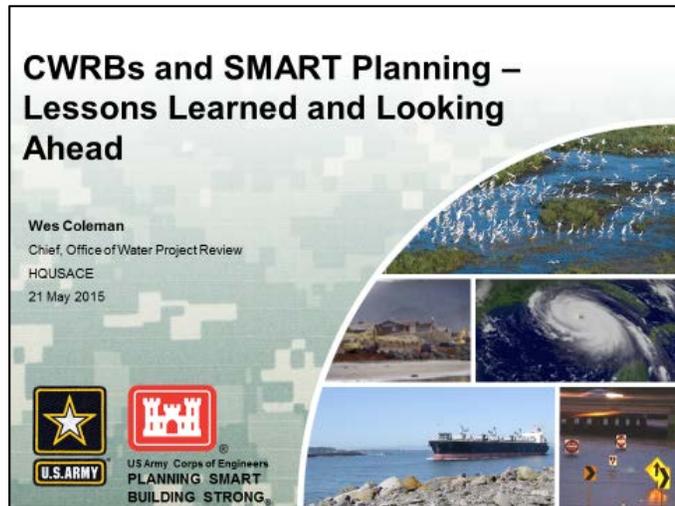


Q&A: CWRBs and SMART Planning – Lessons Learned and Looking Ahead

21 May, 2015

This webinar, part of a series of information-sharing webinars hosted by the Planning Community of Practice, shared an overview on Civil Works Review Boards (CWRB) conducted under the SMART Planning feasibility study process.

Wes Coleman, Chief of Water Project Review, HQUSACE, presented and responded to questions from the field. For more information about Planning Modernization please visit the [Planning Community Toolbox](#). For more information on Civil Works Review Boards, specifically, please visit the [SMART Guide on the Toolbox](#), which includes a link to the HQUSACE CWRB website.



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 email to hqplanning@usace.army.mil

The CWRB Panel & CWRB Logistics

How is the CWRB panel selected?

The standing members of the CWRB panel are detailed in the Board's [Standard Operating Procedures](#) (SOP). The Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations (DCG-CEO) is the chair and in the DCG-CEO's absence the Director of Civil Works (DCW) will chair. The other standing member is the Headquarters Chief of Planning and Policy. Outside of that we try to have the Headquarters' Engineering and Construction (E&C) Chief and the Headquarters Real Estate Chief involved, and one other representative from the Headquarters' Regional Integration Teams (RITs). We also have a requirement now to have 2 division representatives for the panel to the extent that we can. We try to get the Division Commanders or the Director of Programs from two divisions for the panels. If we can't get that full membership we've gone forward with as few as four people on the panel as a quorum. In all cases it will either be the DCW or the DCG-CEO chairing the panel.

Do multi-objective or multi-purpose studies expand or change the panel?

We've had multiple flood-risk/environmental restoration projects come through, and it doesn't really change the panel. Again you're going to have the Planning and the E&C Chiefs engaged for their broad perspectives. We don't add more people necessarily to the panel just because it is a multi-purpose study.

What is the best role for the non-federal sponsors at the CWRB? Do you have any tips for the non-federal sponsor?

The non-federal sponsors are a critical part of the CWRB process and for all milestone meetings because the non-federal sponsors live and breathe the issues on a day-to-day basis, and will be passionate about the needs of their area. The sponsor has the ability to capture that local feel of “Here’s why this is important and here’s the impact that the project or problem has.” It’s also an opportunity for the non-federal sponsor to share their support and demonstrate that they understand the requirements going forward and are on board and ready to support it. The panel is looking beyond how passionate sponsors are about the problems and the solutions: How linked in are they with the solutions that are being recommended, and how will they continue to support the project not only through the construction phase but through operation, maintenance, repair, rehabilitation and replacement?

Are there any limitations on numbers of in-person participants at CWRB? For instance can agencies or stakeholders attend as spectators?

Yes, there are some limitations; we get a lot of requests to sign up to CWRBs in person, even from the press. This isn’t the purpose of the CWRB. The CWRB is an internal decision making meeting; it’s not a public meeting or a public forum.

We do allow Congressional Members or staff to be present, but they typically do not have a speaking role or a place on the agenda.

If the media wants to be involved, the district is required to set up a place at the district office where the media could listen to the CWRB proceedings, and engage with someone from the district about what the acronyms mean and who is speaking. At the beginning of every CWRB it is announced that these are not public meetings, so they are not allowed to be recorded.

Usually the people that are in-person in DC are the project delivery team (PDT) members that come along, a number of folks from HQUSACE, representatives from the Assistant Secretary of the Army’s (ASA) office, staff from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the staff from congressional offices. Because PDT members can participate by phone if needed to support the district commander, it is advised that the district limit the number of PDT members that attend the review board in person.

How many days in advance of the actual CWRB should the key PDT members arrive in DC, and can you give us a sense of what those days will look like for the team?

It depends on how the team wants to prepare for the Review Board. There is no guarantee that the room where we typically hold the CWRB will even be open for the team to practice in if they arrive early. There may be some other space available for the PDT. While some teams arrive as late as the morning of the CWRB, the district may want to arrive a day in advance to go over meeting logistics and presentations. It is expected that prior to signing the final report, the district commander will have been thoroughly briefed on material that will ultimately be presented at the CWRB. In an effort to limit project costs, it is advised that the team do as much preparation at the district as possible.

