

document the mitigation planning process

Overview

One of the most important reasons for having a hazard mitigation plan is to help the community make decisions that will reduce its vulnerability to hazards. Activities that local governments do every day, such as issuing building permits, approving development plans, and repairing roads and bridges, should reflect the community's mitigation vision and goals, whether it's using the most up to date building code, restricting growth in hazard-prone areas, or making infrastructure decisions based on the latest risk assessment findings. The hazard mitigation plan is a guide to keep you on track and serves as documentation of the thoughts and considerations that were the foundation of the planning process. As community leadership changes, and during intense decision-making situations (such as the post-disaster setting and when undertaking major land development decisions), the plan will serve as the representation of the community's principles for hazard loss reduction.

When it is time to put pen to paper, communities and states just initiating or beginning to upgrade existing mitigation plans will not necessarily have the ability to complete all the details of the planning process because of a lack of resources. In these cases, consideration and approval of the plans may be based on the level of documentation provided by the jurisdictions. For example, a community may not be able to complete a risk assessment for all parts of the community, but it may have dealt with the most populated areas first. Documenting in the plan the decision made to undertake this approach is just as important as providing a proposed schedule for completing the risk assessment.

Writing the mitigation plan document should have already begun in the previous steps of the planning process. Now it is time to finalize the plan.



Review existing mitigation plans, such as those from other communities or from your state, for ideas on how to structure your plan.



Procedures & Techniques

Task A. Make decisions about the style of the document.

1. *Decide how to make the document readable.*

a. **Length.** Sometimes the length of the document can be intimidating to readers. There is no “one size fits all” for state or local mitigation plans. Generally, the plan should be long enough to address all of the required elements in the DMA 2000 regulations; however, it should still be functional and easy to read.

b. **Format/Sections.** There is no required plan format under DMA 2000 regulations. However, the information required in the regulations lends itself to organizing the plan in the following manner: planning process, risk assessment, mitigation strategy, and plan maintenance. Detailed technical information should be contained in appendices, along with detailed maps or financial information.

c. **Language level.** The language of the plan should not be overly technical or complex, nor overly simplified.

2. *Determine how detailed the planning document should be.*

Determine how much information should be included in the planning document, and if there is any information that should be included in an appendix. For example, should the entire risk assessment be included in the main text of the mitigation plan, or should it be referenced as an attachment or appendix? A detailed risk assessment is usually put in an appendix to ensure that the mitigation plan is easy to follow and review; a description of the approach and summary findings, however, should be included in the text.

3. *Establish the schedule for writing the plan.*

A schedule for completing your planning process was set earlier in the process. Your schedule should allow time for drafting and reviewing the plan. The planning team, affected or interested agencies, the public, the state, and FEMA regional staff should review the plan before it goes to your local governing body for approval. If you have not done so already, assemble a list of agencies to receive the draft plan. You should also schedule a public forum to give the public a chance to comment on the plan.

The state may wish to suggest a common format and style for all of its community plans.



For multi-jurisdictional plans, DMA 2000 criteria require that hazard and vulnerability data and projects unique to each jurisdiction be included in the plan [44CFR §201.6(c)(3)]. Refer to *Multi-Jurisdictional Approaches to Mitigation Planning* (FEMA 386-8) for more information on multi-jurisdictional plans.



Keep in mind that DMA 2000 requires state plans to be updated every three years and local plans every five years.

4. Determine who should write the plan.

You probably identified someone early in the planning process to write the plan. This person is not necessarily the same person who recorded the meetings. The person selected, however, should be someone who has been involved from the beginning. Possibilities include someone on the planning team, a consultant, intern, or agency staff. Keep in mind that this person has to have good writing and editing skills. If more than one person writes different sections, it is recommended that one person be responsible for final editing.

Task B. Write the plan.

1. Assemble information and write-ups from previous phases of the process.

This includes:

- Meeting notes that document the planning process;
- Risk assessment and capability assessment findings and results;
- Your mitigation strategy; and
- Other existing plans, models, and state and program requirements to provide an organizational framework.

