



**FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES
LEARNING NETWORK**

Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool User and Facilitator's Guide

A companion document to the FAC Self-Assessment Tool



**Created by the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network
fireadaptednetwork.org**

January 2016

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Background	1
What are Fire Adapted Communities (FAC)?	1
The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net)	1
Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool (FAC SAT)	2
Completing the FAC SAT	2
Step 1: Determine General Information	2
Step 2: Complete the Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment	3
Step 3: Prioritize Community Fire Adaptation Needs	4
Step 4: Create a Community Fire Adaptation Action Plan	5
Conducting the FAC SAT Process	5
Method 1: Multi-Stakeholder/ Multi-Meeting	5
Method 2: Group-Driven Rapid Assessment	7
Method 3: Leader-Driven Assessment	8
Method 4: FAC SAT Crosswalk	9
Additional Tips and Resources for Success	9
Embracing Flexibility with the FAC SAT	9
Additional Resources for FAC SAT Data Gathering	10
Additional FAC Training and Facilitation Resources	10
FAC SAT Feedback and Support	11

Acknowledgements & Contact Information

The Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool and this companion document were developed by the FAC Learning Network. Direct questions or feedback to info@fireadaptednetwork.org. The current version of the FAC SAT is available at <http://fireadaptednetwork.org/resources/fac-assessment-tool/>.

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network is supported by Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency through Collaboration: Landscapes, Learning and Restoration, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. This project is subject to the terms of Cooperative Agreement #11-CA-11132543-158 with The Watershed Center.

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Suggested citation:

Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (2016). *Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool User and Facilitator's Guide*. [<http://fireadaptednetwork.org/resource/fire-adapted-communities-self-assessment-tool-user-and-facilitators-guide>]



Introduction

The purpose of this User and Facilitator's Guide is to serve as a companion document to the Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool (FAC SAT). This guide provides information on the FAC SAT, strategies for facilitating different approaches to the FAC SAT process, and tips and resources for long-term success. **New FAC SAT users and facilitators should review this guide prior to using the tool.**

Background

What are Fire Adapted Communities?

The term “fire adapted communities” refers to a national effort to address the increasing risks and impacts of wildfires on landscapes, communities and first responders across the nation. A fire adapted community understands its risk and takes individual and collective actions to prepare for and adapt to wildfires. A fire adapted community is more likely to successfully withstand the impacts of wildfire and recover from its aftermath than a community that has not prepared itself. More information on fire adapted communities is available from the USDA Forest Service at http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/prev_ed/fac/.

Why create the Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool?

Some communities have asked why there isn't a checklist for becoming a fire adapted community. In working with many community members and practitioners, the FAC Net decided a self-assessment tool would be more helpful than a checklist. Checklists imply that once a box is checked, the task is finished. With wildfire mitigation and preparedness, however, tasks continue to evolve and require maintenance. In other words, you're never “done” becoming a fire adapted community!

The FAC SAT helps communities understand this concept of fire adaptation as a journey, not a destination. So rather than a checklist, this self-assessment tool is meant to inspire communities to build the necessary capacity to take action now and in the future.

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net) encourages the development and sharing of best practices and innovations to accelerate the adoption of fire adapted community concepts nationwide. The FAC Net supports individuals and organizations across the United States that have committed to implementing, assessing, and sharing the work they are doing to increase their communities' resilience to wildfire. The FAC Net is managed by the Watershed Research and Training Center and The Nature Conservancy. More information about the FAC Net is available at <http://fireadaptednetwork.org>.



Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool

The FAC Net created the Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool (FAC SAT) to help communities assess their level of fire adaptation and track their capacity to live safely with fire over time. FAC SAT is designed to help community members:

- Identify their community's values at risk;
- Identify their community's capacity to implement FAC actions;
- Assess any gaps or limitations in funding, resources, partnerships and workforce/volunteers;
- Prioritize future fire adaptation actions;
- Complement other work plans; and
- Increase understanding of long-term community fire adaptation needs.

