

Session 5a-c.

Site Visit: Applying Fundamental EIA Skills

Field-based practical exercise and small group work

Summary

This session provides participants with an interactive learning experience, offering field-based practice of core Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) skills. In small-group format, participants will use a brief site visit followed by consultation and discussion to advance understanding of baseline characterization and the identification of impacts of concern.

Session 5a

Participants will be briefed on the various sites to be visited as part of this exercise. A short description of each site will be provided, and participants will generally have the opportunity to select which site they would like to visit. However, in certain circumstances, the facilitation team may find it necessary to assign participation to certain groups to accommodate logistical limitations in transport to/from the respective sites, as well as the capacity of sites to be visited.

Once the participants have self-selected into small groups according to interest/sites to be visited, each small group will need to identify a Chairperson and Spokesperson:

- The Chairperson will be responsible for ensuring that the group's efforts are focused, and responsive to the objectives of the exercise. The Chairperson will also bring all voices and perspectives into the discussion of baseline characterization and the identification of impacts of concern. On a practical note, the Chairperson will also make sure everyone is in the vehicle for the trip home!
- The Spokesperson will be responsible for capturing the consensus opinion(s) or assessments of the group and effectively conveying key aspects to the training group at large. The spokesperson should be able to follow closely the nature of the group's discussion, and record the proceedings in a manner that makes for compelling presentation.

Session 5b

Participants will depart the training venue as part of their small group for travel to the selected sites. Transportation will be coordinated and logistical arrangements are already in place. At a minimum, the Chairperson *may* be provided with the contact information of the host/guide at each of the various sites.

Once arrived at your site, please observe and ask questions, offer and discuss observations within the group, and record your findings (both through notes and photographs). But the most important thing is to have your eyes and ears open and to be observing the environment, and the interaction with the environment of activities taking place around you. Consider a key point of the previous session:

Core skills are needed to implement the EIA process and to help achieve ESDM; the first two of these are:

- Baseline characterization; and
- Identifying impacts of concern

This portion of the exercise will conclude upon each group's return to the training venue. By that time each group should have recorded and generally reached agreement on the baseline environmental conditions present—and that are relevant—at their site.

By conclusion of the site visit proper each group member should also be cognizant or aware of potential environmental impacts, and which of those impacts, given the baseline conditions, require additional study or consideration—these are the impacts of concern. Discussion of the various impacts within the small groups will continue in the following session.

Session 5c

Following return from the field, each small group will convene to discuss the range of impacts observed at their site and which of those impacts may require more thorough treatment through application of the EIA process. Each group will prepare a brief report-out (5 minutes, maximum) that highlights aspects of the baseline characterization and identifies the top 2 or 3 impacts of concern.

The small groups may also briefly suggest potential options for mitigating the impacts of concern that they have identified. However, this is not required—we will spend considerable time in the coming days understanding how to design and implement mitigation measures in response to specific impacts or types of impacts.

Objective

Use a field-based exercise to practice and apply the fundamental Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) skills of baseline characterization and identifying impacts of concern. Recognize the multi-disciplinary nature of effective EIA and the need for a systematic approach to understanding and prioritizing environmental impacts.