2. Write the plan in conformance with FEMA program requirements.

By using this how-to series, you are undertaking a planning process that conforms to several FEMA mitigation programs. FEMA's DMA 2000 requirements are written to fulfill the mitigation planning elements of all FEMA programs; however, refer to program guidance for the specific program to which you are applying, as reflected in Table 1: Hazard Mitigation Planning Process – Local Planning Requirements by Program (found in the Introduction section), for suggestions on how to organize your plan.

To meet DMA 2000 requirements, the plan should include:

a. Description of the planning process [44CFR §201.6(c)(1)].

This section outlines the process you used to create the plan, as well as a definition of the planning area. Identify who was involved in the process, how they were involved, and the methods of public participation that were employed, as well as a detailed description of the decision-making and prioritization processes.



The hazard mitigation plan should be:

Complete. Does it list all of the action steps to be implemented in all relevant parts of the community? Does it document all the activities of the state, tribe, or community?

Clear. Is it apparent who will do what by when? Are there easily identifiable inter-relationships between the loss estimation, problem statements, goals and objectives, the capability assessment, and the list of actions?

Current. Does the plan reflect the current work that is being accomplished? Does it anticipate newly emerging opportunities or challenges such as pending state legislation?

DMA

The DMA 2000 State and Local Plan Interim Criteria (G-318)

guidance document explains what a mitigation plan should include to meet DMA 2000 requirements. The CD ROM can be ordered through the FEMA publications warehouse at 1-800-480-2520.



FEMA is currently developing a guide

on how to use HAZUS to meet DMA 2000 risk assessment requirements.

This guide will be based in part on the results of pilot risk assessments being completed in Warren County, Kentucky; Marion County, Indiana; Austin, Texas; the state of Wyoming; Scottsdale, Arizona; and Portland, Oregon.

HAZUS

Although maps are not required

as part of the hazard profiles, it is a good idea to include them in the plan. Graphics help the reader visualize the geographic relationships between the loss estimation and the mitigation activity chosen. Note that the Community Rating System requires a floodplain map to obtain credits under this program.

DMA

See *Bringing the Plan to Life*

(FEMA 386-4) for more information on how to adopt the plan and monitor its progress.



b. **Risk assessment** [44CFR §201.6(c) (2)]. Include your analysis of the hazards and risks facing your community, tribe, or state, including a discussion of your community's hazards and hazard history. Summarize the key elements of the risk assessment in the plan. You can use the hazard profile, maps, and loss estimation summary chart, or you can refer to your risk assessment included as an appendix (See *Understanding Your Risks*, FEMA 386-2, for more details.)

c. **Mitigation strategy** [44CFR §201.6(c) (3)]. Describe how the community and/or state intends to reduce losses identified in the risk assessment, including:

- Goals and objectives to guide the selection of activities to mitigate and reduce potential losses;
- A discussion of pre- and post-disaster hazard management policies and programs to mitigate hazards, including a capability assessment;
- Identification of mitigation actions that were considered in both pre- and post-disaster environments;
- A prioritized list of cost-effective, environmentally sound, and technically feasible mitigation actions; and
- Current and potential sources of federal, state, tribal, local, or private funding and other resources to implement the mitigation actions.

d. **A plan maintenance process section** [44CFR §201.6(c) (4)].

This section describes how you plan to:

- Monitor, evaluate, and update the mitigation plan;
- Incorporate the requirements of the mitigation plan into other planning mechanisms, such as comprehensive or capital improvement plans; and
- Review progress on achieving goals and activities identified in the mitigation strategy.





Now that you are organized and have all the appropriate information, you can begin writing the plan. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Technical jargon should be avoided whenever possible. The plan should clearly and effectively communicate risks and hazards to all community members, including laypersons.
- Include definitions of all technical terms. People writing the plan are probably familiar with such terms as *retrofitting*, *flood-proofing*, and *special use overlay district*, but most people are not. Make sure a definition is included, either in the text or a glossary.
- Avoid the use of acronyms. While *HMGP* and *NFIP* make sense to mitigation planners, most people do not know what they mean. Sometimes, the use of acronyms is unavoidable, but make sure the term is explained the first time it is used in the document. Acronyms can also be included in a glossary.
- Technical or lengthy analyses should be included as appendices. Such information is good to include as background or as justification for certain parts of the plan, but it should not be included in the text portion of the document.

Task C. Review the plan.

1. *Planning Team Review.*

The planning team should have an opportunity to review the plan and provide comments.