The FAC SAT is solely for the use of communities. It is not a national tracking, comparison or monitoring tool, and **communities will not be asked to share their assessment information** with the FAC Net or anyone else unless they wish to do so (see *FAC SAT Feedback and Support* below).

Completing the FAC SAT

The FAC SAT is organized into four distinct steps.

Step 1: Determine General Information

Step 1 documents the stakeholders participating in the assessment process and basic information about the community, including a clear statement of its boundaries for the purpose of the assessment.

The FAC SAT was intentionally developed to accommodate a range of community scales. For example, neighborhood groups or homeowners' associations can complete the FAC SAT at the subdivision scale; collaboratives, councils and other multi-stakeholder groups can complete it at a municipal or county scale; fire protection districts can complete it at a district scale. The scale may also conform to some other boundary, such as the wildland-urban interface as identified in a local Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Facilitator Tips for Step 1

- When inviting stakeholders to participate in the FAC SAT, consider the natural community boundary to ensure there is diverse representation. Assessing a community at a county scale will likely require a larger mix of stakeholders to ensure a good range of inputs are considered during the data gathering and assessment process.
- At first glance, the length of the FAC SAT may look daunting. Rest assured that many of these pages contain only one or two questions, and there are many methods for completing the FAC SAT based on available time and resources. See *Conducting the FAC SAT Process* for different methods and additional tips.



Step 2: Complete the Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment

Step 2 is the actual assessment, which has three major sections:

- 1) **Wildfire Hazard & Values at Risk**
Wildfire Hazard and Response Capability, Community Values at Risk, Residential and Commercial Properties at Risk
- 2) **Mitigation Plans, Activities & Resources**
Community Plans and Regulations, Wildfire Mitigation/Risk Reduction Programs, Resources and Funding
- 3) **Public Engagement & Partnerships**
Public Outreach and Input, Landowners and Stakeholders, Additional FAC Partners

Each section contains questions focused on different aspects of the community's approach toward wildfire risk reduction and resilience. Whenever applicable, questions include an explanation to help you better understand it in terms of fire adaptation. Individual questions allow you to enter information or circle an answer. Do not consider real-world constraints (e.g., the fact the air quality regulations limit the amount of prescribed burning land managers can do) when answering questions. Depending on the question and available information, some responses may be more subjective.

Subsections and questions are not listed in any order of priority.

Following each subsection is a summary assessment question with a scale of response choices from "Very High" to "Very Low," and descriptions of each choice. Like the individual sections, these summary assessment questions are intended to help you think through the range of factors that may affect your community's ability to be fire adapted.

Facilitator Tips for Step 2

- Some FAC SAT user groups may opt to assign different FAC SAT sections to different individuals or agencies to complete. This can be especially useful when these individuals or agencies have easy access or knowledge relevant to that topic area. However, it is important to also recognize the value in discussing questions as a group (regardless of the data gathering process). The questions are intended to build awareness of different issues associated with adaptation to fire, so the discussion process allows you to better understand your community's strengths and challenges.
- Larger communities, such as entire counties, may wish to modify some FAC SAT questions requiring detailed information on topics such as land ownership, stakeholders and property mitigation.
- You need not answer every question. However, accurate and comprehensive responses that honestly reflect a community's current level of fire adaptation will lead to more robust discussions in Steps 3 & 4.



Step 3: Prioritize Community Fire Adaptation Needs

Step 3 provides a summary table for you to compile the section ratings into one place and prioritize your community's fire adaptation needs. Basic instructions are provided in the FAC SAT, but you are encouraged to read through the following definitions for a more complete explanation of each table column.

Summary Rating is the summary response that you have agreed upon for each applicable assessment subsection.

Trending lets you note where areas may be trending—maintaining means that resources are stable, improving means that this area is seeing positive increases in fire adaptation due to current efforts; declining means that resources and capacity to continue supporting this topic may be threatened or decreasing. Depending on the direction something is trending, more or less attention may be required in the short-term.

