



US Army Corps
of Engineers®

PLANNING ahead

Summer 2023 - Issue 02

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VIEW FROM THE TOP

MESSAGE FROM THE RECENT ACTING CHIEF OF THE OFFICE OF WATER PROJECT REVIEW – HANK GRUBER

Planning Ahead is a quarterly publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Planning Community of Practice (PCoP). Views and opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the USACE or the Department of Defense.

Previous issues of Planning Ahead can be found on the Planning Community Toolbox: www.corpsplanning.us.



In this edition's View from the Top, we heard from Hank Gruber, who recently completed a 120-day detail as the Acting Chief of the Office of Water Project Review (OWPR) and shared with Planning Ahead his perspectives on current challenges and opportunities within the Planning Community of Practice.

Greetings, fellow USACE Planners!!

Let me start out by introducing myself; many know me, but far more may not. I'm Henry (Hank) Gruber. My story began over 30 years ago in the Philadelphia District. I'm a registered Professional Civil Engineer (please don't hold that against me) and I have a Master's in

Business Administration, with a concentration in leadership and management. I spent my first 20 years with the Philadelphia District primarily in the Planning Division. I also worked in the Engineering & Construction and Operations Divisions. My next 12 years took me to the MSC – North Atlantic Division (NAD) – where I worked initially as an Appropriations Manager in the Civil Works group and then moved on to the Planning & Policy Division; first as a Planning Program Manager and then, for the last eight years, as Deputy Chief, Planning & Policy Division, which is my current permanent position.

Recently, I've had two opportunities to work with HQUSACE. First, Mr. Tom Smith, Chief of the Operations and Regulatory Division, afforded me the opportunity to serve as the Regional Integration Team (RIT) Deputy for NAD and the Great Lakes & Ohio River Division (LRD) – an exciting position for sure. Second, Mr. Eric Bush (Chief, HQUSACE Planning & Policy) gave me the incredible opportunity to

perform a detail assignment as the Chief of OWPR.

I've just wrapped up my detail, and all I can say is "WOW." OWPR staff are highly experienced and knowledgeable, and I'm proud to be working with, and learning from, this professional team. Working with numerous Districts, eight MSCs, HQUSACE Senior Leadership, HQUSACE Planning Policy Advisors, the PCoP, RITs, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (ASA(CW)), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), etc. is truly an honor and a privilege. This certainly shows me that it is our PEOPLE and relationships that make us the World Class Organization we absolutely are (per the 2022 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey). Working alongside you every day, seeing all the great work you do – especially in the Districts where all the real, hard work gets done – is amazing. These are challenging yet exciting times, and we have the good fortune to work right now. It's a great time to work for USACE and I

SUMMER 2023 FRONT COVER — AERIAL VIEW OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA, WHERE THE CENTRAL AND SOUTH FLORIDA FLOOD RESILIENCY CHARRETTES HAVE RECENTLY TAKEN PLACE. (SOURCE: ISTOCK)



continue to be proud to work alongside you.

From my viewpoint, we execute extremely well. However, like any modern organization, we can, and need to, improve as we strive to remain relevant. We are continually put under the microscope by Congress and the Administration. One example – a topic on everyone’s minds these days – is the Vertical Team Alignment Memorandum (VTAM). The tenets of the VTAM show me our emphasis is in the right place. (Yes, the 90-day Alternatives Milestone Meeting [AMM] and the 120-day VTAM requirements can be

extremely challenging and onerous for Districts to execute – but these are the targets that we have, as prescribed by Mr. Bush upon the direction of General Graham [Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations] and Mr. Edward Belk [Director of Civil Works]).

What this also tells me, though, is the importance of setting each project up for success from its earliest stages:

- Be ready to go full throttle once you execute the Federal Cost Share Agreement (FCSA), with federal and non-federal

funding secured, and with study teams and Policy and Legal Compliance Review teams established.

- Encourage using vertical teams in charettes to assist and support the District teams to gain alignment on scope, schedule, and budget. These will help to inform the AMM and VTAM and will go a long way in getting studies off to a good start.
- Further encourage utilizing OWPR staff as members on the Policy and Legal Compliance Review teams. OWPR staff bring national perspective to teams and will be able to directly assist toward the end of the feasibility process with

coordinating the Chief of Engineers Report through Headquarters.

I’m returning to my permanent assignment at NAD having learned a great deal during this OWPR experience. I’m grateful to Mr. Bush for affording me this opportunity. As I hope you can tell, I’m genuinely passionate for the work we perform. I look forward to working with everyone in the future and I hope our paths cross again in this small world that is the Corps. Best wishes to all, keep doing all the good things you do for the Nation each day!

