Integrated Communication Planning
April 2, 2020
Q&A Session

This webinar introduced participants to the new USACE Integrated Communication Planning Process. The process, which is applicable across the enterprise, is the result of a collaborative effort between the Public Affairs Office (PAO) and the Project Management, Planning, and Collaboration and Public Participation Communities of Practice (CoPs). Topics addressed included how to identify stakeholders and potential issues, determining communication goals and objectives, and developing key messages and talking points. The webinar was presented by Bill Peoples (Nashville District Public Affairs Chief) and Jacqueline Tate (Great Lakes and Ohio River Division Public Affairs Chief). For additional questions and guidance, reach out directly to Bill or Jacqueline.

The USACE Communication Plan guidance document is available on the Public Affair's Communication Planning Portal, including Appendix A – Determining Stakeholder Engagement Level Worksheet as seen on Slide 11 of the Presentation.

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

What is the best way to work with a stakeholder whose goals or "nice to haves" are not feasible or outside the scope of the project?
Much of this goes back to understanding our stakeholders and what their expectations are, and ensuring that two-way communication is established with the stakeholder from the beginning of the project. Ideally, the stakeholder won't get to the point of having unreasonable expectations because the project delivery team (PDT) understands the stakeholder's issues and interests up front, and can work collaboratively throughout the project process to meet the stakeholder's needs. If this turns out to not be the case at any point, the PDT should take a step back and reassess its relationship with the stakeholder to look for opportunities to establish or reopen two-way dialogue. In addition, especially for new stakeholders, PDTs should invest time in educating them on the USACE mission and the agency's capabilities.

Are PDTs required to fund PAO's labor to assist with a study, or are PAO staff funded by overhead?
PAO staff are primarily overhead funded, meaning that they can provide assistance to PDTs without a labor code. In addition, PAO generally funds its own travel. However, if a certain project or study entails a large amount of travel (e.g., for multiple public meetings), the PDT may be asked to fund travel for PAO staff.

Can a PDT member answer a question from the media if contacted directly and the question is straightforward, or should PDT members always consult with PAO before answering a question?
The short answer is that it is always best to consult with PAO when responding to a question from the media, especially if the question relates to a controversial project or study.

The longer answer is that while it's always best to consult with PAO before responding to a media inquiry, PAO empowers USACE subject matter experts (e.g., project managers, study managers) to answer questions from the media that are within their purview for a particular study or project if they feel comfortable doing so. For example, if a project or study manager has completed media training and has a solid understanding of PAO's approach to responding to the media, then he or she should have the confidence and expertise to talk to the media about the study or project in question.

In addition, PAO is available to help PDTs develop key messages and talking points at the beginning of a study so that study or project managers have this language in their back pocket to use when speaking to stakeholders or the media. Lastly, anyone answering a media inquiry should always follow up with PAO afterward to ensure PAO can properly log the inquiry and response and look out for any resulting stories or news clips.

Is it appropriate for environmental managers to reach out on their own to residents who may or may not be in the project footprint to determine land ownership and confirm tract boundaries, or should PAO be involved in such discussions?

As a general rule, PDTs should reach out to stakeholders as often as they can to build relationships, collect needed data, and share important information from USACE. However, PDTs should always follow relevant regulations when reaching out to stakeholders (e.g., Paperwork Reduction Act, National Environmental Policy Act). In this case, environmental managers should be sure to involve their real estate PDT member(s) before reaching out to potentially affected homeowners to ensure that all relevant laws and regulations are followed.

Can you provide additional information about Enterprise Standard (ES) 28000, including its history and how it has changed over the years?

ES 28000 originated from a 10-step communication process developed by Bill and the Project Management CoP back in 2001, which was initially used in the Nashville District and then implemented more broadly by the Great Lakes and Ohio River Division in 2005. The document was then adopted into an Enterprise Standard through the Quality Management System in 2008-2009 and updated in 2016 and 2019, when its current form as the Integrated Communication Process was established. ES 28000 is available in the Public Affairs folder within the "Headquarters Publications" folder of the Enterprise Quality Management System (QMS).