

A rural landscape at sunset. In the foreground, there is a field of tall green grass and wildflowers, partially obscured by a wire fence. In the middle ground, a large, weathered wooden barn with a corrugated metal roof stands. The background shows a line of trees under a sky with soft, golden light from the setting sun and scattered clouds. The entire image is overlaid with faint white topographic contour lines.

A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING ENGAGEMENT AND RESILIENCY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES



FEMA

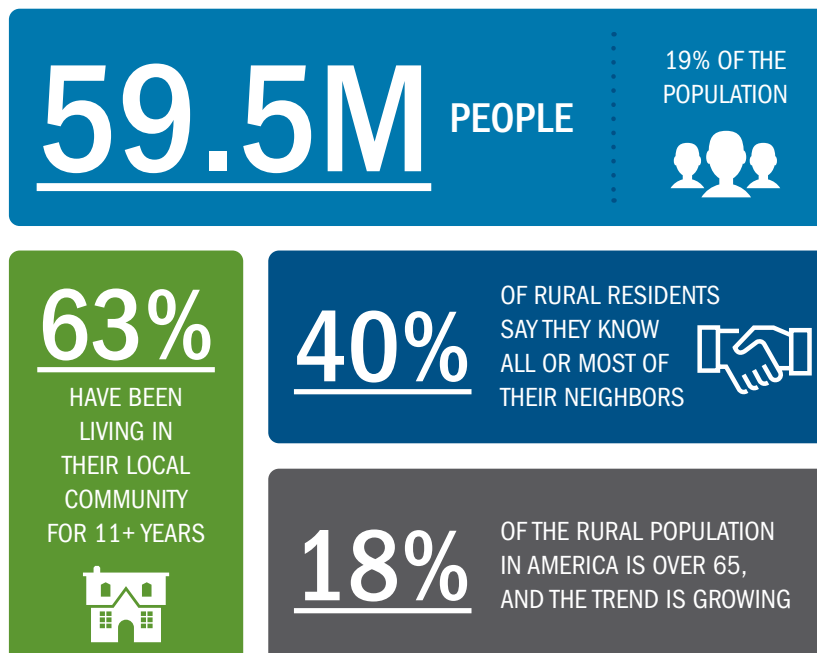
A LOOK AT RURAL AMERICA

Rural America is broader than a single definition, and perhaps best understood through the character and sense of community of the people who live there. Home to a significant portion of the U.S. population and economy, rural America provides crucial sources of water, food, energy, recreation, and a large portion of the country's vital natural resources. While no two rural communities are alike, they are all susceptible to risk from natural hazards, including flood, wildfire, tsunami, landslide, avalanche, and earthquake.

Rural communities face a unique set of challenges given their lower population density and larger amounts of undeveloped land. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to rural communities, this guide is a step towards designing outreach and engagement activities that are authentic and right sized for a particular community to make every community more resilient.

Prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Risk Management Directorate (RMD), with input and feedback from FEMA Regions, the insight and guidance found within these pages take into account community- and culture-based considerations, including, but not limited to: accessibility to high-speed internet, driving distance and accessibility to commonly used community meeting spaces, importance of established trust, accessibility of resources, and the value of community champions. Every community is unique and different, and the insights from this guide should be adapted and applied to best fit those individual needs.

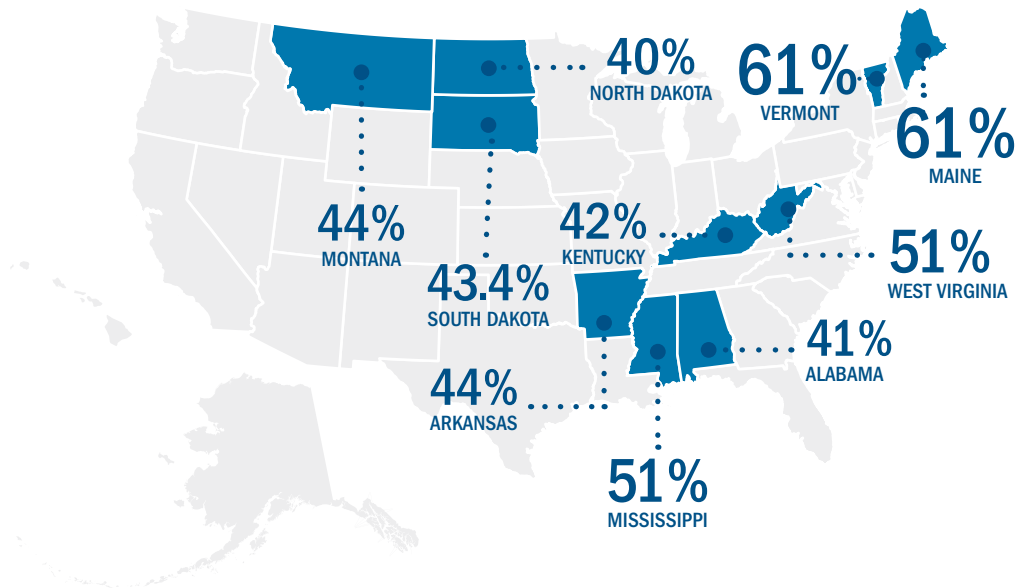
WHO LIVES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES?



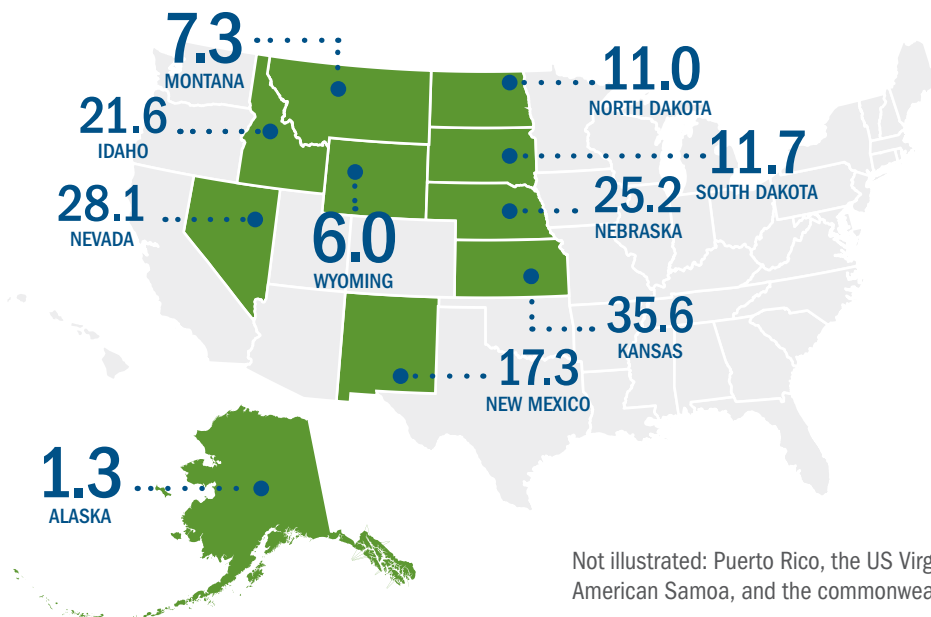
WHERE IS RURAL AMERICA?

97% of the Nation's Land is Considered Rural.

