



# State Mitigation Planning Key Topics Bulletins: Planning Process

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## INTRODUCTION

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) released the [State Mitigation Plan Review Guide](#) (the Guide) in March 2015. This Guide, which became effective March 6, 2016, presents FEMA's official policy on and interpretation of the natural hazard mitigation planning requirements for states established in the Code of Federal Regulations (44 CFR Part 201). The State Mitigation Planning Key Topics Bulletins ("Bulletins") are a series of brief documents aimed at informing states on how to meet the regulatory and policy requirements described in the Guide. The series covers all components of the mitigation planning process. The Bulletins are not intended to clarify policy, but instead to provide state officials approaches and resources for updating state hazard mitigation plans.



Engaging and obtaining input from stakeholders representing a wide variety of agencies, organizations, and jurisdictions is a crucial part of the planning process. Image: Getty Images

## PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

The planning process is typically led by the State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO). While the SHMO usually leads or coordinates the update, input from stakeholders is vital. A stakeholder is a representative of an agency, organization, jurisdiction, or other entity that has a role in natural hazard mitigation. All stakeholders or a sub-set of active stakeholders form the planning team for the planning process, and their participation improves the plan.

A well-defined and documented planning process is critical to the success of the plan. The first step is building the planning team through sector collaboration and stakeholder engagement. The planning team reviews the content of the existing plan, including identified hazards, assessed risk and capabilities, vulnerability, and the mitigation strategy. The plan is updated and revised based on any changes that may have occurred over the past five years, new data, disaster activity, and current conditions. A realistic and effective plan maintenance process should be revised or developed as well to ensure the plan is routinely evaluated. Lastly, per the Guide, the plan must be adopted by the state's highest elected official or designee.

The state mitigation plan is a living document, and the planning process is essential to establishing a structure for ongoing mitigation implementation. When properly executed, the planning process supports relationship building, promotes resiliency and sustainability, aids in consistent evaluation, and provides a means to reduce the costs associated with response and recovery.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLE #1: FOSTER COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

FEMA established four guiding principles for the development of state hazard mitigation plans in the Guide. Guiding Principle #1, **Foster Cooperative Relationships**, emphasizes that FEMA will maintain a close and constructive working relationship with the state. Similarly, identifying and establishing relationships among a variety of agencies, organizations, and individuals is an important part of the mitigation planning process. Creating mutually beneficial partnerships in a thoughtful way, lends itself to developing a strong hazard mitigation plan and the ability to achieve mitigation goals through action implementation.



# RE-ENGAGE AND GROW THE PLANNING TEAM

A strong, effective state mitigation planning team consists of a broad range of stakeholders from various sectors, agencies, and organizations. Diversity and variety are extremely valuable to the planning team, allowing for collaboration to address complicated problems and preventing a duplication of efforts. Bringing multiple stakeholders together to work towards common goals also provides the opportunity for partners to leverage success and to combine technical and financial capabilities. The state should strive for increased collaboration across sectors and robust stakeholder engagement at the beginning of the process to build a more comprehensive planning team.

## Collaboration Across Sectors

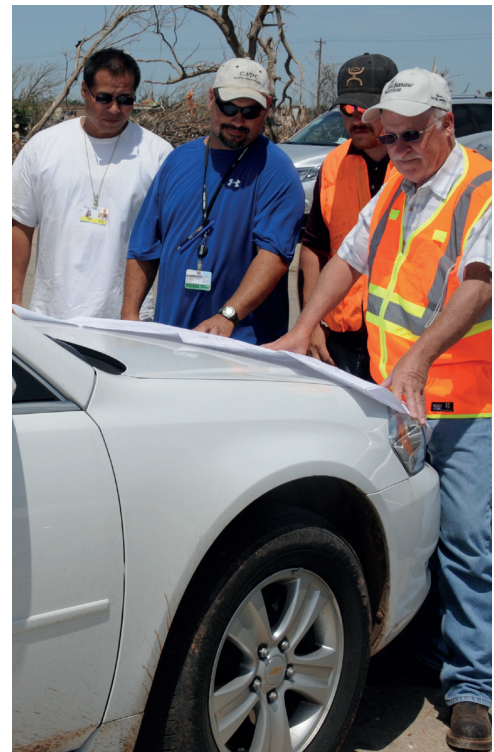
The [National Mitigation Framework](#) is one of five preparedness mission areas under the National Planning Framework. The Framework establishes the connection between mitigation and preparedness, which increases community resilience. In order to maximize state mitigation planning efforts, it is important to develop and maintain cooperative relationships between the seven sectors identified within the Framework. Involving these sectors ensures that the state takes a whole-community approach to mitigation planning and implementation. States rely on the these sectors to function, and the sectors provide important context and insight throughout the planning process.

