



Envision and COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities

This document contains important information about the use of the Envision sustainable infrastructure framework during COVID-19 and is especially written for projects currently pursuing or intending to pursue Envision verification during this time.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	USING ENVISION DURING COVID-19.....	3
2.0	IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND PREPARING PROJECT-SPECIFIC DISRUPTION PLANS.....	3
2.1	GUIDING PRINCIPLES WHEN CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVE / MODIFIED APPROACHES TO ENVISION CREDIT REQUIREMENTS	4
2.2	ADDRESSING COVID-19 DISRUPTIONS: ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES.....	5
2.3	EVIDENTIARY REQUIREMENTS FOR DISRUPTION PLANS	6
3.0	COVID-19 AND OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN ENVISION	6
3.1	EXAMPLE OPPORTUNITIES.....	6
4.0	ENVISION VERIFICATION: TIMELINE CONSIDERATIONS DURING COVID-19	8
5.0	ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & CONTACT INFORMATION	9

1.0 USING ENVISION DURING COVID-19

This document responds to the current COVID-19 pandemic. ISI acknowledges that, during this period where many cities are in a state of lockdown or semi-lockdown, project teams seeking Envision verification may face significant disruptions to business operations.

During this period, A/E/C (Architecture, Engineering and Construction) firms, along with other industry partners, public-sector governments, and agencies, will likely face difficulties meeting certain Envision sustainability and resilience criteria contained in the *Envision Guidance Manual*. As such, this document is intended to assist projects seeking an Envision rating to continue achieving sustainability and resilience outcomes.

Information pertaining to how Envision specifically addresses global health crises like COVID-19 is also presented herein.

2.0 IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND PREPARING PROJECT-SPECIFIC DISRUPTION PLANS

Project teams may encounter one or more challenges and constraints in meeting certain Envision sustainability credits or specific evaluation criteria in the *Envision Guidance Manual*. In these instances, where a credit or specific criteria cannot be satisfied using typical approaches due to impacts caused by COVID-19, there may be alternative ways of meeting the intent that reflect current business realities.

Some of the challenges project teams face may relate to federal, state/provincial, and/or local government directives to self-isolate and practice social distancing. Others may relate to business closures, travel restrictions, supply chain disruptions, workforce reductions, or company policies that constrain necessary activities required to prepare a project for Envision verification.

Should projects wish to adopt measures contained in this document, a **project-specific COVID-19 Disruption Plan** (Disruption Plan) needs to be submitted to ISI.

Disruption Plans submitted to ISI will form part of the documentation to be reviewed. For projects registered to pursue Envision verification under either v2 or v3, a Disruption Plan may be submitted to ISI prior to official submission if the project team wishes to have their alternative strategies confirmed before project verification. Project teams may also decide to submit Disruption Plans to ISI as part of the official Envision verification project submittal or re-submittal.

Project teams who are using Envision for self-evaluation may also wish to prepare Disruption Plans. ISI will not formally evaluate Disruption Plans submitted by projects that are not registered to pursue Envision verification or currently proceeding with verification. However, we encourage such project teams to send a copy to ISI as we intend to develop a compendium of plans and procedures being used to address the impacts caused by COVID-19.

ISI will not publish any Disruption Plans or its contents without express written consent from the project team.

This document does not supersede ISI's *Guide to Envision Verification for Applicants* and related *ISI Policies*; nor is it intended to supplant requirements in the *Envision Guidance Manual*. Rather, this document is intended to acknowledge and address temporary impacts caused by COVID-19.

2.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES WHEN CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVE / MODIFIED APPROACHES TO ENVISION CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

When considering disruptions caused by COVID-19 and how they impact Envision credit requirements, the following guiding principles must be considered:

- A. Consistency with applicable laws:** The Disruption Plan needs to be consistent with federal, state/provincial and municipal laws and directives that protect public health, workers and communities;
- B. Meeting the intent of the credit requirements:** To the extent practically possible, any modified approaches to meeting Envision requirements must respond to the intent of Envision credits and related evaluation criteria, within the *Envision Guidance Manual* (v2 and v3);
- C. Scope and timeline:** Modified or alternative approaches to meeting Envision requirements only apply to the extent and time that they are necessary;
- D. Clarity and simplicity:** Any modified or alternative approaches to meeting Envision requirements must be explained as clearly and simply as possible;
- E. Flexibility:** ISI will provide additional flexibility to the extent practically possible during the disruption caused by COVID-19. ISI recognizes that the full extent of business impacts and the duration of the impacts is still not fully known or understood;
- F. Maintaining Target Envision Rating:** Any modified or alternative approaches to fulfilling Envision requirements cannot be disadvantageous to a project in attaining its target Envision rating.