➤ What’s New on the Planning Community Toolbox

The Planning Community Toolbox is the “go to” website for current planning policy and guidance, and links to the tools that can support planners and planning decision making. Recent additions of interest include:

- Information on the **Pilot Program for Continuing Authority Projects in Small or Disadvantaged Communities** (Section 165(a) of the Water Resources Development Act of 2020) is available on the Toolbox front page, including

the program website, the associated Federal Register Notice, the ASA(CW)’s implementation guidance for WRDA 2020 Section 165(a), and a fact sheet on the pilot program.

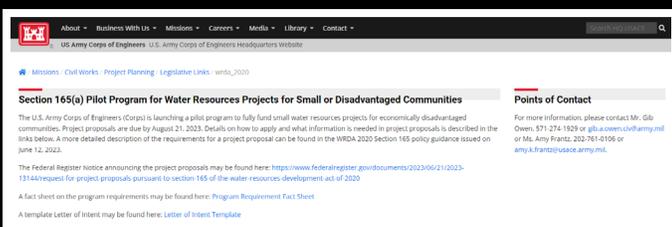
- Study teams should review **the updated Chief’s Report templates** and instructions for use, available on the Templates & Checklists page under the Tools tab. They include an additional section discussing cost risk and should be utilized moving forward.

- Several pieces of **new guidance** applicable to planners are now available, including Engineer Pamphlet 1105-2-61: Feasibility And Post-Authorization Study Procedures And Report Processing Requirements, a memorandum on the Process for Recommending Deauthorization of Federal Navigation Channels Without Structures, Guidance on Cost Engineering Products update for Civil Works Projects in accordance with Engineer Regulation 1110-2-1302 – Civil Works Cost Engineering, and Implementation Guidance for Section 204 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2020, Assistance to Non-Federal Sponsors; Feasibility Analysis.

- All **Chief’s Reports** since 1990 and all Director’s Reports since 2019 are available in the Planner’s Library. If your District has a recently (or not so recently) signed a Chief’s Report or Director’s Report that is not available on the Planning Community Toolbox, please coordinate with your RIT Planner and the PCoP Deputy to get the file posted.

Looking to spread your wings? Job openings across Planning are frequently posted on the Toolbox’s home page under Notices.

Visit the toolbox online at www.corpsplanning.us.





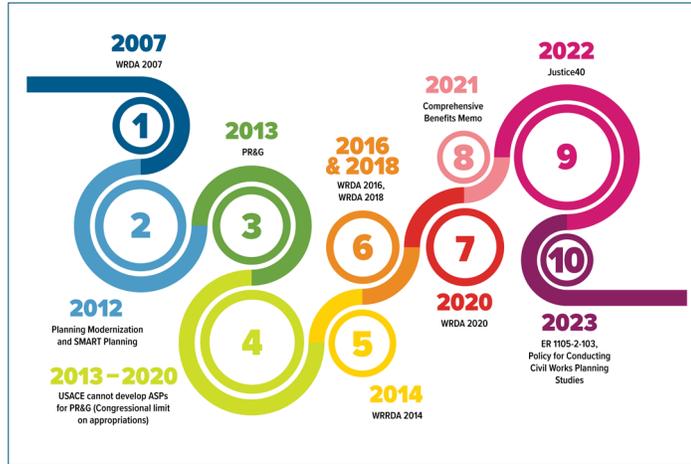
GETTING TO KNOW

THE POLICY FOR CONDUCTING CIVIL WORKS PLANNING STUDIES ENGINEER CIRCULAR REGULATION

LATE BREAKING NEWS

HQUSACE, in concert with DoD publications staff, made the decision to go straight to an Engineer Regulation (ER) rather than an Engineer Circular (EC). The new official title and publications number will be ER 1105-2-103: Policy for Conducting Civil Works Planning Studies.

As an ER, rather than an EC, all our planning guidance under development including the Engineer Pamphlets (the former appendices of ER 1105-2-100, the Planning Guidance Notebook or PGN) can reference our current guidance and reduce confusion as to the current policy to follow.



