



National Institute of
BUILDING SCIENCES™

TURBOGRANTS SURVEY REPORT

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FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We know from the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) research report, Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves, pre-disaster mitigation strategies pay dividends. The study estimated that public-sector investment in mitigation since 1995 by FEMA, EDA, and HUD cost the country \$27 billion but will ultimately save \$160 billion, meaning \$6 saved per \$1 invested. With the rising number of natural disasters, more than ever, communities are relying on these key sources to better prepare for risks.

In a GAO (Government Accountability Office) report published in February 2021, the GAO suggested that FEMA should take additional steps to streamline hazard mitigation grants and assess program effects. This study was developed with the same vision by the industry leaders convened by the NIBS Multi-Hazard Mitigation Council, taking a broader look on how we may best assist to align the supply and needs, to provide the tools and assistance to streamline the process across government agencies, and assist the underrepresented and vulnerable communities who need this the most.

We thank our colleagues and friends who helped NIBS distribute the survey, including:

- Melissa Roberts and Emmie Mediate at American Flood Coalition (AFC)
- Pamela Williams at BuildStrong Coalition
- Trina Sheets at National Emergency Management Association (NEMA)
- Jack Morgan at National Association of Counties (NACo)
- Lori Peek at Natural Hazards Center (NHC)
- Kristen Petersen and Jennifer Hitzke at National Institute of Building Sciences
- Elizabeth Armstrong and Dawn Shiley at International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)
- Genevieve Moran at The Association of State Floodplain Management (ASFPM)
- Mathew Sanders and Sarah Edwards at The Pew Charitable Trusts

NIBS looks forward to continued work with you and all stakeholders to build a more resilient nation.

Lakisha A. Woods, CAE

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1. Introduction

The Multi-Hazard Mitigation Council (MMC) initiated an effort to develop a centralized inventory of hazard mitigation resources, called the National Mitigation Resource Portal (NMRP). The portal aims to enhance community resilience by convening and streamlining mitigation efforts across government and private sector entities. This effort will address these challenges identified by the MMC:

- Difficulties finding existing hazard mitigation resources (like federal grants)
- Technical challenges, limited staff, and strained resources for state and local jurisdictions to successfully apply for federal mitigation grants, especially for underrepresented communities
- Barriers to hazard mitigation investments, both public assistance and private investment, need to be identified and reduced
- Better inform elected officials and decision-makers on mitigation investment

The portal framework includes three modules. Module 1 on Federal TurboGrants aims to help jurisdictions jump-start mitigation projects and improve applicants' capacity to apply for federal grants by reducing difficulties and finding existing hazard mitigation resources and technical assistance. Module 2 is to leverage private sector investment¹ and potentially help the cost share required by many federal grant programs, and Module 3 focuses on education and engagement.

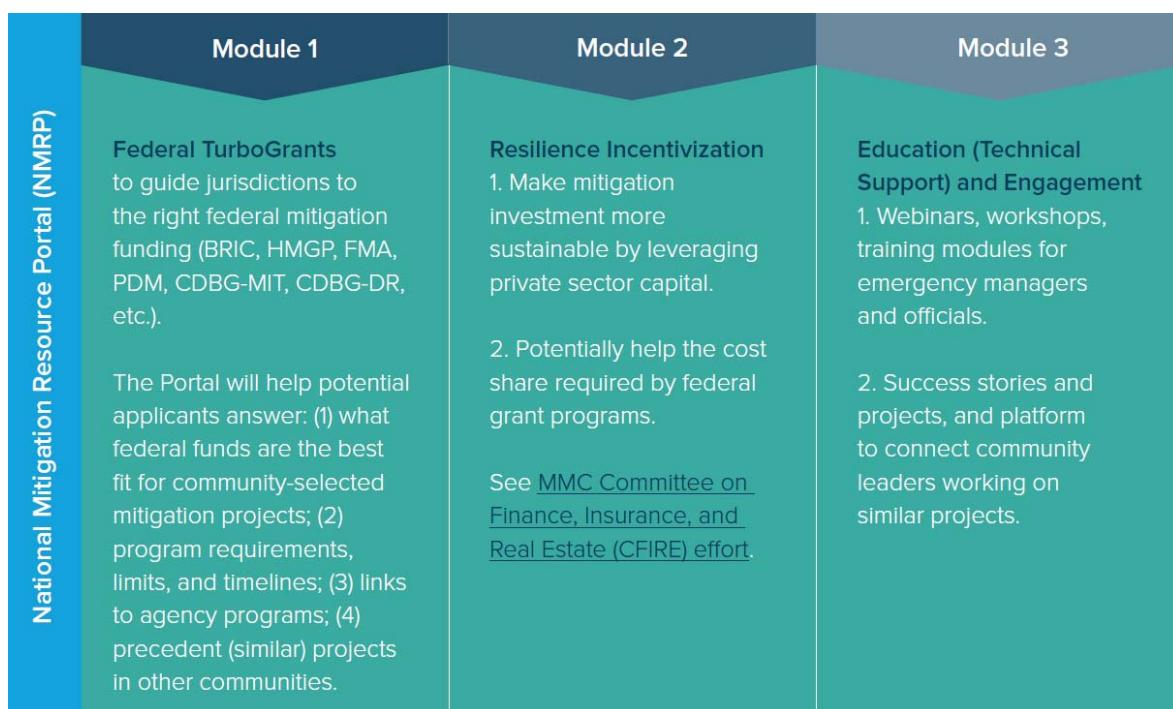


Figure 1: Framework of the MMC National Mitigation Resource Portal

¹ https://www.nibs.org/files/pdfs/NIBS_MMC_CFIRe_2-pager.pdf

The MMC conducted a national survey to solicit feedback from potential portal users to make sure this portal would include the most relevant and useful information to help officials bring mitigation projects to fruition. The survey primarily focused on Module 1 on Federal TurboGrants, and this report summarizes some of the key findings in four areas:

