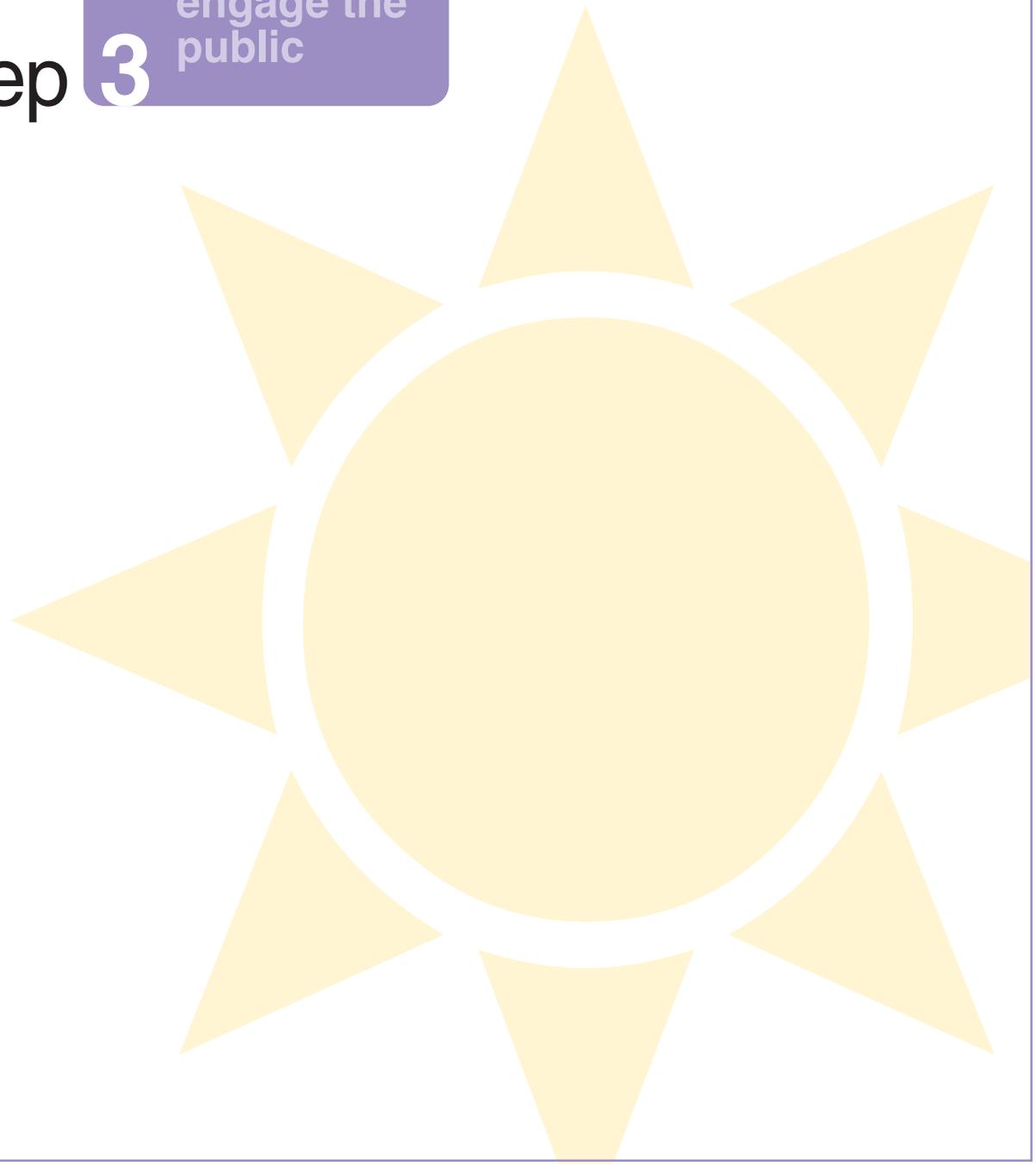


1 assess
community
support

2 build the
planning
team

3 engage the
public

step



engage the public

Overview

Although the planning team represents a cross-section of the community, it is important to include broad public participation in the planning process as well. Involving stakeholders who are not part of the core team in all stages of the process will introduce the planning team to different points of view about the needs of the community. It will also provide opportunities to educate the public about hazard mitigation, the planning process, any findings, and could be used to generate support for the mitigation plan.

The stakeholders to involve include those individuals who do not regularly participate in the planning process, but may be affected or have an interest in the plan and its implications. Such stakeholders include public officials, agency heads, neighborhood and other civic organizations, business associations, institutions, and individual citizens.

Involving these stakeholders in a public participation process will aid in developing support for the plan and its implementation. Getting these stakeholders' support, however, may be a challenge. Two obstacles are commonly encountered. First, most people may not be aware of risks in their community; secondly, they may not know what mitigation is or how it can compliment an array of existing goals. Therefore, it is important to find ways to engage these stakeholders and educate them about the planning process and the benefits of mitigation to them personally and at the community level.

