

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the Agency Decision Milestone

1. SOP Purpose. This SOP describes procedures and requirements for preparing for and conducting an Agency Decision Milestone (ADM) for feasibility and post-authorization studies. This SOP was developed to provide guidance for Project Delivery Teams and the Vertical Team approaching the ADM. Once this guidance is finalized, it will be released as a Planning Bulletin.

2. General.

a. ADM Purpose. The ADM is a decision milestone where a headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (HQUSACE) Senior Leader Panel will be asked to endorse the recommended plan and approve the way forward for feasibility-level design. The majority of the ADM discussion will focus on the study and project risks that are being carried forward in the study or that have arisen since the Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) Milestone meeting.

b. Readiness for ADM. The ADM occurs after completion of the concurrent public, technical, legal, and policy review of the draft report and draft National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation and resolution of the comments. In the event that the study requires independent external peer review (IEPR), the ADM will be scheduled to follow receipt of the IEPR panel's findings, which could be up to 60 days after the last day of the public comment period, or longer if approved by the Chief of Engineers (per Section 2034 of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2007).

c. Scheduling the ADM. Before the District may request scheduling the ADM meeting, the Vertical Team confirms that the analyses in the draft report and the recommendations as a result of the concurrent reviews are compliant with policy and that there is a capable non-federal sponsor(s) ready to support project implementation. Once the Vertical Team has confirmed that the study is ready for an ADM, the Division will coordinate with the District and the Regional Integration Team (RIT) to select the appropriate forum and propose potential dates. The RIT will coordinate within HQUSACE to confirm the date, forum, and Washington-level participation.

d. Participation. The District, Division, and HQUSACE will participate in the ADM meeting.

- The District Commander will provide a brief background on the study and recommendation of the TSP, discuss significant comments received and their impact, the path forward, and how risks will be addressed. The District is responsible for inviting the Agency Technical Review (ATR) team leader and OEO (Outside Eligible Organization) IEPR manager. It is recommended that the District strongly encourage the non-Federal sponsor to participate in the ADM.
- Division participation will include the Chief of Planning and Policy and key members

of the Quality Assurance (QA) Team.

- Headquarters participants include the ADM Panel of senior HQUSACE leaders consisting of the Chief of the Planning and Policy Division, the Chief of Engineering and Construction Division, the Chief of the Real Estate Division, and a RIT Leader (not from the presenting Division). The HQUSACE Review Team and the HQUSACE Office of the Chief Counsel will also participate. Alternate panel members may be designated if the primary members are not available to participate.

e. Forum. The ADM will be a web meeting with audio conference capability.

- The District will reserve the web meeting and audio conference lines and ensure that adequate capacity is established to include District participants, Division participants, the non-Federal sponsor(s), HQUSACE participants, the ATR lead, and the IEPR Manager. It is recommended that the District reserve a local conference room with appropriate technology to host and participate in the web meeting.
- It is recommended that Division participants reserve a local conference room with appropriate technology to participate in the web meeting.
- At HQUSACE, the RIT will reserve a conference room for the ADM, ensure that it includes all necessary equipment (speaker phone, web meeting functionality, projector, etc.), and that the equipment functions properly.

3. Pre-Conference Submittals and Preparations.

a. A minimum of two (2) weeks prior to the ADM, the District must provide the pre-conference submittals concurrently to the RIT and Division. Following a completeness and quality check, the RIT will confirm the ADM date. If the District does not submit a quality, complete read ahead package two weeks prior to the tentative ADM date, the ADM will be rescheduled at the convenience of the ADM Panel and the HQUSACE policy review team. All submittals must reflect any changes that occurred between the TSP milestone and the ADM. The pre-conference submittals include:

- Draft ADM Agenda (ref. Appendix);
- Report Synopsis with one page abstract;
- Decision Management Plan;
- Risk Register, with summary page of significant risks to be discussed including those that changed since the TSP milestone and the high risks that are expected to be carried forward through the feasibility level analysis phase to Preconstruction Engineering and Design (PED).
- The Project Study Issue Checklist- used as a guiding document to determine what major issues should be communicated to the vertical team and what policy risks should be in the Risk Register;
- Decision Log;
- Concurrent Review Summary, outlining significant or controversial issues, any

unresolved issues, and any issues that affect the plan selection. This is not a linear explanation of every type of review or every review comment, but a focus on what concerns and risks affect the path forward;

- The District Commander's briefing slides.

b. Examples of the pre-conference submittals are located on the SMART Planning website.

c. The Planning Community of Practice (PCoP) and Institute for Water Resources (IWR) are developing an automated workflow tool in SharePoint to track read ahead materials and Memorandum for the Record (MFR) submittals. As the Review Manager for the HQUSACE policy review team, the Office of Water Project Review (OWPR) will only track the submission and review of the draft and final reports for studies as well as any issue papers submitted in advance of issue resolution conferences (IRC); they will not track read ahead material, nor review it and provide comments. However, it is expected that all read ahead material will accurately reflect the alignment of the Vertical Team. Decision milestones are not IRCs. Further information and guidance on the submittal and tracking of read ahead materials and MFRs will be provided soon.