Has a CWRB been attempted entirely virtually?

Not yet. We’ve just switched over to webinars for the meetings and the remote engagement of the home district and division. The presentations by the ATR lead and the IEPR Panel lead are typically

provided virtually. Sponsors have participated virtually, but most typically choose to travel to DC for face-to-face interaction with HQUSACE leadership. As the reporting officers supporting the Chief of Engineers Report, the district and MSC commanders are expected to attend the CWRB and make their presentations in person and they are encouraged to minimize the support team that attends in person with them. We have had presentations in the past where a district commander was unable to travel to HQUSACE due to an emergency situation, but that has been the exception. In-person attendance by the panel members is at the discretion of the DCG-CEO. The current DCG-CEO, MG Peabody, requires in-person participation for the panel members.

Preparing for the CWRB

Project area “fly-overs” are a great tool to communicate the team's story in a CWRB presentation and other outreach. However, they usually cost a lot of time and money. Any thoughts on how much of a priority this tool should be when developing study budgets?

In a 3x3x3 environment we’re trying to keep the costs down as much as possible, but they can be done economically with drone technology, Google Earth, and other options. For example, the flyover created for the Turkey Creek Project was about \$2500. However, the main purpose of the flyover is not to support the CWRB. It is a very effective tool for orienting the vertical team at the beginning of a study. So, the cost of developing a flyover may be preferable to the cost to get everyone in the field for a walk through of the project area in a 3x3x3 environment.

SPD districts have been sending staff to HQUSACE in support of CWRBs, at project/district cost, to augment HQUSACE staff. Though this has been useful in facilitating the process and an invaluable experience for this staff, is this going to be an ongoing expectation?

The SPD districts have largely been sending folks out to help the Regional Integration Team (RIT) until some of their vacant positions get filled. Other RITs are using endowed chairs, but either way, they’re not specifically for CWRBs. Sending staff to HQUSACE to support CWRBs is not expected.

District preparation is taking a lot of time. Would you recommend that district presentations be scripted and rehearsed? Should questions be rehearsed so that the District has some answers ready?

One of the best CWRBs was when the district commander gave a presentation about an area he was very familiar with; he spoke very passionately and knowledgably and off the cuff. We don’t expect the district commanders to be the experts on every facet of a study, but the commander did sign a report saying that they are recommending something to the Chief of Engineers so that the Chief of Engineers can make a recommendation for construction authorization. One would hope that the district commander had a good working knowledge of the project before signing the report. If properly sequenced, the bulk of the preparation time leads to the signing of the report, and not to the CWRB itself. It’s good to go through the presentation and think about questions that will be asked, but we prefer they don’t read from scripts.

The Agency Decision Milestone and Civil Works Review Boards

How do the Agency Decision Milestone (ADM) and CWRB differ? Are we expected to present the project information at the ADM meeting even if it's not related to issues at hand?

The ADM and the CWRB have two very different purposes. The ADM is conducted to ultimately support the district commander's report. The CWRB is conducted to get approval to release the Chief of Engineers' draft report for legislatively required reviews. By the CWRB, all of the policy issues have been addressed and a policy compliant draft Chief's Report can be released. For the ADM meeting, a panel of Senior Executives is reviewing the potentially recommended plan and maybe the locally preferred plan. Because there is a lot less information and detail than we would have had in the legacy process, the panel is going to approve the scope, schedule, and budget for additional feasibility level design work that must be undertaken before the district commander can sign the final report. These senior executives need to learn where the project is, how it got there and what are the next steps for getting to a final report. These steps will include things like how are you going to address the IEPR comments? How are you going to get the final costs done? The final benefits? Finalize the mitigation plan? Going into the CWRB, the district is expected to be prepared for many of the questions that the panel may ask, because these issues may have been raised at the ADM meeting.

Lessons Learned from Unsuccessful CWRBs

Out of the 51 CWRBs, how many were not successful, and what were some of the issues that prevented successful completion of the milestone?

There have been five projects that were not allowed to progress immediately to a release of a draft Chief's Report. Of those, callback CWRB meetings were required for three projects. In all five cases, the panel needed additional information before they could agree with the recommendations in the report. For the three projects that required callback CWRB meetings, the HQUSACE policy review team advised that additional analysis and report modifications were needed before the final reports could support a recommendation in the Chief's Report. As a result, the current policy is that the HQUSACE policy review team has 42 days to complete its assessment and resolution of any identified issues with the final report. If issues are not resolved by the completion of the assessment, the report is required to be returned to the MSC for additional work and revision. Ultimately, the go/no go decision for the CWRB will be made by the DCG-CEO following a pre-brief that typically occurs about two weeks prior to the CWRB, unless the report is returned to the MSC before then. If it appears that there will be unresolved issues that will delay the CWRB or that could lead to a panel determination not to release the draft Chief's Report, HQUSACE works with the division and the district to reschedule the CWRB and the pre-brief. The CWRB isn't a rubber stamp. The panel is going to ask tough questions, is looking for all of the issues to be resolved, and will ensure that everything is covered.