States with the Highest Percentage of Rural Residents

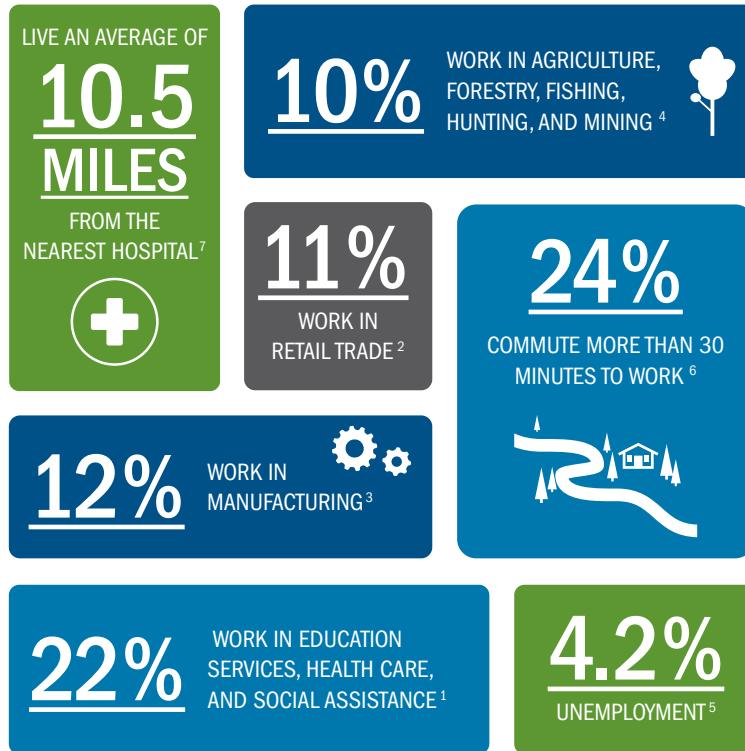


States with the Lowest Population Density (residents per square mile)

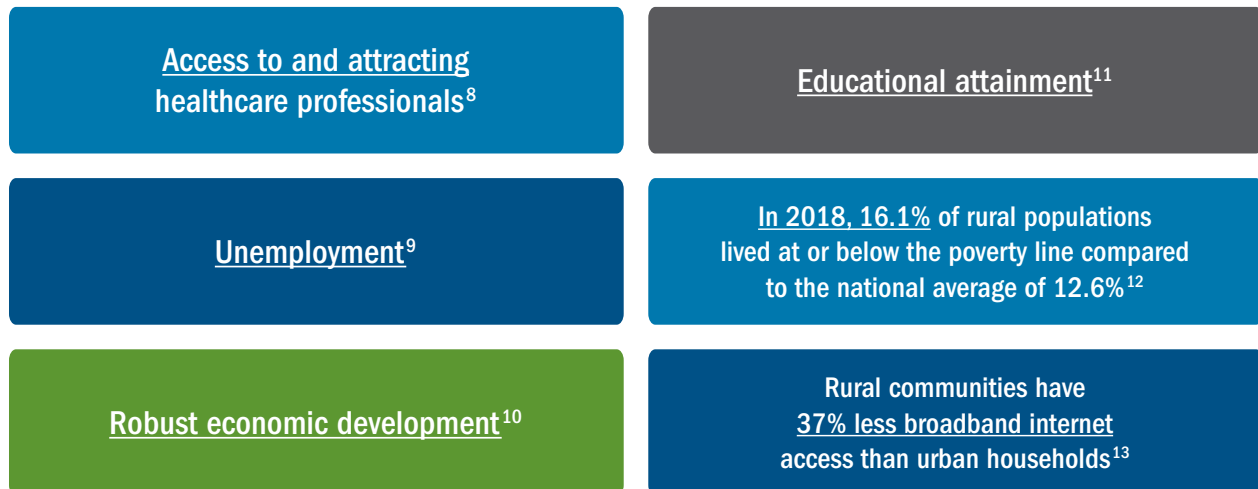


Not illustrated: Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the commonwealth of the Mariana Islands.

HOW DO AMERICANS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES MOVE AND WORK?



CONCERNS IN RURAL AMERICA?



As will be discussed in this guide, these statistics can vary across rural communities. What's important is to take note of these national trends and understand how they may apply in the communities where you work.

RESOURCES

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2017, August 9). Rural Economy Extends Beyond the Farm. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-economy-not-completely-dependent-on-farming.html>
- ² U.S. Census Bureau. (2017, August 9). Rural Economy Extends Beyond the Farm. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-economy-not-completely-dependent-on-farming.html>
- ³ U.S. Census Bureau. (2017, August 9). Rural Economy Extends Beyond the Farm. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-economy-not-completely-dependent-on-farming.html>
- ⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2017, August 9). Rural Economy Extends Beyond the Farm. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-economy-not-completely-dependent-on-farming.html>
- ⁵ United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development. (2019, September 23). Rural Employment and Unemployment. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/employment-education/rural-employment-and-unemployment/>
- ⁶ Evenson, A.; Henning-Smith, C.; & Kozhimannil, K. (2018). [Addressing Commuting as a Public Health Issue: Strategies Should Differ by Rurality](#).
- ⁷ Brown, A., Cohn, D. V., Fry, R., Horowitz, J. M., Igielnik, R., & Parker, K. (2018, May 22). Demographic and economic trends in urban, suburban and rural communities. Retrieved from <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/demographic-and-economic-trends-in-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/>
- ⁸ Rural Health Information Hub. (2019, January 18). Healthcare Access in Rural Communities. Retrieved from <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/healthcare-access>
- ⁹ National Conference of State Legislatures. (2020, January 21). Challenges Facing Rural Communities. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsl.org/research/agriculture-and-rural-development/challenges-facing-rural-communities.aspx>
- ¹⁰ National Conference of State Legislatures. (2020, January 21). Challenges Facing Rural Communities. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsl.org/research/agriculture-and-rural-development/challenges-facing-rural-communities.aspx>

While there is no single standard definition, the U.S. Census Bureau defines whether a community is rural based on population size.

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 60 million U.S. residents, or one in five, lived in rural areas, and defined areas as “rural” encompassing all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.

- ¹¹ National Conference of State Legislatures. (2020, January 21). Challenges Facing Rural Communities. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsl.org/research/agriculture-and-rural-development/challenges-facing-rural-communities.aspx>
- ¹² Rural Health Information Hub. Selected rural statistics for the United States. Retrieved from <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/united-states>
- ¹³ McFarland, C. K. (2018, March 12). [Bridging the Urban-Rural Economic Divide](#).

■ Given web browser and firewall restrictions, some links may not function properly. Additionally, given that links are to outside resources, they may not function in the future.

“By understanding the essence of a community where the risk to these elements would most significantly interrupt how they function can greatly assist in finding how we can help, build trust and advance mitigation.”

Ted Perkins, P.E.
Regional Engineer
FEMA Region X



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INTRODUCTION

Seeking First to Understand

While no two rural communities are the same, they all share a lower population density than urban areas. Because population density often impacts resources, capacity, and economic development – among many other factors – rural communities often have challenges to developing a dedicated approach to resilience.

Being thoughtful of the constraints facing a community is always a best practice in community engagement and holds true in rural outreach.

For example:

- Will seasonal commitments to planting, harvesting, or tourism work prevent suitable meeting turnout?
- Will winter conditions limit the community's ability, or willingness, to travel?
- Have meeting locations been organized so public attendees don't have to drive more than an hour to attend? If not, more meetings may need to be scheduled or locations reconsidered.
- Will weekly or regularly scheduled religious, cultural, or community events limit meeting or planning availability?

- Is childcare necessary to encourage people to attend a community meeting?
- How much time are you asking local partners to commit to this work? Knowing that local staff wear multiple hats, taking up too much of their time can be distracting to their other responsibilities.
- Funding for mitigation often is limited, such that some communities cannot meet hazard mitigation grant match requirements.
- Technology capacity, including high-speed internet and Geographic Information System (GIS) capabilities, can be limited.

Conversely, considering a community's strengths can provide important insights as well. Some rural communities have the benefit of concentrated community leadership, with a small group of individuals having a 360-degree view of community needs and the influence to make things happen. Or, there might be a strong cultural heritage in the area that can increase local involvement and attention to advance projects and planning.

Understanding these nuances and authentically taking these economic and geographic realities and local points of view into consideration is an essential step towards a successful Risk MAP process.

What's in the Guide

This guide is organized into three sections:

- 1** A narrative review of essential elements of successful engagement with rural communities, including trust, partnerships, the value of FEMA's work in the community, and the important considerations when working alongside tribal communities.
- 2** A breakdown of practical suggestions, tips, and ideas for how to better consider rural audiences' needs and perspectives at each stage of the Risk MAP process.
- 3** An appendix that includes resources such as a suggested timetable for planning Risk MAP activities and resource articles.

Other Available Resources

Free and accessible Community Engagement and Risk Communication (CERC) materials that can help support rural community outreach include the following:



The [Communication Plan Guide](#) includes tools to help community officials design a communication plan and can be used closely with Appendix 1 of the Rural Guide. Remember to reduce jargon and answer the “what’s in it for me?” when building trust.



The [Social Media Guide](#) contains tools to help communities communicate more effectively using social media. Many rural communities rely on social media profiles to replace complex websites, while others do not have the staff capacity to maintain profiles.