- Survey respondents
- Current practices and barriers to applying for mitigation grants
- Needs and potential users of the National Mitigation Resource Portal
- Portal's key features to aid decision-making

2. Survey Respondents

The survey was distributed to NIBS membership and more broadly through contacts with the American Flood Coalition (AFC), BuildStrong Coalition, National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), National Association of Counties (NACo), Natural Hazards Center (NHC), International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), the Association of State Floodplain Management (ASFPM), and The Pew Charitable Trusts.

- NIBS received over 400 responses from 48 states (no responses from New Mexico and Vermont), plus responses from the District of Columbia, Federated States of Micronesia, and Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. See [Figure 1](#) for more details.
- Most of the respondents are Emergency Managers (30%), followed with State Agency Representatives (21%), Private Consulting (13%), and City Agency Representatives (9%). Other professions include private non-profit, chief resilience officer, elected official, tribal agency representative, building owner, state hazard mitigation officer, academic, etc. See [Figure 3](#) for more details.

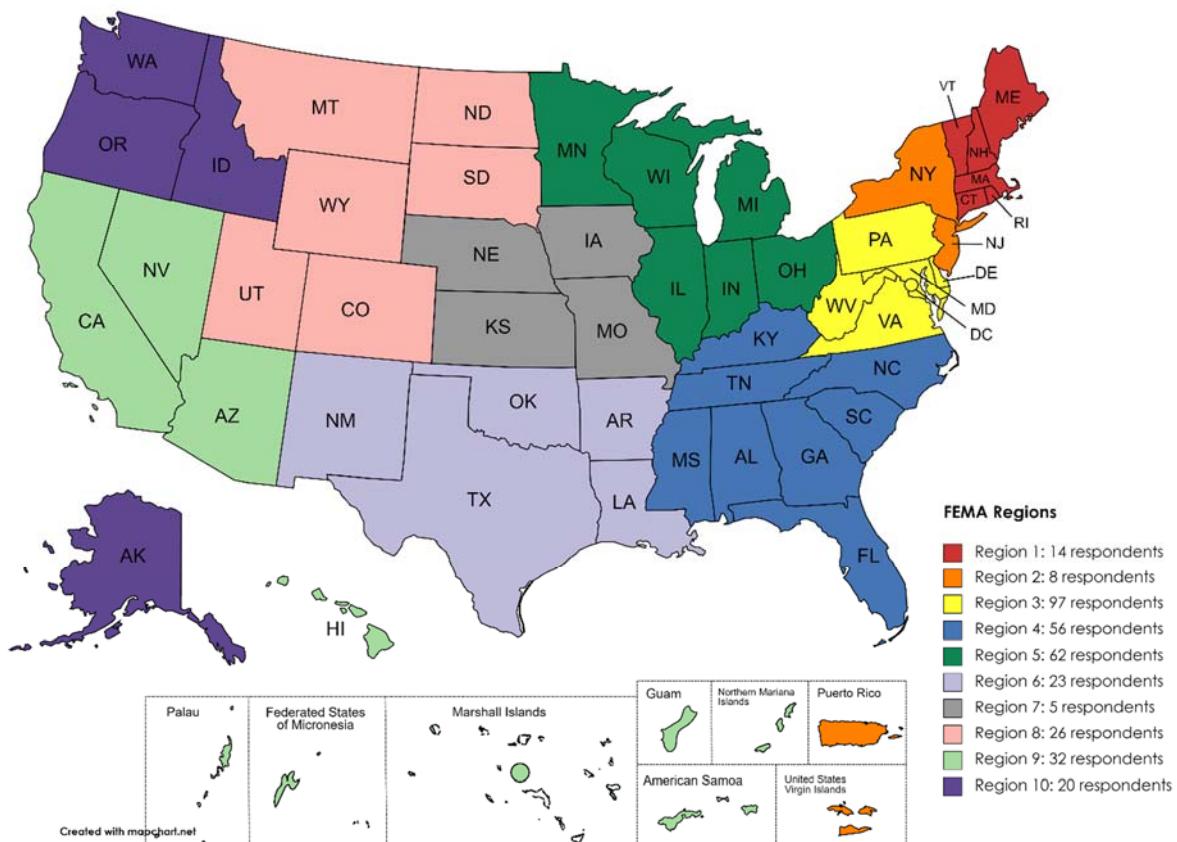


Figure 2: Response to "What state or U.S. territory do you primarily work?"

