# Closure Stage Quality Assurance Report

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| **Form Status: Approved** | |

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| **Overall Rating:** | Satisfactory |
| **Decision:** | |
| **Portfolio/Project Number:** | 00108694 |
| **Portfolio/Project Title:** | Institutional Support to Regional Hub of Civil Service |
| **Portfolio/Project Date:** | 2018-01-01 / 2021-12-31 |

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| **Strategic** | **Quality Rating: Satisfactory** |

1. Did the project pro-actively identified changes to the external environment and incorporated them into the project strategy?

○ 3: The project team identified relevant changes in the external environment that may present new opportunities or threats to the project's ability to achieve its objectives, assumptions were tested to determine if the project's strategy was valid. There is some evidence that the project board considered the implications, and documented the changes needed to the project in response. (all must be true)

◉ *2: The project team identified relevant changes in the external environment that may present new opportunities or threats to the project's ability to achieve its objectives. There is some evidence that the project board discussed this, but relevant changes did not fully integrate in the project. (both must be true)*

○ 1: The project team considered relevant changes in the external environment since implementation began, but there is no evidence that the project team considered these changes to the project as a result.

**Evidence:**

The project team in cooperation with national and international partners of the ACSH identified and analysed new opportunities and changes in the development context based on the national strategies of the participating countries. This was a result of continuous consultations with the National Implementing Agency, the Agency for Civil Service Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Presidential Administration, and other central and regional government entities, as well as with the relevant government organisations in the participating countries. A needs-assessment survey conducted periodically among the participating countries contributed to this goal.

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2. Was the project aligned with the thematic focus of the Strategic Plan?

○ 3: The project responded to at least one of the development settings as specified in the Strategic Plan (SP) and adopted at least one Signature Solution .The project's RRF included all the relevant SP output indicators. (all must be true)

◉ *2: The project responded to at least one of the developments settings1 as specified in the Strategic Plan. The project's RRF included at least one SP output indicator, if relevant. (both must be true)*

○ 1: While the project may have responded to a partner's identified need, this need falls outside of the UNDP Strategic Plan. Also select this option if none of the relevant SP indicators are included in the RRF.

**Evidence:**

The Project responded to development setting specified in UNDP 2018-2021 Strategic Plan - Accelerate structural transformations for sustainable development, and specifically SP output 2.2.1 Use of digital technologies and big data enabled for improved public services and other government functions;

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**Relevant**                                        **Quality Rating:  Satisfactory**

3. Were the project's targeted groups systematically identified and engaged, with a priority focus on the discriminated and marginalized, to ensure the project remained relevant for them?

○ 3: Systematic and structured feedback was collected over the project duration from a representative sample of beneficiaries, with a priority focus on the discriminated and marginalized, as part of the project's monitoring system. Representatives from the targeted groups were active members of the project's governance mechanism (i.e., the project board or equivalent) and there is credible evidence that their feedback informs project decision making. (all must be true)

◉ *2: Targeted groups were engaged in implementation and monitoring, with a priority focus on the discriminated and marginalized. Beneficiary feedback, which may be anecdotal, was collected regularly to ensure the project addressed local priorities. This information was used to inform project decision making. (all must be true to select this option)*

○ 1: Some beneficiary feedback may have been collected, but this information did not inform project decision making. This option should also be selected if no beneficiary feedback was collected

○ Not Applicable

**Evidence:**

A needs-assessment survey conducted periodically collected information about the participating countrie s' priorities, and a feedback mechanism following co mpletion of capacity development activities recorded the feedback from their participants. Such informatio n was constantly used to inform plotting the project's course of action and for project decision making. The target group of the project were government offi cials and executives of central and local agencies an d government departments, as well as employees of state organisations and institutions that are responsi ble for civil service policy formulation and implement ation and for public service delivery and digitalisatio n of public services. The target group also included policy makers and experts, who play a role in advan cing the adaptation and implementation of reform an d development initiatives in these areas. The ultimat e beneficiaries of the project's outcomes were the cit izens of the participating countries including the mos t vulnerable ones, who benefitted through the introd uction of innovative policies and practices as a result of collaborative work of the ACSH participating coun tries, or through improved and more effective comm unication between the Government and Administrati on and the citizens, or through further digitalisation o f public services and their provision through different iated channels of delivery.

