

Conducting a SMART Planning Charette

A Handbook for Project Development Teams



*Created for the Planning SMART Guide
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SMART Planning Charette Handbook

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I Introduction

The *SMART Planning Charette Handbook* provides additional detail and information for the teams undertaking a planning charette and the support team that will be assisting them.

A charette (pronounced [*shuh-ret*]) is a structured, collaborative session in which a group comes together to develop a solution to a problem. It has been used in fields such as architecture, community planning, and engineering for years – bringing together a variety of different points of view to solve a difficult problem, often using the familiar six-step planning process as a key tool.

The Planning Community of Practice is building on this strong foundation. For a feasibility study applying the principles of SMART Planning, a charette allows the convening of the Project Delivery Team (PDT) and vertical team to make decisions critical to the study. A charette has the potential to save the study team – and vertical team – time and money as it may enable more effective and efficient communications and review of study products.

The principles of the charette process (bringing all the decision-makers together in a structured workshop to make specific planning decisions), as well as specific tips, tools and techniques outlined in this Handbook can also be applied, as appropriate, to In Progress Reviews, plan formulation workshops, scoping workshops, and more.

SMART Planning explicitly incorporates uncertainty into decision making. The charette is a means of obtaining simultaneous assessment of key uncertainties and inputs to study decisions from the PDT, vertical team, non-federal sponsor, and others.

The underlying objective of all planning charettes is to help the PDT move forward toward completing a SMART feasibility study and ensure that the vertical team is aligned with the proposed direction. This all-hands approach to propelling a feasibility study forward can be applied to both new start feasibility studies and those underway that are transitioning to the 3x3x3 SMART Planning environment. Because of this, the structure of the charette and its outcomes will be tailored to the decisions needed by the PDT and vertical team that will advance the study.

The outcomes of a planning charette will depend entirely on the participation and engagement of the PDT, vertical team, and non-federal sponsor. Depending on the study and the challenges / decisions to be addressed during the charette, the expertise and experience of additional participants from inside and outside the Corps may be warranted.

Vertical team engagement and their perspectives on the study during a charette provide an opportunity to set a clear strategy ahead to study completion. The goal of the charette is not to criticize or wordsmith, but to have all eyes on the study and move the study forward with SMART Planning principles and processes.

The planning charette will include focused exercises that include examining the study's decision context as a foundation for the feasibility study report (the [Report Synopsis](#)), and the development of tools such as a [Risk Register](#) and [Decision Management Plan](#) as guides for timely and informed decision-making. The planning foundation of the study, along with decisions made and documented in a [Decision Log](#), and work done at the charette becomes the basis for the evolving decision document: the Report Synopsis; the draft report; and ultimately the full feasibility study report.

What's New in the Charette Handbook?

The January 2013 update of the Charette Handbook includes lessons learned from a series of planning charettes that have been conducted between June and November 2012 and feedback from PDTs, vertical team members, charette facilitators, and the Planning Community of Practice.

“Who owns the charette and who is responsible for the outcomes?” was a question raised before, during, and after charettes. Ultimately, the District is the “owner” and convener of the charette and the study team is responsible for ensuring the outcomes of the charette meet the needs of the study. A charette is not a box to be checked –it is an opportunity for the PDT, vertical team, and non-federal sponsor to work together in a focused and intensive workshop to advance the study.

Opportunities for remote participation in charettes have been explored as study teams face tight budgets and the Office of Water Project Review, technical experts from the Planning Centers of Expertise, and division staff each face their own time and budget constraints. While remote participation by teleconference/web meeting or videoconference can be better than no participation at all, remote participation needs to be well-thought out and planned for if it is to be useful to both the study team and the remote participant.

Updated checklists and descriptions of read-ahead materials for charette participants, including the PDT and vertical team have been included in the Charette Handbook and in the online SMART Planning Guide. These changes support the SMART Planning principle of “writing your report as you go” – the Report Synopsis read-ahead replaces the “Seven Pieces of Paper” exercise used in early SMART planning charettes. The key difference between the two is that the synopsis also includes a map or description of the study area and a summary of the study authorities – two areas that members of the vertical team generally wanted more information about before they walked into a charette.

Lessons Learned: A Charette is One Path for Rescoping

Planning Modernization efforts include the deliberate evaluation of the planning portfolio, reclassifying and terminating inactive studies and rescoping active studies for completion within three years / \$3 million.

A planning charette is one route a PDT can take to rescope a study. A charette has the benefit of engaging the vertical team and non-federal sponsor in the rescoping decisions, but it is not the only path.

II When Can a Charette Help a PDT?

A charette is an opportunity to have the full PDT and all levels of the vertical team – District management, PCXs, Division and Headquarters – in the room together, sharing information and making decisions. This opportunity for face-to-face conversations can save time and money for a study team, keeping the vertical team engaged and informed of decisions – and decision-making criteria – being used by the study team.

New Start Studies

A planning charette very early in the feasibility study process brings together the PDT and vertical team, expert planners, the non-federal sponsor, and key stakeholders in an early structured workshop to work collaboratively through at least one iteration of the six-step planning process.

In new start planning charettes, the PDT will critically examine the foundations of the study (problem, objectives, etc.), identify the factors / areas of uncertainty that will impact the next decision (e.g., developing and screening alternatives) and set a strategy for the PDT toward study completion using tools such as the Decision Management Plan and Risk Register.

When there are issues of concern to state or federal resource agencies, their engagement at a charette early in the study process allows information to be shared, concerns expressed, and jointly beneficial study strategies to be explored.

Ongoing Studies

The charette approach may also be used by ongoing studies to move the study toward the next planning decision with vertical team engagement, and when appropriate, rescope their studies to completion within 3 years and for under \$3 million.

For feasibility studies already underway that are transitioning into the SMART Planning feasibility study process, the planning charette will be tailored to that study. The charette will help lay out a strategy to complete the study, whether the PDT is early in the process of defining the array of alternatives, in data gathering to adequately compare alternatives, or developing design, cost, and environmental analyses associated with the recommended plan.

