

A STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING LONG TERM CAPACITY IN TRIBAL AND RURAL FIRE AGENCIES IN THE NORTH COAST REGION



BACKGROUND

NCRP BACKGROUND

The North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP) is a long-term, innovative, and successful collaboration among Northern California Tribes, counties, and regional partners. The mission of the NCRP is to enhance the watersheds and communities of the North Coast region through collaborative, multi-objective planning and project implementation led by Tribes and counties. Since its inception, NCRP has successfully integrated Tribal, federal, state, regional, and local priorities and utilized a multi-benefit approach to identify and seek funding for the highest-priority projects throughout this diverse region. NCRP works collaboratively to achieve positive outcomes for communities as well as working and natural landscapes. The Partnership is led by a Leadership Council comprised of elected officials from Tribes and counties, relies on scientific and technical review from staff and a Technical Peer Review Committee, and is informed by a broad and diverse community of partners. NCRP is committed to transparency and community engagement, to enhancing the health and vitality of economically disadvantaged communities, to achieving measurable, on-the-ground benefits for the region, and to working collaboratively with partners. NCRP acts as a nexus between Tribal, federal, state, and local planning efforts. Given its history and unique governance structure, NCRP is in a strong position in the region to engage Tribes, rural fire departments, and fire protection districts in long-term capacity enhancement efforts.

The NCRP region covers over 19,000 square miles – 12% of the California landscape – and includes the Tribal lands and the counties of Del Norte, Humboldt, Trinity, Siskiyou, Modoc, Mendocino, and Sonoma. The North Coast region is a rural source region for water and biological diversity and sequesters substantial amounts of the carbon found in California's forests. The region is severely economically challenged, with over 50% of the population living under the poverty line. This [North Coast Region Story Map](#) provides additional detail about the region.

HAF AND WRCF BACKGROUND

The Humboldt Area Foundation (HAF) is a community foundation serving the residents of Humboldt, Del Norte, and Trinity counties by promoting and encouraging generosity, leadership, and inclusion to strengthen communities. The Wild Rivers Community Foundation (WRCF) is an affiliate of the Humboldt Area Foundation and serves Del Norte and Curry counties. HAF and WRCF are focused on achieving racial equity, thriving youth and families, healthy ecosystems and environments, and bolstering economic development to create a just economy. The foundations employ a variety of strategies to advance these goals including awarding grants, loans, and scholarships; policy and advocacy; developing philanthropic and public-private partnerships; and bringing together community members and leaders to address regional challenges.

NCRP VISION PLAN AND REGIONAL CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT

NCRP's planning efforts align with and support Tribal, federal, state, and local goals, priorities, and plans, including the US Forest Service, CAL FIRE, and the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force. NCRP has been awarded three rounds of grant funds (Early Action, Round 1, and Round 2) from the California Department of Conservation's (DOC) Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Program, which is intended to support regional planning, capacity building, technical assistance, and project development in order to increase the pace and scale of forest, watershed, and community resilience. The first round of funding focused on developing [A Vision for North Coast Resilience](#), a regional plan that represents a shared vision for watershed, fire, forest, and community resilience. Resilience includes the capacity of communities and ecosystems to recover from and adapt to extreme events such as wildfire, flooding, and drought, as well as impacts from climate change, economic, and health disruptions. The plan is guided by and aligned with the goals and objectives of Tribal, federal, state, regional, and local plans. It was created with input and guidance from hundreds of experts, partners, and community members, using the best available data and information, including Indigenous science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), regional remote sensing, and local expertise. The plan includes a comprehensive list of strategies that articulate a shared regional vision, and solutions and actions to implement the vision.

The foundational strategy of the Vision Plan is to expand and maintain local and regional capacity to improve watershed and community resilience. Key Solutions (each with a list of detailed actions) identified to support this strategy include:

- [Year-Round Local Capacity](#) – Build and enhance the capacity in North Coast communities and organizations to implement high-priority actions to improve community and ecosystem resilience and to participate in and contribute to regional collaborative initiatives.
- [Tribal Capacity](#) – Fund and support Tribal evaluation of their own capacity needs and Tribally determined assistance to address those needs.

Since 2005, the NCRP approach to planning has placed a strong emphasis on equity and the enhancement of capacity for economically disadvantaged, vulnerable, or underrepresented communities, as well as an integrated, multi-objective planning and implementation framework that achieves multiple benefits in the most cost-effective way possible. Because of the strong alignment between the goals of HAF/WRCF and RFFC, the partners recognized the opportunity for expanding the objectives of the HAF/WRCF grant beyond the borders of the geography of the HAF/WRCF focus area, with the intent of leveraging, expanding, and amplifying the impact of this work by combining private foundation and DOC investments.

NCRP is beginning implementation of the Vision Plan, supported by a 2nd round of funding from the DOC's RFFC program. NCRP will support regional partners in building and sustaining capacity to develop and implement actions and projects to enhance the resilience of North Coast communities and landscapes. Key components of this support include (but are not limited to):

1. Expansion of the successful Technical Assistance program, which provides support to Tribes and communities in the form of a contract between NCRP and a technical expert to provide technical assistance to the project sponsor. This expert can assist with grant development, strategic and project planning, permitting, and other activities to support and enhance project sponsor capacity and help with the development implementation-ready projects and get those projects funded. A major benefit of this type of support is that project sponsors receive assistance without the administrative burden of contracting, invoicing, and reporting.
2. Capacity enhancement sub-grant solicitations and awards to help develop the capacity to plan and implement projects, including direct support for workforce development and training, organizational, technical, and administrative capacity development, and other needs identified via regional assessments. These grants will include specific requirements to assess and document capacity needs, and to assess and document the benefits resulting from capacity investments.
3. Regional support and collaborative, backbone infrastructure for initiatives that are best addressed at the regional or sub-regional level, rather than at the level of a single entity (i.e., regional remote sensing, development of PODS/spatial fire management plans, workforce development, regional needs assessments, etc.)

The funding provided by HAF/WRCF has allowed NCRP to pilot and test out many of these strategies, refining and improving them prior to roll-out to the entire region with RFFC funding. In particular, lessons learned during the capacity needs assessment described here have been instrumental to the development of NCRP's Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy. NCRP looks forward to future opportunities to collaborate with HAF on projects of mutual priority.

NCRP REGIONAL CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

NCRP has been providing capacity support to regional partners since its inception, via technical assistance, sub-grants to regional partners, and other methods. These include local and regional assessments, planning grants, and demonstration/pilot projects funded by the DWR's IRWM (Integrated Regional Water Management) and DACTI (Disadvantage Communities and Tribal Involvement) programs, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, CAL FIRE, and the OPR Woody Biomass program. Funding from HAF/WRCF and the RFFC has expanded this capacity support to fire response entities, Tribes, and community organizations supporting community health and safety, fuel management, and fire preparedness. NCRP is currently in the process of developing an integrated approach to long-term capacity enhancement in the North Coast region, aligning the previously separate programs into one comprehensive strategy. The development of a detailed and explicit North Coast Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy will allow NCRP to build on past success and incorporate lessons learned to refine and expand the efforts in a systematic, equitable, and transparent manner.

INTRODUCTION TO HAF/WRCF FIRE RESPONSE CAPACITY PROJECT

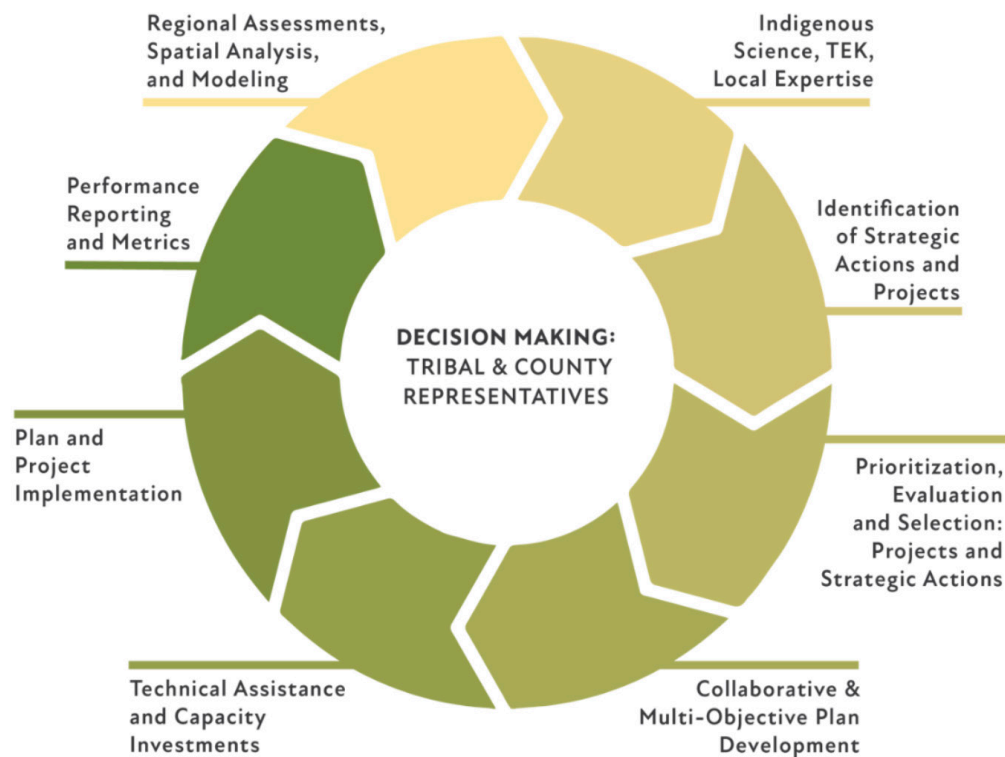
In November 2021, HAF/WRCF provided a grant to NCRP for \$400,000 for the Fire Response Capacity Project. The objectives for this grant were to support strengthening the long-term sustainability of fire response programs of area Tribes and very rural fire departments and protection districts. The first phase of the project consisted of an assessment of regional Tribal and rural fire department needs. The second phase of the project consisted of the provision of direct capacity assistance, in the form of direct assistance for equipment and training and development of detailed Capacity Enhancement Plans for a subset of Tribal fire response entities. This project is a pilot effort in NCRP's larger Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy and allows NCRP to evaluate this effort in a sub-set of Tribal areas and counties in the NCRP region and refine it prior to expansion to the remainder of the NCRP region. Project outcomes include a greater understanding of regional capacity needs and increased capacity in this subset of community fire protection entities. Goals for capacity enhancement include supporting greater financial stability and sustainability, strengthening organizational structure (which may include recruitment and retention, management systems, certifications, or other operational improvements), strengthening the regional fire response system by addressing key vulnerabilities, and establishing or further enhancing partnerships among entities in the region. These outcomes and goals reflect the objectives, principles, and intentions of both HAF/WRCF and NCRP, which include enhancing capacity in DACs and underrepresented communities to ensure that they can achieve community wildfire resilience.

PHASE 1: REGIONAL ASSESSMENT OF CAPACITY NEEDS

The Vision for North Coast Resilience identified expansion of local and regional capacity to improve fire-resilient and community resilience as a major focus. Enhanced regional resilience requires building and enhancing the capacity of fire protection entities and other community organizations to protect and serve communities, foster community and home hardening and reduce community vulnerability to extreme events and respond to these events when they do occur. To build capacity effectively and efficiently, it is critical to have a strong understanding of capacity strengths, gaps, and challenges in order to build on strengths and to address identified gaps and challenges in a manner that is helpful and welcome to the entity and the community being assisted.

The effective and equitable allocation of funding resources requires a multi-scale prioritization framework that relies on spatial analysis and modeling at the regional scale, integrated with state and federal objectives, as well as local knowledge and data from the North Coast region's Tribes, watershed groups, NGOs, landowners, and local agencies. NCRP relies on an ongoing, adaptive process for landscape scale and localized prioritization of actions and projects to enhance watershed, forest, and wildland resilience, reduce hazardous fuel loading, achieve biodiversity and climate goals, and protect and enhance the health, safety, and economic vitality of North Coast communities. This Adaptive Planning and Prioritization Framework (APPF) relies on a set of goals, objectives, and criteria that reflect Tribal, federal, state, and local priorities, principles, and objectives. This framework is described in more detail in the [Adaptive Planning and Prioritization Framework Story Map](#) and is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. North Coast Resource Partnership Adaptive Planning & Prioritization Framework



The first steps of the APPF encompass conducting regional assessments, spatial analysis, and modeling, and engaging local expertise to identify effective strategic actions and projects. Using the principles described in the APPF and guided by data described in the [North Coast Regional Assessments](#) section of the Vision Plan, NCRP performed a detailed needs assessment of Tribal communities, small rural fire departments, and fire protection districts in the region with a focus on those in the HAF/WRCF region (Humboldt, Trinity, and Del Norte counties) during mid 2022 through early 2023. This needs assessment allowed NCRP to document and prioritize the activities and capacity most needed by each regional fire response entity interviewed to ensure long-term, sustainable fire response capacity, and to make recommendations about common capacity needs and challenges throughout this sub-region. Future assessments will include additional entities in the rest of the NCRP region as well as additional outreach to entities that were not successfully engaged during this initial round of assessments.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

FIRE RESPONSE ENTITY CHARACTERISTICS

Entities interviewed as part of this project were selected based on a regional screening informed by local knowledge. Spatial data including fire hazard severity zone, economically disadvantaged community status, and the results of a Communities at Risk Assessment was compiled for the assessment area. While useful for screening priorities, this regional-scale data cannot fully capture the nuances that make each watershed or community distinct. Guidance from local experts and Tribal representatives was integrated with region-scale data to better represent local conditions, needs, and priorities. The local experts who provided input on entities to interview included the representatives of the fire resilience entities that we interviewed initially, who are often aware of the critical needs of other entities in their county or area. This local knowledge was extremely helpful in identifying entities to interview. The entities selected for outreach were those that were identified as meeting many of the following criteria:

- Serve communities at high risk of wildfire.
- Serve communities that have been impacted by recent wildfires.
- Serve Tribal communities.
- Identified by local experts and/or Tribal representatives as being particularly in need of support.
- Subregional organizations able to provide general information about needs in their area (i.e., countywide fire safe councils, fire chief's associations, etc.).

Local fire services and wildfire preparedness and resilience support are provided year-round through a variety of different organizations and governance structures, including:

- Fire related special districts (fire protection districts, community services districts, county service areas, etc. serving specific communities including reservations and rancherias).
- Tribally Chartered Fire Departments (Career and Natural Resources and VFDs).
- Tribes.
- City or county fire protection agencies or Joint Powers Authorities (JPA) involving a city or county.
- Volunteer or community fire protection entities/organizations/nonprofits (non-district fire companies serving specific communities including reservations and rancherias).
- Resource Conservation Districts (RCD).
- Fire Safe Councils (local or countywide), Firewise Communities, or other type of Fire Adapted Communities.
- Prescribed Burn Associations.
- Cultural Fire Practitioners (i.e., the Cultural Fire Management Council).
- Fire Chiefs' Associations.
- Other non-governmental organizations or collaboratives.

