



FEMA



Choosing Contracting Help for Your Local Hazard Mitigation Plan

Developing a local mitigation plan will require active participation and leadership from the jurisdiction(s) involved. However, you also may need or want to have outside assistance with the planning process and writing the plan document itself. Leading the mitigation planning process does not necessarily require formal training in planning, but sometimes it is helpful to hire persons with expertise to assist you in all or portions of the planning process. For example, you may need assistance if:

- You wish to have targeted assistance in identifying hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities, and in performing loss estimates;
- You feel you need an outside facilitator to manage public meetings or to assist in goal setting or prioritizing; or
- No one in the community feels comfortable leading the planning process, or has the time to devote to it.

There are several different options when considering outside assistance for plan development. In addition to private consultants, consider contracting with your regional planning agency, or working with a local university with community planning or emergency management degree programs. Before enlisting outside assistance from any of these sources, consider their experience, the scope of work, the extent of the assistance to be provided, and how those involved will interact with local community representatives, both staff and volunteers.

The following resources are available for helping answer questions regarding how to select assistance with developing a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan

<http://www.planning.org/consultants/choosing/part1.htm>

<http://www.planning.org/consultants/choosing/>

<http://www.lpa.state.mn.us/pdf/Choosingconsultant.pdf>

Successful Hazard Mitigation Plans have a community champion who sets a positive tone, manages expectations of the planning team, sets milestones and keeps the schedule on track, and coordinates regularly with the hired consultant. Be involved!

Be sure the Hazard Mitigation Plan reflects your community! Nothing is more disappointing than to invest community time and money into a Hazard Mitigation Plan only to have it talk about a community you don't recognize! Review the plan often during development and ensure that the plan talks about issues important to your local area.

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What to Look for in a Consultant

Many communities hire consultants to assist with coordinating, facilitating, and scheduling the mitigation planning process. If your community decides to hire a consultant to assist with your mitigation plan, consider looking for a community planner that:

- Understands applicable regulations, laws, and guidance and considerations as they apply to the mitigation plan (e.g., requirements of DMA 2000, state, tribal and local ordinances, and NFIP requirements).
- Understands that each community has unique demographic, geographic, and political considerations that need to be taken into account when creating a fully integrated mitigation plan. Be careful to consider the inherent differences between hiring a consultant that is locally based versus a consultant that is out of region or even out of state.
- Recognizes that community input and public participation are keys to any successful mitigation plan.
- Is skilled in developing community risk assessments and helping communities identify appropriate actions to mitigate their risks.
- Is familiar with emergency management and multi-hazard mitigation concepts.
- Will provide you with the names and phone numbers of past clients.
- Can demonstrate approved plans that are considered models or best examples.
- Demonstrate a community's success with implementation and progress through a successful strategy.
- Has experience with developing successful and creative strategies.
- Can demonstrate plan reviews that were successful on first submissions.
- Can demonstrate successful use of tools, research, media, graphics and communication.
- Demonstrates quality.
- Knows how to utilize latest RiskMAP products developed for the communities.
- Understands long term risk reduction (mitigation) and utilizes strategies based in community development, land management, resiliency, sustainability, and smart growth practices.
- Knows how to build on the existing plan for a plan update without starting over.
- Has the tools to help communities demonstrate and monitor the community's changes in development, changes in vulnerability and risk reduction over time.
- Works well with communities and developing stakeholder relationships that strengthen the integration into other planning mechanisms in the community.
- Has attended FEMA Mitigation Planning training.

It is important to note that consultants do not replace the planning process but rather facilitate it. They do not make the decisions for the plan's contents, the process, the risk findings, the strategies, or the priorities but rather facilitate the community to make these decisions. Consultants do not have ownership of the plan and it is not proprietary.

Consultants do not make a profit in outreach with the general public and stakeholder-building efforts such that this task takes time which is a role best left to the community's capabilities with the consultant's facilitation assistance.

Contract Considerations

If your community decides to hire a private consultant to assist with development of the plan, keep in mind the following important considerations:

- **Schedule:** The **project timeline** is very important. Is the consultant's proposed timeline based on the community's meeting schedule, staff availability and expiration of the current plan? Also, does the timeline take into account time for the State and FEMA to review the plan, and to make any revisions if necessary?
- **Deliverables:** Require that the consultant's final deliverable be a **FEMA-approved** hazard mitigation plan. The consultant should make themselves available to assist with the plan review and approval process and the local adoption process; however,

Be sure to include language in the contract that the jurisdiction will review draft sections of the plan during development so the final plan is not the first opportunity to see the written document.

Include language in your final contract that the consultant will provide digital or electronic copies of the Hazard Mitigation Plan anytime during the development process and upon completion of the final product. The digital or electronic copy of the Hazard Mitigation Plan must be editable. This is a good time to consider how many printed and/or bound copies of the final plan the community may wish to receive from the consultant.

- **Scope of Work:** Consult with the State Hazard Mitigation Officer to discuss what is actually required for a FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan. For example, it may not be necessary to conduct robust data entry or expensive geospatial images for a sophisticated hazards analysis (that costs more than the community has to invest) when a more simple narrative description of hazards (that costs less to produce) is sufficient.

Before requesting proposals from consultants, determine what professional skills will be provided by the community staff. For example, what services can be provided in-house, or in-kind if matching a Federal grant? Consider that some tasks are best completed in-house. For example, it requires less effort for individuals familiar with the zoning code or building codes – e.g. community planner or code enforcement officer – to identify possible changes to those codes to make the community more disaster-resilient.

Don't be afraid to ask for changes if the draft plan does not match your community's vision. Ultimately it is the community's plan, not the consultant's and the community must embrace the final product.

Make sure that the consultants don't promise too much or depend on templates and quantity versus quality.

- **Multi-Jurisdictional Plan Scopes:**

Multi-jurisdictional plans will likely require more coordination between communities. The schedule should account for different jurisdictions' timeframes and meeting schedules.

When a county/parish/township includes a **Federally-recognized tribe** in their planning area, the plan must include the provisions for 44 CFR 201.7 for the Tribal jurisdictions as well. All provisions for both regulations should be completed at the same time so the plan has only one review cycle with FEMA. An example of an element that is unique to Tribes is consideration of cultural and sacred sites.

- **References:** Ask the consultant to provide samples of other FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plans that they have developed.