External Stakeholder Working Group (ESWG)

Year in Review
Calendar Year (CY) 2021
The Year in Review

1. A Year of Growth

During 2021, FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) Division had four main priorities for the growth of the External Stakeholder Working Group (ESWG). These priorities center around further developing the group into a valued resource of stakeholder feedback within HMA.

- Further develop workstreams
- Foster deeper connections with alumni
- Equip ESWG members to be well informed ambassadors for HMA
- Create more opportunities for collaboration and interaction among members outside of quarterly meetings

2. Workstreams - Deep-dive Problem Solving

Each year, the ESWG identifies topics of interest for state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) stakeholders to engage in deep dive thinking and problem solving through workstreams. To decide the workstreams for 2021, the HMA Division utilized a “Shark Tank” style activity to allow different programs and initiatives within FEMA to present potential workstream options to members. The ESWG members then voted on which initiatives they wanted to focus on for 2021.

2.1. BCA and Equity

The BCA and Equity workstream partnered with HMA to examine FEMA’s benefit-cost analysis (BCA) methodology through an equity lens. Over the course of the year, the workstream members identified obstacles and potential solutions related to equity and BCA. Their observations were supplemented with input from ESWG members and other external stakeholders gathered in previous years. The observations and ideas were then shared with the entire ESWG who added additional perspectives. The workstream developed a final report which outlined stakeholder perspectives on the underlying issues around equity and the BCA methodology and potential solutions. HMA plans to use this report to support initiatives focused on making the BCA methodology more equitable.

2.2. Public Assistance (PA) Mitigation

The PA Mitigation workstream’s goals were to (1) increase the number of state emergency management agency websites with accurate and informative information on Public Assistance Mitigation and (2) identify communication material that could be improved to increase the usage of
Public Assistance Mitigation funding. In 2021, the workstream was successful in their outreach efforts and provided valuable feedback on communication materials.

2.3. Swift Current

The goal of the Swift Current workstream is to provide advisory support for the Flood Mitigation Assistance Swift Current program. The objective of the Swift Current Initiative is to obligate mitigation dollars for Severe Repetitive Loss, Repetitive Loss, and substantially damaged National Flood Insurance Program-insured properties as quickly and equitably as possible after a disaster event to reduce disaster suffering. In 2021, the ESWG workstream met regularly with FEMA’s FMA program team to advise at every stage of the project to date, including: concept development and initiation, research and design, drafting and developing an implementation plan, and successful preparation to launch the program in the beginning of 2022. The Swift Current workstream will continue to provide advisory support through the implementation of the program and provide feedback in a post-implementation forensic analysis.

3. Membership

3.1. Blossoming Alumni Network

2021 marked a turning point in the maturity of the ESWG. This year, the group put forward intentional efforts to foster deeper connections with a growing network of alumni. Quarterly member-alumni connect meetings have become a standard practice. These meetings allow current ESWG members to socialize with alumni and become connected to a broader network of knowledgeable mitigation professionals. During these connects, both current members and alums share professional news, discuss mitigation best practices, and turn to each other for guidance and troubleshooting support.

3.2. Chair and Executive Sponsor Transitions

At the end of 2021, Jennie Orenstein (Branch Chief, HMA Policy, Tools and Training Branch, FEMA) stepped down as the Chair of the ESWG. HMA would like to thank Jennie for her 4 years of service as the Chair for this group. Samuel Capasso (Branch Chief, HMA Community Infrastructure Resilience Branch, FEMA) will become the Chair beginning in January 2022.

“Having the opportunity to chair the HMA ESWG has been one of the most impactful experiences while at FEMA! The ESWG members willingness to share their experiences and perspectives to expand the HMA aperture has been invaluable.” – Jennie Orenstein, Branch Chief, HMA Policy, Tools and Training Branch

“I am very excited to continue Jennie’s great work! Since the ESWG began, I have loved every opportunity I have had to engage with such a collaborative group. As a forum for a diverse range of perspectives, the ESWG and its members are the foundation for continuously building and improving our community of practice to help...”
people reduce disaster risks and impacts. I look forward to working with our new and current members and connecting with our ESWG alumni!“ – Samuel Capasso, Branch Chief, HMA Community Infrastructure Resilience Branch

Additionally, Kayed Lakhia (Former Deputy Division Director, Hazard Mitigation Assistance), who served as the ESWG Executive Sponsor since 2017 stepped down as he transitioned to a new position within the Risk Management Division of FIMA. The ESWG would like to thank Kayed for his leadership and for being an enthusiastic champion for the ESWG within FEMA.