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4. Did the project generate knowledge, and lessons learned (i.e., what has worked and what has not) and has this knowledge informed management decisions to ensure the continued relevance of the project towards its stated objectives, the quality of its outputs and the management of risk?

○ 3: Knowledge and lessons learned from internal or external sources (gained, for example, from Peer Assists, After Action Reviews or Lessons Learned Workshops) backed by credible evidence from evaluation, corporate policies/strategies, analysis and monitoring were discussed in project board meetings and reflected in the minutes. There is clear evidence that changes were made to the project to ensure its continued relevance. (both must be true)

◉ *2: Knowledge and lessons learned backed by relatively limited evidence, drawn mainly from within the project, were considered by the project team. There is some evidence that changes were made to the project as a result to ensure its continued relevance. (both must be true)*

○ 1: There is limited or no evidence that knowledge and lessons learned were collected by the project team. There is little or no evidence that this informed project decision making.

**Evidence:**

> Project activities were always evaluated upon completion providing valuable source of information to ensure that its activities were constantly relevant to the participating countries' priorities in public administration and civil service development and public service delivery.
> The knowledge obtained, good practices generated, and past lessons learned during the implementation of the phase of the project through 2018-2020 period have been comprehansively considered in the next project phase design for 2021-2023 .

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5. Was the project sufficiently at scale, or is there potential to scale up in the future, to meaningfully contribute to development change?

◉ *3: There was credible evidence that the project reached sufficient number of beneficiaries (either directly through significant coverage of target groups, or indirectly, through policy change) to meaningfully contribute to development change.*

○ 2: While the project was not considered at scale, there are explicit plans in place to scale up the project in the future (e.g. by extending its coverage or using project results to advocate for policy change).

○ 1: The project was not at scale, and there are no plans to scale up the project in the future.

**Evidence:**

> The project has reached a considerable number of beneficiaries. The number of its participating countries' government beneficiaries increased from twenty-five to forty-two within three years thus expanding the number of the government organisations beneficiaries. The project also developed partnerships with more than 80 international development organisations and other international and regional institutions and professional associations.

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**Principled**                                                    **Quality Rating:  Satisfactory**

6. Were the project's measures (through outputs, activities, indicators) to address gender inequalities and empower women relevant and produced the intended effect? If not, evidence-based adjustments and changes were made.

○ 3: The project team gathered data and evidence through project monitoring on the relevance of the measures to address gender inequalities and empower women. Analysis of data and evidence were used to inform adjustments and changes, as appropriate. (both must be true)

◉ *2: The project team had some data and evidence on the relevance of the measures to address gender inequalities and empower women. There is evidence that at least some adjustments were made, as appropriate. (both must be true)*

○ 1: The project team had limited or no evidence on the relevance of measures to address gender inequalities and empowering women. No evidence of adjustments and/or changes made. This option should also be selected if the project has no measures to address gender inequalities and empower women relevant to the project results and activities.

**Evidence:**

> While implementing its activities, the project ensured a gender balance among participants of its numerou s capacity development and partnerships evens. On average, 51 per cent of participants were female, an d 49 per cent were male.

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7. Were social and environmental impacts and risks successfully managed and monitored?

