

Geotechnical Non-Standard Special Provision Process

This module provides an overview of the Caltrans construction contract standards and development process, and explains the procedures for editing and development of a Non-Standard Special Provisions (NSSP) and associated review and approval process.

1 Background

To ensure consistent contracting practice for all Caltrans construction contracts, Caltrans maintains Construction Contract Standards, which include the Standard Specifications, Standard Special Provisions (SSPs), and Standard Plans. The use of these standards allows the project development teams to efficiently produce consistent, constructible, and biddable contracts.

These standards are applied to all Caltrans construction contracts and updated periodically based on construction feedback. New or updated standards are required to go through rigorous reviews, including by Construction, FHWA, and industry.

Occasionally new or non-standard specifications are needed. The scenarios that require NSSPs include:

- The need for construction bid items that are not in the [Coded Contract Items \(Bid Items\)](#) list, such as rock dowels and lightweight cellular concrete
- The need for construction methods that are not included in the Standard Specifications or Standard Special Provisions, such as jet grouting and stone columns
- When the design requires edits of existing SSPs beyond the instructions allowed.

The use of an NSSP should be limited and justified. An NSSP must go through repeated edits and time-consuming reviews before being accepted for use.

Do not use non-standards if there is a suitable Standard Specification or Standard Special Provisions available.

2 Caltrans Construction Contract Development

2.1 Caltrans Standards

Caltrans [construction contract standards](#) include:

- Standard Plans and Revised Standard Plans
- Standard Specifications and Revised Standard Specifications
- Standard Special Provisions
- Coded Contract Bid Item List

- Specification Templates

The Standard Specifications provide uniform contract clauses that apply to all Caltrans construction contracts. The SSPs provide the means for the Specification Engineer to write project-specific contract clauses and compile them into a project's Special Provisions. To ensure consistency and maintain contract quality, an SSP can only be edited according to the instructions contained in each SSP. In addition to SSPs, NSSPs, when needed, will also be included in the Special Provisions.

In a contract package, the hierarchy of contract parts in descending order is:

1. Special Provisions
2. Project plans
3. Revised Standard Specifications
4. Standard Specifications
5. Revised Standard Plans
6. Standard Plans
7. Supplemental project information (e.g., Geotechnical Design Reports, Foundation Reports)

Therefore, Special Provisions, the highest contract part in the hierarchy of a construction contract, must be edited and compiled based on Caltrans construction contract standards.

2.2 Caltrans Specification Style Guide

All Caltrans specifications, including NSSPs, must comply with the [Specification Style Guide](#), which states:

“The Specification Style Guide includes guidance for the style to be used for the Department of Transportation's construction specifications. Style includes the organization, format, language, and mechanics.

This guide is based on information from several sources, including the Federal Register's writing guidelines, The Chicago Manual of Style (Chicago), Construction Specifications Institute (CSI), AASHTO Guide Specifications for Highway Construction, and the highway construction specifications of other states. These sources may be shown in parentheses.

Throughout the style guide, information and guidance have been provided...”

2.3 Overview of Caltrans Process for NSSPs

The development, review, and approval of an NSSP can take several months and requires collaboration between the Geoprofessional and the Specification Engineer. The Geoprofessional is professionally responsible for the technical content of the Geotechnical NSSP and must ensure that the NSSP is biddable and buildable.

For technical content outside the function of Geotechnical Services, defer to the functional units that possess the expertise. For example, the development of NSSPs for various concrete products should be deferred to Material Engineering and Testing Services (METS) and their assistance should be requested.

Contact Geotechnical.Specification@dot.ca.gov for questions relating to geotechnical NSSPs.

Each NSSP must be reviewed by the owner or delegated person with approval authority to verify that the NSSP complies with:

- [NSSP Development Guide](#)
- [Construction Contract Development Guide \(CCDG\)](#)

For a specified product, verify that at least two manufacturers can provide the product. If only one manufacturer is identified, notify the Specification Engineer and assist the Project Engineer and Specification Engineer in obtaining a *Sole Source* approval.

For sole source products/materials, the Project Engineer will complete a Public Interest Finding (PIF) to satisfy the State proprietary requirements, and obtain an approval memo issued by the District Director/Deputy Director or Engineering Services Division Chief for proprietary products being used on the Department's contract.

3 Geotechnical Process for Established NSSPs

Established geotechnical NSSPs are posted on the [NSSP for Geotechnical Design](#) webpage.

1. If there is a potential need for an NSSP, notify the Specification Engineer.
2. Download the applicable NSSP file.
3. Editing instructions are in "Hidden Text" style. To view the instructions, turn on the display of "Hidden Text" in Microsoft Word (i.e., select File-Options-Display-Hidden Text).
4. Work with District OE or Structure OE to edit the NSSP based on the instructions and project needs. If there is a need for edits beyond the instructions, consult with the designated owner of the NSSP. All edits must comply with the [NSSP Development Guide](#) and [Specification Style Guide](#).

5. Assist District OE or Structure OE to submit the NSSP to the designated owner of the NSSP and the section owner for approval.

For example, for NSSPs placed under Section 19, except for the exceptions listed in the owner roster, a request must be sent by District OE to both [HQ Construction Engineering@dot.ca.gov](mailto:HQ_Construction_Engineering@dot.ca.gov) and the contact or designated owner listed in the Geotechnical NSSP web site for approval.

4 Geotechnical Process for New NSSPs

For geotechnical NSSPs that:

- Are not posted on the [NSSP for Geotechnical Design](#) web site, or
- Require major edits to the existing Standard Special Provisions or Standard Specifications

Expect at least 6 months for the development and approval of the NSSPs. Work with the Specification Engineer in drafting and editing the NSSP.

Submit the following documents to District OE. These documents will be included in the *Request for Approval Package* that will be sent by OE to the specification owner:

- Justification for the NSSP
- Geotechnical reports
- Applicable plan sheets
- Specific permit restrictions that may affect the specifications

The completed NSSPs must be submitted by District OE or Structure OE to the [specification owner](#) for approval.

For example, for NSSPs placed under section 19, except for exceptions listed on the owner rosters, a request must be sent by District OE or Structure OE to [HQ Construction Engineering@dot.ca.gov](mailto:HQ_Construction_Engineering@dot.ca.gov).

Expect at least 4 weeks for review-edit-reconciliation iterations.