[Designing Effective Public Meetings](#) includes tools to help community officials plan and design more effective public meetings.



[Virtual Meeting Platforms and Tools](#) shares information and practices to help make remote meetings accessible and effective.



The [Flood Resilience Messaging Guide](#) shares plain-language messages about flood risk, flood insurance, and mitigation for both technical and non-technical audiences. The Messaging Guide is a great resource to share with public officials meeting with community members, or for FEMA staff before a meeting, and can help identify or refine messages that will resonate with rural communities.

Equity is a system of fairness that includes policies, practices, interactions, cultures, and resources that are responsive to all people. Equity in mitigation is achieved when everyone is treated impartially and provided with equal access to information and assistance, allowing everyone to meaningfully participate and make progress in hazard mitigation.

More practically, equity is taking a rural community and an individual’s background, income, accessibility to technology, expertise, or transportation into account when asking them to effectively work alongside FEMA and its partners to advance community resiliency. This will mean prioritizing the real-life implications of obstacles and opportunities to the people who live and work in these rural communities.

“Are we talking to the right people; all of the right people? We need to open up the process to ensure the community’s hazards are acknowledged and understood.”

Dawn Livingston
Risk Analyst
FEMA Region VII

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The Role of Trust

FEMA has a great opportunity to provide natural hazard data and resources that support keeping people and property safe in a staggering number of rural communities. How success is defined in each rural community is going to differ and will depend upon existing community knowledge of floodplain management, natural hazard mitigation planning, and local resource capacity to actively participate in Risk MAP supported efforts. However, success is absolutely dependent on communities and FEMA trusting each other and cooperating together.

Trust is essential to successful engagement in any community but may carry more weight in rural communities where residents typically know their neighbors and may be more skeptical of new faces or organizations trying to “tell them” something about their home area.



What you may think is just small talk may be the most important part of the conversation to a community leader, and most likely, it will dominate your first interactions with local staff.

Trust is built through listening and being credible and honest. Whether you are engaging with rural communities for the first time, or you are mid-project and many years in, trust fosters stronger relationships, which in turn results in project buy-in that supports communities taking action to reduce their risk to natural hazards. How does this happen? Phone calls or in-person interaction with key community contacts at the front end of a project to hear their key concerns with the process, in addition to what community issues they are currently focused on, can go a long way to establishing a relationship and informing how you approach a project. Search out, identify and listen to other federal, state, county, local, or volunteer organizations working in the area to understand how they are finding success and where there may be opportunities to partner, share insights and advice, or cooperate on projects.

While making a good first impression is an important aspect in all community engagement, doing so in rural communities will start you off on the right path towards building and maintaining strong relationships. For example, rural communities might believe that because they have smaller populations, funding for detailed flood studies and expensive mitigation projects will be directed to more populated and urban communities. Being honest and addressing this perception up front is a first step in building trust: show the community the high-quality expertise and data FEMA is bringing to the existing Risk MAP project by going beyond the map and sharing insights and counsel. And, if possible, outlining what support could be provided to help identify and support the development of mitigation projects in a meaningful way.

Resources

The Trust Equation can be applied to FEMA's mission to reduce risk in rural communities by taking the following four elements of trust and translating them throughout the Risk MAP process.

Self-Orientation:

Most important, trust is based on listening. When we ask questions and have discussions with communities, are we just listening to pursue our own agenda? Are we listening to always be on the defense, building our rebuttal? Or are we listening to really hear the community and learn about their needs?

Credibility and Reliability:

It is important to be credible – mean what you say and say what you mean. Flood mapping is a long and iterative process, laced with regulatory elements that can be difficult to understand. Speaking clearly about this process, educating communities on their roles, and addressing challenging topics can humanize the process and show transparency. By acting with integrity and honesty, you form a solid foundation for a relationship.

Intimacy:

Acknowledge that the process to update flood maps or apply for hazard mitigation grants is difficult and may not always deliver the desired outcomes. If you are genuine and allow yourself to be vulnerable, the community can also be vulnerable. This creates a safe space for sharing questions, concerns, and frustrations. By understanding each other, you can work together to address challenges and identify what is possible.



North Dakota State Water Commission

FEMA Region VIII and the North Dakota State Water Commission (SWC) developed Base Level Engineering (BLE) data for all 53 counties in North Dakota, touching both urban and rural communities and bringing flood risk information to some areas for the first time. To educate communities and their staff, Region VIII and SWC scheduled in-person and telephone meetings to introduce BLE and give real-time answers to questions about flood risk and floodplain management. Outreach and planning began 2 months ahead of the introductory meetings and included multiple meeting formats, including formal presentations and conversation roundtables, to best meet local needs and comfort levels. By understanding each other, you can work together to address challenges and identify what is possible.

“Until we start talking to communities about what they care about we’re having the wrong conversation.”

Kelly Pflücke, AICP
Resiliency Specialist,
FEMA Region II

The Importance of Partnerships

As with all local engagement, FEMA cooperates with federal, state, regional, and local partners to support Risk MAP. Working through existing relationships is always a good outreach approach, but in rural communities, it is often a critical one.

From a local community's perspective, for example, kicking off a project with an unknown federal agency representative may be met with more apprehension than working alongside a fellow community member or other trusted partner. By acknowledging the importance of existing connections and building new partnerships with local decision makers, partners, and communities, FEMA will be better positioned to consider local perspectives to bring forward mutually beneficial solutions to advance mitigation and keep property and people safer.

While many FEMA Regions know or have a list of partners that commonly support Risk MAP and mitigation planning efforts, additional partnerships can be explored to support engagements with rural communities. The first step is assessing the community in question to see who the key influencers are, where you may have an existing relationship, and if you need to build new relationships – which should factor into your timeline.

Partners may include:



Local officials or decision makers who are involved in community development, economic, and/or planning decisions.



Economic and community interest groups with like-minded approaches. This may include sustainability-focused agriculture organizations that work to protect landscape integrity and economic success with whom community members are engaged.



Academic institutions that either have a presence in the community or might have local program extensions.



Rural community planning groups that support local leadership, provide training, and share technical and financial resources that help rural communities achieve their goals and visions (such as Councils of Government or Regional Planning Organizations).



Leveraging the Expertise of Partners to Create Products that Work for the Community

To improve local community staff participation throughout Risk MAP, FEMA Region VII and the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Water Resources (DWR), a Region VII CTP, focused on draft map reviews. Together, the Region and DWR developed websites for both local staff and the public to review the maps. These easy-to-use online tools provided local staff the opportunity to contribute to the review process on their own time and also allowed the public to use the tools to see their property's flood risk.

FEMA's Cooperating Technical Partners (CTP) program also allows FEMA to partner with state and local jurisdictions to carry out the Risk MAP program. Because these entities often have existing relationships with rural communities and an on-the-ground presence, their partnership provides strategic benefits. FEMA's existing work with CTPs in rural regions has provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of working with these communities. CTP program partnerships also have the opportunity to provide technical assistance and other support that rural communities may not have in-house and for which they have no funding allocated.

What Are You Asking of the Community and What Are You Providing?

When communicating with rural communities, it is important to do so in a way that empowers local staff to meaningfully engage with FEMA and their partners throughout Risk MAP by removing barriers to communication and access. Because each community touchpoint involves some form of information sharing, whether we are asking for, providing to, sharing with, or receiving information from rural communities, it is important to apply practices of equity and trust

building as the key building blocks to each form of engagement. During in-person meetings, calls, or virtual meetings, it's important to be transparent about what form of engagement is expected, as well as the role of FEMA and the community in the meeting. Without this clarity, it's possible that meeting goals or outcomes will be misunderstood, which may erode trust or confuse the engagement process.

Four common categories of community engagement and information sharing are:



Asking: You request something specific that you need from a local official and/or project partner.

The time of each project partner is valuable and they often wear multiple hats. Be clear in what you are asking for and how you would like to receive it. Estimate the level of effort needed to complete the task and when you would like to have the information. Be flexible, plan for providing deadline extensions, and offer suggestions to reduce the time and level of effort needed to complete the task. Seek to understand what's possible before you make the request.



Giving: You can bring value to the community by offering FEMA's expertise and counsel to a local official and/or project partner without the need for a deliverable or response in return.