If a PDT expects to seek approval from the Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations for a feasibility study with a Chief's Report scheduled after December 2014, and scoped for greater than three years completion, or for more than \$3 million, they should expect to demonstrate the need for the exemption based on the work done at the charette (identifying areas of risk and uncertainty that necessitate additional time / resources) and vertical team agreement with the proposed approach and scope. The tools developed at the charette, including the Decision Management Plan and Risk Register, should help the PDT and vertical team identify opportunities to shorten its original schedule and reduce the overall budget.

III Who Should Participate in a Planning Charette?

Concurrent vertical team engagement is one of the primary benefits of the charette, and so participation should include all the elements of the vertical team relevant to the discussions and decisions to be made at the charette.

Charette participants generally include:

1. Project Delivery Team (PDT) – At a minimum, the PM, Lead Planner, and other PDT leads (e.g., engineering, real estate, cost engineering, environmental, etc.) must commit their time for the entire duration of the charette. Ideally, participation by *all* members of the PDT should be considered to provide for more comprehensive and informed team discussions and decisions, introduce all to the vertical team, and provide useful experience in applying SMART Planning principles in a feasibility study process. In charettes completed to date, broader PDT participation has resulted in greater understanding of the outcomes of the charette and direction forward.
2. Vertical Team – Vertical team members may be unfamiliar with the study, and so time spent during the charette to orient the full team to the study, develop a common understanding of the next planning decisions, and working together to identify a strategy with an acceptable level of uncertainty to the study and project are especially important. Vertical team members should also commit for the entire duration of the charette. Representatives from all segments of the vertical team participate in the charette, including:
 - a. Headquarters – Headquarters participants may include the Office of Water Project Review (OWPR) Economics, Environmental, and/or Plan Formulation expertise based on the needs of the study and the PDT. (OWPR may designate the Division Planning Chief and/or other MSC participants as their representatives in policy decisions at the charette. In this case, it is expected that the Division representative speaks for OWPR in addressing questions of policy and that decisions made / agreed to will not later be revisited without good reason.) Other Headquarters participants may include representatives from other organizations such as Engineering or the Program Integration Division, as needed, to meet the objectives of the charette.
 - b. Division – The Division Planning Chief or their designee should be an active participant in planning charettes, providing their leadership and planning expertise to support decisions made at the charette.

Lessons Learned: Participation by Leadership

Leadership participation in charettes enables decisions on what study and project risks will be acceptable, whether they are from USACE or its partners.

Past participants in planning charettes include the District Deputy District Manager for Programs and Projects, District Chief of Engineering, District and Division Chief of Planning, and the District Commander.

Leadership's role and participation in the charette should be considered and planned for early in designing the charette.

At a recent charette, while the District Planning Chief was present for the full charette, other district leads attended a 30-minute "resource provider" briefing at the end of each day. This kept them informed of the process and outcomes, and empowered the PDT to make the decisions during the charette itself.

Additional Division participation will be based on the needs of the study and the role of the individual in the vertical team or their appropriate technical expertise, e.g., Planning, Engineering, Programs, Real Estate. As the Division’s representative at Headquarters, the Regional Integration Team (RIT) planner will likely play a role in the charette, either in coordinating participation with Headquarters’ participants or, in the case where there may be ongoing issues to resolve, participating in the charette itself. As they are responsible for all work products requiring Washington Level review, the RIT planner will also ensure the PDT and vertical team meet the commitments made at the charette for sharing documentation such as the Decision Log, Decision Management Plan(s), Risk Register(s), and the Report Synopsis.

- c. District Participation –Additional participation by others in the District outside the PDT, e.g., section chiefs, will be based on the needs of the study and the role of the individual in the vertical team or their appropriate technical expertise, e.g., Planning, Engineering, Real Estate. Individuals assigned to the District Quality Control team may participate to improve their familiarity with the study and planning decisions.
 - d. Planning Center of Expertise (PCX) – Subject matter expert(s) relevant to the study, including the ATR Lead, can bring important technical review information and perspective to a charette.
3. Non-Federal Sponsor – As a partner in the study and part of the PDT, the non-federal sponsor is an important participant as the PDT makes decisions about the path forward in the study. The non-federal sponsor should be prepared to share their point of view and expectations for the study, and actively participate in risk-based critical thinking and decision making during the charette. The charette should provide the non-federal sponsor with a clear understanding of the proposed direction forward and how uncertainties and key near-term decisions affect the rest of the study and the development of the decision document (feasibility study report), and the roadmap for completion of the study.
 4. Other Key Stakeholders – The PDT and vertical team may identify other key stakeholders to participate in the charette based on the study and the decisions to be made, including other federal, state, or local agencies.
 5. Other Corps Expertise – The PDT and vertical team may identify other key skills that would be useful to participate in the charette based on the study and the decisions to be made. For example, someone from Headquarters or Division Engineering / Hydrology & Hydraulics participate can provide input on Engineering decisions and criteria to make those decisions.

Lessons Learned: Engaging the Non-Federal Sponsor

With the relative newness of SMART Planning and the refined feasibility study process, non-federal sponsors generally have benefited from one-on-one information sharing between the lead planner or project manager.

Sharing background information on SMART Planning and how the charette / the transition of the study to the SMART Planning process will impact the sponsor will help alleviate anxiety before the charette begins. For example, can they bring ideas to the table to get to a decision within 3 years and \$3 million? Should the sponsor expect a change in scope and a revised Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement?

Coordination and explanation of the charette purpose, and an introduction to SMART Planning tools such as the risk register and decision management plan, prior to the charette will help establish the non-federal sponsor as a key member of the PDT.

Lessons Learned: Expanding Participation in Charettes – Resource Agencies

The role and level of engagement of resource agencies such as the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service, Environmental Protection Agency, and their state counterparts varies from study to study.

In some studies, resource agencies are full partners and considered to be members of the PDT. In those cases, they should certainly participate in the charette. For other studies, resource agency participation in charettes will be considered by the PDT on a case-by-case basis.

