

THE NETWORK

A publication of the Federal Planning Division of the American Planning Association

Fall 2026

WELCOME TO THE NETWORK

FPD Executive Committee

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Jill Bartholomew | Editorial Support

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FROM THE CHAIR



Shenita McConis, PE, PMP, AICP
FPD Chair

Dear FPD Members and Colleagues,

Welcome to the 2026 edition of our Federal Planning Division magazine! As we reflect on an extraordinary year, I want to take a moment to celebrate our collective achievements and the vibrant community we continue to build together.

First and foremost, a special thank you goes to the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) DC Post for their support and collaboration in hosting the FPD Annual Training Workshop. Thanks to this partnership, the workshop was a resounding success, welcoming over 367 planners in attendance and delivering over 33 Certification Maintenance (CM) hours.

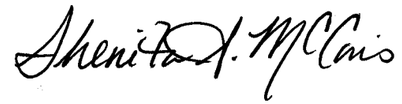
This year marks a major milestone for our community as we celebrate our 40th Anniversary. For four decades, FPD has served as the touchstone for military and federal planning professionals. As we honor this rich history, our focus remains firmly set on building a lasting legacy for the next 40 years by expanding engagement, networking, and leadership opportunities for all members. Our momentum is growing across the globe as we continue to expand through regional cohorts and localized events, such as the Tri-Services SAME Regional Summit held in Germany in March 2026.

We also have incredible things ahead for our June 2027 Annual Training Workshop. We look forward to sharing additional details during our upcoming FPD Annual Business Meeting on November 19, 2026, at 1:30 PM Eastern Time, where we will recognize our 2025 winners, review our year, outline future initiatives, and share exciting updates for the 2027 conference.

In addition to looking forward, we are also celebrating the people and stories that brought us here. A heartfelt thank you to Steve Baird, FPD Vice Chair, for his tireless efforts in cataloging our division's 40-year history and sharing it with our community. If you haven't had a chance to explore it yet, please check it out on our website. Furthermore, if you want to leave your own mark on FPD history, stay tuned for details on the FPD Challenge Coin Design Competition, a unique opportunity to design an emblem commemorating our legacy.

Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to our FPD Executive Committee members for your steadfast leadership, service, and dedication throughout the year. To our members, FPD's strength lies entirely in your talent and participation. I invite each of our members to get involved—whether by joining a committee, volunteering for upcoming events, or helping shape our regional cohorts. Thank you for your passion, your service, and your continued commitment to federal planning excellence. Here's to the next 40 years!

Warm regards,



Shenita McConis, PE, PMP, AICP
Chair, Federal Planning Division
American Planning Association

HELLO FROM THE APA LGBTQ DIVISION



Hi all,

I'm Justin Dula, the chair of the LGBTQ and Planning Division. Thanks for the opportunity to introduce the Division and help continue our partnerships with FPD.

I want to express my admiration for all the work done by folks in the federal government to help improve the lives of those in the United States. I am a former federal employee, having worked at the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights. Though my time working with the federal government was shorter than I'd like, it remains a highlight of my career. My colleagues in the federal government were among the most competent and dedicated colleagues I've had the pleasure to work with. I really want to commend you all on the work you do to help improve the lives of those around the country, even in the face of adversity.

As a population-focused division, the LGBTQ and Planning Division helps to serve both professional planners who identify with the LGBTQ+ community and assist all planners in better reaching out to LGBTQ+ identified communities. We are happy to be a resource to all members of APA and the Federal Planning Division in conducting inclusive outreach, which is at the heart of our profession. Please feel free to contact us as a resource in helping to navigate your work as it relates to inclusive planning to our community by contacting lgbtqplanning@gmail.com or through the other channels shared on the following pages.

We look forward to continuing our partnerships and helping to help meet the aspirational goals of the planning profession together.

Justin Dula, AICP | APA LGBTQ and Planning Division Chair

Committees

Executive Committee

Elected by division membership on a two year cycle. Leads division as outlined in the Bylaws. The executive committee hosts Percolate with Pride chats every other week (first Friday and third Tuesday of every month, noon and 5pm EST, respectively) to hear from folks who are members or may want to connect with division leadership. Stop by to meet fellow division members or ask questions for an informal chat or just hear what is happening.

- **Contact:** lgbtqplanning+exec@gmail.com

Communication

Focuses on communications with Division members, including through the website, social media, and email blasts and coordinates with other committees on content. Meets the first Monday of the month at 5pm EST.

- **Contact:** co-chairs Megan Flory and Michael Greco at lgbtqplanning+comms@gmail.com

Programs

Focuses on programming provided by and for Division members, including webinars, in person local events, National Planning Conference programming, and coordinating on LGBTQ+ events with APA Chapters and other APA Divisions. Meets every third Monday at 8pm EST.

- **Contact:** Nathan Davis at lgbtq+programs@gmail.com

Membership

Focuses on membership expansion and retention. This would include volunteer outreach and coordination, analyzing the membership survey to make recommendations, working on a mentorship program in coordination with the other committees.

- **Contact:** Jonathan Tarr at lgbtq+membership@gmail.com

Committees (cont.)

Student, Young, and Emerging Professional Committee (SYEP)

SYEP Committee is led by students and young emerging planners committed to uplifting queer planning students and early-career professionals. We exist to foster connection, visibility, and leadership opportunities for LGBTQIA+ individuals navigating the field of planning. Our mission is to build an inclusive, peer-driven space where emerging voices from around the country can be heard, supported, and celebrated. This is done through collaborative programming, storytelling, advocacy, and resource-sharing rooted in lived experience, not gatekeeping.

The committee's structure brings together leadership, internal operations, outreach, programming, and student voice into one coordinated team:

- Chair and Co-Chair lead meetings, set direction, and maintain communication with the executive team while supporting all roles.
- Secretary/Internal Communications Lead keeps the committee organized by managing notes, calendars, decisions, and internal updates.
- Events/Programming Leads plan and execute engagement activities and handle logistics and reimbursements.
- Outreach & Communications Leads manage Discord, social media content, and broader engagement, including dedicated outreach to both students and emerging planners while maintaining the full roster.
- Student Representatives contribute perspectives from planning programs and early-career experiences, either in meetings or through monthly updates.
- Project Volunteers offer flexible support for events or initiatives without holding formal positions.

Our committee kickoff meeting took place in February 2026, and as members continue onboarding and settling into their roles, we've begun outlining a broad set of programming ideas we hope to implement and experiment with over time. These concepts reflect the committee's long-term vision for supporting LGBTQIA+ students and emerging planners through mentorship, storytelling, professional development, community-building, and equity-centered planning practice. We envision developing practical support resources, templates for universities and divisions, co-hosted placemaking activities, and programming that centers race, sexuality, geography, class, and support for LGBTQIA+ youth and houseless community members, grounded in engagement that begins at the municipal level.

Our first initiative as a committee was to formalize the NPC26 student scholarship process, transforming last year's scholarship into a structured application and recruitment system. This included creating a clear application workflow, conducting targeted outreach to students, and establishing a transparent selection process.

- **Contact:** Stefanie Esteban at lgbtq+syep@gmail.com

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Transforming Planning Charrettes for Accelerated MILCON Delivery

By Steve Baird, AICP | FPD Vice Chair

As planners, we create high-quality planning products that will set a project up for its best shot at success. Recent changes to the Military Construction (MILCON) process, however, may put the planning process at risk of being undervalued, as designers and contractors move quickly into project development. While the changes are being deciphered and the process is still malleable, the planning community should review their own processes and offer input into the coming changes.

The 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) was signed into law on December 18, 2025. Section 2809 of the NDAA gives authority to authorized agencies (such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [USACE] and Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command [NAVFAC]) to use accelerated design-build and progressive design-build procedures for MILCON projects. This new authority expands the use of alternative delivery methods. The use of Other Transaction Authority (OTA), as authorized by 10 United States Code (U.S.C.) 2808a, is permitted to execute these projects outside of traditional FAR-based methods, which further streamlines the process – while creating the opportunity to miss key steps in the pre-planning of projects.

