

Importance of Public Involvement in Managing Our National Forests

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Forest Service Mission

Sustaining the health,
diversity and productivity
of the nation's forests and
grasslands to meet the
needs of present and
future generations.



U.S. FOREST SERVICE
Caring for the land and serving people

United States Department of Agriculture

The U.S. Forest Service manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world.

We have a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 80% of the 850 million forested acres in the U.S. Over 100 million of these acres are comprised of the urban forests.

First Chief of the Forest Service

GIFFORD PINCHOT



Pinchot guided the fledgling organization toward the utilitarian philosophy of the "greatest good for the greatest number for the longest time."

Pinchot's *Guide to the Behavior of Foresters in Public Office*, referred to as the 11 Maxims, underscored the importance of the public participation.

- "A public official is there to serve the public, not to run them".
- "Public support of acts affecting public rights is absolutely required."
- "Find out in advance what the public will stand for...if they won't stand for it, postpone action and educate them."

What is public involvement?

Actively inviting the public to participate in the planning process.

Encouraging and facilitating the public to participate in decisions affecting public land.

Involving the public helps the decision-maker identify who is interested or affected by a proposal, what they care about, and how we can incorporate their needs into project design.

Who do we involve?

We must involve federal, state and local agencies and affected Native American Tribes.

We must involve interested and affected individuals. These parties are typically defined by the size and location of a proposal, and the type of proposal.

Proponent of a proposal; sometimes the idea for a proposal comes from external sources.

Why involve the public?

Including the public in the decision-making process is outlined in laws, regulations and policies.

One of the major laws bringing public participation requirements into land management planning is the National Environmental Policy Act or NEPA.

- This Act ensures that information is made available to public officials and citizens *before* decisions are made and before actions are taken.
- Project planning must be consistent with NEPA for actions on federal land, or when federal dollars are expended for project implementation on other lands.

LAWS

Section 102(2)(g) of NEPA states that all federal agencies shall make available to States, counties, municipalities, institutions, and individuals, advice and information useful in restoring, maintaining, and enhancing the quality of the environment.