2. *Agency Review.*

Agencies involved in plan implementation should receive a draft copy for review.

3. *Public Review.*

Whether a public forum to review the plan is held following the receipt of agency comments, or concurrently as agencies review the draft, the public should have an opportunity to review the draft plan before it is presented for formal adoption. Provide a draft copy to your State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO) for review prior to formal local adoption to see if the plan meets state and federal requirements. FEMA mitigation staff should review the document prior to formal local adoption to ensure that the governing body is acting on a document that meets federal requirements.

Give the plan to someone who has not been involved



in the planning process to review. If it is clear to that reviewer, you are well on your way to having an understandable draft.



Under the Community Rating System,

a public meeting must be held at least two weeks before the plan is voted on by the governing board, and the meeting must be properly publicized.



Communities should check with their State Hazard Mitigation Officer



(SHMO) to determine the state's requirements for reviewing the plan. The SHMO must review the draft plan to get feedback on how well the plan addresses program requirements. The plan should meet all DMA 2000 requirements before it is presented to the local governing body for adoption. If the governing board has to approve multiple versions of the plan, it will probably lose some of its credibility.

States should check with their FEMA Regional Office



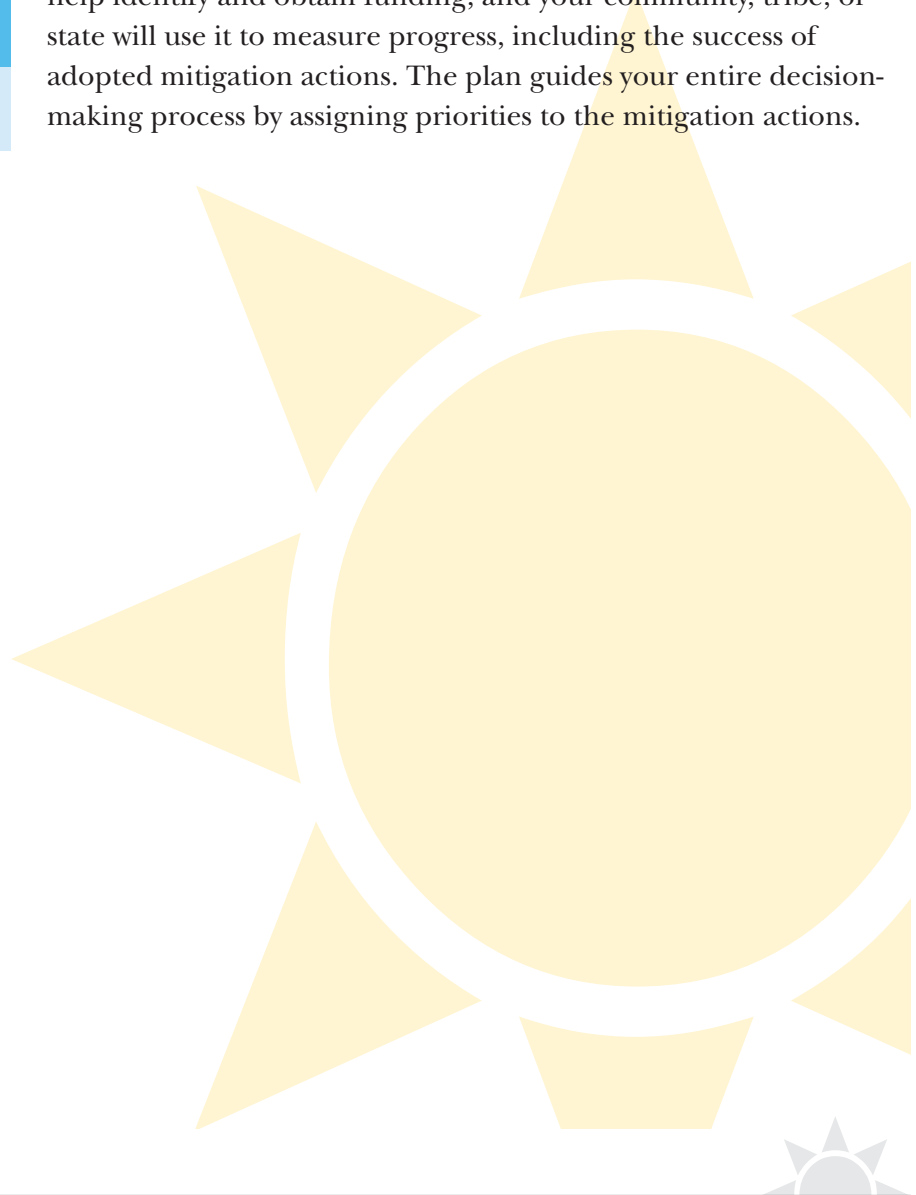
to determine the procedures established for reviewing draft plans.

