

## COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

Enhancing Collaboration & Building Community Capacity

# Quick-Guide #8: Participant Roles and Functions

### POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT ROLES IN THE COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

Developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is a collaborative effort among government entities, and between government entities and interested and affected non-governmental interests, especially local community residents. One way to think about collaboration is that it is a process to leverage the capacities of a diverse set of individuals to achieve a goal that could not be achieved when individuals work alone. What types of collaboration capacities are associated with CWPP development? How does this leveraging of collaboration capacities actually occur?

Findings from social science research sponsored by the Joint Fire Science Program indicate that participants in CWPP development play critical roles in combining their respective knowledge, skills, and resources to produce actionable plans that could not have been achieved by working alone. These roles include:

**Leadership:** CWPP development relies on highly motivated individuals who have a systems view of how the pieces fit together in a CWPP. These leaders span all affiliations, from federal, state, and local government agencies to community leaders and activists, such as county commissioners and HOA representatives. A diverse, representative CWPP “core team” can be well-connected to many different organizations and social networks within the community and outside the community, and can motivate others to participate, reach out across organizational, philosophical, and jurisdictional divides, and quickly assimilate new information to solve problems.

**Fostering collaborative learning:** CWPPs are working plans that bring together a number of complex factors, such as fire behavior, fire risk assessment, community values-at-risk, and working across ownership boundaries and organizations. This often requires CWPP participants to learn about factors of which they have limited knowledge or understanding, and to educate others about factors of which they have expertise. CWPP processes invested in mutual learning have a better chance of being supported and implemented by the local community. Effective promoters of learning come from state forestry agencies, county offices (Cooperative Extension Service, emergency services, fire chiefs), community leaders and activists, and institutions of higher education.

**Facilitating communication:** CWPP development requires consistent communication among government entities and non-governmental interests. Because CWPP development is often through a team effort, someone or some system is necessary to facilitate communication across the various participants involved in CWPP development. All participants play a role in ensuring communication lines are open and active. (over)

**Web Site:**

<http://JFSP.fortlewis.edu>



**Uncovering community values-at-risk information:** Central to a CWPP is the identification of community values-at-risk – those attributes and values important to community residents that would be threatened in the event of a wildfire. Obvious values include life, structures, road and power corridors, and water supplies. However, there may be other community values that need to be captured in order to build community support for, and understanding of, the CWPP. Community leaders such as HOA representatives, elected officials, and community non-governmental organizations are particularly effective in eliciting these values.

**Locating financial resources:** CWPP development does not require an enormous expenditure of resources, but it does require an investment. Depending on the situation, funding may be necessary for a coordinator or facilitator, consultants to compile technical information and/or geographic information system (GIS) databases, and community meeting facilities and supplies. Federal, state, and local governments are most connected to available sources.

**Recruiting participation:** Community leaders can be a valuable asset to connect residents to the CWPP process by crafting messages that appeal to their values and interests. Local government participants, such as a rural fire chief or a county fire specialist, can also serve this role.

**Linkages to other plans:** CWPPs are often tiered to county fire plans, multi-county mitigation strategies, state mitigation strategies, and, in certain situations, public land management agencies' strategic plans. Coordinating plans and priority treatment areas is essential to modify fire behavior across the landscape and ensure cohesive response strategies during fire events. Federal, state, and local governments are typically able to see the landscape view of these linkages.

**Scientific and technical information:**

Information about fire ecology and behavior, vegetation conditions, structural ignitability, and wildfire response is essential to crafting an effective CWPP. GIS tools can greatly enhance analysis of risk, prioritization of treatment areas, and event response. Federal and state agencies generally have access to scientific information, with cooperation from research institutions. County offices and fire protection districts also bring technical information about structures and roads that contribute to CWPPs. GIS capabilities are spread across federal, state, and county agencies, but it is often necessary to rely on consultants to compile and organize GIS information.

**Some strategies to assess and assign collaboration roles and functions in CWPP development:** In our research, CWPP participants assumed collaboration roles ad hoc and opportunistically as needs arose. However, the lessons learned from the research can streamline the assessment and assignment of these roles. Some strategies include:

Conducting an inventory of the human, informational, technical, and financial resources available to complete and implement the CWPP.

Identifying human, informational, technical, and financial resources that are needed to complete and implement the CWPP.

Creating a role matrix that identifies what individual(s) and/or organization(s) will be responsible for bringing available resources into the CWPP process and for locating needed resources. Included in the matrix are timetables.