For an ongoing study where the resource agency has not been engaged, the study project manager should, at least, reach out to share background information on SMART Planning and how the charette and the transition of the study to the SMART Planning process will impact decisions important to the resource agency.

For a new, or fairly new, start study, resource agency participation in the charette can allow early collaborative engagement identifying the decisions, criteria, and resources important to the agency – providing the PDT with valuable information early in the process.

It is recommended that participation in the charette be limited to those that can help move the PDT toward their charette objectives; inviting observers or non-participants to the charette can be disruptive for the group's work. Similarly, participants are expected to be present and engaged for the full duration of the charette, rather than attending for just a portion of the charette.

Before attending a charette, we recommend that all participants are familiar with the following:

- Foundations of SMART Planning video. This 17 minute video provides an introduction to the foundations of SMART Planning and the SMART planning feasibility study process. (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=9&Step=1>)
- SMART Feasibility Studies: Milestones and Process video. This 16 minute video provides more detail on the milestones and process for conducting feasibility studies applying the SMART planning principles. (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=9&Step=1>)
- SMART Planning - Risk Register Presentation (about 10 minutes) at <http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=9&Step=1>
- Read through the SMART Planning Guide located at <http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm>
 - Note the Planning Charettes page at <http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=2&Part=5>

The Charette Facilitation Support Team

The Charette Support Team's primary role is to help the PDT and vertical team achieve their objectives of moving forward toward completing a SMART feasibility study. It is the responsibility of the District to identify the Charette support team. The Charette Support Team will work together to lead the charette.

Although the SMART Planner and Risk Specialists roles can be filled by individuals within the District or even within the PDT, most charettes have benefited from a facilitator outside of the District (and sometimes outside of the Division) who can be a neutral facilitator of the process and who can be perceived by charette participants as being neutral.

The Charette Support Team fills the following roles:

1. **Facilitator** – The lead charette facilitator should be familiar with SMART Planning processes and products and the philosophy of the charette and able to act as a “neutral” in the charette. They may be a Corps employee or an outside contractor. The facilitator will also participate in a coordinating call prior to the workshop where the PDT (e.g. lead planner or PM), RIT, and key members of the vertical team (based on feedback of RIT and PDT) provide input and background on the study and the PDT's objectives for the charette in order to develop an initial agenda for the charette. A list of Corps employees who have received training in facilitation can be found on the [“Find a Facilitator”](#) database open to Corps employees.
2. **SMART Planner** – An individual with experience in SMART Planning principles and process, as well as extensive Corps planning experience in the six-step planning process and plan formulation. The SMART Planner must be comfortable examining and challenging the planning decisions at the charette; for this reason, selecting a SMART planner not involved in the Study and from outside the District and Division is recommended. The SMART Planner will direct certain exercises based on needs of study, and is expected to be a resource to the participants. Their primary role is to remind team of SMART Planning questions, push back on assumptions, and answer questions about the implementation of SMART Planning. As such, this individual should be chosen based on their ability to provide frank and direct feedback to the PDT and vertical team regarding the planning foundations of the study, especially as it affects decisions and the development of the strategy for study completion. This individual may be the charette facilitator or another individual from a District, Division, PCX, Institute of Water Resources (IWR), outside contractor, etc.
3. **Risk Specialist** – Individual with experience in SMART Planning and teaching / communicating tools, such as decision making under uncertainty, risk-informed planning, the Decision Management Plan and the Risk Register, in order to facilitate decision making and document PDT decisions and strategy. This individual may be the charette facilitator, SMART Planner, or another individual from a District, Division, PCX, Institute of Water Resources (IWR), etc.

IV Roles & Responsibilities of the District and PDT – Before, During, and After the Charette

Preparing for the Charette

The District is the “owner” and convener of the charette. When a District decides to use a planning charette as a tool to bring together the PDT, vertical team, non-federal sponsor and other key expertise (e.g., value engineering, resource agencies, centers of expertise), the PDT must be able to articulate the objective of the charette. For example, a PDT may wish to use a charette process to ensure vertical team alignment on the selection criteria level of detail or to have a face-to-face meeting to come to a study decision.

Pre-charette planning and coordination is critical to ensuring that all are starting with the same assumptions and goals.

The charette agenda should be tailored to meet the PDT’s objective. Charettes are working meetings, and should not require significant document preparation ahead of the charette, other than what is necessary to bring the vertical team and others up to speed on the study. Study information readily available prior to the charette should be used to develop or update the [Report Synopsis](#), which will inform the vertical team of the status of the study and assist the facilitator in developing a charette agenda. For ongoing study charettes, it is important that the PDT also clearly describes where they are in the SMART planning process, and articulate the next major planning decision.

The PDT may wish to prepare for the charette by:

- Planning a [“boots on the ground” or virtual site visit](#) during or just before the charette to provide key information and context about the study.
- Articulating where is the study in relation to the SMART Planning process and decision milestones.
 - Can you tell the story of the study? Develop key messages to convey to the vertical team. Does the Report Synopsis concisely communicate the foundations of your study?
 - Can you describe “the big picture” approach to the completion of the study and the plan to complete the study in compliance with the 3x3x3 funding and timeframe objectives?
- Identifying the critical decisions required to make the next significant planning decision.
- Developing or updating the risk register.
- If seeking Senior Leadership review and DCG-CEO approval to proceed beyond three years completion or for more than \$3 million, prepare to discuss why 3x3x3 objectives cannot be met at the charette. What risks and consequences are driving the study to exceed \$3 million and/or 3 years? (For more information, see [Planning Bulletin 2012-04, 3x3x3 Rule Exemption Process.](#))

Lessons Learned: District Leadership Participation in Charettes

A District Lead empowered to make decisions and provide direction to the PDT is critical to have engaged in the entire charette. In planning charettes to date, that individual has most often been the District Planning Chief or the District Commander. For the PDT, it has been most helpful when they know who to turn to when making those decisions, with assurance that their decision is binding.

