



Considerations for Working with a CWPP Consultant



Engaging a consultant to develop or assist with a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) provides an important option for communities seeking to undertake this effort. Benefits to working with a CWPP consultant can include:

- **Specialized expertise and knowledge:** Consultants bring specialized knowledge in relevant topics, such as wildfire risk assessment, mitigation strategies, and community planning. Experienced consultants will have a track record of successfully developing CWPPs, understanding best practices, and overcoming common challenges, all of which can help with CWPP development and implementation.
- **Objective perspective:** Consultants can provide an objective, third-party perspective, ensuring that the CWPP addresses risks and needs without local biases.
- **Time and resource efficiency:** Consultants can dedicate their time to the development of the CWPP, which can accelerate the process by supporting internal staff or volunteers who might have other responsibilities.
- **Regulatory compliance:** Consultants who are familiar with federal, state, and local wildfire regulations can ensure the CWPP meets all legal requirements.
- **Grant support:** Consultants who are familiar with grant writing and securing funding for wildfire mitigation projects may also help increase the chances of obtaining financial support for CWPP implementation.



- **Capacity building:** Consultants can train and educate staff and community members to help build local capacity for wildfire planning and mitigation efforts. They can also recommend practices and policies for ongoing wildfire risk reduction, annual reviews, or other insights and innovations.

Working with a consultant also requires advanced planning to avoid potential challenges throughout the CWPP development process. For example, a poorly defined scope of work, vague project roles, or a lack of clear communication methods can create issues with project delays, scope creep, cost overruns, poor plan quality, or overall dissatisfaction. Using consultants also runs the risk of minimizing or limiting local input and plan ownership if there is not active and continued engagement by community participants.

This resource is intended to maximize positive outcomes for hiring and working with a CWPP consultant. Guidance is arranged by four phases: 1) CWPP Pre-Planning and Request for Proposal (RFP) Launch, 2) Selection and Contracting, 3) Engagement, 4) Closeout and Post-Adoption.

CWPP Pre-Planning and RFP Launch

The initial steps towards engaging with a consultant should focus on identifying project needs, assessing assets and strengths, researching potential consultants, and issuing an RFP. These activities should be undertaken by the CWPP working group (i.e. project management team) that will work collaboratively to drive the CWPP process forward. See the [CWPP Guide](#) for more information on CWPP working groups, initial scoping questions, and other information that will aid this process. It's possible that the scope will change over the course of the project, but creating clear expectations in the RFP will help consultants create comparable proposals that will aid the selection process.

- Define the CWPP project scope, budget, and timing. Take the time upfront to define the purpose of the CWPP and expectations for working with a consultant. The bulk of this information can be synthesized through the preparation of an initial CWPP planning document (e.g., CWPP outline, terms of reference, framework) that addresses key questions.
- Define CWPP goals and objectives to articulate the plan's intended outcomes and establish the overall direction and intent.
- Review the list of CWPP minimum requirements (as outlined in the [CWPP Guide](#) and consider if there are additional topics to address. This is helpful as a reference to ensure the plan remains concise and relevant while meeting the community's needs.
- Anticipate robust community outreach and the leaders, organizations, and groups who will be involved in the CWPP. This component can be overlooked and underestimated, potentially leading to a lack of local support and input, reduced effectiveness of mitigation efforts, or plan opposition. Identify potential obstacles to community outreach and begin developing strategies to address them. This early



understanding will inform capacity and expertise needed to support community engagement efforts. Refer to the CWPP Toolkit's CWPP Community Outreach and Engagement Workbook and best practice "Engage Whole Communities Equitably Through Public Participation" for additional strategies, tips, and resources.