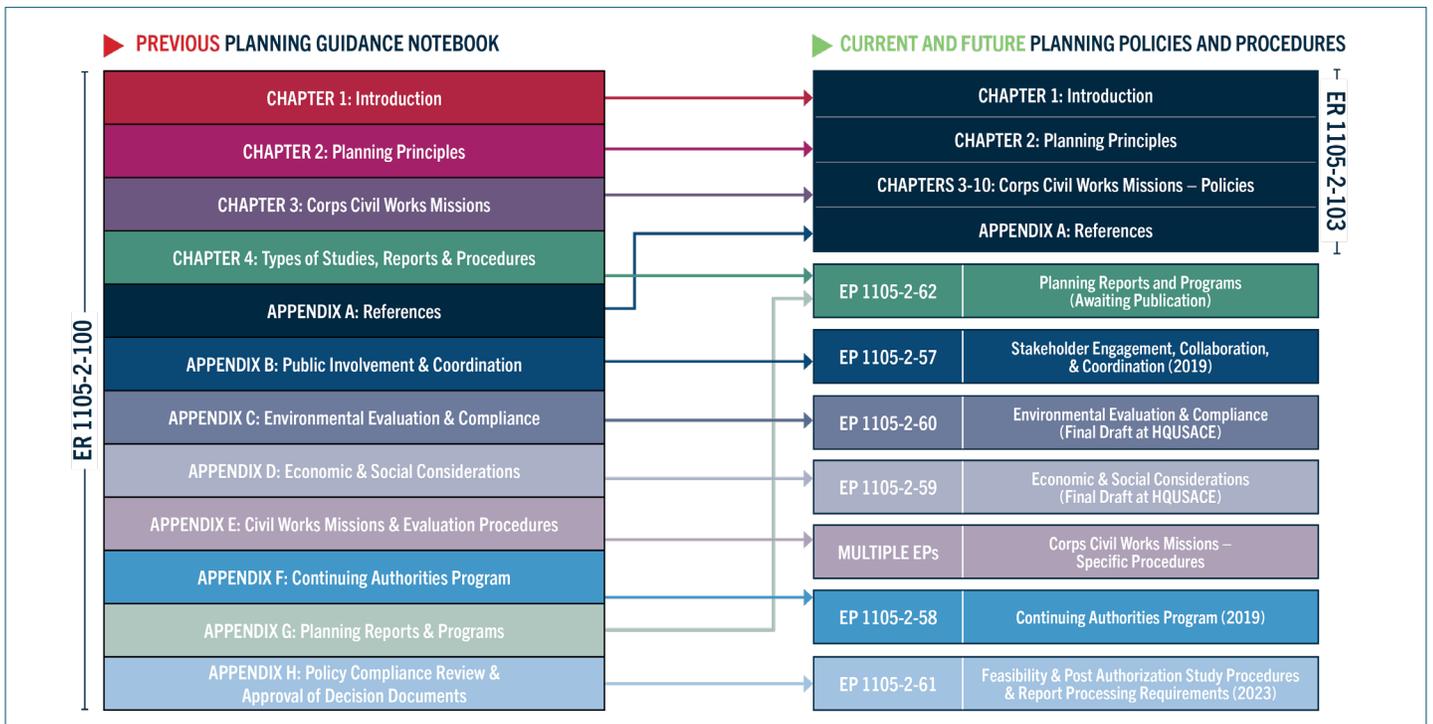
ER 1105-2-103, once published, will replace ER 1105-2-100, the PGN.

Why Is There a New ER?

The ER is the first comprehensive update to the PGN since 2000. The new ER and the accompanying mission-specific Engineer Pamphlets (EPs) incorporate the last 23 years' worth of legislation, official policy memoranda, planning bulletins, and implementation guidance that have changed the way we conduct planning studies. Everything is now in one place.

On March 22, 2023, Mr. Bush released the pre-publication version of the *Policy for Conducting Civil Works Planning Studies Engineer Circular*. The policy was shared internally before being officially signed so that District, MSC, and Headquarters staff

working on planning studies could familiarize themselves with the document. This updated guidance presents the core framework for Civil Works Planning and is the first comprehensive update to guidance for conducting planning studies since 2000.





FEDERAL OBJECTIVE BASED ON PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

Old (1983)

1. Water and related land resources project plans shall be formulated to alleviate problems and take advantage of opportunities in ways that contribute to this objective.
2. Contributions to National Economic Development (NED) are increases in the net value of the national output of goods and services, expressed in monetary units. Contributions to NED are the direct net benefits that accrue in the planning area and the rest of the Nation. Contributions to NED include increases in the net value of those goods and services that are marketed, and also of those that may be market.

New (2013)

1. Seeking to maximize sustainable economic development;
2. Seeking to avoid the unwise use of floodplains and flood-prone areas and maximizing adverse impacts and vulnerabilities in any case in which a floodplain or flood-prone area must be used; and
3. Protecting and restoring the functions of natural systems and mitigating any unavoidable damage to natural systems. This should be put into a figure.

