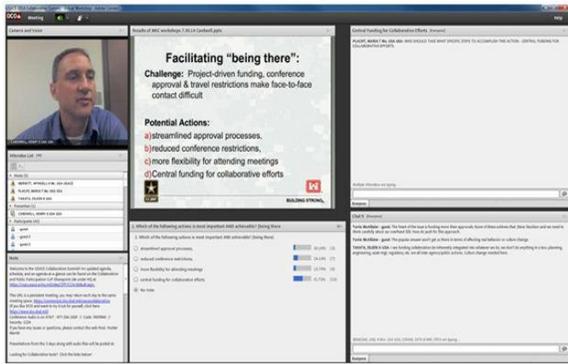


Outcomes of the First National Virtual Collaboration Summit



In August of 2014, the USACE Conflict Resolution and Public Participation Center of Expertise (CPCX) hosted the first virtual National Collaboration Summit. The purpose of the summit, which included over 200 participants, was to enhance USACE capacity to collaborate with its internal and external customers. CPCX hosted the summit on Defense Connect Online, a collaborative virtual platform that allows for more interaction between presenters and participants.

Mr. Steve Stockton, Director of Civil Works, provided the USACE leadership perspective on the importance of collaboration in achieving specific objectives. Mr. Stockton talked about the evolving nature of collaboration in Civil Works stating, “What we are trying to do in Civil Works is to really transform ourselves to be relative into the 21st Century.” Collaboration is part of that transformation process.

“What has become apparent to me is that the more open, transparent, and early we can bring the various stakeholders into the decision-making process, the more likely we will arrive at better solutions and solutions that are more accepted by those involved.”

*-Steve Stockton
USACE, Director of Civil Works*

Other speakers included:

- Panel of experienced USACE collaborators who provided concrete examples illustrating effective approaches to collaboration challenges.
- Panel of partners from outside USACE who shared experiences collaborating with USACE, including what is working and their suggestions for improving collaboration in the future.
- CPCX presentation on national indicators of USACE’s capacity to collaborate.

The panel of partners from outside USACE provided some tips on improving collaborative processes. They spoke about the need for documenting lessons learned from collaborations, the power of relationships, the importance of understanding each other’s objectives and needs, and consistently attempting to find common ground. One panelist commented “*Often times agencies hide behind strict interpretations of regulations, and having the willingness to find the gray areas and change the course is critical*”. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) panelist commented that we should work as one federal entity, where the USFWS’s problems are Corps problems, and vice versa.

“Where I think we struggle is when the Fish and Wildlife Service is treated as another stakeholder as opposed to a partner incorporated as one federal organization seeking to get the best effects.”

*-Paul Souza, Deputy Assistant Director,
Endangered Species, USFWS*

Developing a shared commitment to mutual problem solving, the importance of leadership, and mutual leadership in the outcome were common themes throughout the panel. The panelists concluded by offering a few additional tips:

- Take the time to develop personal relationships, at work and home; take the time to learn about history and gain an awareness of the people you are working with.
- *Identify where* we have mission alignment.
- Be clear about what level on which you are planning to collaborate. Commit to mutual engagement on the various processes that constitute that endeavor—the setting of priorities, project objectives, project performance standards, project design—opening up the designing processes and being open to more designs. *“Don’t assume you know everything and go behind closed doors.”*

A key part of the discussions oriented around issues raised during earlier MSC workshops. Of the 7 issues raised across the MSCs, participants highlighted vertical harmony, civil works transformation, and leadership support as the most important. During the last day, the summit considered ways to address these issues.

Some Issues from MSC Workshops

- ★ **Vertical harmony:** HQ and MSC travel to stakeholder kick-off meetings; representation in earlier meetings without subsequent vertical buy-in
- ★ **Changing guidance:** accommodating engagement within 3x3x3; seeing collaboration as integral to Civil Works Transformation; increased role of non-federal sponsors per WRDA 2014
- ★ **Leadership support:** perception of lack of support for District staff to train and engage in collaborative activities
- 4. **Coordinating collaboration:** HQ executive liaisons; inter-agency liaisons; joint training with other Federal agencies
- 5. **Facilitating “being there”:** streamlined approval processes, reduced conference restrictions, more flexibility for attending meetings
- 6. **Tools for Sharing:** achieving user-friendly file-sharing externally (beyond email and Sharepoint)
- 7. **Support for “how”:** conducting effective virtual meetings; establishing public meeting templates; enhanced use of social media



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Key recommendations for addressing the issues included:

- **Relationship Building-** periodic face-to-face meetings with important partners or stakeholders help to establish and maintain good relationships.
- **Public Involvement Timing** -early public involvement should be considered as part of your risk register. Late and/or inadequate public involvement can significantly affect your scope and cost.
- **Disseminate Case Study Lessons-** develop a manual of some kind that depicts examples and chronicles case studies.
- **Travel Restrictions-** support a streamlined approval process to attend and travel to appropriate project and program related events and conferences.

- **Leadership Support-** senior leaders must support and engage public interaction and communication as a critical strategy to support missions.
- **Accomplish Central Funding for Collaborative Efforts-** put funding into multi-agency partner frameworks that allow for multiple agencies to work together within a watershed or shared priority; encourage MSC to share GE funding with districts for regional collaborative efforts.
- **Regional POCs and Joint Training-** identify regional agency POCs that serve as point people for agency coordination along with joint agency trainings to build networks.
- **Vertical Team to Ensure Timely Decisions and Effective Documentation-** empowered early participation of MSC and HQ staff will result in more timely processing at the end, along with transparency in the supporting documentation.
- **Virtual Collaboration Tools-** coordinate with ACEIT, get training on what is available or explore additional tech needs.
- **Reward Collaboration-** demonstration of collaborative efforts in performance objectives at all levels will encourage and reward collaboration at all levels.

Learn more

[Conflict Resolution and Public Participation Center of Expertise \(CPCX\)](#)