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CSR provides opportunity for Huntsville, Headquarters to synch

HUNTSVILLE, Ala.-- For two days in April the U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville, hosted a leadership team from Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, for a Command Strategic Review.

Maj. Gen. Merdith “Bo” Temple, acting USACE commander, and senior executive service members Ms. Karen Durham-Aguilera, Mr. Bob Slockbower, Mr. James Dalton and Mr. Wes Miller along with other members of the HQ staff engaged in conversation about Huntsville Center’s actions related to each of the three goals we support.

The CSR also presented an opportunity for Center employees to say farewell to Temple, who is planning to retire from the U.S. Army in mid-May. Col. Nello Tortora, Huntsville Center commander, presented Temple with a proclamation from Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle and a “key” to the Huntsville Center.

The Huntsville Center had three objectives for the CSR:

- Demonstrate the strategic alignment between the USACE Campaign Plan and Huntsville Center’s Implementation Plan.
- Share experiences and lessons learned that are applicable across the USACE enterprise. This included acquisition related experience as well as the success of several centers of expertise.
- Continue the dialog with HQ USACE on Huntsville Center’s capabilities and skill sets to leverage our abilities to support the USACE enterprise.

“We were able to achieve our desired objectives although there was a lot of discussion specifically about our Lines of Efforts and how they relate to the Campaign Plan,” said Rick Suever, chief of the Business Management Office.

“The CSR team consisted of the HQ people who most directly influence our success as an organization. We couldn’t have hand-picked a better team for these discussions.

“The primary message from the HQ team was that we need to communicate more – with HQ and with the other major subordinate commands,” Suever said. “We need to continually communicate with HQ so that they can make informed decisions about enterprise workload and explain those decisions when necessary. We need to communicate with the other MSCs so that they are aware of what we are doing, particularly when we are supporting a common customer, and to solicit their support when needed. This is particularly important with impending budgetary constraints.”

Since the last CSR in February 2010, Huntsville Center has demonstrated great examples of programs that support Goal 1, said Durham-Aguilera, director of Contingency Operations and Office of

Homeland Security. Goal 1 actions support contingency operations. She said Huntsville has demonstrated progress through increased engagement, mission support and response, and customers. Huntsville's Goal 1 actions show agency-wide impact, linkage to USACE strategic customers to include the State Department and Foreign Military Sales, and support to combatant commands, major subordinate commands and customers.

Goal 3 actions relate to delivering sustainable infrastructure. Slockbower, director of Military Programs, suggested Huntsville Center clearly align the 40+ programs to the enterprise customers served, and identify which programs are Huntsville Center led or Huntsville Center supported. He noted that Huntsville Center has a wide variety of centers of expertise and technical centers of expertise that provide value to the enterprise in knowledge and production capabilities.

Also in Goal 3 are actions related to innovative approaches to acquisitions. It was noted that developing a programmatic acquisition strategy would help shorten the current 12-18 months of acquisition planning. That timeline could possibly be reduced by placing a liaison officer at the Principal Assistant Responsible for Contracting, Winchester.

"This is really important to the enterprise," said Dalton, chief of Engineering and Construction. "I compliment HNC on leading the efforts on acquisition," Dalton said. "That is definitely a good thing you are doing."

An action in Goal 4 (identify, develop, maintain, and strengthen technical competencies among the USACE workforce) to develop a database of subject matter experts was seen as a good idea that could expand enterprise-wide. To do this, criteria needs to be developed and approved so that SMEs can be identified across multiple Communities of Practice, both programmatically as well as functionally, Slockbower said. The mentoring these SMEs do day-to-day is particularly important to maintain technical competency and effective succession planning according to McNabb, deputy director of Human Resources.

There was also discussion about Huntsville Center's ISO 9001 certification and our quality system restructuring that focuses on end-to-end processes for the products and services we provide to our customers.

"Huntsville Center is taking risk with their ISO certification to build a more effective QMS that is consistent with the USACE Quality and Performance framework," Temple said. Overall the HQ team seemed pleased with how Huntsville Center is approaching the Campaign Plan goals, but suggested establishing outcome based metrics and tying our lines of effort to the USACE Campaign Plan goals and objectives more directly.

"HNC is truly a USACE strategic asset," Temple said. "The HQ needs to clarify what this means and provide guidance, not only for HNC but for all of USACE."