA actions

In addition, NEPA practitioners can use *NEPAssist* to direct project locations to the least environmentally-sensitive areas and identify areas where impacts should be avoided or minimized, as well as potential areas where mitigation might be most helpful. Such applications reduce the cost and time associated with the review and approval of major federal projects.

Since 2008 the *NEPAssist* user community has continued to grow and now consists of over 1700 NEPA Practitioners from 35 federal agencies, 46 tribes, and states and local agencies that have access to *NEPAssist* for the preparation and review of their environmental documents. In addition, *NEPAssist* facilitates collaboration during the NEPA process by improving communications, allowing stakeholders to focus on the same data during early project discussions, which has been shown to result in project improvements and increased commitments for environmental mitigation.

In FY 2012, EPA plans to launch a publicly available website that will greatly expand the *NEPAssist* user base and increase transparency in the Federal decision-making process. The new website will include user-friendly interface that will allow for increased customization.

NEPAssist has also shown to be an effective tool to assist with EPA's environmental capacity building and international collaboration efforts. After receiving a demonstration of the benefits of the *NEPAssist* application, six Central American countries and Canada began to deploy similar environmental assessment tools based on *NEPAssist*.