

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

Enhancing Collaboration & Building Community Capacity

Quick-Guide #18: Monitoring the Collaborative Process

Periodic monitoring of the CWPP planning process can help evaluate progress, document accomplishments, and identify future directions. For many communities, the CWPP collaborative process has been a new experience that gathered diverse participants with complementary perspectives, experiences, and resources in order to accomplish collective goals. It is useful to reflect upon the substantive learning and accomplishments of the group; the openness and inclusiveness of the process; and the quality of communication and relationships within the group, with other agencies, and in the community through monitoring and evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluating the outcome of the CWPP helps document the benefits accrued from the considerable investments of time, effort, and money. It demonstrates to funders and policy makers the accomplishments and priorities that have been made, as well as those that have not, and why. Also, evaluating whether the Plan is on track helps determine if initial goals and objectives need to be adjusted given potential changes in the community and local forests.

Ideally, all participants will take part in monitoring; yet some groups may lack the capacity for participating in ongoing evaluation. If no coordinator or core group is responsible for implementation or oversight of the plan, then perhaps resources could be found to bring in an outside evaluator. A good cross-section of participants should be queried at various intervals as part of the evaluation process with phone or email interviews between meetings or via annual surveys. Non-participants and community residents should be included in the evaluation process, perhaps by forming a community advisory committee or focus groups, or by conducting surveys at community events. Consider using a combination of questions that not only describe activities, accomplishments, substantive learning, and increased awareness, but also more value-based questions such as whether people feel their expectations are being met, and whether the process is perceived as fair and legitimate.

Monitoring Collaboration and Community Capacity

What you monitor and the criteria you use will reflect the expectations, objectives, and values of the participants. Some possible goals of monitoring the CWPP collaboration could be to:

- Assess effectiveness
- Improve accountability and inclusivity
- Align expectations and goals
- Assess learning about fire risk and mitigation
- Build trust among participants and with stakeholders
- Renew commitment to the process
- Find new participants and resources
- Note progress and successes.

Some suggested ways to evaluate the process might include:

- Ask participants if their goals and expectations aligned with those of the group.
- Assess how problems are defined or framed (e.g., with data, models, and maps) and what other options are available.
- Evaluate the quality of communication, decision making, and incentives for participation.
- Determine if scales of analysis (e.g., risk assessment) and action (e.g., fuel reduction and community outreach) are appropriate. Is it better strategically to work across landscapes and jurisdictions, or at the community or neighborhood level?
- Check who is at the table and who is missing. What resources and perspectives could new partners bring?

Web Site: <http://JFSP.fortlewis.edu>



The following questions might help determine how the collaborative process assisted in implementing the CWPP and building capacity for the community to reduce wildfire risk:

- Have community organizations and social service agencies partnered on CWPP efforts?
If so, how?
- Have community partners involved in the planning process remained engaged in implementation?
- How many residents are participating in various projects (e.g., demonstration sites, cleanup days, fuel reduction programs)?
- Are new ties or networks with the community and within the community being formed?
- How have the relationships with community organizations and residents established through the CWPP enhanced opportunities to address CWPP goals?
- How has the CWPP outreach made a positive impact on local organizations and neighborhoods?
Has partnering with the CWPP process increased their capacity to meet local needs and launch projects?

Measuring the impacts of collaboration can be difficult. Significant outcomes such as improved relationships are tricky to measure, but some can be counted – e.g., the number of meetings, number of meeting attendees, number of newspaper articles reporting collaborative activities, and number of new homes with defensible space. Funders and some participants may expect quantifiable impacts, such as acres of land treated. One idea for reporting non-quantifiable benefits is to develop a checklist of potential benefits, and then check off those realized. Another idea is to write the story of collaboration, based on interviews and including quotations from participants and beneficiaries. If baseline data is available, comparisons over time may be useful for demonstrating impacts, such as recording how things happened before the implementation of a CWPP.

Monitoring can also employ indicators and criteria of performance generated elsewhere; for instance, by national policy (e.g., HFRA) and state agencies (e.g., Departments of Natural Resources). A particularly useful guide provided by Resource Innovations, <http://ri.uoregon.edu/programs/CCE/CWPPresources.html>, suggests six CWPP elements to monitor (partnerships and collaboration; risk assessment; reducing hazardous fuels; reducing structural ignitability; education and outreach; and emergency management) and indicators for participants to identify key outcomes and changes over time. The guide also suggests strategies for adapting the CWPP process to reflect lessons learned, defining new actions for the future, and updating the Plan.

Finally, it is important to evaluate the needed capacities and essential components for moving to the next step - implementation. Questions such as the following can be explored:

- Has social capacity been created to implement the plan?
- Are community education and outreach effective and sustainable?
- Are agency and department decision-makers willing to implement projects?
- Is the CWPP comprehensive and multifaceted?
- Are there programs, organizations or plans in which to embed CWPP?

The following website is a good initial reference regarding various aspects of ecological monitoring:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/spf/cfrp/monitoring/>.