What has changed between the Planning Guidance Notebook (ER 1105-2-100) and this ER?

First, the ER looks very different from the PGN. The ER format and organization have been revised by separating out the USACE Civil Works Mission Areas (formerly Chapter 3 of the PGN) into consistently formatted chapters within the ER for each of the mission areas. Each of the PGN Appendices will now be published as their own EP. The intent is to have all overarching and mission-specific policies (“must-dos”) in the ER and all procedural guidance in the EPs.

Additionally, there are two significant changes in content that consider the 2013 Principles, Requirements, and Interagency Guidelines for Federal Investments in Water Resources (PR&G). These changes are found in Chapters 1 and 2 of the ER and include:

1 Updated Federal Objective and Guiding Principles that are the core of feasibility studies and recommendations, and

2 Acknowledgment of the ability to recommend a plan other than the National Economic Development (NED) Plan that reasonably maximizes the public benefits, relative to costs, using agreed-upon selection criteria.

The familiar six-step planning process and core approach have not changed, but updates to the planning framework align the ER with policy we are already doing, such as risk-informed decision making, consideration of benefits across all the four 1983 Principles and Guidelines (P&G) accounts, and clear articulation of trade-offs between alternatives.

What’s Next?

The pre-publication ER is being routed for approval as part of the publication process. Later this summer, the ER will be officially published as the new policy. When officially published, ER 1105-2-103 should be referenced instead of ER 1105-2-100 for mission-specific policies. The pre-publication version of the ER can be shared with your study partners with the recognition that additional changes are possible through the publication process.

The mission-specific procedural guidance EPs are currently being finalized by Headquarters and Planning Centers of Expertise (PCX) teams, with [EP 1105-2-61: Feasibility And Post-Authorization Study Procedures And Report Processing Requirements](#) recently published in July; anticipated publication dates for the remaining EPs are still to be determined. Attempts are being made to publish them as close to the ER as possible. Until each EP is officially published, continue to reference ER 1105-2-100, ER 1105-2-103, or other official/signed guidance.

Headquarters will rescind each existing Planning Bulletin that contributed to development of the ER or EPs, as needed, as it is incorporated into an official ER or EP. WRDA implementation guidance memoranda are only rescinded and replaced if subsequent legislation modifies them enough to

require revised guidance and should continue to be referenced, if applicable. The latest guidance will always be available on the [Planning Community Toolbox](#).

In the coming years, the ASA(CW) and USACE will work through the federal rulemaking process to develop and finalize Agency Specific Procedures as required by the 2013 Principles, Requirements, and Interagency Guidelines for Federal Investments in Water Resources. Once that rulemaking process is complete, we will be able to review and revise ER 1105-2-103 and make changes to align with the completion of the ASPs.

Find out more about the ER, view previous PGN Roll Out webinars, view factsheets and other materials, and provide feedback on the ER on the Knowledge Management Portal site.





CONGRATULATIONS TO THE PLANNING ASSOCIATES CLASS OF 2023

The Planning Associates (PA) Class of 2023 (“The Mallards”) is slated to graduate on 31 August 2023 after an intensive two-year program that started back in November 2021. The six graduates are Rick Butler of Jacksonville District, Jeff Herzog of New England District, Melinda Fisher and Brandon Wadlington of Southwestern Regional Planning and Environmental Center, Dan Meden of Regional Planning and Environment Division North, and Abbe Preddy of Norfolk District.

One of first things that the cohort had to do during team building was agree on a logo and a vision. Without knowing the road ahead of them, the team used their humor, personalities, and experience as planners to settle on the mallard. The mallard serves as a metaphor for how plan formulation can appear to be seemingly calm and floating at the surface, but often comes with a lot of frantic paddling beneath the waters. The Mallards’ vision is to **“Adapt, Lead, and Grow”** as a planning community. The Mallards all love what we do – but understand that you can’t be satisfied, or else you will find yourself stuck and



eventually sinking.

The Mallards’ great endeavor came amidst the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, with several personal challenges, some career transitions, and PA programmatic leadership changes – all while balancing project workloads and their first year Capstone assignments and second year Applied Learning Environment assignments. It was almost providential that the PA ’23 cohort selected a mallard as their mascot very early in the program.

The coursework cumulatively captured multiple business lines with support from the Planning Centers of Expertise and planning staff from across districts and divisions. In the end, the Mallards each shared a desire to bring back the knowledge gained from the PA program to help mentor new staff, while thinking critically about updated Planning guidance from



THE PLANNING ASSOCIATES CLASS OF 2023 (“THE MALLARDS”) INCLUDES: RICK BUTLER (JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT), JEFF HERZOG (NEW ENGLAND DISTRICT), MELINDA FISHER AND BRANDON WADLINGTON (SOUTHWESTERN REGIONAL PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER), DAN MEDEN (REGIONAL PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT DIVISION NORTH), AND ABBE PREDDY (NORFOLK DISTRICT).

