

Guidance on Hiring Consultants to Develop Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plans

Consultants can be a valuable resource in supporting jurisdictions to develop their natural hazard mitigation and climate adaptation plans. They can bring a wealth of experience to the planning process and can bring additional capacity to the project team. However, consultants cannot take the place of local expertise, knowledge, and values. Consultants also cannot build local capacity and relationships within and between jurisdictions. Plans developed by a consultant must be implemented locally, so it is important that the consultant and project team work together to create a product that is useful and actionable for the jurisdiction once the product is complete.

In order to ensure that consultants provide the best value for your money and produce the quality plans that help achieve your jurisdiction's goals, we have developed some guidance for selecting consultants. This guidance is meant to supplement your normal procurement process and help ensure that your RFP results in a strong pool of candidates.

Ideal role for a consultant in plan development

Some suggested ideal roles for a consultant in developing resilience plans, including natural hazard mitigation plans, include:

- Helping facilitate meetings, manage the project (setting meeting dates, scheduling rooms, inviting attendees and stakeholders), and develop communication material.
- Technical, cartographic and graphic assistance— making maps, conducting GIS analysis, developing graphics and conducting localized assessments of the current and future hazards.
- Managing writing of the plan with support from staff with specific expertise and documenting the planning process
- Compiling more generalized and higher level case studies and examples that the jurisdiction can use as a jumping off point for a more specific assessment that responds to local conditions and concerns.
- Organizing, advertising, and helping to facilitate community meetings, or other community engagement processes

Considerations when hiring a consultant

References – When obtaining references from a potential consultant to develop resilience plan, check whether they have developed similar plans for other communities. Check whether they have worked in communities of similar size and that face similar hazards.

Capacity – The expertise of the consultant should match the specific needs of the jurisdiction. For example, don't hire an engineering firm to conduct an assessment of your risks and don't hire a graphics and GIS firm to run your meetings.

Effectiveness – If your community is completing a natural hazard mitigation plan, it will need to be reviewed and approved by CalOES and FEMA. One measure of a consultant's effectiveness is how many times each of their plans has been reviewed or sent back with comments by CalOES or FEMA before being approved.

Check with FEMA or CalOES –As the reviewers for all the plans in California, FEMA and CalOES are often familiar with consultant's work. While they cannot recommend or discuss specific consultants, they may be able to help answer the questions above by providing contacts to jurisdictions that have worked for consultants you are considering and researching how many times plans have been reviewed by a specific consultant.