The governance structure utilized by a provider affects how the organization is operated and what funding is available (e.g., formation processes, powers, governing board, and authority to establish different funding sources). Given the diverse range of community characteristics and emergency service needs throughout the region, each fire-service organization provides an emergency response and deployment system that reflects its constituents' expectations, needs, and local risks, within its revenue and support constraints.

INTERVIEW FORM & PROCESS

The interview form and supplemental questionnaire were developed by NCRP staff and modeled after similar assessments completed in northern California, including the Inner Coast Region Needs Assessment conducted by the Napa RCD and the Forest and Fire Capacity and Needs Assessment conducted by the Watershed Research and Training Center. Interview questions were consistent across interviewees to ensure that NCRP could quantitatively document needs in each community and at the scale of the entire North Coast region. The NCRP Tribal Engagement team was integral in the development and review of the interview questions to ensure they were applicable to Tribal communities. The team "test drove" the questions in interviews with five entities of varying type, location, and scope and solicited feedback on the questions and interview format verbally and in writing. Comments were used to further refine the interview form and approach. The revised interview questions are included in Appendix B.

CHALLENGES

Initially there was some difficulty identifying the appropriate contact for each entity, including the lack of publicly available contact information for entities without websites. The appropriate contact also varies by entity, in some instances being the chief, assistant chief, board member, executive director, or other primary contact. The interview process continued into fire season, which proved difficult to schedule interviews with fire personnel. Even with best intentions, interviewees had to delay or cancel interviews if they were called out unexpectedly to a wildfire or other incident. Some of the challenges in connecting with entities during the interview process are symptoms of the state of scarcity and lack of capacity and funding that these entities are experiencing. For example, many fire districts and volunteer fire companies are primarily staffed by volunteers who also work full time jobs. Because of this, it was sometimes difficult to schedule interviews with a representative of these entities, even outside of fire season.

RESULTS: SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES FROM ASSESSMENTS

RESPONSE RATE AND ENTITY CHARACTERISTICS

For this assessment, 123 community fire response and resilience entities serving small rural and/or Tribal communities across the North Coast region were identified. Of these, 70 were contacted and 32 entities were subsequently interviewed between July 2022 and April 2023. The interviewees are shown in Table 1. For the full list of identified fire response entities, see Appendix A.

Table 1. Assessment Interview Participants

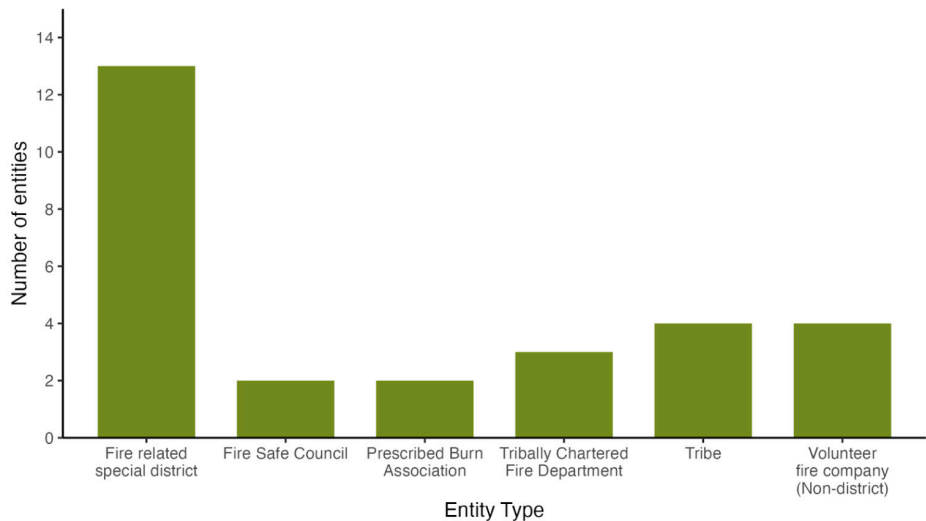
COUNTY	FIRE RESPONSE ENTITY
Del Norte	Del Norte County Fire Safe Council Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation
Humboldt	Yurok Fire Department Hoopa Fire Department Willow Creek VFD Briceland VFD Orleans VFD Hoopa Fire and Rescue Orick CSD Lower Trinity PBA Southern Humboldt Fire Chief's Association
Mendocino	Round Valley Tribe Mendocino County Fire Safe Council Leggett Valley Fire Department Whale Gulch VFC Mendocino Fire Chief's Association Bell Springs VFD
Modoc	Pit River Tribe
Siskiyou	Siskiyou PBA Seiad Valley Fire Department Hornbrook FPD
Sonoma	Timber Cove FPD Northern Sonoma Coast FPD

Trinity	Coffee Creek VFD Hayfork FD Salyer VFD Southern Trinity VFD Tsnungwe Tribe Post Mountain VFD Trinity Center VFD Trinity County OES
Cross-county	American Red Cross: Trinity, Del Norte, and Humboldt Counties

Interviews were conducted with entities located in all seven NCRP counties. The majority of entities interviewed were located in Humboldt and Trinity Counties (n = 9 and n= 8, respectively). The remaining entities interviewed were located in Mendocino County (n = 6), Siskiyou County (n = 3), Del Norte County (n = 2), and Sonoma County (n =2), Modoc County (n = 1), with one cross-county entity included.

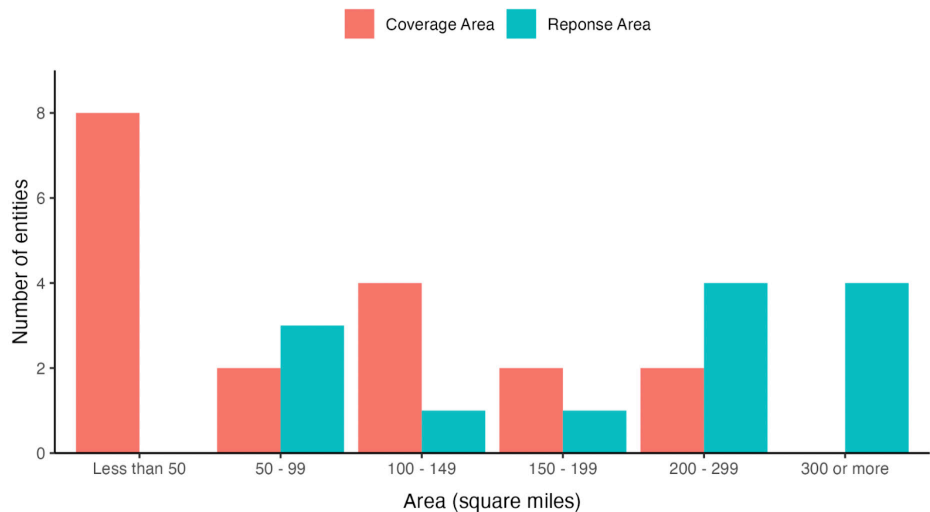
Most of the groups that were interviewed were fire related special districts (n = 13). Other entity types included Fire Safe Councils, Tribes, Tribally Chartered Fire Departments, and volunteer or community fire protection entities not associated with a district. Some entities fit into multiple categories. In Brice-land, for example, the volunteer fire department is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that is contracted by the Brice-land Fire Protection District to provide fire protection services within the district. The two entities are distinct and have separate boards but are effectively one entity from a fire response perspective. For this assessment, only those fire protection entities that had no association with a fire protection district or other special district such as a community services district were classified as volunteer fire companies. The number of entities in each type is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Number of Entities by Entity Type



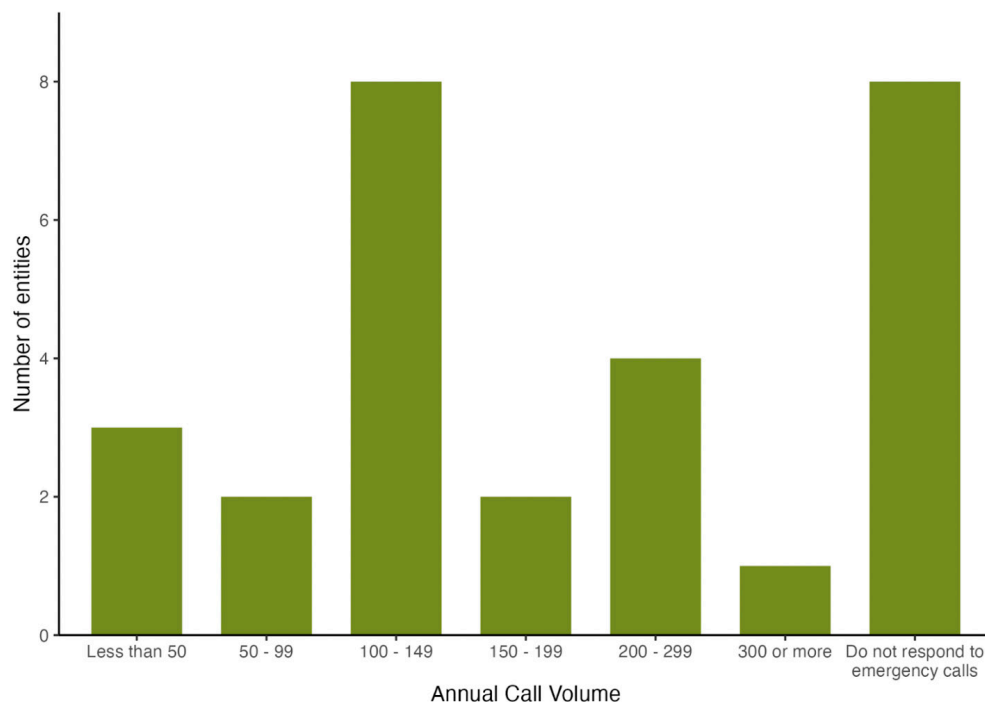
All the entities interviewed for this assessment serve economically disadvantaged communities. Sizes of coverage areas of fire resilience entities varied widely due to the different types of entities interviewed. For example, the Mendocino County Fire Safe Council provides services throughout Mendocino County while Orick Volunteer Fire Department primarily serves the 2.3 square miles within the Orick Community Services District. Fire protection entities associated with a fire district or other special district generally provide services to a much larger area than their home district due to mutual aid and auto aid agreements with neighboring districts or departments (and participation in CALFIRE station coverage and CALFIRE or USFS wildfire suppression efforts). For example, the Leggett Valley Fire Department in Mendocino County is responsible for providing services to its 29 square mile district but has a response area of over 250 square miles due to mutual aid. Most fire response entities interviewed associated with a district have response areas that are two to ten times larger than their district area. Figure 3 shows the number of entities in each coverage area and response area category.

Figure 3. Number of Entities by Coverage Area and Response Area



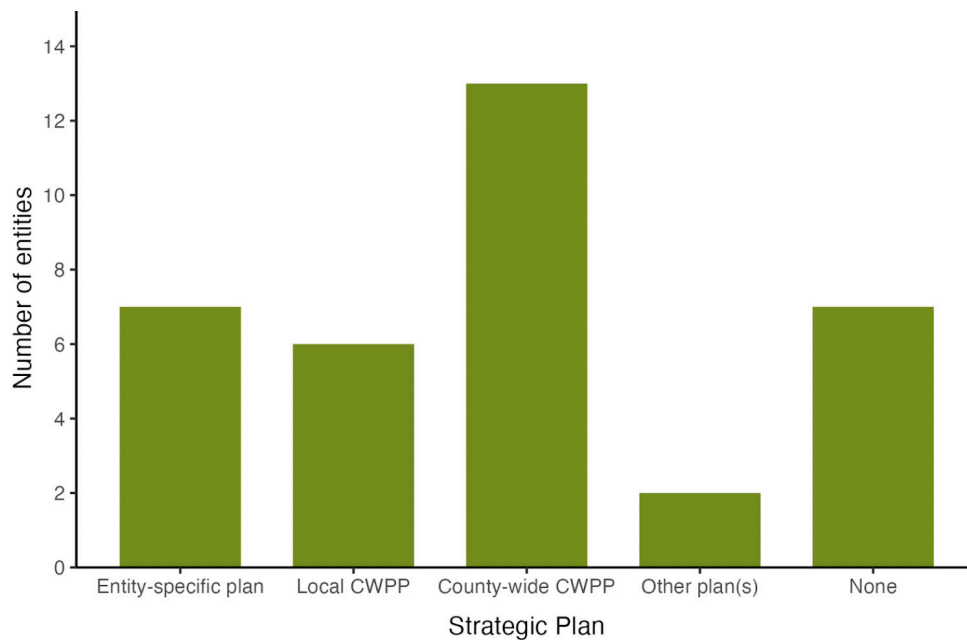
71% (n = 20) of the entities interviewed respond to emergency calls. Among these entities, the average annual call volume ranged from 15 calls to 432 calls. Most entities respond to 100 to 250 calls per year. Many entities noted that they are all-risk departments, meaning they respond to a wide variety of emergencies, not just structure or wildland fires. For twelve of the entities that respond to emergency calls, over half of the calls they respond to are for emergency medical services (EMS) or traffic accidents. The three Tribal entities that respond to emergency calls (Yurok Fire Department, Hoopa Fire Department, and Hoopa Volunteer Fire and Rescue) had the lowest proportion of EMS calls. All three include forest health and vegetation and fuels management within their scope of work, as opposed to only about half of fire districts and volunteer departments. Figure 4 shows the number of entities that receive each category of average annual call volume.

Figure 4. Number of Entities by Call Volume



Most departments had or were included in at least one strategic planning document, such as a community wildfire protection plan (CWPP). Five entities have multiple types of strategic plans and seven have no strategic plan. Only a quarter of the entities interviewed have a strategic plan specific to their entity. Figure 5 shows how many entities have each type of strategic planning document.

Figure 5. Number of Entities by Strategic Plan Type



All entities interviewed have cooperative relationships with other entities. For fire districts and paid or volunteer fire departments, relationships include mutual aid, in which multiple departments are dispatched to an incident together when needed, and auto aid, in which a department is automatically dispatched to any incident that its auto aid partner entity is dispatched to. All entities that respond to emergency calls have formal or informal mutual aid agreements with neighboring entities. Just two departments have auto aid agreements (Leggett Valley Fire has auto aid with Piercy Fire District and Willow Creek Volunteer Fire Department has auto aid with Blue Lake).