Headquarters and lessons learned.

After-class discussions often led to organic camaraderie building beyond the classroom. The Mallards quickly became a family, discussing their personal lives, projects, and work challenges over dinner, weekend trips, and games of shuffleboard. Having the cohort rooted in a family bond and not just a classroom connection will certainly help their relationships grow as their careers continue to grow.

The Mallards agree that the PA program is a major commitment, requiring attentive involvement in coursework, independently scheduled meetings with senior policy advisors, and critical thinking on both the Capstone and Applied Learning Environment assignments – but each Mallard would wholeheartedly recommend the experience to others.

For anyone interested in pursuing the Planning Associates Program, contact PA Program Manager Lisa Rabbe.



PCoP NEWS FLASHES

PLANNING COMMUNITY UPDATES



Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 Modifications to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Provisions

Study teams should be aware that Section 321 of the 2023 “Fiscal Responsibility Act” (also known as the Builder Act) made modifications to several provisions of NEPA, including page and time limits for stand-alone Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements, notices of intent, responsibilities of the lead agency in developing a schedule in consultation with each cooperating agency, the non-federal sponsor, and others as appropriate, and categorical exclusions from other agencies. Teams should review the highlights included in the Summer 2023 Hot Topics for more detail and can reach out to Julie Alcon (OWPR Environmental Team Lead) for questions and more information.

E-Risk Register Tool Rollout

The new e-Risk Register (ERR) is live at <https://err.sec.usace.army.mil> and ready for use. This new

iteration, which builds on the original Assistance for Project Teams (APT) online risk register, aims to provide study teams and the vertical team with a high-quality tool to better assess, manage, and view all risks for a particular project in a consistent and integrated manner across project lifecycles and the full enterprise. Trainings have been scheduled throughout the rest of FY23 to help roll out this new tool to USACE Civil Works.



Coastal Storm Damages Prevented (CSDP) Tool Now Available for Use

The *CSDP tool has been released for use in helping teams report estimated damages prevented by Coastal Storm Risk Management (CSRM) projects*. Users input data describing the project, storm characteristics, damage functions, and structure information and the tool applies the same storm and structure inventory to the with- and without-project conditions, with damages calculated at the structure level. A new “What-if Scenario

Analysis” component adds features that allow for rapid screening-level examination of planned or existing CSRM project performance under different conditions such as alternative designs, increased storm intensity, and risk due to sea level rise at a study location.

Planning Community of Practice National Workshop & Special “Planning Fundamentals” Webinar Series

The next National PCoP Workshop is being planned for 14-16 November 2023 at the St. Louis District with the theme “The Stories We Tell.” The planning team will provide opportunities for virtual sessions throughout the workshop for PCoP members when possible. In addition, leading up to the workshop, the PCoP will be hosting a series of webinars expanding on the topics found in Chapter 2 (Planning Framework) of the Policy for Conducting Civil Works Planning Studies EC. Webinars will cover topics such as the Principles & Guidelines formulation and evaluation criteria, alternative development and selection, scoping, and comprehensive benefits; all webinar presentations and



LIEUTENANT GENERAL SPELLMON SPEAKING AT THE 2019 PCoP NATIONAL WORKSHOP.

recordings will be posted to the Planning Toolbox. Stay tuned for more information coming soon!



PCoP Hot Topics

Can't wait for the next edition of Planning Ahead? Get the scoop on key initiatives and information from Headquarters on investing in our people; implementing clear and efficient guidance and processes; and demonstrating readiness and meeting our partnership commitments in the monthly PCoP Hot Topics newsletter. Find the latest in your email inbox or on the PCoP Knowledge Management Portal site. To be added to the newsletter email distribution list, email us at hqplanning@usace.army.mil.



RECOGNIZING OUR FY22 NATIONAL PLANNING AWARD RECIPIENTS

JEFF GREENWALD – WINNER OF THE FY22 PLANNING EXCELLENCE AWARD
– ENJOYING SOME TIME OUTDOORS. (SOURCE: JEFF GREENWALD, NWO)



In this edition of Planning Ahead, we recognize and celebrate the FY2022 Programmatic Awards for Planning Excellence and Planning Achievement. The Planning Excellence award is designed to recognize an individual's contributions to advance the state of the art of the practice of Civil Works Planning, and the Outstanding Planning Achievement award recognizes a Civil Works planning project delivery team for the accomplishment of an outstanding planning activity. In a future edition, we will recognize the FY2022 Enterprise Planning Excellence and Planning Achievement awardees, along with the Noel Clay Planning Champion and Lifetime Achievement in USACE Planning awardees.