- Identify a list of CWPP deliverables and ensure these meet the minimum requirements of a CWPP. Deliverables may include a specified number of review drafts and a final plan, required field work and data collection, expectations related to public engagement activities, other plan formats and distribution methods (e.g., story maps, websites), and other specifications related to plan development such as spatial hazard and risk assessments.
- Assess internal resources and expertise available from the CWPP working group and assign specific roles and tasks to meet intended plan activities, tasks, resources, and deliverables. Typically, the use of internal resources and expertise is cost effective and provides greater benefits to engagement, ownership and local relationship building; however, internal capacity and/or expertise are often limiting factors that require external consultants. Understanding these needs before hiring a consultant can help the CWPP working group contribute to plan development and project oversight. Refer to the best practice [Create Diverse and Multidisciplinary CWPP Working Groups](#) for additional strategies, tips, and resources on working groups.
- Create a realistic CWPP schedule. Depending on the community and the complexities of the planning area, CWPP development can range from 12 months to two or more years. Allow enough time and budget to accommodate CWPP working group members' workloads while considering other factors, such as scheduled vacations, fire season, seasonal events (winter holiday season, tourist influxes, significant community special events), weather disruptions, and how these might impact CWPP development activities, such as participation in meetings and plan review requests.
- Develop the CWPP project budget that includes funds for internal staff time (CWPP working group and employees' time), travel expenses, meeting expenses, and all anticipated consultant costs. This will be a balance between cost savings and engagement benefits of using internal resources with a realistic assessment of internal capacity and expertise limitations. Also consider travel expenses and additional time for external consultants who are not locally based. Ensure that the budget is within any applicable grant funding requirements (if this is the source of funding) or pursue funding sources that will meet the needs of your budget. Refer to the [CWPP Funding Resources and Tips](#) for more information on potential CWPP funding sources in California.
- Prepare the RFP. As part of the process, become familiar with internal legal and procurement procedures to avoid future project delays, disputes, or oversights, and ensure the RFP (and final contract) reflect this information, as necessary. At a minimum, the RFP should include:



- Detailed descriptions of CWPP goals, objectives, scope of work, expected deliverables, and timelines.
- The CWPP project schedule and any requirements for the response, such as a consultant's proposed timeframes for interim milestones and final deliverables.
- The CWPP project budget (as a not to exceed amount or range) and any requirements for the response, such as a budget breakdown on how consultants plan to allocate available funds with details including proposed hours and billing rates associated with each phase or task.
- Information on the type of consultant qualifications required in the proposal, such as a company overview, proposed team members and their capacity, bios, references, and relevant experience (similar work examples).
- An outline of how project proposals will be evaluated, including any criteria or weightings, and whether final interviews will be required.
- A schedule of key deadlines and activities associated with the RFP and submission process, including an open period for questions and any pre-proposal meetings.
- Any additional information required by the local contracting agency (e.g., sample contract, insurance requirements, delivery method, other submittal requirements).

Some communities reach out to consultants before issuing an RFP to get a better sense of what consultants' costs are and what is typically included in a CWPP project. This can be especially helpful if communities (and CWPP working group members) are new to the CWPP process; however, keep in mind that these are estimates and preliminary conversations, and they should not set up expectations of final awards or budgets. Reviewing previous RFPs issued by others can also provide ideas, but it is important to use them as a reference only to ensure the RFP meets the unique needs of the community.

- Distribute the RFP through applicable channels. Communities may identify potential consultants in advance to share the RFP with by searching for firms with experience in wildfire management, forestry, fire ecology, emergency planning and previous CWPP project experience. Be sure to also follow any internal posting and RFP notification procedures to ensure transparency during the distribution and selection process. Consider providing at least four weeks of RFP response time for consultants to have sufficient time to prepare and submit their tailored responses.

Selection and Contracting

Once RFPs are collected, the next steps are to evaluate all eligible proposals, select the best candidate, and set up a contract for working with the selected consultant. Evaluate proposals based on objective criteria, which may include:



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- Ensuring the proposal met basic minimum qualifications and the submittal deadline.
- Reviewing the consultant team's technical knowledge on relevant areas such as wildfire risk assessment, mitigation, and community engagement, and their capacity to undertake the work within the proposed schedule
- Assessing the proposed approach and schedule to developing the CWPP, including how the consultant will handle stakeholder engagement, data collection, and analysis methods.
- Examining costs in relation to the value and comprehensiveness of the proposed services.

There may be other considerations that factor into the evaluation process, such as finding the type of firm that is a good cultural fit with the community. For example, some CWPP working groups may have preferences such as working with a small, local consulting firm that knows the area, or a larger firm with a deep bench and broader ability to address adjacent issues, such as reviewing environmental regulations.