4. Final Draft.

After comments have been received, revise the plan and prepare a final draft. Once comments from all relevant parties have been incorporated, you are ready for the next step: Presenting the plan to your local government body for adoption. This step is covered in a subsequent guide, *Bringing the Plan to Life* (FEMA 386-4).

Summary

The mitigation plan document is the culmination of everything you have gathered and produced up to this point, but it is also your key to implementing the policies and projects that have been identified. It is a record of the process you used to develop your goals, objectives, and mitigation actions. The plan is a tool to be used to help identify and obtain funding, and your community, tribe, or state will use it to measure progress, including the success of adopted mitigation actions. The plan guides your entire decision-making process by assigning priorities to the mitigation actions.



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The Hazardville Mitigation Plan

(Part 4 of a 4-Part Series on the Mitigation Strategy Process)

[Hazardville, EM] The members of the Town Council were presented with a draft copy of the Hazardville Hazard Mitigation Plan at last night's public meeting. According to Planning Department Director Joe Norris, lead planner of the Town of Hazardville Organization for Risk Reduction (THORR), the feedback received from the Town Department Heads and community members was very helpful, and he confirmed that all of the comments would be taken into consideration in the final draft version of the plan. "Overall," Norris stated, "the comments we've received have been positive and supportive, indicating our plan is in line with the community's needs and interests. We plan to incorporate the citizen

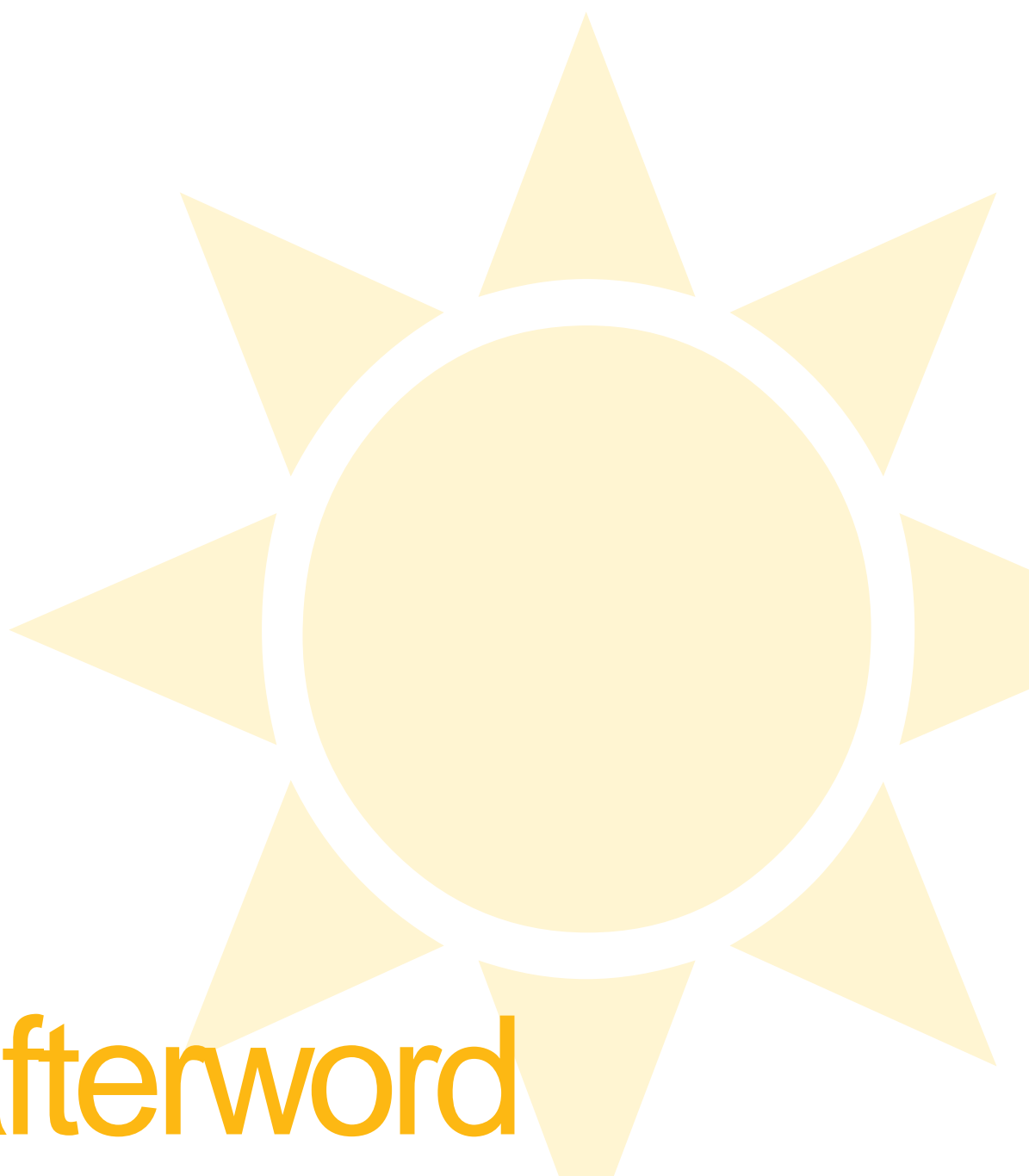
feedback we received last night to ensure that we haven't missed the boat on any issue that is important to our community."