**PLANNING
EXCELLENCE –
Jeff Greenwald
Omaha District**

Jeff Greenwald of the Omaha District is recognized with the FY22 Planning Excellence

(Programmatic) award for his work on the Garrison Dam Safety Modification Study (DSMS), the Snake Creek DSMS, and the Glendive, MT Section 205 Feasibility Study. As a Senior Planner and Project Manager for the Omaha District, Jeff has exemplified excellence in USACE Planning through team leadership, his ability to formulate plans that address diverse water resource challenges, and his prowess in building relationships with non-federal sponsors.

Of his many accomplishments, Jeff has become proficient in leading diverse teams of dam safety experts. Jeff, whose skillset was previously nationally recognized for his lead role in the Cherry Creek DSMS, guided the team through the plan formulation process for the District's Garrison DSMS on the Missouri River in North Dakota. Guided by Jeff, the team successfully identified a tentatively selected plan

(TSP) that was then approved by the vertical team. Despite the technical complexity of this project, Jeff and the team were able to complete it within a highly constrained schedule.

As Jeff was working on the Garrison DSMS, he was also proving himself to be a talented communicator while leading another DSMS for the Snake Creek Embankment in North Dakota. By leading his team through extensive economic and environmental analysis on the effects of embankment failure and impacts of operational decisions on the project's authorized water supply and environmental purposes, Jeff's guidance resulted in another TSP approval for the Snake Creek team. This project also required close coordination with the state of North Dakota to ensure full stakeholder consideration. His constant and compassionate communication with the

state, the irrigation district, and other stakeholders contributed to meaningful relationship building, which was a key factor in the success of the study.

Jeff also demonstrated outstanding flexibility and efficiency in his work on the Glendive, Montana Section 205 Flood Risk Management Feasibility Study under the Continuing Authorities Program. When Jeff realized that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was initiating a floodplain mapping study that would overlap with the 205 study, he led extensive coordination between USACE, FEMA, the U.S. Geological Survey, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and other stakeholders to ensure integration of modeling approaches between the two studies. Additionally, Jeff facilitated several effective discussions with the sponsor and a non-profit in the study



area regarding potential options for addressing life safety issues behind the city's existing levee.

Jeff's versatile ability to oversee projects spanning diverse subject matter, ranging from dam safety to flood risk management, and his success in building and managing relationships with sponsors and stakeholders, clearly contribute to USACE Campaign Plan goals for partnership and innovation. These qualities and achievements solidify Jeff as a worthy recipient of the 2022 Planning Excellence Award.



OUTSTANDING PLANNING ACHIEVEMENT
 – Jessica Ludy & Alev Bilginsoy
 San Francisco District

San Francisco District's Advancing Equity Team, led by Jessica Ludy and Alev Bilginsoy, is recognized with the USACE Outstanding Planning Achievement (Programmatic) award for significant contributions made in advancing equity and environmental justice outcomes within USACE, both regionally and nationally. The District team has increased awareness of concepts related to equity within USACE and identified institutional barriers that could hinder USACE assistance to disadvantaged communities. Serving as "force multipliers," the team has continued to lead multiple equity-centered projects that resulted in

significant outcomes inside and outside the agency.

With Jessica and Alev as the driving force, the District team and the National Flood Risk Management Program launched the "Bridging the Equity Gap" webinar series to explore the intersections between environmental justice, equity, and USACE mission area goals. The team ensured that the webinars tapped a broad cast of panelists, ranging from government partners to community-based organizations and universities. Featuring such a diverse set of lived experiences facilitated well-rounded and equity-focused discussions on the inequalities present in our flood risk management practices. The series offered practitioners a suite of ideas and actions for shrinking flood resilience disparities across the United States and delivering environmental justice. Jessica and Alev made sure every webinar included close captioning.

