

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

Enhancing Collaboration & Building Community Capacity

Quick-Guide #13: Learning Community

Creating Communities of Understanding: Social Learning in Eastern CWPPs

Social learning focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context, such as during the development of a CWPP, and is based on the fact that people learn from one another. Social learning can lead to the development of learning communities. Learning communities are places or processes where people come together to share knowledge which allows them to find common ground to work together in an area of interest—in this case, wildland fire management. We found that community wildfire protection planning often led to the development of learning communities.

Coming to a Shared Understanding of Wildfire in CWPP Groups

CWPP groups report success in coming to a shared understanding of wildfire and wildfire management through the planning process. By providing a forum where multiple stakeholders can meet and discuss face-to-face, HFRA fosters learning and common understanding among CWPP participants. Groups enhanced their knowledge of local ecological and wildfire issues such as hazardous fuels management and identified locally-specific causes of wildfire.

Additionally, CWPP groups found that they better understood institutional and social systems surrounding wildfire after the planning process. For example, agencies learned about each others' roles, limitations, and capabilities in terms of wildfire management. This understanding helps CWPP participants identify how they can work together and coordinate action in the future.

Fostering Learning in CWPP Groups

Certain types of activities aided learning within CWPP groups. Discussing or creating maps of the planning area as a group helped participants come to a shared understanding of their local landscape. Additionally, conducting a group risk and asset assessment process facilitated collaborative identification of hazards to mitigate and values to protect. CWPP groups that went on joint field trips and site visits found that linking their planning to on-the-ground examples was crucial to group learning.

Maintaining an open atmosphere for group discussion was also important for fostering learning within CWPP groups. Additionally, groups that had a designated and experienced facilitator found that helpful in supporting dialogue and encouraging common understanding among planning participants.



Linking Learning to Action

By engaging in a learning-centered CWPP process, groups found they were able to accomplish action together that they would not have been able to achieve individually. CWPP groups identified weaknesses in their community's wildfire management and created the political will to address it by having leaders in the room. Some groups were able to discover and secure funding sources that otherwise would not have been available. Finally, some groups found ways to complete cross-tenure fuels reduction projects by sharing information and learning about other agencies' fuels plans and approaches. Fostering learning and creating shared understanding serves as the basis of a CWPP group's future action supported by ongoing communities of understanding.

Extending Learning Beyond the CWPP

CWPP participants can add value and expand the impact of their planning process by keeping their home organization or agency updated about what they are learning within the CWPP process. Planning participants who communicated new ideas gained within the CWPP group to their agency colleagues reported potential changes and improvements in the way their organization conducts business. Additionally, keeping lines of communication open can help planning participants better represent their agency's interests. Finally, through their participation some groups found further ways to coordinate and work together beyond the scope of the CWPP. The communities of understanding formed in the CWPP provided a foundation for continued collaboration in diverse efforts.



For a copy of the complete article related to social learning, please contact Rachel Brummel at the University of Minnesota, brumm043@umn.edu



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