Norris said, "The mitigation plan was written by a graduate student intern from the Emergency State University's Planning Department, with oversight and assistance from all of the THORR members." In order to document the planning process, the student attended THORR meetings and took notes on the process, discussions, and decisions of the group. Norris pointed out to the Town Council that the plan itself is very straightforward, with many of the details presented in separate appendices. "We wanted this plan to be easy to read and to understand so we organized it clearly and in-

cluded an annotated outline in the introduction." Norris added that THORR would submit a draft plan to the State Hazard Mitigation Officer and the FEMA Regional Office for review to ensure all requirements have been properly addressed under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, prior to submitting the final plan for approval.

According to Norris, the final plan and overall strategy will be presented to the Town Council for approval on February 13, 2003, and will then be forwarded to the State for final review. The State will review the final plan and send it to the FEMA Regional Office for approval.



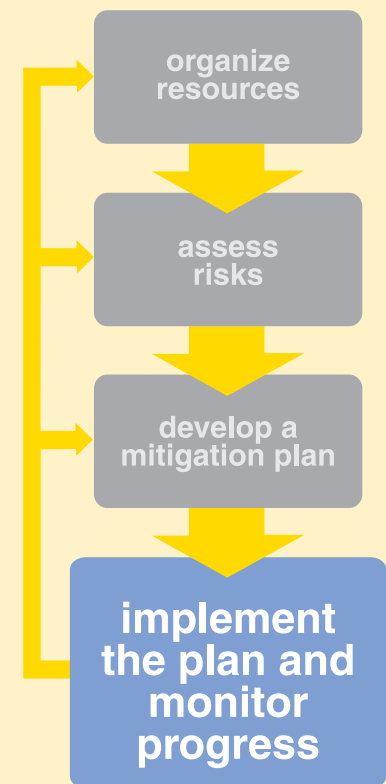


afterword

You have a mitigation plan. Now what?