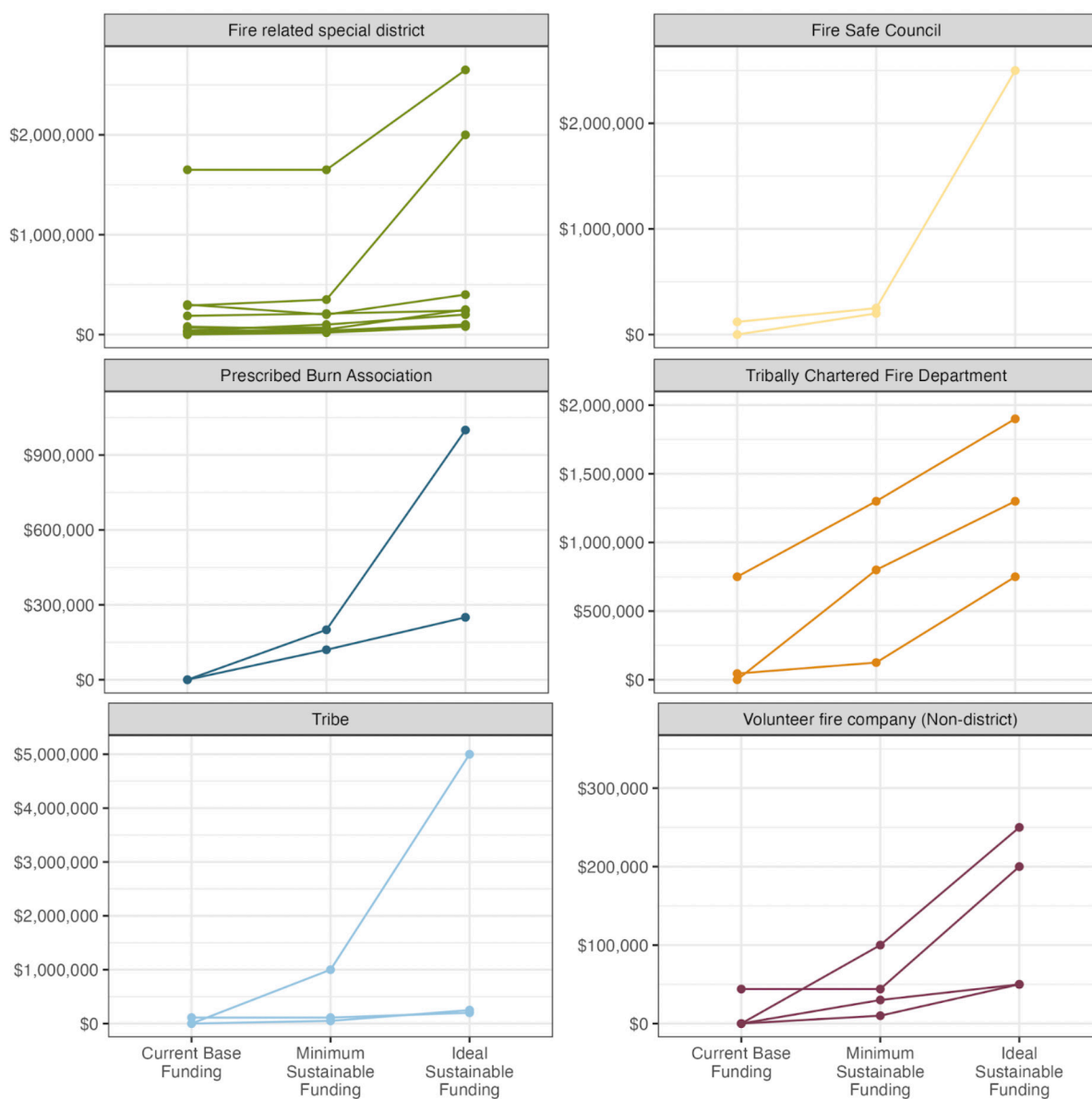
FUNDING SOURCES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Base Funding: For the purposes of this assessment, base funding was defined as any stable, regular funding that an entity receives on a long term or ongoing basis. Property taxes, sales taxes, parcel assessments, and county and Tribal funds are examples of base funding sources. Money derived from community donations, fundraisers, grants, and state and federal wildfire reimbursements would not be classified as base funding under this definition. Eleven of the entities interviewed receive no annual base funding.

Of entities that do receive base funding, annual base funding ranged from \$17,000 to \$1.6 million with a median of \$74,000. Regardless of how much base funding they currently receive, every entity interviewed expressed a need for additional base funding to sustain their current services and achieve their goals. The amount of sustainable base funding needed to support each entity in achieving its goals or plans ranged from \$50,000 to \$5 million per year, with a median of \$250,000 per year. The wide range is due to differences in entity type, scope of work, and each entity's goals. Some all-volunteer entities would like to pay call stipends to their firefighters, compensate officers for their administrative work, or hire a bookkeeper or administrator. Many entities would like to maintain and upgrade their

equipment and infrastructure. Some departments, like Briceland VFD and Leggett VFD, want to establish regular year-round paid work opportunities for their firefighters on related activities such as fuel reduction. Others did not want to increase their scope of work, but simply needed additional regular ongoing funding to pay their bills and keep their equipment and infrastructure operational. Entities that currently receive less than \$50,000 per year base funding or receive no base funding at all are particularly in need of base funding. The status of an entity's fire resilience program also plays a role. Some entities, such as the Pit River Tribe and the Round Valley Indian Reservation are building fire resilience programs from the ground up, while others, like the Hoopa Fire Department and Yurok Fire Department, have existing programs that they would like to augment. Figure 6 shows current, minimum, and ideal base funding by entity type.

Figure 6. Funding level by Entity Type



Differences in funding sources by county: Fire response entities in Humboldt County have an annual opportunity to apply for funding through a half cent Public Safety/Essential Services sales tax enacted in 2014 through Measure Z and renewed by voters in 2018 through Measure O. The Humboldt County Fire Chief's Association surveys local fire service providers each year to determine their critical needs and submits a cohesive grant application that is intended to represent all fire agencies. Funding has been used to purchase equipment, build fire stations, cover a portion of the cost of contracting CAL FIRE to provide emergency dispatch services to all participating fire service providers, and to support planning efforts to establish long-term sustainability by establishing reliable revenue sources through fire related district formation, expansion, and/or consolidation and by identifying other strategies to sustain and improve services into the future.

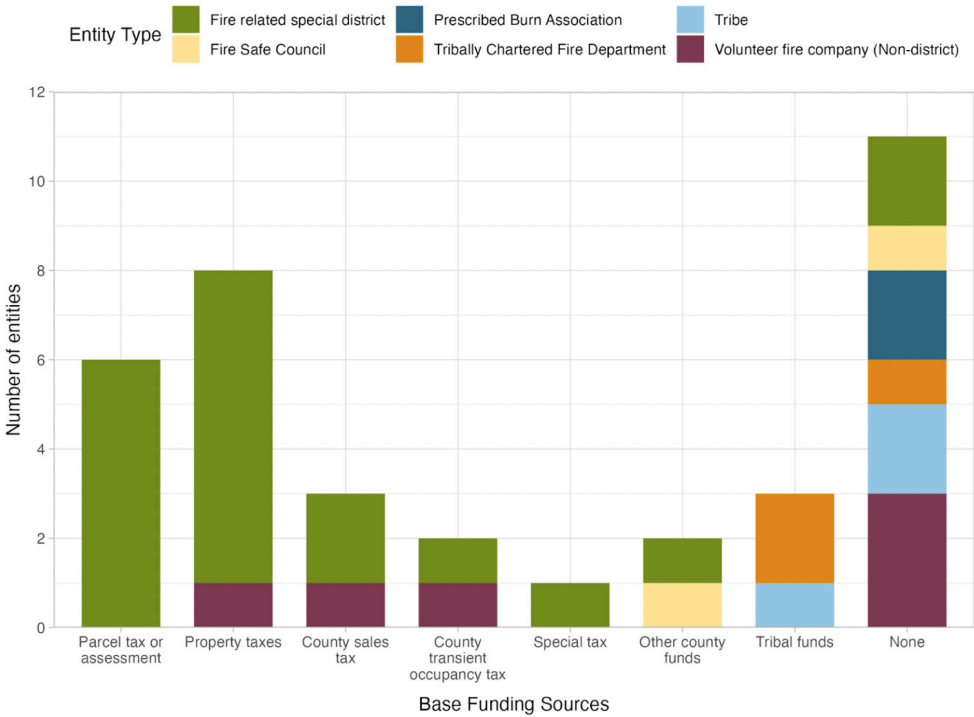
Mendocino County has 20 local fire departments. Most of the local departments do not have a paid chief, and most are staffed by volunteers. All of them except Westport receive some funding from property-tax assessments on residents in their districts. There are three additional streams of funding in the county: Prop 172, a half cent sales tax that funds police and sheriff in addition to fire districts, a private campground transient occupancy tax which began in 2020, and Measure P, a ¼ cent sales tax to fund essential service including fire protection and prevention, passed in November 2022.

Trinity, Siskiyou, and Sonoma counties have no county wide funding streams for volunteer fire departments. No entities that respond to emergency calls were interviewed in Del Norte and Modoc counties, so county-wide funding streams (if any) are unknown.

Differences in funding source by entity type: Fire response entities associated with a district are much more likely to receive base funding than volunteer fire companies not associated with a district. Most fire districts receive funding from county property taxes, a district parcel assessment, or both. The amount of base funding from these sources varies widely by community, even within the same county. For example, Post Mountain VFD in Trinity County receives only about \$24,000 annually from its parcel assessment, while neighboring Hayfork VFD generates over \$180,000 per year from its parcel tax. However, being associated with a district does not always guarantee base funding. Two district-related fire companies in Trinity County received no funding from their district or received some, but the amount was unreliable from year to year. Additionally, district funding comes only from residents of the district, but fire departments routinely travel outside of their districts to respond to incidents. Some districts contain a large amount of state or federal land which they do not receive funding from. Others, such as those in northern Sonoma County, respond to many incidents involving tourists. As a result, many departments are routinely providing services to areas or populations without receiving funding from them. At least one department noted that receiving funding from their entire response area as opposed to just their home district would help sustain their operations. Figure 7 shows base funding sources for each type of entity.

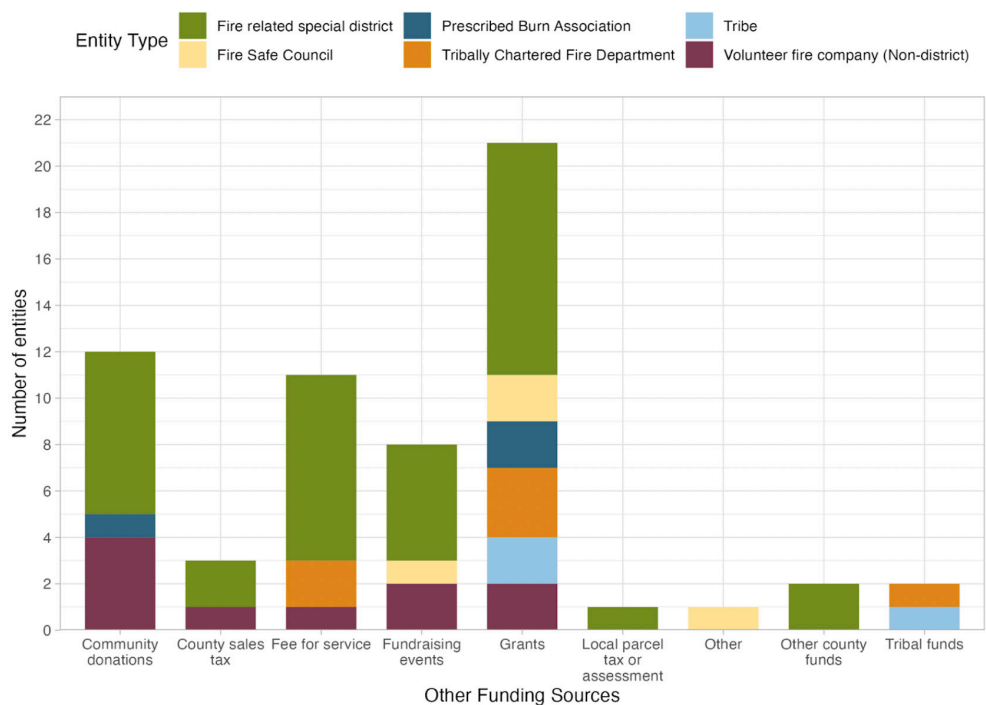
Funding for Tribal entities primarily came from Tribal funds and grants. The Tsnungwe Tribe, which is not federally recognized, is funded solely by grants. Some Tribal entities considered the funding they receive from the Tribe to be base funding (stable, regular, and ongoing), while others did not. The Yurok Fire Department, for example, receives around \$100,000 from the Tribe’s general budget each year, but because this money is not guaranteed from year to year, they do not consider it to be base funding. Similarly, the funding allocated to the Tolowa Dee-Ni’ Nation Natural Resources Department is dependent on the Tribe’s casino revenue, which varies from year to year, and thus is not considered to be base funding.

Figure 7. Base Funding Source by Entity Type



Non-base funding sources: All but two entities received some revenue from sources that are not considered base funding. Grants are the most common source of non-base funding with three quarters of the entities interviewed receiving some funding from grants. Community donations, fee for service work such as state or federal wildfire response, and fundraising events are also common forms of non-base funding among the entities interviewed. Figure 8 shows non-base funding sources for each type of entity.

Figure 8. Non-base Funding Source by Entity Type



Grant writers: While a majority of the entities interviewed have received grants, none had a full-time grant writer. In general, grants are written by a staff member (for entities with paid staff), the fire chief (paid or volunteer), or a volunteer besides the fire chief. While grants can help fire resilience entities implement a specific project, upgrade equipment and infrastructure, and offset the costs of training, they generally do not provide support for the base functions of an organization. The top expenses for entities interviewed tend to be things that grants will not fund, like equipment maintenance, fuel costs, and insurance costs. One entity noted that they found it challenging to find grants that are not tied to specific outcomes such as acreage burned or NWCG certifications. Short grant cycles are also an issue. One fully grant-funded entity noted that short grant cycles made it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff.

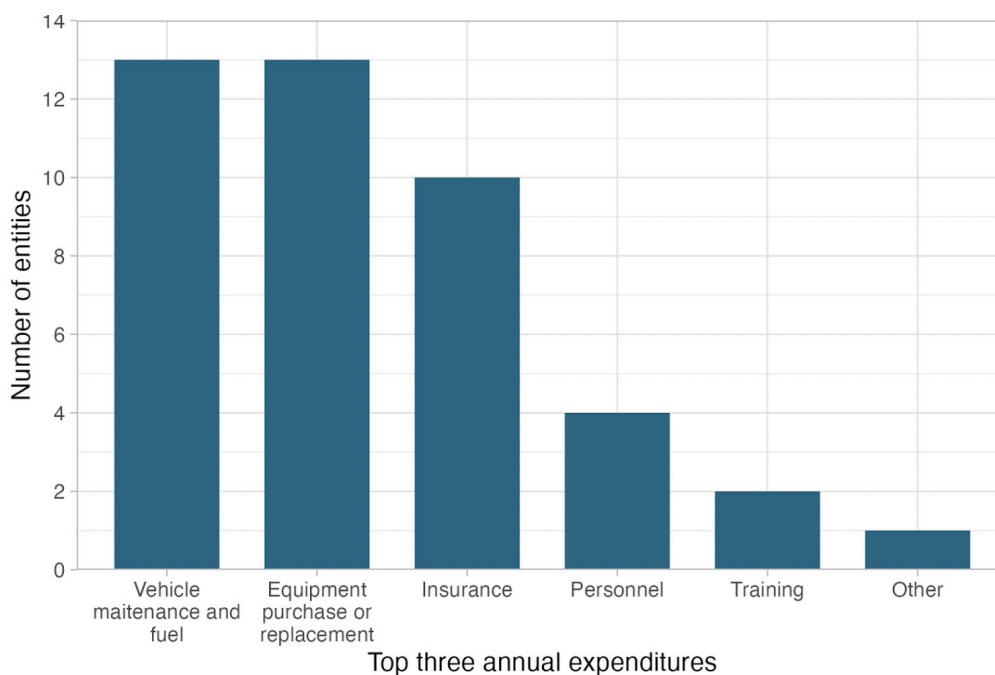
COVID-19 impacts on funding: Multiple entities noted that COVID-19 had impacted their annual funding. This is particularly important for fire companies that do not receive tax revenue from a district or county and are reliant on fundraising events and community donations (i.e., Orleans VFD and Seiad Valley Fire Department).

