

ALIGNING EXPECTATIONS

How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

Miki Fujitsubo, National Technical Specialist, FRM-PCX

Camie Knollenberg, Chief, Plan Formulation Branch,
Regional Planning & Environment Division North, MVD

Eric Thaut, Deputy Director, FRM-PCX

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3

Significance of the concern

4

Recommended action to resolve the concern



US Army Corps of Engineers
**PLANNING SMART
BUILDING STRONG**



Learning Objectives

Participants will become familiar with the:



- ✓ Requirements for and use of the 4-Part Comment Structure
- ✓ Five key components of an effective comment response
- ✓ When and how to document discussions between the PDT member and reviewer
- ✓ What to avoid when writing comments and responses



Application Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- ✓ Participate today in quick and fun interactive exercises to apply and reinforce the learning objectives
- ✓ Share key take-away points and concepts with their respective offices and fellow team members

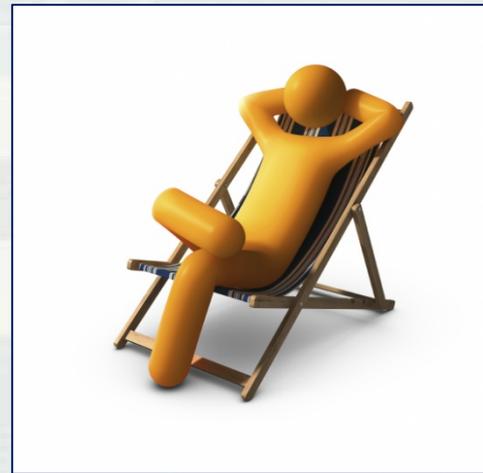


How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

BLUF: Why should I care?

Effectively written comment and responses:

- Improve the quality of your products, decision making, and project implementation
- Save you time and funding
- Minimize schedule delays due to prolonged review engagements
- Make your life a little bit easier ...
...and less stressful



How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

...and in addition

Effectively written comments and responses also promote communication and transparency, which:

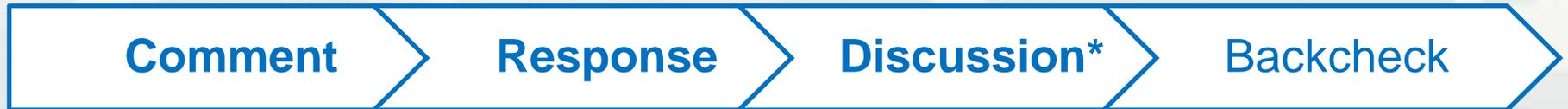
- Minimize potential misunderstandings between PDT members and reviewers
- Document review history so that previously raised concerns are not rehashed over and over
- Inform decision makers as to how concerns were resolved
- Result in an accountable and professional public record



How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

Components of Comment-Response Record

There are four basic components of a comment-response record:



*Optional, Use when appropriate

This session focuses on how to effectively write the first three components.



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4 Part Comment Structure

- 1 Clear statement of the concern
- 2 Basis for the concern
- 3 Significance of the concern
- 4 Recommended action to resolve the concern

The Foundation for Effective Review
Comments & Responses



How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

4 Part Comment Structure

Concern

- Be clear and succinct
- What is the problem to be resolved?

Basis

- Cite the appropriate law, policy guidance, procedure, or state of practice if possible

Significance

- Not just High/Med/Low
- Explain how the concern could affect product quality, decision making, or project implementation

Recommendation

- Be specific
- For example, what additional analysis are needed or where should the report be revised



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4 Part Comment Structure



- A quality comment is of value regardless of the source.
- The 4 part comment structure is required for ATR and IEPR; however, it is strongly recommended for any review.



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Effective Responses

So What about those Responses?