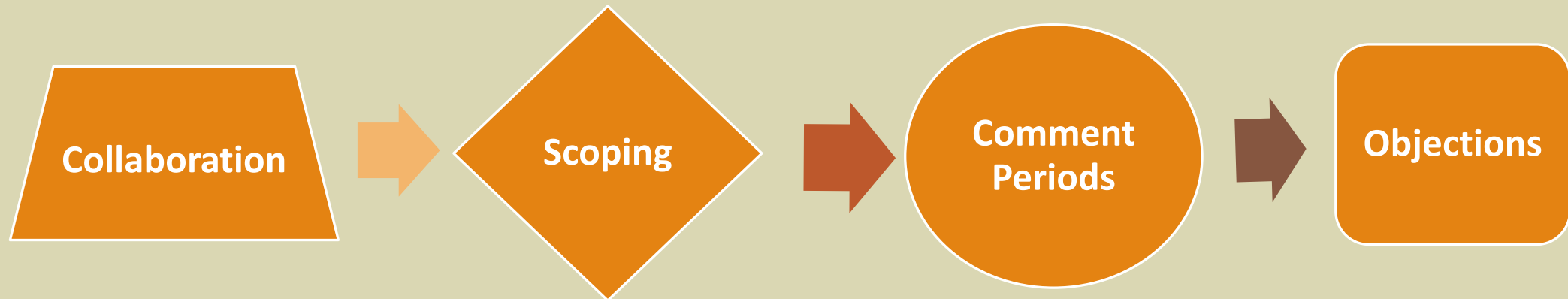
REGULATIONS

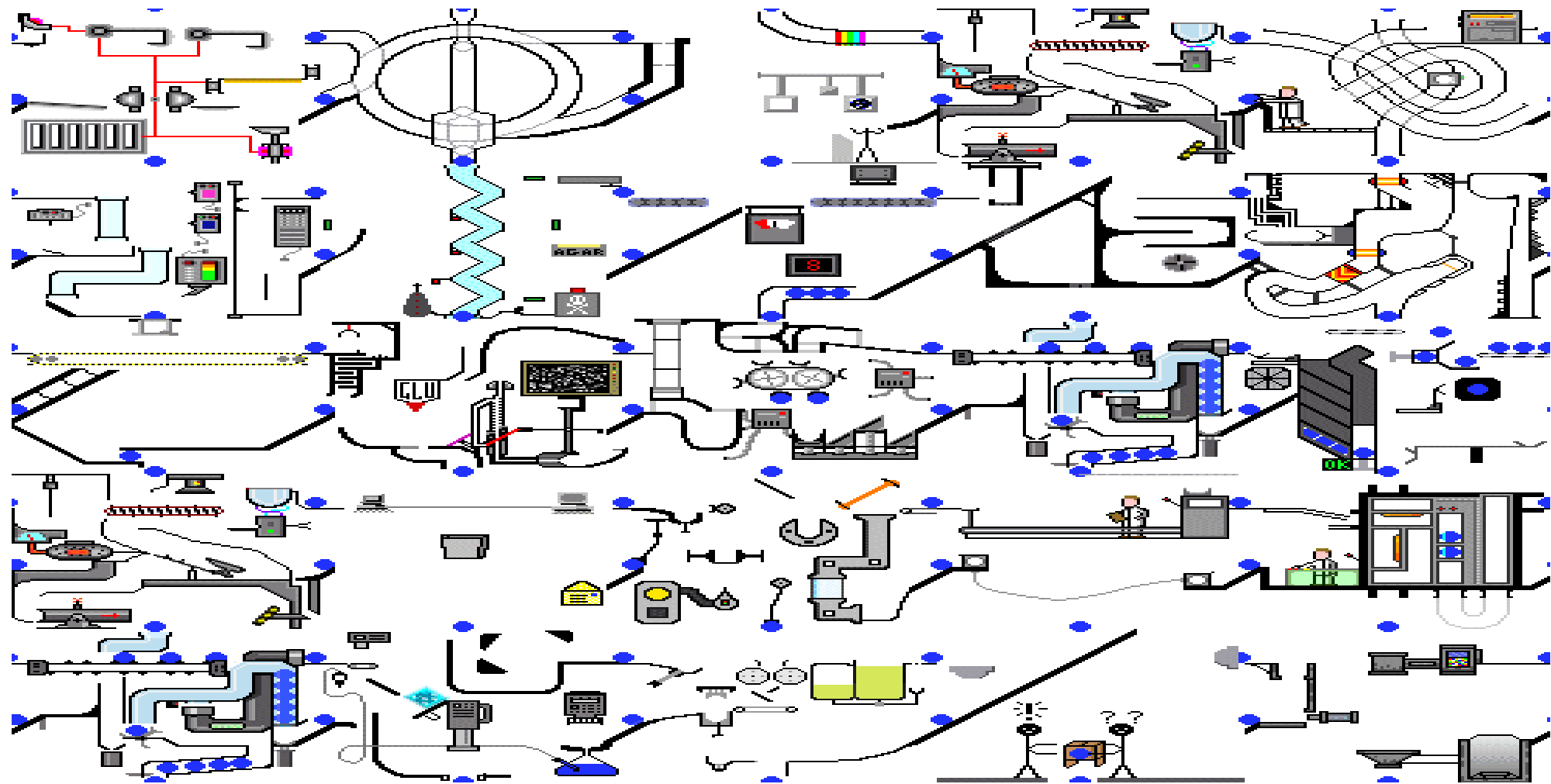
Agencies shall (a) Make diligent efforts to involve the public in preparing and implementing their NEPA procedures (40 CFR 1506.6).