CALFIRE and USFS reimbursements: Eleven entities receive funding from working on state and federal wildfire incidents. Annual funding from working wildfire incidents can vastly exceed an entity's base funding. One interviewee noted that their department may have completely run out of funding and needed to close if not for the revenue they received from working the August Complex fire. While state and federal wildfire reimbursements can be a lifeline for some entities, none considered this to be a reliable funding stream because it is dependent on the fire season and having adequate staff or volunteer resources to work large fires while maintaining services in their home community or district. A few entities expressed interest in participating in strike teams to generate revenue, but cited lack of volunteer resources as a limiting factor. A few entities also noted that long reimbursement times (~8 months, according to one entity) made working with CALFIRE and USFS a challenge, since small departments have to pay up-front for the costs of food and lodging for their volunteers. One small department lost about \$7,000 for participating in a wildfire suppression effort that they were not reimbursed for because the agreement had expired.

EXPENDITURES/FUNDING NEEDS

Top annual expenditures for entities interviewed included vehicle maintenance and fuel, equipment and/or infrastructure purchase or replacement, insurance, personnel, and training. That many entities' top expenses are critical to the functioning of the organization and can often not be met via grant funding speaks to the need for base funding for fire resilience entities. Figure 9 shows top annual expenditures by number of entities.

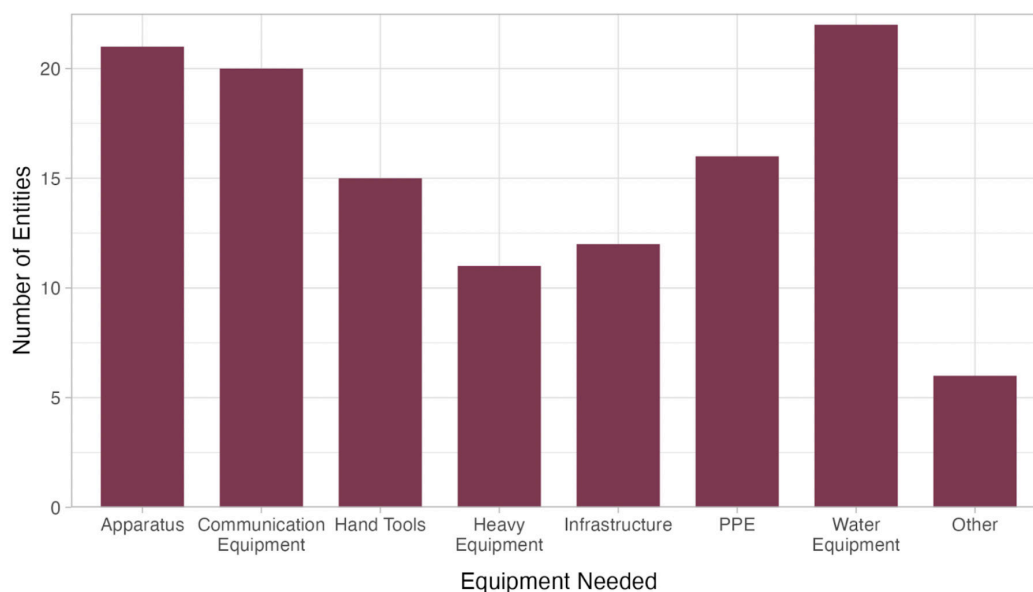
Figure 9. Top Annual Expenditures



EQUIPMENT

Nearly all the entities interviewed need equipment or infrastructure. Apparatus, communications equipment, and water equipment were the most common equipment needs. Some entities are operating with apparatus from the 1970s and 1980s that require frequent maintenance and should be upgraded. One department's newest engine is from 1985 and all its engines are manual transmission, which limits the number of volunteers that can operate them. Multiple entities were interested in having smaller apparatus, such as a Type 6 engine, to respond to medical incidents or navigate rugged, narrow mountain roads common in North Coast rural areas. A few entities are also in need of a structure fire engine (Type 1 or Type 2). Water equipment needed includes water tenders, hose, pumps, and fittings, and water storage tanks at the station or strategic locations within an entity's response area. Communications equipment needed includes pagers, handheld radios, and repeaters. Many departments that cited a need for personal protective equipment and hand tools noted that these are needed on an ongoing basis due to normal wear and tear or the need to outfit new volunteers.

Figure 10. Equipment Needs



Heavy equipment was noted as a need by entities that are currently doing or would like to do fuel reduction work in their communities. A chipper was the most sought-after piece of heavy equipment (noted by 7 of the 11 entities in need of heavy equipment). Other heavy equipment desired includes a masticator, a curtain burner, dozer, and excavator. Other equipment needs mentioned included a storage container or gear trailer, pickup truck or other non-apparatus vehicle, and EMS equipment such as extrication equipment. Figure 10 shows categories of equipment needed by interviewees.

As noted above, equipment-related expenses are often among entities' top annual expenditures. Vehicle maintenance and/or fuel and equipment purchase or replacement were each selected by thirteen entities as one of their top three expenses. The next most common expense, insurance, selected by ten entities, generally refers to insurance on infrastructure and vehicles in addition to personnel related insurance. One entity suggested that assisting entities with navigating the state and federal excess property system could be a cost-effective regional strategy to address some of the equipment needs. Limited capacity for vehicle maintenance in some communities is also an issue that may be possible to address on a regional scale.

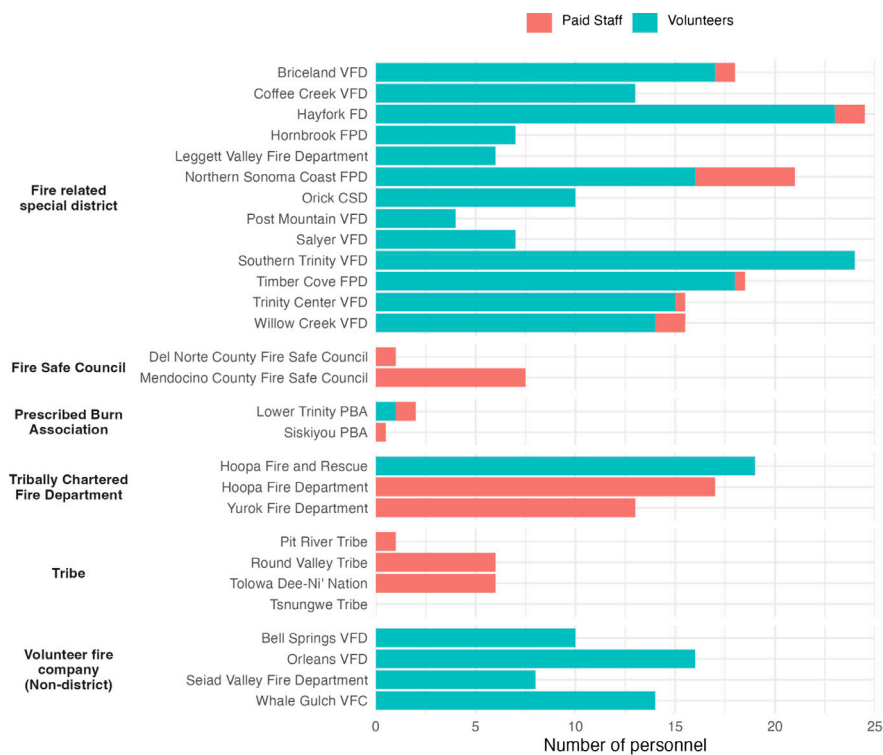
INFRASTRUCTURE

While less common than other types of equipment needs, infrastructure needs are a high priority for the departments that have a need in that area. Some entities need to upgrade their infrastructure to make it safe to use, such as adding a well and water purification system, fixing unsafe wiring, or adding bathrooms. One fire response entity is currently using a pole barn with a gravel floor that lacks bathrooms, potable water, internet, and a backup power source as its station. Other entities need to upgrade their space to serve their existing functions, such as adding space to store apparatus, lay out hose, and hold regular training sessions or adding a kitchen and sleeping quarters. Three entities noted a desire to develop a community resilience center or public safety facility to provide a safe place for community members during emergencies.

PERSONNEL

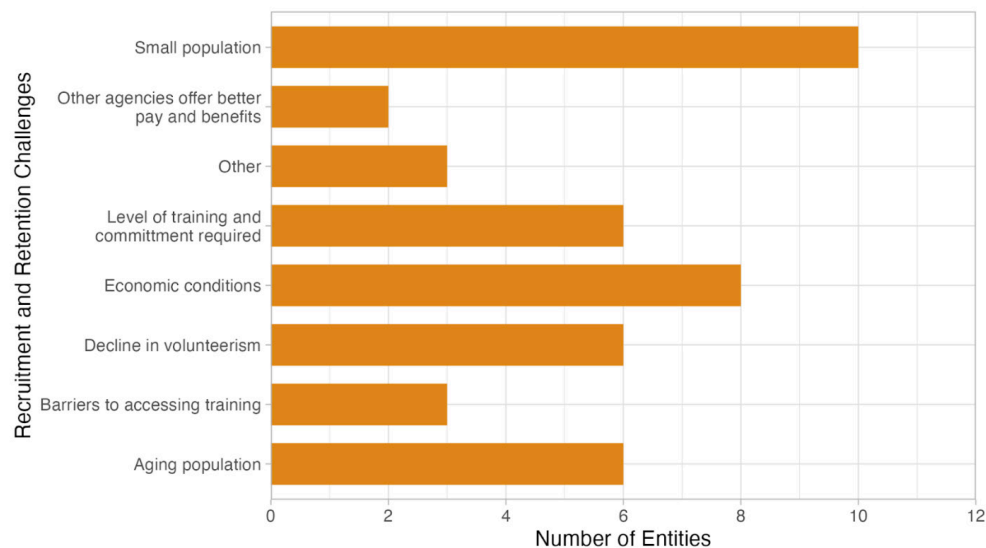
Fourteen entities interviewed had some form of paid staff (either full-time, part-time, and/or seasonal). However, only eight of the entities interviewed relied entirely on paid staff. All eight of these were either a Tribe, Tribally-chartered fire department, fire safe council, or a prescribed burn association. All of the fire related special districts and volunteer fire companies were run primarily by volunteers, although some had a paid chief, janitor, secretary, and/or bookkeeper. Three of the volunteer-based entities offer stipends to volunteers for participating in training or responding to an incident, but these stipends are minimal (ranging from \$5 to \$30 per call for the entities interviewed). Figure 11 shows the number of paid and volunteer staff for most interviewed entities.

Figure 11. Number of Paid and Volunteer Staff per Entity



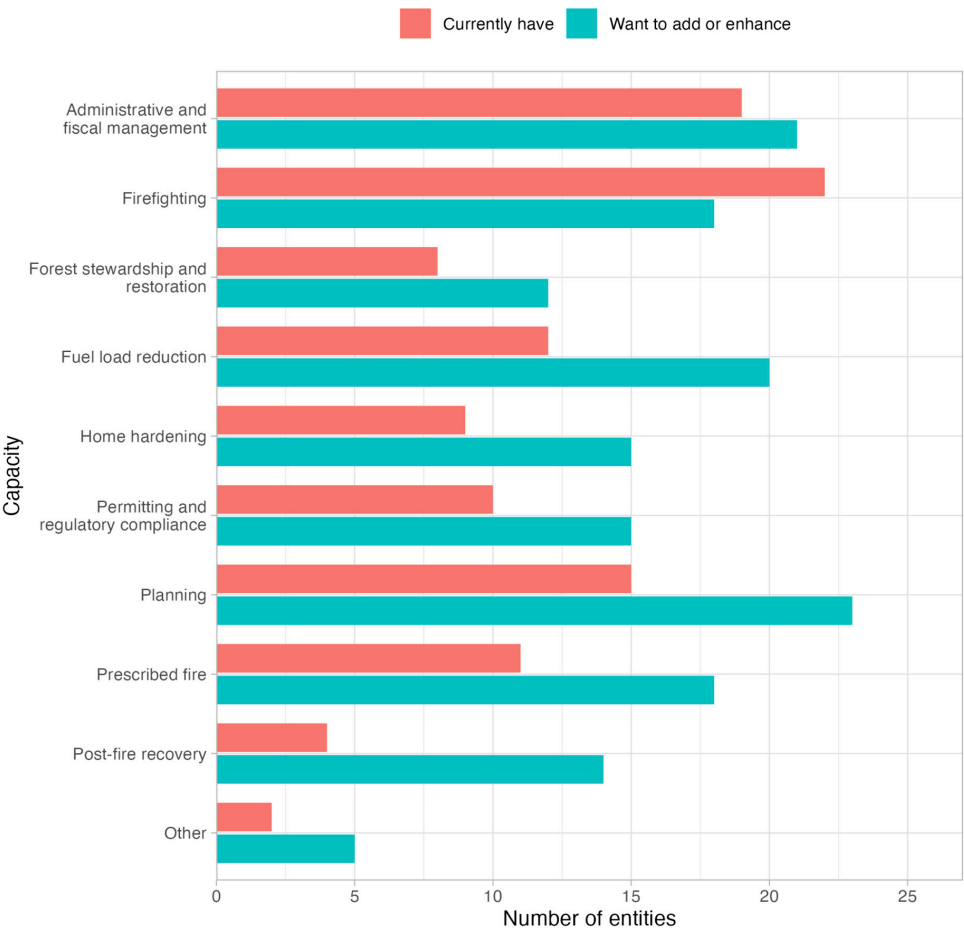
Most entities noted that recruitment and retention of volunteers is a challenge for a variety of reasons. Many rural communities have a limited population, and that population increasingly skews older, meaning that there may only be a small pool of able-bodied volunteers to draw volunteers from. Some entities noted that many community members could not afford the time required to volunteer because they need to work full time to make a living. An overall decline in volunteerism and the high level of training required and barriers to accessing training were also commonly cited barriers to recruiting and retaining volunteers. Entities are trying a variety of tactics to overcome these challenges. Some entities can provide call and/or training stipends to compensate volunteers for their time, but most do not or cannot. A couple of entities expressed interest in having an explorer program to introduce youth to the fire service and help with recruitment. To address both the need for fuel reduction and workforce development in their communities, a few entities are trying to develop year-round employment opportunities for volunteer firefighters. For entities with paid staff, recruitment and retention can also be a challenge. One entity noted that it was difficult to recruit crew members when the state and private vegetation management contractors can offer better pay and a longer working season. Figure 12 documents recruitment and retention challenges experienced by interviewees.

Figure 12. Recruitment and Retention Challenges



The capacities that each entity possess vary based on the type of entity and its goals. Administrative and fiscal management and firefighting are the two most common capacities that entities currently have, followed by planning. The most common capacities that entities wanted to add or enhance included planning and administrative and fiscal management, followed by firefighting, fuel reduction, and prescribed fire. Figure 13 shows capacities possessed and needed by interviewees.