The PDT should expect to be engaged with the facilitator and vertical team ahead of the charette via conference call to understand the charette’s objectives, prepare for the charette, identify and ensure participation of PDT, vertical team, and other key stakeholders, etc. With the charette objective(s) in mind, the PDT will develop an initial charette agenda. The facilitation support team should provide input, as they will be implementing the agenda. The PDT will also manage the list of participants, working in conjunction with the Division and Headquarters Regional Integration Team to coordinate scheduling and logistics.

Additional pre-charette coordination and preparation with the non-federal sponsor may be necessary so they understand the purpose and importance of their participation in the charette and are familiar with the SMART Planning feasibility study process and decision milestones.

The PDT is responsible for the logistical arrangements of the charette, generally including: identifying and resourcing a facilitator and other support team members as needed; coordinating with the facilitator and vertical team so that the facilitator can develop an agenda for the charette; securing a meeting facility; travel and lodging recommendations; room arrangements (e.g., breakout rooms, if needed); and providing charette materials (list developed in conjunction with the facilitator).

Background information on charettes and resources and additional tools designed to assist PDTs and charette participants in preparing for a charette are available on the online Planning SMART Guide (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm>).

Developing the Charette Agenda

A representative of the PDT such as the Project Manager or Lead Planner, will develop a starting-point agenda for the charette that will help the PDT and vertical team achieve the outcomes they identified – e.g., reach the next decision point, identify a clear strategy, etc.

Whether a new start planning charette or a charette for an ongoing study, the agenda will likely include the following elements:

1. Charette Introduction & Overview. This introduction and overview provides all participants with the context of their work in the charette in the broader Planning Modernization efforts. The Division Planning Chief, for example, may provide this introduction. For those unfamiliar with SMART planning principles and processes, it provides a basic introduction and reinforces the importance of SMART Planning principles in the Corps.
2. Study Overview and (Virtual) Tour. Whether in the field or via a virtual tour, the time taken to explain the history of the study, the site, the problems/opportunities, etc. is time

Lessons Learned: Developing the Charette Agenda

As owners of the charette, the PDT should also develop the initial agenda, shaping it to ensure that their objectives are met applying SMART planning tools and principles.

Members of the vertical team may provide useful feedback and suggestions for the agenda, ensuring their objectives are also met.

Once drafted, the facilitation support team can work with the PDT to firm up roles, presentations, and how to use a variety of large-group and small-group exercises to meet the PDT’s objectives based on their previous charette experiences.

well spent to (1) develop a common sense of purpose for the full PDT and vertical team; (2) orient the charette participants to the problem they are all being asked to address. The study overview and tour offers the PDT the opportunity to tell the story of the study, identify important issues or constraints, and get feedback on the upcoming decisions. This is also a time for the PDT to evaluate the way they tell the story and identify changes that would strengthen the explanation of federal interest, problems/opportunities, objectives/constraints, formulation strategies, etc. In others words, would increased clarity in the story help clarify the path to a recommendation?

3. Examine and confirm the foundation of the feasibility study, building on the Report Synopsis read-ahead. The charette should focus on ensuring the Problems, Opportunities, Objectives and Constraints provide a strong foundation for the planning decisions to be made.
4. Where is the PDT in the planning process? What is the next planning decision?
5. Develop a decision management plan (DMP) for the next planning decision, establishing the criteria and tasks to reach that decision.
6. Develop risk register to support the DMP, documenting how the PDT is managing study and project risk.
7. If time permits, the charette participants may develop or outline the DMPs for future major study decisions / milestones.
8. Document charette agreements and next steps.

Typically, a planning or ongoing study charette will be between 3 and 4.5 days, depending on the objectives of the charette.

Developing the agenda in close coordination with the PDT and, when possible, the vertical team, will help all to understand the structure and process of the charette.

At the Charette

Charettes are, by design, interactive and collaborative, and there is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach to conducting a charette. The facilitation team will draw on a variety of exercises and techniques to help the PDT achieve its objectives and move the study forward.

During the charette, it is the responsibility of the PDT participants to ask questions of the vertical team, share what they know, and challenge themselves to meet the objectives of the charette. Similarly, the vertical team should ask critical questions to help inform decisions, share what they know, and challenge themselves to meet SMART Planning objectives. This interaction will assist the integrated team in answering this challenging question: What is the appropriate level of detail, and corresponding uncertainty, for the decision information being developed in this study?

The objective(s) of the charette, discussed by the PDT and vertical team during the planning call, should be stated up front, agreed upon by the charette participants, and reinforced throughout the charette.

Study Foundations: Buy-in, Understanding, Wordsmithing

While ensuring the full PDT and Vertical Team understands and is on board with the foundations of the study – the Problems, Opportunities, Objectives & Constraints, the agenda should be structured to focus on reviewing and understanding these important foundations of the study.

Unless there is an unacceptable risk associated with the phrasing of the problems, the temptation to wordsmith should be avoided.

Lessons Learned: Remote Participation in Charettes and Charette Etiquette

Tight travel budgets and busy schedules can make the expense of a multiple-day charette daunting – for the members of the vertical team that are traveling and for the study team that is paying for participation and travel.

Study teams have used conference calling and web meetings during charettes to engage and inform individuals who have been unable to travel to participate in charettes face-to-face.

While remote participation was – in most cases – considered better than no participation at all, challenges with technology and communication nuances lost without the face-to-face interaction has the potential for frustration for both study teams and vertical team members.

When the only option for participation is remote participation, pre-charette coordination and communication has been especially important to (1) identify the parts of the charette where the remote participant can most effectively participate and (2) establish the products or information to share with the remote participant after the charette.

For those on the phone, be mindful of how your participation / comments are being perceived by the PDT and project sponsor. For those in the room, the individual participating remotely may not realize the impact their words / demeanor are having in the room. If you can, reach out (one time when using your blackberries during the charette is appropriate!) and help them participate more effectively.

These lessons also hold true when key participants can only participate in a portion of the charette, rather than the full duration.

