

Planning Associates Program

Class of 2006 Team Quadriga

Critical Think Piece - Executive Summary

Communicating risk is one of the most challenging and critical jobs we face. Team Quadriga has explored how the Corps of Engineers could improve risk communication as related to the Civil Works Business Lines. The type of risk associated with the different business lines includes risk to life, property, the economy, and to quality of life. People across the nation live with these risks, both in areas where there are existing projects and in areas where there are no projects. Yet the majority of the public does not understand the risks they face. Threats from floods, hurricanes, and other natural processes have been reduced by the construction of Corps projects. But never do these projects eliminate risk. In fact, all Corps projects involve some risk; if nothing else the risk that projected benefits will not be fully realized. Deferred maintenance for existing infrastructure could result in possible loss of the facility or higher cost when the work is finally done.

Team Quadriga considered the various risks faced, challenges with communication, and identified ways to improve communication. The team queried a number of Corps experts encountered during the training year; the ideas presented are a compilation from the team and those public affair officers, planners, researchers and developers from various Corps offices that were consulted. Identified are three categories of ideas for improving risk communication. These are not alternatives; the team anticipates that each of these ideas would be worthwhile.

1. Develop Risk Communication Plan for the Corps of Engineers. The Corps needs a plan to develop a standard for risk communication. This can be done with strategic partners, including the public, to develop more effective communication strategies that better acknowledge public perspectives. This would improve education strategies, the planning process, and shared information post construction. Budget priorities could be given to projects practicing risk communication.
2. Develop New Ways to Characterize and Communicate Risk. Work with others to improve terminology and examples. Partner with media to improve how complex messages are delivered to the public. Join forces with project partners to develop risk communication strategies. Expand use of visual tools (like physical models). Create an interactive, public website and frequent television spots.
3. Strengthen National Partnerships. Work with Federal agencies to develop a national risk communication policy. Expand initiatives like Silver Jackets to improve coordination between governments. Develop and use Memorandums of Understanding and Agreement with key partners to address risk communication. Develop national standards for building codes to address homes in flood risk areas. Coordinate regularly with local land use planners in their forums.