Figure 13. Capacity – Existing and Needed

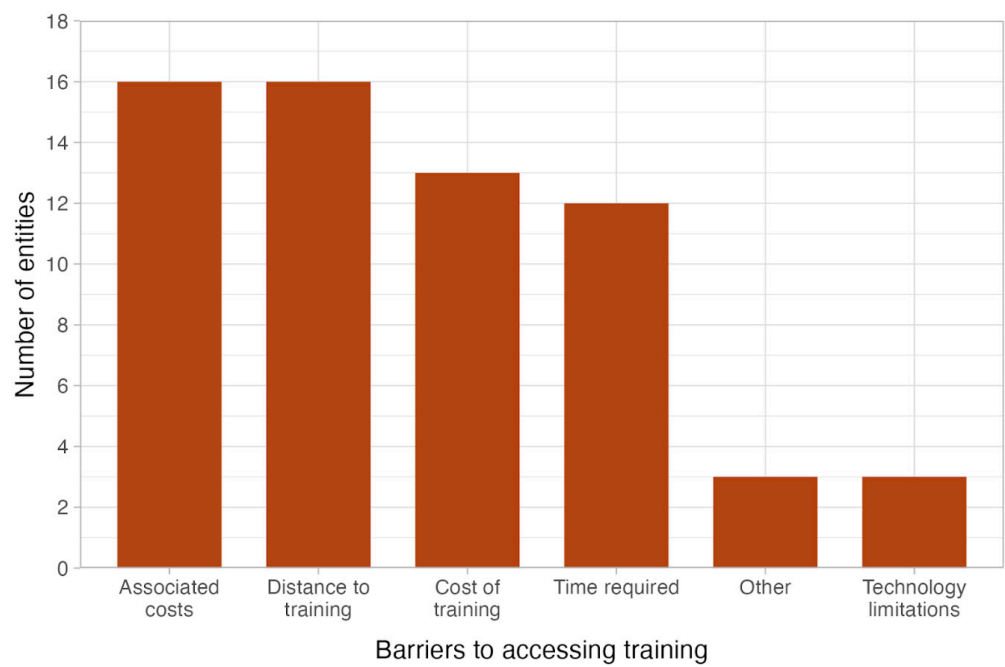


Training: Nearly all entities interviewed that respond to emergency calls have minimum training requirements. Common requirements include basic first aid and CPR, Title 22 public safety first aid, or EMT for medical response, basic wildland firefighter training (FFT2) for fire response, and a firefighter endorsement to drive fire engines. Other training required by at least one entity include structural firefighter certification, low angle rope rescue, sawyer certification (S212), hazardous materials training, and auto extrication.

Nearly all entities interviewed mentioned at least one barrier to accessing training. The most common barriers were distance to training, cost of training, associated costs (i.e., gas, lodging, food), and the time required to attend training. Distance to access training seems to be the root issue, since greater distance to training increases the time required and incurs additional costs related to travel. Given the spread-out nature of rural communities and the rugged terrain of the North Coast region, even when training is offered at a central location within a county, the travel time for some entities is still over an hour each way. The time and distance required to access training is particularly challenging for volunteer-based entities, whose responders are often working full-time jobs in addition to their fire response activities. A few entities noted that limited internet access in their community or at the station is a barrier to accessing training offered online. Other barriers included short notice about

when trainings are occurring, limited personnel to send to trainings, and lack of consistent funding. Figure 14 shows barriers to accessing training.

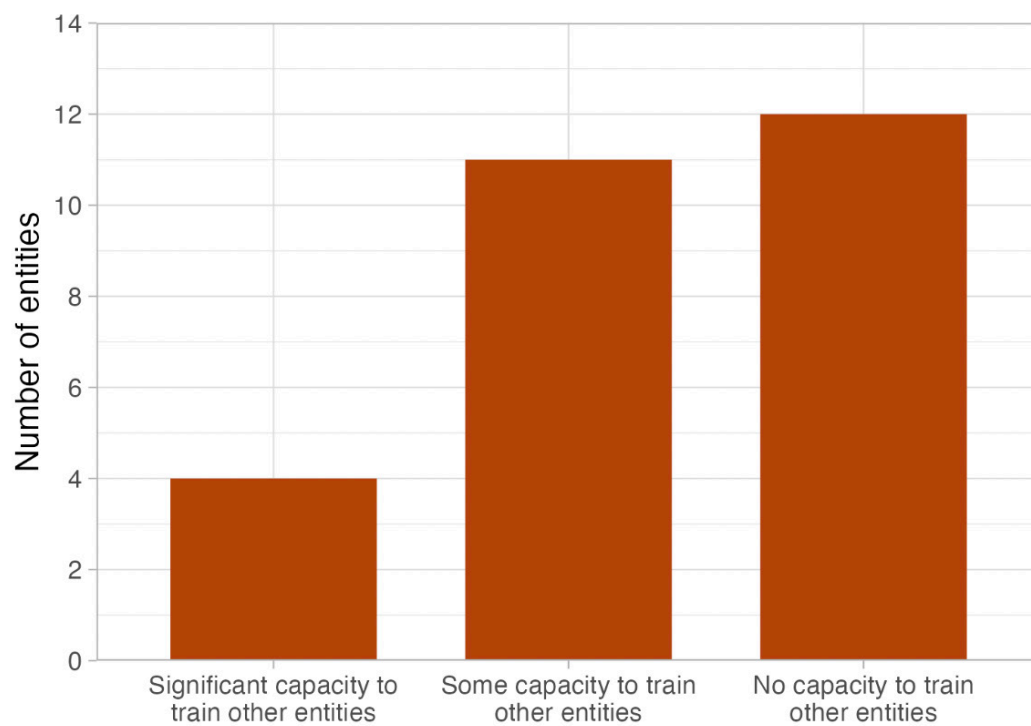
Figure 14. Barriers to Accessing Training



Nearly all entities wanted improved access to required training (i.e., FFT2) and/or access to additional kinds of training (i.e., swiftwater rescue). Most minimum requirements such as first aid and CPR or basic wildland fire certification require an annual or biennial refresher or recertification. Many entities wanted these training courses to be offered locally or in a nearby community on an annual basis to reduce the time, travel distance, and costs associated with training. Some entities also wanted access to more advanced trainings that are helpful, but not required to do their jobs, like low angle rope rescue, auto extrication, swiftwater rescue, EMT, and hazmat training that would enable them to respond to incidents more effectively.

Just four of the entities interviewed have a significant capacity to train others. Eleven entities have some capacity to train others and twelve do not have the capacity to train others. Of the entities that have some capacity to train others, most are limited to basic medical training (first aid and CPR). Figure 15 shows the number of entities that do and do not have capacity to train others.

Figure 15. Training Capacity



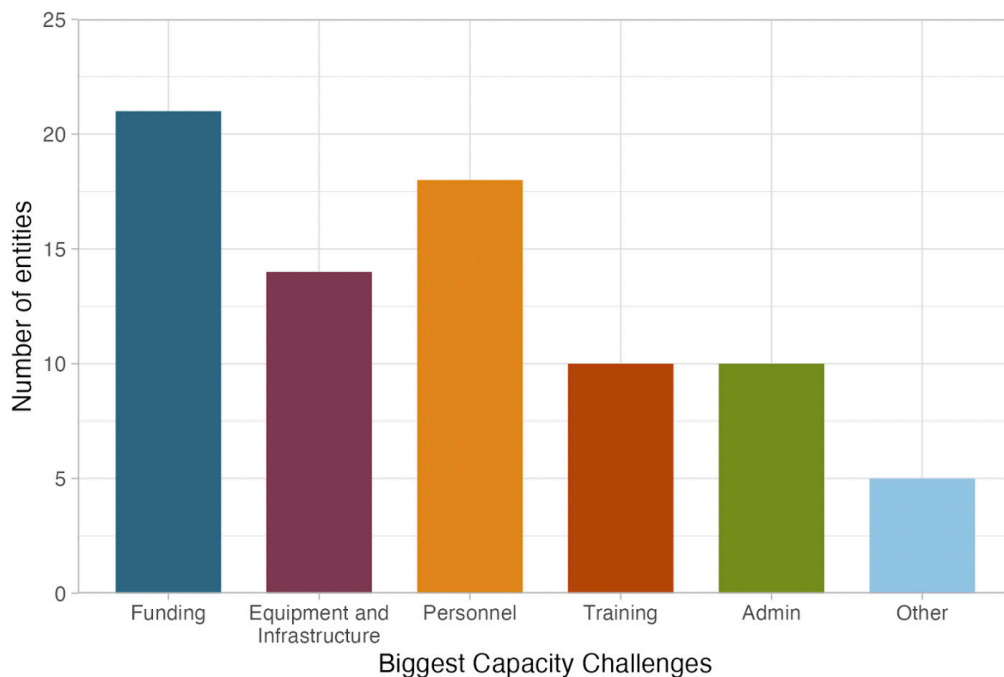
BIGGEST CAPACITY CHALLENGES

While most entities face multiple major capacity challenges, funding and personnel were the two most cited capacity challenges among the entities interviewed. These challenges are interrelated which means they compound upon each other to limit the capacity of fire resilience entities. However, it also presents an opportunity since alleviating pressure in one category provides benefits in other areas of capacity.

For example, limited base funding leaves entities struggling to pay their basic expenses like insurance and fuel costs, leaving little left over to maintain or upgrade critical equipment and infrastructure, hire an administrative assistant, pay volunteers a call or training stipend, or pay for training for staff or volunteers. Limited personnel capacity hinders entities' ability to conduct strategic planning, apply for grants, and organize training. Recruitment and retention of staff and volunteers are hindered by barriers to accessing training and outdated equipment and infrastructure (hard to train when you don't have a functional firehouse, very costly to acquire PPE for new recruits, very old vehicles are difficult to drive, etc.). Old equipment requires more maintenance, which is a significant cost for entities. Outdated and rickety equipment is especially an issue for departments that make money by going out on strike teams and need functioning apparatus to do so.

While addressing the lack of stable, ongoing funding available to fire resilience entities would likely provide the biggest impact, providing support in any of these capacity areas has the potential to make a significant difference for entities across the region. Figure 15 shows the biggest capacity challenges for interviewed entities.

Figure 15. Biggest Capacity Challenges



DISCUSSION OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS: LESSONS LEARNED

This assessment produced valuable results, both in terms of lessons learned about the capacity needs of fire response entities in the region, but also about how to effectively conduct assessments of capacity-limited fire response entities before, during, and after fire seasons. Some key observations and lessons learned from the interview process include:

- It is challenging to schedule interviews with overburdened/volunteer staff. Once “fire season” starts, which in recent years has been extended much beyond the traditional fire season, it is virtually impossible. When working with fire response entities, timelines must consider the fact that respondents may be unavailable, predictably, at certain times of the year, and, unpredictably, any time.
- When conducting such an in-depth and time-consuming interview and asking so much time of staff (particularly volunteers) it is important to be clear on how the data will be used, and how it will benefit the respondents, if it will and if this is known. During the interview period NCRP’s Capacity Strategy was still very much under development, so initially it was not yet possible to share direct benefits to respondents, outside of the (significant) contribution to establishing regional needs. Once interviewers developed the strategy of referring respondents to the NCRP TA program (see section below) this was helpful in ensuring that there could be a direct benefit to interviewees in the short term. Once we returned to a small subset of respondents for the Implementation Phase, they were very pleased to have participated, and appreciated the follow-up and the investment in their entities. Future assessment efforts will benefit from having a well-developed capacity investment strategy that can be shared with interviewees during the initial contact.
- Future assessment and interview efforts would benefit from stronger up-front alignment with relevant sub-regional entities (i.e., Fire Chief’s Associations). This process would have benefitted from pre-interviews with these groups, and interview refinements based on the results, as well as synthesizing information from the Fire Chiefs Association annual reports (i.e., Humboldt County’s [here](#)) or municipal service reviews.
- No respondent had the time, ability, or inclination to fill out supplemental survey forms, so it is best to include all needed information in the oral interview.
- Questions interviewees found most difficult to answer:
 - What tasks they are responsible for, how often they undertake them and what they require,
 - What reporting standards and outcomes they would expect to be held to if they received base funding,
 - Barriers to deploying current capacity,
 - Programmatic approaches NCRP should be considering,
 - Base funding estimates for minimum and blue-sky base funding.
- Questions added after piloting the initial interview form (i.e., about infrastructure, top annual expenditures, and specific kinds of technical support needed) provided concrete, useful information.
- The questionnaire was thorough – many respondents noted that the interview questions seemed to cover just about everything they could think of.
- For future assessments, it will be helpful to review and revise the interview questions and note exactly what information is expected, how it can be quantified, and what information will help increase understanding of the core issues and opportunities.
- The quantitative nature of questions was helpful. For the next phase of assessments, it will be important to

review and update questions based on how useful these data were for informing recommendations and next steps.

Observations related to assessment responses include:

- All fire response entities need support, but non-district fire companies, Tribes, and fire districts lacking a secure tax base, an assessment area that matches the response area, or another type of stable base funding are most in need.
- Most entities have significant capital investment needs for infrastructure and equipment purchase and/or replacement, and no clear, identified way to meet these needs.
- For base funding, helping non-district fire companies become districts and implement even a small parcel assessment could be very helpful. As evidenced by Post Mountain, even a small assessment (\$24 per parcel per year) in a small community can provide a healthy amount of base funding to build from. Helping existing districts explore adding a small parcel assessment could also help, although some interviewees noted that they didn't think their community would support adding or increasing an assessment. As noted above, many districts are being financially supported by a small community while providing services to a much larger area, so helping interested districts (like Orick) explore annexation could also potentially be useful, although again most entities didn't seem interested in annexation or were actively opposed.
- Mendocino County could serve as a model to other counties for how to fund fire services at a county scale and could provide policy tools that could be advocated for similar legislation in other counties (either Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) or sales tax).
- For equipment purchases, there are a variety of needs, from large capital investments (i.e., new trucks) down to small tools and equipment that must be regularly replaced or upgraded (i.e., PPE). Thus, different types of grants/funding, with different timescales, will be needed to meet these needs. Regional grant writing assistance would help fund direct purchases, but ongoing funding is needed for maintenance, repairs, and replacement, and grants often do not cover maintenance costs. Base funding needs to include such operational expenses.
- Infrastructure funding, for upgrades to existing infrastructure, as well as developing new infrastructure that can support increased/full-time staffing, is a huge need, and volunteer organizations cannot even begin to address the very complex funding, permitting, and implementation contracting components of such projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY BASED ON ASSESSMENT RESULTS

- Across the board, it was clear that having a regional fund developer/grant writer to provide ongoing support with grant identification and grant writing would be helpful to fire response and resilience entities, particularly those that are entirely volunteer staffed.
- For personnel, many entities are struggling with admin and fiscal management. Providing ongoing technical support (rather than short-term TA consultant assistance) for these functions would be very helpful and take some weight off the shoulders of already overburdened fire chiefs/volunteers. Beyond the time required for grant development, the time required for contracting, invoicing, and reporting makes even available grant opportunities remain out-of-reach for many understaffed entities.