Based upon the objective(s) of the charette, the PDT should be prepared to think critically about the planning issues, assess key uncertainties, contribute to the group discussions, and identify information sources that may be used as evidence for decisions. During this process, PDT members should take notes, document areas of agreement between the PDT and vertical team – and how that agreement was reached, etc. In general, the facilitation team will not be developing comprehensive charette documentation.

During a planning charette, a variety of tools will be used to assist the PDT and vertical team in thinking critically and advancing the study. The PDT should expect that the following documents are generated or updated during the course of the charette, and they are encouraged to use these tools throughout the study. Identifying a lead writer at the beginning of the charette for each of these outputs can be useful:

- A [Decision Management Plan](#) for the next major decision(s) within the study, with a clear strategy to the next planning decision milestone and ultimately the completion of the study (at least conceptually) within the guidelines of 3x3x3.
- A [Risk Register](#) for the next decision(s), and ultimately for the study, that can be carried forward through the feasibility study into Preconstruction Engineering & Design (PED) and ultimately construction.

- The [Decision Log](#) should be updated to document areas of agreement / decision during the course of the charette.

If there have been developments in the study at the charette, the PDT would also benefit from updating the [Report Synopsis](#) or draft feasibility report, developing the report as the study progresses.

After the Charette

Before the end of the charette, the PDT and vertical team should jointly establish next steps, including what documentation or materials from the charette will be circulated.

The Decision Management Plan and Risk Register are important tools to establish and communicate the study’s path to completion. If they are not completed during the charette, there should be a common understanding of when and how they will be completed and shared with the full vertical team, and whether or not the documents are being shared for informational purposes, or if sign-off/concurrence is required.

Members of the PDT and vertical team may agree that certain documentation from the charette, such as a briefing memo, the Decision Log, or the Decision Management Plan, would benefit from endorsement or sign-off by the vertical team or someone not present at the charette (e.g., a decision to apply a model in a certain way, or to use a certain level of detail for a cost estimate). In that case, clear communication is critical for identifying the decision / recommendation, the decision maker, and next steps.

Lessons Learned: Following Up After the Charette

Participants in recent charettes have been most satisfied when the PDT and vertical team schedule a follow-up conference call with key charette participants (project leads and vertical team) to review and report on decisions made during the charette that need follow up and for finalizing/sharing products that establish the next steps, such as the Decision Management Plan and Risk Register.

V Roles & Responsibilities of the Vertical Team– Before, During, and After the Charette

Preparing for the Charette

Each member of the vertical team should ensure they are able to participate in the charette – or designate someone in their stead so that the PDT can ensure that decisions made at the charette can be acted upon. If members of the vertical team critical to meeting the objectives of the charette cannot participate in person, and rescheduling the charette is not an option, the vertical team member should propose strategies for ensuring they stay informed and on board with key study decisions made at the charette.

The vertical team attending the charette should be familiar with the overall study and review any materials circulated ahead of the charette, such as the [Report Synopsis](#) read-ahead.

Prior to the charette, the vertical team should participate in a planning conference call to understand the charette’s objectives, identify key questions or concerns they have for the facilitator and PDT to address in the charette, and identify and ensure participation of key vertical team members based on the needs of the study.

At the Charette

Each participant in the vertical team act according to the role they have in the study. For example, participants from the Division should ensure that issues related to quality control are addressed; the Office of Water Project Review should ensure that study decisions and recommendations are compliant with Corps of Engineers policies; technical experts from the Planning Centers of Expertise should work with the PDT to ensure current best practices / processes are incorporated in the study's decisions.

The objective(s) of the charette, agreed upon by the PDT and vertical team before the charette, should be stated up front, agreed upon by the charette participants, and reinforced throughout the charette.

The vertical team members are full participants in the charette, bringing their expertise and experience to the table. The vertical team must be ready to step forward and verbalize their concerns if they feel the PDT is headed down a path that will raise the concern of reviewers, articulate what they are looking for at each milestone, and be able to answer PDT members' questions/concerns.

After the Charette

While the PDT and vertical team should be able to leave the charette with a Decision Management Plan and updated Risk Register articulating the next steps of the PDT toward the next planning decision, members of the PDT and vertical team may agree that certain documentation from the charette, such as a briefing memo, the Decision Log, or the Decision Management Plan, would benefit from endorsement by the vertical team or someone not present at the charette (e.g., a decision to apply a model in a certain way, or to use a certain level of detail for a cost estimate). In that case, clear communication between the vertical team and PDT is critical for identifying the decision / recommendation, the decision maker, and next steps.

VI Roles & Responsibilities of the Facilitation Support Team– Before, During, and After the Charette

Preparing for the Charette

As far in advance as possible (ideally 2-4 weeks ahead of the charette), the PDT will coordinate a conference call with the charette support team and vertical team to prepare for the charette. Participants in this pre-charette planning session will include the facilitator, PDT representative (e.g., the PM or Lead Planner), and vertical team representative (e.g., Division rep, OWPR and RIT planner). Others, such as a member of the PCX or a planner with SMART planning/charette experience, may also participate in the planning call.

Before this call, the PDT should develop and circulate the [Report Synopsis](#) read-ahead to the vertical team and support team. Areas of discussion at the preparation call may include:

- Confirming the goals for the charette. Why does the PDT want to bring together the vertical team and the PDT for a charette?
- Does the vertical team have any specific questions or concerns about the study information they have received (Planning Foundation exercise) that should be addressed in the charette agenda?
- In moving to the next planning decision, are the expertise / experience of other Communities of Practice or the PCX needed at the charette?

- Discussing any read-ahead work to be done by the PDT and vertical team and how it will be used at the charette (e.g., establish participant familiarity with SMART Planning and Risk Register).
- Planning for a real or virtual site visit to orient the full PDT and vertical team to the study.
- Ensuring common understanding of roles and responsibilities of charette participants and support team.
- Identifying and communicating vertical team expectations of any charette outcomes (e.g., updated risk register, decision management plan, decision log).
- Logistics for the meeting, including travel and lodging recommendations, meeting facility, room arrangements, etc.