Prioritization provides a space for you to prioritize each topic. Different prioritization methods can be used, such as a numerical ranking system (1= highest priority, 9=lowest priority), choosing the top three priorities, or labeling each item as “high,” “medium” or “low.”

Additional Notes is a space to capture additional information useful in the prioritization process, such as evaluating the potential impact and feasibility of each assessment section. For example:

- What is the potential impact associated with addressing this topic? How much do users think that improving a specific rating would increase their community's ability to adapt to a wildfire? Impacts could be significant to improving community fire adaptation, moderate or minimal/ not very significant.
- How feasible is it to take action given the current situation? For example, in many places groundwork may need to be laid before changing building codes is a viable option. Future actions may be not feasible, minimally feasible, moderately feasible but with some constraints, or very feasible with limited or no known constraints.

Facilitator Tips for Step 3

- Facilitators should consider in advance which prioritization method would be most effective for the group. If time is available, adding the potential impact and feasibility discussions may increase your ability to create more effective actions in Step 4. Limited time, however, may dictate a simpler method, such as choosing the top three priorities.
- Assessment ratings do not have to be associated with priorities. For example, users may have assigned a “low” assessment rating for the condition of “Community Values at Risk,” but for a variety of reasons might decide that it's more important to focus on an area they assessed as currently in “medium” or “high” condition.



Step 4: Create a Community Fire Adaptation Action Plan

Step 4 provides an action table to help you identify both short- and long-term actions. The table also helps you identify the additional partners and resources needed to implement each action, and track progress over time.

It may not be necessary to have an action listed for each topic or timeframe—for example, if one section is a low priority, even if the summary rating is high, you may want to focus your actions on other topics that have a higher community priority.

Facilitator Tips for Step 4

- While it may be tempting for users to feel “done” after completing the previous steps, it is important to build in enough time for this final step. Listing specific actions ensures that change (i.e., “community fire adaptation”) will continue into the future. The more specific each action is—and clearer the assigned roles and additional partners and resources for it—the more likely it is to get implemented.
- Before the meeting closes, decide when and how often follow up meetings should be held, and who will maintain this information and be a future point of contact for the FAC SAT.

Conducting the FAC SAT

The FAC SAT is flexible with respect to users, audience, facilitation methods and implementation.

There is no single "right" way to use the tool.

This section describes four methods for conducting the FAC SAT, starting with the most time-intensive method, a multi-stakeholder/multi-meeting approach. Choose the method that best meets your community’s needs.



Source: Dovetail Partners

Method 1: Multi-Stakeholder/Multi-Meeting

This method is best suited for a multi-stakeholder group that has the resources and time to meet over the course of several weeks or months. It is the most comprehensive approach to completing the FAC SAT, and encourages discussion and allows time for thorough research and data collection. A group using this method should conduct several meetings, as described below.



Method 1: Suggested Meeting Format

Meeting	Agenda	Outcomes
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate introductions and provide an overview of the tool, including background information on fire adapted communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Step 1 Determine process for Step 2 Assign data-gathering tasks Schedule next meeting
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Compile data and complete Step 2. Discuss and answer the summary questions at the end of each section in Step 2. Complete the summary table in Step 3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Step 2 Complete Step 3 Schedule next meeting
3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Review Step 3. Complete Step 4. Assign action items to groups or individuals. Develop a plan for tracking actions over time. Look for opportunities to include this information in grant applications or other funding sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Step 4 Assign action items Schedule future meetings

Additional considerations for the Multi-Stakeholder/Multi-Meeting Method:

- Requires a dedicated group facilitator to assign roles and data collection, organize meetings, and provide materials and equipment.
- Requires strong facilitation skills to encourage thorough discussions on multiple facets of community fire adaptation.

