

Create Diverse and Multidisciplinary CWPP Working Groups



Diverse and multidisciplinary CWPP working groups play an important role in developing and implementing a thorough and effective Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). "Working groups" are appointed committees, councils, or other types of dedicated and organized teams composed of stakeholders that can contribute to aspects of CWPP plan development and, in some cases, plan implementation. Working group members typically represent the diverse interests of local government, community leadership, fire agencies, forestry and natural resource departments or organizations, residents, and other relevant community organizations. Working groups help foster collaboration, enhance community engagement and ownership, provide leadership and continuity, and facilitate resource mobilization.

Key Strategies for Creating CWPP Working Groups

Strategies for creating and leveraging CWPP working groups that include a diverse representation across a variety of fields include:

- **Select representation from multiple areas of expertise and groups.** Wildfire preparedness and risk reduction planning requires insights and expertise from a variety of fields. By uniting parties with diverse backgrounds and skill sets, working groups help ensure the resulting CWPP reflects local challenges and opportunities. For example: forestry experts understand forest health and forest dynamics concerns and issues; fire agencies provide insights into fire behavior and suppression strategies; biologists are familiar with sensitive or critical plant and animal habitat; elected officials can speak to funding opportunities, relevant policy and legislation, and competing projects; tribal representatives provide perspectives and



concerns about cultural resources and mitigation techniques; and residents engaged in neighborhood wildfire programs can contribute local viewpoints on mitigation strategies. Creating a collaborative environment can yield a well-rounded plan that addresses unique challenges of the community.

- **Formalize your working groups.**

Coordinating instruments, such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Terms of Reference, or local government resolution, can help define roles, establish accountability and commitment, and lend credibility to working groups. Additionally, official working groups with close ties to local government may be better positioned to get the resources they need to accomplish their goals.

- **Identify a working group coordinator.**

Working groups typically benefit from appointing or nominating an individual leader or organization to play a central role in ensuring effective collaboration, coordination, and productivity within the group. This is especially true for informal groups who may not have bylaws or charters in place. The coordinator can facilitate meetings, guide group decisions, help resolve conflicts, define roles and responsibilities, ensure accountability, and monitor progress.

- **Establish clear roles and responsibilities.**

Assigning roles, tasks, and deliverable metrics helps ensure everyone understands their part in the working group, minimizing conflict, avoiding duplication, and ensuring measurable progress. In formalized working

groups, it may be critical to distinguish between voting and non-voting members and to determine when in the process the voting responsibilities might change (e.g., one might be a voting member early in the CWPP development process and become a non-voting member during implementation). It's worth noting that some groups may work best on an informal consensus basis.

- **Develop a work plan and central location for document storage.**

A work plan serves as a roadmap for the group to achieve its goals. It also ensures effective resource mobilization, promotes collaboration, and increases accountability. Develop the work plan early in the CWPP process, and include such items as the group's objectives, key tasks, responsibilities, milestones, the group's communication process, and evaluation and updating procedures. Additionally, agree upon an accessible, central location for all working group data to be stored.

- **Schedule regular communication.**

Maintaining regular communication with working group members facilitates coordination, decision making, information sharing, and keeps forward momentum for the group. Some formats, such as in-person meetings and interactions, also help foster interpersonal relationships within the working group to increase a collaborative and supportive working environment. Over time, stakeholders can also develop a better understanding of other members' goals and positions, paving the way for enhanced communication and faster resolutions.



Working Groups in Action

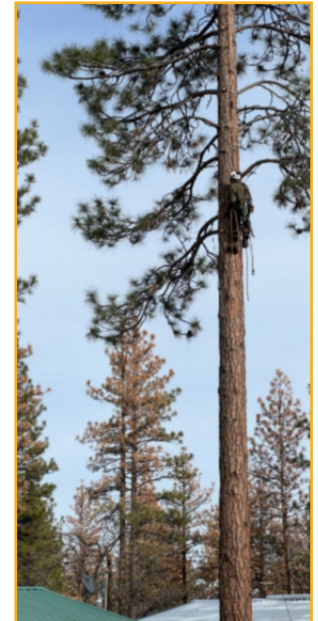
CWPP working groups can provide leadership and continuity in the CWPP process, and they create channels for ongoing public engagement and participation. In California, many communities have embraced the use of dedicated working groups to strengthen the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of CWPPs.

Some CWPP working groups were created through formal coordinating instruments and tied in with the local county governments. For example, in 2019, the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors passed a [resolution to establish](#) the Mariposa County Fire Advisory Committee (MCFAC). The original intent of MCFAC was to create a multidisciplinary advisory body for the County Board of Supervisors and County Fire Chief on all fire-related topics, including acting as a working group to support an update to the county's CWPP. Since that time, MCFAC has evolved to meet the needs of the updated CWPP to assist in its implementation. Two County Supervisors sit on the MCFAC in a non-voting

capacity and attend every monthly meeting, and the entire Board of Supervisors receives a copy of MCFAC meeting minutes, as well as periodic in-person updates.

