



Corps Planning: Feasibility Studies & Project Delivery

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the Federal government's largest water resources development and management agency. The Corps began its water resources program in 1824 when Congress directed the Corps to survey and improve the nation's river navigation systems. In the 20th century, the Corps became the lead federal flood control agency and significantly expanded its civil works activities, becoming a major provider of hydroelectric energy and the country's leading provider of recreation. In the late 1960s, the Corps civil works program added aquatic ecosystem restoration to its primary mission areas. Today, in addition to our primary missions of flood risk management, navigation, and aquatic ecosystem restoration, the Corps Civil Works program is engaged in natural and cultural resource management programs at its water resources projects and regulates certain activities in the Nation's wetlands.

Feasibility Studies and Civil Works Project Development

The Corps' Civil Works Planning Program conducts a broad range of studies, including studies leading to new projects that require Congressional authorization, studies involving evaluation and design of projects under continuing authorities, and reexaminations of existing projects.

Often referred to as the first step toward construction of a civil works water resources development project, the feasibility study is the disciplined process under which Corps planners work with a non-federal study sponsor and multi-disciplinary study teams to identify water resources problems, formulate and evaluate solutions, resolve conflicting interests, and prepare recommendations. A feasibility study is used to investigate the Federal interest, engineering feasibility, economic justification and environmental acceptability of a recommended water resources project. A feasibility study determines if Congressional authorization and implementation of a specific Civil Works project are warranted.

Corps feasibility studies are cost-shared with a Sponsor, reflecting our shared responsibility for the nation's water resources. A Sponsor can be a State, Tribe, county, city, town, or any other political subpart of a State or group of States that has the legal and financial authority and capability to provide the funding and real property requirements needed for a study and a project.

The results of a feasibility study, the recommendation for the authorization of a specific water resources project and the analyses that support that recommendation, are documented in a feasibility report. The final feasibility report will include documentation required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable laws and guidance.

The recommendation to Congress for authorization of a water resources project will be made by the Chief of Engineers in the form of a "Chief's Report." After the Chief's Report is signed, the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) will officially transmitted the Chief's Report to Congress with the views of the Administration.

Following the transmittal of the Chief's Report, the Corps and its non-federal partner complete the detailed engineering and technical studies and design needed to begin construction of the project as recommended. This "Pre-Construction Engineering and Design" phase is usually cost-shared at the

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same breakdown as construction costs; note this is different than the typical 50-50 cost-sharing of feasibility studies. Construction may begin after congressional authority and appropriations for the recommended water resources project.

Study Authorization and Appropriation

Before the Corps becomes involved in studying a particular water resources problem, two types of Congressional authority are required: study authority and budget appropriations. A study authority approves the conduct of an investigation to address the identified problems. Once a study authority is available, budget appropriations to allow for the expenditure of Federal funds for the study can be provided by Congress (usually in the annual Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act).

If there is no available study authority, community representatives may contact their Congressional delegation to request a new study authority and may also submit a proposal for Congressional consideration via the Assistant Secretary of the Army's Annual Report to Congress on Future Water Resources Development.

Once an appropriate study authority is available, the Corps will follow the normal federal budgetary process to request federal funding. Once budget appropriations are available, the study may begin.

Project-Specific Post Authorization Planning Activities

Once a water resources project has been authorized by Congress and constructed, a number of factors may lead to a re-examination of the authorization of that project. For example, projects authorized and constructed years ago may require a study to consider the engineering, environmental, and economic impacts of a major rehabilitation effort. A community may wish to look at an already-authorized and constructed federal project for additional national benefits related to the Corps' missions – e.g., adding ecosystem restoration benefits to an existing navigation project. Or, changes to the project's design or construction schedule may produce a need to update the total congressionally authorized cost of the project.

The Corps may also continue to be engaged with the water resources projects they had a role in planning, designing, and building by maintaining a Master Plan. A Master Plan is the document that conceptually establishes and guides the orderly development, administration, maintenance, preservation, enhancement, and management of all natural, cultural, and recreational resources of a Corps water resource project.

For More Information

Information about the Corps Civil Works Project Delivery process can be found online on the Corps Planning Community Toolbox, www.corpsplanning.us, and in the various [fact sheets](#) developed by the Headquarters Planning and Policy Division.

The annual submission period for proposals for inclusion in the Report to Congress on Future Water Resources Development generally runs from May through September. The latest information is always available on the Headquarters Planning and Policy Division website, with a [webpage](#) specifically for the Report to Congress.

For more information on the breadth of the Corps Civil Works water resources development and management activities, please contact your local District's Planning Department.

<http://www.usace.army.mil/Locations.aspx>.