○ 3: Social and environmental risks were tracked in the risk log. Appropriate assessments conducted where required (i.e., Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for High risk projects and some level of social and environmental assessment for Moderate risk projects as identified through SESP). Relevant management plan(s) developed for identified risks through consultative process and implemented, resourced, and monitored. Risks effectively managed or mitigated. If there is a substantive change to the project or change in context that affects risk levels, the SESP was updated to reflect these changes. (all must be true)

◉ *2: Social and environmental risks were tracked in the risk log. Appropriate assessments conducted where required (i.e., Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for High risk projects and some level of social and environmental assessment for Moderate risk projects as identified through SESP). Relevant management plan(s) developed, implemented and monitored for identified risks. OR project was categorized as Low risk through the SESP.*

○ 1: Social and environmental risks were tracked in the risk log. For projects categorized as High or Moderate Risk, there was no evidence that social and environmental assessments completed and/or management plans or measures development, implemented or monitored. There are substantive changes to the project or changes in the context but SESP was not updated. (any may be true)

**Evidence:**

> Project was categorized as low risk through the SES P.

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8. Were grievance mechanisms available to project-affected people and were grievances (if any) addressed to ensure any perceived harm was effectively mitigated?

○ 3: Project-affected people actively informed of UNDP's Corporate Accountability Mechanism (SRM/SECU) and how to access it. If the project was categorized as High or Moderate Risk through the SESP, a project -level grievance mechanism was in place and project affected people informed. If grievances were received, they were effectively addressed in accordance with SRM Guidance. (all must be true)

◉ *2: Project-affected people informed of UNDP's Corporate Accountability Mechanism and how to access it. If the project was categorized as High Risk through the SESP, a project -level grievance mechanism was in place and project affected people informed. If grievances were received, they were responded to but faced challenges in arriving at a resolution.*

○ 1: Project-affected people was not informed of UNDP's Corporate Accountability Mechanism. If grievances were received, they were not responded to. (any may be true)

### Evidence:

> UNDP's Corporate Accountability Mechanism was made available to project-affected people and prospective vendors as well as to other relevant parties on first formal instance of interaction with them.

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**Management & Monitoring**                    **Quality Rating:  Highly Satisfactory**

9. Was the project's M&E Plan adequately implemented?

◉ *3: The project had a comprehensive and costed M&E plan. Baselines, targets and milestones were fully populated. Progress data against indicators in the project's RRF was reported regularly using credible data sources and collected according to the frequency stated in the Plan, including sex disaggregated data as relevant. Any evaluations conducted, if relevant, fully meet decentralized evaluation standards, including gender UNEG standards. Lessons learned, included during evaluations and/or After-Action Reviews, were used to take corrective actions when necessary. (all must be true)*

○ 2: The project costed M&E Plan, and most baselines and targets were populated. Progress data against indicators in the project's RRF was collected on a regular basis, although there was may be some slippage in following the frequency stated in the Plan and data sources was not always reliable. Any evaluations conducted, if relevant, met most decentralized evaluation standards. Lessons learned were captured but were used to take corrective actions. (all must be true)

○ 1: The project had M&E Plan, but costs were not clearly planned and budgeted for, or were unrealistic. Progress data was not regularly collected against the indicators in the project's RRF. Evaluations did not meet decentralized evaluation standards. Lessons learned were rarely captured and used. Select this option also if the project did not have an M&E plan.

**Evidence:**

> The project aligned with its M&E plan, contained in the project document. The Plan was regularly reviewed and updated throughout the duration of the project. Systematic reporting of project progress and performance took place quarterly. Results of such evaluations appear in the annual progress reports, and in Steering Committee meeting minutes.

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10. Was the project's governance mechanism (i.e., the project board or equivalent) function as intended?

◉ *3: The project's governance mechanism operated well, and was a model for other projects. It met in the agreed frequency stated in the project document and the minutes of the meetings were all on file. There was regular (at least annual) progress reporting to the project board or equivalent on results, risks and opportunities. It is clear that the project board explicitly reviewed and used evidence, including progress data, knowledge, lessons and evaluations, as the basis for informing management decisions (e.g., change in strategy, approach, work plan.) (all must be true to select this option)*

○ 2: The project's governance mechanism met in the agreed frequency and minutes of the meeting are on file. A project progress report was submitted to the project board or equivalent at least once per year, covering results, risks and opportunities. (both must be true to select this option)

○ 1: The project's governance mechanism did not meet in the frequency stated in the project document over the past year and/or the project board or equivalent was not functioning as a decision-making body for the project as intended.