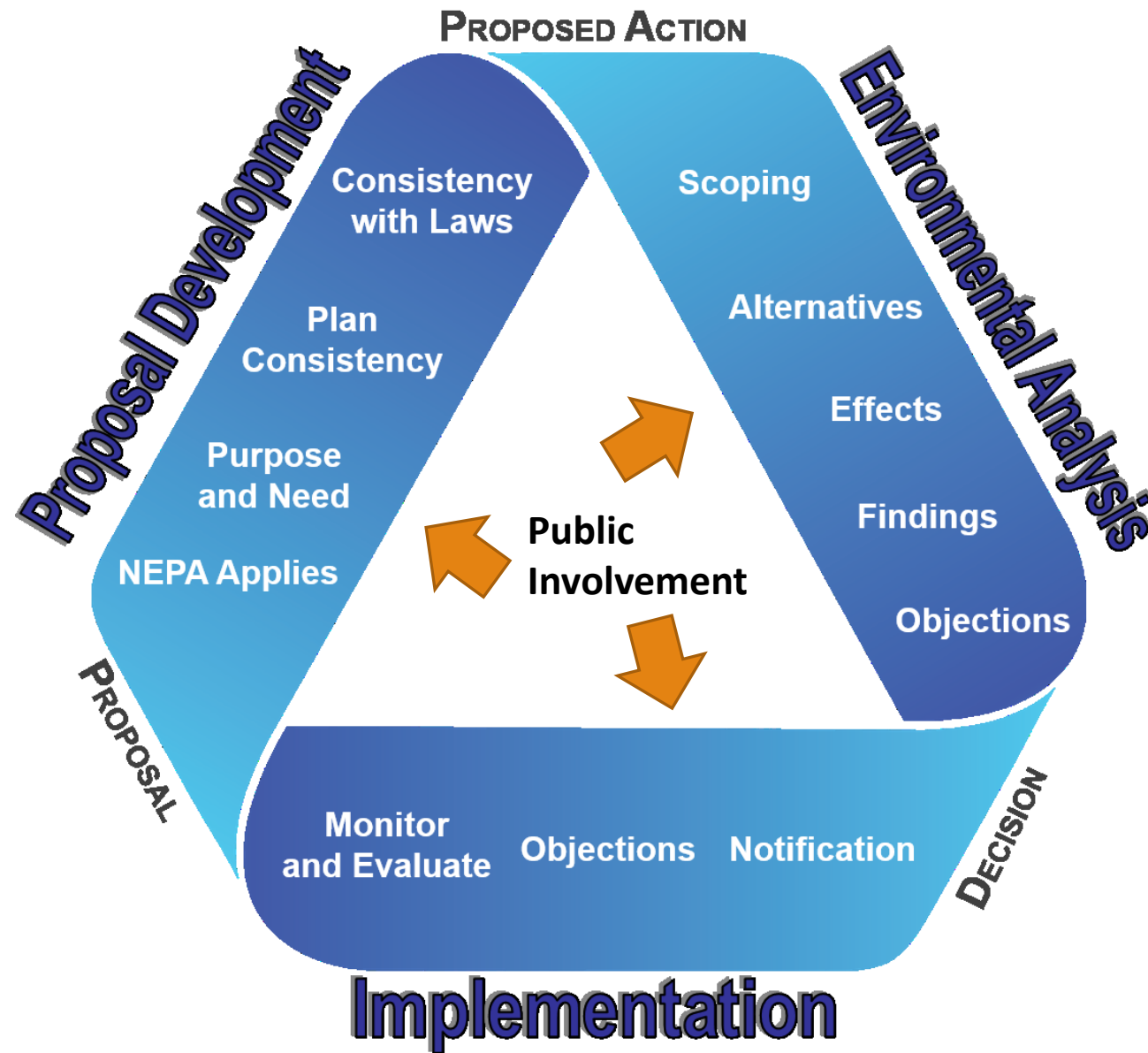
POLICY

Public involvement should occur throughout the analysis process. Continue to keep the public informed of the progress of the environmental analysis (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15).

When do we involve the public?

