



# PLANNING BULLETIN

**US Army Corps  
of Engineers**

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**Subject:** Planning SMART Guide

**Applicability:** Guidance

1. Improving feasibility study execution and delivery through Planning Modernization is one of the four pillars of the broader Civil Works Transformation underway at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Planning modernization emphasizes execution, instills accountability, and improves the organizational and operational model regionally and nationally to ensure consistent quality products. The effort will improve planner knowledge and experience through additional mandatory training, professional certification, and an update of planning processes and planning guidance.

On 8 February 2012, Major General Michael J. Walsh, Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations issued a memorandum on feasibility study program execution and delivery. This memorandum issued guidance for scrutiny of the current portfolio of feasibility studies and the conduct feasibility studies to produce more efficient, effective, and quality decision documents and introduced a 3x3x3 rule for all feasibility studies that have not had a Feasibility Scoping Meeting (FSM) by 31 Dec 2011.

In accordance with the 3x3x3 rule, all feasibility studies should be completed within a target of 18 months but no more than three years, at a cost of no more than \$3 million, utilize 3 levels of vertical team coordination, and be of a “reasonable” report size. The SMART Planning methodology and framework were developed in response to this directive to facilitate more efficient, effective and consistent delivery of Planning Decision Documents.

2. SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Risk Informed, Timely) Planning is a modernized methodology and framework for conducting USACE civil works planning. The methodology applies critical thinking and vertical team engagement at the beginning and throughout the study process. SMART Planning is decision focused planning rather than task oriented planning. It reorients the planning process away from simply collecting data or completing tasks and refocuses it on doing the work required to reduce uncertainty to the point where the team can make an iterative sequence of planning decisions required to complete a quality study in full compliance with environmental laws and statutes. SMART Planning identifies a series of specific decisions to be made throughout the planning process in a timely manner. It measures progress toward planning objectives and constraints that are realistically attainable. The decisions made are relevant to the planning process and the objectives pursued are relevant to solving the problems and attaining the opportunities of the study area.

3. SMART Planning Framework - Milestones: A feasibility study following the SMART Planning framework works progressively through the six-step planning process, with five milestones that mark key decisions along the path to an effective and efficient study. These

milestones are not the same as the Feasibility Scoping Meeting (FSM) or Alternative Formulation Briefing (AFB). There is no direct translation between the FSM/AFB and the way forward to developing feasibility reports. The Milestones at the end of each phase are not a check-box and do not necessarily represent a single meeting or point in time – they are decisions made as the district Project Delivery Team (PDT) moves from reconnaissance to the Chief’s recommendation of a plan to address appropriate water resources problems, needs and opportunities. The new milestones are:

- a. Alternatives Milestone: The Alternatives Milestone ensures the three levels of the Vertical Team (VT) concurrence on the focused array of alternatives and the criteria that will be used to evaluate and compare alternatives to reach the Tentatively Selected Plan.
- b. Tentatively Selected Plan Milestone: The second decisional milestone during the feasibility study is the TSP Milestone where the VT agrees on the PDT’s recommendation of a tentatively selected plan and proposed way forward on developing sufficient cost and design information for the final feasibility study report. At this milestone, a draft feasibility study report has been prepared and the Chief, Office of Water Project Review gives approval for release of the draft report for public, technical, legal, and policy review.
- c. Agency Decision Milestone: The Agency Decision Milestone represents an endorsement by the Senior Leadership that the tentatively selected plan will move forward into feasibility-level analysis and development of a final recommendation. This milestone occurs after completion of the concurrent public, technical, legal, and policy review of the draft report, including any documentation required for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other laws and guidance, and preparation of proposed actions to address comments received. In the event that the study requires Independent External Peer Review (IEPR), the milestone will be scheduled to follow receipt of the IEPR panel’s findings. Before this milestone, the vertical team concurs that the analyses in the draft report and the recommendations as a result of the concurrent reviews are compliant with policy and that there is a capable non-Federal sponsor(s) ready to support project implementation.
- d. Final Report Milestone: The final report milestone is the MSC Commander’s submittal of the final report of the District Engineer and NEPA document to HQUSACE. Provided that all policy issues have been addressed and the recommended plan does not vary significantly from the selected plan endorsed at the agency decision milestone, the DCG-CEO will make a decision on the release of the final report and NEPA document and draft report of the Chief of Engineers for State & Agency and final NEPA review convening of the Civil Works Review Board as deemed necessary. If the final report recommends a plan different from the recommendations at the Agency Decision Milestone, a Civil Works Review Board will be held after the VT has concurred with this change.
- e. Chief’s Report Milestone: Once the Chief of Engineers signs the report signifying approval of the project recommendation, the Chief of Staff signs the notification letters forwarding the Report of the Chief of Engineers (Chief’s Report) to the chairpersons of

the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works and the House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. The signed Chief's Report is then returned to the Regional Integration Team (RIT), which will immediately transmit the final package for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (OASA (CW)).

4. The Planning SMART Guide is an online guide that provides an overview of the tips, tools, and techniques to implement feasibility studies in a more effective manner and consistent with the Deputy Commanding General of Civil and Emergency Operation's 8 February 2012 memorandum. The Guide is not a replacement for ER 1105-2-100, the Planning Guidance Notebook, or other Planning Guidance, but rather provides examples, tips, best practices, and lessons learned from the National Pilot Program for Feasibility Studies and other ongoing studies that have applied five key principles in conducting feasibility studies:

- Identify the Federal role early in the study and apply critical thinking at all phases of the study.
- Focus on identifying and then reducing key areas of uncertainty throughout the study, balancing the level of uncertainty and risk with the level of detail in the study.
- Issues of concern are identified early and throughout the iterative process with Vertical Team engagement and appropriately timed and scoped agency review including District Quality Control (DQC), MSC Quality Assurance (QA), technical (including IEPR, if necessary), policy and legal reviews.
- Seamless feasibility studies depend on ensuring that all resources, including funding, human resources, and data, are available for the duration of the study.
- The development of the feasibility study report should begin from the early stages of the study, without unnecessary products developed specifically for process milestones.

5. A collaborative group of District, Division, and Headquarters cross functional members have been working together since March 2012 to create the Planning SMART Guide (SMART Guide) and are continuing to update it to provide additional tools and tips for implementing the SMART Planning framework. The SMART Guide is the first step in the transition to update the PGN Appendices G&H and future Planning and Engineering Regulations. The feasibility study process outlined in the SMART Guide can be accomplished under current laws and in most part under current guidance; the SMART Guide annotates where existing guidance is modified. The SMART Planning framework milestones replace those in PGN Appendices G&H, and the SMART Guide will continue to evolve as concepts are tested and replaced.

6. The SMART Guide should be utilized immediately; the methodology and critical thinking applies to all Planning Studies. Studies subject to the 3x3x3 Rule must utilize the new milestone framework. Guidance on which studies are considered Legacy and which must be 3x3x3 compliant is provided in Planning Bulletin 2012-03. The SMART Guide can be found on the Planning Community Toolbox at [www.corpsplanning.us](http://www.corpsplanning.us).

7. Point-of-contact for the Planning SMART Guide is Ms. Susan B. Hughes, 202-761-4121.



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