**Evidence:**

The project governance mechanism, its Steering Co
mmittee (Project Board), functioned well. It monitore
d the implementation process closely and it provided
its recommendations continually on the most effectiv
e implementation strategy in achieving the project o
bjectives. Steering Committee meetings took place o
nce per year. The Steering Committee also met with
the Advisory Board periodically discussing the proje
ct results to date, as well as its plans and strategy fo
r the foreseeable future.

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11. Were risks to the project adequately monitored and managed?

○ 3: The project monitored risks every quarter and consulted with the key stakeholders, security advisors, to
identify continuing and emerging risks to assess if the main assumptions remained valid. There is clear
evidence that relevant management plans and mitigating measures were fully implemented to address each
key project risk and were updated to reflect the latest risk assessment. (all must be true)

◉ *2: The project monitored risks every year, as evidenced by an updated risk log. Some updates were made to
management plans and mitigation measures.*

○ 1: The risk log was not updated as required. There was may be some evidence that the project monitored risks
that may affected the project's achievement of results, but there is no explicit evidence that management
actions were taken to mitigate risks.

**Evidence:**

Risk log was maintained and updated regularly in th
e Atlas project management module. Operational an
d other risks were systematically monitored and man
aged to keep the project on course.

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**Efficient**                                   **Quality Rating:  Exemplary**

12. Adequate resources were mobilized to achieve intended results. If not, management decisions were taken to adjust expected results in the project's results framework.

- ◉ *Yes*
- ○ No

**Evidence:**

> The project had adequate resources at its disposal to implement its envisioned activities.

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13. Were project inputs procured and delivered on time to efficiently contribute to results?

- ◉ *3: The project had a procurement plan and kept it updated. The project quarterly reviewed operational bottlenecks to procuring inputs in a timely manner and addressed them through appropriate management actions. (all must be true)*
- ○ 2: The project had updated procurement plan. The project annually reviewed operational bottlenecks to procuring inputs in a timely manner and addressed them through appropriate management actions. (all must be true)
- ○ 1: The project did not have an updated procurement plan. The project team may or may not have reviewed operational bottlenecks to procuring inputs regularly, however management actions were not taken to address them.

**Evidence:**

> The project procurement plan was updated on a reg
> ular basis, as it was needed. Implementation of the
> plan did not have experience any unnecessary delay
> s, besides some expected minor ones keeping bottle
> necks at the minimum.

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14. Was there regular monitoring and recording of cost efficiencies, taking into account the expected quality of results?

- ◉ *3: There is evidence that the project regularly reviewed costs against relevant comparators (e.g., other projects or country offices) or industry benchmarks to ensure the project maximized results delivered with given resources. The project actively coordinated with other relevant ongoing projects and initiatives (UNDP or other) to ensure complementarity and sought efficiencies wherever possible (e.g. joint activities.) (both must be true)*
- ◯ 2: The project monitored its own costs and gave anecdotal examples of cost efficiencies (e.g., spending less to get the same result,) but there was no systematic analysis of costs and no link to the expected quality of results delivered. The project coordinated activities with other projects to achieve cost efficiency gains.
- ◯ 1: There is little or no evidence that the project monitored its own costs and considered ways to save money beyond following standard procurement rules.

**Evidence:**

> The project regularly reviewed costs against other pr
> ojects and the UNDP country office and it coordinate
> d with other projects to achieve cost efficiency. Also,
> the project's prudent management and targeted inter
> action based on cost-sharing principles while condu
> cting joint activities with the governments of participa
> ting countries and international partners in the perio
> d 2018-2020, has allowed it to utilize Government-pr
> ovided funds effectively and efficiently.

