



# Hazard Mitigation External Stakeholder Working Group

Year in Review

Calendar Year 2023



FEMA

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# 2023 Year in Review

## 1. Introduction

In 2017, FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) Division stood up the External Stakeholder Working group (ESWG) to provide an opportunity for FEMA staff to build external partnerships as part of a larger effort to improve program delivery to all its stakeholders.

The ESWG is made up of 12 individuals, including:

- Three state or territory representatives
- Three local/regional representatives
- Three Tribal Nations representatives
- Two FEMA HMA Regional staff representatives
- One FEMA Headquarters HMA Branch Chief

As investing in mitigation is a shared responsibility, FEMA has increased engagement and transparency with non-federal partners at the state, local, tribal, or territorial levels. The ESWG provides a venue to open channels of communication between state, local, tribal, or territorial stakeholders and partners, gather their perspective into mitigation and/or HMA program elements, and increase transparency in the division's goals, program priorities and policy development.

## 2. 2023 Priorities for the ESWG

In 2023, FEMA's HMA Division identified four main priorities for the ESWG shown below.

1. Foster deeper connections with alumni.
2. Equip ESWG members to be well-informed ambassadors for HMA.
3. Provide a menu of engagement opportunities to members with different experience.
4. Create more opportunities for collaboration and interaction among members outside of quarterly meetings.

## **3. 2023 Working Groups**

Each year during the first annual EWSG meeting, topics for workstreams are identified. These workstreams align to identified topics of interest for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial (SLTT) stakeholders so that they can engage in collaborative discussion and problem-solving through smaller focused working groups. Each workstream aligns with FEMA’s strategic priorities. Summaries of the three workstreams for 2023 are below.

### **3.1. Customer Experience and Program Delivery Working Group**

The “Customer Experience and Program Delivery” workstream focused on HMA programs obligation rates. The working group completed an analysis incorporating feedback from FEMA headquarters, FEMA regions, and the ESWG. ESWG work group members provided additional feedback on how HMA programs can improve obligations, such as the request for information (RFI) processes. ESWG members provided feedback on the need for guidance, trainings, and transparency throughout the entire grant review process.

### **3.2. Flood Mitigation Assistance: Swift Current Working Group**

The “Swift Current” working group focused on providing feedback to improve the rollout of the new Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) initiative. In March 2022, FEMA launched the Flood Mitigation Assistance program Swift Current initiative that seeks to substantially speed up the delivery of funding following a flood event. Swift Current aims to better align the delivery of flood mitigation funding to better support disaster survivors by expediting Flood Mitigation Assistance awards following a disaster, in addition to an annual grant application cycle. The workstream members provided feedback on the following publicly available documents for the Swift Current program: the operations plan, scenario graphics, a flow graphic, a federal cost-share graphic, and a “Differences between Flood Mitigation Assistance and Swift Current” fact sheet.

### **3.3. Nature-Based Solutions Working Group**

The “Nature-Based Solutions” (NBS) workstream focused on creating an online case study map that highlights actual FEMA-funded NBS projects. This tool allows the users to search for case studies based on location, hazard type, and project type. ESWG member feedback directly influenced the development of this tool. Members expressed a need for this tool to be simple with optional layers of detail and printable aspects for communities with a lack of Internet access. This map is being developed to include supporting documents for each case study, such as the application, benefit-cost analysis (BCA), and cost-share funding avenues. Based on ESWG feedback, a tribal lands location filter will be added to ensure the tool is accessible and as inclusive as possible.

## **4. Connecting with Mitigation Stakeholders**

In 2023, ESWG members met both in-person and virtually. The Quarter 1 meeting took place virtually and allowed members to discuss high- priority topics and future meeting activities without having to

travel. Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 meetings took place in-person and allowed for the members to network and engage through site visits and presentations. Priorities for the stakeholder meetings encompassed cultivating relationships that lasted well beyond the meeting, showcasing local mitigation projects, working towards workstream goals, and gaining feedback on HMA programs and policies. The Quarter 4 meeting took place virtually and provided the opportunity to celebrate members concluding their ESWG term and allowed workstreams the opportunity to report out on their accomplishments.

#### **4.1. Quarter 1 Virtual Meeting**

The Q1 meeting was held virtually on Feb. 22–23, 2023. At the meeting, new members were introduced to the existing ESWG cohort. The meeting covered current HMA division updates, including the 2023 [HMA Program and Policy Guide](https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/guide) (<https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/guide>), an overview of the current workstreams projects, and potential new workstreams or topics to be included in future meetings, and a discussion of future deliverables such as the *Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Application* (<https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/storm-rlf>). Members also participated in sessions that highlighted challenges for specific HMA projects and discussed further networking opportunities between current ESWG members and alumni.

#### **4.2. Quarter 2 Meeting: Washington, DC – FEMA Headquarters**

Q2 was the first in-person meeting of 2023. Members gathered in Washington, D.C. at FEMA Headquarters (HQ), June 6–8, 2023. This quarterly meeting was designed so members could take part in panel discussions. These discussions touched on personnel, training, and capacity building opportunities (training, etc.). Topics ranged from across HMA: BCAs, ongoing and expected changes to HMA programs, and ideas for better communication between FEMA, applicants, and subapplicants. Q2 included two working group sessions where members shared goals and progress updates from their respective workstreams. Dempsey Kraft, Region 6’s Regional Tribal Liaison, presented on indigenous history and relationships with Tribal Nations; Andrea Limauro, Environmental Protection Specialist with DC Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) presented on flood resiliency leveraging NBS. Several excursions were also incorporated into Q2, including a guided tour of the Blue Plains Wastewater Treatment Plant, a self-guided tour of the Museum of the American Indian, and a night out at the Nationals Stadium.