In terms of the impact to planning, the Planning Charrette Report (PCR) process is a strong candidate for review and alignment with the goals of MILCON transformation and executing projects via Progressive Design-Build and Design-Build. FPD is planning to host an Industry-Government Engagement (IGE) event with the goal of providing meaningful and actionable recommendations to validate the role of the PCR in these new delivery methods. Experts from the planning, design, and construction fields will be convened to generate recommendations to re-imagine the PCR.

We are looking for key subject matter experts in planning, programming, design, cost estimating and construction to be part of a dynamic IGE Roundtable event currently planned for late February in Germany (in conjunction with the CENAU Program Brief). If you have relevant experience and wish to impact the future of the PCR, contact Steve Baird, AICP, FPD Vice Chair, at bairdjs@bv.com for more information and to express your interest in participating in this event.

CERTIFICATION MAINTENANCE

By Ricqui Brager, AICP and Heather Mendenall, AICP, CCF | Professional Development Officers

Become a CM Provider

If your organization offers professional development opportunities for planners, consider applying to become an APA Certification Maintenance (CM) Provider, enabling you to offer your CM-eligible activities for AICP credential holders.

Mandatory topic credits (Ethics, Law, Equity, and Sustainability/Resilience) require at least one hour per topic and must apply to current planning practice. Diversity of speakers is strongly encouraged.

As a CM Provider, you can promote your events through the APA CM Search, where more than 16,000 AICP members look for eligible training.

To Qualify, Activities Must:

- Address a planning-related education or training objective.
- Be at least 15 minutes long (or 1 hour for mandatory topic credits).
- Include at least one subject matter expert, and for mandatory topics, at least one speaker must hold American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) credentials (with a majority AICP for ethics).
- Clearly state learning outcomes, CM credits, speakers, and contact information when listed.

Helpful Resources:

- APA CM Program Overview
- APA CM Provider Toolkit *(requires member login)*
- CM Providers Resources
- CM Search

Recent CM Webinars

FPD recently held a webinar titled "Federal Planning Trends and Installation Planning," CM #: 9338035.

The webinar was hosted by the APA Ohio Chapter as part of their webinar series. It was an informative presentation with an amazing turnout of over 300+ virtual attendees. If there is any interest in 2027 to present a session with the APA Ohio Chapter Webcast Series, please reach out to Ricqui or Heather, the FPD Professional Development Officers, who can coordinate how to submit and schedule a session with the APA Ohio Chapter.

- **Recording:** APA Ohio Webinar, Federal Planning Trends and Installation Planning, CM #: 9338035, https://youtu.be/TezigVtw380

Stay tuned for a winter FPD webinar series!

FPD has received interest in those wanting to present a webinar to FPD members. If you are interested, please reach out to the FPD Professional Development Officers (PDOs) to coordinate.

- Ricqui Brager, AICP
- Heather Mendenall, AICP, CCF



Upcoming CM Opportunities

APA Ohio Chapter Webcast Series:

Indigenous Methodologies for Sustainable and Resilient Planning and Design Practices

- AICP CM: 1.5 | SR AICP CM: 1.0 | Eq AICP CM: 1.0
- November 19, 2026, 12:00 PM CST
- Registration and more information

Held during Native American Heritage Month, this webinar features Indigenous planners and scholars exploring sustainable, culturally grounded approaches to planning and design. Through presentations, a panel discussion, and Q&A, speakers will highlight place-based knowledge, community engagement, environmental adaptability, and strategies for building respectful partnerships with Native Nations and Indigenous communities.

Guest Hosts: APA Sustainable Communities & Tribal and Indigenous Planning Divisions

APA Ohio Chapter Webcast Series:

Trust but Verify: Measuring Whether Planning AI Actually Works

- AICP CM: 1.5
- November 20, 2026, 12:00 PM CST
- Registration and more information

This webinar shifts the focus from whether large language models (LLMs) can improve public access to planning information to the harder question every planning department faces before deployment: how to evaluate whether a given AI software or workflow is actually fit for the task. Using the Urban Institute's work connecting AI to the Minneapolis zoning code through retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), the session presents a practical framework for evaluating LLMs on planning-related tasks, covering how to define what "good" looks like for a specific audience and use-case and how to measure response quality, accuracy, relevance, and reliability.

Guest Host: APA Technology Division

APA Ohio Chapter Webcast Series:

This is the Way: An Insider's Guide to Private Practice

- AICP CM: 1.5
- December 4, 2026, 12:00 PM CST
- Registration and more information

This session explores the challenges, rewards, and career opportunities of private sector planning. Through a moderated panel discussion, experienced planning professionals will share their career journeys, insights into the business side of planning, and perspectives on the opportunities and constraints of private practice. Panelists will offer practical advice for those considering joining or starting a planning firm, drawing on their diverse public and private sector experiences. Featuring storytelling, humor, audience participation, and live polling, this interactive session will provide valuable insights and inspiration for planners at every career stage.

American Trails Advancing Trails Webinar Series:

Training for a Future I Could Not See: How Conservation Experiences Build Lasting Capabilities

- AICP CM: 1.0
- December 10, 2026, 12:00 - 1:00 PM CST
- Registration and more information

Through personal narrative, guided reflection, and practical discussion, this webinar will encourage participants to consider how conservation and trail-related experiences can prepare people for responsibilities they cannot yet anticipate.

Presented by: Robert Graham, Author, Field Notes

FPD COHORT UPDATES AND BEST PRACTICES

By Katie Benzel, AICP, | Communications Coordinator

FPD cohorts have been coming together across the country! This year, we welcomed new cohorts in Pittsburgh and Atlanta, and there may be some action brewing down in Florida and across the pond in Europe, as well! Stay tuned for more.

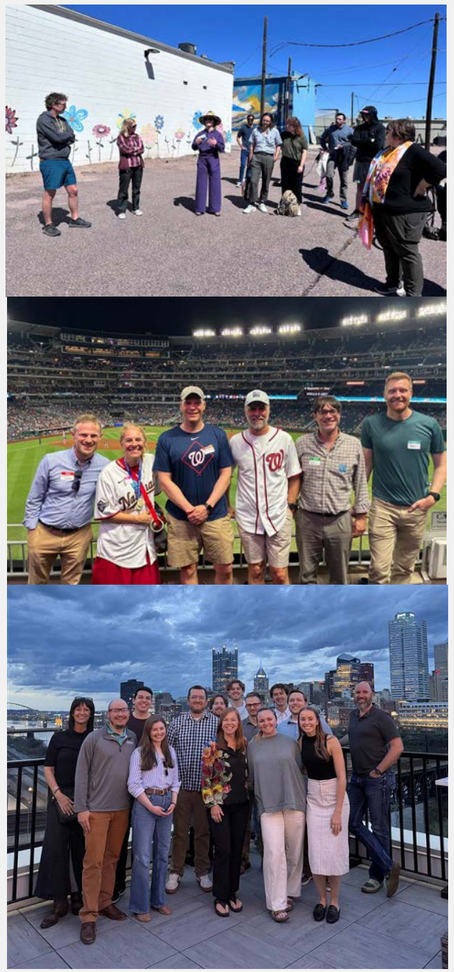
As a reminder, you can find all of our cohort contact information on our website: FPD Regional Cohorts.

Our most active cohort is located in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. Be sure to reach out to Paula Loomis and Travis Willer to receive their email updates.

Cohorts are a great way to meet other federal planners in your area to talk about work, or not! Extend FPD's reach outside of our annual training workshop and find some federal friends in your own backyard.

Emily Voorhees and Tony Robbins are gauging interest for a Jacksonville, FL, cohort; be sure to email them to stay up to date.





Top: Members of FPD Colorado Springs and APA Colorado took a downtown walking tour in honor of Jane Jacobs during a Jane's Walk in early May.

Middle: Members of the FPD DC cohort watched the Nationals take on the Rockies in August.