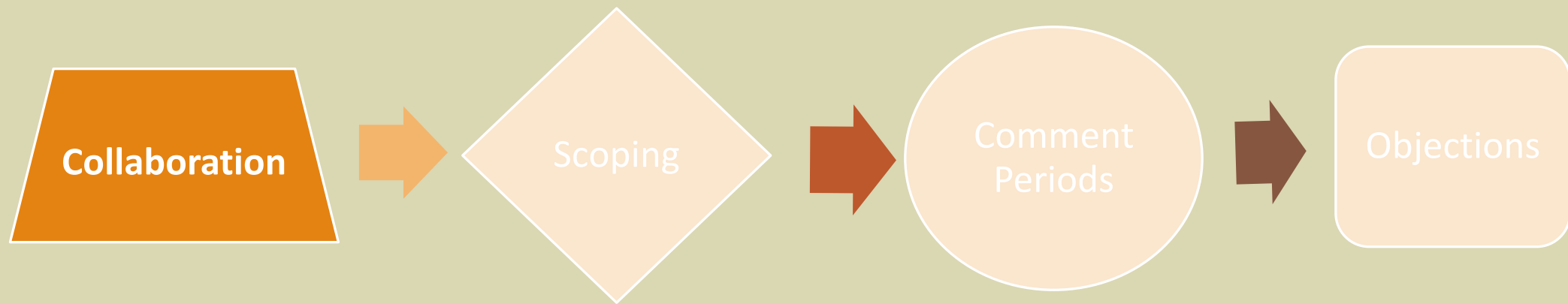


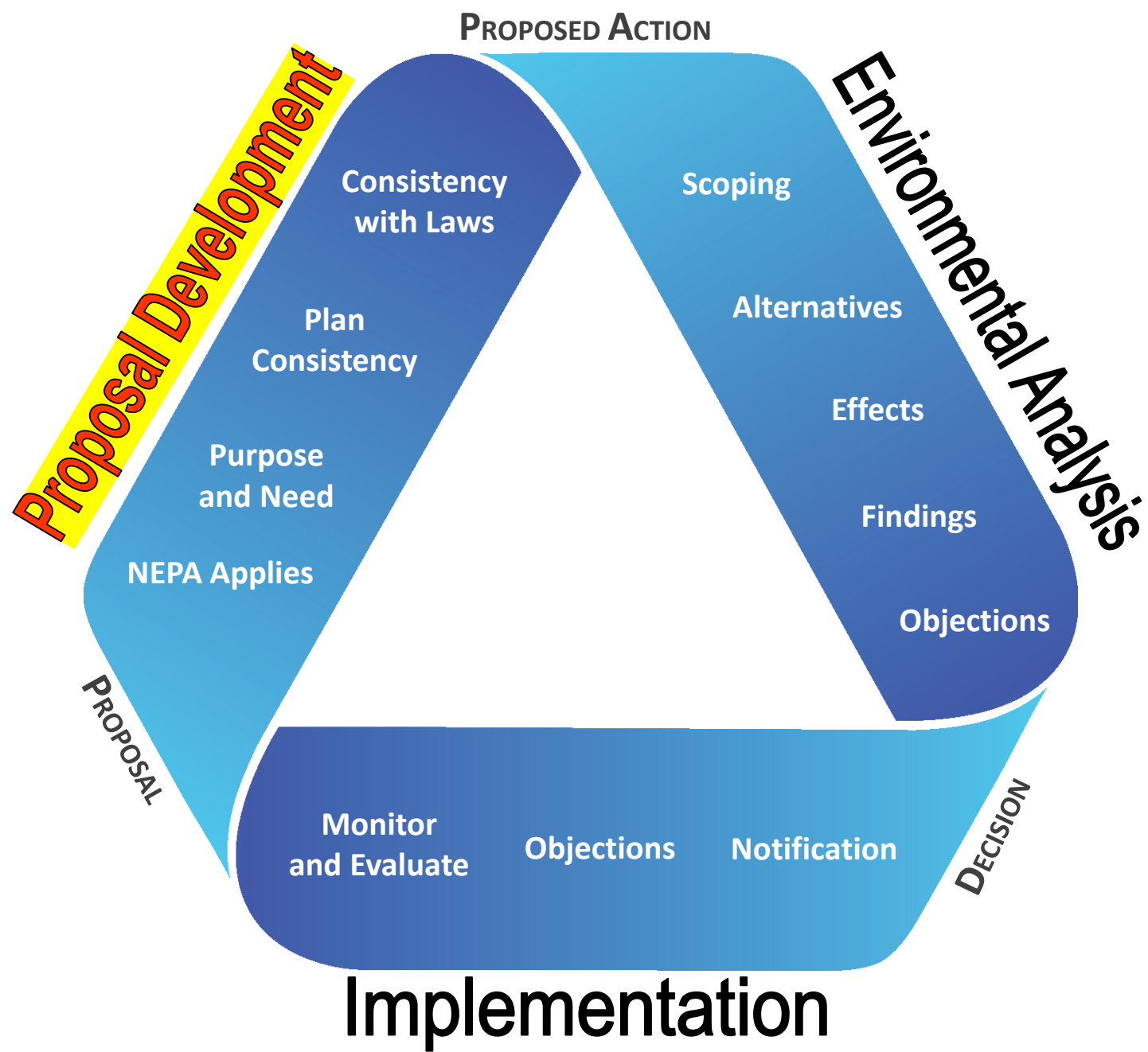




Type of Analysis Document	When It Applies	Type of Decision
Categorical Exclusion	Actions are excluded from analysis in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.	Decision Memo
Environmental Assessment (EA)	Used to inform the decision-maker and public that no significant effects would occur if a proposal is implemented.	Decision Notice
Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)	Prepared when actions are known to have significant effects in both the context (scale) and/or intensity (extent).	Record of Decision

When do we involve the public?





Collaboration

Collaboration is people working together to share knowledge and resources to describe and achieve desired conditions.