**Figure 1. ESWG Members Gather at FEMA Headquarters in Washington, DC for Quarter Two Meeting Workstream Working Sessions.**

#### **4.3. Quarter 3 Meeting: Choctaw Nation, Oklahoma**


The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma hosted the Q3 in person meeting at their headquarters in Durant, Oklahoma on Aug. 22–24, 2023. During the three-day Q3 meeting, ESWG members attended talks about local mitigation projects in the southeastern Oklahoma region focusing on water resource management, and an ongoing wind feasibility project. Members also enjoyed presentations from Choctaw members, including *Tools to Address General Wealth Gaps* (presented by Carrie Blackmon, Service Coordination Program Direction, Choctaw Nation) and *HMA Grants and Collaborative Mitigation* (presented by a panel of Choctaw Nation representatives). Attendees toured the Choctaw Nation Headquarters and learned about the Nation’s history, culture, and tribal-specific hazard mitigation strategies. The group also had the opportunity to visit the Choctaw Nation Cultural Center, with exhibits that highlight the true testament of the Nation’s resiliency, strength, and beauty.



**Figure 2. ESWG Members on a Tour of the Choctaw Nation Headquarters.**

#### 4.4. Quarter 4 Virtual Meeting

The Q4 virtual meeting took place Nov. 7–8, 2023. During the meeting, members participated in their final workstream working session and reported out to the wider group on their accomplishments during 2023. Members learned about updates from HMA Leadership, including the status of the wildfire management reports implementation, and updates to the [BCA streamlining](https://www.fema.gov/grants/guidance-tools/benefit-cost-analysis/streamlined-bca) (https://www.fema.gov/grants/guidance-tools/benefit-cost-analysis/streamlined-bca) section of the FEMA website. Q4 also provided the opportunity for current members to connect with ESWG alumni for conversation and networking. Outgoing members provided feedback during and after the Q4 meeting in reflection of their time as an ESWG member and offered potential ways to further improve the experience for future members.


Let's Hear from the ESWG Members

<p><i>"The ESWG is a great opportunity to share perspectives, network, and learn from each other!"</i></p> <p>- Regional ESWG Member</p>	<p><i>"The ESWG was recommended to me by a former member as a good way to get connected with peers and learn more about FEMA programs. It has far exceeded my expectations!"</i></p> <p>- Tribal ESWG Member</p>	<p><i>"This group is a great opportunity to learn and improve FEMA processes, procedures, and initiatives."</i></p> <p>- Local ESWG Member</p>
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In addition to the four quarterly ESWG meetings, several smaller meetings, commonly known as “Special Sessions,” were held in 2023. Meeting attendees discussed targeted topics that might not be discussed as in-depth in the quarterly meetings. Table 1 outlines each meeting title, date, and topic of discussion.

**Table 1. Special Sessions**

Title	Date	Discussion
Equity Standards Discussion	Jan. 26, 2023	Focused on limiting mitigation complexity issues associated with equity standards. Discussed the impacts of information challenges and mismatches between geographic areas used in applications and subapplications.
2023 HMA Program and Policy Guide Feedback	May 24, 2023	ESWG members provided feedback on the updated <a href="https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/guide">2023 HMA Program and Policy Guide</a> (https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/guide) released in March 2023. This helped inform the Tools Section in the development of the 2024 HMA Program and Policy Guide and future annual updates.
FEMA Region 6 Tribal Affairs Overview	Aug. 7, 2023	Discussed Tribal Nation relations, including cultural affairs, strategies, working groups, and curriculums. Included a discussion of Tribal Governments and Native American History, as well as a Tribal Nation’s role and policies within HMA.
Reducing Stakeholder Burden	Oct. 26, 2023	Brainstorming session focused on ideas to reduce stakeholder burden when applying for a FEMA grant.
Extreme Temperatures	Dec. 4, 2023	Focused on data availability and barriers to the development of subapplications for extreme-temperature mitigation projects.

## 5. Membership

### 5.1. Congratulations!

New Position: Paige Nutter, 2022–2023 ESWG Member, has started a new position as a Tribal Relations Specialist at FEMA headquarters.

New ESWG Leadership: In 2024, FEMA HMA Disaster Grants Implementation Branch Chief Howard Stronach will begin serving as Chair. Sam Capasso, 2022–2023 ESWG Chair, has started a new detail as the Interim Division Director for the Incident and Mitigation Readiness Division. Sam stepped down as Executive Chair at the end of 2023. HMA would like to thank Sam for his service, dedication, and leadership of the ESWG.



## **5.2. Appreciation for Outgoing Members**

HMA would like to express sincere gratitude to the following ESWG members whose two-year membership term ended in December 2023:

- Vermechia Alsop – State Hazard Mitigation Officer, Washington, DC
- Anthony Bateman – Planner, Charlotte, North Carolina
- Paige Nutter – Hazard Mitigation Coordinator, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
- Bradley Peterson – Administrator, Madison County, Idaho
- Genelle Winter – Grant Coordinator, Metlakatla Indian Community, Alaska
- Mark Junker – Tribal Response Coordinator, Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska

## **5.3. Welcome to New Incoming Members**

- Emma Giardina – Hazard Mitigation Program Manager, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- John “Randy” Jackson – Emergency Management Director, Quapaw Nation, Oklahoma
- Michael Morlan – Emergency Management Deputy Chief, Bexar County, Texas
- Shawn Newell – Director of Safety and Emergency Management, Mi’kmaq Nation, Maine
- Mathew Noble – Deputy State Hazard Mitigation Officer, Iowa
- Tim Zientek – Emergency Manager, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Oklahoma



