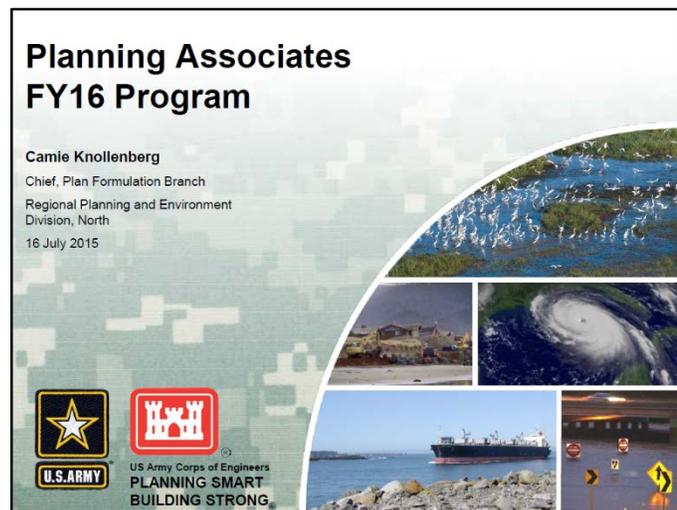


## Q&A: Planning Associates FY16 Program

July 16, 2015

The July 16<sup>th</sup> webinar is part of a series of information-sharing webinars hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Planning Community of Practice. Camie Knollenberg, the Chief of the Plan Formulation Branch in the Regional Planning and Environment Division North provided an overview of the FY16 Planning Associates Program, and with the help of Planning Associates that have already completed the program, answered questions about the PA Program in the upcoming year.



For more information on the PA Program, please contact Joy Muncy at IWR. A general overview of the program and information about past years' programs is available on the [Planning Community Toolbox](#).

### Structure of the PA Program

#### **How many weeks total will participants be TDY?**

The full program is approximately 11 months long; about 20 weeks are TDY.

#### **When is the travel agenda finalized for the year? Is it possible to know the dates of when we are expected to be TDY throughout the 11 month program?**

The travel and course schedule is almost finalized; we had some changes in course owners and we need to ensure that the calendar works for them. For the most up-to-date schedule, you can email Joy Muncy at IWR.

#### **What types of training courses will be offered?**

The Planning Associates program includes training in each of the business areas: ecosystem restoration, flood risk management, coastal storm damage and hurricane reduction, water supply, endangered species, deep draft navigation, shallow draft navigation, cultural resources, tidal and inland navigation. The Program also includes sessions on critical thinking, risk-informed decision making, and leadership.

The PA program is an opportunity to learn more about other civil work missions and also be immersed in the missions we are most engaged in for each week. The courses take advantage of conveying the perspective from other divisions and districts working on similar projects.

**Do the courses include case studies in each of the business lines that simulate the planning process?**

Yes. The PA program is not just learning by listening, some courses take a case study all the way through the planning process, and some have multiple case studies that touch on different key topics or decision points during the planning process. In addition, most courses include field trips to make it more experiential.

**Could you tell me more about the opportunity to meet others planners the nation through the PA Program?**

Networking and meeting people is a tenet of this program. Not only are you in other districts and divisions for the TDY portion of the Program, you'll also be at HQ in DC for four to six weeks. There are ice breakers and panel discussions and other opportunities to interact with other planners, subject matter experts, your trainers, and others outside of Planning.

**What are the expectations for "giving back" after the program? Does the District provide support for that time?**

There are multiple opportunities for giving back: you can be an instructor for a course, in the module that you have the most experience in, for example; you can be engaged in a team working to implement Planning Modernization key tasks; etc.. In some cases, those "giving back" activities may be funded through headquarters or the USACE Learning Center, but your district needs to know that you'll be giving back at a national, or at least regional level. This has been an expectation of the program for some time, and hasn't been a problem so far.

**Applying to the PA Program**

**If more of your experience external to USACE, how much should you present in comparison to the USACE experience in your application?**

You should emphasize whatever experience demonstrates your planning experience, whether that is internal or external to the Corps. Specific questions about shaping your application can be directed to your supervisor when you're applying.

**How many students will be selected this year?**

While there is no set number, this year the Program will probably accept 5-10 associates; selection the Program remains highly competitive.

Due to funding constraints, PA class sizes are a bit smaller than they have been in the past. We're also making some changes in how the program is executed, reducing the amount of course time in some areas, and increasing in others; updating the leadership training; increasing the critical thinking aspects of the course; changing how PAs evaluate their own learning and take information back to their districts.

## **PA Program Benefits for Supervisors and Home Districts**

### **What kind of information do PAs bring back to the region?**

In addition to the in-depth training across business lines, the information and networking in the Program allows you to learn beyond the boundaries of your own district, and demonstrates that there are multiple ways to do things – useful information to bring back to your district.

### **For supervisors who have had past Planning Associates, I'm curious what challenges you might have faced in having a team member who's going through the Program.**

One of the biggest issues is workload balancing: you need to make sure that communication is open. It's an opportunity to engage young and new planners to support and backfill the person that's in the program, but that takes a lot of coordination and good communication with the PA and the other folks in the office.

## **Questions for those who have gone through the PA Program**

### **Do you have any advice for balancing the PA Program's travel schedule and workload with home life?**

I did as much PA work as I could while I was traveling anyway, so while I was home I could be present and spend my time on the family. Even so, you may find that there are times when you are home that you might have to catch up on your district work. This is an 11 month commitment for the whole family.

### **What tips do you have for individuals that are worried about the time away from their districts and if it's worth it for their career?**

Managing expectations at the district office is key. I recommend that you work with your district to minimize your work for the year that you're in the PA program and focus on that training. It's really hard to be fully present for both the PA Program and District work, and your PA training will, in the end, benefit the District as well.