

Level Up Audio Project – Episode 2

Integrated Resilience Planning: City of Santa Cruz

- Voice-over Welcome to *Level Up*, a FEMA audio project for practitioners where communities share their stories about building resilience and reducing risk from a disaster.
- Most communities adopt a plethora of city planning documents to guide growth and development: a transportation plan, a general plan, a hazard mitigation plan, a land use plan ... the list goes on. In many cases, even plans with the same goal do not speak to each other or reference the same materials and resources, often creating conflicting guidance.
- In this episode, we speak to Tiffany Wise-West from the City of Santa Cruz, California, about how she is breaking down silos in order to help the city's departments prepare for and react to the impacts of a changing climate. Here's Tiffany:
- Tiffany Wise-West, City of Santa Cruz Santa Cruz is a city of 65,000 people. We are on the central coast of California, about 70 miles south of San Francisco. We are situated right on the Pacific Ocean, but we are also backed by the Santa Cruz mountain range. And so, we have a combination of hazards from, you know, coastal hazards related to sea level rise, coastal storm flooding, erosion. But then we also have that wildfire hazard and associated hazards like landslides and so forth. So, while we have a very idyllic, beautiful, beautiful city, with a lovely temperate Mediterranean climate, we are particularly subject to hazards.
- Voice-over Tiffany Wise-West is the Sustainability and Climate Action Manager, a department of one. She leads Santa Cruz's strategy for how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to a changing climate.
- Tiffany mentions many different planning documents in this interview, and I'll define them as we go along. A climate adaptation plan is intended to help a city reduce its risk to future climate change impacts. Generally speaking, a standalone Climate Adaptation Plan is voluntary and not tied to a particular funding stream.

Tiffany Wise-West, City of Santa Cruz After I took this job about two and a half years ago, I realized right away that our climate adaptation plan required updating and that there was new science and modeling available and there were some regulatory drivers that necessitated us diving into our hazards a little more deeply.

This topic in particular, it spans every discipline, every type of agency, every stakeholder. We were forming our internal team and developing our outreach techniques and strategies, I really kept that at the forefront of my mind that there are a number of different angles that need to be evaluated and addressed through adaptation planning.

We used our existing adaptation plan as kind of a framework because this update to our adaptation plan was not intended to be a wholesale new document. However, we did add in a number of new components to kind of get to that more well-rounded type document, you know, things like social vulnerability and public health.

Asia King, FEMA It sounds like the interdisciplinary nature of this plan makes it a prime candidate for integration with other community plans. What does plan integration look like to you?

Tiffany Wise-West, City of Santa Cruz From a regulatory context here in California, we are required as local governments to integrate adaptation planning and vulnerability assessments into our local hazard mitigation plans.

Voice-over The Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, or LHMP, is a planning document that describes a community's current risk to natural hazards (as compared to the future risk that a climate adaptation plan addresses). It assesses the community's ability to address those risks and details the community's long-term plan to reduce risk. Having an active, FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan is a condition for accessing certain grant funds offered by the federal government.

Tiffany Wise-West, City of Santa Cruz So, right there is a connection between our adaptation plan and our LHMP and, in fact, our climate adaptation plan is an appendix to our local hazard mitigation plan. It also means, through SB-379, integrating your vulnerability assessment in your adaptation planning into the public safety element of your general plan. So, bringing in a third plan document.

Voice-over A third planning document, indeed – the most important, the city's General Plan.

California's Senate Bill 379, active as of January 2017, requires communities to incorporate climate change risks and resilience strategies into their safety element of the General Plan.

However, in many communities, the General Plan, the Hazard Mitigation plan, and other plans that focus on or influence the community's risk are not coordinated with one another. A great idea might be present in the climate adaptation plan or General Plan but never make it to the local hazard mitigation plan where it could qualify for FEMA funding.

Asia King, FEMA Ok so now we have three plans: the climate adaptation plan, the general plan, and the local hazard mitigation plan. How did you integrate these?

Tiffany Wise-West, City of Santa Cruz We formed an interdisciplinary team across the City and that team worked on both projects together. So, I was the project manager for the adaptation plan. We had a public works staffer who was the project manager of the LHMP, and we work very closely together.

Our sea level rise vulnerability assessment was referenced in the LHMP, you know, so there was this kind of cross referencing. We also did a cross walk of all of the strategies within each of the plans and in our adaptation plan, one of the appendices is this crosswalk. So, you can see by hazard what are the different strategies in both the plan documents. So, that's like a kind of nice reference tool.

Asia King, FEMA Can you give us some examples of where these plans overlap or areas where they are different?

Tiffany Wise-West, City of Santa Cruz The LHMP actually looks at more hazards than the adaptation plan because it's looking at earthquake, tsunami, landslide, which are not things that we typically think about as being climate influenced. But what if you had sea level rise in combination with a tsunami? There is a connection there. What if you had earthquake in an area that is inundated with flooding because of sea level rise and greater coastal storm flooding and you're exacerbating liquefaction. So they are connected, and that's another area that our adaptation plan does not flesh out.