d. The District Commander's briefing slides will follow the posted template and include slides summarizing the recommended plan, significant issues and concerns from concurrent public, technical, independent external, and policy reviews (the focus of the discussion). Also included are lessons from other investigations/efforts used on the study and lessons from the current study that will be used to improve future investigations.

e. The RIT may have a short pre-brief for the HQUSACE ADM Panel and the HQ Review Manager, giving the basics of the study (scope of the project, how features relate to each other, how the project relates to nearby projects) and any significant policy issues so that the ADM can focus on meaningful discussion. This pre-brief will not include a detailed discussion of the reviews or the pre-conference submittals. The RIT may provide feedback to the District, Division, and ATR lead following the pre-brief to support an effective ADM meeting.

f. One week prior to the ADM, the HQ review manager will provide the HQUSACE policy review team slide(s) to the RIT. The RIT will combine the HQUSACE policy review slides with the District slides for the final presentation. Three business days prior to the ADM, the RIT will confirm the agenda times, speakers, and attendees, and provide printed copies of the agenda and the pre-conference submittal package to the HQUSACE attendees. Presentation slides are to be printed two slides per page, portrait layout. The RIT will distribute the agenda and pre-conference submittal package electronically to the remote Division and District attendees, including the ATR lead and IEPR Manager.

4. Conference.

a. Presentations will follow the template agenda and will be in the following order:

- District Commander's project briefing, including significant review issues and concerns, impact on TSP, and Risk Register highlights;
- MSC slide on their Quality Assurance; ATR and IEPR leads can comment if needed

- HQUSACE Review Manager’s briefing on the policy and legal review;
- District Commander’s briefing on the feasibility level analysis phase and the study timeline.

b. Panel Member’s Questions and Discussion. After the presentations have been concluded, the ADM Panel will ask questions and discuss the project, plan formulation, policy issues, national considerations, risk, and the schedule, scope, and cost of the feasibility level analysis phase.

c. Confirmation of the Recommendations.

- After discussions, the Panel will make a recommendation on the endorsement of the recommended plan and path forward to completion of the study (the schedule, scope, and cost of the feasibility level analysis phase). A majority vote by the Panel is needed to proceed.
- If the recommended plan and path forward is not endorsed, the Decision Log will identify required actions of the team and the study will not proceed into the feasibility-level analysis phase until the additional work has been completed. If there are significant changes to the recommended plan that had been presented in the draft report during concurrent review, the public review process may need to be repeated and a second ADM may need to be held.
- The District will update the Decision Log and draft the MFR throughout the meeting. The MFR is simply a written outline of the main points discussed in the meeting and the decisions made. Before the meeting adjourns, the ADM Panel and Vertical Team will concur on the Decision Log and MFR.

5. Actions Subsequent to the ADM.

a. Documentation of the ADM. The District is responsible for documenting the discussions and decisions made at the ADM. The District will finalize the MFR within one week of the milestone and submit the MFR signed by the District Planning Chief through the MSC to the RIT, along with the supporting Decision Log. If the RIT deems the MFR an accurate representation of the milestone decisions, the RIT will distribute the MFR to all meeting participants.

b. Feasibility Level Analysis Phase. Feasibility level analysis of the agency recommended plan occurs after the successful completion of the ADM. This phase of the study includes development of the Final Draft Report and additional planning and design of the recommended plan to reduce risk of uncertainty with cost data, engineering effectiveness, environmental impacts, and economic benefits.

Appendix: ADM Agenda Template

PROJECT NAME
AGENCY DECISION MILESTONE - DATE
AGENDA

Welcome/Introductions (5 min)

HQUSACE Chief of Planning & Policy

Project Briefing (15 min)

District Commander

- Brief project overview
- TSP and the trade-offs between benefits, environmental impacts, costs, policy, legal issues, and sponsor capability that led to selection

Review Summary Discussion (20 min)

District Commander

- Overview of significant Agency Technical Review, Independent External Peer Review, policy, legal, and public comments
- Risk register highlights
- Important Decisions made in response to comments and impact on recommended plan

Quality Assurance by MSC, and significant ATR and IEPR comments (5 min)

MSC Commander

(ATR, IEPR Leads if needed)

Input on significant comments, issues of concern, and decisions (5 min)

HQUSACE Review Manager

Path Forward – Feasibility level design (DMP) and Final

District Commander

Report (10-15 min)

Applied lessons learned from previous studies/lessons learned so far on this study

Panel Discussion (20 min)

Vote on Decisions (5 min)

- Approval of the Recommended Plan by the ADM Panel
- Approval of the proposed way forward for the final feasibility study report by the ADM Panel
- Concurrence on the draft MFR and updated Decision Log by ADM Panel, Vertical Team, PDT