Stakeholders from the local, state, and federal **Emergency Management** sector inform the plan with first-hand knowledge of past hazard occurrences and response systems. Stakeholders involved in the threat and hazard identification and risk assessment (THIRA) planning process are valuable team members to assist in appropriately integrating information from THIRA into the plan and vice versa. Mitigation greatly benefits emergency management by decreasing vulnerability and impact, thus reducing necessary response efforts.

Knowledge and understanding of current business and employment activities are crucial for assessing community risk and developing a sound mitigation strategy. The state should include stakeholders from the **Economic Development** sector in the planning process to ensure the mitigation plan contributes to economic viability. Mitigation plays an important role in economic development, particularly during the recovery phase. Stakeholders from this sector benefit from participating in the mitigation planning process by ensuring that the mitigation strategy includes actions to improve economic resilience.

### KEY SECTORS TO ENGAGE DURING THE MITIGATION PLANNING PROCESS

- **Emergency Management**
- **Economic Development**
- **Land Use and Development**
- **Housing**
- **Health and Social Services**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Natural and Cultural Resources**



Planning team members from the emergency management sector can contribute first hand knowledge of hazard occurrences and response systems. Image: George Armstrong/FEMA, Moore, OK

**Land Use and Development** is considered a key sector because how and where we build is intrinsically linked to how we are impacted by disasters. Knowledge of existing and future land use and development is key to crafting an effective mitigation strategy as well as a useful tool for assessing vulnerability. Land use and development planning and regulations can be structured in a way that greatly reduces statewide risk by directing development away from known hazard areas. Participation in the mitigation planning process will enable stakeholders in the land use and development sector to gain knowledge about hazard areas and associated risks. With this knowledge, these stakeholders will be better positioned to make decisions that will prevent losses and result in long-term risk reduction.

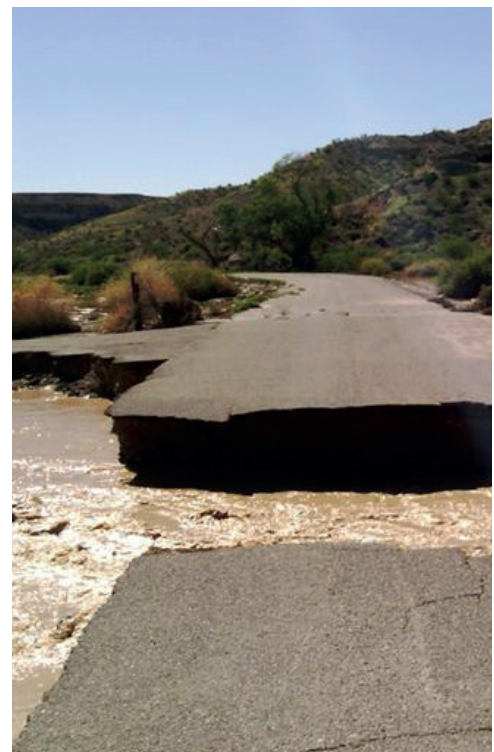
Stakeholders from the **Housing** sector have benefits similar to the land use sector and can aid in linking mitigation and recovery. The state should coordinate on housing issues during mitigation plan development to identify risk and vulnerability within this sector and to ensure the mitigation strategy directs new housing and post-disaster rebuilding outside known hazard areas. Housing sector stakeholders benefit from participating in the mitigation planning process by gaining insight into high risk areas, at risk populations, and model building codes and other minimum standards for development that can reduce losses. Additionally, the mitigation planning process should bring awareness to potential mitigation funding resources that may assist housing and development.

The **Health and Social Services** sector is also essential to integrating mitigation into the disaster recovery process. Stakeholders from this sector are important to the mitigation planning process because of their ability to inform the mitigation plan's vulnerability assessment. Reducing social vulnerability is vital to community resilience, and those working in this sector can help to ensure continuity of service delivery for children, seniors, people living with disabilities, people with functional needs, people from diverse cultural origins, people with limited English proficiency and underserved populations. The Health and Social Services sector plays an important role in linking vulnerable populations to grants and other assistance before and after a disaster, and there may be opportunities to combine traditional mitigation funding sources with existing health related funding to implement mitigation with this sector.