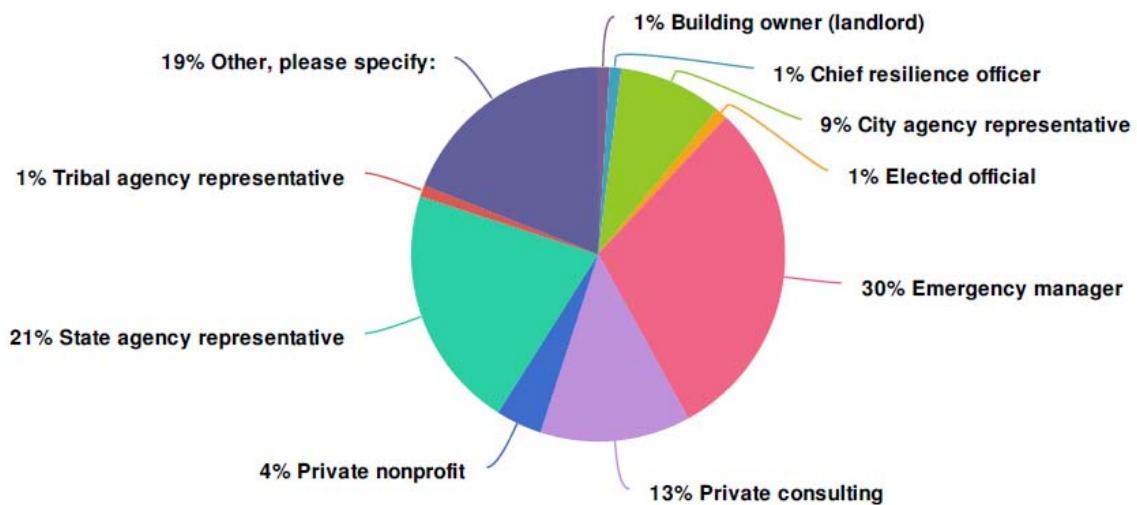


Figure 3: Response to "Which of the following best describes your profession"

Note: Other professions specified by the respondents are state hazard mitigation officer, trade association, a federal agency providing building management services to other federal agencies, academic, academic/sea grant/extension, building commissioner, building director, building manager / facilities manager, construction service provider, county agency, county flood control hydrologist, county flood manager, county planner, county planning & zoning director, county planning administrator, county planning director, county planning official, county stormwater engineer, county zoning & floodplain admin. and CRS coordinator, county floodplain manager, county representative, design engineer, EM specialist, education, emergency management planner, FEMA reservist, energy manager, federal agency architect, federal government, federal partner, federal agency, federal agency sustainability manager, floodplain administrator, floodplain administrator/planner for Matanuska-Susitna borough (Alaska), floodplain specialist, fusion center, government SME, HSEEP exercise planner, healthcare administration, hospital administrator cum nodal officer of medical college, insurance sales flood, law enforcement, NAVFAC, non-profit organization, non-profit emergency management, professor, project manager, regional agency, regional entity, regional government representative, regulatory inspector, researcher, standards development organization, state planner, statewide interoperability coordinator, student, sustainability coordinator, USDA buildings & infrastructure SME - rural development, county planner, federal government analyst, floodplain manager, governmental, instructor, local government floodplain official, local government staff, professor, and university extension specialist.

3. Current practices and barriers in mitigation grants applications

The survey was designed with a series of questions to understand current practice and barriers, like how they may begin a mitigation projects, where they may search for funding, difficulties they encountered, and experiences of obtaining funding to meet federal cost requirements.

- **Start of a project:** Mitigation projects may be initiated in many different ways. Based on the survey, mitigation projects are most commonly, about 42%, initiated by referring to a local hazard mitigation/emergency plan. About 40% respondents suggest they would start with an idea for mitigation projects then search for funding (project/need oriented); as comparison, 15% suggest would find a funding resource first then build a project around it (funding oriented). About 18% respondents suggest they would develop projects jointly with their State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO). See [Figure 4](#).
- **Initial funding search:** The top three resources that respondents rely on are: state, tribal, or territorial government offices (60%), internet (50%), and colleagues, word of mouth (35%). See [Figure 5](#).
- **Barriers:** Among all the shared difficulties, the top three are technical challenges (like conducting benefit-cost analysis) (47%), don't have time/resources to pursue (37%), and can't find a match for cost share requirement (33%). Other barriers also have received at least 25% or higher votes, including grant deadline does not coincide with projects, too little precedent examples, don't know where to begin, and oo many places to search. See [Figure 6](#). Other comments include:
 - Eligibility standards are broad and not always helpful when trying to determine which funding source is best for a project
 - Federal agencies don't work together and often cancel each other out
 - Application process is not clear, too long, complex and burdensome in many cases
 - Higher HQ budget constraints and approval process
 - Small rural communities lack capacity to apply for funding resources. Additionally, 35% of rural America still does not have broadband internet access
 - Federal funding generally does not have the long-term scope that some projects require
 - States sometimes do not agree with the use of finding even though it is eligible through FEMA guidance
 - 'Secrecy' about evaluation criteria, like for UASI
 - Lack of communication opportunities with agency executives with authority
 - Project is too big for available funding, limited funding for public education
- **Federal cost share requirements:** Cost share in current practice are mostly from either city funding (43%), state funding (42%), or county funding (40%). Private sector funding (15%) and foundations (12%) also play important roles in contributing to cost share. See [Figure 7](#).

