

This webinar provided an overview of the USACE Water Resources Certified Planner (WRCP) Program in advance of the 2021 Call for Applications. The webinar was presented by Kim Townsend (HQUSACE Senior Water Resources Planner) and addressed the purpose of the program, qualifications required for certification, and the application and evaluation process.



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

WRCP Experience Requirements

Does experience working on a feasibility study only count towards WRCP certification if the applicant is the lead planner at the time of the conclusion of the study?

No – study experience counts even if the applicant was not involved at the time the study concluded. However, a WRCP applicant's score for any given study is dependent, in part, on the number of milestones in which the applicant was involved for that study. Applicants should keep in mind that while they can list up to 15 studies in their application, only the 5 highest-scoring studies will be counted toward their application score.

How does experience working on non-General Investigations (GI) feasibility studies factor towards an applicant's score (e.g., Flood Plan Management Services [FPMS], Planning Assistance to States [PAS], Continuing Authorities Program [CAP], or planning support in the Preconstruction Engineering and Design [PED] or Construction phase)?

Credit is provided for all types of studies, though traditional feasibility studies offer the most potential for points. Applicants are encouraged to list up to 15 studies if they are uncertain how their involvement in one study may score compared to their involvement in another. Additionally, credit is given for work done during PED and Construction. Applicants can claim credit for PED and Construction support in the "Studies" tab, under "Planning Support During Construction."

Some planners work in Districts that don't often receive GI studies. How can they gain the necessary experience to score high enough on the application to be certified as a WRCP?

While it is possible to be certified as a WRCP without extensive GI experience, a diverse and rigorous workload certainly strengthens one's application. Planners in this situation should discuss their options with their supervisor or Planning Chief and ask to be considered for larger scale studies that might be outside of their District or MSC. Planners in this situation should also consider listing temporary detail assignments in their individual development plans.

How should experience working on a USACE planning study be documented in the application if the experience was gained while as a contractor?

If a current USACE planner has prior experience working on a Civil Works planning study as a contractor, that experience can be included in the "Studies" section of the application. Just be sure to include a comment elaborating on why you believe that experience to be evidence of your planning expertise, since it is considered a unique situation.

How relevant is experience outside of USACE (e.g., experience with another federal agency or in academia)?

The purpose of the WRCP certification is to demonstrate expertise in the USACE Civil Works Planning process. Experience unrelated to the USACE Civil Works Planning process will not strengthen an application. Applicants are highly encouraged to include any mentoring or teaching experience directly relevant to their USACE planning career.

How is Project Manager (PM) experience on Planning studies counted in the WRCP application?

A PM's role in a study differs from District to District, with some Districts combining the PM/Lead Planner role on studies, and others distinguishing between the two. Regardless, if a PM was directly involved in planning efforts (e.g., preparing planning documents, issue resolution, community engagement, etc.), that experience can be included in one's application. Within the "Studies" tab of the application, the applicant should select "Project Manager" as their role.

WRCP Application Logistics

Will submission of an essay be required to complete the application process?

The essay portion of the application process comes *after* Planner Database applications are scored by USACE Headquarters. Not all who apply within the Planner Database will be contacted for an interview or provided essay questions. Only the highest scoring applicants will move into the interview and essay phase.

How much time should applicants budget to complete the application?

Applicants should plan to start the application process as soon as possible. It may take a week or more just to gather the information required and potentially another 8 hours or so to input the information into the application. However, these are just estimates – the bottom line is that applicants should not wait until the last minute. Applicants should be sure to include adequate time for their supervisor to review and approve their application. Applications must be validated by an applicant's supervisor on or before the 14 May 2021 deadline.

What are some general words of wisdom for those who are planning to apply?

- Use your resume as a baseline for gathering information, and your individual development plan and/or performance reviews to help fill in gaps.
- Take your time, review, and revise.
- Talk to your supervisor about the information you are providing – they might recall certain experience you are forgetting to include!
- Don't forget to save, save, save as you go through each tab of the application.

Does the first group of WRCPs certified in 2017 need to reapply for certification? If so, how will they be notified about the recertification process?

The requirement for recertification is every 5 years. The first group of WRCPs certified in 2017 will need to apply for recertification in 2022. The recertification process will likely involve a short form that will ask the WRCP to confirm that they are still involved in Planning work, and will not require the full application process and interview/essays to be repeated again. Impacted WRCPs should look out for an email with instructions on how to recertify next year.

Miscellaneous

Project Management Professional (PMP) certification is recognized as a professional standard and can be used in both the private and public sectors. Does the WRCP certification translate in a similar fashion or is it specific to USACE?

The WRCP certification is only recognized within USACE. Like other professional certifications (e.g., PMP or PE) there are many quality USACE employees who are not certified – but certification as a WRCP is one way to demonstrate one’s mastery of Planning. Headquarters Planning leadership strongly encourages top performers within the PCoP to apply and encourages “greener” planners to add this certification to their professional goals.