Based on the planning call and the charette objectives, the PDT will draft an agenda for the charette, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the support team. The facilitation support team, working with the PDT, will assist in refining and finalizing the agenda. The facilitator and charette participants should expect that the agenda will be modified as needed during the charette to meet the needs of the PDT and vertical team, reflecting the collaborative problem-solving approach of a charette.

Facilitation “best practices” apply to planning charettes as well. The [Conflict Resolution & Public Participation Center of Expertise](#) housed at the Institute for Water Resources is a resource for PDTs and charette support teams.

Lessons Learned: Facilitating Toward the Charette Objectives

Participants bring a diversity of experiences and opinions to a planning charette. Retaining focus on the charette objectives can be a challenge for facilitation support teams.

Some lessons learned from previous charettes include:

- Ensure the study foundations (e.g., problem statements, etc.) are adequate for the decision – wordsmithing during the charette is generally not appropriate or productive. It can be challenging to balance creating group buy-in with re-creating work already done; work with the PM and lead planner to identify a strategy that will benefit the PDT – and revisit it as needed!
- Having an ‘in-house’ pre-meeting for Corps of Engineers participants can resolve questions related to Corps policy / process without confusing or frustrating external participants such as the non-federal sponsor. PDTs have found that when they inform the sponsor of these pre-meetings, it has not been a concern.
- PDT-vertical team-facilitator time outs to caucus and confer have been useful to ensure charette objectives are being met and charette is staying on track.
- Even with pre-charette coordination, when study teams and vertical team members are face-to-face, discussions on study status and the next major planning decision have sometimes taken unexpected turns. The facilitator, PDT lead and vertical team will work together to decide how to best use the time at the charette.

At the Charette

The support team will facilitate, support, and guide the PDT through the charette process. The support team will not make decisions for the PDT and vertical team.

Support team documentation will generally focus on the process of the charettes, rather than the outcomes, to share lessons/experiences and improve the implementation of future planning charettes.

After the Charette

The support team's role is essentially complete at the end of the charette, although they may reconvene for an After Action meeting to discuss opportunities to improve guidance and support for future charettes.

The PDT may choose to ask the advice of the SMART Planner or risk specialist on the execution of tools such as the Decision Management Plan and Risk Register after the charette, or engage the support team in charette follow up or future coordination efforts with the vertical team.

VII The Report Synopsis – Charette Read-Ahead

The PDT should prepare the Report Synopsis and circulate it to the Support Team and vertical team as a read-ahead. This read-ahead is not a reviewable document and should not be written in stone – this should reflect the most current and best thinking of the full PDT.

The foundations of the planning study are critically important when the PDT and Vertical team come together to determine the next steps and key uncertainties in their path to study completion. The Report Synopsis completed or updated prior to the charette summarizes and communicates the planning foundations of the study.

The Report Synopsis will be used by the charette support team to:

- Ensure the agenda meets the study where it is and focuses the time of the agenda on questions that need to be addressed before the study moves forward.
- Identify a starting point for the charette. If the vertical team understands and is in alignment with the foundations of the planning study (Problems & Opportunities, Objectives & Constraints, etc.), the PDT and vertical team will be able to more quickly move forward into developing a decision management plan and next steps for the study. Assumptions about the starting point of the charette should be confirmed by the PDT and vertical team during pre-charette coordination calls.

The Report Synopsis is intended to be a brief document, not more than 10-15 pages. *If the PDT has previously developed a Report Synopsis, this can be used. If no Report Synopsis exists, then the PDT should document available information / decisions in a clear and succinct manner.* If a study is early in the planning process, these statements may not be very refined, or there may not be information for each area. **Blank pieces of paper or blank sections of the synopsis are OK.**

The Report Synopsis should include:

1. What is the study authority and purpose?
2. What was the last planning decision (or milestone)? What is your existing time and budget to complete?

3. Map of study area.
4. Problems and Opportunities. What is the federal interest? The Corps interest?
5. Objectives & Constraints. What does success look like? What are the constraints that will limit the extent of your planning process?
6. Decision Criteria. How will you measure success? Include Evaluation Criteria, Comparison Criteria, and Selection Criteria *if they have been developed*.
7. Key Uncertainties. What areas of uncertainty do you expect to impact your planning decision(s)?
8. Without Project Condition. What will it be/look like if we do nothing?
9. Measures Screened. What measures are on the table which meet the Objectives & Constraints; what have you screened out, and why?
10. Formulated Plans under consideration.

This exercise is most useful when the Report Synopsis is developed by the entire PDT, rather than one person.

After the charette, the PDT can update the report synopsis with new decisions or information and bring that forward through the study, writing the feasibility study report as decisions are made.

An example outline of a Report Synopsis can be found on [the Planning SMART Guide](#).

VIII Decisions and Documentation Developed at the Charette

The planning charette is focused on bringing the PDT and vertical team together to move the PDT forward to their next significant planning decision. The PDT will likely develop or lay the foundations for the following tools that the PDT will use to continue their study:

- Decision Management Plan
- Risk Register
- Decision Log
- Updated Report Synopsis

Decision Management Plan

The decision management plan is a tool that provides a clear strategy to study completion for the PDT. The decision management plan is not a replacement of the Project Management Plan (PMP). Rather it is a concise summary list of next steps that the PDT is undertaking, from one planning decision milestone to the next, prepared throughout the course of the feasibility study. A typical decision management plan will be 5 to 15 pages long.

The decision management plan is to be used as a decision-focused guide for the PDT, in concert with the risk register, and as a reference for the vertical team. The plan should convey the PDT strategy on how to manage risk and reduce uncertainty in next-step actions with an eye on the completion of the study.

Over the course of a study, the PDT may develop several decision management plans, one for each planning decision through the end of the study. The PDT may also find it useful to outline subsequent decision management plans for the duration of the study based on available information and experiences. The decision management plan(s) may also be used as a reference for PMP updates, if needed.