Lassen County also has a formalized CWPP working group, formed through a [2014 MOU](#) between the Lassen Fire Safe Council, the Resource

Conservation District, CAL FIRE, the Bureau of Land Management, the US Forest Service, local rancherías, and local logging companies. Their working group regularly presents CWPP updates to the Lassen County Board of Supervisors, and two board members remain highly engaged with the group's activities.



Hazard tree removal in Lassen County. Photo credit: Lassen County Fire Safe Council. Photo credit: Lassen Fire Safe Council

Other CWPP working groups are created through other mechanisms. The Humboldt County Fire Safe Council (HCFSC) is a Board of Supervisors appointed committee facilitated by the County Coordination Team. The HCFSC consists of twenty-one member seats (primary and alternate) representing the full spectrum of organizations engaged in wildfire planning and response within the county, including federal, state, and local groups. Members and their alternates participate in independent working groups focused on



A Mariposa Fire Safe Council member reviews NEPA documents with a contractor. Photo credit: Al Golub.



Humboldt County chipper day. Photo credit: Humboldt County

specific topics. During the last update of the CWPP, the working groups were organized around and focused on the development of each of six goal areas in the CWPP Action Plan. The focus has since shifted to implementation, and working groups are now formed on an ad hoc basis. These ad hoc working groups also invite participation from other special interest stakeholders, such as local project coordinators, who do not have an appointed seat on the HCFSC. The County Coordination Team is currently funded by a grant from the California Fire Safe Council and plays an important role in convening the working groups, tracking their outputs, and serving as a liaison to the larger HCFSC.

Regardless of how a CWPP working group is organized, successful outcomes are based on holding regular meetings and having established communication channels. For example, the Lassen County Working Group meets quarterly via video conference to share project updates throughout the year, and then the group meets annually in person to prioritize projects. MCFAC in Mariposa County meets monthly, and group members share an action plan document that they use

to communicate project status and updates in between meetings. In both cases, regular communication helps working group members stay accountable and engaged in the CWPP process.

In addition to consistent communication, high-functioning CWPP working groups tend to establish clear roles and responsibilities. Julia Cavalli, a Senior Environmental Analyst for Humboldt County Public Works and leader of their CWPP County Coordination Team, believes the group's success highly depends on clarity of roles. For example, even though there is some crossover, Public Works focuses on outreach and education, defensible space, and roadside treatments, while the Resource Conservation District, who has natural resources focus, generally works on forest health projects. Knowing this makes it easier for Cavalli to track who is doing what, and both groups benefit from the other's efforts.

Another theme shared by successful working groups is strong interpersonal relationships and trust among members. Working group structure and governance, such as transparent communications, established conflict resolution protocols, and clear goals and expectations, help foster productive relationships. For example, the Humboldt County CWPP County Coordination Team builds trust among HCFSC members and other collaborators by writing and implementing grants together. This approach encourages collaboration, builds group resilience, and provides an opportunity for capacity-building and mentorship of local partners.



Additional Tips for Success

- Maintain flexibility. Over the course of developing and implementing a CWPP, priorities and circumstances may change. Be open to revising strategies, adjusting plans, or incorporating new initiatives that enhance the group's relevance and impact over time. Periodically assess the make-up of the working group to determine if the right people are still at the table. It's entirely possible that the people who were involved in the beginning of a CWPP are no longer needed, and there may be newly identified agencies and people that should be included.
- Strategically select working group partners who will assist with succession planning for the group. Political priorities and funding mechanisms can shift, and so it's vital for the ongoing success of the CWPP group to foster collaboration with external partners, organizations, or stakeholders who share common goals or interests. That way, if a leading partner leaves the group or decreases their participation, there is someone else who can fill their shoes.

Key Resources

Harvard Business Review Research

Harvard Business Review presents university research that provides guidance and suggestions for how teams can work together effectively. One study examined 55 large, complex business teams to determine eight factors for successful collaboration. Although [Eight Ways to Build Collaborative Teams](#) is focused on the business environment, most of the advice can be adapted for any team. Another study, described in [How High-Performing Teams Build Trust](#), interviewed 1,000 team U.S. office workers to identify how teams successfully build trust amongst their members.

Joint Fire Science Program's Quick Guides

The Joint Fire Science Program is an applied research collaboration between the U.S. Forest Service and several universities that aims to improve the ways communities are collaborating to address wildfire risk. Quick Guide #8, [Participant Roles and Functions](#) recommends roles and processes for collaborative CWPP work groups. Quick Guide #6, [Assessing Community Resources for Collaboration](#), provides an approach for assessing community collaboration resources and matching them with available opportunities and strategies.

Interested in more CWPP best practices and guidance? Explore the entire CWPP Toolkit [here](#).



About the California CWPP Toolkit

The California CWPP Toolkit was co-developed by CAL FIRE's Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation Division, Community Wildfire Planning Center, Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, and California Fire Safe Council.

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