Bottom: The Pittsburgh FPD cohort got its start with a rooftop happy hour gathering in April.

Best Practices for Starting (and Sustaining) a Cohort

- **Start with who you know.** Cohorts do best in areas that have a lot of federal institutions or a lot of planning firm branches. Start with a small inner circle and ask each prospective member to invite someone else.
- **Start simple.** A simple happy hour or meetup at an interesting location can be great to spark conversation. Encourage people to come with ideas for future events. Aim for 1-3 events in your first year, including a few educational and a few purely social. Pro tip: Lean in to your hobbies (hiking? pickle ball?) and get others to join you.
- **Keep it grassroots.** Planning events shouldn't all fall on one person. Ask your members for ideas about things they could present on, or places in your city that could make a good walking tour.
- **Partner with other organizations.** State APA chapters often have local regional representatives, and there are a ton of SAME posts across the country and abroad. Reach out to these folks to set up joint events, which can make the lift even lighter. Look into established planning-related events like Jane's Walk, which provides resources to help plan and advertise your event.
- **Consider virtual offerings.** Create a virtual book club. Or better yet, host a webinar and apply for CM credit for a presentation from a local subject matter expert. AICP planners will line up! Refer to page 10 of this magazine or reach out to the FPD PDOs Heather Mendenall and Ricqui Brager for how to become eligible for CM.

AWARD WINNERS

By Diana De Gonzalez, AICP | Awards Program Co-Chair

2025 APA FPD Annual Awards Program

We're thrilled to kick off another year of honoring our top federal planning projects. Thank you to everyone who completed the awards survey, guiding changes to this year's awards process. Please keep an eye out for survey results and calls for committee members and jurors!

FPD Awards Committee

Diana de Gonzalez, AICP | Chairperson FY25-26 | WSP
Travis Willer, AICP | Co-Chairperson FY23-24 | USAF - ACC
Beth Rothman, AICP | AECOM
Dr. Paula Loomis, FAIA, AICP | The Urban Collaborative
Jay Pezzotti | USAF - SFCEC
Ed McConnell, AICP | HDR, Inc.
Amy Vandeveer, AICP | USAF - AFCEC
Fernando Hernandez | USAF - AFCEC
Alison Eubanks, AICP | USAF - Spangdahlem AB, 52d Civil Engineer Squadron
Margaret Durant, AICP | AECOM

2025 Award Program Jurors

Leslie Bender
Katie Benzel
Kinyata Evans
Barry Gordon
Kelsey Hinke
Gregory Lipscomb
Ashley Oliver
Sally Payne
Liz Perales
Nathan Rickard
Will Sanford
Kunth Shah
Jennifer Sheppard
Amy St. George
Mark Theys
David Thomas
Ivy Thompson
Emily Voorhees
Ben Warsinske
Adam Wilkerson
Ben Zitelli

Each year, the APA's FPD honors excellence in federal planning through its Annual Awards Program. These awards celebrate the best in project innovation, technical achievement, environmental stewardship, and individual leadership across federal agencies and military services. The 2025 award winners highlight how thoughtful planning strengthens mission readiness, promotes resilience, and builds stronger connections between federal facilities and their surrounding communities. Collectively, they affirm the importance of planning as a tool for advancing federal missions while strengthening communities, protecting resources, and shaping a more resilient future.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU:
Fill out the awards survey to help shape this program in future years:
www.surveymonkey.com/r/T9YDN7N

Category 1: Outstanding Federal Planning Program	
Honor Award	**FY21 United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) Poland Provided Infrastructure (PPI) Planning and Programming Support** | *United States Air Force, Republic of Poland, and the Woolpert-Black & Veatch Joint Venture*
Merit Award	**Ammunition & Explosives Facilities Support (A&EFS) Program** | *United States Navy and AECOM*
Citation Award	**FY22 United States Air Force Civil Engineer Center (AFCEC) District Plans and Transportation Plans** | *United States Air Force and The Schreifer Group*
Category 2: Outstanding District/Area Development Project	
Honor Award	**North Riverside Complex Real Property Master Plan Update** | *Illinois Army National Guard and JG&A-The Schreifer Group Joint Venture*
Merit Award	**Ramstein Air Base Husterhöhe District Development Plan** | *United States Air Force, Federal Republic of Germany, and The Urban Collaborative*
Citation Award	**Port of Manzanillo Master Plan** | *United States Army Corps of Engineers, Dominican Republic, and WSP*
Category 3: Outstanding Facility Requirements Project	
Honor Award	**Program of Requirements for Research Buildings 2, 3, and 4** | *National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and Metropolitan Architects and Planners, Inc.*
Merit Award	**United States Army Headquarters (HQ) Installation Management Command (IMCOM) Power Projection Platform Requirements Analysis** | *United States Army and Michael Baker International*
Category 4: Outstanding Technical Planning Project	
Honor Award	**The James V. Forrestal Building Technical Assistance Panel Report** | *National Capital Planning Commission, Public Buildings Reform Board (PBRB), and Urban Land Institute (ULI) Washington*
Merit Award	**United States Air Force Academy Monuments and Memorials Master Plan** | *United States Air Force and AECOM*
Citation Award	**National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Post-Agencywide Information Awareness Facility Consolidation Assessment (PAFCA)** | *National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and The Urban Collaborative*
Category 5: Outstanding Environmental Planning Project	
Honor Award	**Southern Indiana Military Installation Resilience Review** | *United States Navy and Tetra Tech*
Merit Award	**Avon Park United States Air Force Range Military Installation Readiness Review** | *United States Air Force and Marstel-Day*
Citation Award	**Engineering With Nature Natural Infrastructure for Mission Readiness at United States Navy and Marine Corps Installations** | *United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, and Jacobs*
Category 8: Outstanding Planner of the Year	
Margaret Durant | *AECOM*	
Category 9: Outstanding Emerging Planner of the Year	
Bailey Moro | *The Schreifer Group*	
Category 11: Rik Wiant Distinguished Service & Leadership	
David Ziegman | *Woolpert*	

Category 1: Outstanding Federal Planning Program

FY21 USAFE PPI Planning and Programming Support

United States Air Force, Republic of Poland, and the Woolpert-Black & Veatch Joint Venture



This planning effort addressed a complex challenge requiring coordination among U.S. and Polish planning frameworks, stakeholders, and mission requirements. The planning team demonstrated adaptability by relocating the proposed project site based on stakeholder workshops and analysis, ultimately selecting an alternative that better supported long-term mission objectives. The plan established a clear path forward while maintaining alignment with broader U.S., Polish, and NATO objectives. Beyond its immediate application, the planning methods used to coordinate multiple organizations, planning systems, and stakeholder groups can be applied to other international and multi agency efforts. Combined with a well-organized bilingual presentation and successful integration of mission, stakeholder, and planning requirements, the project distinguished itself from other submissions and represented the strongest overall example of excellence in federal planning practice.

Category 2: Outstanding District/Area Development Project

North Riverside Complex Real Property Master Plan Update

United States Army National Guard and JG&A-The Schreifer Group Joint Venture



This plan rose to the top as the best example of an ADP in this category because of how it promoted adaptive reuse and good stewardship of federal dollars. The need for the plan and the implementation strategy was clearly laid out. The jury appreciated the clear writing and presentation and the easy to read mapping. It was a great plan as a steward for adaptable reuse, modernization, footprint reduction, and overall capacity visualization. It also specifically calls out contributions of the National Guard stakeholders.

Category 3: Outstanding Facility Requirements Project

Program of Requirements for Research Buildings 2, 3, and 4

National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and Metropolitan Architects and Planners, Inc.



The award recognizes the comprehensive analytical process that included planning and design context, qualitative and quantitative performance criteria, sustainability, and other critical factors. The innovative multi-disciplinary approach centered the daily users of the space, creating "research neighborhood" concepts that balanced shared space and technically diverse labs, leveraged video tours made by laboratory users during Covid, and included room-by-room programming sessions. The project prepared for design-build implementation by including minimum performance standards, inclusive of architecture and engineering, detailed diagramming, and coordination with the campus standards. The requirements process built up from requirements to dimensional bubble diagrams to real property concepts to effectively rehabilitate out-of-standard research facilities.