San Francisco District also supported Marin City in community-driven flood response through the Marin City Emergency Action Plan FPMS Interagency Nonstructural effort. Marin City is a small, unincorporated community with significant environmental justice concerns located on San Francisco Bay. They experience flooding that stifles local services and transportation, puts public health at risk, and compounds



The following people are recognized by the team for contributions to the forward movement of equity and environmental justice at USACE:

- LTC Kevin Arnett (SPD)
- Tessa Beach (SPN)
- Julie Beagle (SPN)
- LTC Andrew Boggs (formerly SPN)
- Tami Church (SPN)
- Michael Deegan (IWR)
- Lindsay Floyd (SPK)
- BG Toni Gant (SPD)
- Kelly Janes (NWP)
- Quanita Kendrick (MVN)
- Marie Kopka (CWIFP)
- Emily Marcil (LRE)
- Akilah Martin (LRC)
- Judy McCrea (OWPR)
- Hunter Merritt (IWR)
- MAJ David Miller (SPN)
- Rachael Orellana (SPK)
- Jerica Richardson (HQ)
- Sarah Rupper (SPN)
- Trevor Snyder (SPL)
- Eileen Takata (SPD)
- Cindy Tejada (SPD)
- Melissa Weymiller (SPK)
- The SPN Programs Team
- The SPN Tribal & Cultural Resources Team
- A special shout out to USACE's community and nonfederal partners, without whom this work could not be done!

the impacts of existing environmental pollution. The District team built a trusting relationship with Marin City founded on transparency, responsiveness, and accountability. With this, Jessica and Alev were able to leverage and amplify the expertise of community leaders, and forge partnerships among local, regional, and state agencies. These relationships bring more resources and awareness to improving flood safety and community resilience as a direct result of the emergency action plan.

While on a detail with IWR New Horizons, Jessica prepared an online library of environmental justice-focused resources that benefit all USACE team members, including planners. The San Francisco District Environmental Justice digital library is a curated and organized compilation of EJ resources that allows district

teams to build collective knowledge and promote equitable outcomes in the projects executed by USACE and its partners. Among other items in the library, the team prepared a tailored Communities of Concern Mapping tool for the District's area of responsibility and a Project Equity Checklist to help teams implement environmental justice work in their everyday activities.

Through a wide array of initiatives, the Advancing Equity Team is part of a network of environmental justice advocates across USACE working in synergy with outside organizations. In recognition of its innovative and thorough approaches to building support for disadvantaged communities, the Advancing Equity Team has been selected as the Outstanding Planning Achievement awardee for 2022.





PLANNING CHARETTES: EXPLORING BEST PRACTICES 10 YEARS ON FROM SMART PLANNING



10

For over a decade, the USACE Planning Community has utilized the concept of a charette to ensure study teams have an opportunity to coordinate with all team members during the critical scoping phase. Debby Scerno, a member of the OWPR Environmental Team, and several study teams she has worked with shared their perspectives with Planning Ahead on best practices for charettes, based on three charettes in the first half of 2023.

In 2012, when the concept of risk-informed planning was introduced to the PCoP, holding a charette – a practice utilized by engineering, architects, and others – was incorporated into the planning “toolbox”. A charette (pronounced [shuh-ret]) is a structured, collaborative session in which a group comes together to develop a solution to a problem.

A charette assembles the study team, the stakeholders,

How is a planning charette different from a scoping workshop or a team meeting?

No matter what the name, it’s what happens in the room that matters - whether that room is virtual or face-to-face.

The vision for a planning charette is that it:

Involves all the relevant decision makers – decisions are made and documented with everyone in the room.

Engages the full team – including all key disciplines within the study team, the non-federal sponsor, review team representatives, vertical team representatives, and, if necessary, other federal agencies.

Identifies the next steps so that the study team continues to move forward and doesn’t get stuck.



and vertical team to make decisions critical to the study. While charettes have an upfront fiscal and time cost, they provide an opportunity to jumpstart activities early in the scoping phase, which may save money and/or time later in the study.

As USACE embarks on more studies with an expected focus on comprehensive benefits, charettes also provide the opportunity to explore benefit categories other than traditional economic measurements – and to have these conversations with the “right people in the room.”

While some studies don’t think that a charrette is worth the cost, the value of early alignment on scoping and consideration of economic, environmental, and social benefits may shift the equation. This, in combination with an increase in studies, provides the PCoP with an opportunity to revisit the conduct of charettes and identify some best practices.

While charettes can be held in person or virtually, there are some distinct advantages to holding them in person. A charrette provides the opportunity to build team relationships – both within USACE and between USACE and stakeholders. Team building was evident at the charrette for the Central and South Florida Flood Risk

Management project, where new planners were able to converse each day after the meetings about project details with section, branch, and division planning leaders and HQUSACE personnel. This allowed for a better understanding of the USACE planning process and how it would apply to that project. Gustavo A. Suarez-Narvaez, Jacksonville District, stated: “The Central and South Florida Flood Resiliency charrette was a great opportunity to build trust with the stakeholders. During the charrette, it was crucial to answer stakeholders’ questions, and listen to what the community’s concerns are. This helped us to identify areas with existing flooding problems that have not been documented previously. Following up on stakeholders’ questions or requests after the charrette is key to showing them that we care and to continue building trust.”

