

MAKING MITIGATION WORK WEBINAR SERIES



Natural Hazards Center and FEMA Webinar Series "Making Mitigation Work"

Written Questions and Answers after the October 13, 2020 Webinar The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000: Twenty Years of Promise, Pitfalls, and Progress from a Planning Perspective

Jim Schwab, Jim Schwab Consulting LLC
Robyn Fennig, Wisconsin Emergency Management
Derrick Hiebert, King County Emergency Management
Shanene Thomas, Federal Emergency Management Agency

Question from Melina Matos:

What are the opportunities and difficulties that a hazard mitigation plan has to integrate climate adaptation?

Derrick Hiebert: Lots! Especially for adaptation. We weave climate change/adaption throughout our mitigation plan. This is consistent with our state and what most jurisdictions in WA are doing now. The biggest impacts of climate change are in the form of hazards (at least locally) so any plan worth its salt has to consider how risk of those hazards is changing due to climate change.

Robyn Fennig: There are some barriers to incorporating climate adaptation or climate change into our state hazard mitigation planning efforts based on guidance/direction from our Governor and State Legislature. Other states are also in a similar position from the state side of things.

Another barrier is for many areas, climate modeling has not been downscaled to accurately project impacts to local jurisdictions engaged in planning and what the planning scenarios are.

Question from Mark Thompson:

I believe that community planners/ community development offices should "own" the plans, not the Emergency Managers. Do you agree? If not, why not? If so, how do we spread that belief?

Derrick Hiebert: Mark, there really isn't one right way. My answer would be there should be a partnership. If your planning department is ready and able to consider hazards in comp planning, land use codes, etc., then they may be perfect. If you have a full-service emergency

management office that is involved in planning, response, recovery, etc., maybe they should own it. It really varies.

Robyn Fennig: I think it largely depends on how your state does things. In Wisconsin, Emergency Managers are engaged in all aspects of emergency management, from planning/preparedness through recovery and mitigation. Some of our best planning processes are facilitated by people who aren't in the planning/zoning offices. Some of our best planning processes are facilitated by professional planners. The emphasis should be on who has the bandwidth and passion to do the planning process in a way that promotes engagement and thorough conversations about hazards, risk and strategies to minimize impacts/mitigate risk.

Question from Anonymous:

How much is now being set aside every year for Hazard Mitigation programs like BRIC?

Speaker: Up to 6% of disaster damages (Certain Stafford Act categories) will be set aside for BRIC

Question from Richard Roths:

In the early days of DMA2k emergency managers fought including planners in the process of mitigation planning, saying they were trying to take their jobs. How has this changed?

Derrick Hiebert: Honestly, I don't see any too much of this tension locally. My experience is that there is just a disconnect. I engage with planners in jurisdictions without emergency managers and with emergency managers in jurisdictions that have them. I always ask them to convene a team consisting of at least public works, planning, and some kind of emergency service/management. In King County, we actually have to be pretty proactive if we want our hazards stuff to connect with planning, so much of the time we need to be the ones reaching out and convincing planners. All this is to say, it depends. Most of the time, however, I don't think there is too much desire among EMs to exclude planners.

Robyn Fennig: In a post COVID-19 world, I know few emergency managers in Wisconsin who would feel this way, because in WI, EMs are managing really difficult resource allocation strategies (for COVID PPE and vaccines), in addition to response to HazMat spills, training/exercises, other planning and preparedness...the list goes on! I think that emergency managers are really great facilitators and subject matter experts who really could co-lead the process with other practitioners, like planners.

Question from Jasper Cooke:

It seems like the most effective planning process locally is one that integrates all the existing plans (e.g. comprehensive, economic, land use, etc.) What does that look like at the state level? Can FEMA, for example, combine the THIRA and mitigation planning requirements? I know that THIRA is used more often for preparedness grants, which are mostly terrorism focused, but if we want the locals to do integrated planning, it seems like it should start w/ integrating federal planning requirements.