Category 4: Outstanding Technical Planning Project

The James V. Forrestal Building Technical Assistance Panel Report

National Capital Planning Commission, PBRB, and ULI Washington



The James V. Forrestal Building Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Report represents the highest standard of federal technical planning by transforming a complex federal real estate challenge into an actionable, consensus-driven roadmap for implementation. Developed through a partnership among the National Capital Planning Commission, Public Buildings Reform Board, and Urban Land Institute Washington, the effort combined rigorous federal planning analysis with private-sector expertise to evaluate realistic alternatives for the future of the Forrestal Building and its role within the National Capital Region. The project's success is demonstrated by its ability to reduce stakeholder uncertainty, align federal and local priorities, and directly support the accelerated disposition strategy that enabled the Department of Energy's relocation from the facility.

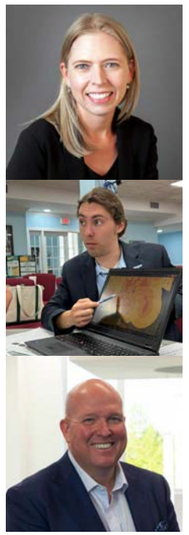
Category 5: Outstanding Environmental Planning Project

Southern Indiana Military Installation Resilience Review

United States Navy and Tetra Tech



The Southern Indiana Military Installation Resilience Review (SIMIRR) is an exemplary model of integrated resilience planning that successfully bridges military readiness with regional collaboration. Through a systems-based approach, the project united military installations, local governments, utilities, universities, and regional partners to develop stakeholder-driven, implementable solutions that address complex, interconnected challenges. Its innovative use of GIS, FEMA Hazus modeling, interactive vulnerability workshops, and a large-scale tabletop exercise transformed technical analysis into a collaborative decision-making process, while a detailed implementation roadmap—including project priorities, funding strategies, permitting considerations, and assigned responsibilities—ensures recommendations are both feasible and actionable. By building on prior regional planning efforts and aligning local, state, and federal objectives, SIMIRR demonstrates how resilience planning can break down organizational silos, strengthen military and community partnerships, and create a highly transferable framework for integrated regional planning.



Category 8: Outstanding Planner of the Year

Margaret Durant

AECOM

Category 9: Outstanding Emerging Planner of the Year

Bailey Moro

The Schreifer Group

Category 11: Rik Wiant Distinguished Service and Leadership Award

David Ziegman

Woolpert

FPD Updates

ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

Join us for updates on the latest from FPD, including much anticipated details about our 2027 Annual Training Workshop!

We will also provide a presentation of the award winners for each of our categories.

TEAMS MEETING LINK

Meeting ID: 236 020 628 780 263 4

Passcode: Ka7kU3h4

Dial in by phone:

+1 917-809-8575, 994476822#



WELCOME TO THE EC

This year's election results are in, and FPD is happy to announce that Sean Martin, AICP, PMP, will be our next FPD Vice Chair as of Jan. 1, 2027. Sean is an Army veteran who brings decades of experience with local, county, regional, and federal planning. The Executive Committee is excited to gain his voice moving forward.



Reflections from GOS 2026 Summer Internship:

CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD

By Will Seemiller ★ *FPD Member-provided Content*

This summer I had the opportunity to work at Cushman & Wakefield in their St. Louis office as a global occupier services intern. Cushman & Wakefield is a global commercial real estate company specializing in development and management. Throughout my 10-week program, I learned from development professionals and got to learn about the project lifecycle, from initial bidding to restaurant field management on the Chick-fil-A account. Cushman & Wakefield gave me my first introduction to a corporate environment, and throughout this internship experience I was able to learn more about how my urban planning education can be applied to real estate development through understanding land use ordinances and how they affect designs in multiple parts of the country. Chick-fil-A has the goal of opening 175 new restaurant locations across the US in 2026.

My first couple of weeks at Cushman & Wakefield allowed me to cycle through the various project teams, from field management to design & construction. The field management team deals with currently opened restaurant locations, and coordinates with operators to ensure CFA's strict design regulations are consistently met. Because Cushman & Wakefield works on a nationwide scale, field management consultants are tasked with collaborating with service vendors that provide the experience restaurants aim to cultivate. Design, construction, and development teams look at each project individually, sometimes dozen at a time, to examine the space that new restaurants aim to occupy and ensure that the physical space of a restaurant complies with its contextual physical environment. One development meeting I was able to shadow talked about a new construction of a restaurant situated along a rural highway. Professionals were tasked to think large issues, such as how a drive-thru may affect traffic flow, to even the smallest details of how an outdoor sign may affect visibility and the aesthetic character of a region. There were also many times where I had to think about how the municipal regulations for land-use, decided by the town's local planners, affect the feasibility and cost of a new restaurant construction. Many fellow planning students may be familiar with conducting due diligence reports and environmental impact assessments in their works—something I've learned can kill a potential restaurant construction before ground is even broken on a project. Through site tours of different Cushman & Wakefield-owned buildings across the city, I was also able to gain insight on the massive funding required for large scale projects, such as offices. I think about a tour of the Rawlings HQ in St. Louis, a massive office complex with a 35,000 lb golden baseball glove installed at the top of the building. The infrastructure and permitting required for a feature many people likely overlook absolutely astounded me. Projects require coordination on a scale that supersedes just the planning body of a city and its developers. Engineers, architects, brokers, and suppliers, are all stakeholders in any new construction project. The biggest lesson I learned at Cushman & Wakefield was really about the large amount of risk developers take on both in time and money, which just reinforced to me the value of understanding the sites we use to build our communities.

In planning education, students like me are often taught to think about the theory of how space is used. We are prepared to work for municipal governments to make spaces people enjoy being in. At Cushman & Wakefield, I got the opportunity to see how those regulations affect private developers firsthand, and I began to think about how the economic development of different regions (even in the construction of a new fast-food restaurants) can be both propulsed and halted by what us planners allow the land to be used like. It gave me a very interesting insight into the battle between public good that planners strive for the profit incentive developers need in order to engage in such a high-stakes industry. My call to action for aspiring planners is this: try not to get too lost in the weeds of how you can limit development. Developers strive to turn a profit, and oftentimes harsher regulations on land use are sole reasons why a town may be overlooked for revitalization. In the new age of planning, with less focus on expansion, we can focus on revitalization of our spaces for public use. After experiencing the private side of land use, I urge future planners to think of ways to work with developers instead of against them. Look at fast food restaurants with the same opportunity as parks and public spaces. They have an untapped opportunity to become third spaces, to become treasured aspects of a community, and the relationships that planners can build with developers can spark reinvestment by turning private entities into permanent investors in a community.





CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF FEDERAL PLANNING

1986–2026 | Honoring Our History and Shaping Our Future

By Steve Baird, AICP | FPD Vice Chair

In 2026, the American Planning Association's Federal Planning Division (FPD) celebrates 40 years of advancing federal planning, strengthening professional connections, and creating opportunities for those who plan and shape our nation's federal facilities, installations, and communities.



Past Chairs Meeting in 2011: L-R: David Van Horn, Mark Lundgren Roger Blevins, Jerry Zekert, Bill Myers, Andrea Wohfeld-Kuhn, Stan Mael, Leticia Gomez, Joe Hart

FPD's story began with a simple but important goal: to ensure that federal and military planners had a recognized place within the broader planning profession. In September 1986, the American Planning Association (APA) approved the establishment of the Federal Installation Planning Division, marking a significant milestone in the professional recognition of federal planning.

What began as a grassroots effort by dedicated planners has evolved into a professional community committed to education, collaboration, and advancing the practice of federal planning.

Built by Planners. Sustained by Community.