- Review previous CWPPs that the consultant has produced to determine if their work reflects what the community is seeking, such as similar levels of community engagement and plans produced at a comparable scale.
- Conduct interviews with top candidates to provide an opportunity to meet the consultant team, observe their communication skills, and discuss different aspects of the CWPP process, such as how they would handle unexpected challenges and adapt their strategies to keep the project on track.
- Check references for finalists to determine if past projects met expectations in terms of performance, reliability, project management, budget, and overall client satisfaction.
- Once the final consultant is selected, translate the RFP into a clearly defined contract that includes the scope of work, roles and responsibilities, specific milestones, deliverables, payment process, timelines, and other key information, such as payment terms that align with project milestones and deliverables, and a statement to ensure that the community has unrestricted access and license to use all the data, information, intellectual property and other products developed as part of the CWPP. Include other contract provisions, such as project amendments, dispute resolution, and other applicable requirements specified by grant funding agents and local government agencies. Ensure all final contracts are signed and dated; avoid informal communications (e.g., emails) as final documentation.
- Post final decisions and share any feedback with other consultants that were not selected. Sharing feedback can help respondents grow professionally and promote a positive candidate experience. It also provides an opportunity for the community to reflect on its own consultant selection process and keeps the door open for future interactions.



Engagement

After the consultant is officially under contract, the CWPP working group should expect to be involved in the development and implementation of the CWPP through regular engagement, collaboration, and communication. Tips and considerations to maximize these working relationships and its planning outcomes include the following:

- Establish an internal project manager from the CWPP working group. This person will serve as the primary point of contact for the consultant to bring clear communications, enhanced efficiency, stronger relationships, and better accountability to the project. Ideally, the project manager is someone who can make decisions, access information and resources quickly, engage stakeholders (i.e., a “spark plug”) and be a positive force for the CWPP process. The project manager will most likely need to dedicate a significant amount of time, so consider other responsibilities they already have in their day-to-day activities. An unresponsive or slow project manager can lead to project delays and increased project costs if the consultants end up doing more work than originally contracted for.
- Treat the consultant as part of the CWPP working group and avoid project team silos by including them in appropriate team communications. Provide the consultant with all relevant historical information, local knowledge, and place-based context so that they are fully up to speed and able to contribute in a meaningful way. While the consultant may provide the process and expertise, they may not have the local context and community connections needed to develop a successful CWPP on their own. Although they are part of the team, the consultant may also require some buffering from internal politics and conflicts so that they are allowed to remain impartial and objective for the benefit of the project.
- Over the course of the CWPP project, consistently check progress and communicate to make sure project goals are on track, detect problems early, manage resources, and maintain quality and accountability. Consistent communications and monitoring will also help avoid scope creep, which can compromise and derail a project. Establish a schedule for regular progress reports and meetings, as well as preferred channels for communication (e.g., in-person meetings, video calls, emails), to review work quality and adherence to project goals and timelines.
- Stay engaged! Successful CWPPs are community-driven, which means community members, local government, and emergency services are engaged during the entire process. This is especially important in instances where there may be difficulty getting community members on the same page, in which case a local contact is crucial for facilitating community dialogue and resolving differing inputs on the CWPP. The consultant may also be unfamiliar with specific local conditions, and they will need help from the community getting data confirmed as they go through their analyses.



Closeout and Post-Adoption

After the consultant is officially under contract, the CWPP working group should expect to be involved in the development and implementation of the CWPP through regular engagement, collaboration, and communication. Tips and considerations to maximize these working relationships and its planning outcomes include the following:

- **Acquire all CWPP data and information.** Prior to the CWPP closeout, ensure that all data and other supporting documentation (e.g., spatial data, meeting notes, public outreach outcomes and materials) have been transferred from the consultant. These materials are helpful for reference and will be necessary for any future CWPP updates performed internally.
- **Conduct a post-project review.** Reviewing the CWPP development process allows for reflection on what went well and what did not to help inform learning and any improvements on future initiatives. A project review also provides an opportunity for team recognition and closure.
- **Consider re-engagement on major CWPP updates.** In cases where the community experiences significant changes shortly after plan adoption, such as a large fire or other disaster, explore the possibility of re-engaging with the consultant to update relevant portions of the plan. This may entail updating the wildfire risk assessment or other sections related to fire context and hazardous vegetation conditions.

Interested in more CWPP resources 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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