



Comprehensive Documentation of Benefits in Decision Document

What is it?

America's water resources —rivers, wetlands, inland and coastal waterways, and more— support billions of dollars in commerce, affect public safety, supply needed habitat for fish and wildlife, and provide a variety of other important benefits. Decision-makers faced with competing alternatives and limited budgets need to determine the most beneficial public projects in which to invest taxpayer dollars. The U.S. federal government uses benefit-cost analysis to inform decision making on taxpayer investments. The Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) January 5, 2021 “Comprehensive Documentation of Benefits in Decision Document” policy directive seeks to ensure that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has carefully evaluated, calculated, and documented the totality of a proposed project's benefits and impacts to support USACE recommendations for potential future investments in water resources projects. Benefit categories include social, environmental, and economic; the policy directive requires evaluation and consideration of a proposed project's benefits across all these categories.

What are the past and current efforts?

Some of the Civil Works missions for which the USACE is responsible include supporting coastal and inland commercial navigation, reducing inland (riverine) flood and coastal storm risks, and restoring degraded aquatic ecosystems in U.S. states and territories. Federal water resources projects are authorized by Congress through Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) legislation and most projects begin with a feasibility study, which is paid for by a mix of annual Congressional appropriations and funds provided by a cost-share partner such as a state or Tribe. The Principles and Guidelines for federal water investments guide the multidisciplinary team, composed of USACE staff and cost-share partners, responsible for formulating and evaluating project alternatives for their engineering performance and economic, environmental, and social effects. The study results are conveyed to Congress through a Chief of Engineers Report (Chief's Report) when there is a favorable recommendation for a proposed project. Study results also are submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which applies its own fiscal, economic, and policy analysis to determine whether projects warrant funding according to executive branch objectives. Congress considers USACE study results, recommendations of OMB, and other factors in choosing projects to authorize. Both the projects selected for initial study and the projects authorized for implementation are at the discretion of Congress. These proposed projects and the methodology for selecting them is of intense interest to decisionmakers and the affected public. USACE strives to be transparent, comprehensive, inclusive, and unbiased in the study process and the Comprehensive Documentation of Benefits in Decision Document policy directive supports these efforts. It recognizes that the needs of the nation are shifting and gives study teams freedom to meet a variety of objectives and imparts greater awareness of the needs of all stakeholders.

What continued efforts does the USACE have planned?

The directive is in effect now, and while USACE has some tools that can help staff implement the directive immediately, staff and stakeholders may have interest in the directive and questions about how USACE will

apply the directive, as well as tools, data, and information needed to perform the required analyses. USACE leaders will increase communication and engagement activities with staff and stakeholders relative to addressing comprehensive consideration of benefits and costs.

Why is this important to USACE?

To make informed decisions, a holistic analysis of all potential benefits and impacts is imperative. Benefit-cost analysis is well-established in theory and practice; however, USACE is committed to continuously improving its study and analysis processes to better take into account all types of benefits. It is important to remember that while every reasonable effort to comprehensively assess and document benefits will occur, a persistent challenge for USACE, Congress, and any presidential administration is the current \$98 billion backlog in already Congressionally authorized, but not yet Congressionally appropriated USACE construction activities.

Resources:

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https://planning.erdc.dren.mil/toolbox/library/MemosandLetters/ComprehensiveDocumentationofBenefitsinDecisionDocument_5January2021.pdf

Engineer Regulation (ER) 1105-2-100 (Planning Guidance Notebook)

https://www.publications.usace.army.mil/Portals/76/Publications/EngineerRegulations/er_1105-2-100.pdf

Corps of Engineers Civil Works Planning Toolbox

<https://planning.erdc.dren.mil/toolbox/index.cfm>

Water Resources Development Act

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11322>

Principles, Requirements and Guidelines

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2014/12/24/2014-30170/economic-and-environmental-principles-and-guidelines-for-water-and-related-land-resources>

Please contact your local district office for more information. You may find your local district via the locations tab on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers website here: <https://www.usace.army.mil/Locations/>
National stakeholders may contact hqplanning@usace.army.mil