You may have information that is new to a project partner and needs to be delivered. Remember to put yourself in the audience's shoes; this is achieved through listening to their needs and making connections to known support. If this is something they haven't asked for or knew that it was something that they could ask for, start with the basics and build from there. Ensure that it is clear what the information is and how it directly relates to them.



Sharing: You and a local community are sharing mutually beneficial information to help advance collaboration and partnership.

This type of engagement reflects a trusting relationship. Your communication is aligned and there is buy-in to the project at hand. This is the perfect time to introduce new partners and resources to expand the network of support available to the community.



Receiving: A local official has information they believe will help advance collaboration, community understanding, or mitigation, and you are the recipient.

If the information is important enough to share without you asking for it, you can assume it is important to the community or local official. Seek to understand why and fold this new understanding and knowledge into community engagement as best as possible or have a transparent discussion about the obstacles to doing so while looking for new solutions and opportunities. And, acknowledge the contribution with a "thank you."

Community Partnership Building

How FEMA approaches and works alongside a rural community at the beginning of a project or study will set the stage for longer-term success. These are questions FEMA staff use at the beginning of rural community engagement efforts to better understand the community's needs and how FEMA can add value.



How comfortable are you with floodplain management, and what can we do to help break down and decode Risk MAP, the NFIP, hydraulics and hydrology, and how a floodplain map or mitigation plan is created?



What are your community's safety, resiliency, and hazard mitigation goals? What's worked for your community before, and what are the three obstacles preventing you from doing more?



We want this to be a community-backed process. Who needs to be involved and who should we call to introduce ourselves to? Are there local experts or community organizers who have led past projects that will have important insights, and can we meet with them?



What questions do you have about our team, FEMA, and the resources and support we can offer?



What's important to the people that live here, and what do they want to make sure is here for their grandchildren's children?

Mitigation in Rural Communities

Equitable outreach and engagement are fundamental principles to helping ensure rural communities have the information and feedback channels to make informed decisions and have opportunities for mitigation funding and technical assistance. But what barriers exist for rural communities when considering mitigation efforts?

The March 2020 Summary of Stakeholder Feedback for the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program shares that communities that are designated as “small and impoverished” struggle with a 90/10 cost match, and communities that are just outside of the criteria for “small and impoverished” are equally under-resourced and would face limitations to apply for mitigation funding. These communities may have both capacity and capability limitations that mean they need assistance and attention to support their risk reduction goals.

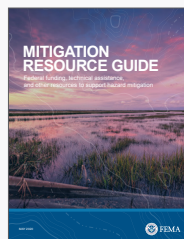
These are real and difficult challenges to address, but we can make progress by building trust and working alongside partners. For example, are there state and non-traditional funding mechanisms that can fill these gaps? Exploring all options and building a coalition of partners to creatively consider new solutions can reinforce new partnerships, advance trust, and remove barriers to resiliency planning and mitigation action.

Working directly with communities to identify which funding approaches or sources are the most appropriate will increase a rural community’s confidence that submitting a grant proposal is worth their time, set expectations about what FEMA can and cannot do, and build trust in FEMA. And, when possible and appropriate, providing the technical assistance to support a proposal or other mitigation planning effort will reduce the likelihood that a rural community’s lack of time, resources, or expertise stands in their way of advancing mitigation action.

Definition of a Small and Impoverished Community:

The term “small and impoverished community” means a community of 3,000 or fewer individuals that is economically disadvantaged, as determined by the state in which the community is located and based on criteria established by the President.

FEMA RMD has created a number of State Mitigation Funding Guides that review and detail different funding resources. Call your State Hazard Mitigation Office, or perhaps your National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Director or Regional Risk Analysis Branch, to learn if there’s a Funding Guide for your state or to request its development.



Resources

Mitigation planning is not a one-size-fits-all process. If barriers exist with limited solutions and support, mitigation projects can be scalable. There are resources available that rural communities can leverage as a starting point to spur creative ideas and approaches to mitigation.



[Mitigation Ideas: A Resource for Reducing Risk to Natural Hazards](#)

Provides a resource that communities can use to identify and evaluate a range of mitigation actions for reducing risk to natural hazards and disasters.



[Guide to Expanding Mitigation: Making the Connection with Agriculture](#)

Developed by FEMA Region II to show how community officials can work together with the agriculture sector to support hazard mitigation, including the planning process. The guide is a starting place for community officials to initiate a conversation about mitigation investments that make agriculture more resilient.



[Mitigation Showcases: Evergreen State College Seismic Retrofit and Newport, Oregon, Tsunami Safe Haven](#)

Showcases how local communities have leveraged partnerships and collaborated with state and federal partners to complete mitigation projects that address vulnerabilities to earthquakes and tsunamis. The narratives describe how partners collaborated to meet FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance requirements and build political and public support, and are intended to support communities interested in pursuing similar actions.



[Protect Your Home from Natural Hazards Brochures](#)

Available online and for free, these brochures help homeowners and renters take steps inside and out of the structure to reduce damage from flooding, wildfires, and severe wind.



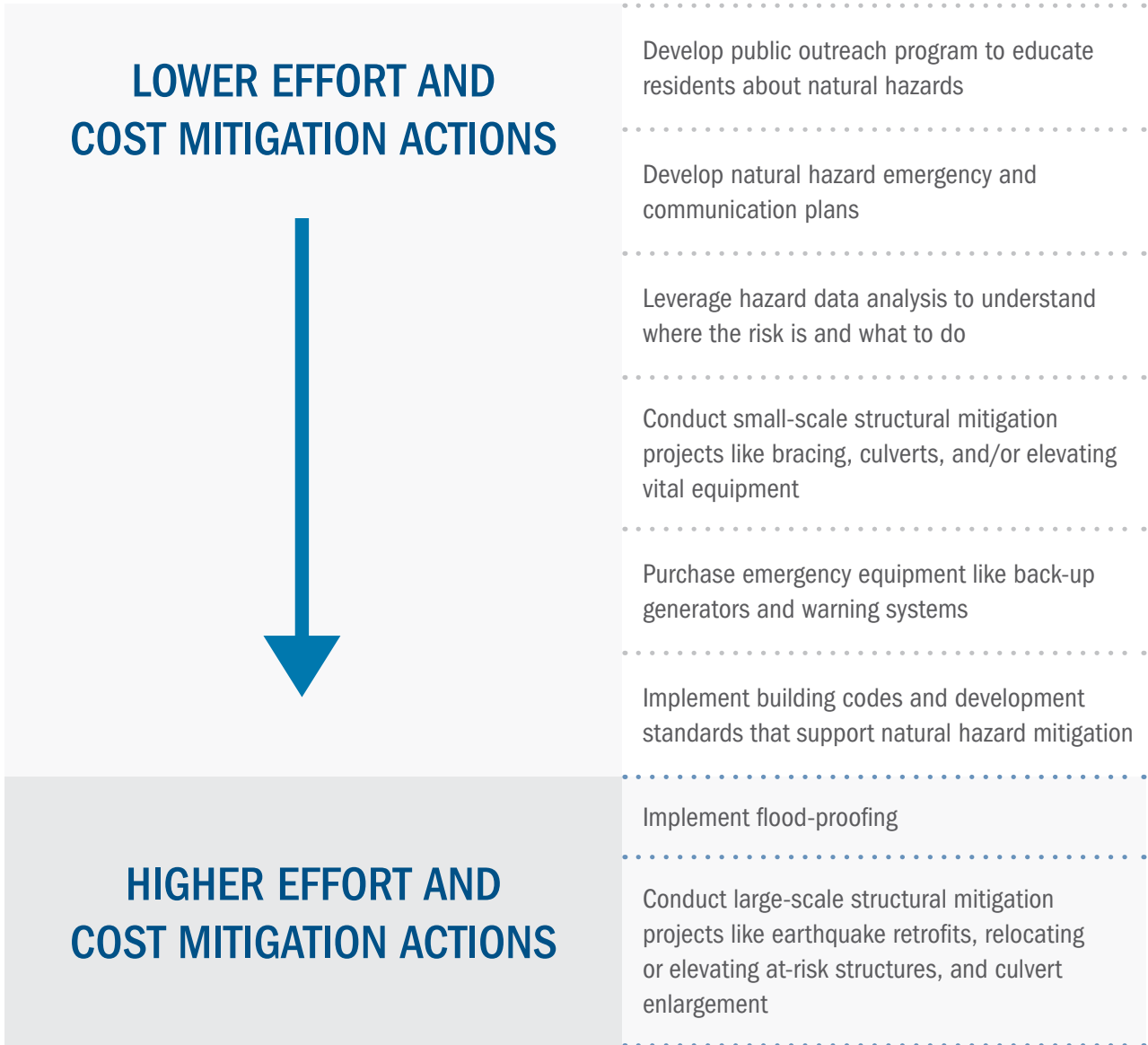
Defining Mitigation in Rural Communities Increases Mitigation Project Proposals

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, rural communities do not have a large number of traditional homes or emergency services facilities. To assist these communities, traditional mitigation outreach expanded to include small businesses and farmland located in flood hazard areas, and FEMA Region II expanded the definition of “mitigation” to include these non-traditional sectors, which resulted in more than 146 Hazard Mitigation Grant Program project submissions.

