



Making Mitigation Work:

A Webinar Series

Natural Hazards Center and FEMA Webinar Series “Making Mitigation Work”

Written Questions and Answers after the August 13, 2019 Webinar

An In-Depth Look at the National Mitigation Investment Strategy: Aligning Mitigation Investment for the Whole Community

Angela Gladwell, University of Colorado Boulder, August 13, 2019

Question from Anonymous: When we talk about aligning program requirements, are we specifically talking about FEMA and FIMA programs, or across other federal programs too?

Speaker response: The National Mitigation Investment Strategy is an interagency document and the recommendation to align programs and requirements is referencing programs across our federal and non-federal partners.

Question from Anonymous: Is post-disaster hazard mitigation also intended to be holistic for all recommendations? How does the Investment Strategy align with a FEMA response lifespan?

Speaker response: The Investment Strategy recommends actions reflecting input and involvement from, and benefits for, all national stakeholders in disaster resilience, including federal departments and agencies; state, territorial, tribal, and local governments (SLTTs); and private and non-profit sector entities such as businesses, philanthropies, foundations, universities, and other non-governmental organizations. The Investment Strategy provides an opportunity for national scale coordination around mitigation investment and disaster resilience priorities and is not solely focused on pre- or post-disaster mitigation.

The idea is that through implementation, mitigation actions will be incorporated into every decision across the disaster lifecycle, such as land use planning, smart growth development, building code adoption and everything in between. While there is often more federal funding for mitigation after a disaster, FEMA pre-disaster mitigation grants are available for communities to explore ways to act proactively against future disasters. The Investment Strategy recognizes the opportunity that is presented during recovery and the necessary linkages between recovery planning and mitigation.

Question from Anonymous: Does the Investment Strategy address the progressive impacts of slow-onset or chronic disasters such as land subsidence, coastal erosion and sea level rise?

The intent for the Investment Strategy is to address slow-onset and chronic disasters as well. The Investment Strategy has an overarching guiding principle to consider changing conditions throughout the implementation of the Strategy so as you think about things like coastal erosion and sea level rise and those types of issues and again combined with other issues that change again as populations move, as the built environment changes all

of those things changes the risks that may exist in a particular area. The goal is that the Investment Strategy, and the recommendations therein, would be utilized to help address those issues.

Question from Anonymous: Formerly, every mitigation dollar spent saved 4 dollars in response/recovery. More recently the ratio was 1 to 6. Now it is 1 to 11. Can you point to specific mitigation activities that illustrate this?

Speaker response: The most recent National Institute of Building Sciences Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves Study has concluded that across a selection of federal grants, mitigation funding can save the nation \$6 in future disaster costs, for every \$1 spent on hazard mitigation. Further, this study found that designing buildings to meet the 2018 International Residential Code (IRC) and 2018 International Building Code (IBC) produces a national benefit of \$11 for every \$1 invested. To read the entire report and the different benefits studied, visit: <https://www.nibs.org/page/mitigationsaves>

Question from Anonymous: What does the Investment Strategy mean, practically speaking, for a small community in the West that is trying to live more safely with wildfire?

The Investment Strategy highlights an example of heavy forests areas around Mount Adams, Washington, a community at risk of catastrophic wildfires. Mitigating the risk caused by timber (fuel for forest fires) requires extensive cooperation and planning. Federal land managers at the Wildlife Refuge, community forest managers from the Mount Adams Resource Stewards Collaboration, landowners, and National Forests and National Parks personnel have been working together to treat timber and induce controlled fires. The multi-year effort spans over nearly 400 acres. Mitigation projects like this are also supplying wood products, increasing local jobs, enhancing forest health and wildlife habitat, and making nearby communities safer from wildfires.

Question from Anonymous: What are some of the support systems in place to encourage communities to adopt say, latest building codes as a mitigation investment. What are the funding sources they have available?

Speaker response: The Investment Strategy provides recommendations on how to identify, support, influence, and align mitigation investments. FEMA has conditional requirements for Hazard Mitigation Assistance. The NFIP has minimum building standards for development in special flood hazard areas that predate modern up-to-date building codes and standards. The Disaster Recovery and Reform Act of 2018 (DRRA) calls for FEMA's grant programs to require the latest building codes and standards. Additionally, DRRA proposes legal changes that would reward state investments in resilient building and mitigation through actions such as increasing cost shares and linking assistance to other financial incentives to mitigate.

