

## **RESOLUTION OF THE MINNESOTA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY BOARD**

Approval of the 2023 continuous improvement process for the environmental review program

### **Introduction**

Minnesota's Environmental Review Program (ER Program) was created in 1973 to provide usable information to communities, decision makers, and project proposers for a wide variety of projects. Historically, program updates occurred through legislative direction, mandatory category evaluation, and other initiatives – usually in response to a specific issue. EQB wants to ensure that the environmental review program continues to serve the needs of Minnesota well into the future. To this end, EQB has chosen to build a continuous improvement approach to be more proactive and systematic in making necessary changes.

The goal of the continuous improvement process is to identify and prioritize program changes in a strategic, transparent, and efficient manner to support continuous evolution and optimization of the program.

### **Board authorities**

The Board is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the state environmental review program and is directed by rule to take appropriate measures to modify and improve the effectiveness (Minn. R. 4410.0400).

### **Background**

The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) contracted with Management Analysis and Development (MAD) to help coordinate the development of a continuous improvement process.

MAD consultants conducted research on:

- Recommendations from past EQB evaluations: A review of recommendations from ten reports consisting of past EQB evaluations conducted between 1994 and 2021.
- Notable examples of successes and best practices: Interviews with environmental review program state representatives in California, Massachusetts, Washington, and Wisconsin.
- Best practices in the literature: A focused literature review examining best or emerging practices in environmental review.

Between January and March 2023, MAD and EQB staff gathered input in two main ways:

- A listening session held on Monday, January 30, 2023.
- Written feedback gathered through the online Engagement HQ platform from January through March 2023.

MAD and EQB staff conducted regular meetings to gain feedback from:

- A continuous improvement interagency team.
- Board members at EQB monthly meetings.

This effort culminates in a proposed continuous improvement process, to be executed at least once a biennium, with the following proposed procedural steps:

1. Solicit ideas for program improvements.  
*The process will begin with a call for suggestions for programmatic improvements from governmental partners, stakeholders, and the public. Ideas for improvements will be collected through multiple channels including, but not limited to an engagement HQ on-line platform, phone calls, emails, and meetings.*
2. Review the scope of the improvements.  
*All improvements must pertain to EQB's purview or represent ideas that could reasonably fit under EQB purview. Ideas that pertain solely to the authority of other agencies would not move forward in the process. EQB staff will make and document such determinations.*
3. Evaluate and score improvements using a program effectiveness prioritization matrix.  
*EQB staff will run scoped-in improvements through the prioritization matrix, scoring improvement ideas based on how they meet the criteria for program effectiveness. Improvements will be ordered based on how they contribute to overall program effectiveness.*
4. Plan for implementation of improvements.  
*EQB staff will consider logistics and resource needs for undertaking the improvements that met the most criteria for program effectiveness. Staff will present this information to the Environmental Review Implementation Subcommittee (ERIS) and make a recommendation for which improvements to act upon.*
5. ERIS completes review of implementation planning.  
*ERIS will review the improvement ideas, matrix scoring, and the implementation considerations. ERIS will make a recommendation to the Board on which improvement projects the EQB should implement.*
6. Board completes review and directs staff to implement selected projects.  
*The Board will review ERIS's recommendation and reach a consensus on which improvements EQB would like to focus on for a time period as determined by the board.*

## Findings

Regular implementation of this standardized six-step process will provide consistency in assessment and implementation of environmental review program improvement suggestions. The process steps are comprehensive, action-oriented, and inclusive. They are the result of over six months of research, engagement, and board member feedback.

This process will:

- Provide clarity on the Board's definition of an effective program, through the criteria in the prioritization matrix;
- Allow the board to clearly identify areas of improvement and maintain knowledge of needed improvements over time;
- Create a standardized way of prioritizing needed improvements; and
- Provide a transparent evaluation process showing why improvements are (or are not) pursued.

## Resolution

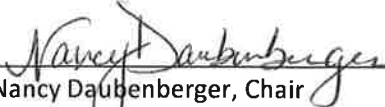
The board resolves to adopt and use the following continuous improvement procedural steps at least once a biennium for the environmental review program:

1. EQB staff solicit ideas for program improvements.
2. EQB staff review the scope of the improvements.
3. EQB staff evaluate and score improvements using a program effectiveness prioritization matrix.
4. EQB staff plan for implementation of improvements.
5. ERIS completes review of implementation planning.

**6. Board completes review and directs staff to implement selected projects.**

**These steps will be re-evaluated at least every four years, so the board may make any necessary adjustments.**

The board approved and adopted this resolution on June 21, 2023.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Nancy Daubenberger, Chair  
Minnesota Environmental Quality Board

Date: 6/21/2023

