

About Battelle

Battelle is the world's largest nonprofit independent research and development organization, providing innovative solutions to the world's most pressing needs through its four global businesses: Laboratory Management, National Security, Energy Technology, and Health and Life Sciences. It advances scientific discovery and application by conducting \$5 billion in global R&D annually through contract research, laboratory management, and technology commercialization.

Roadmap for Conducting WRDA 2034 Independent External Peer Reviews

Objective

The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2007 (Public Law 110-114), Section 2034 (November 8, 2007) describes the requirements for triggers and the process for conducting independent external peer reviews (IEPRs). The process for planning and conducting IEPR activities should further be consistent with the requirements and procedures of the Department of the Army, USACE, guidance Peer Review of Decision Documents (EC 1105-2-410) dated August 22, 2008, and the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, released December 16, 2004.

IEPRs must be conducted by an outside eligible 501(c)(3) organization per WRDA Section 2034. Battelle, formed in 1925, is a 501(c)(3) organization that meets the "outside eligible organization" (OEO) requirements. The following process is based on Battelle's experience conducting more than 25 peer reviews for USACE since 2005.

Process

In conducting independent external peer reviews, it is imperative that a defined process be implemented to deliver timely and appropriate comments.

Schedule Setting and Planning – As part of the initial planning, a Scope of Work (SOW) and schedule needs to be prepared by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). SOWs should include project details, a listing of the review documents, any supporting documents, and a description of each task to be performed. The schedule in the SOW is revised to reflect the actual notice-to-proceed (NTP) and availability of review documents. The schedule should include any critical drop-dead dates.

Review Documents – Review documents may include, but are not limited to, the following: Environmental Impact Statements, Feasibility

Studies, General Re-Evaluation Reports, Limited Re-Evaluation Reports, Project Implementation Reports, Dredged Material Management Plans, and other reports including existing, with, and without project conditions. Ideally, review documents should be available when Battelle receives the SOW or, at the latest, when the NTP is received.

Meetings – Project kick-off meetings are held early in the process. It is recommended that USACE and Battelle meet immediately after receiving the NTP; USACE, Battelle, and the peer review panel should meet after the panel is under contract and prior to the panel beginning the review. Other meetings are held at various points in the process. Meetings can be teleconferences or during in-person site visits. Participation by Battelle and the peer review panel in the Civil Works Review Board may be required also.

Peer Review Panel – Having the review documents available at the NTP allows for the most efficient recruitment process. Panel size varies depending on the technical needs of the project and can range from 3 to 10 panel members. Candidate peer reviewers are screened for general and specific conflicts of interest (COIs) and will be required to sign a COI statement as part of their subcontract. USACE provides input and/or approval on COIs within days of NTP to avoid delays. Specific COI information could be included in the SOW.

Charge Questions – Charge questions are developed by Battelle and approved and edited by USACE. The questions focus on the engineering, economics, and environmental analyses, methods, and models, as appropriate to the project study and review documents.

Conduct Peer Review – The peer review panel provides individual comments in response to the charge questions. Key issues, conflicts, and positive feedback are identified by Battelle

and included in a list of talking points. A panel review teleconference, facilitated by Battelle, is conducted with the peer review panel to review this list of talking points and identify the issues that will be the basis for developing final panel comments.

Final Panel Comments – Final panel comments are developed by the peer review panel with oversight from Battelle. Final panel comments include four parts: the comment statement, the basis for the comment, the significance level of the comment (high, medium, or low), and recommendations for resolution. Final panel comments are presented and summarized in the final report.

Final IEPR Report – The Final IEPR Report follows requirements described in EC 1105-2-410. The report includes a project summary from the SOW, details the IEPR process, describes the panel members and their selection, and summarizes the comments of the peer review panel. In addition, the report includes the peer review panel’s assessment of the adequacy and acceptability of the economic, engineering, and environmental methods, models, and analysis used as well as the panel’s opinion as to whether there are sufficient analyses upon which to base a recommendation for construction, authorization, or funding.

Comment/Response Process – Previously named “Response to USACE Clarifying Questions,” the comment/response process involves more than the panel responding to clarifying questions. DrChecks is used to document the final panel comments and responses from USACE (PDT) and peer review panel. All responses include “concurrence,” or “non-concurrence.” A teleconference is held between USACE (PDT, PCX), Battelle, and the peer review panel to discuss each of the final panel comments with the goal of reaching “concurrence” on as many comments as possible. To improve the probability of reaching “concurrence” it is recommended that the PDT provide (via email) draft Evaluator responses prior to the teleconference. After the teleconference, the PDT (Evaluator) inputs their responses to the final panel comments into DrChecks, specifically focusing on the Final Comment Statement and Basis for Comment. The peer review panel provides responses (BackCheck) to the Evaluator responses. Battelle inputs the panel’s responses and closes out DrChecks.

Key Points to Remember

The schedule for conducting IEPRs is aggressive and each project has its own unique delays (e.g., delay in availability

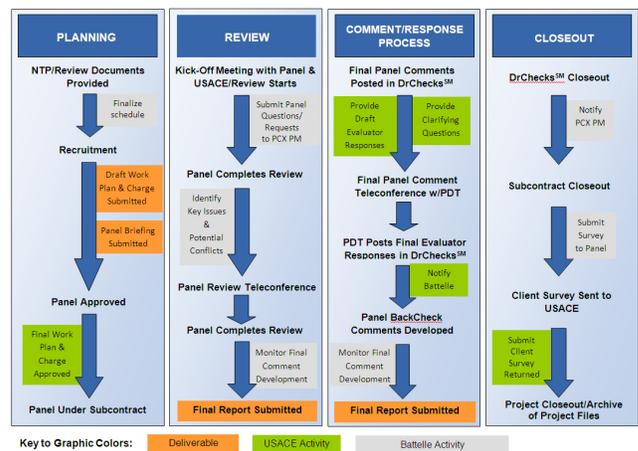
of review documents, revisions to review documents, and even natural disasters) that could affect the schedule. Communication and responsiveness is extremely important during the IEPR to meet the schedule.

Version control (i.e., date and/or version number) is critical when developing the SOW.

The cost for conducting IEPRs is dependent on several factors, unique to each project: panel members (the number of panel members required for the IEPR, the specific disciplines being sought, the average charge out rate for panel members, and the hours for each panel member to review the documents and/or the model all play a part in this cost), site visits, comment/response process, and review documents.

Average timeline to conduct an IEPR is 14 -18 weeks from NTP to delivery of the Final IEPR Report. The comment/response process adds another 4 to 6 weeks to the schedule.

The period of performance end date is often scheduled for 2 months after the date for closeout of DrChecks. This allows for shifts in the schedule without requiring a contract modification which requires time and money.



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