Question from Anonymous: Will this effort include additional FEMA funding opportunities for implementation through current programs and for current disasters?

Speaker response: The Investment Strategy does not authorize additional funding, though the implementation of it may lead to policy changes and further program improvements.

Question from Anonymous: Where can I see research findings about building codes that you mentioned?

Speaker response: For more information on the No Code, No Confidence campaign, please visit: <http://inspect2protect.org/>

Question from Anonymous: Do we have, or will FEMA develop, a clearinghouse of successful practices that can be shared with communities trying to incorporate mitigation investments?

Speaker response: Recommendation 2.1 in the Investment Strategy discusses how to make risk information more available and easier to use. Flood maps, building codes, insurance rates, and other forms of risk information help the whole community understand risks. Risk information also guides planning and mitigation investment decisions. The Federal Government is committed to making this information easy to access, but mitigation-related data is limited and decentralized. By identifying, centralizing, and sharing risk information, the Federal Government and nonfederal partners will provide the whole community with a more complete picture of potential mitigation opportunities, and their costs and benefits.

There are other examples and recommendations outlined for each of the three goals identified in the Investment Strategy. These successful best practices can help inform and encourage communities that want to incorporate mitigation investments, please visit <https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1565706308412-19739d7deeca639415cc76c681cee531/NationalMitigationInvestmentStrategy.pdf>

Question from Anonymous: What kinds of information can help communities and governments to make decisions regarding mitigation? And where is the best place to send communities for them to get access to federal funding for mitigation?

Speaker response: There are many different resources that are available right now. For example, one of our upcoming webinars focuses on the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. If you want to learn more about that program, now is a good opportunity to do that. What we're looking at as we move forward because what we've learned is having the basic information about what programs are available to support mitigation is one of the most critical kind of pain points that people have. Part of one what we're exploring is providing more resources. We could likely provide something that's consolidated at a national level, but how do we build off that to more a state and localized information that can share these various programs and available funding sources? So, we have a lot of work to do in that area, but at least we know what the problem is, so that's one step in the right direction.

Question from Anonymous: How do we educate local leaders and decision makers with mitigation plans? Often flood impacts are protected by privacy which makes it difficult to involve the whole community without having the data we need but local municipalities do have it.

Speaker response: The Federal Government is committed to making this information easy to access, but mitigation-related data is limited and decentralized. By identifying, centralizing, and sharing risk information, the Federal Government and nonfederal partners will provide the whole community with a more complete picture of potential mitigation opportunities, and their costs and benefits.

Question from Anonymous: How does the Investment Strategy incorporate and influence private sector investment and the business community?

Speaker response: When identifying and developing common measures, the Federal Government and nonfederal partners are encouraged to consider leveraging public-private partnerships. Public-private partnerships bring in diverse perspectives and increase the likelihood that common measures will capture all aspects of natural hazard risk, mitigation, and resilience. FEMA is encouraging the private sector and business community to consider long-term risk reduction when investing in facilities and infrastructure. We know the Federal Government and nonfederal partners will get the most out of cost-effective mitigation investments by working together. For example, municipal infrastructure investments are locally funded, sometimes with support from federal or state programs. However, much of this infrastructure is owned and operated by the private sector. Revenue may come in from rates charged to consumers with regulatory approval. In this example and others, the Federal Government should serve as a model for nonfederal partners by aligning federal financing and incentives with nonfederal sources. Aligning investments will reduce future risk to critical infrastructure and the lifelines this infrastructure supports.

Question from Anonymous: How does the National Mitigation Investment Strategy (NMIS) relate to the BRIC program?

Speaker response: We've had a great partnership with our mitigation directorate partners on this, so coordination has occurred throughout the process. BRIC is an important opportunity for communities and for those who are not aware of BRIC, it is a new FEMA grant program that has recently been authorized. BRIC will provide a new source of pre-disaster funding for communities. From my perspective, BRIC provides a great federal example of pre-disaster mitigation and how important that shift in focus is for us. How are we going to really leverage BRIC when you think about what the need is throughout the country even in times where there's high disaster activity? This pre-disaster mitigation program has more funding than other years; yet it still is only a very small portion of what is really needed in the country. There are great examples out there and one of my recent favorites that I learned about is a library at the University of Utah that just did a substantial seismic retrofit that used some pre-disaster mitigation but really use that to highlight and leverage the need to do the seismic retrofit and funded most of it through private philanthropy. So, it's a good way to be able to take the federal dollars that you have and really leverage them to get and maximize your impact.

