Needs assessment methodology
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Project goal: The goal of the proposed Consortium is to improve land management in relation to fire risks in California by improving science delivery to wildland managers.

Needs assessment goal: The goal of the assessment process is to gather input from partners and other wildland science end users on local priorities for disseminating wildfire science and structuring the consortium.

Wildland science end-users: We are defining science end users as those that take action on fire and fuels reduction in California, and the groups that support and/or need to cooperate with them (air and water quality monitoring groups, environmentalists…)

Assessment approaches: We will assess science dissemination needs by using a series of qualitative inquiry methods to illicit input from end users about the current state of wildfire science dissemination, areas of needed improvement and local priorities. Assessment methods will include:

- interviews - these will be one on one semi-structured opened ended interviews with key informants
- agency meetings - these will be meetings with appropriate partner groups and end user organizations to solicit input
- disciplinary focus groups - these will be held at gatherings of different manager disciplines such as foresters, fire fighters, air quality experts, etc
- place-based workshops - these will be integrative meetings where the input gathered in each region will be presented for input and feedback from the broad base of stakeholders in each region. A key task at these meetings will be to rank regional priorities

Each of these assessment events should be fully documented to help with later analysis. Interview conversations will be written up, notes of agency meetings and focus groups will be taken and finalized, workshop minutes will be written and reviewed by participants.

Based on these assessment products, we will identify science dissemination needs and themes for each region and summarize our findings in the final proposal.

Timeline:

August - Develop assessment methodology and plans, finalize contracts and funding transfers, train staff in qualitative inquiry techniques
September - Conduct interviews with key informants, organize agency meetings and disciplinary focus groups
October/November - Conduct agency meetings and disciplinary focus groups
November /December - Hold regional meeting, write up assessment findings report
December/January - Finalize proposal

Key Informant Interviews

The goal of key informant interviews is to elicit the views and priorities of wildfire science end users for our project. In order to do this, it is important to practice active listening, use questioning to develop an informant's ideas, and take good notes to share with the rest of the team. Other interview best practices are:

- Openness - Try to let the interviewer guide the conversation in the direction they want to go by supporting their ideas and asking explanatory questions to make sure you understand their point of view.
- Neutrality - Generally you should not offer your opinion to the interviewee. This is done so that interviewees are comfortable offering an opinion that may be different than your own. The only time you should offer an opinion is when asked (if you don't answer direct questions people may view you as secretive). If asked, try to be as diplomatic as possible.
- Confidentiality - Assure the participant that their views will be kept confidential by our team (they will not be associated with their individual opinion in the needs assessment write up).
- Write ups - Take copious notes during the interview and try to write up the interview that very day using as many of the interviewees own words and expressions as possible. It would be great to get a few quotes that are indicated as so in a write up. Share your write ups with the rest of the team as soon as they are done so we can all keep in the loop.

Selecting interviewees: It is a good idea to start with people that we know are interested in this process. This should at least include our collaborative partners and others who applied but were not successful. We probably will want to split up interviewees into types (NEPA coordinators, fire fighters, etc, and each take a particular type).

At the end of every interview, please ask if they know others who are very interested in this issue and if it would be OK for you to contact them and say the first interviewee suggested them. Try to get contact info if you can. (This is called snowball sampling. Strictly we would keep on with more interviews until we no longer get new ideas or input).

Possible Interview Questions:

Have you seen successful examples of wildland fire science used in land management?
What do you think made this example successful?
What do you think are the characteristics of successful science partnerships in general?
How could we better deliver wildland fire science to "users" like you?
What are some of the problems in your work that better science delivery could help address?
What are the other barriers that stand in the way of management besides use of science?
What would be the best ways of disseminating research information to managers like you?
How or would you want to be involved in a wildfire science consortium?
Do you have any questions for me?
Are there other people who are very interested in this topic that you would suggest we talk to? (If so, is it ok to say you suggested it?)