



# Planning Process Transformation: Frequently Asked Questions

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## **What will transformation of the Civil Works Planning process accomplish?**

The revised process will ensure studies are completed in less time without jeopardizing the quality of engineering, environmental and economic analyses. It will:

- Streamline the process to produce concise Chief's Reports faster and at lower cost.
- Reinforce integration with continuous vertical and horizontal engagement.
- Reinforce risk into assumptions and reduce risk associated with decision options.
- Upgrade planning expertise through continual training and updated guidance.
- Use more sophisticated tools and methods to prioritize solutions to water resources challenges.

## **What is the current situation with the Planning program?**

USACE is currently engaged in approximately 365 pre-authorization planning studies. Some pre-authorization studies have been ongoing for 7-9 years or longer. Since the passage of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007, 21 Chief of Engineers Reports have been completed. USACE must modernize its study management processes to deliver faster water resources solutions to the American public.

## **Is anyone frustrated with the current planning process?**

Some sponsors and stakeholders are frustrated with the cost and time it takes to complete studies. One concerned stakeholder is the Senate Appropriations Committee. The Committee is concerned about the Corps planning program specifically, the decline of the number of Chief of Engineers Reports completed since 2006. USACE completed 26 reports in 2005 and 2006, however, since the 2007 Water Resources Development Act, only 21 Chief of Engineers' reports have been completed.

## **What is the 3x3x3 rule?**

The rule stipulates that feasibility studies will be completed at a cost not more than \$3 million, in three years or less, and continued involvement of the three levels of USACE (districts, divisions and Headquarters). In addition, reports should be targeted to be no more than 100 pages in length. Any schedule or budget exceeding these guidelines will require Headquarters, USACE approval.

## **Is the \$3 million threshold the total feasibility study cost or the federal share?**

The \$3 million threshold is the total feasibility study cost.

## **Where did the 3-year duration and \$3 million thresholds come from?**

ER 1105-2-100, states typical studies should be completed in 18-36 months, this timeline threshold is not new, it has been the guidance for many years. In addition, Section 2033(c) of WRDA 2007 directs that the benchmark goal for a study be within 2 years or generally up to 4 years. The \$3 million threshold was selected to scale studies commensurate with complexity. It is not intended to be a one-size fits all approach for feasibility studies. We recognize there are complex watershed and other multi-purpose studies that may require additional time and funds to complete; however, these complex studies are envisioned to be the exception rather than the rule. This also enforces vertical team concurrence on scope and assures DCG-CEO approval.

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**My current Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement (FCSA) cost exceeds the \$3 million threshold. Will we have to amend the FCSA and re-scope to complete in 3 years?**

If your study is not scheduled for completion (submission of final report to HQUSACE) by 31 Dec 2014, you will have to either request approval to continue as-is or re-scope to complete in 3 years and \$3 million. The amount of funds spent to date and number of years the study has been ongoing should be considered in any request sent forward. The need to amend an FCSA should be a consideration made by the district and should be evaluated as part of the re-scoping effort.

**Does the 3x3x3 rule apply to ongoing Reconnaissance studies? I am ready to execute an FCSA and the cost will be over \$3 million. Will I have to re-scope or request approval from HQUSACE to continue as is?**

Yes. The study will have to be re-scoped based on the rule. To avoid delay, districts should elevate issues to MSC's for vertical team discussion and study-specific guidance. The specifics on requesting exemptions have not been developed and exceptions will be rare.

**Does this include Limited and/or General Reevaluation Reports?**

Yes. This guidance addresses all feasibility studies in the General Investigations program, which includes all cost-shared studies, Limited and General Reevaluation Reports. However, the number of studies described in the memorandum reflects feasibility studies only.

**Is the 3x3x3 rule trying to push more engineering items in to the Planning Engineering and Design (PED) or delay other processes in order to meet the 3-year timeline?**

No. The goal is to focus on the appropriate level of study and detail needed to make a decision. Feasibility-level design and other study requirements will still be conducted using the data appropriate for developing the solution. The difference is that the higher level of detail will be limited to a single alternative or small set alternatives.

**MG Walsh's memorandum dated February 2012 indicates studies scoped to be longer than 3 years or for more than \$3 million will require Headquarters' approval. Will guidelines be forthcoming as to how to request this approval, or the circumstances under which approval would be granted?**

Yes, a Planning Bulletin has been posted on the 3x3x3 rule exemption process. All exemption requests will be submitted by the district commander and endorsed to HQUSACE by the MSC commander. The Regional Integration Team will review and ensure the completeness of the exemption request package. A Senior Review Panel will be virtually convened to review the request and made the appropriate decision based on the information provided. More information on this process can be found on our SMART Planning website

<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/library.cfm?Option=Listing&Type=PB&Search=Policy&Sort=Default>

**Who is on the Senior Leaders Review Panel?**

The Senior Leaders Review Panel consists of the Chiefs of Civil Works Planning and Policy, Engineering and Construction, and the Chief of Programs Integration Divisions. Board members will get support as needed from staff.

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**Is the target report length of 100-pages for the main feasibility report or an integrated report and environmental document? Is there an example?**

The target length of 100-pages is for the integrated document. An example (template) is under development and will be posted on the Planning Community Toolbox website

<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/library.cfm?Option=Listing&Type=PB&Search=Policy&Sort=Default>

**What part of the analysis should districts cut in order to reduce the size and detail of reports?**

Districts should use the principles of SMART Planning to question what is relevant to making risk-informed decisions instead of simply cutting portions of the report details out. Data gathering and analysis should focus on areas critical to differentiating between alternatives. A risk-based decision making approach is important. Information that is common to all the alternatives should be acknowledged (i.e., what is the minimal level of detail that is acceptable?). This could help define what components, at a minimum, must be included in feasibility studies.

