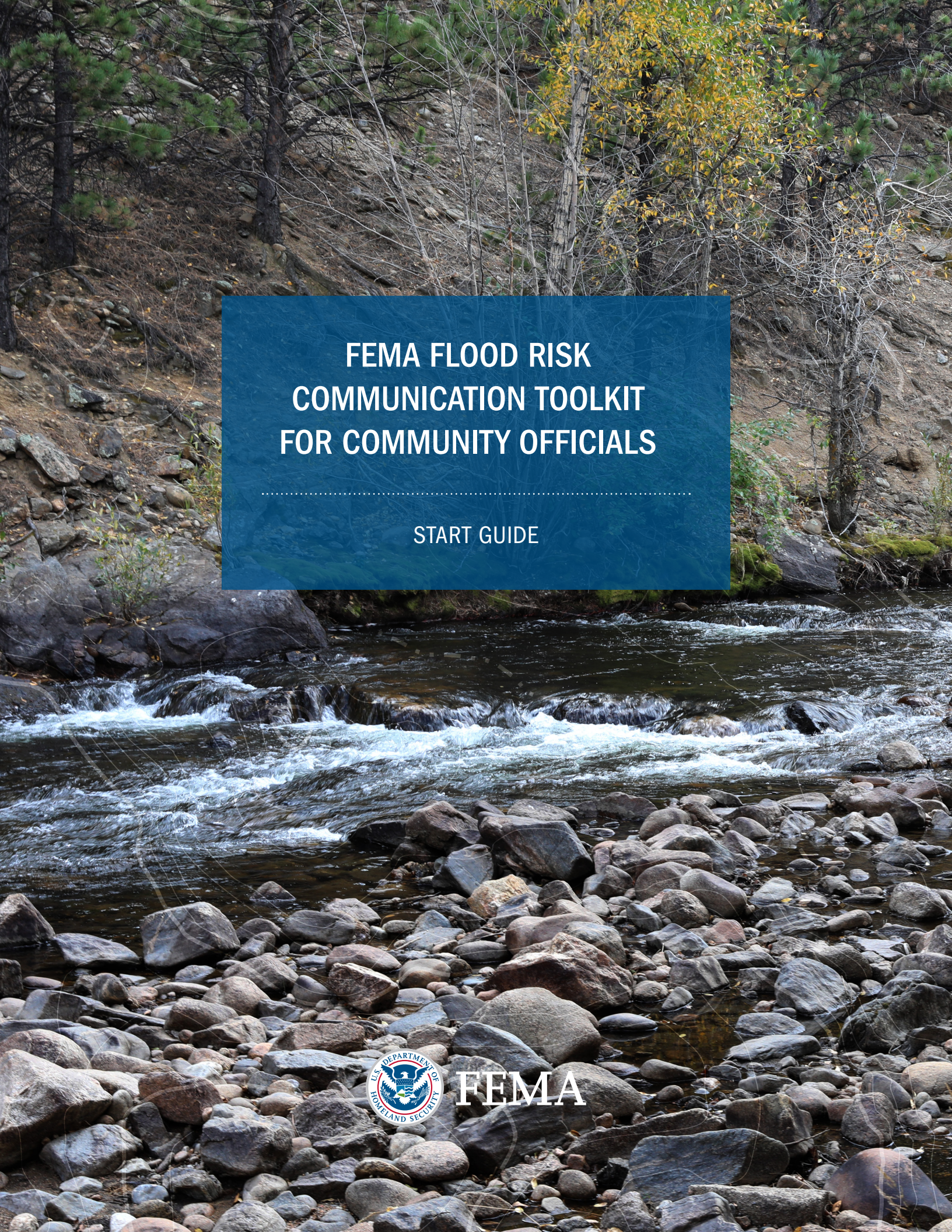

FEMA FLOOD RISK COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY OFFICIALS

START GUIDE

FEMA

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WELCOME TO THE FLOOD RISK COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT

Every year, the United States experiences natural and manmade disasters that can cause billions of dollars in losses. Flooding is the most common disaster in the United States, with severe flooding causing immense damage. For many, a flood may wipe out their entire livelihood. To help your community recover and be more resilient following a flood, it is important for both community officials and residents to understand flood risk, prioritize discussions about it, decide together how to protect families and property, and ultimately create more resilient homes and communities.