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**Effective**                                    **Quality Rating: Exemplary**

15. Was the project on track and delivered its expected outputs?

◉ *Yes*
○ No

**Evidence:**

> The project has delivered its expected results. In some cases, it exceeded its expected targets.

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16. Were there regular reviews of the work plan to ensure that the project was on track to achieve the desired results, and to inform course corrections if needed?

◉ *3: Quarterly progress data informed regular reviews of the project work plan to ensure that the activities implemented were most likely to achieve the desired results. There is evidence that data and lessons learned (including from evaluations /or After-Action Reviews) were used to inform course corrections, as needed. Any necessary budget revisions were made. (both must be true)*

○ 2: There was at least one review of the work plan per year with a view to assessing if project activities were on track to achieving the desired development results (i.e., outputs.) There may or may not be evidence that data or lessons learned were used to inform the review(s). Any necessary budget revisions have been made.

○ 1: While the project team may have reviewed the work plan at least once over the past year to ensure outputs were delivered on time, no link was made to the delivery of desired development results. Select this option also if no review of the work plan by management took place.

**Evidence:**

Reviews were taking place regularly and were reflected in the annual work plan. Project progress was validated through regular meetings with programme units and senior management of the Country Office in Kazakhstan.

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17. Were the targeted groups systematically identified and engaged, prioritizing the marginalized and excluded, to ensure results were achieved as expected?

○ *3: The project targeted specific groups and/or geographic areas, identified by using credible data sources on their capacity needs, deprivation and/or exclusion from development opportunities relevant to the project's area of work. There is clear evidence that the targeted groups were reached as intended. The project engaged regularly with targeted groups over the past year to assess whether they benefited as expected and adjustments were made if necessary, to refine targeting. (all must be true)*

○ 2: The project targeted specific groups and/or geographic areas, based on some evidence of their capacity needs, deprivation and/or exclusion from development opportunities relevant to the project's area of work. Some evidence is provided to confirm that project beneficiaries are members of the targeted groups. There was some engagement with beneficiaries in the past year to assess whether they were benefiting as expected. (all must be true)

○ 1: The project did not report on specific targeted groups. There is no evidence to confirm that project beneficiaries are populations have capacity needs or are deprived and/or excluded from development opportunities relevant to the project area of work. There is some engagement with beneficiaries to assess whether they benefited as expected, but it was limited or did not occurred in the past year.

○ Not Applicable

**Evidence:**

Target groups were identified through the project' participating countries specialized institutions and through the needs-assessment surveys that provided credible data and other information on their capacity needs. The project was constantly in communication with its target groups to assess benefits of their joint activities.

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**Sustainability & National Ownership**                    **Quality Rating:  Satisfactory**

18. Were stakeholders and national partners fully engaged in the decision-making, implementation and monitoring of the project?

○ 3: Only national systems (i.e., procurement, monitoring, evaluation, etc.) were used to fully implement and monitor the project. All relevant stakeholders and partners were fully and actively engaged in the process, playing a lead role in project decision-making, implementation and monitoring. (both must be true)

◉ *2: National systems (i.e., procurement, monitoring, evaluation, etc.) were used to implement and monitor the project (such as country office support or project systems) were also used, if necessary. All relevant stakeholders and partners were actively engaged in the process, playing an active role in project decision-making, implementation and monitoring. (both must be true)*

○ 1: There was relatively limited or no engagement with national stakeholders and partners in the decision-making, implementation and/or monitoring of the project.

○ Not Applicable

**Evidence:**

> The Country Office supported the implementation and monitoring of the project. This was a NIM project and the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs was selected as the project implementing partner. The UNDP Country Office in Kazakhstan provided full programmatic oversight and operations support to the project implementation in accordance with UNDP rules and regulations. Furthermore, all relevant stakeholders and partners were actively engaged throughout the project implementation period, playing an active role in project decision making, implementation and monitoring tasks.