Like Land Use and Development, the **Infrastructure** sector is strongly linked with the mitigation planning process. Those working in this sector plan and make decisions concerning the location and extension of roads and utilities through planning, budgets, regulations, codes, and other standards. Infrastructure mitigation projects may be eligible for FEMA funding pre- and post- disaster. The state's infrastructure stakeholders, which may include state departments of transportation,



Engaging Housing sector stakeholders can help link mitigation and recovery and encourage development outside of known hazard areas.  
Image: Rosanna Arias/FEMA, Mantoloking, NJ



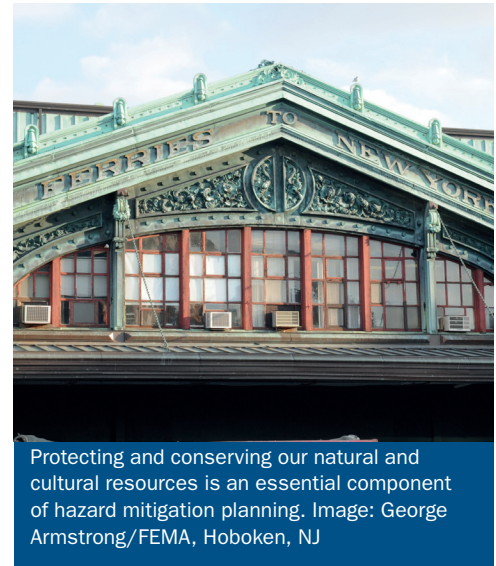
Infrastructure mitigation projects can help increase resiliency and reduce losses.  
Image: Cristen Hodgers/FEMA, Moapa, NV

transit authorities, bridge and tunnel commissions, and/or licensing and inspections entities, will assist in setting priorities and building resiliency as infrastructure is built and/or upgraded. These stakeholders can also provide valuable information and data for the risk and vulnerability assessments.

An important part of hazard mitigation involves the protection and conservation of **Natural and Cultural Resources**. These resources are meaningful to communities but are also often important economic drivers. Including this sector in the planning process ensures that protection of these assets is included in the mitigation strategy. Stakeholders from this sector can assist with identifying natural and cultural resources and informing the risk assessment. Including historic preservation-related mitigation actions can build public support for the plan.

Environmental resources can play a key role in reducing future disaster losses by providing areas that naturally accommodate and buffer hazards. For example, wetlands provide flood storage capacity and open space can help with storm water runoff. By participating in the mitigation planning process, stakeholders from the Natural and Cultural Resources Sector have the opportunity to effect policy change and to combine funding resources for structural mitigation projects.

Stakeholders from these seven sectors, along with all state planning stakeholders, bring a variety of skills and resources to the table. One might be more skilled at drafting legislation, another at community education and outreach initiatives, and another at writing grants. Together stakeholders build capability for hazard mitigation related projects by leveraging each other's ideas, talents, funding streams, and time to accomplish more together.



## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement is an opportunity to educate people who live and work in the state on hazard mitigation and to provide them the opportunity to comment on the plan. While not required for a state hazard mitigation plan, the opportunity for input can be worked into the input process in a way that matches the expectations for public engagement in your state. Some examples of public outreach activities are:

- Schedule outreach activities at pre-planned public events such as festivals and fairs.
- Solicit input through mail and/or online surveys.
- Place public notices/announcements in newspapers, the library, or other public spaces.
- Post materials online or create a project website.
- Post or ask other organizations to post announcements to a survey via social media.



# ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders provide valuable input in developing and reviewing the plan. Make an effort to reach out to stakeholders that have not participated in the past to grow the planning team, and re-engage those who have been on the planning team before and have institutional knowledge of the plan. Develop a plan to gather input and provide opportunities to review information at the beginning of the process; set meeting dates, outreach methods, and other activities at the beginning to work towards your deadline; and maximize participation by providing advance notice to participants.

Common engagement methods include meetings, surveys, requests for information, and review of draft material. Including in-person meetings with virtual opportunities may help maximize participation by gathering as many stakeholders for collaboration while casting the net wide for participants who have limited availability. Regardless of the engagement methods chosen, ensure that stakeholders' time is used in a meaningful and productive way.

Meetings are a common and often effective way of gathering stakeholders. They provide the opportunity to gain input through discussions, group activities, and informal discussions during breaks. How many meetings to hold depends on what will work best for your stakeholders; give ample notice for meetings and process milestones. Meetings can be scheduled according to sections of the plan, such as developing the risk assessment or mitigation strategy. A review meeting is typically held towards the end of the process to summarize the plan in person and encourage stakeholders to review sections pertaining to their agency.

Opportunities for input and review should be made for those that cannot attend meetings. Free survey tools are readily available online and may be used to collect ideas for mitigation, success stories, related plans, and the best available data. The lead agency may post information on its website or create an inexpensive project website to direct people to opportunities for input and review.