FPD's history is ultimately a story of people. From the founding members who championed professional recognition to the volunteers, Division chairs, workshop organizers, and members who have sustained its mission, each generation has contributed to the organization's growth and success.

Forty years later, that spirit of service, collaboration, and professional advancement remains central to FPD's identity.

Explore Our History

This anniversary offers an opportunity to reflect on the people and milestones that shaped FPD. Read the full retrospective, "40 Years of Federal Planning: The Journey to Professional Federal Planning," for a closer look at the Division's founding, evolution, leadership, and annual training workshops.

- **READ the full 40th Anniversary Retrospective**

1986

A Division is Born

Following the efforts of pioneering federal planners, APA formally approved the Federal Installation Planning Division. Its establishment helped bring federal and military planning into the broader professional planning community.

1988 to 1993

Expanding Our Mission

The Division evolved into the Federal Planning Division, reflecting a broader mission that extended beyond installation planning to include federal planning policy and programs. During these formative years, FPD emphasized professional education, knowledge sharing, and greater participation in APA.

1993 to 1994

Creating New Opportunities

Recognizing the need for more dedicated professional development opportunities, FPD members organized an independent workshop preceding APA's National Planning Conference in 1993. Its success helped establish the foundation for the Division's annual training workshops, with the first formally listed workshop held in San Francisco in 1994.

1994 to 2025

Strengthening the Profession

FPD continued to expand opportunities for federal planners through workshops, conferences, professional networking, and leadership within APA. Its efforts also helped advance recognition of military planning experience for AICP eligibility and opened pathways for federal planners to achieve recognition through the AICP College of Fellows.

2026 and beyond

Looking Toward the Future

As FPD celebrates its 40th anniversary, the Division is exploring new opportunities to serve its members, strengthen professional partnerships, and continue advancing federal planning. Building on four decades of progress, FPD is considering new ways to collaborate with organizations such as the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME).

LOOKING BACK AT THE 2026 FPD ANNUAL TRAINING WORKSHOP

By Katie Benzel, AICP | Communications Coordinator

The FPD, in partnership with the SAME DC Post, returned to Washington, D.C., for three days of community building and learning. After FPD had to cancel the workshop due to a lapse of federal funding in 2025, it was readily apparent that our membership was eager to get back together.

The workshop, held at the National Press Club, sold out a few weeks in advance, proving that federal planners were excited to come together and discuss changes and trends in the industry and connect with friends and colleagues new and old.

The workshop opened with an engaging talk from Thomas E. Austin, the Architect of the Capitol, whose office is charged with preserving the historic federal buildings and grounds that make up the U.S. Capitol campus. Informative sessions were a mix of updates about new technology and planning techniques, project-specific sessions, and interactive exercises. One well-attended session in the ballroom featured representatives from each major military branch and shared a preview of an upcoming Department of Defense Instruction that will roll out a new digital master planning process.

The FPD also had awards certificates ready for our 2024 award winners due to the cancellation of the 2025 workshop. Outstanding project work and key figures in federal planning are selected each year by a panel of jurors and the executive committee. (More details on this program are on page 18 of this issue.)

Of course, the real magic of any FPD gathering happens between the sessions and after hours, when industry friends get to reconnect and form new bonds. The standout event this year was the closing networking social at the Capo Speakeasy, a backroom bar accessed through a deli storefront. Optional mobile tours held the day after the workshop sessions wrapped included a sunset river cruise along the Potomac and walking tours on the National Mall.

The FPD found this event to be a great success and looks forward to resuming the annual cadence of workshops in partnership with like organizations such as SAME. Stay tuned for more details on the Annual Training Workshop in 2027!



SAME DC Post President Bree Beal, left, and FPD Chair Shenita McConis.



Dominique Norman of the Army Reserve Installation Management Directorate was honored with the Rik Wiant Award for 2024.



FPD Executive Committee members, L-R: Mary Finnegan, Ricqui Brager, Jill Schreifer, Brittany Bates, Shenita McConis, Diana De Gonzales, Katie Benzel, Steve Baird, Sarah Diehl, Terrence Harrington, and Dana Orkin.



Planners practiced real-world techniques during several interactive sessions at the workshop.



Left to right, Kelly Olson, Rogelio Flores, Shenita McConis, Rachael Richter, Bethaney Krzys, and Nate Manning presented on the future of digital master planning for military installations.

DEFINING A SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH

for Planning Projects in Poland

By Yinka Adesubokan, AICP ★ *FPD Member-provided Content*

To reach full operational capacity (FOC) across the Republic of Poland, components of U.S. Army Europe and Africa (USAREUR-AF), Installation Management Command-Europe (IMCOM-E), U.S. Army Garrison-Poland (USAG-Poland), and U.S. Air Forces in Europe – Air Forces Africa (USAFE-AFAFRICA) are utilizing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District (USACE NAU) to plan, design, and construct a growing portfolio of approximately $7 billion in military infrastructure investments across the country.

Based on a three-year perspective of working within this large scale bi-lateral effort, I have sought to ground my responsibilities as a Master Planner in what is outlined in the Military Decision-Making Process Handbook (No. 15-06): Planning is both the art and science of understanding a situation, envisioning a desired future, and laying out effective ways of bringing that future to fruition.

To successfully execute a multi-billion-dollar U.S.–Polish military infrastructure portfolio and prevent costly bilateral impasses, multi-national Project Development Teams (PDTs) must establish and enforce the Initial Planning Charrette packages as our binding "single source of truth"—basing every project on validated mission requirements rather than evolving ideas or fragmented interpretations of outdated project titles.



Poland Agreed Facilities and Areas utility upgrades.

The Bilateral Framework and Strategic Posture in Poland

The United States leads the Enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group in Poland and deploys a rotational Armored Brigade Combat Team in the country under Operation Atlantic Resolve. Through these operations, U.S., Polish, and other Coalition forces are co-located at multiple existing and expanding military sites across the country.

Signed on August 15, 2020, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) enacted a historic bilateral arrangement between the United States and Poland in which the Host Nation funds facility design & construction, while providing logistical support for U.S. Forces in Poland to meet regional operational and security requirements. The EDCA established 19 installations—designated as Agreed Facilities and Areas (AFAs)—alongside a comprehensive list of military infrastructure projects:

- Poland Provided Infrastructure (PPI): Encompasses 115 agreed-upon military construction projects. In 2026, the estimated cost of PPI facilities grew to approximately $4 billion.
- Poland Provided Logistical Support (PPLS): Covers required food, fuel, housing, supply storage, telecommunications, facility maintenance, fire and emergency services, medical care, and base life-support needs for up to 12,000 personnel annually, currently executed at roughly $150 million per year.
- U.S. Provided Infrastructure (USPI): To achieve FOC alongside PPI, U.S. proponent organizations are funding more than 330 additional USPI projects across Poland.

Since 2020, to support U.S. Forces across both the PPI and USPI programs, USACE NAU inaugurated a Special Program Integration Office (SPIO) to consolidate district engineering, construction, and program/project management resources. During this time the NAU Regional Planning Support Center (RPSC) has worked with both U.S. and Polish stakeholders to develop Poland-wide Land and Air Vision Plans, comprehensive Requirements Analyses, and Installation Development Plans—including six Area Development Plans (ADPs) with adjoining Execution Plans for U.S. Army AFAs, six ADPs with Execution Plans for U.S. Air Force Aerial Ports of Debarkation (APODs), and follow-on Planning Charrette Reports (PCRs) for every individual project as required.

Once fully realized, this list of projects will reach FOC as just-in-time investments of military construction. However, a military facility is not exclusively a budgeted building request, but a capital investment in mission capability, human resources, land use, energy, resilience, and sustainment. Consequently, the planning foundations we establish in initial project defining reports must stand the test of time by remaining anchored in validated user requirements and functional criteria. In practice, that requires aligning competing resources and multi-disciplinary, multi-national PDTs behind a single source of need to champion each project through completion—a task made significantly more complex by shifts in both countries military posture and the inflation in the cost of construction since 2020.