Derrick Hiebert: Plan integration is something that FEMA pushes hard – and we do, too! It is a tremendous way to implement the mitigation plan. There are specific requirements for mitigation planning that push for plan integration. If I want to do plan integration, I start by

outlining my planning process and developing a “planning strategy” (project plan) to ensure that I meet requirements WHILE accomplishing my other objectives (such as plan integration).

Robyn Fennig: Many states do this already! In Wisconsin, our Risk Assessment for Natural Hazards (from the State Hazard Mitigation Plan) is rolled into our THIRA directly for those planning scenarios. Mitigation staff in Wisconsin work with the THIRA planner to create and update the THIRA scenarios for natural hazards. I think it would be worth it to follow-up with the various states that integrate their State Mitigation Plan with their THIRA and see what the benefits are for them.

We have a lot of conversations internally about how to do this locally -- the problem is that very few locals engage in the THIRA process, so we don't see a huge reason to promote it.

I would love to continue this conversation, Jasper. Feel free to drop me a line (robyn.fennig@wisconsin.gov).

Question from Anonymous:

How do the need for maintenance, and maintenance costs, fit into the current mitigation thinking, and BRIC?

Derrick Hiebert: For plan maintenance costs, FEMA pays you to plan, so it should cover a lot of your maintenance costs. That said, most maintenance is staff time and partnership maintenance. That should be part of any EM job anyway. In my view, the most essential skill for any EM is relationship development and management...mitigation gives you another way to go about that.

Robyn Fennig: Obviously, plans can't be standalone documents that sit on a shelf. The value is in the process, and part of that process is implementing and maintaining the plan itself. BRIC does not have a lot of planning money generally, so states are not likely to spend their low allocation (only \$300k per state for mitigation planning activities in BRIC!) on maintenance activities. I would love to see a policy change where subrecipients can document their time for plan implementation and maintenance activities to be used for in-kind match for a future plan update. I would even love to see folks track that time to help show the value of mitigation planning and use that to leverage even better processes and technical assistance at the state and federal levels!

Question from Anonymous:

I'm curious whether the panelists think that it could be more equitable if FEMA was responsible for conducting BCAs, rather than the Applicant or sub applicant. There could be issues when BCAs don't pass- accusations of unfairness- but would also eliminate extensive training requirements/capacity reqs.

Robyn Fennig: I love this question! I worry that if the applicant or subapplicants don't do it, FEMA won't care about troubleshooting the process and will shy away from the difficult BCAs. Subrecipients and states are most bought into the process and also knowledgeable about documentation availability/limitations to back up all the numbers in the BCA. I generally find the best FEMA partners are those that worked at the state and local level because they get the struggle and the process we go through -- that said, not all FEMA partners or regions have that lens or passion to advocate for subrecipients in the states they work with. I am jaded by the

changes to the Public Assistance delivery model and how even though states are told PA will take on 406 mitigation BCAs, they simply don't have the time or knowledge to do them. They don't follow-up or ask questions in a way that subapplicants can understand. I see this being an easy out for FEMA to avoid doing BCAs.

What I would love to see is provide states some additional funding to offer technical assistance and hire staff. I see a lot of flexibility in the type of support FEMA provides to states in the National Dam Safety Program or the Floodplain Management and Insurance grants. If FEMA HMA provided the same type of support and technical assistance to states to keep outreach and workshops happening beyond what we can request in our post-disaster Admin Plans, we could do a lot more support for BCA development!

I would love to continue this conversation. Feel free to drop me a line (robyn.fennig@wisconsin.gov).

Resources:

From Maria Price: US Army Corps of Engineers support state-led Silver Jackets Teams through its Flood Risk Management Program. <https://silverjackets.nfrmp.us/> It's a great resource & are pushing for Hazard Mitigation Plans for all communities/City/County.

From Lori Peek: Here is the link to the BRIC Summer Engagement Series (w/ YouTube video links) that some of the panelists have mentioned: <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/building-resilient-infrastructure-communities/july-2020-sessions>

Comments, Suggestions, or Questions for the Natural Hazard Center?

Please contact: katherine.murphy-1@colorado.edu.

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