Elements of a Decision Management Plan typically include:

- The planning decision to be made
- Sequence of events required
- Criteria for making the decision
- Decision maker(s)
- Schedule for decision
- Decision summary (to be completed when decision is made)

The decision management plan is not intended to be a “reviewable” document, but the PDT may find it useful to ensure vertical team awareness of the decision management plan before the decision is made, as it outlines the decision criteria and approach for making the decision.

If the PDT has outlined decision management plans through the end of the study, these decision-oriented tasks will form the framework for the PMP.

For more information, see the [Planning SMART Guide](#).

Risk Register

A feasibility study will continually ask how additional detail will affect the next planning decision. Where is the uncertainty? Will more data mean a better decision? What are the consequences of a wrong decision? One technique for understanding and communicating how PDTs are taking into account uncertainty in their study is to develop and use a [risk register](#).

The risk register complements the decision management plan. The decision management plan is used to outline the strategy for making the next significant planning decision; what is the decision and what information is needed to make it. Risk registers are used to identify and assess the risks that follow from the decision strategy contained in the decision management plan. The study team uses the risk register to determine whether the risk – to the study and to the project – is tolerable. If not, the decision strategy and planning tasks will be changed and documented in the DMP.

What are the Risks to the Planning Decision?

A risk register is a useful tool for the study team to understand and communicate the risks associated with making planning decisions – e.g., the criteria to be used to evaluate or compare plans; the approach taken to scale the agency recommended plan.

During early phases, the study’s risk register will primarily focus on the risks of decisions to the study itself: to the budget; the duration; the decision outcome (did we eliminate the best plan?).

Once the agency recommended plan (and potentially the Locally Preferred Plan) are being detailed, the study risk register will also include project risks (will the project perform as expected?).

During the course of the feasibility study, the study team will also use another form of the risk register for the [Cost Schedule Risk Analysis](#).

Risk registers have long been used in the project management industry. Within the Corps of Engineers, the risk register is most commonly used in the cost and schedule risk analysis. The risk register is a flexible risk management tool that can help a team to assess, manage, and communicate risks. While the decision management plan outlines the sequence of events needed to make a decision, and the criteria for that decision, the risk register captures and communicates information about the uncertainty associated with those criteria or the elements that feed into the planning decision.

The risk register collects information in a spreadsheet format about:

- Risks and their causes.
- The consequences of that risk.
- The likelihood of the risk occurring.
- The team's confidence in their ratings of the risk consequences and likelihood.
- PDT recommendation about the risk.

The risks associated with the study outputs and project outcomes documented in the risk register are based on input from the PDT and feedback from vertical team members.

At a charette, the participants develop the risk register together to identify risks throughout the feasibility study, and specifically risks in making the next planning decision, and as a guide for decision-making in a timely manner, making and accepting decisions based on information available to the PDT at that time.

Ultimately, the risk register is a tool to assist the PDT in acknowledging and talking about the risk and uncertainty inherent in any study. The risk register:

- Identifies and documents the risks the PDT and the Corps is willing to tolerate.
- Identifies ways the PDT will manage risks that are not acceptable.
- Documents all risk mitigation strategies being pursued in response to the identified risks.
- Considers risk mitigation strategies in terms of likelihood and consequence.
- Provides the PDT and vertical team with a documented framework to report risk status.
- Represents an actionable document prepared early in the study.
- Helps ensure the communication of risk management issues to key stakeholders.
- Provides a mechanism for seeking and acting on feedback.

For more information and a risk register spreadsheet template, see the [Planning SMART Guide](#).

Decision Log

There are many times over the course of a study that the PDT or the sponsor will need to make decisions relating to the project. Often these decisions can change the course of the project. The decision log is a tool for the PDT to document the decisions made to reduce the chances of a dispute arising from unknown decisions. The decision log does not mean that a decision will never resurface over the course of a project. There are times that new risks or opportunities are introduced to a project and it causes the team to rethink previous decisions. The usefulness of the decision log allows the team to make sure that decisions are documented so that if they need to be reevaluated, they are easy to identify.

A decision log is a common tool in project management. While it can be customized to meet the PDT's needs, at a minimum, a decision log includes:

- A reference (identifier) for the decision.
- Date the decision was made.
- Description of what was agreed to and why.
- Who agreed to it.
- Where you can find information or supporting documentation.

The PDT / vertical team may agree on additional information on each decision based on the needs of the study.

The decision log serves as the ongoing documentation of decisions throughout the duration of the study and should be shared between the PDT and vertical team to assist in clearly communicating decisions.

For more information and a decision log template, see the [Planning SMART Guide](#).

Report Synopsis Description

The PDT will develop the feasibility report over time, with the report synopsis providing the foundation and the draft report growing over time and confirmed at each milestone. The report synopsis is not a required outcome of a planning charette, although if there are updates to the synopsis after the charette, they should be incorporated.

For more information and a decision log template, see the [Planning SMART Guide](#).

VII Additional Resources

For PDT and Vertical Team

- SMART Planning Guide (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm>)
 - Charettes page (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=2&Part=5>)
 - Tips, Tools and Techniques page (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=8&Part=0>)

For Charette Facilitation Support Teams

- SMART Planning Guide (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm>)
 - Charettes page (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=2&Part=5>)
 - Tips, Tools and Techniques page (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=8&Part=0>)
- Facilitation Presentation: Public Involvement and Teaming (PCC7) (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/resources.cfm?Id=0&Option=Planning%20Core%20Curriculum&Sub=PCC7>)
- Natural Resources Gateway Facilitator Tools & "Find a Facilitator" info (<http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/employees/facilitator/facilitator.cfm>) including "Good Enough to Share" resources for group facilitators (<http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/employees/gets.cfm?Id=facilitator>)

- USACE Conflict Resolution & Public Participation Center of Expertise (<http://www.iwr.usace.army.mil/index.php/about-us/technical-centers/cpc-public-participation-tools/>)