2.2 ADDRESSING COVID-19 DISRUPTIONS: ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

Certain business activities may not be able to be carried out in typical ways for the foreseeable future due to restrictions on group gatherings and other disruptions caused by COVID-19.

2.2.1 Example Disruptions and Alternative Approaches

2.2.1.1 Stakeholder Engagement / Public Consultation

Gathering stakeholders together for public consultations, design charrettes, and other types of workshops may not be possible for an extended period of time. Project teams are encouraged to investigate alternative means of communicating with stakeholders (including the public) and gaining their feedback. Examples may include utilizing video conferencing, social media, traditional mail, and online surveys.

2.2.1.2 Establishing Baselines

Some projects currently in design are facing challenges with respect to establishing baselines. For example, QL1.4 Minimize Noise and Vibration requires a baseline for a Conserving level of achievement or higher. However, typical noise and vibration levels in cities that are in a state of lockdown or semi-lockdown are not present. This makes it challenging to establish a baseline for performance improvement. Projects in geographical areas where reduced activity is affecting the ability to establish appropriate baselines should investigate alternative approaches. Example alternative approaches may include:

- Relying on studies conducted prior to COVID-19 either for the specific project in question or for a project in the same vicinity;
- Relying on studies or other background research conducted at the time relevant ordinances were established;
- Investigating and deploying other innovative measures to establish a baseline during this unprecedented time. Such new approaches may also be considered for innovation points within the Envision system.

2.2.2 Monitoring

While many monitoring activities are likely to be possible, social distancing requirements may impact workplaces and these activities. Project teams are encouraged to investigate alternative means of undertaking monitoring activities, such as remote or digital techniques.

2.3 EVIDENTIARY REQUIREMENTS FOR DISRUPTION PLANS

Projects submitting a Disruption Plan to ISI must document the disruptions impacting the project and provide evidentiary information.

For example, projects affected by impacts relating to social distancing requirements caused by COVID-19, evidence articulating the risk(s) posed by holding activities using typical approaches (e.g., in-person workshops or design charrettes) need to be provided.

For other impacts, such as supply chain disruptions, project scope, or timeline changes, evidence these are related to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is required. This may include documented legal notices, official notices from suppliers, or other written communications or documentation to aid ISI and its third-party verifiers in understanding the nature and extent of the disruptions to the project.

Any Disruption Plans submitted to ISI for Envision verification purposes are considered 'living documents' that may require revisions as market conditions evolve. In cases where market conditions materially affect a Disruption Plan, ISI will require such plans to be revised and resubmitted.

The process of accepting and evaluating Disruption Plans for projects pursuing Envision verification is temporary and shall remain relevant for the period where business operations are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is not enough information at this stage to know when this crisis will be over, nor when business operations will 'go back to normal'. Therefore, ISI is cannot provide an exact date for when this Disruption Plan process will expire. Any actions agreed to within the Disruption Plan will be considered during project verification. If project verification occurs after the date of this process being rescinded, the Disruption Plan will still be considered as part of the usual verification process for the period covered.

3.0 COVID-19 AND OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN ENVISION

While COVID-19 will undoubtedly affect many projects pursuing Envision verification, it may also present project teams with unique or expanded opportunities.

3.1 EXAMPLE OPPORTUNITIES

3.1.1 Maximizing Resilience

Several Resilience credits within Envision v3 (e.g. CR2.3, CR2.4 and CR2.5) address health. In CR2.3 Evaluate Risk and Resilience, "Health Epidemics" is an example of a risk classified as an "Acute Shock". While these Envision credits rely on the project team to identify the particular risks their projects face (e.g., a landlocked project might not be at risk from sea level rise), COVID-19 has

demonstrated that all communities around the world must now consider epidemics and global pandemics as potential risks.

3.1.2 Addressing Public Health and Safety

QL1.2 Enhance Public Health and Safety in Envision v3 explicitly recognizes projects that exceed minimum health and safety requirements. This includes addressing health risks such as infectious diseases, epidemics, and global pandemics like COVID-19. There are many ways not currently mandated that projects could be modified or retrofitted to address this issue. Doing so would help such projects attain credit under Envision. As projects rise through the levels of achievement in QL1.2, they expand their consideration of health and safety impacts beyond the project itself to include its surroundings and ultimately the entire community. At the Conserving level, projects ensure they are equitably benefiting all citizens within a community. This is particularly crucial in the case of public health and safety. At the Restorative level Envision recognizes projects that, "provide critical infrastructure services to communities experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, imminent, negative health and/or personal safety impacts."

