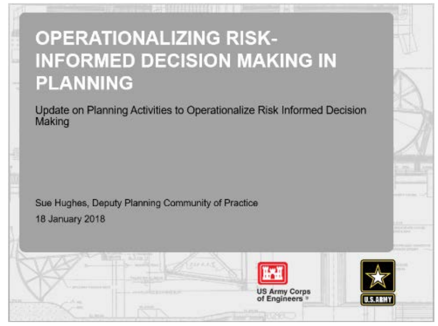
Operationalizing Risk Informed Decision Making in Planning
Planning CoP Webinar
January 18, 2018
Q&A Session

During this webinar, Ms. Sue Hughes, Planning Community of Practice Deputy, provided an update to the community of ongoing activities to operationalize risk-informed decision making in planning. Further questions and ideas for future webinars or learning sessions related can be directed to Ms. Hughes. Questions and responses are edited for length and clarity and are not a direct transcription.



In addition to questions (below), the following observations were offered by webinar participants:

- RPEDS (Regional Planning and Environment Division – South, MVD) is incorporating risk based on the two new risk documents (Risk Informed Planning Manual and Principles of Risk Analysis) into our review processes. We want to keep abreast of similar activities in other Districts and Divisions. I'm aware of the LRD CAP process that is updating their CAP procedures. I hope news about related updates will be posted on the Planning Toolbox.
    - Response: The PCoP also hopes people will share their lessons learned and experiences. There are a number of paths: experiences / lessons learned that are "good enough to share" with colleagues can be posted to the PCoP SharePoint site (USACE access only). Teams or Districts can get on the PCoP Webinar schedule to share lessons and more broadly (contact Jodi Creswell) or highlight their experiences in a story in the quarterly Planning Ahead newsletter (contact Marriah Abellera). Policy or procedural documents, fact sheets, reports, etc. can be posted to the Planning Community Toolbox public website (email hqplanning@usace.army.mil).
- We seem to be reverting to more and more review; it now accounts for over 33% of the study timeline (including read-ahead review prior to milestones).
    - Response: Some of this time cannot be avoided, such as public comment periods on the draft and final reports and state and agency review of the final feasibility study / draft chief's report. It is up to the entire Corps team to deliver quality documents on the timeline and budget that we have committed to, including the quality control and quality assurance measures in place to deliver those products. We do think that a forward-looking emphasis on the feasibility milestones will help orient decision making forward. If there is a specific policy or HQ-mandated process that is negatively impacting your ability to deliver a quality planning product, please email me (Sue Hughes).
- Your slide show an estimated 12 months from the start of a study to the Tentatively Selected Plan milestone and, by policy, the draft report. That means we spend two thirds of the study performing review and approval and less than 12 months to do the work to identify a project. I usually advise teams it will take at least 18 months, and maybe longer, to get to the TSP.
    - Response: It is the PCOP's goal to determine the initial TSP in 2-3 months and a refinement of the TSP for the Draft Report in less than 12 months. Using the techniques described in the Planning Manual II – Risk Informed Planning will help teams get there. If a study team need

more time or money it should be based on the needs to reduce uncertainty and manage risks. The question for teams and decision-makers is how the uncertainty effects our objectives. Answering the uncertainty question relative to the objective allows us to organize our scopes of work to reduce uncertainty at the time doing so matters most to our objective(s). Our goal is to drive more of our studies when possible to meet the 3-year timeline from FCSA to Chief's Report. The need for more detail must be driven by uncertainty and unacceptable risks. As we improve those skills across all members of the PDT and decision makers, some projects might still need more than 3 years, but doing so will be driven by uncertainty and risk management decisions. We also need to ensure we are not preparing the Draft Report like we have done in the more recent past. The report needs to be concise with a clear comparison of alternatives and an explanation of why, not just how or what, to include risk analysis and identify the TSP. The effort expended after public review of the Draft Report getting to a final feasibility design and a Chief's Report is an important part of the study phase. The input received is vital to the Agency's recommendation to Congress and for implementation. The more rigorous 'planning analysis' done through the Draft Report to refine costs and benefits and make final agency recommendations is augmented after the ADM with more detailed engineering in order to prepare Final Report and Chief's Report. Throughout that analysis, we need to ask if the new information produced impacts the TSP and, if so, how? If so, additional iterations may be necessary to affirm the formulation and evaluation of alternatives.

- It seems like an internal challenge is in our Office of Counsel; their role is to advise on minimizing risks, at least from a legal perspective, but they often weigh in on policy too.
  - Response: This is a challenge. We recognize that there is not a defined corporate "risk tolerance" in the many decisions that impact study teams. Increased transparency in the assessment of risk associated with a decision and acknowledgement of uncertainty is intended to daylight these challenges so that they can be addressed. There are some risks that absolutely exist – but if they don't impact the immediate decision, do we need to be spending resources to address them?
- In evaluating risks, often you have to acknowledge unknowns that add to risk. This in turn adds to uncertainty that would need to be communicated with the sponsor with sensitivity, but openness. Consideration of this adding to how to weigh paths and recommendations could increase complexity of a study.
  - Response: I have heard the concern that this is additional work, but I don't see it that way. We're already considering uncertainty in our planning process. What we're looking at is being more transparent in communicating that uncertainty within our team, with our sponsors, and with decision makers. This is not additional sensitivity analysis.
- Can we have a risk aversion hotline to report and resolve risk averse behavior?
  - We'll take that into consideration. In the meantime, we are all looking for examples of how teams have worked to overcome risk averse behavior and come to a common understanding going forward. You can share your ideas with us at any time by emailing hqplanning@usace.army.mil or me (Sue Hughes) directly. Your advice and lessons learned in overcoming that that are "good enough to share" with colleagues can be posted to the PCoP SharePoint site.

When will new format and content of the Agency Decision Milestone begin?

We do not have an exact date, because this is largely a change in how we organize and present information, and how we use that information to make decisions. At HQ, the PCoP is working to prepare HQ decision makers for all the milestone meetings to hear information differently and understand the uncertainty and risk management approaches that teams will be including in their read-aheads (report summary) and presentations. At the same time, we will be working with teams to present information differently and teams/RITs to arrange the milestone meeting agenda to focus on the decision(s) to be made. If you have an upcoming milestone meeting and are willing to lean forward, contact your RIT Planner and Sue Hughes.

If I'm on a PDT that wants a planning mentor to come out and train my team, how do I make that happen?

Talk to your leadership: your district planning chief and your MSC. Our intent is to coordinate across the Planning Advisory Board (all the MSC Planning Chiefs) to align planning mentors with studies.

Any thoughts on communicating risk and uncertainty internally to USACE decision makers vs. externally/to the public (e.g., the TSP Milestone meeting discussion vs. the draft report)?

I would like to believe that how we are evaluating uncertainty, and assessing and managing risk, is talked about at milestone meetings *and* in communicating with our study partners and the public. That is the hard part about telling the risk story, being more transparent about what we know, what we don't know, and what can go wrong. It is not comfortable, and not the usual way that engineers communicate.

I assume that these improvements will be incorporated in the updated PGN. What's the ETA on roll-out of the updated sections?

Most of these improvements do not need changes in our planning guidance. Nevertheless, we are still working to get a baseline update to the Planning Guidance Notebook (April 2000) and appendices out. Review of the Main body of PGN (chapters 1-4) is on hold for now so that reviewers can focus on the Appendices, where a lot of procedural guidance lives. Most of these are in HQ "chop" right now, and we plan to get them out as they cross the cross the finish line.