## DOCUMENT THE PROCESS

Supporting documentation includes the materials and methods used to gather input for the plan. Examples of these materials include:

- **Meeting materials:** Provide sign-in sheets, presentation slides, documents that inform attendees, completed forms with ideas from attendees, and meeting minutes.
- **Surveys:** Show the location and method of survey, tallied results, and/or raw results, depending on the survey size.
- **Engagement efforts:** Provide invitations (show list of those invited and sample invite rather than each invitation if it is easier), advertisements in traditional resources such as newspapers, newsletters and other publications as well as digital sites such as Twitter and Facebook announcements.
- **Photographs:** Illustrate how many people come to meetings or other events.

Documentation of the planning process will likely generate many pages of information that would interrupt the flow of the plan. It is best to gather this information in an appendix. It is easiest to collect documentation during the planning process rather than hunting for information when you are ready to submit the plan for review. Creating a participation folder where you save information after each invite and meeting works well. Saving documentation as PDF files allows you to combine all the PDF files into one file that has bookmarks for ease of navigation.



## How Stakeholders Improve the Plan

Varied and diverse stakeholders from different sectors bring expertise to the hazard mitigation planning process that improve the quality of the plan.

- The best available data for **hazard identification and risk assessment** is likely to come from a variety of sources. The state climatologist, environmental resources and protection agencies, transportation departments, coastal protection organizations, state geographic information systems (GIS) offices, and others could each have a different set of information and data that improves the hazard profiles in the plan. Part of the planning process is determining and maintaining current information on what particular resources and sources of information are available in your state to keep the plan current and strategize actions.
- Similarly to hazard data, the best data on **critical infrastructure and state-owned and leased assets** likely comes from an agency responsible for the state’s real estate, particularly the agency that insures state facilities, the state police, emergency management agencies, homeland security agencies or fusion centers, utility commissions, transportation agencies, and others. The agencies and organizations that collect, monitor, and maintain these critical asset data sets will also assist in identifying **vulnerable assets** and appropriate mitigation strategies.
- Each state has agencies and organizations that assist and provide services to **vulnerable communities** before and after disaster. For example, Health and Social Services agencies can inform the plan with data sets regarding vulnerable populations and community experience of needs and solutions to design effective mitigation actions.
- The **mitigation strategy review and development** is the key element of the planning process, as the mitigation strategy is the heart of the plan. Stakeholders’ input improves the strategy by linking resources to incomplete and ongoing actions, recommending an action be discontinued, identifying new actions that will address new and changing hazards, and leveraging additional resources and funding streams to accomplish all actions.
- **Mitigation success stories** come from a variety of sources. State agencies involved with planning and land use regulations may implement new model ordinances that reduce hazards, a health related agency could have a new plan to address at-risk population, and there may be a U.S. Housing and Urban Development National Disaster Resilience Competition applicant or awardee in your state. The plan is an opportunity to sell your state’s success from a variety of stakeholders and to show how much can be accomplished moving forward.

- Stakeholders can support **implementation ideas** by linking resources and funding to mitigation actions. They can also provide input on how to maintain the plan between updates. They could provide ideas for organizing a new committee or building on a related planning mechanism to continue meetings and progress, as well as input on when and how often to meet.
- Stakeholders will provide a valuable role to **review** draft materials such as tables, maps, chapters, and the full draft plan. Stakeholder review can identify additional and better data sources, additional mitigation actions, implementation resources, mistakes, and general improvements to the plan. By engaging stakeholders, you are asking your state's experts if the plan is the best it can be.

## PLAN REVIEW, EVALUATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION

The key to plan review, evaluation, and implementation is to continue to harness the momentum gained during the plan update process. The plan must describe the lead agency and the schedule for monitoring, evaluating, and updating the plan. While you have a quorum of stakeholders, ask for input regarding the best method to engage them throughout the planning cycle. Determine a maintenance plan that will continue the practices employed to update the plan, including ample meeting notice, making good use of each participant's time, and tracking mitigation success. Methods may include:

- Regular meetings;
- Conference calls to complement in person meetings at a more frequent schedule;
- Creating or working with an existing committee or organization;
- Annual review of actions by each participating stakeholder;
- Presentations at related conferences or events;
- Newsletter articles in stakeholder publications
- Educational trainings that help implement actions or accomplish actions by increasing capability; and
- An online presence for hazard mitigation information and resources.

Tracking mitigation implementation is a key to building success. Partners will be inspired by implemented projects and will work towards similar solutions in the future. The state plan should track and consolidate mitigation success. This can be difficult to do when mitigation projects are tracked in a variety of federal, state, and local databases. Methods used in the update should be clearly explained, and mitigation actions to improve data should be closely followed and implemented.