- Another type of assistance identified would be helping entities register for and navigate the state and federal excess property program, which would mainly help entities acquire apparatus (although it doesn't help much with other equipment needs).
- Training is a significant need for long-term as well as new staff and volunteers. Providing a training coordinator and a training fund for the region would be helpful. Many entities expressed interest in bringing training to their communities, which could reach many more participants at a lower cost than sending staff to out-of-area training courses. Most were eager to share training with other nearby districts and entities. One additional need related to training is to be able to fund the full cost of travel, lodging, meals, etc. for trainers and trainees, as well as stipends for volunteer trainees, as these costs are typically not covered in full by state grants with state reimbursement rates. Foundation or other private fundings would be a good complementary source to fill this need.
- Multiple departments noted it is a challenge to keep track of the ever-growing list of qualifications and certifications each volunteer needs, who has them, and who is due for training. A central tracking platform or system would be helpful and could be maintained or supported by a regional training coordinator.
- Workforce development is a strong need throughout the region. Leggett Valley VFD and Briceland VFD have proposed workforce development programs that may be good models, addressing the NCRP Vision Plan strategies related to capacity. They aim to establish regular year-round paid-work opportunities for the crew on fire-department-related projects, such as CalFire cover during fire season and fuel reduction work during the winter/spring months. Potential pilot projects could serve as a model for other communities in the region. A few departments expressed interest in having an explorer program to get local youth involved in fire response and provide workforce development. This is another strategy supported in the Vision Plan.

INTERIM CAPACITY ASSISTANCE FOR ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS VIA NCRP/RFFC TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

While the long-term North Coast Capacity Enhancement Strategy is intended to provide strategic, systematic, and comprehensive planning and capacity support that addresses interrelated needs, it was recognized that many entities do have immediate, discrete, and time-sensitive needs for internal capacity development. To address these needs while the larger Strategy is being developed, interviewers referred the participants to the NCRP Technical Assistance (TA) program, where they could apply for funding up to \$15,000 in the form of a contract between NCRP and an approved TA provider who would provide specific technical assistance during the interim period while the larger NCRP Capacity Enhancement Strategy is being developed. Eleven interviewees (8 from the HAF/WRCF region) applied for and were granted TA support, funded by the RFFC program. Table 2 shows the TA support provided for each of these entities.

One interviewee considered applying but recognized that as an all-volunteer entity they did not have the capacity to access or utilize the TA assistance, even if it were awarded. This is a significant concern for small, rural, all-volunteer entities who may be most in need of capacity assistance and will be addressed in the Regional Capacity Strategy.

Table 2. Technical Assistance Support for Fire Response Participants in HAF Assessment Phase

TRIBAL/FIRE RESPONSE ENTITY INTERVIEWED	PROJECT	COUNTY	AWARD AMOUNT
Southern Humboldt County Fire Chiefs Assoc.	Develop Administrative Support Position	Humboldt	\$15,000
Trinity Center VFD	North Trinity Lake Wildfire Response Plan	Trinity	\$15,000
Humboldt County PBA	Southern Humboldt Technical Support	Humboldt	\$15,000
Hoopla Fire Safe Council	Strategic Planning & TCWPP development	Humboldt	\$15,000
Briceland VFD	Briceland VFD Wildfire Resilience Project	Humboldt	\$15,000
Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation	Tribal Community Wildfire Protection Plan	Humboldt	\$15,000
Siskiyou PBA	PBA Structure Development	Siskiyou	\$15,000
Kneeland Fire Protection District	Annexation of Goodwill Response Area	Humboldt	\$12,000
Albion-Little River Fire Protection District	Water Storage Tanks for Firefighting	Mendocino	\$15,000
Timber Cove Fire Protection District	Site Planning for Specialized Septic and Water System Upgrade	Sonoma	\$15,000
Leggett Valley FD	TA for Hazardous Fuel Reduction Planning	Mendocino	\$15,000
TOTAL TA AWARDS RESULTING FROM INTERVIEWS			\$162,000

PHASE 2: CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT PLANS AND DIRECT ASSISTANCE FOR TRIBAL FIRE PROTECTION ENTITIES IN HAF REGION

As the results of the Assessment phase showed, a significant limiting factor in realizing the shared vision for regional wildfire resilience is the lack of capacity in local organizations and communities to conduct all the necessary work, including hazardous fuel management in and around communities, home hardening and defensible space, fire prevention, preparedness, and response, and community emergency planning. Local fire protection entities face common challenges, including:

- Difficulty with volunteer recruitment and retention - including aging of current volunteer corps and lack of availability of younger volunteers.
- Difficulty in accessing and paying for training - while training requirements are increasing, local availability of training is inadequate. Accessing the appropriate training requires traveling long distances and is cost and time prohibitive for volunteers.
- Difficulty supporting administrative functions - many entities need grant funding to support their responsibilities, but lack administrative staffing for grant development, administration, and reporting requirements, as well as financial management, staff and volunteer organization, and other organizational requirements.
- Limited planning resources - it is costly and time-intensive to create, update, and maintain response-area maps, fire management plans, and other important planning resources.
- Lack of base funding/capital investments to cover facilities, equipment, communication, fees, insurance and worker's comp, training, etc.

To begin to address the needs and challenges identified in the interviews, NCRP is piloting an approach to providing capacity enhancement support tailored to specific fire response entities. With support from HAF/WRCF, NCRP is piloting this approach with five Tribes and Tribal fire protection entities from within the HAF/WRCF region who participated in the assessment interviews. HAF/WRCF funds prioritize Tribal interviewees because the waiver of Tribal sovereignty is not required for these funds, funding can go to non-federally recognized Tribes, and full expenses can be covered for activities like travel and lodging that state funds may not fully reimburse. Together with leadership from these entities, NCRP staff and consultants are working to develop a detailed plan for addressing the identified capacity needs, as well as providing direct support to alleviate some immediate needs in equipment and training. This pilot allows NCRP to test out and evaluate methods, structures, contracting instruments, plans, tools, and staffing and consultant resources that will inform the regional NCRP Capacity Enhancement Strategy as well as future phases of its implementation. The Strategy will be adaptively updated with lessons learned through this pilot process, so future phases will reflect a refined approach, grown from the foundation described here. This approach is being developed as a test bed with the intention of refining and applying it more broadly across the region, including the other Assessment participants, and expanding to other high-needs and high-priority (based on APPF-guided regional assessments) entities in the region.

For this pilot approach to providing capacity support, NCRP has met with each entity and worked with them to develop a tailored package of capacity support and assistance. This capacity assistance takes two main forms, designed to meet some immediate capacity needs while developing short- and long-term strategies to more fully address all capacity needs identified in the interview: 1) Direct assistance for equipment and training, in the form of a contract between the entity and Humboldt County to advance-pay or reimburse costs (depending on the preference of the recipient); and 2) Planning support, provided via a direct contract between NCRP and one or more consultants selected by the recipient from [NCRP's approved pool of consultants](#) to provide services enumerated in a Scope of Work developed in collaboration with the recipient, and focusing addressing their priorities and developing a strategic plan that addressed funding, personnel/training, equipment, and infrastructure needs. This Capacity Enhancement Plan contains the common elements listed above, tailored for each entity, and can also include other elements from a menu of options, including but not limited to:

- Grant development for specific upcoming RFPs
- Volunteer recruitment and training plan (regular or youth/workforce development)
- Tribal CWPP
- Fire Management Plan
- Defensible space plan
- Spatial planning resources, such as PODS development for service area, other mapping
- Invasive species management plan
- CERT development plan
- Land acquisition plan
- Other elements as requested by recipient.

With \$300,000 for the five pilot projects, recipients were invited to choose how they would prefer to receive the \$60,000 of support allocated to them, with equipment support capped at \$15,000 and training support capped at \$20,000. All recipients chose to receive planning support, in different amounts, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. HAF/WRCF Sub-grantee Allocations - Direct Support & Planning Support

SUB-GRANTEE	DIRECT SUPPORT – VIA CONTRACT WITH HUMBOLDT COUNTY	PLANNING SUPPORT – VIA NCRP TA CONSULTANTS	TOTAL SUPPORT
Tolowa Dee-ni’ Nation	\$15,000 equipment \$10,000 training	\$35,000	\$60,000
Hoopa Fire Department	\$15,000 equipment \$20,000 training	\$25,000	\$60,000
Tsunungwe Tribe	\$0	\$60,000	\$60,000
Yurok Fire Department	\$15,000 equipment \$20,000 training	\$25,000	\$60,000
Hoopa Fire & Rescue	\$15,000 equipment \$20,000 training	\$25,000	\$60,000
TOTAL	\$130,000	\$170,000	\$300,000

DISCUSSION OF IMPLEMENTATION PHASE AND LESSONS LEARNED

- All recipients will be followed up with to evaluate the impact and leverage of these capacity investments. Preliminary lessons learned from the initiation of this pilot implementation phase include:
- All recipients who were offered assistance were eager and grateful to participate in this pilot project. Four out of five recipients chose to receive both direct and planning support. The fifth recipient does not have staffing or capacity to receive and administer direct support, so they chose to receive their full allocation in the form of planning support. Recipients appreciated the flexibility to choose allocations and to be able to receive support in all three high-priority areas: planning (including grant identification and development), training, and equipment.
- All recipients were appreciative of the format of the planning support, which is provided in the form of a contract between NCRP and the chosen consultant. This structure allows the recipient to benefit from the planning support without the administrative burdens of contracting, invoicing, and reporting. Several noted that these burdens can prevent them from seeking or using other seemingly available funding sources which have larger administrative burdens.
- All recipients appreciated the ability to receive direct support either in the form of advance payments, with documentation provided after purchase, or as reimbursements, so that they could choose which type of support best met their needs.
- All recipients were grateful that this private, foundation-based funding could be used to cover a wider range and the full cost of expenses that are generally not fully reimbursable with state grants (i.e., actual cost of lodging, meals, etc. for trainings rather than capped state-reimbursement rates).
- From an administrative perspective, the Humboldt County team suggested that for future collaboration with foundations, direct funding to local recipients from the foundation should be considered as an option for those recipients who find the longer timeline and legal and insurance requirements of the County burdensome. For these assessment and implementation efforts, the NCRP would still develop the assessment tool, conduct the assessments, analyze the results, and develop a strategy for capacity support consistent with the NCRP Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy, but then there would be the option for the selected recipient to receive a grant award directly from the foundation, if the process of entering into a sub-grantee agreement with Humboldt County was determined to be an obstacle. Note that this recommendation does not refer to consultant/planning support, which as noted provides the benefit of assistance to the recipient without administrative requirements via the NCRP TA program.

NEXT STEPS:

IMPLEMENTING THE VISION FOR NORTH COAST RESILIENCE

The HAF/WRCF investment in the capacity of regional fire response entities, along with ongoing support from the RFFC program for vision planning and plan implementation, technical assistance, and regional sub-grants for demonstration, planning, and implementation projects, have together catalyzed this long-term plan to enhance the capacity of Tribes and rural fire response entities in the region. The seed money that HAF has provided for the development of the assessment and the focused pilot implementation project were especially valuable in shaping this trajectory of increased regional capacity support. The immediate next steps NCRP is taking, with support from the RFFC program and other funding sources, include:

- Active development of NCRP Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy (in progress, to be adopted by NCRP's Leadership Council in January 2024). This Strategy will include policies and procedures to allow for the equitable, inclusive, and transparent provision of robust capacity assistance, both to individual entities and at the regional level.
- Implementation of the Strategy with RFFC Round 2 funding (beginning January 2024).
- As an interim step while the above measures are being finalized, NCRP continues to conduct outreach to other interviewees to provide planning support similar to that described here.
- Once the Strategy is developed, NCRP will share it with partners, funders and North Coast communities and request collaborative support in refining the approach.
- Prioritization of investments will consider regional spatial assessments reported in the Vision Plan and ongoing, as well as additional local assessments and interviews to be conducted by NCRP staff and consultants.

Some preliminary components of the NCRP Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy will include:

- A plan for supporting capital investment needs for large equipment and infrastructure, which will need to be addressed via specific capital investment strategies which may require different funding sources from current regional capacity investment funding, which tend to focus on planning and technical assistance. Capacity investment planning is an important part of an overall capacity enhancement strategy for each entity served.
- Continued focus on support for entities most in need of capacity assistance.
- A continuum of capacity support that can raise the capacity of low-capacity entities while continuing to support high-capacity organizations in effectively implementing regional priorities.
- A transparent and equitable process that outlines a trajectory to long-term sustainability, with a focus on "blue sky outcomes" over short-term band-aids or "random acts of funding," while acknowledging that short-term support focused on immediate needs may be an important first or interim step in the development of strategic capacity support.
- Utilization of the approach outlined in the APPF for screening based on regional priorities and needs.
- Robust Tribal support, including support for Tribe-to-Tribe meetings to discuss and identify capacity needs and review and adaptively refine the NCRP Capacity Enhancement Strategy.
- Community engagement and workshops to identify capacity needs and review the draft Strategy and identify gaps via listening sessions and workshops.

- Building a long-term customized program of local capacity support, both for individual entities and for support best provided at the regional level.
- Development of and support for regional efforts, such as a regional training program/training center, regional equipment sharing/support/maintenance efforts, and other efforts identified via community engagement.
- Identification of solutions for organizations that need very basic support to enable them to participate fully in the Strategy's offerings.
- Documentation of project benefit performance measures that ensure that NCRP's programs are effective and achieve high-priority outcomes on the ground and in communities, including evaluation and impact reporting such as:
 - Metrics for evaluating enhancement of capacity.
 - Accessible and transparent reporting via websites, dashboards, and project management tools (i.e., NCRP Project Tracker, NCRP Airtable, etc.).
 - Effectiveness monitoring over the long-term (i.e., follow-up interviews to gauge improvement; collecting other metrics regionally).

CONCLUSION

The investment in interview/assessment and a pilot implementation project by HAF/WRCF was extremely valuable. This investment allowed NCRP to evaluate and quantify specific needs in a sub-region of the wider NCRP region, and to provide data and local expertise to guide the development of a NCRP Capacity Enhancement Strategy for the whole region. It has created the opportunity to engage with and provide preliminary support to fifteen Tribes and rural fire protection entities, addressing some immediate capacity needs while the larger Capacity Enhancement Strategy is being developed. The lessons learned from both the Assessment and Implementation phases of this project will help guide the allocation and use of funds for capacity enhancement that NCRP has been awarded from the RFFC program, \$10 million for 2024-2027.

While all forms of support provided through this project are valuable to the recipients, NCRP finds the Capacity Enhancement Plans particularly valuable, as the depth of the evaluation of capacity needs that these reports document will be useful in developing a comprehensive roll-up of regional capacity enhancement needs as well as the opportunity to evaluate various tools and funding sources for meeting these needs. This process is helping to uncover which needs are entity-specific and/or best provided directly to each entity, and which needs are common and may be best addressed at a regional level, by providing consistent, expert support to multiple entities via a small team of experts (i.e. regional resources for grant writing, admin/fiscal administration, training and workforce development, perhaps via investments in sub-regional training centers, shared equipment, etc.). Lessons learned from both the assessment and pilot implementation phases will be valuable in informing and improving the NCRP Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy, and raising capacity to protect and enhance the safety, health, and well-being of all communities in the region.

