

Feasibility Study Initiation in Light of Risk-Informed Planning


Planning CoP Webinar

August 23, 2018

Q&A Session

In a joint webinar hosted by the Planning and Program & Project Management Communities of Practice, Ms. Kimberly Townsend (P.E., Senior Water Resources Planner, Planning CoP) provided an overview of feasibility study initiation in the context of risk-informed planning. The webinar was held in anticipation of studies initiating from the 2018 Supplemental Appropriation or the FY18 Work Plan, and covered topics including the Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement (FCSA) execution process, as well as project delivery team (PDT) efforts during the first 90 days of the study leading up to the Alternatives Milestone. For more feasibility study information and resources for PDTs:



- [Single Phase Feasibility Study Resources on the Planning Community Toolbox](#)
- [Emergency Supplemental Single Phase Feasibility Study Resources on the Planning Community Toolbox](#)
- [Tips, Tools, & Techniques for Feasibility Studies on the Planning Community Toolbox](#)
- [Frameworks for Milestone Presentations on the PCoP SharePoint](#) 
- [Institute for Water Resources \(IWR\)-Assistance for Planning Teams \(APT\)](#)
 - Note: Login for IWR-APT is the same as for the Planner Database. The password can be easily reset.

This summary of the Question / Answer session of the webinar is not a transcription; questions and responses have been edited and reordered for clarity.

Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreements

What is the purpose of the letter of intent if the sponsor has to sign the FCSA?

The letter of intent (LOI) demonstrates to Headquarters and other interested entities that the District has a sponsor who is fully financially capable and willing to participate as a partner in the feasibility study. It could be argued that the FCSA does the same thing, but the letter of intent is provided before the sponsor signs the FCSA. Ultimately, the purpose of the letter is to ensure that Districts are communicating with their sponsors and that the sponsor is fully aware of the feasibility study process.

Is the 10 October deadline to execute the FCSA for Supplemental studies in guidance, or is it a goal?

The 60-day deadline was clearly communicated from Headquarters to the Major Subordinate Commands (MSCs), along with a strong emphasis on efficient execution of Supplemental studies. The goal of the initial \$100k of study funds provided to Districts is to ensure that PDTs are able to kick off studies as quickly as possible. A significant delay in agreement execution may result in de-selection; this decision

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would be made on a case-by-case basis. For regularly appropriated studies, the FCSA must be signed in the fiscal year in which it is selected as a new start.

If we don't execute the FCSA by 10 October, can we still begin the study since it is 100% federally funded?

PDTs should still plan to begin their studies even if the 10 October FCSA execution deadline isn't met. The deadline is meant to demonstrate the high priority of the studies. However, no funding beyond \$100k will be allocated without a signed FCSA.

Feasibility Study Tools and Guidance

Is the decision log still required by the vertical team as a milestone meeting read ahead?

The decision log is not a required read ahead submittal for milestone meetings. However, it is still a useful tool that PDTs should consider using to document their decisions throughout the study process, which will help PDTs communicate effectively to the vertical team. For milestone meetings, in-progress reviews, or other vertical team meetings, MSC and HQ participants may request the decision log (or similar tool used by the PDT) to better understand the evolution of the study and the decisions made.

Is the use of IWR-APT a mandatory requirement for all feasibility studies?

No, IWR-APT is not a required tool; however, using IWR-APT's online risk register and other tools is strongly encouraged as the tool allows vertical team members to easily access study documents.

Will HQ be developing new / additional guidance for implementing the [Director's Policy Memorandum Civil Works Program 2018-05: Improving Efficiency and Effectiveness in USACE Civil Works Project Delivery \(Planning Phase and Planning Activities\)](#)?

Each of the functional areas at Headquarters is actively working on individual guidance (i.e., Real Estate, Engineering & Construction, Planning, Project Management, Office of Counsel, etc.). Updated guidance should be released in the near future, although they are likely to be released at different times. These guidance documents are being developed in response to Mr. Dalton's May 2018 [Director's Policy Memorandum 2018-05: Improving Efficiency and Effectiveness in USACE Civil Works Project Delivery \(Planning Phase and Planning activities\)](#) and will apply to all planning activities.

Specific guidance on the Supplemental can be found in the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works [Policy Guidance on Implementation of Supplemental Appropriations in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018](#) memorandum and [Director's Policy Memorandum 2018-09: Civil Works: Principles of Delivery for the 2018 Emergency Supplemental](#).

Study Funding

When and how does a District get the next increment of funding for a Supplemental study?

All PDTs will receive \$100k up front to kick off the first iteration of the study. Once the FCSA is executed, Headquarters will issue the first year of funding. The actual date entered for the Review Plan in the Program and Project Management Information System (P2) database allows second year funds to be

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allocated for non-Supplemental studies. For Supplemental studies, funding will be provided as needed based on the vertically aligned funding streams, not on an annual basis.

Are Planning Mentors funded from studies or by Headquarters?

There is some funding available (up to 40 hours) for Planning Mentors approved to work on regular Work Plan studies. For Supplemental studies, Planning Mentors will need to be funded by the study, including the initial \$100k provided to the PDT prior to FCSA execution.

How much is the first year funding expected to be?

For regular new start studies, funding is based on the figures provided in the appropriations bill or the final Work Plan. For Emergency Supplemental studies, first year funding will be based on vertically aligned required funding on an as needed basis.

Study Process

Can you highlight the ways this study initiation process differs from how we used to do new starts (i.e., programs / project management / funding)?

As far as the FCSA execution process, it's exactly the same. Once the FCSA has been executed, the focus is on identifying and managing risk and managing your resources efficiently. For example, PDTs should be kept to a core group of critical team members, with additional members pulled in as needed throughout the study process. PDTs should be using risk discussions to help manage the study schedule, scope, and budget – by continuously evaluating and re-evaluating the available information and communicating risks to the vertical team at milestone meetings.

Regarding environmental coordination, the presentation stated that initial National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping should occur prior to AMM. However, the Office of Water Project Review (OWPR) has indicated that we need to be careful not to release a Notice of Intent (NOI) too early for studies requiring an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as this will trigger the two-year clock for "One Federal Decision" monitoring. Can you provide clarification on not releasing the NOI too soon?

Jeff Trulick (OWPR): This issue on NOI timing is being worked by multiple offices inside and outside the Corps, and guidance should be released in the near future. With an EIS especially, PDTs should be aware of [Executive Order 13807](#) (Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure). Currently, the proposal is that the two-year time period be measured from NOI to signed Record of Decision; the details are still being worked out. PDTs can engage in scoping activities and soliciting public input before the NOI is released ("early scoping") as long as there is appropriate public notice and enough information available so that the public and relevant agencies can participate effectively.

Is there a requirement to do a Federal Interest Determination somewhere during this process, along the lines of what is required for Continuing Authority Program (CAP) studies?

Prior to the Alternatives Milestone, the PDT will conduct and document a preliminary analysis of the Federal interest and a rough order of magnitude of costs, benefits, and environmental impacts. If at any

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point during the study it is determined that there is no Federal interest, the study is considered inactive and will be terminated. There is no official Federal Interest Determination requirement for a feasibility study, however. The PDT should be confident in the federal interest of proceeding with the study by the time you reach the Alternatives Milestone and continually evaluate federal interest through the course of the study.

Is three months the goal or the expectation for scoping and alternatives evaluation and reaching the Alternatives Milestone? [Planning Bulletin 2017-01](#) recommends three to six months.

Three months is the goal. However, one size does not fit all, and the progress of each study will be considered on a case-by-case basis. PDTs should be communicating study status and any issues regularly, in addition to making vertically aligned decisions throughout the study process.