“Listen! We need to see the world from the community’s perspective so we can explain how our service can add value (value in their eyes).”

Paul M. Hoole
Mitigation Planner
FEMA Region II

Mitigation Actions



Mitigation in Rural Tribal Communities

Rural communities are not just limited to counties, cities, and towns. American Indian Communities are found throughout the nation and within rural areas. The [First Nations Development Institute](#) cites that 54 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives live in rural and small-town areas (Deweese & Marks, 2017). While most of the information presented in this Rural Guide can be applied to rural tribal engagement, it is important to distinguish the differences.

There are almost 600 different Tribal Nations in the United States, many with their own cultures, languages, values, and perceptions of the universe (Evans & Werkheiser, 2018). They have their own governments, laws, rules, regulations, and policies with different perspectives about consultation and how efforts and action should move forward. Always be mindful of the unique sovereignty and government-to-government relationship between FEMA and Tribal Nations.

A core theme of [FEMA's Tribal Mitigation Policy](#) surrounds the Agency's commitment to supporting strong and lasting partnerships with tribes to assist them in preparing for, responding to, and recovering quickly from hazards. A common, unintended failing that can hinder this commitment is a tribal community's perception of insensitivity about their culture.

Before reaching out to rural tribal communities, take the time to learn about their governance operations,

but also their history, values, and traditions that are indigenous to their way of life. In addition to glean mitigation-specific insights – such as how mitigation planning decisions are made; if they participate in the NFIP; and existing land-use and development regulations, projects, and plans where mitigation planning is a critical component – it is equally important to consider the cultural context, historical attributes, and connections to place that may impact a tribal community's perspectives on, or approaches to, mitigation challenges. Making the effort to genuinely acquaint yourself with the tribal community in advance of any conversations with them is a critical building block to establishing the foundation of a relationship that must be nurtured over time.

It's also a good best practice to make initial introductions, as well as other interactions, with tribal communities and leaders in person. Initial conversations should focus on listening and building a personal relationship that is both reciprocal and authentic. Learn about them, ask questions, and let them learn about you. You may find that tribal leaders aren't as concerned with a person's title or professional position as they are in learning about people, interests, and motivations. To build trust and better understand the community, wait to discuss project tasks and project-specific activities and make time to attend culturally important events, visit historic locations, and visit heritage centers.



Tribal-Specific Challenges

The March 2020 report, Summary of Stakeholder Feedback on the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program (BRIC), shares the following summary of feedback from tribal partners about their unique, tribal-specific needs. Understanding these concerns is an important first step towards building trust and supporting resilience and mitigation on tribal lands.

CHARACTERISTIC	OUTCOME
Rural and isolated	With one road in/out: small hazards can have large impact; evacuation route(s) and food access can be cut off, response time is slow.
Low capacity	Not many dedicated positions for hazard mitigation and/or grant management in tribal communities; those who manage grants wear many different hats.
All tribes are unique	Tribes are in different stages of hazard mitigation planning/experience; should not be treated all the same.
Complex land/road ownership	Project eligibility may be limited because there are often state and Bureau of Indian Affairs-owned roads throughout reservation: patchwork tribal land ownership can complicate potential project footprints.
No tax base	Tribes do not have tax bases; without this revenue, meeting even a 10% non-federal match is frequently prohibitive.
Traditional knowledge	Ability to incorporate traditional knowledge into hazard mitigation is important (e.g., cultural resources in hazard mitigation plans [HMPs] and Benefit-Cost Analysis [BCA], consideration of cultural lifelines).
Relationship with state/county	Nature or working relationships with state/county varies among tribes; can have implications for HMPs/planning, application reviews, eligibility, etc.

Resources

There are several resources available that address tribal mitigation planning, including the two listed below, and many others that are found [here](#).



[Tribal Mitigation Planning Handbook](#)
Supports Tribal Governments in developing and updating their hazard mitigation plans and includes recommendations for success and other resources.



[Tribal Hazard Mitigation Assistance Job Aids](#)
Created to help streamline the Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant programs, each document is specific to funding and project proposals and can support tribes in completing a planning grant or subgrant application for aid.



The Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe Tsunami Vertical Evacuation Tower

Located on the shores of Willapa Bay along the southwest coast of Washington, the Shoalwater Bay Indian Reservation only has a 20-minute warning to evacuate an inbound tsunami. By having an approved Hazard Mitigation Plan, the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe was eligible for FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program and, in 2018, was awarded \$2.2 million for construction of a vertical evacuation shelter, the second tsunami evacuation structure completed along the Washington coast. The structure will provide a safe evacuation place not just for Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribal members, but for all residents in the surrounding community.



How Technical Assistance Can Make a Difference

Technical assistance is the connection of FEMA's capabilities with the community's needs. It's moving beyond delivering data to a community to sitting down and working alongside a community to listen to their needs, show how the flood risk data is relevant to their work, and work with them to incorporate the data and any needed expertise to benefit the community. This often includes activating local hazard data through the development of an updated risk assessment via Risk MAP, but it can mean much more. Examples of technical assistance include the following:



Providing community planning support for using and incorporating flood hazard data into community mitigation efforts and planning;



Working alongside communities to develop guidance to integrate natural hazard data into other local plans and processes, or to help connect communities to other similar jurisdictions that have successfully completed similar projects and will have insights to share;



Helping develop, refine, and prioritize mitigation strategies, as described in FEMA's guidance, [Incorporating Mitigation Planning Technical Assistance into Risk MAP Projects](#); and



Helping communities identify new partners or cooperative funding resources that may be available outside of FEMA grants.

Technical Assistance and Partner Support

Just as technical assistance is valuable to communities and community leaders, it is a process that can help FEMA build stronger relationships with partner agencies that can bolster local risk reduction efforts.

By involving traditional and non-traditional decision makers in community working groups, roundtables, charrettes, or other formats, FEMA and communities are positioned to have a single conversation about risk reduction in a rural community and increase the likelihood of understanding and consensus.

Technical assistance conversations and interactions with rural communities can be formal or informal based on the culture and personality of the partners, but the primary goal is to ensure the community understands how risk assessment data, training, and grants are available to help them reduce risk.

For any community, technical assistance is the opportunity to translate data into a valuable partnership where communities can advance resilience and confidently explain to residents what's happening, why it's happening, and why the efforts and actions are appropriate for their community. It is also an opportunity to build trust and transparency while helping community decision makers to understand and answer tough questions (e.g., why flood or earthquake insurance can reduce a community member's financial risk, or how Risk MAP data can sync up with the hazard mitigation planning update process). Also, because rural communities value the importance of personal connections and trust, working alongside a rural community to cooperatively find a solution together will go a long ways in building rapport.

How to Make the Most of In-Person Meetings

This checklist of important considerations and questions is designed to be a resource when working in rural communities to help increase the likelihood that FEMA can provide the right level of support for each community while advancing Risk MAP, resilience, and mitigation. In many cases this support may be directly linked to the production of a flood map but may also include other forms of technical assistance. Adapt the checklist as necessary.

The IKEA Effect is a cognitive bias in which people place a higher value on the outcomes of efforts or processes they were a part of developing. In FEMA's case, the more a community is worked alongside as a partner, given shared responsibility in efforts such as meeting planning or solutioning, the more likely it is they will believe in, and endorse, an outcome.

MEETING PLANNING AND EXECUTION

Are you the guest or the host?

▶ Collaborate on this process – it should not happen to a community, but with a community. Be conscious of the local influence and dynamics and consider how federal, state, and local partner organizations and influencers with like-minded approaches or outcomes can work alongside FEMA.