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19. Were there regular monitoring of changes in capacities and performance of institutions and systems relevant to the project, as needed, and were the implementation arrangements[8] adjusted according to changes in partner capacities?

○ 3: Changes in capacities and performance of national institutions and systems were assessed/monitored using clear indicators, rigorous methods of data collection and credible data sources including relevant HACT assurance activities. Implementation arrangements were formally reviewed and adjusted, if needed, in agreement with partners according to changes in partner capacities. (all must be true)

◉ *2: Aspects of changes in capacities and performance of relevant national institutions and systems were monitored by the project using indicators and reasonably credible data sources including relevant HACT assurance activities. Some adjustment was made to implementation arrangements if needed to reflect changes in partner capacities. (all must be true)*

○ 1: Some aspects of changes in capacities and performance of relevant national institutions and systems may have been monitored by the project, however changes to implementation arrangements have not been considered. Also select this option if changes in capacities and performance of relevant national institutions and systems have not been monitored by the project.

○ Not Applicable

**Evidence:**

The ACSH further reinforced its existing partnerships with the Academy of Public Administration of Kazakhstan (APA) and the Nazarbayev University (NU), actively engaging them into project activities' as responsible parties through the Collaborative Advantage model based on HACT assessments completed in 2017 as required, in line with UNDP HACT rules and regulations. In this context, the APA and the NU served as key "responsible partners" of the project, in carrying out joint studies, as well as implementing other activities in research, learning and capacity building. These institutions were empowered and specifically designated by the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan as research and education centres of excellence, including those in the field of public administration and civil service. Furthermore, the "National ICT Holding Zerde" has also been designated as a "responsible partner" through the Collaborative Advantage model based on the HACT assessments completed as required, in line with UNDP HACT rules and regulations for implementing activities in the areas of innovations in governance and digitalisation of public services including the launch of accelerator labs.

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20. Were the transition and phase-out arrangements were reviewed and adjusted according to progress (including financial commitment and capacity).

○ 3: The project's governance mechanism regularly reviewed the project's sustainability plan, including arrangements for transition and phase-out, to ensure the project remained on track in meeting the requirements set out by the plan. The plan was implemented as planned by the end of the project, taking into account any adjustments made during implementation. (both must be true)

◉ *2: There was a review of the project's sustainability plan, including arrangements for transition and phase-out, to ensure the project remained on track in meeting the requirements set out by the plan.*

○ 1: The project may have had a sustainability plan but there was no review of this strategy after it was developed. Also select this option if the project did not have a sustainability strategy.

**Evidence:**

The sustainability of the project has always been on agenda of the Steering Committee and was discussed during the Committee meetings.

The ACSH initiative has been extended beyond 2020 and the relavent agreement on fincning is signed between GOK and UNDP securing sustainability and funding for the next phase of the project 2021-2023 in amount of USD 3, 600, 000. The ACSH new phase (3) under Project ID 00123513 has been launched in November 2021.

The ACSH has continued expanding its network as a globally recognized platform for exchange of knowledge, best practices and innovations. For examples, the Government of the Republic of Korea has allocated $ 994,000 to UNDP and Astana Civil Service Hub to implement a regional project on Innovation and Digitalization in Governance in the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. For this purposes, in July 2021, an Agreement was signed between UNDP and the Ministry of the Interior and Safety of the Republic of Korea. The Project is designed for three years (2021-2023) and will be implemented utilizing the capacity of the Astana Civil Service Hub as a multilateral knowledge sharing platform. In the framework of the project, it is envisioned to conduct analytical studies, workshops and seminars to upgrade the skills of civil servants with involvement of leading Korean experts, as well as to organize study visits to government agencies of the Republic of Korea.

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**QA Summary/Final Project Board Comments**

The Project Board approved the closure of the project