Navigating a Dynamic Bilateral Stakeholder Pool

The most critical and challenging aspects of installation master planning in this environment is bringing all pertinent stakeholders together and achieving consensus on project scope during the planning phase. Countless hours from subject matter experts (SMEs), end-users, and bilateral program managers went into developing our initial master planning products and project lists. However, over the past six years, organizational priorities have evolved, the U.S. mission has shifted from rotational forces to an enduring presence, and fiscal constraints fluctuate every budget cycle in both Washington and Warsaw. Because of these shifts, a project originally listed in the 2020 EDCA as construct "Maintenance Facility & Motor Pool" has evolved in 2026 into a U.S. operational requirement for a "14-Bay Tactical Equipment Maintenance Facility with Supporting Infrastructure" —a scope expansion that both parties struggle to reconcile. Such discrepancies consistently turn what should be a collaborative planning charrette into a contentious line-item budget negotiation.

An additional dynamic involves the Host Nation holding substantial influence over which projects advance through planning, design, and construction due to how the PPI program is structured:

1. **Case-by-Case Foreign Military Sales (FMS):** USACE administers the PPI program under FMS allowing Poland to procure U.S. engineering and construction services through government-to-government agreements ("cases"). Unlike FMS programs in other nations where an entire portfolio is delivered under a single umbrella case, each PPI project is administered as its own individual case.
2. **Decentralized Host Nation Authorities:** A bilateral adjudication board of two officers from each nation oversees the PPI program, project-level execution spans 12 Regional Infrastructure Offices (RZIs), 24 Garrison Support Units (GSUs), and individual Base/Training Commands at each AFA. Each authority operates with significant autonomy and can have its own interpretation of the minimally descriptive projects listed in the EDCA.
3. **Cost and Land Control:** Under EDCA regulations, the Host Nation does not dictate specific U.S. operational resources or functional scope, but Polish authorities retain the right to review and challenge total cost estimates and maintain direct control over site selection and land conveyance.

At the PDT level, this structure means that any disagreement over a project's title or scope can quickly trigger an impasse during the planning phase —pushing the PDT further apart from agreeing to a project's single source of need. In the best-case scenario, a resolution is found after a few weeks of request for information (RFI) exchanges. On the more challenging end, months after in-person workshops, breakdowns in communication lead to the draftings of Memorandums for Record, to document each organizations competing position, deferring tangible solutions into later stages of design.

Lessons Learned: The PCR as the Single Source of Truth

When the source of need fragments early in a project, it introduces avoidable schedule risk, scope increases, mismatched engineering assumptions, and volatile cost rationale at every subsequent stage of execution.

To be successful, the planning foundation must clearly communicate project scope and cost that dispersed stakeholder groups can defend as they carry the project forward through each subsequent phase. Our PDTs must be equipped to deliver a unified project summary—articulating required capabilities, selected solutions, strict scope boundaries, critical assumptions, and the consequences of maintaining the status quo—both up and down the chain of command.

Master planning seeks to find optimal solutions for the greatest number of people served. Developing a validated project criteria package at the planning stage to serve as the authoritative single source of truth establishes a disciplined, chain of logic:

1. **Mission Requirement:** Defines an agreed-upon operational or institutional capability that must be provided to support the mission.
2. **Installation Planning Basis:** Demonstrates direct alignment with the Installation Master Plan, ADPs, land-use strategies, and supporting utility and infrastructure capacity.
3. **Alternative Analysis:** Evaluates credible options to satisfy the requirement—including renovation, replacement, consolidation, land conveyance, operational workarounds, or a no-action baseline.
4. **Economic Decision:** Selects the alternative that delivers the required capability at the best life-cycle value while accounting for cost risk and uncertainty.
5. **Authorized Scope:** Locks in the complete and usable facility requirements within a definitive project space plan and line-item budget.
6. **Design & Construction Discipline:** Delivers only the approved requirement unless a formally adjudicated change updates the authorized project record.

Common fractures in planning execution happen when teams allow a preliminary concept, a late user preference, or an isolated design decision to become the de facto requirement, untethered from the validated source of need. Working stakeholders toward aligned decision-making during the planning phase improves traceability from mission to project, strengthens budget requests, and preserves disciplined scope from planning through final construction turnover.



Program process graphic showing how component plans work together.

FPD AT NCP26

A Recap of Leadership, Fellowship, and Engagement

By Shenita McConis, PE, PMP, AICP

As the Federal Planning Division (FPD) delegate at this year's APA National Planning Conference (NPC26) in Detroit, Michigan, I was proud to represent our community of planners. Our small yet diligent FPD contingent—featuring Jill Schreifer, FAICP, Rudy Bauer, AICP, and myself—made a strong showing, diving headfirst into days of professional growth, strategic networking, and community building.



Leadership and Division Momentum

The conference kicked off on Friday, April 24, with an intensive APA Leadership Session. The packed day included a joint leadership plenary and the Divisions Council Executive Committee spring business meeting. It was an invaluable opportunity to connect with leaders from across APA's 27 divisions.



Key discussions centered on the anticipated impacts of APA's major new initiative to include division membership directly with overall APA membership—a game-changer for engagement. We also celebrated a major milestone for the community: the Asian and Pacific Islander interest group received official support to transition into a full-fledged division.

Inspiration and Cutting-Edge Training

Saturday morning set an energetic tone with a keynote address by Jaz Ampaw-Farr, a multi-award-winning inspirational speaker from the UK. A true force of nature, Jaz challenged the audience to reframe their perspectives on self, work, and community, leaving us energized to drive real transformation.

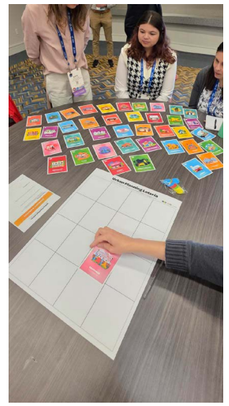
NPC26 offered robust learning opportunities across eight diverse training tracks:

- Climate Change, Energy, and the Environment (33 sessions)
- Economic Trends and Transformations (34 sessions)
- Emerging and Evolving Technology (23 sessions)
- Housing Challenges and Solutions (35 sessions)
- Inclusive Planning for Social Change (52 sessions)
- Navigating the Political Landscape (28 sessions)
- Transportation and Infrastructure (28 sessions)
- Upskilling for the Future (35 sessions)

Highlights

Among the phenomenal lineup, a few standout experiences defined the conference:

- **Game On: Play for Inclusive and Meaningful Engagement:** Co-endorsed by the Latinos and Planning Division and the Transportation Planning Division, this session—moderated by Marco Hinojosa, AICP, with speakers James T. Rojas and Vanessa Alvarez Diaz—explored how gamification makes community engagement more accessible and meaningful. Participating in a hands-on Lotería activity showed me firsthand how playful, tactile methods help communities articulate values and co-create visions of place. It was deeply inspiring to see divisions making such a massive impact at the national level.



Highlights (cont.)



- **Mobile Tour—Detroit's Transformative Greenway Network:** To witness urban resilience in action, I joined an e-bike mobile tour across Detroit's revitalized riverfront. Spanning 3.5 hours, our ride covered the Detroit Riverfront, Dequindre Cut, Dennis Archer Greenway, and Southwest Greenway. We explored how the City, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, local businesses, and community organizations have turned contaminated industrial sites and historical scars into a restorative, equitable greenway network that sparks connectivity and thriving community culture.

Looking Ahead to NPC27

NPC26 reminded us of the power of innovative engagement, cross-division collaboration, and resilient community building. But the journey doesn't stop here.

Don't miss the chance to elevate your practice, reconnect with peers, and showcase the vital role of federal planning on a national stage. **Make plans now to join us for NPC27**—let's continue shaping the future of our profession together!

Celebrating Our Own

Beyond the sessions, NPC26 was a time for deep fellowship. The FPD contingent gathered at the opening reception on day one to reconnect and share insights. Most importantly, we proudly came together on Sunday, April 26, to celebrate and support Jill Schreifer, FAICP, during her official induction into the prestigious Class of 2026 College of Fellows.