Meetings remain flexible and agile

- ▶ Dates, times, and locations for community engagement should be selected equitably, ensuring that ALL can meaningfully participate and make progress in hazard mitigation and floodplain management. For example:
- Certain days may be reserved for worship and family.
 - Know the economic drivers of a particular region and how that may affect availability. For example: planting season (spring), harvest season (fall), calving season (late winter or spring), salmon run (June), tourist season, etc.
 - Do not require rural community members to drive long distances for a meeting. It may be more productive to have smaller meetings and more of them, or one-on-one phone calls.
 - Research what community events are underway; avoid conflicts OR align strategically.
- ▶ Share best practices on meeting format presentation styles with local staff and follow their suggestions on how to best present to the audience.
- ▶ Follow direction from local staff to identify new and innovative outreach ideas and circles of influence that can share your message. Better yet, have a community leader recruit and share key messages.
- ▶ Invest in the value of facetime and plan for in-person meetings or video calls, if possible.

KNOW THE COMMUNITY AND MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE

Invite the community to be part of the process before the meeting

- ▶ Help smaller communities who may be new or unfamiliar to a mitigation or mapping process understand how the decisions, maps, or outcomes are being made. Solicit their feedback and input along the way so that meetings begin with a common understanding and are used to advance decisions and outcomes, not just report updates.

Identify community influencers

- ▶ Work with your local point of contact to identify who should be involved in conversations and begin building your communication network.
- ▶ Have direct interaction with people in key community positions that have critical information and intel on who does what in the community. Even small communities generally have a Clerk, and a phone call to this person can often provide incredible insight.

Understand local planning efforts

- ▶ Learn how the community plans for community and economic development. Do they have a Comprehensive Plan, Emergency Management Plan, Flood Management Plan, etc.? Which of their local planning documents are used and why (or why not)? What is important for them to protect?
- ▶ Leverage technical assistance and resource support to integrate Risk MAP data into existing local planning processes.

The importance of perspective

- ▶ Understand the local community's values, constraints, concerns, etc. Put yourself in their shoes while cycling through the Risk MAP process and before making decisions.

Understand the decision-making structure of the community

- ▶ Listen and learn the links and relationships between the rural community and the county/state from local staff.
- ▶ Look beyond job titles to the individuals whose roles and responsibilities align with flood risk reduction.
- ▶ Balance the dynamic between “quiet” and “loud” rural communities within a study area and ensure that all voices are heard.

Consider the role of consensus in civic leadership

- ▶ Leverage how fast word travels in rural communities by holding forums for people to get involved and provide feedback and input.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Frame the discussion with the community's words

► Review county, town, and local resources to better understand how they talk about their goals, obstacles, future opportunities, and priorities. Understand how these align with FEMA's values, but incorporate the community's words and phrases to show how outcomes and goals are in alignment.

The importance of follow up and deadlines

► Deadlines matter. Being on time matters. Doing what is promised and working in the best interest of the local community, matters. This is part of building trust and partners.

Follow up on community requests

► Show that you are listening by following up on requests you received and next steps that were identified.

Be a connector

► FEMA's scope and influence may be smaller or more restricted than what a community believes it to be. However, this doesn't mean FEMA cannot be of assistance by making connections with other branches, other subject matter experts, or other federal agencies. Make new connections and help overcome obstacles to show commitment to the community's welfare.

Enable working groups to advance work

► Smaller, more intimate workgroups of community members, partners, and officials can accelerate work by compartmentalizing and focusing energy, as well as increase accountability in more bite-sized outcomes. When supported, these workgroups will develop ownership of a topic and build local expertise and buy-in.

Share the news and keep in touch

► Keep everyone up to date on project status and available resources. Discuss and implement the communication platforms and formats that can be most successful in rural communities.



Best Practices and Important Considerations for Virtual Meetings

Be it the travel restrictions of COVID-19 and related health concerns, travel budget and resource realities, or the availability of rural audiences to travel to community meetings in a distant location, virtual meetings can offer a strong, personal, and productive meeting if managed well. FEMA and the CERC provider have put together resources to help support and guide a good virtual meeting experience. These are available from the FEMA Regions.

When considering or organizing virtual meetings, consider these best practices and important considerations:

Before the Virtual Meeting

- Consider a virtual meeting a production, not a conference call. Plan, schedule, and conduct three internal dry runs and prepare a script and run of show to align the intent of the slide, the visuals on the slide, the narrative to support the slide, and the total anticipated time to help keep you on schedule. This can be done in a simple Word table.
- Send the virtual meeting announcement and invitation 4 to 6 weeks in advance of the go live date. Plan to begin one-on-one calls and emails to influencers, decision makers, and community officials no later than 3 weeks before the go-live date.
- Use a website that allows participants to both register for and attend the virtual meeting (e.g., Zoom or Eventbrite). Using a one-stop-shop platform will help streamline attendance cataloging for follow-up correspondence and outreach.

During the Virtual Meeting

- If using PowerPoint as a presentation tool, estimate 2 minutes of voice-over per slide.
- The virtual meeting experience for participants is always improving. There are several ways to engage participants and obtain feedback, including poll questions, breakout sessions, and meeting reactions used within the platform.
- Provide at least one break (5 minutes) for every hour of a presentation and ensure that time is set aside for questions and answers during the run of show.

After the Virtual Meeting

- Send a “thank you” email with all resources (including slides) immediately after the event. Emails such as this can easily be written before the virtual meeting so that they are ready to send.
- Reach out to decision makers, community leaders, and partners to get their informal input on the meeting’s organization, facilitation, and outcomes 3 days after the meeting. Plan to send at least one reminder email 2 days after the first input email is sent. Chronicle these insights to help improve future community meetings. Importantly, and to stay in compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, do not use a survey and keep questions open-ended.
- Conduct an internal after-action discussion within 24 hours after local input has been collected, making sure to record lessons learned and areas to improve.

Digital Communications Channels

If virtual meetings aren’t the right fit, there are other digital ways to connect with a community:

- Newsletters
- Website
- Blogs
- Social media
- Pre-recorded video
- Podcasts
- Public relations / news articles
- Business chats (Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.)

APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDED RURAL PLANNING TIMELINES

The activities and timelines below are suggested benchmarks for when to begin taking a particular action. These are just suggestions; communities that have previous experience with FEMA, state, county, or other partners may require less planning time than communities unfamiliar with a process. It is important to adjust these activities and timelines, as necessary, without losing sight of the intent to build trust, rapport, and communication with rural communities.

Relationships with Tribal Communities
Take Time: As reviewed earlier, personal connections, understanding, and trust are uniquely important when working alongside tribal communities. Work with available Tribal Liaison's and account for this in your timelines, which may need to be extended up to a year. Be consistent, persistent, and respectful.

Planning Timeline for all Rural Community Engagement Touchpoints

PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
BEFORE THE MEETING: GET TO KNOW THE COMMUNITY	Call the community to ascertain capabilities for holding and joining a meeting, whether in person or virtual. Asking about audio, internet, or space constraints, as well as how their personal or community level of comfort using different technologies or traveling at certain times of the day, will shape how meetings come together.	6 weeks before target meeting date
	Coordinate with the community to identify a meeting space that meets location and space needs and will be well-received by meeting attendees. This can include government buildings, schools, churches, and/or community centers. Ensure that the meeting space is within a 1-hour drive for all participants, is "neutral," and does not inhibit certain meeting attendees from participating. Consider a childcare or family-friendly arrangement.	5-6 weeks before target meeting date
	Schedule the meeting, send invite emails, and make follow-up calls to confirm that these materials were received. Ideally, have a local leader do this outreach.	4 weeks before target meeting date
	When practical, make one-on-one phone calls with meeting invitees to ensure that they understand the meeting's purpose and what their role is in the meeting; confirm that they are the right person to attend and, if not, reach out to their recommended contacts.	2 weeks before target meeting date
	Send a copy of the meeting agenda to key decision makers and partners, and schedule a call to review, answer questions, and make amendments. Send a revised copy to decision makers, partners, and scheduled attendees.	1-2 weeks before target meeting date



PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
MEETING DAY	Call influencers, partners, and vocal community leaders to remind them of the meeting, and re-send the meeting reminder email to all attendees.	12-24 hours before the meeting
	Take detailed notes, connecting the dots between local discussions and Risk MAP support. Share all federal, state, and partner contacts and resources with the community for follow-up.	During the meeting
	Ask meeting attendees to leave with one action item they plan to take. This creates optimism after complex discussions.	During the meeting
	Clearly share why FEMA is working with the community and work to better understand – and share based on pre-meeting conversations – how that activity aligns with and supports local community goals, including economic development, natural resource conservation, and resilience. Clarify what FEMA is going to do, what the community will do, and who will help manage the process and communications.	During the meeting
POST-MEETING FOLLOW-UP	Send final meeting notes, including specific follow-up action items and responsibilities for each action item listed.	1 week after the meeting
	Call participating communities to answer any questions about meeting materials and to discuss capacity issues for implementing action items from the meeting.	2 weeks after the meeting



Planning Timelines for Each Risk MAP Community Engagement Touchpoint

The following timelines are suggestions for supporting rural communities during each stage of Risk MAP. Depending on a community's resources and familiarity with Risk MAP, these timelines may need to be extended or relaxed. However, the goal remains the same: build trust, rapport, and understanding of the community's needs and opportunities to bring new value to advance local resilience and mitigation efforts.