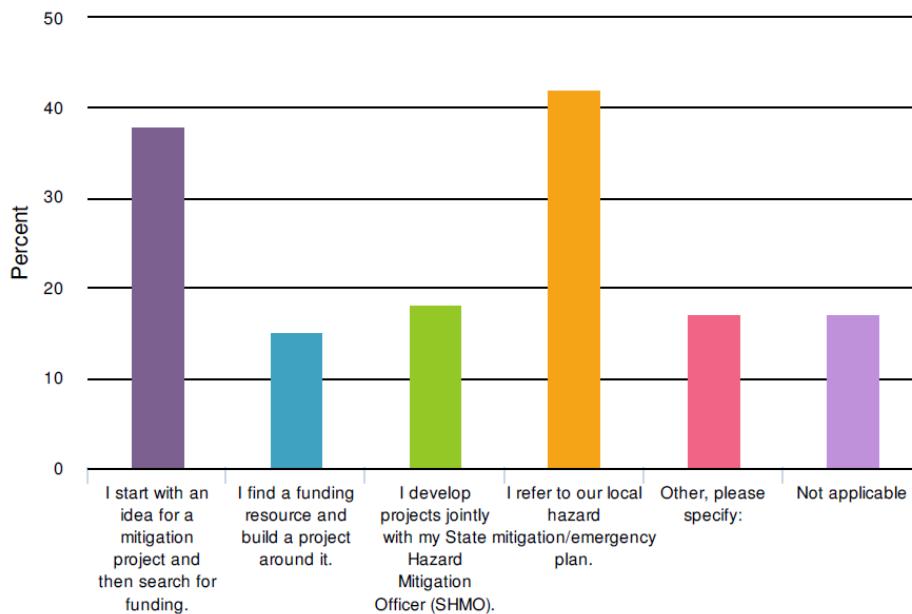


Figure 4: Response to "Which of the following describes how you typically begin a mitigation project?"

Note: under "other, please specify," many comments would fall under one of the provided options but with more details like "review plans submitted to the state with our SHMO and other state representatives," "listen to the departments' needs," and "look for project once grant is released." Other comments include "work with communities first," "take ideas from Mayor," "evaluate areas of risk in the community, determine vulnerability to the risk and with the mitigation plan, determine mitigation alternatives," "look for ways that insurance mechanism can help," "projects come out of studies," and "start with homeowner request for acquisition or elevation."

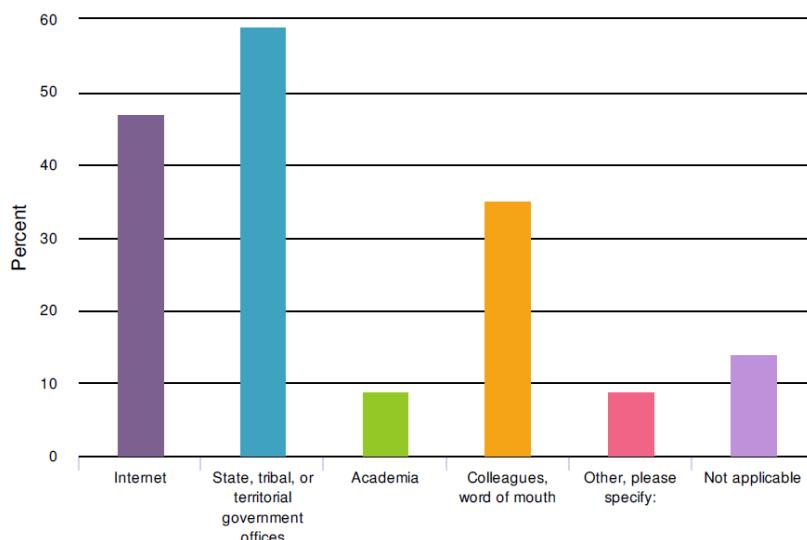


Figure 5: Response to "When there is a need for a mitigation action and when federal dollars are needed to complete the project, how do you approach your search for potential funding sources?"

Note: under "other, please specify," many comments would fall under one of the provided options but with more details like "talk with SHMO, County Emergency Management, and Council of Government." Other comments included "non-profit organizations working in mitigation," "dedicated staff that regularly researches," "multisectoral co-ordination & emergency meetings," "search for successful projects in media and best practices and see how they were funded," and "for individuals in small communities the USDA NIFA extension service, local radio stations, posters in local stores."

Value	Percent
I don't know where to begin.	25%
There are too many places to search.	24%
I don't have the time or resources to pursue.	37%
There are technical challenges like conducting a required benefit-cost analysis (cost effectiveness).	47%
I cannot find a match for grants requiring cost shares or matches.	33%
Grant deadlines do not coincide with our project.	31%
There are few examples of what has worked and what has not worked.	27%
Other, please specify:	14%
I do not experience these difficulties.	12%

Figure 6: Response to “What, if any, difficulties do you encounter when searching for funding and resources from the federal government.”

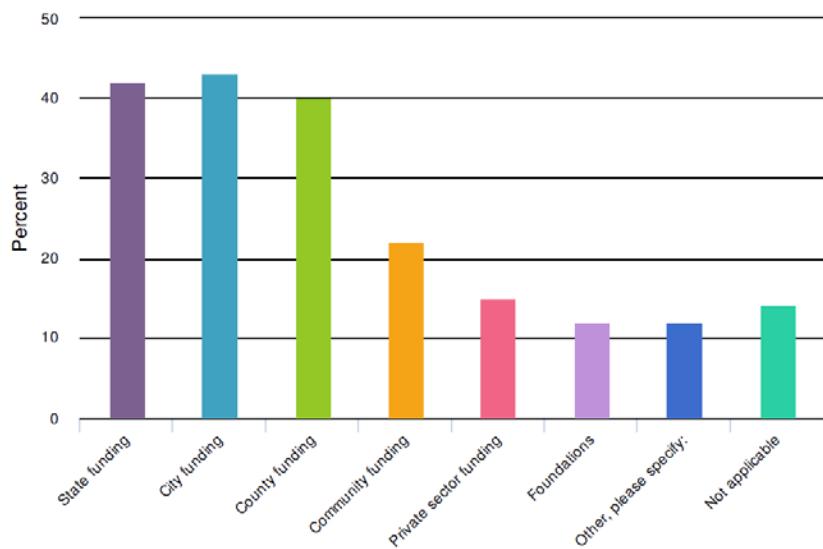


Figure 7: Response to “In your experience obtaining funding to meet the federal cost share requirements, please tell us where the cost share comes from.”