BEYOND THE PROMPT
CHARLIE'S FIRST 6 MONTHS

Lessons in experimentation, professional judgment, and the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the planning profession

By Nikki Boler ★ *FPD Member-provided Content*

Throughout 2026, our federal planning team at Tetra Tech has explored a central question: How can we responsibly integrate AI into a profession where technical accuracy, stakeholder engagement, and professional judgment are essential?

Our team has tested applications ranging from technical documentation and quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC) to strategic planning, operational tools, and visualization. Some experiments have evolved into useful workflows, while others have revealed limitations that warrant further exploration.

As a senior planner and visualization lead, I have a strong interest in emerging technology and how it can support project execution. That curiosity has shaped my approach to AI, while my professional experience informs how I evaluate its usefulness. This article is not intended to establish a universal standard or prescribe a single approach to AI integration in federal planning. Rather, it offers a practitioner's perspective on what our team has tried, what we have learned, and where we see opportunities to improve our processes.

Unsurprisingly, AI helped me develop this article. The experiences, professional opinions, and underlying arguments are my own; AI assisted with organizing the narrative, challenging assumptions, and refining the writing. This interactive approach reflects my preferred use of AI, and I believe transparency about its role is the first step toward ethical integration.

Defining Ethical AI: More Than a Human in the Loop

Ethical AI integration involves more than disclosing its use. Environmental impacts and complex questions surrounding data center development also warrant serious examination. I won't attempt to resolve those issues here. Instead, I'll focus on the applications and workflows our team has developed and how we evaluate their responsible use.

One of the most common phrases in discussions about responsible AI use is "keeping a human in the loop." However, as our team has developed and tested AI-assisted tools, we've found that human judgment isn't simply an ethical consideration; it's

a practical necessity that must shape the process from beginning to end.

In my preferred approach, the practitioner brings technical expertise, identifies the problem, establishes constraints, supplies appropriate references, challenges the results, and ultimately determines what is acceptable use. AI supports that process but does not—and, more importantly, cannot—replace the professional's responsibility for the work.

Meet Charlie: An Experiment in Iterative AI

When I joined Tetra Tech in the spring of 2026, I was given access to several AI platforms. While I've explored multiple tools, I've found the most consistent success with OpenAI's ChatGPT Enterprise, where I began working with an assistant I affectionately named Charlie.

At just over six months old, Charlie is still very much a work in progress. I tend to describe him as a particularly enthusiastic intern that is available to help brainstorm, organize, review, and challenge ideas, but whose work should never be accepted without direction or examination.

Before you start naming your own digital assistant, take time to understand your organization's AI policies. Not all platforms offer the same security protections, and access to an AI tool doesn't necessarily mean it's approved for every type of information. Understanding which applications are authorized and what information can be shared is essential. Charlie operates within an approved enterprise environment, allowing me to explore AI applications while respecting our information-security requirements.

Charlie did not arrive knowing how to perform federal planning tasks. Before starting a deliverable, I spent time providing context about our team's work, strategic goals, my own professional development goals, and the types of tasks I wanted his assistance with. I don't search for prompts. I simply talk to Charlie as I would a teammate, explaining what I'm trying to accomplish, asking questions, and working through ideas.

I've learned that there isn't a magical prompt that produces the perfect result. Instead, it's the combination of ongoing conversations, relevant reference materials, and examples of our work that makes the process effective. Those conversations have been just as important as the information I've provided.

Charlie's Successes

Given the widespread exposure to AI, some of Charlie's most useful capabilities may not come as a surprise. He excels at summarizing meeting notes, developing narratives when provided with strong inputs and reference materials, and assisting with quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC).

Today, colleagues occasionally refer to an AI-assisted review as a "Charlie Report." What started as an individual experiment has become a useful part of our team's review process, helping us identify inconsistencies, refine narratives, and improve the quality of our work.

Importantly, familiarity with Charlie does not make him an authoritative technical reviewer. His reviews are intended to complement established QA/QC procedures, not replace professional judgment or technical validation.

Visualization: Enhancing the Human-Made Plan

I love all things graphics—perspectives, drawings, maps—and Charlie has been part of some exciting experiments in visualization. We've developed two AI-assisted workflows incorporating Charlie and Adobe Firefly, including one we've named "The Overlay."

After completing the traditional modeling and rendering process using our software stack, I export the final visualization as a JPEG and ask Charlie to run The Overlay. This workflow enhances the rendering with supplemental elements such as cars, scale figures, streetlights, and other details that a former colleague and I affectionately call "gingerbreading."

These finishing touches give a visualization character and a greater sense of place, but they're often the first things sacrificed when project budgets or schedules become constrained.

Our second workflow is more labor-intensive and uses a considerable number of AI credits. After bringing a model into Photoshop, I zoom into areas that would benefit from additional detail but that I don't have the budget or time to enhance in SketchUp. I then isolate sections of the image and ask Charlie to make targeted improvements.

The challenge is that Charlie doesn't always respect the established geometry. This is where the credits add up! It can take several attempts, conversations, and revisions before we achieve a usable result. I then assemble the enhanced sections into a composite image in Photoshop.



INITIAL SECTION PERSPECTIVE
TRADITIONAL VISUALIZATION WORKFLOW

Developed using AutoCAD, SketchUp, and Lumion, this initial section perspective represents a reasonable four-hour visualization deliverable. While additional refinement in Photoshop could enhance the image's realism and overall presentation, the project schedule did not justify the additional production time. This presented an opportunity to experiment with Charlie: Could AI help elevate an already complete visualization without significantly increasing the hours invested?



AI-ENHANCED SECTION PERSPECTIVE
THE OVERLAY

Through extensive conversations and experimentation with Charlie, I developed "The Overlay," an AI-assisted rendering treatment that enhances the original visualization by blending realistic architectural imagery with conceptual sketching. Once refined, I began applying this treatment across different projects to establish a more consistent visual identity, regardless of the modeling software used. The design, architecture, and original model remained entirely human-developed.

After approximately 20 hours of work, the result is an impressive, highly detailed axonometric visualization. While we're unable to share the finished product at this time, we look forward to showcasing the work as part of an upcoming client press conference.

Beyond the finished product, the greatest success was achieving this level of detail within such a limited production schedule. By incorporating AI into our existing workflow, we were able to produce a visualization that would traditionally require considerably more time to develop.

For me, the greatest opportunity isn't simply that AI can create an impressive picture. It's that AI can allow planners to devote more resources to developing sound plans while still producing compelling visualizations that communicate those plans effectively.

Through our experimentation, we've also been able to quickly enhance portions of a plan to illustrate what a particular area could look like. This allows us to communicate design intent more efficiently, explore visual possibilities, and refine how we present our ideas without rebuilding the entire model.

This is also where my approach goes beyond simply keeping a human in the loop. With Charlie, I can harness his impressive generative capabilities within a narrowly defined sandbox that I've established. I determine what can be enhanced, what must remain unchanged, and whether the resulting image accurately represents the original plan.

That is fundamentally different from allowing generative AI to determine what should be built.

Looking Ahead: What Could AI and Federal Planners Accomplish Together?

Attending the September 2026 Federal AI Summit at Stanford University was an exciting experience that broadened my thinking beyond immediate production tasks. Discussions about emerging technologies, workforce readiness, and future applications challenged me to think about what AI could offer federal planners and, ultimately, our clients.

Master planning produces substantial information about facilities, infrastructure, development constraints, and long-term investment priorities. As planners, we're in a unique position to consider how AI might help connect that information to subsequent phases of design, construction, operations, and facility management.

I'm thinking beyond digital twins and interactive models. What if AI-enabled systems could help clients maintain more sophisticated, evolving records of their facilities and master plans? Could we eventually analyze how the facilities we've planned actually perform once they're constructed, compare those outcomes to our original assumptions, and use that information to inform future planning decisions?