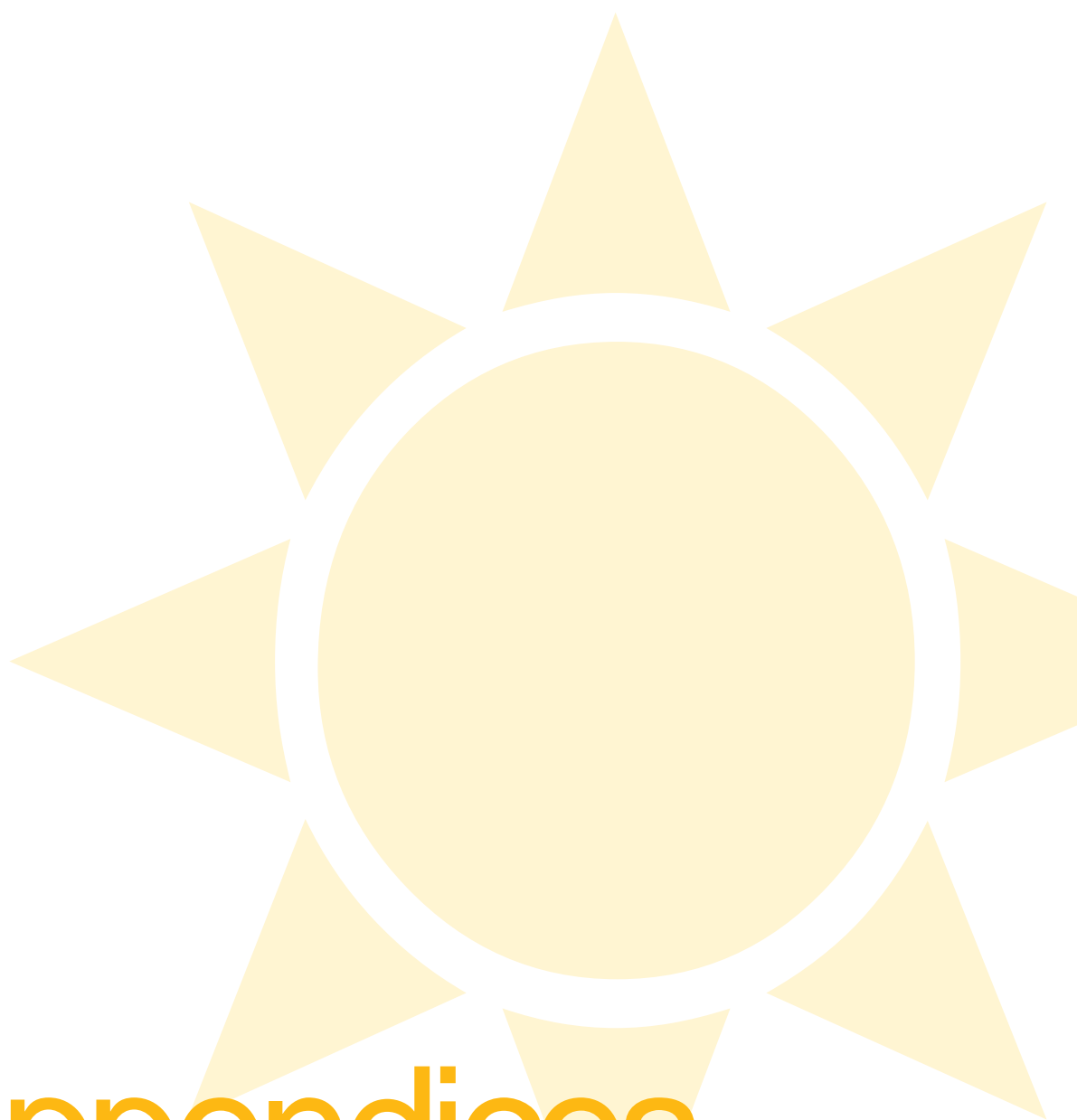
A common failure of some mitigation plans is that they are never implemented. Therefore, in the next phase of the mitigation planning process you will learn how to present the mitigation plan to your governing authority for adoption, formally authorizing the responsible bodies to implement the plan. DMA 2000 requires adoption of the plan by the local government to be eligible for consideration of approval by FEMA. Additionally, multi-jurisdictional plans must be adopted by all of the communities included in the plan in order for each jurisdiction to be eligible. Refer to *Multi-Jurisdictional Approaches to Mitigation Planning* (FEMA 386-8) for more information. If you followed the suggestions in this guide and kept everyone informed of your progress, and you solicited public input and addressed all of your important hazard related goals, your community should be well positioned for the final phase of the planning process—Implement the Plan and Monitor Progress.

As detailed in the Foreword, the hazard mitigation planning process consists of four basic phases.



The next how-to in the series, *Bringing the Plan to Life*, will assist you in maintaining an up-to-date, relevant plan.





appendices