Note: under “other, please specify,” it is suggested that the cost share funding could also come from CDBG funds, funding from other agencies and federal government through OPM and Congress, in-kind in applicable, PNP as Subapplicant for HMGP, Philanthropy, Property Owner, regional consortium, and trade association.

4. Needs and potential users of the National Mitigation Resource Portal

In this section, input was collected on key questions on the needs of such a portal, who may be the primary user, and who are the underrepresented groups.

- **Needs of the Resource Portal:** Over 80% of the respondents rated the need to create a one-stop mitigation resource portal that contains a centralized inventory of available resources across different grant programs and federal agencies is very important or extremely important (rating 8 and above on a scale of 1-10, with 1=not important at all and 10=extremely important). See [Figure 8](#).
- **Portal users:** About 90% of the respondents think local government and communities would be the most frequent user, followed by state agencies (67%), states (50%), and private non-profit (47%). Other portal users could include individual homeowners, businesses, federally recognized tribes, academia, tribal agencies, and territories. The comments also suggested public utilities, environmental consultants, international agencies and governments, renters, school districts, U.S. military, and consulting engineers as potential users. See [Figure 9](#).
- **Underrepresented user group:** Based on the survey, the top three underrepresented user groups in current federal mitigation grants application are individual homeowners, businesses, and private non-profit. See [Figure 10](#). (Note: NIBS tried to reach out to the underrepresented groups when conducting the survey. Those underrepresented groups may still be a small percentage of the overall responses. This is an area NIBS will keep working on.)

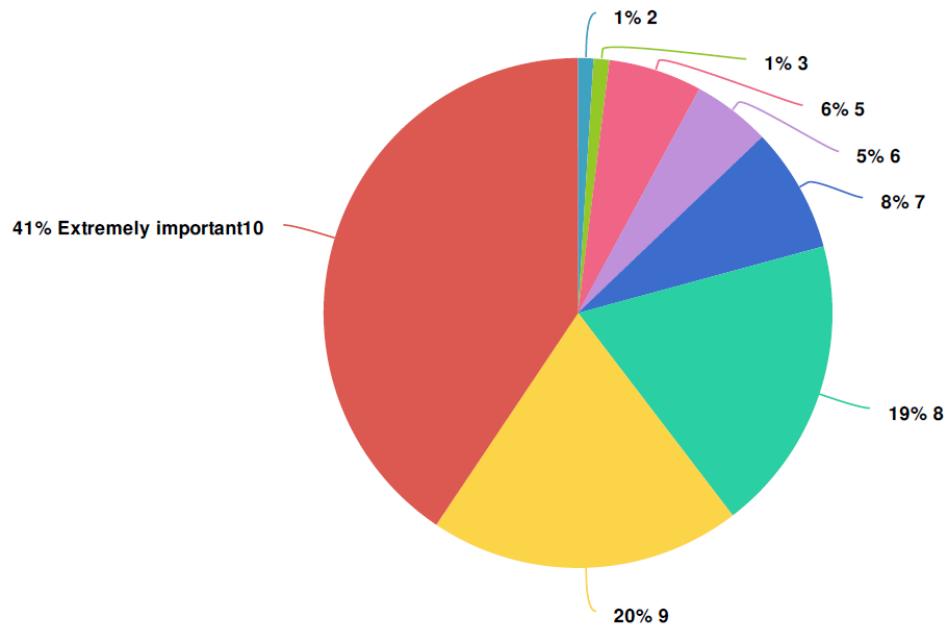


Figure 8: Response to "On a scale of 1-10, how important is it to create a one-stop mitigation resource portal that contains a centralized inventory of available resources across different grant programs and federal agencies? (1=not important at all, 10=extremely important)?"