How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

5 Key Components of an Effective Response

Clear statement of agreement or disagreement with the comment

Address all stated concerns and actions

Provide information relevant to the concern, including supporting rationale

Summarize pertinent discussions with reviewer or other subject matter experts

Describe how the concern has been (or will be) addressed in the document



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Effective Responses: What to Avoid

- Expression of personal opinions or perspectives
- Use of personal pronouns
- Criticism of an individual rather than responding to the concern
- Becoming defensive
- Unsupported statements
 - *Provide policy or technical basis*
- Ambiguous statements
 - *Be specific and direct, allow reviewer to react*

Do not include



How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

Effective Discussion Documentation

And the Discussions?



When and why to Document a Discussion

Reviewer

- **When:** Prior to writing a comment.
- **Why:** To seek clarification or additional information to better identify or describe a potential concern.

PDT Member

- **When:** Prior to writing a response.
- **Why:** To seek clarification about a comment OR if the PDT member does not agree with the comment.

Reviewer

- **When:** During comment backcheck.
- **Why:** To seek clarification about the response or to resolve disagreement.



Key Components to Discussion Documentation

Clear statement of point of confusion or disagreement

Concise description of how issue was resolved

Description of any actions taken (or to be taken) and citation of revision location in the documents

Explanation of when/how the issue will be elevated if not resolved

Inclusion of supporting policy/technical methodology & subject matter expert (SME) consultation



Discussion Documentation: What to Avoid

- Verbatim record of back and forth discussion
- Expression of personal opinions or perspectives
- Criticism of an individual
- "Agree to disagree" statement; acceptable outcomes are the concern was:
 - *Resolved to the satisfaction of all parties*
 - *Determined to not be substantive after discussion*
 - *Elevated for resolution*

Do not include



How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

Common Best Practices

- ✓ Use the 4 part comment structure
- ✓ Be succinct
- ✓ Be professional
- ✓ Be respectful
- ✓ Focus on improving the products, decision making, and project implementation
- ✓ Review proposed comments and responses to ensure consistency



How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments
And now...let's have some fun! (really)

ATR Idol

THE REAL WORLD

**Who wants to be a
Policy Reviewer**



ATR Idol

- The purpose of this exercise is to use best practices provide responses and to select the best comment.
- Exercise is meant to be fun and interactive
- It can be done as a large group (over 10) or small group (under 10)
- For this session it will be done as a large group prior to the breakout sessions



ATR Idol

- Five contestants
- Read the comments
- Judges will provide responses
- Audience will pick winner



Contestant 1

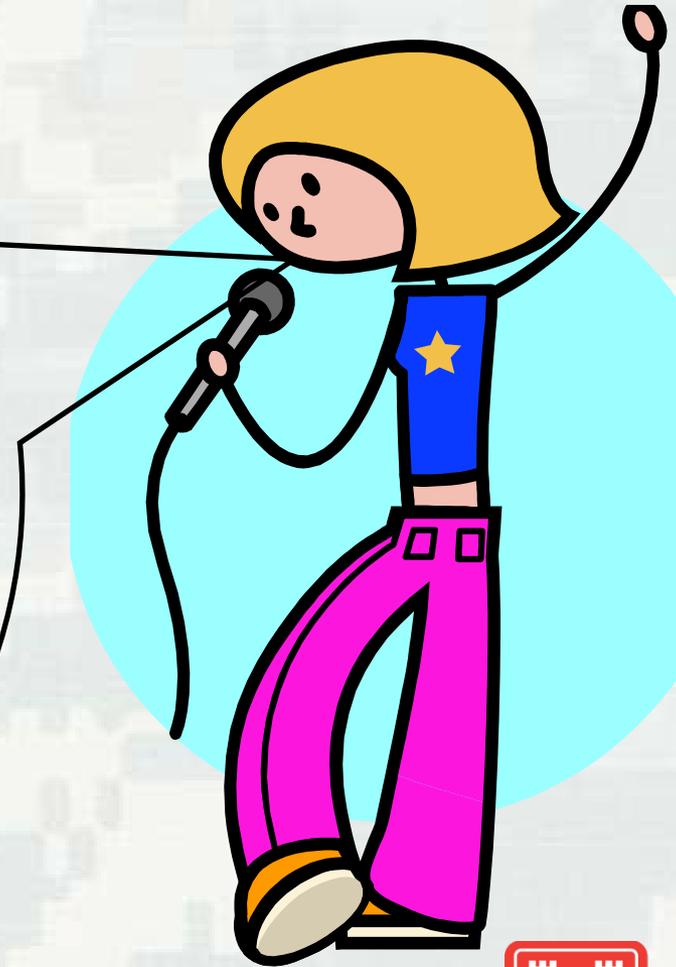


The report is too verbose and repetitive. The report could have been written is less than half the present length.