3.1.3 Improve Construction Safety

The credit QL1.3 Improve Construction Safety in Envision v3 addresses improving health and safety practices during construction. Project teams can consider including public health concerns in their hazard analyses and include protective measures and/or methodologies in construction safety plans. Requirements could also be passed to the contractor that account for worker safety related to COVID-19 during construction.

3.1.4 Material Selection and Availability

COVID-19 may cause supply chain interruptions that could affect the choice and availability of materials used on a project. This presents project teams with a unique opportunity to consider whether materials from local suppliers are potentially more attainable than those from greater distances. This also presents project teams with an opportunity to consider the potential to reuse existing materials or structures on site.

3.1.5 Plan for Continuity

COVID-19 has highlighted an unexpected reality for the safe operations of civil infrastructure. The possibility that key staff may fall ill at nearly the same time and be required to step away from their positions for a period of weeks means that projects should consider continuity planning. Continuity planning involves crafting a strategy that retains the core functions of the project in a time of crisis. This may include an analysis of different scenarios, developing an emergency operations manual, cross-training staff, or other activities that maintain essential services. Continuity planning is most closely aligned with LD2.3 Plan for Long-Term Monitoring and Maintenance in Envision v3, but may

also be relevant to LD2.1 Establish a Sustainability Management Plan, RA2.4 Commission and Monitor Energy Systems, and RA3.4 Monitor Waster Systems.

3.1.6 Innovation

Projects that are finding unique ways to protect communities, workers, and the public in the face of COVID-19 may be eligible for extra credit points. In Envision v3, there are three ways that projects can be recognized for innovation:

- **Innovation:** implementing innovative methods, resources, technologies or processes;
- **Exceptional performance:** going above and beyond the highest level of achievement in a given credit; and
- **Other Aspects of Sustainability:** Addressing aspects of sustainability not already included in the Envision framework.

The topic of addressing infectious diseases, epidemics, and pandemics is covered in the Envision framework and thus could not be considered as “addressing additional aspects of sustainability”. However, projects that are implementing unique approaches to dealing with COVID-19 or going above and beyond typical regulatory requirements to protect workers and ensure public health and safety may qualify for innovation points.

4.0 ENVISION VERIFICATION: TIMELINE CONSIDERATIONS DURING COVID-19

[SECTION UPDATED DECEMBER 8, 2020]

Effective teamwork and collaboration are crucial aspects of preparing projects for Envision verification. As such, government directives to social distance and company policies encouraging or mandating employees to work remotely may affect a project team’s ability to work collaboratively on their submission. This could be especially true of teams who typically collaborate in-person and are adjusting to changes.

Also, many companies and public-sector agencies are furloughing or reducing hours amidst COVID-19. This may directly or indirectly inhibit project teams as they prepare their project for Envision verification.

ISI understands these issues and our goal is to alleviate as much of the pressure as possible. **To this end, ISI is extending more flexibility and latitude regarding project submission and re-submission timelines for Envision v2 projects.**

Our goal is to continue to do all we can to support as many projects as possible in their pursuit of Envision verification.

ISI had anticipated all v2 projects would *complete* verification by the v2 sunset date of December 31, 2020. As the pandemic unfolded, we then hoped all Envision v2 verification teams would be able to submit for review on or before the end of the year, but we came to realize this will be a stretch for several teams, despite their best efforts to hit that target date.

In the spirit of sustainability, which includes health and well-being, we don't want to be the source of unnecessary stress or pressure for project teams seeking verification under Envision v2.

Therefore, any project teams working on an Envision v2 project, know that we're here to support you. You will be able to continue working with Envision v2, and we will review your project(s) when you're ready and able to submit them for review. We do ask that all project teams working on a registered Envision v2 project keep ISI informed of their submission schedule and endeavor to submit their projects in as timely a fashion as possible, as we are looking to wind down the use of Envision v2 as soon as we can.

5.0 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & CONTACT INFORMATION

ISI Policies and additional Envision verification-related resources can be found on the "Resources" page on the ISI website: <https://sustainableinfrastructure.org/resources/>.

For more information about Envision verification or to ask questions about this document, please contact:

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