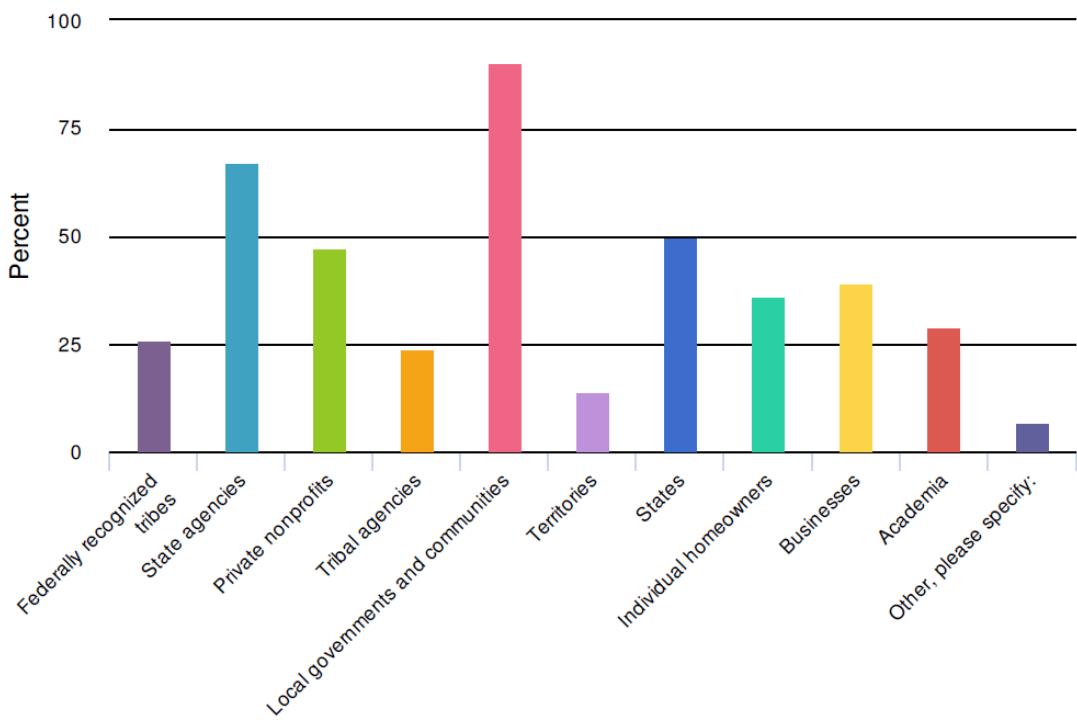


Figure 9: Response to "In your area, who are the potential users of the mitigation resource portal?"

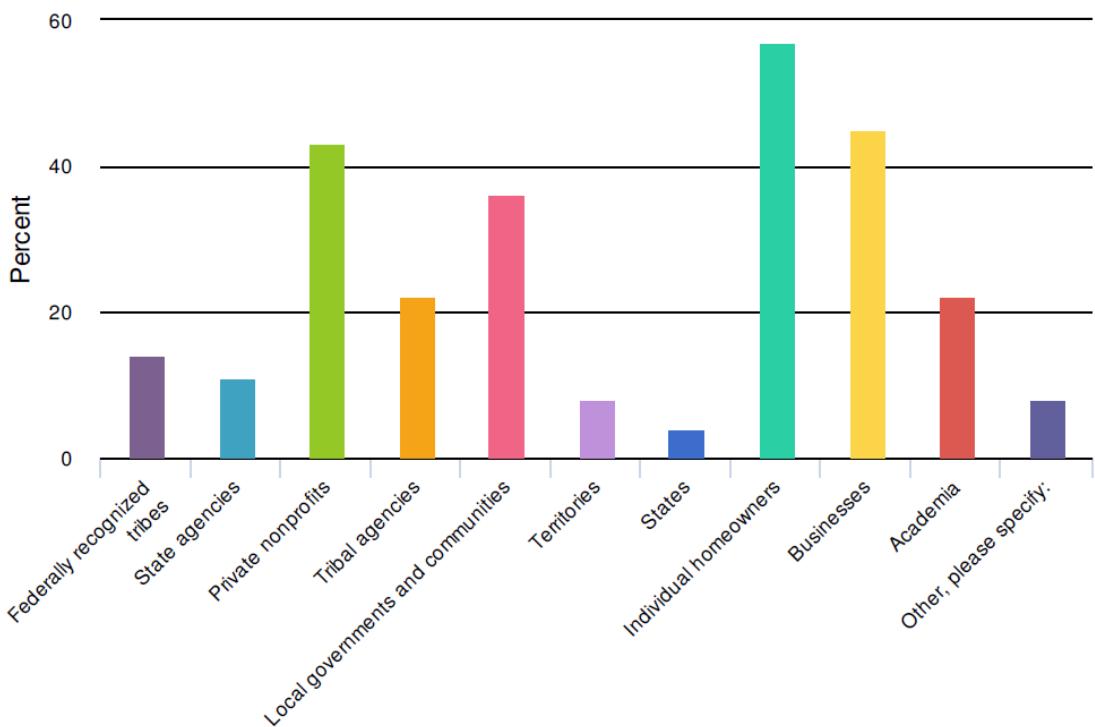


Figure 10: Response to "In your opinion, what are the top three most underrepresented user groups in the current federal mitigation grant application?"

5. Portal's key features to aid decision-making

- **Portal key features:** Almost all the features suggested in the survey received at least 50% vote from all respondents, see **Figure 11**. They include, in the order from high to low:
 - Eligibility requirements (who is eligible) (77%)
 - Types of projects the grant program supports (76%)
 - Summary of key requirements like benefit-cost analysis, cost share, environmental compliance, etc. (74%)
 - Time frame to apply (67%)
 - Example projects and/or contact information for people who conducted similar projects (66%)
 - Technical assistance like training opportunities and webinars offered (61%)
 - Funding level (max) (59%)
 - Links to related grants (56%)
 - Non-federal match sources (53%)
 - General length of grant process (47%)
 - Other comments include "a list of weighted criteria," "application assistance resources," "GIS mapping of community resources," "more project scoping funds," "social equity requirements - if any," "list of recipients and amounts granted," and "who to ask for more information."
- With the questions of whether Census and Social Vulnerability Index data would be useful in the decision-making process on mitigation projects, 45% respondents answered "yes" and 46% answered "maybe."
- NIBS received hundreds of comments on existing/similar efforts and suggestions for portal development and will use them for further development. Below summarizes some of the comments:
 - **Training and 24/7 technical support.** The tool won't be useful in many cases if they don't have some level of capacity to seek knowledge and technical assistance and resolve varying interpretations of funding sources offered.
 - **Usability and simplification.** It must be usable by people with no formal background in the concepts or terms (Often, an intern or junior staff member will be assigned to "look for grant opportunities" etc.). Please make it as plain English as possible. No one knows what a mitigation is. But they do know that they need to protect their culvert, lift station, road, water plant, or bridge from being damaged.
 - **Cross agency collaboration.** What federal \$ can work with other federal \$ - If the overall goal is to build a resilient community, we should be able to work with several federal agencies and not one or the other.
 - **Promote collaborations.** Beyond application, some entities are just not capable of administering a grant if they get one. There are a lot of opportunities where a larger regional entity like a county could apply and admin a grant for a smaller community. Also

NGOs (such as the Nature Conservancy, Council of Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers, and many others) could fill that gap.