Charettes also offer the opportunity to explore knowledge gaps and gain concurrence on the problems, opportunities, objectives, and constraints that will shape the feasibility study scope, schedule, and budget. For example, while the National Economic Development account benefits for a navigation study might be obvious, meeting with the local stakeholders, as

While the organized meeting portion of the charrette is the focus, it is also important to build in some time for group activities – lunches, dinners, site visits, or informal gatherings such as a hike or other outdoor activity. Additional ways encourage team building teams include:

- Seat attendees from different organizations together
- Introduce everyone in attendance and provide name tags or tents to encourage study team members to learn one another’s names

was done in Menominee, Michigan by a Detroit District study team, provided new information. One piece of information gathered was that many of the businesses in the area provide supplies for the ship building company in town, which is dependent upon the navigation channel. John Love, Detroit District, stated: “The study problems, opportunities, objectives, and constraints developed by the group really helped us get on the same page and contributed to an understanding of the metrics and data needed to justify the deepening project.”

Charettes further allow USACE planners to interact with stakeholders and identify potential issues with proposed management measures as well as the range of benefits they might garner. Lacey Gabbard noted of a recent charrette in the Louisville District: “We were able to gauge the town’s

interest or disinterest in some of the different measures/ alternatives we are looking at and how that level of interest might waiver throughout the community.”

Lacey also recommends the use of a facilitator and supervisory involvement in charrette planning and execution, which allows the study team to focus on recording input and interacting with those in attendance.

The facilitator can help design an agenda to achieve the outcomes the study team needs to keep the study moving forward, and can redirect conversations, clarify concerns, and ensure participation and engagement.

Supervisory involvement ensures that USACE planning and other processes are explained in a policy compliant manner, assists the team in understanding the





PCoP Q+A

NEW FEASIBILITY MILESTONE & REPORTING GUIDANCE



I've heard there is new guidance available on feasibility and post-authorization report processing as well as feasibility milestones. What do study teams need to know?

HQUSACE recently published [EP 1105-2-61, Feasibility And Post-Authorization Study Procedures And Report Processing Requirements](#), which outlines the key milestones in the development of feasibility and post-authorization reports, report processing requirements, and the decisions and processes associated with feasibility studies and their milestones. This EP replaces Appendix H of the Planning Guidance Notebook (Engineer Regulation 1105-2-100). It incorporates – and supersedes – several Planning Bulletins, including Planning Bulletin 2018-01 and 2018-01(S). This EP also incorporates the procedural requirements associated with the Vertical Team Alignment Memorandum (VTAM), including clarifications on required submittals before and after the Alternatives Milestone if the study team has identified in early scoping that a 3x3 exemption is needed.

Planners and their project managers should also be aware of two new milestones that are noted in EP 1105-2-61, which have been added to PROMIS (P2) for inclusion in feasibility study schedules. These milestones are unique and do not duplicate other codes/milestones:

1 CW142 – Required 90-day Interagency Meeting: this new milestone documents completion of initial coordination (within 90 days of the FSCA) with federal and state resource agencies and Tribal Nations as required by law (Section 1001 of WRRDA 2014 / 33 USC 2282c). This milestone will

be actualized on the date of the interagency meeting of all federal, Tribal, and state agencies that may be required by law to conduct or issue a review, analysis, or opinion on or to make a determination concerning a permit or license for the study.

2 CW143 – Vertical Team Alignment Memo Signed: this new milestone documents completion of the VTAM for feasibility studies, post authorization change reports, validation reports, and watershed studies, per requirements in CECW-P Vertical Team Alignment Memo Guidance, 29 JUL 2022. This milestone will be actualized on the date of the MSC Commander's signature of the VTAM.

These new milestones should be added to ongoing studies as well as new studies; this includes retroactively adding each milestone as actualized if already achieved. For purposes of the Civil Works Project Delivery Dashboard, these two milestones are not tracked feasibility study milestones – but their execution is important for study teams and Headquarters alike. These two milestones are also not applicable for Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) studies.

For any questions, reach out to Daniela Todesco (Investigations Portfolio Manager, HQUSACE).

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS,
CONCERNS, ANXIETIES —
IF YOUR QUESTION CAN HELP
FELLOW PLANNERS, EMAIL US AT
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AND MAYBE YOU'LL SEE IT HERE.