### MAINTENANCE: SCHEDULE MEETINGS NOW!

Plan steps for implementing the plan during the update process to continue momentum. Each state defines its own process for monitoring, evaluating, and updating the mitigation plan. Annual meetings are a great way to keep the planning process active and can strengthen the mitigation program. Pick a season, month, or even a day to hold planning team review meetings.



Organizing regular meetings with the planning team and scheduling presentations and educational trainings are effective ways to continually review, evaluate, and update a plan through the plan maintenance process. Image: Manuel Broussard/FEMA, New Orleans, LA

## ADOPTION AND ASSURANCES

The plan must be formally adopted by the highest elected official or designee. The highest elected official is the Governor in most cases. Having the highest elected official engaged shows the state's investment in the process and provides the support to secure and rally resources and investment to implement the plan. It is important to wait for FEMA to grant Approval-Pending-Adoption status prior to adoption so that all edits are made prior to having the highest elected official or designee adopt the plan. Assurances are typically covered in the resolution or other mechanism for adopting the plan. Assurances show the state is aware of its obligation to manage FEMA funding, follow federal statutes and regulations, and to amend the plan when needed to address changes in federal statutes and regulations.

## RESOURCES

The following resources may be used by states to inform the planning process. The planning process may be tailored to what works best for your state using ideas and requirements in these documents. Visit FEMA's [Hazard Mitigation Planning](#) website for additional and up-to-date resources.

### HAZARD MITIGATION PLANNING PROCESS

FEMA provides an overview of the [Hazard Mitigation Planning Process](#) online, with links to the official guidance documents.

### INTEGRATING HAZARD MITIGATION INTO LOCAL PLANNING: CASE STUDIES AND TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY OFFICIALS

[Integrating Hazard Mitigation Into Local Planning: Case Studies and Tools for Community Officials \(2013\)](#) provides practical guidance on how to incorporate risk reduction strategies into existing local plans, policies, codes, and programs that guide community development or redevelopment patterns. While this document is primarily for a local audience, the steps for creating resilient communities through integration include transferrable lessons for states on building strong partnerships, educating and motivating leaders, and monitoring and evaluating the plan.

### LOCAL MITIGATION PLANNING HANDBOOK

FEMA's [Local Mitigation Planning Handbook](#), effective March 2013, is the primary guidance for local single- and multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan. However, this guide has ideas and resources that may be adapted to state level.

### NATIONAL MITIGATION FRAMEWORK

The National Mitigation Framework, released May 2013, provides context for how the whole community works together and how mitigation efforts relate to the other four mission areas in the [National Preparedness System](#). Because the National Mitigation Framework establishes a common forum for coordinating and addressing risk reduction, it may be helpful to state planning teams in designing a planning process that incorporates the whole community of partners, including the seven sectors identified in the Guide. The [National Mitigation Framework](#) provides roles and responsibilities for a wide range of stakeholders.



## **NATIONAL DISASTER RECOVERY FRAMEWORK**

The [National Disaster Recovery Framework \(NDRF\)](#) is a guide that enables effective recovery support to disaster-impacted states, tribes, territories, and local jurisdictions. The Framework defines core recovery principles, roles and responsibilities of recovery coordinators and other stakeholders, a coordinating structure that facilitates communication and collaboration among all stakeholders, guidance for pre- and post-disaster recovery planning, and the overall process by which communities can capitalize on opportunities to rebuild stronger, smarter, and safer. The sectors in the State Mitigation Plan Review Guide connect to the Recovery Support Functions outlined in the NDRF.

## **PLAN INTEGRATION: LINKING LOCAL PLANNING EFFORTS**

[Plan Integration: Linking Local Planning Efforts \(2015\)](#) is a step-by-step guide developed to help communities not only analyze their local plans for existing integration, but also further improve those efforts including interagency coordination. Like *Integrating Hazard Mitigation Into Local Planning: Case Studies And Tools For Community Officials*, this guidance was written for a local audience. However, states can use the plan integration questions, best practices, and case studies to understand how interagency cooperation strengthens hazard mitigation.

## **STATE SILVER JACKETS PROGRAM**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) State Silver Jackets Program is an interagency program designed to bring together multiple federal, state, tribal and local agencies to learn from one another and apply their knowledge to enhance risk reduction. The Silver Jackets seek to leverage multiple programs and points of view to develop collaborative, cohesive solutions. There are currently Silver Jackets teams present in most states; visit the [program's website](#) to get more information on your state team.