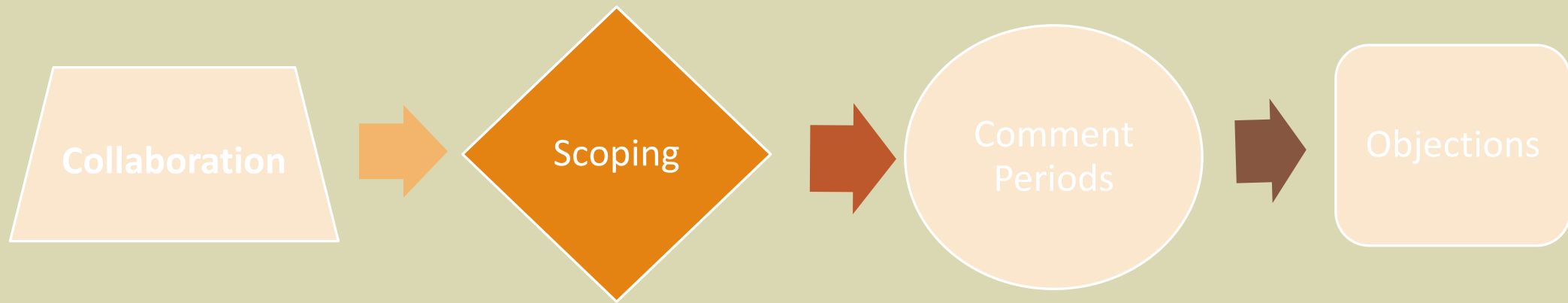
Collaboration is a key, interactive part of public participation.

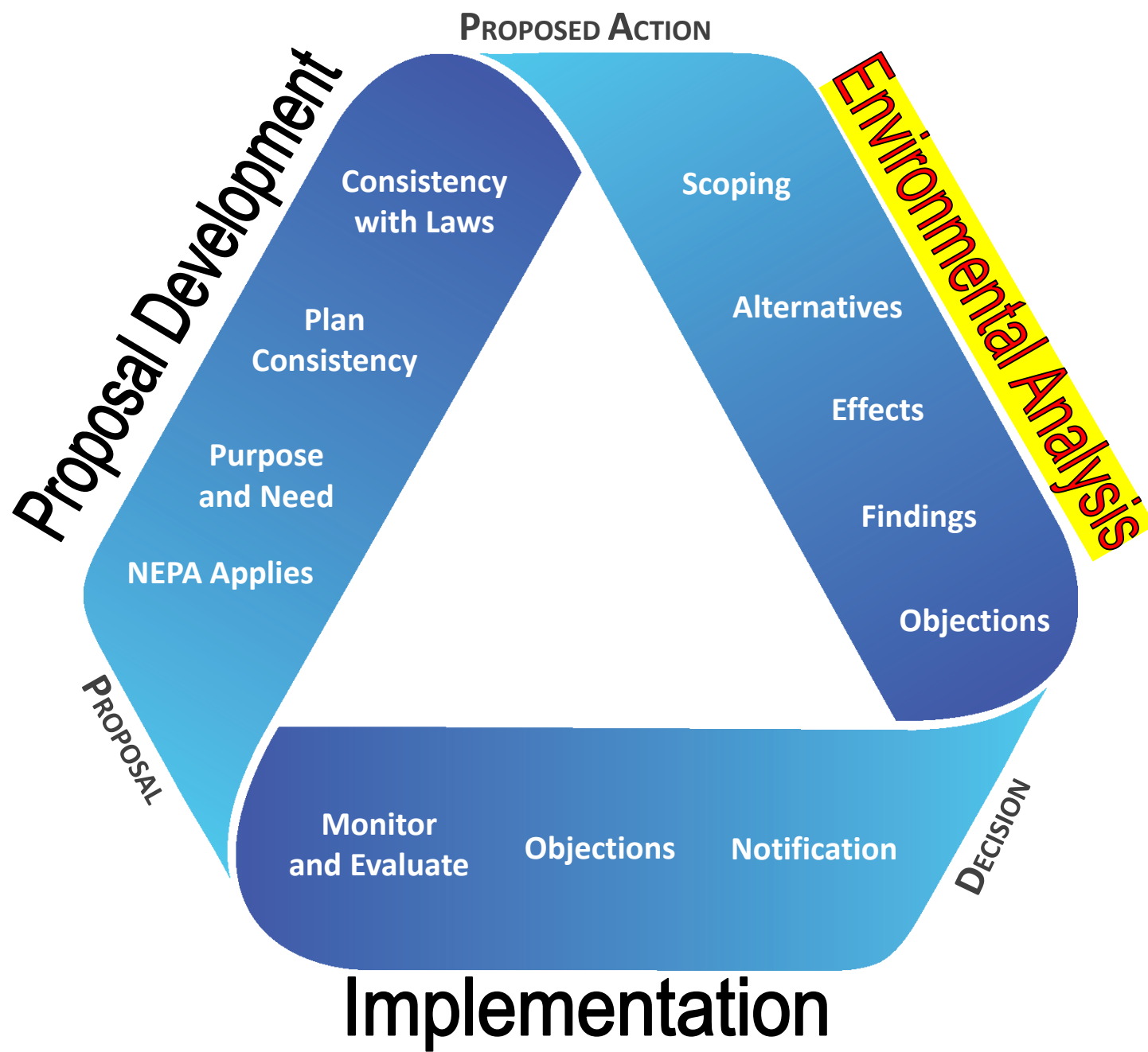
There are a wide range of approaches, tools, and processes to accomplish collaboration. The methods of how we collaborate is at the discretion of the decision-maker.