“The infrastructure of rural America is an integral part of the natural environment and calls for a holistic approach to maintaining lifestyles and livelihoods, as we care for the Whole Community and the Whole Environment.”

Tony Mendes
Senior Emergency Management Specialist
FEMA Region VIII

Building Resilience

Risk MAP supports many facets of community risk reduction, from data and analysis to planning, training, and partnership building. Consider these steps to help build a baseline understanding of community resources and areas for near- and long-term rural community support.

PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
BEFORE THE MEETING	Gain insight through collaboration with state and regional partners to learn about the local planning processes, hazard mitigation plan status, and prior mitigation challenges and successes.	8 weeks before target meeting
	Collect local insight from rural community staff about mitigation roadblocks and gaps in information.	6 weeks before target meeting
	Prepare resources to anticipate needs, including realistic mitigation solutions that can be accomplished in rural communities. Provide best practices found in similar capacity communities, if available.	5 weeks before target meeting
	Gather known partners to build targeted resource networks to support local needs.	3 weeks before target meeting
	Plan for workshop activities that encourage all participants to share their collective knowledge among peers and with federal partners.	2 weeks before target meeting



PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
MEETING DAY	LISTEN. LISTEN. LISTEN. Mitigation, risk analysis, and communication are difficult, and each community will face their own challenges. Listen to specific needs and underlying issues. Be forthcoming about what can and cannot be solved.	During the meeting
	Encourage meeting participants to leave with an action item, large or small, that they can act on to increase community resilience moving forward.	During the meeting
POST-MEETING	Follow up! Stay connected, either directly or through project partners, and check in on known local milestones to offer resources and technical support.	Ongoing

Discovery

Discovery is an important opportunity for FEMA to formally introduce community officials and other partners to Risk MAP and the importance of understanding their risk of flooding and other hazards. Many residents of rural communities have lived in the area for long periods of time, so approach Discovery as both an opportunity to learn, ask questions, and to share what is already known.

PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
ENGAGEMENT PLANNING: PRE-DISCOVERY LOCAL ENGAGEMENT	Be clear in communicating the goals of Discovery and the level of effort needed from staff to support the effort.	8 weeks before target meeting
	Allow for extra time to provide a plain-language introduction to floodplain mapping, floodplain regulations, and the NFIP to educate those new to the concepts and programs.	8 weeks before target meeting
	Be flexible, be prepared for limited or no internet technology access, and plan for technology to fail. This can include mailing paper maps ahead of calls to collect physical comments.	7 weeks before target meeting
	Plan for multiple calls to best fit schedules, keep conversations casual, and allow for all voices to be heard.	7 weeks before target meeting



PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
	<p>When conducting pre-Discovery interviews or kickoff calls, leverage local processes and existing technology. This creates familiarity for local staff and can help encourage open and honest discussions.</p>	<p>5-6 weeks before target meeting</p>
<p>ENGAGEMENT PLANNING: DISCOVERY MEETING</p>	<p>Gain insight into community organizations and learn who your local champions are. They will help encourage attendance and local buy-in.</p>	<p>5 weeks before target meeting</p>
	<p>Identify and ask a key meeting participant, either local staff or trusted project partner, to open the meeting. This will encourage meeting attendees to trust unfamiliar staff at the meeting and reduce barriers to open communication.</p>	<p>4 weeks before target meeting</p>
	<p>Design workshop activities tailored to local needs, emphasizing the local connection between Risk MAP and the daily tasks of the community.</p>	<p>2 weeks before target meeting</p>
<p>AT THE MEETING</p>	<p>Be approachable and listen both intently and intentionally. Be flexible with the meeting and presentation style to fit the culture and tone of the community, including dressing accordingly. Use paper maps in addition to digital databases.</p>	<p>During the meeting</p>
	<p>Reduce the use of Risk MAP jargon, speak out all acronyms, and start with the basics.</p>	<p>During the meeting</p>
	<p>Be clear in your communication about what will come next – in the immediate and long term. Address any concerns around funding and scoping future work.</p>	<p>During the meeting</p>
<p>POST-MEETING</p>	<p>Follow up with existing resources and spell out clear ways to access and apply the support.</p>	<p>1 week after the meeting</p>

Data Development and Flood Risk Review

Ahead of a Flood Risk Review (FRR) meeting, Data Development is a unique time to bring new value to partnerships in rural communities. During this time, FEMA can ask local experts for information, open the door to receiving information later, and prove elements of self-orientation and intimacy. The FRR meeting itself is an opportunity to look beyond the map, ask questions, and understand community insights with the practical goal of gathering feedback on draft versions of the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) and Flood Insurance Study report.

PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
BEFORE THE MEETING	Identify the best method and format to share the work maps for their review. This can include web viewers, GIS datasets, FEMA online links, and paper map panels.	6 weeks before target meeting
	Review the maps in advance and build working lists of mitigation strategies or funding support solutions that may align with the early data, help show value, and help build trust.	5 weeks before target meeting
	Be specific when asking staff to prepare for the meeting. Why is it important for them to attend? What do you want them to review and how do you want them to review it? This respects their limited time.	4 weeks before target meeting
	Follow up on delivery of the work maps via phone to ensure that staff received the information and answer any immediate questions.	2 weeks before target meeting
	Identify known challenges when developing the work maps to discuss openly at the meeting.	2 weeks before target meeting
AT THE MEETING	Be prepared for limited or no internet access and anticipate technology failures by arriving with paper maps and/or extra laptops.	During the meeting
	Recap project history (starting at Discovery) and provide the opportunity to answer questions about floodplain mapping, floodplain regulations, and the NFIP to educate any new and unfamiliar staff.	During the meeting
	Listen to technical concerns and be clear about the process to revise work maps and/or scope additional work.	During the meeting
POST-MEETING	Follow up on specific asks from attendees, validating their concerns and identifying next steps moving forward.	1 week after the meeting

Consultation Coordination Officer Meeting

The Consultation Coordination Officer (CCO) meeting provides FEMA, state, tribal, and rural community officials an opportunity to discuss the preliminary FIRM, next steps, and the timeline for adopting the updated map into the local ordinance.

This meeting begins discussions about how to inform the public (if appeals are being considered) and may also include attendance from planning and emergency management – perhaps for the first time. It is a unique time to discuss how the maps reflect the rural community’s perspectives, what’s learned and incorporated throughout the numerous touchpoints, funding and grant solutions that have been advanced or may be in the future, and how these insights are reflected in the maps and the process.

PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
BEFORE THE MEETING	If the CCO meeting and Open House are planned to occur on the same day or adjacent days, host a conference call to coordinate community efforts to spread the word about the Open House. This should include talking to community leaders about what methods or channels make sense for getting the word out. This may include sending mailers, submitting news articles, leveraging social media, and posting notices in community gathering spaces. Provide templated messaging to support each format.	6 weeks before target meeting
	Compile a list of meeting options that would accommodate a community with lower capacity and limited meeting spaces.	6 weeks before target meeting
	Identify the best method and format to share the preliminary FIRM(s). This can include web viewers, GIS datasets, FEMA online links, and paper map panels.	6 weeks before target meeting
	Be specific when asking staff to prepare for the meeting. Why have they been invited and what can they contribute moving forward to inform the public and adopt the map?	3 weeks before target meeting
AT THE MEETING	Because the CCO includes those who participated in the FRR and staff from planning and emergency management departments, talk through the project history. Be mindful that this audience may not be familiar with floodplain management jargon, engineering methods, and the NFIP. Simplify messages and draw connections to planning and emergency management concepts.	During the meeting



PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
	Provide additional or follow-up options to in-person meetings that may provide a lower level of effort and may not require an in-person event. Leave behind contact information.	During the meeting
POST-MEETING	Be available to continue discussions with local staff and elected officials around the implications of the flood map update to best prepare them to respond to questions from the public and businesses.	Ongoing

Public Open House and Appeal Period

The Public Open House is a unique and important opportunity for FEMA to show the local community that the time, work, and energy put into their flood maps are in the best interest of the families, schools, and businesses of that area. The location of the meeting, the time FEMA spends speaking with residents, and how well FEMA can discuss events and development in the area are all ways to personalize and localize the effort to increase trust and show the value of the maps.

Telephone town halls, webinars, and pre-planned social media tools can also be used. While each engagement opportunity should provide information to the public about changes to the preliminary FIRMs, the process of appeals and map adoptions, and the regulatory and insurance requirements, the tools and tone of the discussion should reflect the community’s personality

PHASE:	ACTION ITEM:	TIMELINE:
BEFORE THE MEETING	When planning for public engagement, be flexible with scheduling – anticipating additional time – and provide scalable options that best fit the community’s size, capacity, and resources.	6 weeks before target meeting
	Identify which method of engagement best meets the needs of the community – clearly identifying the level of effort, resources, and physical/technological capacity of each option.	6 weeks before target meeting
	Identify the best way to conduct outreach to the public. Are online platforms, radio/newspaper announcements, printed flyers, or individual mailers the best? Allow for extra time when coordinating this effort, as local staff are the “owners” of this task and their time may be limited.	6 weeks before target meeting



PHASE:

ACTION ITEM:

TIMELINE:

AT THE MEETING

Focus on the audience in attendance and have empathy. Many residents and business owners are going to be concerned about financial, development, and insurance implications. Speak in plain language and be understanding around the financial burdens that some may face.

During the meeting

If meeting in person, be personable, approachable, and don't over dress. Offer contact information for follow-up.

During the meeting

POST-MEETING

Remove complicated phone trees, multiple "pass-offs," and other barriers that prevent the public from speaking with subject matter experts.

Ongoing

“Outreach is effort. If communities are given insight and responsibility during the mapping process, they will have more faith in that process, more ownership of the map, and more belief in their risk and their ability to address it.”

Dane Bailey
Mitigation Project Manager
FEMA Region VII



APPENDIX 2: SUPPORTING NEWS ARTICLES AND DISCUSSIONS

A selection of news articles and discussions about rural engagement and case studies.

[Nonmetro Counties Gain Pop. For 2nd Straight Year](#). The Daily Yonder. April 18, 2019.

- For the second year, the nonmetropolitan population increased; 2018 saw an addition of 37,000 residents (a 0.1-percent gain), close to the increase between 2016 and 2017, which was 33,000. This change is said to be higher in rural counties adjacent to metropolitan areas, largely due to a migration of folks from other counties and an increase in births over deaths (though the rate of “natural increase” is declining).

Note: This article was included as a reference to highlight the growing rural population; it includes a definition for “rural community” from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

[Rural Classifications from the USDA Economic Research Service](#)

- Rural is a multidimensional concept with varying definitions – consider the application when choosing which definition/guideline to use. According to the Office of Management and Budget, rural areas can be subdivided into micropolitan areas (nonmetro, labor-market areas centered on urban clusters of 10,000–49,999 persons) and all remaining counties, often called “noncore.” The U.S. Census Bureau defines urban and rural areas based on population density. According to the 2012 delineation from the 2010 Census, rural areas are open country and settlements with less than 2,500 residents. Every 10 years, the Census causes a shift in classifications between metro and nonmetro, typically resulting in a large loss of nonmetro population.

Note: This information was included as a reference to provide a highly detailed definition of metropolitan, nonmetropolitan, and rural areas. Additionally, this resource provides Census Bureau definitions of urban areas, urban clusters, and rural.

[Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau](#)

- The Census Bureau uses a definition based on population density and other measures of dense development when identifying urban territory. The definition seeks to draw the boundary around an urban area’s “footprint” to include its developed territory. To accomplish this, the Census Bureau’s definition of urban is largely based on residential population density and a few other land-use characteristics to identify densely developed territory.

Note: This resource was included to help explain the process other governmental agencies go through to define rural, urban, nonmetropolitan, etc.

[What is a rural community? The answer isn't always so simple](#). Politico. April 2, 2019.

- Using population as a gauge for what constitutes “rural” is becoming increasingly problematic, as it affects the financial support for which communities are eligible. Researchers and policy experts are pushing for a more holistic consideration for defining rural – one that looks at factors such as population density and commuting time (from rural to core economic zone).

Note: This resource was included to show the complexities of defining rural communities, noting that population counts aren't always the best indicator. This resource touches on other factors that contribute to defining a community as rural.

[Community Development in Rural America: Collaborative, Regional, and Comprehensive](#)

- Rural communities have a unique set of characteristics (geographic isolation and reliance on personal transportation, limited human capital, scarce financial capital and institutions, inadequate resources, etc.) that define their specific challenges. The primary opportunities for rural economies include energy creation (wind farms, alternate fuels, etc.), ecosystem services (watershed protection, carbon sequestration), linking ecotourism with cultural heritage (a higher wage tourism strategy), regional food systems to bolster economies, and e-commerce and telework (data centers, working from home, etc.).

Note: This reference was included to highlight some of the socioeconomic issues that face nonmetropolitan communities, such as environmental issues, economic development, people capital, and natural amenities.

[Australia's Centre for Rural & Remote Mental Health](#) provides suggestions for engaging with rural communities, including:

- Being aware of what has happened in that community and what is currently taking place;
- Not comparing rural communities to each other – no two are the same;
- Focusing on the benefit your presence will provide;
- Attending local events to build trust, relationships, and connections; and
- Considering what you are leaving behind.

Note: This resource was included to show international research and recommendations for engaging with rural communities.

[Rural Engagement for Resilient Communities](#)

The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities is working on an initiative on Rural Engagement for Resilient Communities. It is supporting efforts to close the digital divide, building capacity for development and engaging students in rural areas. Through this, the Association hopes to create best practices for engaging with rural communities

Note: This resource was included to highlight the digital divide seen in rural communities, touching on the need to build high-speed internet capacity and connectivity.

[Rural and Remote Engagement Tip Sheet](#)

This tip sheet from the British Columbia Ministry of Health provides guidance and support for health care organizations engaging with rural patients, families, and caregivers. It identifies decision makers, barriers to engagement, tips and tools for effective engagement, and recommended engagement techniques.

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National Conference of State Legislatures. (2020, January 21). Challenges Facing Rural Communities. Retrieved from ncsl.org/research/agriculture-and-rural-development/challenges-facing-rural-communities.aspx

Note: These resources highlight research on rural America and provide insights into the policy options States have undertaken to address the challenges facing rural communities.

Rural Health Information Hub. (2019, January 18). Healthcare Access in Rural Communities. Retrieved from ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/healthcare-access

Note: The *Rural Health Information Hub* is an online source for rural-specific resources, funding opportunities, data, State-specific information, case studies, and tools for success.

Rural Health Information Hub. Selected rural statistics for the United States. Retrieved from ruralhealthinfo.org/states/united-states

Note: The *Rural Health Information Hub* is an online source for rural-specific resources, funding opportunities, data, State-specific information, case studies, and tools for success.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development. (2019, September 23). Rural Employment and Unemployment. Retrieved from ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/employment-education/rural-employment-and-unemployment/

Note: *USDA Rural Development* offers loans, grants, and loan guarantees to help create jobs and support economic development and essential services, such as housing, health care, first responder services and equipment, and water, electric, and communications infrastructure.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2017, August 9). Rural Economy Extends Beyond the Farm. Retrieved from census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-economy-not-completely-dependent-on-farming.html

Note: The *U.S. Census Bureau (Urban and Rural)* defines “rural” and provides an [online interactive map](#).