



Planning Modernization

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BUILDING STRONG®

Planning Modernization

Planning Modernization is a central component of the Corps' Civil Works Transformation efforts, building a sustainable Civil Works Planning Program that delivers quality products and decisions. This will be achieved by:

- Investing in our People: improving planner knowledge and experience through training and other opportunities, and creating a sustainable national and regional planning operation and organization;
- Managing a Portfolio of Projects: focusing available funding on the most credible and viable projects for Congressional authorization and ensuring consideration of study objectives throughout the lifecycle of Corps projects; and
- Transforming Planning Processes: bringing increased efficiency and efficacy to the processes the Corps uses to make decisions and produce planning decision documents.

Planning Modernization efforts in FY13 have focused on portfolio management and improved delivery of planning processes. In FY14, supporting the long-term sustainability of the Planning program and improving the efficiency of delivery will be examined as we look to transform Planning Operation and Organization.

Investing in Our People

People are USACE's most valuable resource. USACE Planners proactively anticipate and solve the problems of the future and deliver integrated and sustainable water resource solutions, using leadership, policy, and technical planning skills.

Workforce development equips planners with the skills, knowledge, and experience needed to solve the Nation's complex water resources problems. The Planning Community of Practice maintains a comprehensive training strategy for USACE planners and those engaged with the Civil Works planning program. The Planning Core Curriculum provides the core body of knowledge necessary for the technical planning function.

The full Planning Core Curriculum is undergoing a refresh in order to meet the needs of planners today and into the future. Beginning in FY15, the Curriculum will provide for the basic needs of entry level planners to move to the journeyman level stage utilizing three courses over two to three years and incorporating a hierarchical approach to training that draws upon the latest in education research and methods of delivery. Alternative methods of delivery to traditional face-to-face classroom training, including web-based and "virtual classroom" courses, will enable greater participation in key training programs and reduce the training budget.

Each of the four Planning sub-communities (Plan Formulation, Cultural, Environmental, and Economics) are developing career roadmaps and have identified criteria for planners to become subject matter experts. The career roadmaps serve as the guide for all planners to achieve designated technical expert status by providing training, technical mentoring, and on-the-job experience. Efforts will continue through calendar year 2013 to develop criteria and procedures for proceeding from designated experts within each sub-community to Agency Technical Review (ATR) certification and/or Professional Planner Certification.

Strengthening Portfolio Management

In FY2012, the Planning Community began a review of more than 600 feasibility studies in its portfolio to focus available funding on the most credible and viable projects for Congressional authorization and reclassify studies with limited likelihood of success to inactive status. Thirty studies have been completed since the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 and an additional 37 studies are on track to be completed by December 31, 2014.

Active studies are continually examined through a process that reviews study progress, study scope and the likelihood of Federal interest to determine whether the study should continue as is, be re-scoped, classified as inactive, or terminated. This process actively manages the complete portfolio of feasibility studies to optimize available resources and address the nation's critical water resources needs. When funding and policy issues are resolved, studies may move from an inactive status back to the active portfolio. Studies will be terminated if they have no viable sponsor or have been inactive for an extended period.

Transforming the Feasibility Study Process

The Corps' feasibility study process has been transformed with a focus on decision-making earlier in the study process, using a progressive and iterative planning process to address key areas of uncertainty. The 254 current active studies in the planning portfolio are being executed based on "SMART Planning" milestones – key decision points to ensure accountability and successful study execution. In addition, since 2012, Districts have been directed to complete all feasibility studies within a target timeline of 18 months and no longer than three years, at a cost of no more than \$3 million, and at a "reasonable" written length.

These fundamental planning principles underlie the transformation of the feasibility study process:

- Districts remain responsible for executing studies and District staff will form the heart of the Project Delivery Team. However, a coordinated USACE District, Division, and Headquarters Vertical Team is deployed throughout the project development process in a One-Corps approach to identify and resolve policy, technical, and legal issues early in the process.
- A full array of alternatives is considered and evaluated. Studies first focus on a fair and credible comparison of alternatives. Under the new process, once a plan is tentatively selected and undergoes concurrent public, technical, policy, and legal review, additional detailed analysis and design will be conducted to further reduce uncertainty in costs, benefits, and impacts.
- Final feasibility studies will match the level of detail required by law and regulation for a Chief's Report and recommendation to Congress for consideration of project authorization. However, the approach to level of detail, data collection, and models throughout the process is based on what is necessary to support decisions to be made throughout the feasibility study. The expense and time of collecting more data or analyzing multiple alternatives to a high level of detail must be justified, rather than assumed.

The direction of the Planning Guidance Notebook (ER 1105-2-100) has been supplemented by a series of Planning Bulletins that establish key decision-based milestones for feasibility studies, elaborate on the role of the Vertical Team throughout a study, and establish additional planning and decision-making tools that study teams can use during the development of feasibility study reports. As the processes in the planning bulletins are tested through the implementation of feasibility studies in Districts across the nation, detailed process guidance will be incorporated into upcoming revisions of Corps guidance, including in Engineering Circulars or Engineering Regulations.

All active feasibility studies not scheduled for completion by the end of 2014, including new studies and those underway, have transitioned to the feasibility study execution process described above with concurrent review and decision-based milestones.

For More Information

For more information on processes and tools for improving feasibility study delivery, please see the Corps' Planning Toolbox at www.corpsplanning.us.