

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

Enhancing Collaboration & Building Community Capacity

Quick-Guide #3: Existing Networks

Networks are an important element of a community situation (See QG 1) and serve as mechanisms to assist us in achieving goals, whether we want to strengthen the community capacity, improve communication between wildfire suppression groups and homeowners, or coordinate fuel treatment projects. Networks of diverse people and organizations help communities achieve common goals by pooling resources and information. They allow relationships and trust to develop among the diverse people who will be important in carrying out the CWPP projects.

Consciously use, strengthen and build networks during the planning process, in order to create the capacity for planning and implementation. As you begin a CWPP, think about who can provide access to networks important to the CWPP process. As one volunteer fire department (VFD) chief pointed out, everyone on the VFD is connected to some part of the community or county. People can access their networks, thereby bringing important, unique information and resources necessary to planning and implementing a CWPP. For example, in Lake County, Minnesota, the facilitators invited individuals to the first meeting who represented different pre-existing networks, such as county officials, VFD, and regional wildfire suppression analysts. In Post Mountain, California, the (Hayfork) Watershed Research and Training Center had ties to many networks across the state that increased the group's access to resources. In Lincoln County, Montana, communities are achieving county CWPP goals locally through participation in the Firewise Communities USA program—linking them to communities across the country who are facing similar fire management challenges and giving them access to the vast Firewise toolbox. The Fire Safe Councils in California provide an established and powerful network that can facilitate development and implementation of CWPPs.

To strengthen community capacity, ***plan on involving local networks as well as networks that reach beyond the community.*** Local networks can bring legitimacy to the CWPP process, but being involved in the planning can also reinforce and support local ties that maintain capacity to work together for common goals. In Colorado, CWPP organizers started by working with local people to build networks that strengthened the community. Including people who represent broader networks, across the region or state, may bring in new ideas and resources to expand relationships for local folks as well as help with access to decisions and/or resources to support local activities. In Grizzly Flats, California and High Knob, Virginia, individuals who lived in the neighborhoods had many connections with planning, government agencies, county decision makers, fire protection etc. They used these networks to strengthen and link their plan to groups outside the homeowners' association.

Diverse networks will expand the contributions to wildfire preparedness planning, beyond the traditional fire suppression organizations, but be aware that all networks are not alike and ***some may be difficult to integrate into an open planning process.*** Since wildfire preparedness involves the whole community, you will have some participants who have never “worked” with wildfire issues! This can be a good thing because it brings in new ways of solving problems and integrates wildfire planning across multiple networks of people. In Lake County, Minnesota, political officials allowed information to flow from county government, while VFD representatives provided a flow of landscape and structure information from multiple VFD groups in the county. However, be prepared that some tightly organized networks may not want to sit down with others to plan, especially if they think wildfire preparedness conflicts with their primary goals. (over)





Including the widest diversity of networks may mean that *some networks of people and organizations will be less involved than others*, but all are important to improving community capacity and wildfire preparedness. In Taylor, Florida, the church network became more involved as the CWPP participants began an outreach program for homeowners, but they were less involved in selecting fuel treatment projects.

Regional planners and partners have an important role in supporting multi-network planning to tap new resources, influence decisions, and strengthen relationships that will sustain the wildfire preparedness through implementation and into the future. These participants can identify and help link people and organizations that are doing similar things in other communities or other counties. Josephine County, Oregon worked with an intermediary organization, Resource Innovations at the University of Oregon, which was able to link to state-level networks, bringing information to the local planners and sharing the new plans with regional networks. They can use their time to organize workshops, databases or meetings that benefit many CWPP groups. Or they may have the time and connections to bring important lessons learned and messages to decision makers at the state or federal level. Northern California Fire Safe Councils organized annual meetings during which the Post Mountain CWPP group was able to share their ideas and learn from other communities working on CWPPs.

Policy initiatives that encourage ***collaboration can strengthen networks that will generate resource streams and increase trust and mutual understanding about wildfire preparedness, as well as for other programs***. When networks don't exist, new networks can be organized. Once planning gets started, participants need to continue being aware of how they are using networks and whether they are helping to achieve the common goals. Participants have to continue to check that the quality of information remains strong, that relationships remain positive and focused on achieving common goals, and that expectations for feasible, successful projects are completed. To keep track of this, oversight and monitoring will be necessary. Otherwise, if CWPP projects languish, individuals and organizations will begin to withhold access to other net-

works, blocking resources and information flows, and reducing trust. Regional-scale funders have to be prepared for the expectations that arise from multiple networks supplying resources and information. In Lake County, Minnesota, all the participants used their respective organizational resources but expected to be able to leverage National Fire Plan funding to meet their longer term goals. In Josephine County, along with a common goal, resources, and political will, the CWPP group was able to bring in new agencies to work on wildfire preparedness, such as the Oregon Department of Transportation.

As one participant in Lake County, Minnesota said, after the CWPP he could “just pick up the phone and ask a question or for a favor”. This was a sign that the CWPP network was functioning for information and resource flows, supported by trusting relationships.