Appendix A: Pre-Charette Checklists

District & PDT Pre-Planning Charette Checklist

1. Identify why you are holding a charette – what are the objectives? (NOTE: If you are holding a Rescoping charette, one of the objectives will be to develop a strategy to study completion within 3 years and \$3M.)
2. Read the Charette handbook and ensure that all members of the PDT are familiar with it.
3. The following resources are recommended for all SMART Planning Charette participants to orient and prepare for the charette.
<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=8&Part=1a>
 - a. Foundations of SMART Planning video. This 17 minute video provides an introduction to the foundations of SMART Planning and the SMART planning feasibility study process. (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=9&Step=1>)
 - b. SMART Feasibility Studies: Milestones and Process video. This 16 minute video provides more detail on the milestones and process for conducting feasibility studies applying the SMART planning principles. (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=9&Step=1>)
 - c. View the [SMART Planning - Risk Register Presentation](#) (about 10 minutes)
 - d. Read through the [SMART Planning Guide](#) and the [Planning Charettes page](#)
4. The PDT will develop / update the Report Synopsis for a charette read-ahead. This read-ahead should reflect the most current and best thinking of the full PDT using information available. The PDT should use this to communicate the fundamentals of its study – it should use maps, tables, bullets, or short sentences. It can – and should – have blanks if the team has not yet completed certain planning steps; it is not intended for formal policy and technical review and should not be “written in stone”. (See the Planning Guide for an outline of a Report Synopsis (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=8&Part=6>)). This read-ahead will be to:
 - a. Develop an agenda that meets the PDT where they are in the study and focuses the time of the agenda on questions that need to be addressed before the study moves forward.
 - b. Identify a starting point for the charette. If the vertical team understands and is in alignment with the foundations of the planning study (Problems & Opportunities, Objectives & Constraints, etc.), the PDT and vertical team will be able to more quickly move forward into developing the Decision Management Plan, Risk Register and next steps for the study.
 - c. If you are holding a charette where the primary purpose is to rescope to completion within 3 years and \$3 million, the charette read-aheads for the vertical team should include the expected time and budget to complete.
5. Identify and coordinate the charette support team, which may include a facilitator, expert planner, and risk specialist.
6. Identify list of attendees / invitees. Identify critical attendees.

- a. Communicate charette expectations (e.g., full participation; no leaving for meetings).
 - b. Determine technology needs if there will be remote participation.
7. Hold coordination call with charette support team and vertical team.
8. Draft an initial agenda to meet the objectives of the charette. Example agendas are available on the [Planning SMART Guide](#).
9. Set / confirm dates based on attendance of critical attendees, space, PDT preparation, etc.
10. Coordinate logistics (space, materials, participation). Coordinate with vertical team as needed.
11. Work with support team to complete any pre-charette actions deemed necessary.

Vertical Team

Pre-Planning Charette Checklist

1. Read the Charette handbook and be familiar with your role and responsibilities ahead of and at the charette.
2. The following resources are recommended for all SMART Planning Charette participants to orient and prepare for the charette.
[\(<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=8&Part=1a>\)](http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=8&Part=1a)

 - a. Foundations of SMART Planning video. This 17 minute video provides an introduction to the foundations of SMART Planning and the SMART planning feasibility study process. (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=9&Step=1>)
 - b. SMART Feasibility Studies: Milestones and Process video. This 16 minute video provides more detail on the milestones and process for conducting feasibility studies applying the SMART planning principles. (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=9&Step=1>)
 - c. View the [SMART Planning - Risk Register Presentation](#) (about 10 minutes)
 - d. Read through the [SMART Planning Guide](#) and the [Planning Charettes page](#)

3. Read the Report Synopsis read-ahead and assess the current state of the planning work. The purpose of this read-ahead is to concisely convey the planning foundation for the study. It is not intended for formal technical or policy review. It should reflect the most current and best thinking of the full PDT. See the Planning Guide for an outline of a Report Synopsis (<http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm?Section=8&Part=6>). This will be used to:
 - a. Develop an agenda that meets the PDT where they are in the study and focuses the time of the agenda on questions that need to be addressed before the study moves forward.
 - b. Identify a starting point for the charette. If the vertical team understands and is in alignment with the foundations of the planning study (Problems & Opportunities, Objectives & Constraints, etc.), the PDT and vertical team will be able to more quickly move forward into developing the Decision Management Plan, Risk Register and next steps for the study.
4. Coordinate within your chain of command who will participate, their role, engagement in charette preparation calls, etc.
5. Confirm your participation with the PDT.
 - a. If you are to be participating remotely, work closely with PDT to establish common understanding of:
 - i. Participation needs - e.g., listening in, participating in discussions, and/or weighing in on decisions).
 - ii. Technology – e.g., conference phone, videoconference, web meeting.
 - iii. Limits to participation – e.g., remote participation the whole time or only for portions of the charette.

Facilitation Support Team Pre-Planning Charette Checklist

1. Confirm support role and dates with District / PDT
 - a. Ensure your understanding of the PDT's objectives for the charette (rescoping; making a planning decision; addressing a roadblock)
 - b. Confirm the preparation time you will have and who is on the support team
 - c. Confirm that the RIT Planner is aware and working on the scheduling
 - d. Confirm PDT is aware of pre-planning charette checklist, especially the development of the Report Synopsis read-ahead.
2. Coordinate with the PDT contact
 - a. Ensure all participants have the Report Synopsis read-ahead before the coordination call
 - b. Participate in the pre-charette coordination call scheduled by the PDT
 - i. A separate pre-coordination call with the vertical team may be useful to identify issues or concerns specific to the vertical team.
 - c. Confirm timing / constraints in participation, duration, etc.
 - d. Confirm logistics, including if there will be a tour, whether there will be breakout rooms or a single room, hotels/transportation, materials / A/V requested, handouts (e.g., Report Synopsis, Risk Register templates, Frequently Used Planning Terms, etc.)
 - e. Confirm participation of vertical team and others
3. Work with the PDT to finalize the agenda with input from the Expert Planner and other support team members (as needed). Specify and communicate roles and responsibilities within the team and for others (e.g., who will lead which parts of the agenda; will there be a welcome; will Division Planning Chief be giving the SMART Planning remarks at the beginning; is there a specific role for the PCX?).