Collaboration is encouraged for all project planning efforts, but it is required for actions analyzed via an EA or EIS.

Collaboration at the beginning can lead to more support throughout the process.

When do we involve the public?





Scoping

An early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action.

Scoping is required for all actions on Forest Service land, or where federal funds are used on other lands.

We typically scope our proposals by sending information through direct mailings, press releases, and posting information to our internet site.

The method used for scoping is at the discretion of the decision-maker.

We are required to disclose project information in the Schedule of Proposed Actions, or SOPA (<http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/>). The SOPA is nationwide database that can be updated daily.

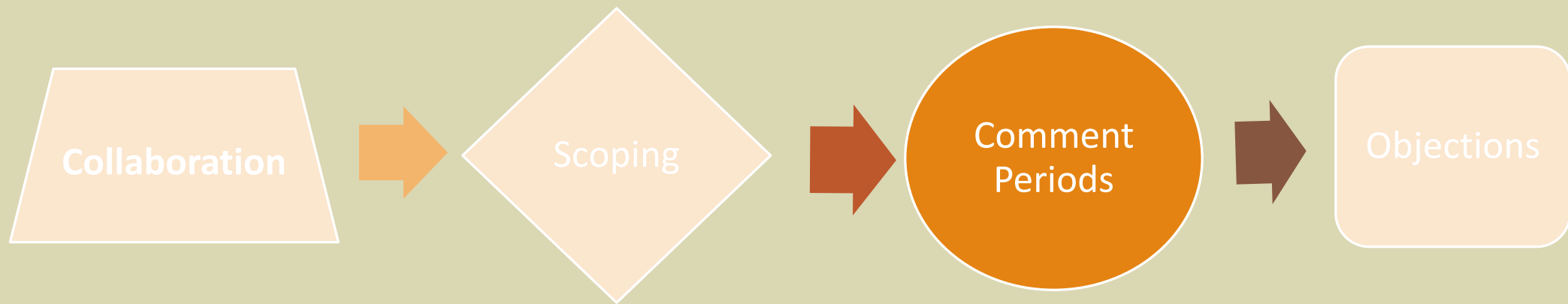
Scoping

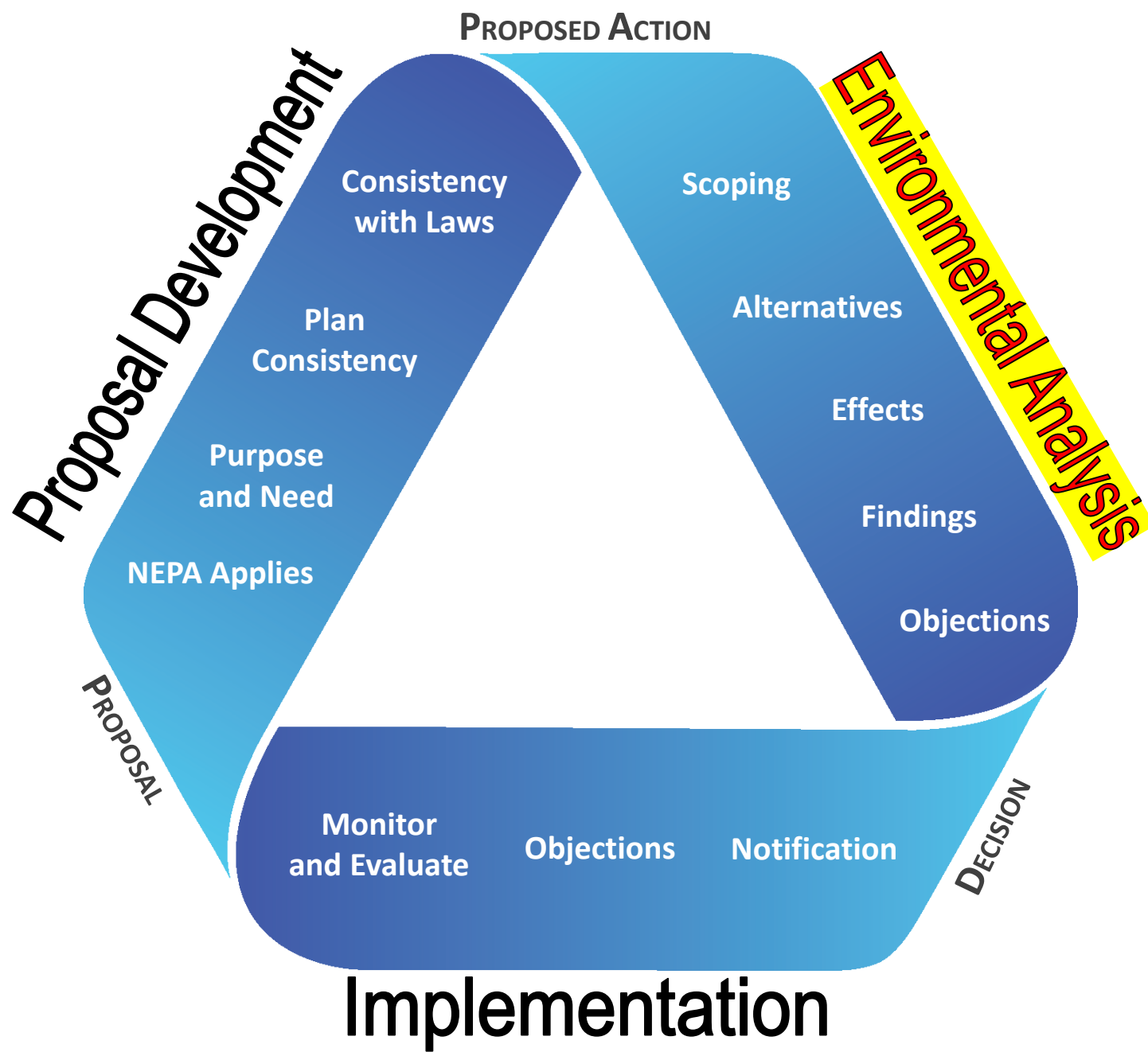
It is important for us to remember, and remind our public, that scoping is not a voting process. The decision-maker uses the process to determine how to proceed during the analysis process.