Question from Anonymous: Did this strategy inform the development of the HUD CDBG Mitigation funding stream that has rules set to come out in the coming month?

Speaker response: Yes. HUD is a member of the MitFLG Interagency Group and has been part of the drafting of the Investment Strategy and will continue to be part of the implementation moving forward. FEMA participated, along with other agencies, on an interagency working group that helped inform the development of CDBG-DR-MIT.

Question from Anonymous: We want to support vulnerable populations within the same area subjected to different types of natural hazards, where one area can be affected by various types of hazards (e.g., both fire and hurricane). How do we want to measure damages to human life?

Speaker response: This an overarching principle that is important in the implementation of Investment Strategy, so we're still very much maturing our approach. From my perspective right as we move forward, we should choose some areas of focus. We want to say, "Over the first year or two this is what we want to focus

on and accomplish,” and based on how we frame that, then we want to think about some of these other principles as they apply to that focus area.

We need to ask important questions like:

- What does that mean for vulnerable populations?
- What then do we need to be thinking about regarding multiple hazards for this implementation area?
- Would we be factoring those things into that implementation approach?

For example, let’s say we are going to work on a national strategy to improve the adoption and enforcement of building codes. Well, we know that one of the things we would think about that is identifying some of the barriers to do that. For example, we know affordability of housing is an issue and one of those codes may not be adopted, so that would then factor into what the options are. Additionally, how do we better understand what those issues are and what’s really contributing, and how do we use that to craft our range of solutions? That’s just an example of how it might be factored in as we move forward.

Question from Anonymous: We would like to know how the states will be aligned with these goals as it seems that many mitigation projects funded by FEMA are pass-through through the state, which may have different goals. It also becomes a competition among counties within the state, with the more rural counties with significantly fewer resources getting left behind. And the application process itself often exceeds the administrative capabilities of the more rural counties.

Speaker response: FEMA funded projects are passed through the state, each of which has its respective mitigation and funding goals. The goal, therefore, is to align investments to better suit the whole community and encourage counties to leverage the federal funding they currently must maximize the mitigation impact. For example, adopting and enforcing up-to-date building codes is important because enforcing building codes over time reduces losses. A growing number of states and communities adopted building codes and standards set to higher performance standards. However, code development and enforcement vary widely across the country. It is the role of states and communities to adopt (or not adopt) codes for natural hazard resistance. Developing, approving, incorporating, inspecting, and enforcing building codes varies widely across the country, and only 32 percent of disaster-prone jurisdictions have adopted disaster-resistant building codes. We encourage counties to empower advocates and communicate expectations of protection. Public demand often leaders to updated codes and practices and greater accountability often leader to stronger enforcement.

Question from Anonymous: Currently FEMA tends to put a premium on expediency in processing Public Assistance (PA) projects often at the expense of not implementing 406 mitigation. How will this influence the PA workflow to effectively evaluate all eligible PA projects for 406 mitigation. It appears that 406 gets shortchanged in order to move PA projects through more quickly.

Speaker response: The overarching goal of the Investment Strategy is to improve the coordination and effectiveness of mitigation investments. Although it does not pose structural changes to existing programs, new requirements or legislation, but implementation actions may identify address opportunities for improvements to existing programs.

Question from Anonymous: We have a much easier time measuring and communicating risk from some perils than from others. Speaking as a natural-disaster risk scholar and practitioner, my experience is that flood risk info is harder to get than seismic but is much more important in terms of people and property exposed and annual loss. Regarding Goal 2, Recommendation 2.1 (make risk info more available, easier to use), when will

we fix that problem, and get that costly information out to technical intermediaries (scholars like me and practitioners like construction contractors) and to the public for free?

Speaker response: The goal is to centrally share risk information. The Federal Government and nonfederal partners are working together to improve how risk information is collected and shared, still maintaining necessary measures and controls for sharing sensitive, proprietary, or secure information. We know that creating a unified platform that provides consistent risk information across the whole community will help improve risk information sharing. This would also allow nonfederal partners to identify risk data for better planning and decision-making and share their own risk information and resources. We've identified this need and are working to get some plans in motion.

Comments, Suggestions, or Questions? Please contact: katherine.murphy-1@colorado.edu.

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