Responses to HAF Final Narrative Report Questions can be found in Appendix C.

APPENDIX A: REGIONAL FIRE RESPONSE ENTITIES IDENTIFIED, CONTACTED, AND INTERVIEWED

FIRE RESPONSE ENTITY	STATUS	COUNTY
Del Norte County Fire Safe Council	Interviewed	Del Norte
Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation	Interviewed	Del Norte
Fort Dick Fire Department	Contacted	Del Norte
Klamath Fire Protection District	Contacted	Del Norte
Gasquet Fire Department	Contacted	Del Norte
Smith River Fire Protection District	Contacted	Del Norte
Crescent Fire Protection District		Del Norte
Gasquet Neighbors Helping Neighbors		Del Norte
Resighini Rancheria		Del Norte
Yurok Fire Department	Interviewed	Humboldt
Hoopa Fire Department	Interviewed	Humboldt
Willow Creek VFD	Interviewed	Humboldt
Briceland VFD	Interviewed	Humboldt
Orleans VFD	Interviewed	Humboldt
Hoopa Fire and Rescue	Interviewed	Humboldt
Orick CSD	Interviewed	Humboldt
Lower Trinity PBA	Interviewed	Humboldt
Southern Humboldt Fire Chief's Association	Interviewed	Humboldt
Alderpoint VFD	Contacted	Humboldt
Willow Creek FSC	Contacted	Humboldt
Bridgeville FPD	Contacted	Humboldt
Redway FPD	Contacted	Humboldt
Honeydew Volunteer Fire Company	Contacted	Humboldt
Kneeland Fire Protection District	Contacted	Humboldt
Humboldt County Fire Chief's Association	Contacted	Humboldt
Carlotta VFD	Contacted	Humboldt
Palo Verde VFD	Contacted	Humboldt
Miranda Volunteer Fire Department	Contacted	Humboldt
Whitethorn Fire Protection District	Contacted	Humboldt
Shelter Cove Fire		Humboldt
Loleta VFD		Humboldt
Ruth Lake CSD		Humboldt
Garberville FPD		Humboldt
Ferndale VFD		Humboldt
Humboldt County Prescribed Burn Association		Humboldt

Petrolia Volunteer Fire Department		Humboldt
Blue Lake VFD		Humboldt
Wiyot Tribe		Humboldt
Rio Del VFD		Humboldt
Telegraph Ridge FPD		Humboldt
Bear River Rancheria		Humboldt
Round Valley Tribe	Interviewed	Mendocino
Mendocino County Fire Safe Council	Interviewed	Mendocino
Leggett Valley Fire Department	Interviewed	Mendocino
Whale Gulch VFC	Interviewed	Mendocino
Mendocino Fire Chief's Association	Interviewed	Mendocino
Bell Springs VFD	Interviewed	Mendocino
Piercy VFD	Contacted	Mendocino
Long Valley – Laytonville Fire Department	Contacted	Mendocino
Elk CSD/VFD	Contacted	Mendocino
Covelo Fire	Contacted	Mendocino
Westport Fire	Contacted	Mendocino
Ukiah Valley Fire Authority/Mendocino Fire Chiefs Association	Contacted	Mendocino
Comptche Volunteer Fire Department		Mendocino
Redwood Valley-Calpella Fire District		Mendocino
Brooktrails Township Fire Department		Mendocino
Anderson Valley Fire Department		Mendocino
Albion-Little River Fire Protection District		Mendocino
Mendocino FPD/VFD		Mendocino
Potter Valley Fire		Mendocino
Redwood Coast FPD		Mendocino
Fort Bragg Fire Protection Authority/Rural Fire District		Mendocino
South Coast FPD		Mendocino
Hopland Fire Protection District		Mendocino
Little Lake Fire District		Mendocino
Mendocino County Prescribed Burn Association		Mendocino
Whale Gulch FSC		Mendocino
Pit River Tribe	Interviewed	Modoc
Siskiyou PBA	Interviewed	Siskiyou
Seiad Valley Fire Department	Interviewed	Siskiyou
Hornbrook FPD	Interviewed	Siskiyou
Fort Jones Fire Department	Contacted	Siskiyou
Tulelake VFD/ Tulelake Multi County Fire Protection District	Contacted	Siskiyou
Quartz Valley Indian Reservation	Contacted	Siskiyou

Karuk Tribe DNR	Contacted	Siskiyou
Happy Camp Fire Protection District	Contacted	Siskiyou
Salmon River Volunteer Fire and Rescue	Contacted	Siskiyou
Klamath River Fire Company	Contacted	Siskiyou
Copco Lake Fire Department	Contacted	Siskiyou
Hilt-Colestin Rural Fire District	Contacted	Siskiyou
Pleasant Valley Fire Zone	Contacted	Siskiyou
Dorris Fire Department	Contacted	Siskiyou
Grenada Fire Protection District		Siskiyou
Butte Valley Fire Protection District		Siskiyou
Gazelle VFD		Siskiyou
Montague Fire Department		Siskiyou
Weed Fire Department		Siskiyou
Scott Valley Fire Protection District		Siskiyou
Etna Fire Department		Siskiyou
Mid Klamath Watershed Council/ Orleans - Somes Bar FSC		Siskiyou
Timber Cove FPD	Interviewed	Sonoma
Northern Sonoma Coast FPD	Interviewed	Sonoma
Fort Ross Volunteer Fire Department	Contacted	Sonoma
Cloverdale Fire Protection District		Sonoma
Cazadero Community Services District		Sonoma
Bodega Fire Department		Sonoma
Monte Rio Fire Protection District		Sonoma
Sonoma County Fire District		Sonoma
Graton Fire Protection District		Sonoma
Occidental Fire Department		Sonoma
Northern Sonoma County Fire		Sonoma
Gold Ridge Fire Protection District		Sonoma
Forestville FPD		Sonoma
Coffee Creek VFD	Interviewed	Trinity
Hayfork FD	Interviewed	Trinity
Salyer VFD	Interviewed	Trinity
Southern Trinity VFD	Interviewed	Trinity
Tsnungwe Tribe	Interviewed	Trinity
Post Mountain VFD	Interviewed	Trinity
Trinity Center VFD	Interviewed	Trinity
Trinity County OES	Interviewed	Trinity
Weaverville FD	Contacted	Trinity
Hawkins Bar VFD	Contacted	Trinity

Junction City VFD	Contacted	Trinity
Trinity County Fire Safe Council	Contacted	Trinity
Nor Rel Muk Wintu	Contacted	Trinity
Trinity County Fire Chief's Association	Contacted	Trinity
Douglas City VFD		Trinity
Lewiston VFD		Trinity
Hyampom VFD		Trinity
Downriver Fire		Trinity
Zenia-Kettenpom Fire		Trinity
American Red Cross: Trinity, Del Norte, and Humboldt Counties	Interviewed	

APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please select your organization type:

ORGANIZATION TYPE	X
Tribally Chartered Fire Department (Career and Natural Resources and VFDs)	
Tribe	
Fire related special district (Fire Protection District, Community Services District, County Service Area, Resort Improvement District, etc. serving specific communities including reservations and rancherias)	
City or county fire protection agency or JPA involving a city or county	
Volunteer or community fire protection entity/organization (non-district fire companies, etc. serving specific communities including reservations and rancherias)	
Resource Conservation District (RCD)	
Fire Safe Council (local and countywide)/Firewise Community/other types of Fire Adapted Community	
Prescribed Burn Association	
Cultural Fire Practitioner (i.e. the Cultural Fire Management Council)	
Fire Chiefs' Association	
Other non-governmental organization or collaborative (please describe)	

2. What communities does your entity serve? Are any of these communities considered vulnerable or economically disadvantaged? *Output: number of entities serving disadvantaged communities*
3. What is the size of your coverage area? *Output: average and range of entities' coverage area and response area sizes*
- ° For fire related special districts, does your response area match your jurisdictional boundary? What is the size of your response area?
4. Do you have an organizational charter or articles of incorporation, guiding principles, constitution, Standard Operating Guidelines, by-laws, shared service agreements? May we have a copy? Or can we cite? *Output: Number of entities with guiding or formational documents and number that would like assistance developing one*
- ° If no, what would be required to develop one?
 - ° Would you like assistance for this? (NCRP could provide personnel and a template via TA that would support our regional plan)

5. Do you have a strategic plan, work plan, or action plan such as CWPP? May we have a copy? (Consultants to review plans in advance and share what they have gleaned) *Outputs: Number of entities with a strategic plan and number that would like assistance developing one*
 - If yes, please describe your plan including when it was prepared, your planning timeframe, when it was last updated, and its effectiveness.
 - If no, what would be required to develop one?
 - Would you like assistance to develop a strategic plan or enhance your existing plan? (NCRP could provide personnel and a template via TA that would support our regional plan)
6. Do you have cooperative relationships, formal or otherwise, with neighboring organizations where you share or add to your capacity, resources, capabilities, or responsibilities? If so, which entities do you have relationships with? Please describe. *Output: number of cooperative relationships*
7. Scope of Work
 - What is the focus of your organization? *Output: number/percent of entities engaged in work in each focus area*
 - Community or forest fire protection
 - Forest health
 - Vegetation management and/or fire resilience,
 - Community emergency/disaster response/preparation/education
 - Regional/community coordination relating to the above
 - Other (please describe)
 - What are your organization's top three priorities in the near term (1-3 years) and the long term (4-10 years)? *Output: Most common categories of priorities (equipment, funding, staff/volunteer recruitment/retention, etc.)*
 - What tasks is your organization responsible for conducting, how often do you undertake them, and what do they require (personnel or other costs)? (Examples: Home hardening, fuel reduction program, etc.) Difficult to quantify
 - Are there other tasks that are needed in your community/service area, but are outside your scope of work? If yes, is another entity currently undertaking or planning to undertake these tasks? Difficult to quantify
 - If applicable: What is a typical number of emergency service calls that you respond to annually? *Output: average and range of number of calls; average proportion of call categories*

CATEGORY	AVERAGE # OF CALLS
EMS/Traffic Collisions	
Structure Fire	
Wildland Fire	
Other	

8. Base Funding

- Context: NCRP and partners continue to hear that volatile, short term, and insufficient funding are barriers to success and sustainability. We are interested in understanding the level of long-term base funding that will allow your entity to execute its responsibilities
- Do you currently receive any base funding (regular or ongoing stable annual funding)? If so, how much?
Outputs: Average and range of current base funding needed
- What have COVID-19 impacts been on this base funding?
- What are the top three annual expenditures for which base funding is used? *Output: most common large expenditures for fire resilience entities*
- What are your current sources of base funding? What other sources of base funding would you like to develop? (Note that there is an opportunity to provide more detailed information about this in the written survey)
- What percentage of annual base funding is derived from federal wildlands fire reimbursements? What percentage of base funding is derived from CalFire reimbursements? Any comments on reimbursement processes or rates?
- What is the absolute minimum base funding (bare bones) needed to support existing foundational functions and operations? *Outputs: Average and range of minimum base funding needed; average shortfall between bare bones funding and current funding*
- What amount of sustainable base funding would support your entity in achieving its goals or plans (blue sky)? *Outputs: Average and range of sustainable base funding needed; average shortfall between sustainable funding and current funding*
- What is an appropriate duration of base funding to ensure stability and sustainable operations? Why is this duration important? *Output: duration of base funding preferred by fire response entities*
 1. 1 year
 2. 2-4 years
 3. 5-9 years
 4. 10 years or more
- What reporting standards and outcomes would you expect to be held to if you received base funding (e.g. for special taxes and assessments)? *Difficult to quantify*
- What are the key tasks to be achieved in each of the above?
- Is there a grant writer on your team? Is this grant writer a volunteer or paid consultant? What is the annual percentage of funding received attributable to grants? *Outputs: number of interviewees that have grant writing capacity; percentage of annual funding from grants*

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9. Equipment and Infrastructure

- ° What additional equipment or infrastructure does your entity need to fulfill its goals and/or responsibilities? (Note that there is an opportunity to provide more detailed information about this in the written survey) *Output: types of equipment most needed by entities*

EQUIPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE	NEED?
Water equipment	
Fire Engines	
Hand Tools	
PPE	
Heavy equipment (e.g. chippers, masticators, etc.)	
Communication equipment	
Other (Please specify)	

- ° Does the fire station have:

1. Potable water
2. A working kitchen
3. Generator/Back-up energy supply
4. Internet

10. Personnel/Experience

- ° How many active staff/members does your organization have? How many are: full time, part time, seasonal, volunteer, or other (please specify)? *Output: average number of staff and volunteers*

CATEGORY	NUMBER OR FTE
Full-Time	
Part-Time	
Seasonal	
Volunteer	
Other (please specify)	

11. Please indicate the capacities your entity currently has and would like to develop: (Note that there is an opportunity to provide more detailed information about this in the written survey) *Output: most common capacities that entities currently have and want to add or enhance*

CATEGORY	WE HAVE CAPACITY IN THIS AREA	WE WANT TO ADD OR ENHANCE CAPACITY IN THIS AREA	WE DO NOT NEED CAPACITY IN THIS AREA
Firefighting			
Fuel Load Reduction			
Home Hardening			
Prescribed and/or Cultural Fire			
Forest Stewardship & Restoration			
Post-Fire Recovery			
Planning			
Administrative and Fiscal Management			
Permitting and Regulatory Compliance			
Other (please describe)			

12. Is recruitment and/or retention of staff/volunteers a challenge for your entity? If so, what are the barriers? What approaches does your entity use (or have used in the past) for recruitment and retention? *Output: number of entities for which recruitment or retention are a challenge*

13. Training

- What training is required to do your work (e.g. NFPA/CICCS/NWCG/OSFM/Cal FIRE requirements or certifications)? Do you require that all personnel have minimum certifications? *Difficult to quantify*
- What is the frequency and personnel allocation of training (e.g. X different trainings for # of trainees per year)? *Output: average number of trainings per month or year*
- Does your organization have the capacity to train others? *Output: number of entities with the capacity to train others*
- What training does your organization need? *Difficult to quantify*
- What are the barriers to accessing training? What are other costs associated with training? *Outputs: most common barriers and costs to accessing training*

14. Needs and Challenges

- What are your biggest capacity challenges? (open ended, interviewer will ask for more detail as needed, or prompt from a list: stable funding, personnel, administrative systems, equipment, infrastructure) *Outputs: most common capacity challenges mentioned*
- What are the barriers to deploying your current capacity - e.g. regulatory, etc. *Difficult to quantify*

15. Programmatic Approaches: What are some approaches to capacity development in other regions that you think NCRP should consider? (Example: [Marin Chipper Program](#)) *Difficult to quantify*
16. Projects (use Project Tracker to fill out; build on existing lists and add to them; promote TA):
- Concept
 - Pending – need TA
 - Pending – waiting on funding
 - In progress
 - Complete
 - O&M
 - Monitoring
 - Blue sky long term
17. Does your organization need technical assistance to fulfill its responsibilities and/or meet its stated goals? If so, in which categories? *Output: Most common types of TA needed by entities*
- Adapting to changing demographics
 - Adapting to climate impacts
 - Staff/volunteer recruitment and retention
 - Funding development
 - Facilities, equipment and apparatus
 - Succession planning
 - Interoperability
 - Strategic planning
 - Permitting and regulatory compliance (e.g. CEQA/NEPA)
 - Project design and planning
 - Mapping and spatial analysis
 - Financial management
 - Other (please describe)
18. Do you see opportunities for new or enhanced regional collaboration that would help you or other organizations better achieve desired objectives? Would it be helpful for an outside organization to assist with discussions or planning regarding regional collaboration? *Difficult to quantify*
19. What other questions should we be asking that will help the NCRP understand regional and local capacity?
20. Is there anything else you wish to share?
21. Who else should we be talking to? (see list of prospective interviewees)

APPENDIX C – HAF/WRCF FINAL REPORT NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN THE NARRATIVE REPORT:

1. How has this grant made a difference to your organization and its ability to serve the community?

This grant 1) provided critical seed funding to develop and conduct capacity assessments of fire response entities in the North Coast region; 2) provided critical implementation funding for capacity support for five Tribes, as well as the opportunity for NCRP to pilot a larger regional approach to regional capacity support; 3) provided capacity support that was robust and flexible enough to cover full costs for training rather than being limited to state reimbursement rates; 4) provided direct support to Tribes without requiring a waiver of Tribal sovereignty if they did not wish to include one; and 5) provided critical lessons learned to support the development of the NCRP Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy.

