Q&A: Unifying Planning Modernization
SMART Planning Webinar Series #1
April 4, 2013

Following the **Unifying Planning Modernization** webinar presentation, Sue Hughes, Deputy, Planning Community of Practice, took questions via the "chat" function. The questions and responses below are not a direct transcript; they have been reordered and edited for clarity. Additional questions and feedback are always welcome via the SMART Guide comment form online at:
http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=10&Step=1

SMART Planning and the 3x3x3 Rule

How many projects have completed the SMART Planning process? If there aren't any yet, what is the farthest that some projects have progressed so far?

No studies have gone all the way through yet – we're all looking forward to that. The furthest SMART Planning studies have reached the TSP milestone; we've had a few of those.

Feasibility Study Milestones & Documentation

Can you provide a crosswalk to compare legacy milestones and new SMART milestones; e.g., the Alternatives Milestone is between F2 and F3?

Our thought all along was to deliberately avoid an explicit crosswalk between the legacy milestones and the SMART Planning milestones. Our argument against such a crosswalk is that SMART milestones are very different than our previous milestone structure. We want the SMART milestone to be a measure of an agreement that we make as an agency, rather than getting to a certain point and checking it off. We also want to recognize that an alternative might change when we have different information. We know it is not black and white; that is one reason why we don't have the crosswalk.

What is the expectation for documenting Vertical Team concurrence at the Alternatives Milestone meeting?

As a study moves through the SMART milestones, we want to document vertical team concurrence on what's been done and what needs to be done. What we're seeing as the norm for documenting decisions is a decision log. But we're also seeing is that the Vertical Team is finding a Memorandum for the Record (MFR) very useful. While we don't want to create more paperwork, we are hearing that a short, concise MFR can document that "we know where we are and we know where we're going." It can be very generic: these people met on this date and produced these documents, attaching the decision log, decision management plan, report synopsis, and risk register (for example). The key is one piece of paper that documents what's been done and where things are.

The Planning Team

What are the checks and balances with SMART Planning? Who is checking to make sure we stay true to the SMART Planning concepts and don't get tied up in "the details" during reviews?

That's always going to be an issue, and that's a responsibility that falls on all of us. Just like we say every planner needs to know the next decision and why they need the information, the same thing goes here for reviewers. A reviewer needs to know why they are asking for that information, what decision they are trying to make. We each have the responsibility to hold ourselves and our teams accountable at all levels. We all are learning this together and there will be some speed bumps, but if you have an issue that's not going anywhere, you need to raise the flag and follow our issue resolution or dispute resolution process. I am hoping we can get to it less bureaucratically, though.

Charettes and Other Opportunities for Vertical Team Engagement

What is being done to ensure HQ and OWPR participation in planning charettes and In Progress Reviews (IPRs)?

We recognize the staff of the Office of Water Project Review (OWPR) cannot be at every charette and IPR across the country. Wes Coleman, Chief of OWPR, is working to identify MSC resources that staff at the MSC level can "represent" OWPR at In Progress Reviews and other in-person meetings. This has been demonstrated at POD, and seems to be working pretty well.

Another component of that is our focus on Planning portfolio management. Together, the Districts, Divisions, and Headquarters, need to identify the studies that we all need to be working on. It doesn't make sense to schedule a charette for a study that doesn't have funding in place to move forward this FY and is not in the budget for next FY.

Does OWPR have some "lessons learned" from charettes to share?

This doesn't exist as a separate document. However, the latest Charette Handbook (January 2013) includes lessons learned from OWPR and other vertical team participants and PDTs from the first several planning charettes.

Internal and External Reviews of Feasibility Studies

Review policies don't seem very clear or consistently applied. Our study was told that policy review would not occur until ATR was complete.

We recognize there are probably many different ways of doing concurrent review out there right now. Our vision is that the PDT is incorporating appropriate elements of agency technical review (ATR) all along the way as part of that early vertical team engagement, but that formal ATR is concurrent with formal policy review. One thing we have seen is that the quality of District Quality Control is impacting how comfortable the MSC and other parties are with the concurrent review approach. This will

continue to be a challenge as we move forward, and we will have an upcoming webinar focus solely on review.

Are any efforts underway to build a cadre of policy reviewers to ease the workload and improve the availability of the current OWPR staff? If we train more people in policy, won't that also improve our overall execution of SMART Planning?

By OWPR reaching out and delegating elements of policy review to the MSCs, we are training a broader cadre to do the policy review. Bringing the policy reviewers in early and being involved with the PDT more as an advisor or mentor as part of early vertical team integration, there is also an opportunity for learning and knowledge transfer that goes on through that aspect as well.

Corps and Federal Guidance and Regulations and SMART Planning

Planning Bulletins have created a moving target for us as far as guidelines for exemptions to the "3x3x3 rule." Is there a planned schedule for providing final guidance?

Our approach with Planning Bulletins is to provide some general guidelines and parameters for the implementation of SMART Planning, while giving the PDTs the maximum flexibility to meet the goals of the 3x3x3 rule and existing guidance. We are working to ensure that Planning Bulletins are not issued too soon or too frequently– or too far apart either. We do not want them to be too prescriptive to limit good work done by PDTs, nor be too vague so that nobody knows what is expected. The best thing PDTs can do in this time of uncertainty is ask. The notion of vertical team integration and discussion is paramount. We need to ask and share information, not withhold information.

We do not have a plan to update or change the guidance related to the 3x3x3 rule exemption process at this time.

When do we hope to see more concrete buy in from the other Communities of Practice in the form of changes to their written guidance?

When 3x3x3 guidance was issued, Engineering was in the process of reissuing their guidance on how to incorporate Engineering in Planning. They stopped that when we started talking about SMART Planning, which was a good thing and a wise resource decision. When will they take what we're doing and incorporate it in their guidance? That's what they're planning to do from this point forward. That effort will be concurrent with our efforts overhaul our Planning guidance and incorporate these concepts.

How do we transition to 3x3x3 SMART studies started under the current P&G, acknowledging that new Principles and Requirements have just been published?

Legacy studies are following the current Principles and Guidelines (P&G). For studies transitioning to SMART planning, or beginning as SMART Planning studies, our guidance is – and continues to be - in the current Planning Guidance Notebook (ER 1105-2-100). Our current guidance provides a lot of flexibility regarding benefit categories that are included in the recently released Principles and Requirements. It

will be some time before the Council on Environmental Quality finalizes the draft Interagency Guidelines that go with the Principles and Requirements, so changes to our guidance will not be immediate.

Training, Communication & Outreach

How can these SMART Planning Webinars be accessed?

The slides from each webinar in the SMART Planning series, as well as a summary of the Questions and Answers / discussion, will be made available on the Planning Community Toolbox and SMART Guide at www.corpsplanning.us. At this point, we are not intending to provide a recorded version of the full 1-hour webinar, but welcome your input on that matter on the feedback and comments form on the SMART Guide (link).

What is the status of the Planner Certification development?

The plan is that it is going to be coming soon. We have taken a tiered approach to include both a general Planning track and a more technical track, modified to reflect each of the four planning sub-Communities of Practice (Cultural, Environmental, Plan Formulation, and Economics). We wanted to step back and ensure that the certification process ties in with our reexamination of a comprehensive Planning training strategy.