**What is “risk based scoping?”**

Risk-based scoping involves defining the appropriate levels of detail for investigations so that recommendations for authorization can be captured, succinctly documented and completed in a timely manner. This scoping will rely on the current USACE planning fundamentals – ensuring the right level of quality analysis – and will incorporate appropriate levels of review, with the aim to be more flexible and scalable.

**Paragraph 4.b of MG Walsh’s February 2012 memorandum states that studies that did not receive funding in FY2010, FY2011 and FY2012, or are not in the FY2013 President’s Budget should be identified as inactive. Does a study need to have received funding in all three Fiscal Years and be in the FY2013 President’s Budget to remain active?**

No. If a study received funding in any one of these Fiscal Years or if it is in the FY2013 President’s Budget, it should be identified as active. Funding means that the study received funds either through congressional appropriation or an allocation from a work plan.

**If Feasibility Scoping Meeting (FSM) documents were provided but did not meet criteria for an FSM, do they meet criteria for a FSM by 31 Dec 2011?**

No, if it was determined that they did not meet the requirements for an FSM then, one did not occur. The FSM date is a trigger, but it doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be revisiting studies that have gone past the FSM and are still lengthy and costly.

**Does this apply to reconnaissance or Planning Engineering and Design (PED) studies?**

This only applies to feasibility studies; however, as we initiate new studies it will be incorporated into the reconnaissance phase as well.

**What does reset mean?**

It is a critical review of all feasibility studies. Under a reset, all studies will be reclassified, re-scoped, or may continue as-is. Districts conduct line item study review and define a) USACE role, b) Scope of solution, and c) Scope of study for the MSC’s and the Regional Integration Team’s to review and concur. The MSC’s prioritize active feasibility studies regardless of business line.

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**Does the 3x3x3 guidance apply to watershed studies even though they weren't specifically mentioned in the guidance memorandum?**

Although watershed studies were not specifically spelled out in the memorandum these studies are feasibility studies and are not excluded from compliance with the 3x3x3 guidance.

**What is the completion date for studies being reset this summer under the 3x3x3 memorandum?**

Three years after the reset. In addition, if the study has been going on for many years, then anything approaching 3 years should get highly scrutinized.

**May we propose new start reconnaissance studies for FY2014?**

Yes. The guidance applies to feasibility studies and does NOT apply to proposed reconnaissance starts.

**If a study/project was not included in the FY2013 Presidents Budget may we propose a budget for FY2014?**

Yes, if the study received appropriated (including Work Plan) funds in FY2010, FY2011 or FY2012.

**If a study/project did not receive an appropriation in FY2010, FY2011 or FY2012 (including work plan) may we propose a budget for FY2014?**

Yes, if it was in the FY2013 budget.

**We have some active feasibility studies that have been moving along with either carry over or reprogrammed funding since FY2009. If we request funds for these studies, will they be automatically eliminated from our budget request?**

Yes, unless there is an approved exemption.

**Regarding MG Walsh's 11 Apr 2012 Memorandum to MSC Commanders, paragraph 5, b (3) states, "Only studies scheduled to be completed within the next two years (BY+2) will be eligible for budget consideration." Completing these studies in two years would in some cases require budgeting to capability level Is that ok?**

Yes, as indicated in the 8 Feb 2012 memorandum, "It is our intent to provide high priority and to optimally fund those feasibility studies that meet the criteria laid out in paragraph 4a of this memorandum..."

**When will the new Planning Paradigm be implemented?**

The intent is to fully implement this process in FY2014; however, many of the concepts are now being applied to ongoing feasibility studies. An overview of the SMART planning process and the SMART Guide is currently available on the Planning Community Toolbox website located at: <http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/>. The website is a key resource for planners, sponsors, and any other interests for accessing the most up-to-date information related to progress on this initiative.

**Will the new paradigm require changes to existing legislation, policy, and guidance?**

The new process can be implemented in large part without modifications to existing legislation, policies, or guidance. A task force comprised of those that developed the planning paradigm and other members representing all Civil Works functional elements convened in early March 2012 to refine the concepts and methodologies for implementing it. Further guidance is being provided through the Planning Bulletins being posted on the Planning Community Toolbox website.

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**Will the proposed *Principles, Requirements and Guidelines (PR&G)* affect the new Planning Paradigm?**

The paradigm will be implemented independent of PR&G. The concepts of the new paradigm are consistent with the existing and proposed PR&G.

**Is the National Pilot Program for Feasibility Studies continuing? Will there be more pilot studies?**

The current ongoing five pilot studies will continue to validate concepts of the new Planning Paradigm and provide lessons learned. No additional pilot studies are proposed.

**What additional training will be provided on the new Paradigm?**

The Planning Community of Practice is developing a comprehensive training approach that will address transition and implementation to the new planning paradigm by FY2014. This is a training program that minimizes costs, allowing maximum participation in the training. Interim training to Project Delivery Teams will be provided at charrettes, and will include risk-based documentation in risk registers. A train-the-trainer program is under development for the charrettes.

For more information, see [www.usace.army.mil](http://www.usace.army.mil), or contact Ms. Ada Benavides at [ada.benavides@usace.army.mil](mailto:ada.benavides@usace.army.mil).

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