We also have a, an effort underway right now that I think really could motivate more consideration of climate change, emissions reduction, climate adaptation across the full spectrum of planning documents within the city. And that's a health in all policies framework that we're looking at, which has three pillars: public health, equity and sustainability. So, we have a city council and department heads subcommittee that are looking at how can we use those three lenses in the development of our projects, programs and policies and ultimately in our decision making. And so I think that has the potential to really ensure that those crucial elements related to climate are considered throughout the planning, the implementation, the monitoring processes.

Asia King, FEMA Can you explain what health in all policies means? You mention incorporating public health, equity, and sustainability into your planning. What does that look like?

Tiffany Wise-West, City of Santa Cruz Yeah, so we have a large Latinx community many of who don't speak English. That communication barrier is what makes those folks particularly vulnerable, in addition to living in a low-lying area that's known to flood now and will continue to increase in intensity and frequency of flooding. We also have elderly folks, so we know if there is some kind of emergency that they will be having mobility issues.

There are Tribal communities here, and that's an underrepresented group in this kind of work. We do also have a pretty large homeless community. We're starting to attempt to track people that don't have lodging or don't have a place to sleep at night, and then trying to also identify how do we bring them into this conversation.

Voice-over Hazard mitigation plans must address vulnerability of people, places, and things. Climate adaptation plans are particularly well positioned to do that as vulnerable populations are often the most impacted by climate change.

Importantly, a hazard mitigation plan can incorporate as much additional information and data as the community desires, as long as it meets FEMA's minimum

requirements for plan approval. This means that the community can add climate adaptation data to their LHMP to make projects listed eligible for funding.

Tiffany Wise-
West, City of
Santa Cruz

What's helpful with integrating the LHMP and the adaptation plan together it also broadens the eligibility of our activities in FEMA's mind. So, we can pursue funding that deals with adaptation because we have done this integration, which is critically important because the funding of this work is one of the most challenging areas.

Asia King, FEMA

You've talked a lot about what Santa Cruz has done and your successes and challenges. What advice do you have for listeners who want to integrate climate adaptation plans and hazard mitigation plans in their own communities?

Tiffany Wise-
West, City of
Santa Cruz

I would say look at other good examples as a first step. I think that you also need to kind of define a manageable process, and if you can get buy-in from your leadership to have an interdisciplinary team, I think that is definitely the key.

I would say just going a step further on the leveraging resources that are out there. If you can align yourself or become a member of, say, the American Society of Adaptation Professionals or the Urban Sustainability Directors Network or, here in California, the Alliance for Regional Climate Collaborative ...

... All of those organizations have archived webinars, toolkits, resource documents, studies. And I have found that my involvement in these groups has really streamlined how I access information. In California, we have the adaptation clearing house that has a number of resources, and so I think making yourself familiar with the groups and the organizations that are really kind of leading the way. It's so key.

Jurisdictions need to be aware that the bond-rating agencies are utilizing this kind of planning in their formula for your bond rating. And so, if you are not doing this kind of work, that is going to impact your ability to borrow. That could be a very big problem for jurisdictions. And so, being on top of that, having that conversation with your finance director, your risk management to make sure that they understand that if you don't do this work, there can be a very real impact on the rest of the city's operations.

There's a greater trend towards inclusivity, diversity, equity, social justice, environmental justice, and maybe your State doesn't necessarily, you know, have regulatory drivers around that. But, again, leveraging some of these resources that are out there around these kinds of topics I have come to realize is so critically important.

The folks that are on the frontline, the folks that are underrepresented and vulnerable are the ones that suffer the most from climate hazards. That's really become a central focus of my work and our work here at the city, and I'm really proud of our leadership for enabling that.

Voice-over

To recap, Tiffany’s top three tips for integrating multiple plans for risk reduction are:

- Identify specific areas where plans might align, such as the safety element of the General Plan and the hazard analyses of the Hazard Mitigation Plan and Climate Adaptation Plan, and leverage these.
- Make the process for your local departments and disciplines as effortless as possible– provide clear expectations and meeting timelines. Aligning missions is hard and is often in addition to staff’s day to day!
- Collaborate with impacted communities, including the most vulnerable, such as elderly residents, low income neighborhoods and residents that do not speak English.

You can learn more about Santa Cruz’s climate adaptation planning effort by visiting their website, cityofsantacruz.com and searching for the Climate Adaptation Plan.

If you are interested in learning more about hazard mitigation, go to fema.gov and search “hazard mitigation.”

This episode of *Level Up* was produced by FEMA Region IX’s Mitigation Division and Resilience Action Partners. Your host is Asia King. Many thanks to Tiffany Wise-West from the City of Santa Cruz for taking the time to talk to us about plan integration.