- **Capacity building.** Disadvantaged communities need the portal, but more than that they need the people who will use the portal. Those people don't exist. There is a need to do capacity building to create and train the users--not in the use of the portal so much as in the overall process.
- Use portal to promote **standardized information** needs for applications.
- **Update and maintenance.** Portal should be updated routinely to ensure up-to-date information is available to any group or entity seeking assistance.
- **State funding opportunities.** Creating a portal for federal funds could overshadow state funding opportunities, if those are not somehow mentioned or linked to this federal funding portal.
- **Outreach.** How to communicate this resource exists to such a wide audience (from local governments to state governments, from businesses to homeowners) is a key.
- **Categorize projects.** Minimize the number of items you will include in the portal. 600 people will want 100 different things. The projects must be categorized by type to be most useful to users.
- **Special district needs.** Special districts are often left out of the funding loop and/or jurisdictions do not consider their needs. A "Special Districts" section or notation that special districts are eligible to apply (and a "how to apply") would be extremely helpful.

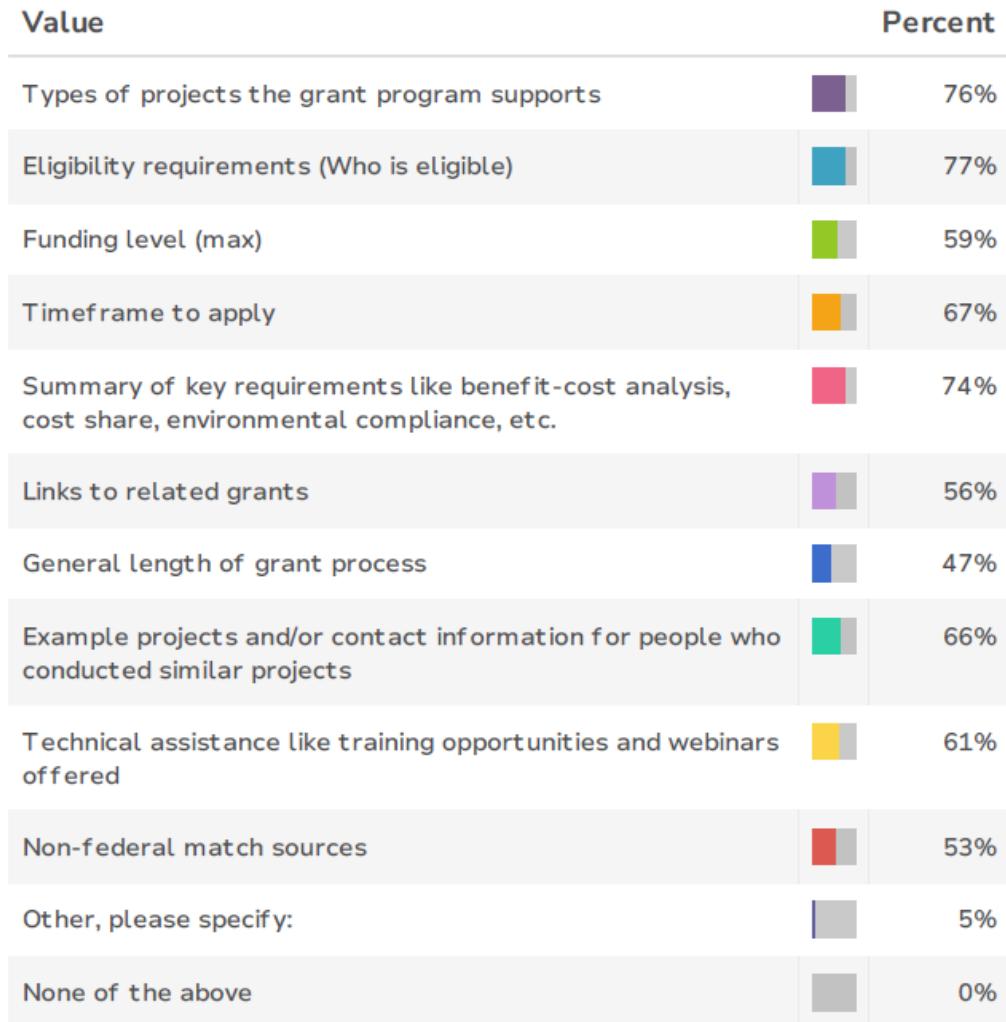


Figure 11: Response to “What is the key information you want to get from a one-stop mitigation resource portal that may help your decision-making on mitigation projects?”