Contestant 2

Paragraphs 3 and 4 discuss the scarcity of high quality instream aquatic habitat in the targeted stream reaches, but does not provide a larger context for scarcity. Recommend addition of information regarding the quality of instream aquatic habitat in the Rocky River and tributaries and the quality of habitat in the targeted stream reach relative to the rest of the streams in the watershed.



Contestant 3



yellows do not show up well on screen or when printed - very hard to read so therefore confusing.



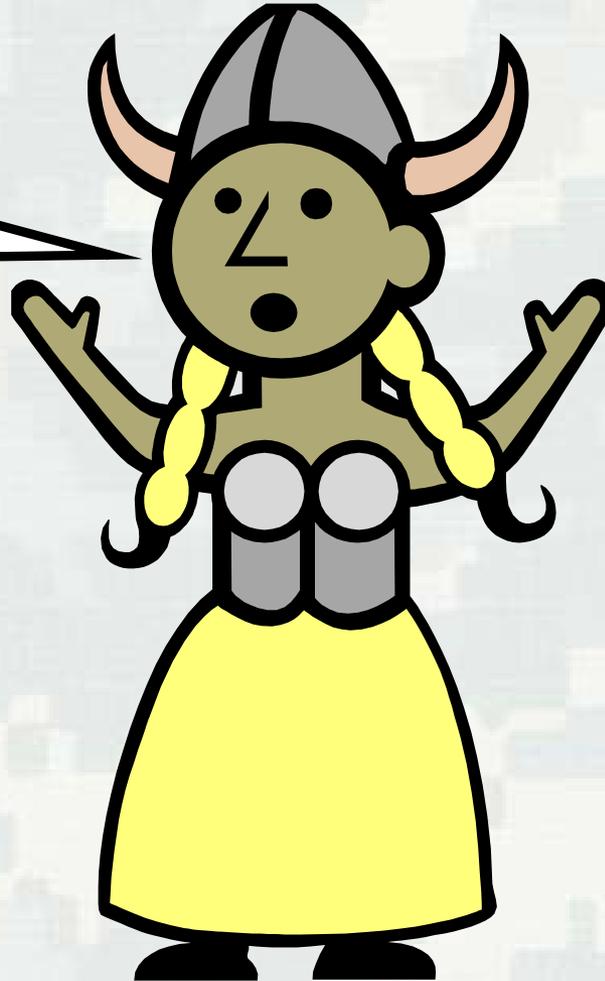
Contestant 4

It does not appear that the VISTA model for calculating transportation related benefits has been certified (or approved). EC 1105-2-412 states that Use of certified (or approved) models for all planning activities is mandatory. Lack of certification could be an issue despite the numerous previous applications of the model. Recommend early vertical teaming and PCX coordination if they haven't already occurred.



Contestant 5

I am surprised by
the Finding of
No Significant
Impact.



Judges' Responses

- Judges provide short responses to comments
- Remember they are volunteers so be kind 😊



LET'S PICK AN IDOL



Take Away Points

- Poorly built comments are hard to response to and to resolve
- Remember to cite references, not personal opinion
- Editorial comments should be made off line
- ATR documentation accompanies report through approval so keep it professional, relevant and concise.



...And Now on to More FUN

- *The Real World*
 - ▶ Demonstrate that the 4 part comment structure is applicable to every day life
- *So You Want to Be a Policy Reviewer*
 - ▶ Identify the policy issue based on the circumstance and write an effective 4 part comment that will articulate the concern and allow for an efficient resolution
- Pick One but both are yours to take back to your teams