Scoping can help the decision-maker determine what type of analysis is needed, refine the proposal, explore possible alternatives, and identify potential environmental effects.

Examples of our scoping results (1) support; (2) no support; (3) requests for clarifications; and (4) requests for change.

When do we involve the public?





Comment Periods

There are two types of comment periods; commonly referred to as informal and formal.

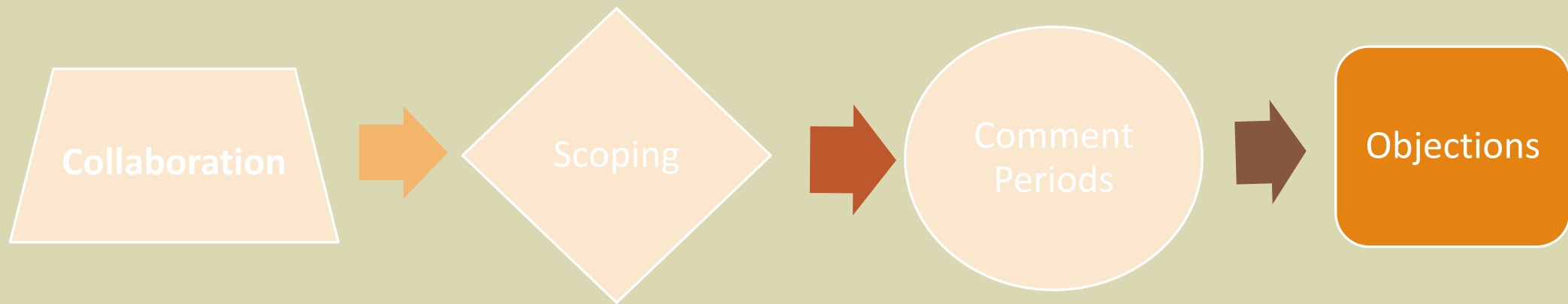
Informal comment periods are not required.