This step will show you how to identify the stakeholders, organize your public participation activities, and incorporate public feedback into your decision-making process.





Public Participation Methods

Groups make decisions in many ways. In a partnership, the level of enthusiasm or involvement of individual members is tied directly to the feeling of ownership in the project. Using a consensus-based approach to decision making helps promote an attitude of respect for other opinions while ensuring a process that allows everyone to participate and be heard. This differs from the majority-rule concept, in which members of the group may leave the decision-making process feeling unhappy with the outcome. Majority rule is a legitimate way to make decisions when the situation does not warrant the time consuming process of consensus. The group should be able to decide whether the seriousness and significance of the situation requires consensus or majority rule.

Consensus is a way of working together as a group to reach a decision or solution. The consensus-based approach is an important part of working and acting as a team because it forces the individual members to move beyond their own self-interests and take into consideration the positions of other stakeholders. It is an informal discussion involving talking issues through, understanding what other people are saying and feeling, and then trying to work out decisions acceptable to everyone. All of the members should be a part of the decision and should feel the decision that was reached was the best possible one for the team. The decision may not be their personal preference, but it is one they should be able to support.

For additional information, including techniques you can use to reach consensus, see *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, and *Breaking the Impasse: Consensus Approaches to Resolving Public Disputes* (see Appendix B).

Procedures & Techniques

Task A. Identify the public.

Identifying the people to involve will be similar to what you did in Step 2, Task A, when you created the planning team. In this step, however, you will be looking more toward educating and informing the public about what is happening and how proposed measures may affect them, providing opportunities for them to voice their concerns, and integrating their feedback as you make decisions.

As a start, you may have developed a list of stakeholders when you identified members for the planning team. Revisit this list to see who declined to join the planning team and put them on your contact list. Also, as you learned more about your community, you may have encountered other stakeholders you may not have originally considered. Revisit the questions in Step 2, Task A.2 to help you identify these people. You may also have lists of participants from previous planning efforts. Review these lists and select those who should be contacted.

An effective way to identify leaders

in the community (this would include people who may not necessarily be heads of organizations or elected officials, but who command the respect of community members, e.g., a lawyer, neighborhood activist, or philanthropist) is to ask team members and those who attend public participation activities to name individuals they think should be contacted. You will notice that the same names keep coming up. You may want to personally invite these people or follow-up a mailing to them with a phone call to ensure that they are aware of the next planning team meeting.



Task B. Organize public participation activities.

1. Schedule public participation activities.

During your organization of the team (Step 2), you set up a regular meeting schedule (Task C) and a timeline for completing certain phases of your plan. Revisit this schedule and identify points where it is important to inform the public of what is happening and to seek their input to assist you in making a decision. For example, you may want to hold a public meeting at the beginning of the planning process to let stakeholders know the purpose of your planning effort and how you are approaching it. You may have one or more people join the team after such a meeting. Once they understand what is involved, they may decide it is worth their time. Another good time to invite public involvement is after you have completed your risk assessment and damage loss estimation [see *Understanding Your Risks* (FEMA 386-2)]. This will give the public a chance to learn specific information about the community's vulnerabilities, which can be a revelation as to why mitigation planning is important. You may also want to get feedback and input on setting goals, and identifying and selecting mitigation alternatives. Stakeholders should review and agree with your selection and evaluation criteria. Once you have a draft plan that the public can review, invite them to provide comments before the plan is presented formally for adoption [see *Bringing the Plan to Life* (FEMA 386-4)]. Note that Hazardville held four public meetings during the one-year planning process.

Determine the appropriate public participation method for different types of stakeholders.

Not everyone likes to participate or voice opinions in a large meeting setting. Others may prefer to learn about community initiatives during their regularly scheduled association meetings. It is important to assess how best to reach your stakeholders. Ask others on the team what they have done in the past to inform or get input from stakeholders. The public participation methods that will work for your community or state depends on the size of your community, the extent of citizen involvement, governmental policies, and the capabilities of the officials to support the planning initiative. Review how you have handled this



in the past and what produced good results. You may have found that elected officials prefer a one-on-one briefing. Businesses, non-profits, and institutions may have welcomed you at their business association meetings or invited you to speak at their regularly scheduled breakfasts. The team can also ask to be added to the agendas of scheduled community group meetings, including neighborhood associations, community service groups (Lions, Jaycees, etc), business alliances, and the local Chamber of Commerce, to explain and talk about the planning process. Take advantage of the meeting infrastructure already in place.

Some other participation methods you may want to consider for your community or state include: hosting a public workshop, establishing a hotline, conducting interviews, and distributing a questionnaire. Workshops can be held during different milestones in the planning process for large or small groups of community or state representatives, business representatives, and citizens. These meetings can bring problems and issues to the table and provide new ideas for solutions.