Community Example

Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP) undertook a multi-stakeholder / multi-meeting approach to complete their FAC SAT. Over the course of four meetings and work conducted by various members between each meeting, the group gathered data, answered questions and completed the section assessments. GFFP had a dedicated meeting organizer who coordinated and compiled all final assessment information. Through the FAC SAT process, GFFP found that the scale (geographic and experiential) of their fire adapted community efforts was broader and more intricate than the scope of the FAC SAT. However, they also found benefit in the process of discussing the questions as a group, which led to a deeper analysis of several components of their fire adaptation activities, such as “Residential Values at Risk” (since renamed “Residential and Commercial Properties at Risk.” This section had the lowest summary rating and helped identify outreach opportunities and needs. GFFP also believed this tool would be useful in CWPP creation and updates.



Method 2: Group-Driven Rapid Assessment

For those communities or groups with less time and fewer resources, it can still be beneficial to gauge fire adaptation through a rapid assessment approach that increases awareness of community strengths, gaps and challenges. Rather than completing each question, users go directly to each summary section and discuss and assign ratings. This method may not reveal as much information, but it can help a group determine its priorities and a future direction.

Method 2: Suggested Meeting Format

Meeting	Agenda	Outcomes
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure all attendees come prepared with an understanding of FAC SAT and agreement on the boundaries of the community being assessed. 2. Read through the assessment questions, but focus on summary questions. 3. Through group consensus, discuss and determine a rating as a group. 4. Complete Step 3 through a pre-determined prioritization process. 5. Assign actions and next steps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete FAC SAT summary assessment questions • Plan of action for future data gathering, assignments and FAC actions

Additional considerations for the Group-Driven Rapid Assessment Method:

- Only use this method if the group has a solid understanding of the community, fire adaptation concepts, and current mitigation in place.
- This method requires stakeholder rapport, a high level of participant knowledge, and strong facilitation.

Community Example

When stakeholders from the **Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative** met to discuss and use the FAC SAT, they had planned for a half-day meeting. To maximize their limited time, stakeholders decided to focus on Ashland as their FAC SAT community (rather than the entire project area for the collaborative). Stakeholders had a good working knowledge of Ashland's strengths and challenges. This let them skip individual questions and instead spend time discussing and answering the summary questions. Stakeholders found value in these discussions because it helped identify areas that rated "high" but were trending down. In other words, it brought attention to where future resources could be required to maintain specific levels of adaptation. The discussions also enhanced stakeholders' understanding of FAC and created awareness of adjacent communities that could benefit from the FAC SAT process.



Method 3: Leader-Driven Assessment

For some communities, strong leadership and local knowledge may provide the right conditions for completing portions of Steps 1 and 2 of the FAC SAT in advance of a stakeholder meeting. In this method, a small working group or an appropriate knowledgeable individual (e.g., a FAC coordinator) gathers data and completes questions before meeting with other stakeholders. During the meeting, discussions can then focus on assessment results, prioritization and actions. This method can also be used as a public engagement tool by sharing the results with members of the public.



Source: FAC Network

Method 3: Suggested Meeting Format

Meeting	Agenda	Outcomes
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure FAC SAT questions have been completed satisfactorily. 2. Review responses to each question and discuss summary assessments to determine ratings. 3. Complete Step 3 through a pre-determined prioritization process. 4. Assign actions and next steps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete FAC SAT • Increase community awareness of FAC • Determine potential for further data gathering and actions

Additional considerations for the Leader-Driven Rapid Assessment Method:

- Only use this method if the leader has a solid understanding of the community, fire adaptation concepts, and current mitigation in place. Leaders completing the FAC SAT should also be prepared to discuss any questions about how specific answers were determined.

Community Example

FAC leadership in the **Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team** completed the FAC SAT on behalf of each fire protection district in the Tahoe Basin. The FAC leader then met with stakeholders to work through the rating and prioritization process. In some cases, it was also used as a public engagement tool. Through the FAC SAT process, stakeholders found ways to expand the focus of their Community Wildfire Protection Plan to ensure activities were oriented toward long-term fire adaptation. The group also translated the FAC SAT into a Google document and projected findings onto a screen. This let audience members view and discuss the topic in a more efficient manner.