Inviting residents to participate in discussions about how to protect the people and things they value most will increase the likelihood for public support of flood mitigation solutions. This Flood Risk Communication Toolkit is designed to help community officials talk with the public about flood risk.

The Start Guide introduces the Toolkit's components, which were developed to help community officials begin and maintain an open channel for flood risk communication. The Toolkit includes templates and guides for designing an overarching communication plan, effective public meetings, and a social media strategy for addressing flood risk as well as story maps and videos to visually communicate the objectives of updating the community's flood risk data and maps. You can deploy it during a flood map update or when your community uses flood risk data to plan mitigation efforts to protect residents and investments.

To see the full Flood Risk Communication Toolkit for Community Officials, visit:

FEMA.gov

The Flood Risk Communication Toolkit includes the following components:

The **Communication Plan Guide** walks users through planning community engagement during the map update process and beyond. It explains the best ways to set up and use the other items in the Toolkit.

Used to help think through, plan, and track your communication and progress.

Designing Effective Public Meetings Guide shares information on how to design more effective meetings, from planning to setting clear goals and objectives, to the steps to take when the meeting is over. This component also includes tips for conducting early, effective, and comprehensive engagement.

Used to plan and execute public meetings during your mapping update and afterward; respond to road blocks experienced on the flood map journey.

The Social Media Guide (with Editorial Calendars) includes tested methods, content strategies, and suggested social media posts for events that mark the journey to update flood risk data and maps.

Used to take advantage of social media, with sample posts you can tailor for your community's use on various platforms.

Story Maps are interactive resources that combine the power of maps, multimedia tools, and the strength of a well-written narrative to relay compelling flood risk messages visually. Several story maps on various subjects, including flood mitigation success stories (**floodeconomics.com**), how to better understand coastal flood maps (**https://arcg.is/1bD1m8**), and structure-based risk assessments, are available as resources.

Used to offer a versatile, visually interactive, highly accessible online resource. By combining powerful, plain-language narrative with various media, enhance your messaging and engage diverse audiences.

The Video Series includes eight short videos designed to help community officials and decision makers understand, relate to, and communicate the objectives of updating the community's flood risk data and maps, including how to use updated flood risk information to increase community resilience.

Used to understand and explain concepts relevant to the flood map update journey, such as using updated maps for floodplain management and to reduce your community's flood risk.

Community Engagement Examples is an appendix of sample content collected to inspire communications within your community (e.g., news releases, PSAs, Tweets, newsletters, blog posts, utility bill inserts, fact sheets, community dashboards, and podcasts) for use during and after the mapping process.

Used to jump-start your communication with tried-and-true methods and products you can adjust to suit your community.

Tips for Discussing Complex Risk Topics in a Meaningful Way

Having conversations that persuade people to act on their flood risks can be difficult. After all, no one wants to believe that a flood will affect them personally. As humans, we are hardwired to prioritize the actions that will benefit us immediately and less likely to act on uncertainties or things that may happen in the future. Fortunately, there are ways to overcome these barriers and have more productive and meaningful conversations with members of your community. **Following are some quick tips:**

TIP #1

Relate to Your Audience

You know your community best. What are the things that are most important to residents? What does the community aspire to be in 10, 20, or 50 years? We often filter the information people tell us through the lens of our own beliefs and values. Start the conversation by relating flood mitigation and community resilience to what matters most to that audience.

TIP #2

Avoid Jargon

Speak plainly, and try to limit discussions of highly complex or technical topics that go too far into the weeds. At its core, convincing your audience that flood mitigation is important requires tapping into their emotional connection with the things that may be at risk--their homes, their businesses, or their cherished spaces. Leading the conversation with data risks losing your audience at the beginning.

TIP #3

Tell Stories

Stories of personal experience help people make those emotional connections that are so important to believing that risks are real. They can also help people feel that protecting themselves from these risks is important.

TIP #4

Be Credible

Answer questions honestly. When you don't have all the answers, admit it—and commit to finding them and following up.