These are possibilities rather than capabilities we've established within our practice. Challenges surrounding data quality, interoperability, security, and implementation remain. Nevertheless, the opportunity is exciting.

What if AI could help us not only plan for the future, but learn from what we've already built?

The Value Is in the Process

I hope something in this article has sparked an idea for you or your team. I'll admit: I drink the AI Kool-Aid, but that doesn't mean I don't understand or empathize with the legitimate concerns that come with introducing AI tools into our workplaces.

If there's anything I'd encourage you to remember, it's that simply being "in the loop" isn't enough. The quality of AI-generated results depends heavily on the information, context, and direction we provide. Most importantly, your brain, your talent, and your professional experience are not replaceable. AI isn't a substitute for those things, but it might just help you spend less time on repetitive tasks and more time doing the parts of planning you love.

One final point worth repeating: we don't approach Charlie by searching for the perfect prompt. We have conversations. We've found that working conversationally with a large language model (LLM), a type of AI trained to understand and generate language, has been particularly beneficial for our applications. And no, we don't actually think Charlie is human! But by consistently communicating how I think, what I'm trying to accomplish, and what I expect from the work, we've developed a much more effective working relationship.

I'll keep working with Charlie, and if the last six months are any indication, we'll continue developing new processes and visualization tools for our team. Charlie won't be making the plans, but he'll certainly be helping me enhance them.

Announcements

- **Thanks to an APA grant, we are able to offer $500 awards for articles to feature in this publication. See details on our website: federal.planning.org/knowledge-center/federal-division-resources/**
- **As always, reach us at federalplanning@gmail.com with thoughts or feedback for FPD or to discuss advertising in this publication.**

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

By Sarah Diehl, AICP, PMP | Membership Coordinator

I'm pleased to share a membership update based on the latest member roster data provided from APA, along with exciting opportunities to engage in the months ahead. Your membership is the foundation of our division. Thank you for being part of this community and for advancing the practice of federal planning together.

Membership Snapshot (as of Oct. 2026)

926
Total Members

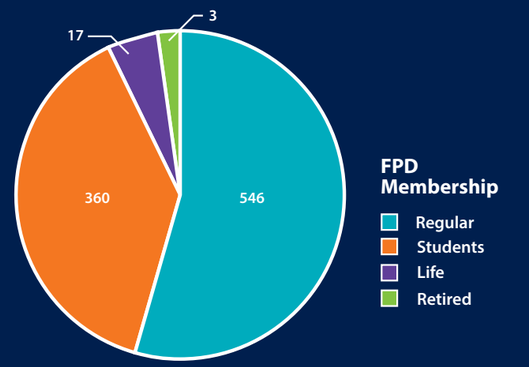
+7%
from September 2025

43%
Members with APA Professional Credentials

- **378** AICP
- **9** FAICP
- **12** AICP Candidates

Most Common Industry Roles

- Senior Planner
- Community Planner
- Senior/Vice President
- Project Manager
- Military/Federal Planner
- Senior Associate
- Environmental Planner



Top 10 Areas by Membership

- **Virginia** — 107 members
- **Colorado** — 38 members
- **Florida** — 72 members
- **Ohio** — 31 members
- **Texas** — 55 members
- **North Carolina** — 30 members
- **National Capital Area** — 51 members
- **Pennsylvania** — 28 members
- **Georgia** — 38 members
- **Washington** — 28 members

Why FPD Matters

FPD connects planners working within and alongside the federal government to share knowledge, address challenges, and advance the practice of federal planning.

Together, we:

- Elevate best practices in federal property planning, infrastructure resilience, and policy.
- Support professional growth through AICP CM credit events, webinars, and networking.
- Strengthen the pipeline of emerging planners, offering mentorship and resources.

How You Can Engage

- **SHARE** your expertise by leading a webinar or contributing to newsletter content.
- **VOLUNTEER** with FPD committees or initiatives.
- **CONNECT** with peers by sharing your tools, insights, and lessons learned through our upcoming survey and regional cohort events.
- **QUESTIONS?** Reach out to the FPD Executive Committee at federalplanning@gmail.com.

What's Coming Up

Annual Business Meeting
Nov. 19, 2026 at 1:30 p.m. EST

Fill out the Awards Survey

- https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T9YDN7N

This survey will capture feedback on the awards program and how we can improve this process in future years. The survey will stay open through mid-December.

IGE Roundtable
February 2027, Germany

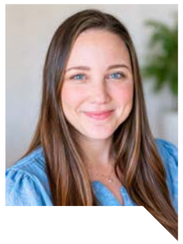
2027 Annual Training Workshop
June 2027, Virginia

Pre-conference Planning Workshop at SAME Indo-Pacific Regional Summit
Aug. 30-31, 2027, Honolulu

Meet the New Emerging Federal Planners (EFP) Group

CO-CHAIRS

FPD is excited to announce the new co-chairs of the EFP group:
Erin Wohlitka, AICP, and Caroline McGonigle



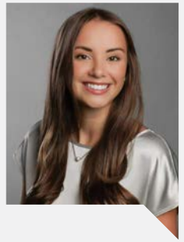
Erin Wohlitka, AICP

Senior Planner, Stantec GS

Erin is a Senior Planner with Stantec GS and brings more than a decade of planning experience, beginning her career in local land use planning along Florida's Treasure Coast before transitioning into federal planning four years ago. Federal planning has become a rewarding chapter of her career, where she works as a planner and project manager on military installation master planning efforts for multiple branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and federal campus planning for other U.S. federal agencies.

Erin has been actively involved with EFP since becoming a federal planner, and the group has been a valuable part of her professional growth. Through EFP, she has connected with other federal planners, built relationships across the industry, and become more engaged within FPD. Her experience has fueled her desire to create those same opportunities for other emerging federal planners and encourage them to become more involved in the broader FPD community.

Erin lives in South Florida with her firefighter husband, 5-year-old son, 8-month-old daughter, and family dog, Pepper. She serves as Secretary of her son's school PTO and is passionate about supporting him and other children with exceptional abilities. Outside of work and volunteering, she enjoys spending quality time with her family, putting their Disney Annual Passes to good use, and never passing up great food and a good cocktail.



Caroline McGonigle

Federal Planner II, Michael Baker International

Caroline McGonigle is a Federal Planner II with Michael Baker International, bringing more than three years of planning experience to the EFP team. After beginning her career in local government planning, she transitioned into federal planning and now supports installation planning efforts across all military services. Her work includes master planning efforts that help guide the long-term development and mission readiness of military installations. She enjoys collaborating with multidisciplinary teams and stakeholders to shape resilient, future-focused communities.

Caroline is actively involved with APA FPD, where she leads the Pittsburgh Cohort and helps connect federal planners through networking and professional development opportunities. She is passionate about building relationships across the profession, fostering career growth, and supporting the next generation of federal planners. She is also involved with Michael Baker's Early Career Professionals group, where she advocates for cross-disciplinary collaboration and employee engagement.

Caroline lives in the Lawrenceville neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Outside of work, she enjoys staying active through hiking, biking, and exploring the outdoors. She also loves traveling, discovering new foods, and taking advantage of the unique experiences that come with a career in federal planning.

Together, Erin and Caroline look forward to bringing their different experiences and backgrounds within FPD to their leadership of EFP. Over the next year, their goals include growing EFP membership and engagement, supporting members pursuing AICP certification, and encouraging more emerging planners to step into leadership roles within EFP and the broader FPD community. They hope to continue building a welcoming and engaged community where emerging planners can develop professionally, learn from one another, and find meaningful ways to contribute.

Interested in getting involved with EFP?

Erin and Caroline would love to hear from you! FPD members can reach out directly to either Co-Chair at erin.wohlitka@stantecgs.com or caroline.mcgonigle@mbakerintl.com. In addition, an EFP interest form is located on the FPD webpage for members interested in learning more about how to get involved.



The Network

American Planning Association
Federal Planning Division

Creating Great Communities for All

federal.planning.org