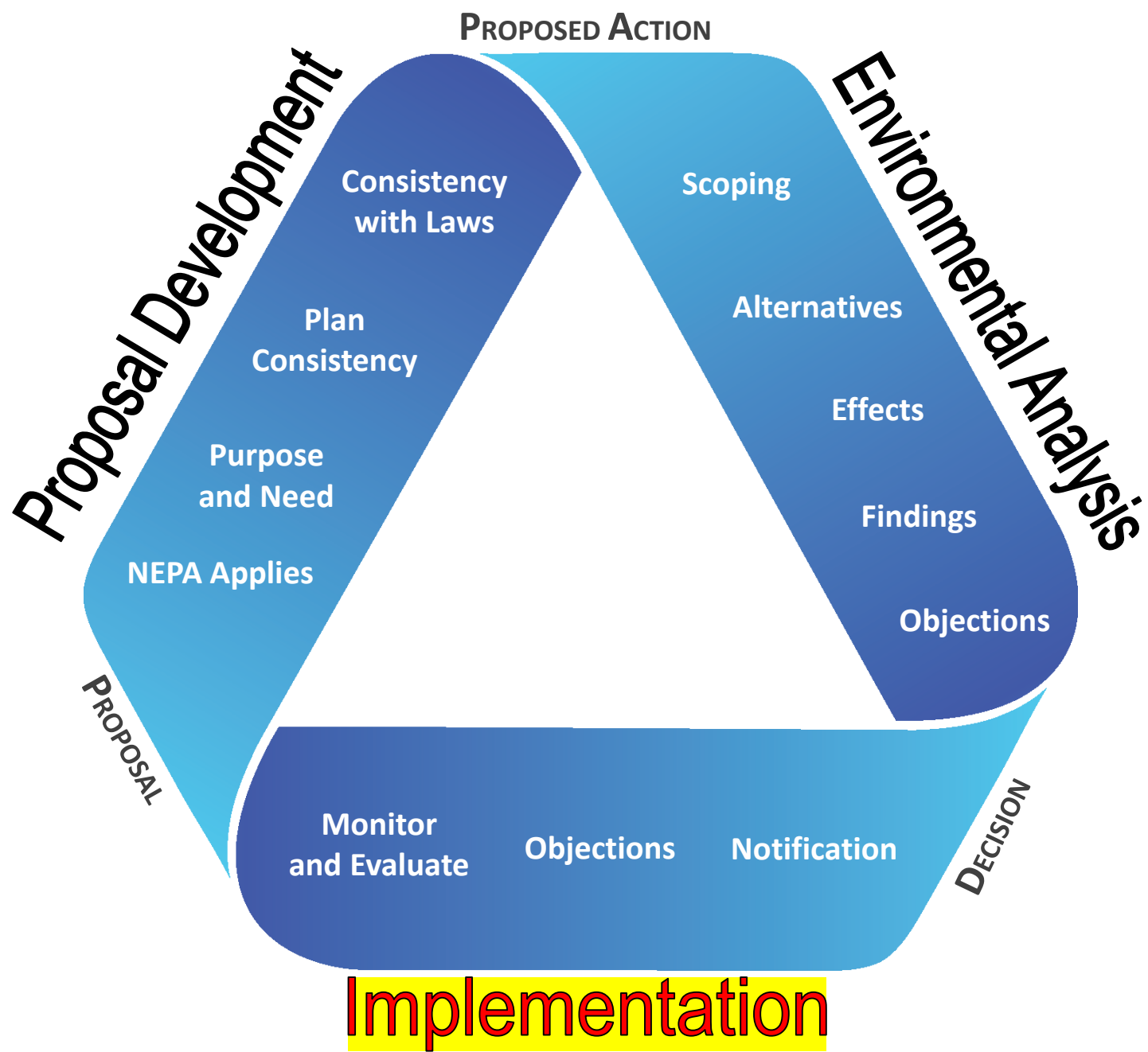
- They can be used at the decision-maker's discretion to gather information about the public's needs or concerns during collaboration and scoping.

Formal comment periods are required.

- They have to be specifically identified as formal by the decision-maker via a legal notice publication in the newspaper of record.
- There is a mandatory 30-day comment period accompanying Environmental Assessments.
- There is a mandatory 45-day comment period for Environmental Impact Statements.

When do we involve the public?





Predecisional Administrative Review Process

This objections process, allows for continued collaboration with the public, prior to a decision being made.

A 45-day objection period is available for EAs or EISs, unless no comments are received during the formal comment period.

- One caveat is...unless the agency included new information in the analysis document or draft decision that was not previously available for comment.

The objections process is only available for those individuals that previously submitted comments on the proposal.

A Reviewing Officer, who is one level higher than the decision-maker, evaluates how, and if, an objection can be addressed.

Predecisional Administrative Review Process

The reviewing officer provides an offer to meet/discuss concerns with the objector to determine if, and how, a project's design can be changed to resolve objections.

If objections can be addressed, the reviewing officer assigns instructions to the decision maker to incorporate into the project.

A final decision cannot be made unless all instructions have been addressed. Instructions can include additional analysis, or changes to project design.

What does public involvement help us do?

- Comply with laws, regulations and policies.
- Meet the vision and intent of NEPA by making people part of the process!
- Adds to our knowledge of the land.
- Assists to provide alternatives for the decision-maker to consider.
- Helps future planning, in terms of incorporating what we learn through prior public involvement.