“Since the time we established the ESWG five years ago, our intention was to create a candid forum for dialogue and exchange of ideas from a plurality of voices around the nation. We have been fortunate that we have been able to engage a dedicated group of people over the years. I have been honored and privileged to lead this group and look forward to seeing you all again in the alumni forums!” Kayed I. Lakhia, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP, CFM, Former Deputy Division Director, HMA

3.3. Welcome to Incoming Members

FEMA is excited to welcome our new members in 2022:

- Genelle Winter – Grant Coordinator for the Metlakatla Indian Community, Alaska
- Paige Nutter – Hazard Mitigation Coordinator, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
- Jack Krolikowski – Deputy State Hazard Mitigation Officer, State of Georgia
- Vermecia Alsop – State Hazard Mitigation Officer, Washington, DC
- Jacy Hyde – Hazard Mitigation Branch Chief, State of California
- Bradley Petersen – Administrator, Madison County, Idaho
- Anthony Bateman – Emergency Management Planner, Charlotte, NC
3.4. Appreciation for Outgoing Members

FEMA’s HMA Division would like to express sincere gratitude to the following ESWG members whose membership term ended in December 2021:

- Richard Fisher – Principal Civil Engineer, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, IL
- Christine Hurley – Executive Director, Monroe County Land Authority, FL
- Lucrecia Vargas - State Hazard Mitigation Officer, Arizona Dept of Emergency and Military Affairs, AZ
- Jennifer Oakley – Mitigation Grants Planner, Arkansas Division of Emergency Management, AR
- Serene Hayden – Incident Commander, Yurok Tribe Office of Emergency Management, CA
- JaLeesa Tate – State Hazard Mitigation Officer, Maryland Department of Emergency Management

3.5. In Memoria – Mr. Tracy DePew

In February 2021, ESWG alumnus Mr. Tracy DePew passed away. Tracy was a strong and passionate advocate not only for the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians, but for all tribal nations,
while serving on the ESWG. He was not shy to voice his opinions and share his perspective, while still giving space for others to grow and expand their own perspectives. He was an intelligent and thoughtful leader and was known for his down to earth demeanor. Tracy’s legacy as a champion of FEMA’s ESWG will be honored for years to come.

4. Connecting with Mitigation Stakeholders

One function of the ESWG is to serve as the bridge between external stakeholders and FEMA’s HMA Division. In 2021, the ESWG was able to connect with mitigation stakeholders in new ways.

4.1. Region VII Annual Mitigation Summit

In September, ESWG Member Steve Duryea presented at the Region VII Mitigation Conference. His presentation discussed the structure and purpose of the ESWG and the collaboration and problem solving being done to make the Benefit Cost Analysis tool more equitable.

4.2. Region X Tribal Conference

In June, the ESWG was highlighted during the Region X Tribal Conference. This targeted outreach with Tribal stakeholders served two goals: (1) increase awareness among Tribal stakeholders about the existence and purpose of the ESWG and (2) notify stakeholders of the opportunity to join the ESWG and contribute their perspective to enhance mitigation across the nation.

5. Navigating a Virtual Landscape

5.1. Virtual Field Trip

During the Q2 meeting in May, the ESWG piled into the metaphorical travel bus and journeyed to different states for a virtual field trip. This field trip highlighted three interesting mitigation related initiatives and projects.

- Joel Paulsen (Executive Director, FM Area Diversion Project) presented on the [FM Area Diversion Project](https://www.farmdiversion.org), which is designed to protect the Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo metro area during times of extreme flooding. It was developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Diversion Board of Authority. The project began construction in early 2017 and will prevent catastrophic flooding with a few major components.

- Kristen Baja (Urban Sustainability Directors Network) presented on Resilience Hubs. Resilience Hubs are community-serving facilities augmented to support residents, coordinate communication, distribute resources, and reduce carbon pollution while enhancing quality of life. Hubs provide an opportunity to effectively work at the nexus of community resilience, emergency management, climate change mitigation, and social equity while providing opportunities for communities to become more self-determining, socially connected, and successful before, during, and after disruptions.
Nickea Bradley (Deputy Director, City of Houston Office of Emergency Management) presented on Project Brays. Project Brays is the largest, most significant flood damage reduction initiative to be managed by the Harris County Flood Control District. The project will benefit thousands of residents and businesses along Brays Bayou.

5.2. Embracing Virtual Collaboration

While the ESWG was not able to have an in-person meeting in 2021, that did not inhibit the group from creating an environment of collaboration, discussion, and perspective sharing on important topics. ESWG members embraced virtual tools such as collaborative white boards to share their perspective, generate new ideas, and brainstorm solutions. The group is planning to continue this trend by utilizing a virtual collaboration platform in 2022 to stay connected and share resources in between the quarterly meetings.

![Virtual white board from 2021 Q3 meeting showing ESWG discussion on Strategic Retreat](image)

Interested in learning more or joining the ESWG?

If you are a state, local, tribal, territorial or FEMA regional stakeholder and are interested in becoming a member of this group, please visit the ESWG webpage to read about the group and SUBMIT AN EXPRESSION OF INTEREST. Expression of Interest forms are accepted year-round on a rolling basis and spots are filled as needed.