



US Army Corps  
of Engineers®

# General Investigations

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## Introduction

General Investigation (GI) studies refer to the traditional and most common way for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to assist a community in addressing complex water resource problems. There is no ceiling on the maximum size of a project but GI studies are typically reserved for large-scale projects costing more than \$15 million which exceeds the limits established for projects pursued under the Continuing Authorities Program. These types of studies are typically conducted in partnership with a non-federal entity (sponsor). A GI study often begins with a ***request for assistance from a community or a local or state government entity with a water resource need*** (e.g., navigation, flood protection or ecosystem restoration) beyond its capability. Before initiating a study, the Corps generally ***requires two types of congressional authority - authorization and appropriations***.

If the Corps has previously conducted a study in the geographic area of concern, a new study can be authorized through a House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee or Senate Environment and Public Works Committee resolution. If the Corps has not previously conducted a study in the geographic area of concern, a new study would need to be authorized through legislation, typically a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Once authorized, appropriations for GI studies are appropriated as individual line items in the annual Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act, and historically Congress has modified funding amounts through congressional adds.

## Project Phases

There are two phases that a project passes through using GI funding before being authorized for construction: the ***feasibility phase*** and the ***preconstruction engineering and design phase***. Both of these phases are conducted under a single congressional study authority.

### Feasibility Phase

The feasibility phase serves to define problems and opportunities and formulate and evaluate alternative plans culminating in a detailed presentation of a recommended project. Feasibility phase planning is guided by the requirements of the “Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies” (commonly referred to as the “Principles and Guidelines” or P&G).

The Principles and Guidelines define the federal objective of Corps project planning, which is to contribute to national economic development consistent with protecting the Nation’s environment, pursuant to national environmental statutes, applicable executive orders and other federal planning requirements.

At the beginning of the feasibility phase the Corps and a non-federal sponsor will collaborate on the development of a Project Management Plan (PMP) outlining responsibilities, guidelines, assumptions, tasks, estimated costs and schedule for the feasibility phase, and will execute a Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement (FCSA). Feasibility phase investigations are cost-shared equally between the Corps and a non-federal sponsor, per the terms of the FCSA that details the responsibilities of each party. This phase concludes with a feasibility report that describes the Corps' proposed action. Corps guidance requires feasibility phases to be completed in less than 36 months.

Feasibility phase planning follows these six steps: (1) specify problems and opportunities associated with the federal objective and specific state, Tribal and local concerns; (2) inventory, forecast and analyze existing and future conditions relevant to the identified problems and opportunities; (3) formulate alternative plans to address the problems and capitalize on the opportunities; (4) evaluate the economic, environmental and other effects of each alternative plan; (5) compare the alternative plans and their effects; and (6) select a recommended plan.

The final feasibility report is submitted to USACE Headquarters for a multi-step review and approval process referred to as Washington Level Review. Upon completion of the review and approval, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works [ASA(CW)] transmits the final report to Congress for consideration of authorizing the recommended project for construction in the next WRDA.

## **Preconstruction Engineering and Design Phase**

The purpose of the preconstruction engineering and design (PED) phase is to complete any additional planning studies and all of the detailed technical studies and design needed to begin construction of the project. The PED phase typically initiates under GI funding, which allows for continuation of project design and preparation of detailed plans and specifications while awaiting construction authorization through a WRDA.

Preconstruction engineering and design initiates with the negotiation of a Design Agreement and can last until completion of plans and specifications or receipt of Construction General funding. It is during the PED phase that the Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) is developed, which outlines the sponsor's and Corps' responsibilities for project construction and operation and maintenance after construction is complete. The execution of the PPA cannot occur until after Congress has authorized the project for construction.

## **Requesting Assistance**

To request assistance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in conducting a GI Study, please visit [www.usace.army.mil/Contact/OfficeLocator.aspx](http://www.usace.army.mil/Contact/OfficeLocator.aspx) and type in a zip code to find the nearest Corps office.

Requests can be sent to the Planning Branch of the local Corps office.