2. What are 1-3 key learnings your organization had about growing and strengthening capacity for fire response work? How have things evolved for the organization over the grant period?

NCRP learned that the need for growing and strengthening capacity is significant for all fire response entities, particularly the many Tribal and rural fire response entities that rely on volunteers. The many specific types of needs identified are detailed in this report, but perhaps most significantly, NCRP found that there are many barriers to accessing currently available support and/or grant funding, including the fact that fire chiefs and volunteers do not have the time or expertise to apply for grants, handle the fiscal, administrative, and reporting requirements of grants, or hire and manage consultants to assist with this work. This renders available support out of reach for many. In addition to increasing the level of support available for regional fire response entities, an effective capacity strategy must address these barriers to accessing and benefiting from available and future support.

During this grant period NCRP has recognized the increasingly urgent need for a comprehensive, accessible, and transparent region-wide approach to providing capacity support, which it is developing into the NCRP Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy.

3. What information would you like the field of philanthropy, our communities and the region to know about this work and your organization?

NCRP would like to recognize the value of the flexible support provided by private philanthropy as a complement to public support provided by state and federal agencies. The flexibility in the timeline and the flexibility in the ability to tailor assistance to identified needs, rather than meet a pre-determined set of program priorities allowed this help to be offered when, where, and how it was most useful to sub-grantees and recipients of assistance.

QUESTIONS FOR SUB-GRANTEES TO ADDRESS IN THEIR NARRATIVE REPORTS:

1. *What was most important to subgrantees about their ability to do capacity building work through this grant?*
2. *What were the results of those capacity building efforts?*
3. *What opportunities, partnerships or barriers did they experience along the way?*
4. *How did these efforts impact their ability to serve the community?*
5. *What is needed to continue growing their successes or removing barriers to strengthening capacity?*
6. *What do they want the field of philanthropy and our community to know about their work and how to support it?*

Sub-grantee agreements are in progress as of this writing. NCRP will be able to address these questions once the assistance in the sub-grant agreements and planning support consultant contracts have been implemented.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is your vision for fire resilience in the next ten years?

NCRP's vision for fire resilience is described in detail in the Strategies section of the [Vision for North Coast Resilience](#). Outcomes from implementing this vision include:

- Capacity – Local and regional capacity expanded and maintained to improve watershed and community resilience.
- Fire Resilient Forests – Resilient and healthy forests resulting from increased pace, scope, and scale of landscape-level treatments focuses on hazardous fuel load reduction and beneficial fire, and the revitalization of local Indigenous knowledge and practice.
- Community Health and Safety – Local communities safer from wildfire and other extreme events with a focus on equity and enhancing the resilience of vulnerable populations.
- Ecosystem Conservation and Restoration – North Coast ecosystems protected, restored, revitalized, and stewarded to enhance function and increase resilience.
- Climate Action – Nature-based solutions applied to reduce and avoid emissions, sequester and store carbon, and adapt and build resilience to climate change and extreme events.

The plan contains 38 Solutions and over 300 Actions to advance this vision.

2. What are key systems evolutions needed to strengthen regional fire response and resilience?

A lack of capacity constrains the ability of all communities, including Tribes, private landowners, local agencies, and community-based organizations (CBOs), to achieve the long-term goals of community health and safety, resilient forests and watersheds, and a vibrant economy. This lack of capacity is evident wherever you look: planners lack data and analytic tools; organizations lack backbone capacity to sustain the work; funding is short-term, volatile, and project-based; local businesses struggle to access contracts; project permitting can be expensive and time-consuming.

And, at the core, there is a fundamental lack of human capacity. Despite investments in and calls for an increased workforce, significantly more resources are spent on fire suppression than on building a robust stewardship economy supporting year-round work for residents. There is so much work to be done, at all levels, but there is a lack of well-paying, career track, and pensioned employment to support a robust local workforce. Instead, outside of federal and state agencies, this work is mainly done by nonprofits, community organizations, volunteers, and field workers who see only a limited pathway to viable careers that can sustain communities and families. Workforce development efforts should seek to uphold fair labor standards for forest workers, particularly workers dealing with hazardous or precarious conditions.

In order to build healthy and resilient communities and ecosystems, we need data and analytic tools to support planning and adaptive management, a strong collaborative infrastructure to support the development and implementation of a shared vision, capacity – in the form of well-paying, career track, and pensioned employment for a local workforce – to implement that vision, policies that incentivize use of the local workforce and maintain local revenue, long-term funding, and test beds where innovative ideas can be tried, and successes shared, scaled up, and implemented throughout the region. Funding and capacity support should build multi-benefit projects that leave no one behind as we work together to forge a shared vision of a climate-resilient future for the North Coast region.

Forests in the North Coast Region face multiple stressors, including uncharacteristic large wildfires, droughts, pests and diseases, invasive species, and land use changes, including increased development in the WUI. Forest management during the colonial era, including more than a century of fire exclusion, as well as climate change, have exacerbated these problems. At the ecosystem scale, these stressors are leading to the loss and conversion of forest land and loss of the many ecosystem services provided by healthy forests.

Restoring healthy and resilient forests requires a profound change in how forests are managed. The right tools must be applied at the right time and place, by the array of entities in the region with experience and responsibilities in wildfire management. Tribes should be supported in reinstating Indigenous land stewardship strategies, including cultural burning. All landowners and land managers, public and private, should be supported in applying adaptive management to restore fire frequency and reduce hazardous fuel loads over the long term. In order to do so, it is imperative to increase local capacity, including a cadre of well-equipped and trained natural resources professionals who will steward the land, with short- and long-term use of vegetation management, beneficial fire, and the increased use of managed fire for resource benefits.

3. How are Tribal fire response and resilience efforts influencing the region? What supports this and how can we nurture that? What are barriers getting in the way of that influence and what is needed to remove those?

The Tribes and Tribal communities in the region share the needs of many rural communities, including the need for local capacity – personnel, equipment, infrastructure, and other resources – to carry out ecosystem and community resilience work. California Tribes also face unique challenges that extend from first contact to current barriers that discourage and often prohibit Tribes and Tribal members from employing traditional stewardship strategies, from engaging in collaborative work, and from developing capacity. There is now an urgent need to support and rebuild Tribal CBO and community capacity to engage in these cultural practices

to correct the legacy environmental issues created by their suppression. There must be a significant increase in local, well-equipped, and trained personnel for land stewardship, including beneficial fire and the practices and activities that are applied before, during, and after the use of fire.

Building Tribal capacity includes building capacity for rapid fire response by qualified firefighters with access to the appropriate equipment to extinguish or begin to contain a large fire as additional resources are being dispatched to the incident. This immediate response to community and wildland fires that start within and adjacent to the WUI can help fill community protection needs that federal and state agencies may not have the resources to address, due to capacity limitations or due to multiple competing wildfire events that draw resources to other areas. Having local fire response capacity can help to reduce the frequency and scale at which extreme wildfire events affect communities in the region.

Each Tribe has a unique set of needs to develop and sustain their capacity to apply Indigenous knowledge and practices, including TEK, locally and on the needed larger scale. Support is needed for both near and long-term capacity building and for long-term strategy implementation to provide services for the entire region and to provide sustainable careers for local community members. To carry out ecosystem and community resilience work, Tribes need support to build capacity so that each Tribe can dedicate staff, leadership, and community knowledge holders to restore Tribal stewardship strategies, apply regional Tribal science, and for local Tribal people to apply TEK to the land and to carry out ecosystem and community resilience work. North Coast Tribes need adequate opportunities to meet, discuss, and develop shared priorities related to community, ecosystem, and watershed resilience.

Tribal capacity needs assessments must be led by Tribes, must be respectful of Tribal sovereignty, and must ask questions that are applicable to Tribal communities. Thus, NCRP will support Tribes in evaluating and filling Tribal capacity needs. The NCRP Director of Tribal Engagement and the Tribal Technical Assistance team work intimately with Tribes in the region seeking opportunities for inter-Tribal collaboration and developing Tribally-led programs to support regional Tribal capacity building and to support North Coast Tribes in the application of Tribal stewardship strategies.

To ensure success of community and ecosystem resilience efforts on all lands in the region, Tribal members, with coordination by regional Tribes, must be an integral part of the year-round trained workforce for fuel management, forest and community restoration and revitalization, firefighting, and other core activities. Tribal crews should lead and conduct most of the work in Tribal communities and are integral to the stewardship of their ancestral lands.

4. What is the role of regional partnerships in strengthening Tribal and organizational capacity for fire response and resilience? How can those opportunities be nurtured?

[AB 642](#) (2021) mandates development of a proposal for a Prescribed Fire Training Center in California. To expand the impact of a central training center, [California's Strategic Plan for Expanding the Use of Beneficial Fire](#), Key Action 1.1 encourages the use of regional satellite sites for live fire training. The North Coast, with its rich community of fire practitioners and leaders, offers many potential training center locations. For example, the mid-Klamath offers an ideal site for training on cultural and community-based burning, working in conjunction with local Tribes, the [Indigenous Peoples' Burning Network](#), the [Cultural Fire Management Council](#), the [Mid Klamath Watershed Council](#), and other local partners. A second regional site in southern Mendocino or northern Sonoma County that would support training focused on these regional landscapes and vegetation patterns could be developed by a consortium of regional Tribes and/or could build off the experience and

efforts of [Fire Forward](#) and the [Good Fire Alliance](#). Many other opportunities for training sites or logistical hubs exist throughout the North Coast region, including locations with the [Humboldt PBA](#) and [Trinity Integrated Fire Management Partnership](#). Tribes can be valuable leaders and partners in developing these regional centers, partnering in land acquisition, design engineering, and construction and potential funding through federal Tribal programs. Tribes have been discussing the required features of such centers for many years. These features include incorporation of community resilience facilities and training centers that offer courses that are Tribally led, driven by local Indigenous knowledge and practices that incorporates TEK, contain workforce housing similar to a Type 3 fire camp, and offer tool and equipment resource sharing. Smaller field-based satellite facilities would reduce travel time and make resources more accessible to remote, rural communities. Local training centers and programs would be tailored to reflect local ecosystems and would be a place for Tribes to train local workforces on regional ecological stewardship.

At the community scale, PBAs are now being launched throughout the state as a way for landowners, community members, NGO partners, local fire services, and others to use prescribed fire in their communities. The Nature Conservancy's [Fire Learning Network](#) has been leading [Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges](#), or TREX, since 2008. This internationally recognized training model has resulted in thousands of people from all backgrounds being trained in prescribed fire use. The Watershed Center has worked with TREX, CAL FIRE, and USFS Region 5 leadership to develop California TREX (Cal-TREX). Cal-TREX events focus on increasing the local capacity of agency and community fire practitioners and PBAs throughout the state. Many TREX trainings have happened throughout the North Coast since the first TREX in 2012, with the Klamath TREX providing annual fire trainings for the past eight years and training over 600 participants in prescribed and cultural fire. PBAs, TREX, and Cal-TREX trainings should be expanded throughout the North Coast region, providing an accessible and flexible complement to the development of brick-and-mortar training centers.

NCRP has been supporting Tribally led prescribed fire trainings starting in September 2023 and plans to expand these offerings as part of the Regional Capacity Enhancement Plan. Additional funding for this effort from a private/philanthropic source would be helpful in order to cover the full cost of participating in trainings or bringing trainers to the area to host multi-Tribe trainings.

5. What key opportunities are coming up to support regional fire resilience? What is needed to most effectively leverage those opportunities?

Key opportunities supporting regional fire resilience include the myriad Tribal, federal, state and philanthropic funding sources focused on this topic. The most important factor in allowing effective leveraging of opportunities is to know who needs what, when, and where – in other words, strategic, comprehensive needs assessments so that opportunities can be pursued in the most effective and efficient manner, meeting the highest needs in the most direct way, over the long term, thereby avoiding “random acts of funding.”

To effectively leverage upcoming opportunities, particularly time-sensitive opportunities, it is important to have positive relationships in place and trust built in order to quickly act on opportunities. It is also important to have policies, procedures, and contracting mechanisms in place, including procedures for soliciting, reviewing, and approving sub-grant agreements, prioritizing projects, and providing technical assistance.

6. Do you have feedback on how these funds were disbursed and how HAF could be more supportive of your work?

As noted in the Discussion of the Implementation Phase (above), from an administrative perspective, the Humboldt County team suggested that for future collaboration with foundations, direct funding to local recipients from the foundation should be considered as an option for those recipients who find the longer timeline and legal and insurance requirements of the County burdensome. For these assessment and implementation efforts, the NCRP would still develop the assessment tool, conduct the assessments, analyze the results, and develop a strategy for capacity support consistent with the NCRP Regional Capacity Enhancement Strategy, but then there would be the option for the selected recipient to receive a grant award directly from the foundation, if the process of entering into a sub-grantee agreement with Humboldt County was determined to be an obstacle. Note that this recommendation does not refer to consultant/planning support, which as noted provides the benefit of assistance to the recipient without administrative requirements via the NCRP TA program.

Also, in terms of grant timelines, when working with rural, economically challenged, or historically underrepresented fire response entities, timelines must consider the fact that respondents may have foundational capacity challenges, may be unavailable, predictably, at certain times of the year, and, unpredictably, any time. Grant deadlines that coincide with or follow fire seasons are more challenging to meet, and project schedules should plan for any engagement with fire response entity staff to take place outside of the late summer/fall season.

The flexibility of what this funding could support was extremely helpful, particularly the fact that sub-grants to Tribes did not require a waiver of sovereignty, if the Tribe did not wish to have one, as state grants often do. Also, the fact that full expenses can be covered rather than state travel/lodging reimbursement rates was particularly attractive. These are very helpful features to retain in future funding opportunities.