Holding regular community meetings can create a public forum in which questions can be asked, issues can be raised, answers can be given, and concerns can be addressed. These public meetings will also help you sell mitigation beyond the planning team to the community at large. As part of this, you need to agree on the public participation rules. You may decide to use the same ones that apply to the planning team or modify this list. Also, agree on how you will handle conflict beforehand.

A hotline can be established so that anyone with a concern, question, or comment can reach a person who will be able to speak knowledgeably about the planning process. This number should be well publicized in newsletters, news releases, meeting announcements, etc. The key to an effective hotline is ensuring that callers feel that the person at the other end of the hotline is interested in what they have to say, and not whether or not they have all the answers. A cost-effective alternative to a telephone hotline would be to post an e-mail address or use an interactive Web site.



Interviews allow you to gather information from key people, including community representatives or leaders, heads of civic groups, and people who will be most affected by the plan and might be more comfortable talking one-on-one. Obviously, you cannot interview everyone, but by interviewing key community members, you can gather specific qualitative information that you probably cannot obtain in any other way.

Questionnaires can also be used to gather valuable information that people might not feel comfortable disclosing face-to-face. The questionnaire can be as simple or detailed as you want and is a good way to collect a lot of information on citizens' knowledge of hazards as well as what mitigation activities they'd like to see implemented. An excellent example is the questionnaire used by the Partners for Disaster Resistance: Oregon Showcase State Program, which is included as Appendix D.

Once you determine how to best approach public stakeholders, assign responsibilities for:

- Organizing mailings;
- Logistical coordination;
- Meeting facilitation;
- Establishing a hotline;
- Contacting interviewees; and
- Developing presentation materials.

Again, select the method, or methods, most appropriate for your community and assign responsibilities accordingly.

Analyze, evaluate, and incorporate comments.

As a team, decide how to analyze, evaluate, respond, and incorporate comments into your decision-making process. Stakeholders should know that you will listen to their opinions and suggestions, and that you will decide how to best incorporate these into the plan. They should be warned, however, that while suggestions are welcome, they will not always be acted upon. However, stakeholders deserve an explanation of your decision. Someone should be assigned the responsibility for organizing the feedback you receive, including summarizing meeting points,



identifying and tracking key issues, and responding to feedback.

Keeping track of and analyzing public comments can get complicated if you have a large amount of information coming in. Develop a process for organizing and storing the comments you receive. This can be based on such things as the topic addressed in the comment, the geographic area of the person making the comment, or whether it is a positive or negative comment. It doesn't matter how the feedback is organized, as long as you ensure that the comments are incorporated into the various stages of the planning process. The Library in Appendix B contains references that include more specific information on how to analyze and evaluate public feedback.

2. Document results.

Documenting results is a crucial part of analyzing, evaluating, and incorporating public feedback. As mentioned previously, all public comments, regardless of the source of the comment, should be recorded and organized. After each public participation activity, results should be documented so that they can be referred to later. Decision makers will use the public comments to ensure that all issues are addressed during the formation of the mitigation plan. The documentation of the feedback serves as a permanent record that shows you included public input during the planning process. A specific person or persons from the planning team should be designated the central contact for public feedback. This person will be responsible for maintaining and organizing the comments.

Obtain Letters of Support or Endorsement

During public outreach activities, you may come to realize that certain groups or organizations strongly support your mitigation plan and planning process. Try to get these organizations to provide you with letters of support or endorsement. To ease this process, provide them with a template letter that they can tailor and send back to you. These letters will let you know who is interested and can possibly help you, and will also be of assistance during the formal plan adoption process. They may also help in continuing to attract new participants.



Task C. Develop a public education campaign.

You will need a specific way to present information to each type of stakeholder. When meeting with elected and public officials, for example, you may want to present a brief PowerPoint presentation that can be expanded for use in a larger public meeting setting. You may leave brochures with them that can also be distributed at fairs or libraries. Look at the activities and map out what information would be useful to leave with stakeholders and what information you need to prepare for presentation purposes. The following are information materials you can prepare as part of your education campaign, as well as venues for distributing them.



1. News media.

One of the easiest and most effective ways to inform and involve the public is through the media. Print, radio, and television media have the ability to affect and shape our opinions and behavior, and influence our preferences and choices. Your team might want to include a special insert in the local paper, broadcast public meetings on the local access channel or through public service announcements, or even produce a video highlighting recent disasters and damages in your community or state.

You can contact local reporters and give them a press kit, which is a folder summarizing the key information that includes your goals and actions, to pique their interest and provide them with accurate information. You can also do a news release, which you write and provide to local news media. If your story generates enough interest, a feature story may be done. This is a full news story written by a reporter. A news conference is another way to get information out, but to generate enough interest and ensure that the media will show up, these are usually only done for major announcements by well known people.