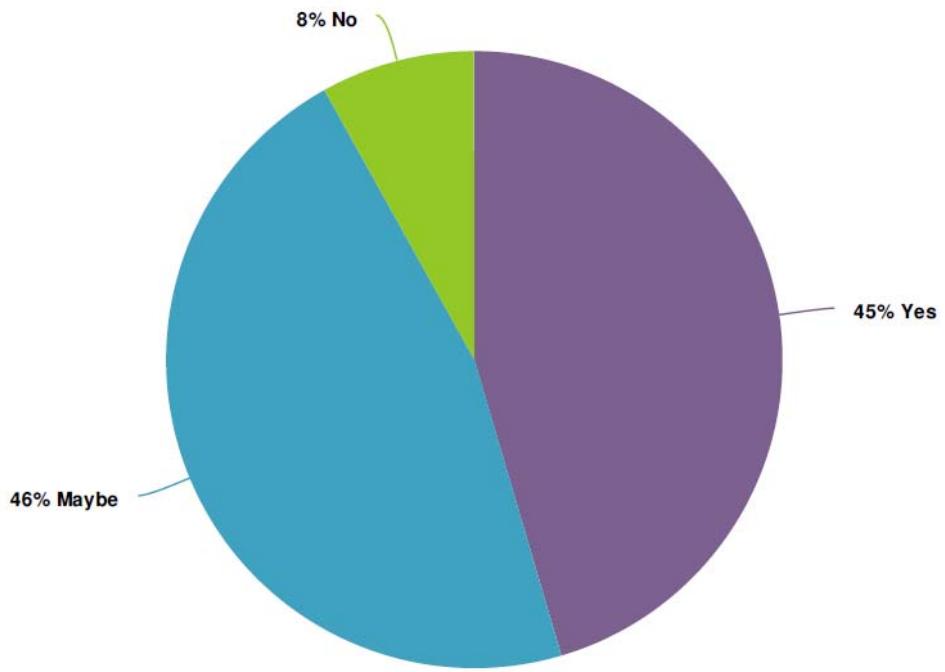


Figure 12: Response to "Would Census and Social Vulnerability Index data be useful in your decision-making process on mitigation projects?"

6. Appendix: Survey Questions

1. Which of the following best describes your profession? (Choose one)
 Building owner (landlord)
 Chief resilience officer
 City agency representative
 Elected official
 Emergency manager
 Private consulting
 Private nonprofit
 State agency representative
 Territorial
 Tribal agency representative
 Other, please specify: [\[open textbox\]](#)

 2. In what state or U.S. territory do you primarily work?

If you selected Tribal Nation, please specify: [\[open textbox\]](#)

 3. Which of the following describes how you typically begin a mitigation project? (Choose all that apply)
 I start with an idea for a mitigation project and then search for funding.
 I find a funding resource and build a project around it.
 I develop projects jointly with my State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO).
 I refer to our local hazard mitigation/emergency plan.
 Other, please specify: [\[open textbox\]](#)
 Not applicable

 4. What, if any, difficulties do you encounter when searching for funding and resources from the federal government? (Choose all that apply)
 I don't know where to begin.
 There are too many places to search.
 I don't have the time or resources to pursue.
 There are technical challenges like conducting a required benefit-cost analysis (cost effectiveness).
 I cannot find a match for grants requiring cost shares or matches.
 Grant deadlines do not coincide with our project.
 There are few examples of what has worked and what has not worked.
 Other, please specify: [\[open textbox – Required if selected so piped into Q5\]](#)
 I do not experience these difficulties.
- [Show Q5 if respondent selects at least two challenges in Q4]*
5. Please rank these difficulties from most challenging to least challenging.
 [Only challenges selected in Q4 will appear]

6. In your experience obtaining funding to meet the federal cost share requirements, please tell us if the cost share comes from the following. (Choose all that apply)
- State funding
 - City funding
 - County funding
 - Community funding
 - Private sector funding
 - Foundations
 - Other, please specify: *[open textbox]*
 - Not applicable
7. When there is a need for a mitigation action and when federal dollars are needed to complete the project, how do you approach your search for potential funding sources? (Choose all that apply)
- Internet
 - State, tribal, or territorial government offices
 - Academia
 - Colleagues, word of mouth
 - Other, please specify: *[open textbox]*
 - Not applicable
8. On a scale of 1-10, how important is it to create a one-stop mitigation resource portal that contains a centralized inventory of available resources across different grant programs and federal agencies? (1=not important at all, 10=extremely important)?
9. In your area, who are the potential users of the mitigation resource portal? (Choose all that apply)
- Federally recognized tribes
 - State agencies
 - Private nonprofits
 - Tribal agencies
 - Local governments and communities
 - Territories
 - States
 - Individual homeowners
 - Businesses
 - Academia
 - Other, please specify: *[open textbox – Required if selected so piped into Q10]*

[Show Q10 if respondent selects at least two users in Q9]

10. Based on your opinion, please rank the potential users of the portal from most frequent to least frequent user.
- [Only users selected in Q9 will appear]*
11. In your opinion, what are the top three most underrepresented user groups in the current federal mitigation grant application? (Choose up to 3)
- Federally recognized tribes
 - State agencies
 - Private nonprofits
 - Tribal agencies

- Local governments and communities
 - Territories
 - States
 - Individual homeowners
 - Businesses
 - Academia
 - Other, please specify: [\[open textbox\]](#)
12. What is the key information you want to get from a one-stop mitigation resource portal that may help your decision making on mitigation projects? (Choose all that apply)
- Types of projects the grant program supports
 - Eligibility requirements (Who is eligible)
 - Funding level (max)
 - Timeframe to apply
 - Summary of key requirements like benefit-cost analysis, cost share, environmental compliance, etc.
 - Links to related grants
 - General length of grant process
 - Example projects and/or contact information for people who conducted similar projects
 - Technical assistance like training opportunities and webinars offered
 - Non-federal match sources
 - Other, please specify: [\[open textbox\]](#)
 - None of the above
13. Would Census and Social Vulnerability Index data be useful in your decision-making process on mitigation projects?
- Yes
 - Maybe
 - No
14. Do you know of any existing/similar efforts we should be aware of? If applicable, how might we collaborate with these existing efforts? [\[Open-ended question\]](#)
15. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for the portal developers? [\[Open-ended question\]](#)
16. If the NIBS team wants to ask more questions or gain more information to help further gauge the portal development, could we please contact you for a potential interview? If so, please provide your name, email, and organization below.