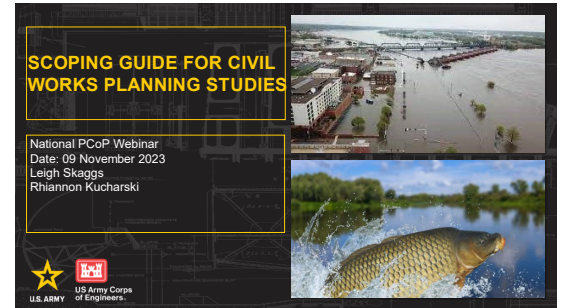


Planning Fundamentals: Scoping Guide for Civil Works Planning Studies

9 November 2023

Q&A Summary

This webinar was part of the Planning Fundamentals Series and introduced the [Scoping Guide for Civil Works Planning Studies](#), a new resource for project delivery teams to conduct feasibility phase scoping. This presentation provided an overview of what scoping for planning studies is, the contents of the Scoping Guide, and how this new resource can assist teams. The webinar was presented by Rhiannon Kucharski (Chief of Planning, Honolulu District) and Leigh Skaggs (Senior Plan Formulator, St. Paul District), lead developers of the Scoping Guide and members of the PCoP's Planning Workforce Development Committee.



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

Scoping Guide Contents

Does the Scoping Guide address National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping requirements?

No. This guide does not address specific NEPA scoping requirements; however, the guide recognizes that overall study scoping needs to include NEPA scoping.

Does the guide address that habitat evaluation models are required to be identified as part of the scoping process for ecosystem restoration studies?

Yes. The guide discusses how study teams should work with the appropriate [Planning Center of Expertise](#) (PCX), based on the study business line and focus, to determine necessary models and other needs for the study. For this specific example, a study team would coordinate with the [Ecosystem Restoration PCX](#). The Scoping Guide includes an example of scoping for environmental evaluations, including model selection and ECO-PCX coordination.

Level of Detail and Timing Considerations in Scoping

What level of detail of the problems, opportunities, objectives, and constraints (POOCs) is needed to inform input from, and expectations of, collaborators, resource agencies, and other partners?

The study team should start on the POOCs with initial scoping and development of the Six Pieces of Paper, but by the time an initial charrette is completed, it is ideal for study teams to have a well-developed and agreed upon POOCs in order to properly scope the study.

How would the key activities from the "Study Initiation Phase" vary between Continuing Authority Program (CAP) studies to specifically-authorized feasibility studies (e.g., those authorized in Water Resources Development Act bills)? Would it have similarities, but scoped to a unique authority?

The key activities would be very similar between CAP studies and specifically authorized studies, although the scale and level of detail could be significantly different. The authority is a key component to scoping and will help inform the key activities in the "Study Initiation Phase." CAP feasibility studies are meant to be smaller and quicker than General Investigations feasibility studies.

Funding Considerations in Scoping

How should study teams approach underbudgeting for a feasibility study, for example an under-scoped Federal Interest Determination (FID) carried into the feasibility cost share agreement (FCSA)? Most study team members are not eager to start scoping until they have project funds to work with, and if more funding ends up being required it is not ideal to have to go back to the non-federal partner for an FCSA amendment.

The standard FCSA template for a specifically authorized study assumes a \$3 million cost shared study. Early discussions about the need to amend the standard FCSA with the non-federal sponsor can prepare the non-federal sponsor. It is important for the non-federal sponsor to understand that the “standard” \$3 million cost of a feasibility study is just an estimate, and that the study scope, schedule, and budget will be refined within the first few months of the study (post-FCSA). We recognize the challenges for study teams to not have project dollars available to begin scoping until after the FCSA is signed.

Are there best practices for study teams wanting to avoid funding delays after signing a FCSA?

Holding execution of the FCSA until funding is ready may be helpful, although this could be a challenge if there is a FCSA signing deadline (for example for emergency supplemental funded studies). It is critical for project management leads and the district Planning Chief to be coordinating up the Programs chain regarding the status of federal funding, as well as coordinating with the non-federal sponsor to make sure they are poised to provide the funding immediately upon executing the agreement.

It is also important that the non-federal sponsor understands that by signing the FCSA, they are indicating readiness to provide the funding. Equally, USACE should be prepared to move nimbly to get funds moved and in place as soon as the agreement is executed.

How should study teams proceed if funding delays create issues in meeting 3x3 and milestone deadlines?

If funding delays early in the study create issues in completing the study in three years/\$3 million total study cost, the Vertical Team Alignment Memorandum should reflect the need for additional time or money and the reasons for that.

Study teams should notify the vertical team so they are aware of any milestone timeline challenges related to funding delays, while concurrently working with Programs and the non-federal sponsor to manage – and adjust as needed – deadlines and expectations. Note: this may result in a requirement to send a revised study schedule to the non-federal sponsor if key milestones, such as the release of the draft report, are delayed.