You can also contact local publications and newsletters and ask them to include information about the plan and the planning process. Examples of local organizations that might have publications include: watershed organizations, historic societies, volunteer organizations, technical associations, garden clubs, and churches.

2. Brochures, fliers, and newsletters.

Brochures, fliers, and newsletters are relatively inexpensive to produce and can be useful in reaching audiences that might not otherwise have the opportunity to learn more about hazards that affect your community. Someone on the planning team can create the brochure or newsletter, or perhaps you can find a volunteer willing to produce it. Make sure these publications are reviewed and approved by key members of the planning team before they are distributed. The brochures should be clear and easy to read and understand. The brochures, fliers, and newsletters should include information about the planning committee and what the mitigation plan is expected to accomplish in your community or state. Make sure that the



While the media is a good source for getting information to the public, you do have to be careful. Sometimes the media

can distort the information you give them or give it a different spin. The media likes attention-grabbing headlines so they may try to make your plan controversial in some way. You should work on establishing an honest, working relationship with a local reporter so that each of you has someone to turn to when you need to gather or provide information to the community.



FEMA's *Mitigation Resources for Success CD (FEMA 372)*

is full of materials and practical ideas for building community awareness. The success stories from other communities or states may ignite a wealth of new ideas in your planning team. The Mitigation Library contains brochures, fact sheets, and step-by-step instructions on disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. To order, call the FEMA publications warehouse at 1-800-480-2520.



documents include a designated department or contact name and phone number in case anyone wants to learn more about the initiative. These documents can be distributed through utility bills, grocery or department stores, government buildings, and libraries throughout the community or state.

3. Outreach activities at festivals, fairs, and bazaars.

Public events provide unique opportunities for planning team members to interact with the public in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. The planning team may want to ask the event coordinators if they would consider donating a booth or a table to display hazard and mitigation-related brochures, fliers, and newsletters. During the event, team members can talk to citizens about their experience with hazards and try to get feedback on any mitigation activities the team is considering. This also provides people with an opportunity to ask questions face to face. Someone on the planning team should be in charge of keeping track of the dates of local fairs, festivals, etc. and should be responsible for contacting the organizers of the events.

When creating a mitigation plan

in response to the Cerro Grande Fire, the town of Los Alamos, NM created a Web page to announce public meetings, gain public input into the process and development of the plan, and to inform the public about the potential mitigation measures and the progress of the mitigation plan.



4. Get your planning team connected to the Internet.

As more communities learn about the Internet and obtain the resources to set up Web sites, more people come to expect information at their fingertips. Almost all state, regional, and local governmental entities now have Web sites. Linking to a Web page on these sites can be an excellent way to publicize and highlight your planning efforts. The Web page can be as simple as a description of the planning initiative with upcoming meeting dates, times, and minutes from the last meeting, or it can be highly developed with links to mitigation and hazard resources and sites. The Web site could also be used to post questionnaires for citizens to determine their perceptions of hazards and risks in the community or state, as well as provide an additional outlet to generate feedback on issues.



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THORR to Hold Public Workshop

[Hazardville, EM] The Town of Hazardville Organization for Risk Reduction (THORR) is organizing a facilitated workshop to educate the community on the mitigation planning process and to outline opportunities for public input in the planning process. This meeting will also serve as a forum for the public to voice their opinions and concerns about the mitigation plan. Ms. Rita Booke, head of the local Citizen's for Action group, has agreed to record all public comments and will post them and their responses on the THORR Web page. Ms. Booke stated, "Public input into this process is so important, I really hope people come to the meeting and voice their opinions and ask questions. Without public comments this process will not be nearly as effective; in fact, we're counting on

public input to help us shape the plan."

Mr. Joe Norris, Planning Department Director and Chair of THORR, said he would be available to answer questions on the day of the workshop. "I have details about the last flood and how it affected the community as a whole," said Mr. Norris. "These details are not easily forgotten since I, as well as many others, lost crops and ended up doing major repairs on our homes after the flooding of May 2000."

Mary Tremble, Director of Hazardville's Emergency Management Agency, will discuss the disasters that have occurred in the past in and around Hazardville, and state representatives from the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP), Office of the Environment, and Office of Planning will be on

hand to demonstrate their support for the planning process. Hazardville received a \$20,000 grant from the State Emergency Management Agency's Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program to complement local funding to develop Hazardville's All-Hazard Risk Reduction Plan.

Starting May 5, 2002, local radio station WHAM will begin announcing the date, time, and location of the workshop to ensure that as many people as possible are aware of what is happening and, therefore, better informed. Jim Snow, owner of Snow's Snowplows and the business leader of THORR, and Mr. Norris will also distribute posters and fliers announcing the workshop.