Method 4: FAC SAT Crosswalk

Communities may also decide that the best way to use the FAC SAT is as a reference guide, or “FAC Crosswalk,” to ensure an existing initiative includes all aspects of community fire adaptation. In this method, the FAC SAT is not necessarily completed, nor are meetings required. Instead, the FAC SAT is reviewed by a program director or steering committee to determine where an existing planning process (e.g., Community Wildfire Protection Plan, FAC work plan) requires additional data and future actions. The primary purpose of the FAC SAT in this case is to identify gaps or provide ideas for areas of improvement.

Additional considerations for the FAC SAT Crosswalk Method:

- This method is most effective when the existing initiative already has a robust and comprehensive self-assessment process.

Community Example

Project Wildfire’s Steering Committee annually determines its goals and activities. This long-standing group has been successful at getting steady funding and maintaining capacity, and already has many FAC activities in place. During a work planning session, a subcommittee reviewed the FAC SAT to help identify new priorities. The group found that many questions pertaining to public outreach and input gave them ideas for new tasks to support their marketing plan. The FAC SAT also helped the group craft new strategic objectives for their program of work that were more oriented toward community fire adaptation.

Additional Tips and Resources

Embracing Flexibility with the FAC SAT

Embrace the flexible nature of the FAC SAT process and use this to your benefit. As previously noted, there is no single “right” way to use the tool. Communities that have begun using the FAC SAT have already discovered a number of innovations, including:

- Developing an online spreadsheet to facilitate data gathering;
- Using the FAC SAT to report successes on grant applications by showing measurable improvements in community fire adaptation;
- Conducting breakout groups to discuss different components of the FAC SAT during a multi-day workshop;
- Providing inputs to other wildfire planning efforts such as the Community Wildfire Protection Plan; and
- Offering incentives for completion of the tool, in the form of small monetary rewards to local fire protection districts.



Additional Resources for FAC SAT Data Gathering

Local Plans, Codes and Other Community Documents

The following community plans are often accessible online and provide local information:

- Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- Comprehensive Master Plan (or equivalent)
- Emergency Management Plan (local and/or state)
- Hazard Mitigation Plan (local and/or state)
- Land Use/Development Code (or equivalent)
- Local Wildland-Urban Interface Code
- Building Code (local and/or state)

Economic Profile System (also known as the Human Dimensions Toolkit by the USDA Forest Service)

The Economic Profile System (EPS) is a free online tool that lets users quickly create and download reports of current and historical socioeconomic data in convenient formats. The EPS uses federal data sources, including the Bureau of Economic Analysis and Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce; Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor; and others.

Website: <http://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/economic-profile-system/about>

Demographic Data for National Forests and Grasslands in U.S. Counties

A database produced by the USDA Forest Service and the University of New Hampshire has recent information on demographic change related to National Forest System lands and social and economic characteristics for each U.S. county.

Website: <http://www.unh.edu/demographic-indicators/USFS%20DataBook.070213/Final%20Display/EntryPage.html>

National Fire Incident Reporting System

The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) is a reporting standard that fire departments use to uniformly report on the full range of their activities, from fire to emergency medical services to equipment involved in the response. NFIRS software is available as free desktop and web-based applications from the U.S. Fire Administration.

Website: <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/data/nfirs/>



Source: Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council



Additional Resources

For a deeper dive into FAC and resilience, you can also explore these resources:

Fire Adapted Communities Course

The U.S. Fire Administration offers a six-day course for people who have organizational responsibility for wildland-urban interface (WUI) risk reduction operations in their agency or jurisdiction. The course helps students to create and sustain a fire adapted community. More information and a course schedule is available at:

<https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/nfacourses/catalog/details/10543>.

Resilience Toolkits

Many communities are engaged in resilience assessment efforts. Two efforts in particular were used to inform the development of the FAC SAT and this *User and Facilitator's Guide*:

- **Los Angeles County Community Disaster Resilience**
Los Angeles County developed their community disaster resilience initiative through a process with stakeholders over multiple years. Their interactive website highlights that process and contains a number of resources, including a resilience builder toolkit. More information is available at <http://www.laresilience.org/resources/>.
- **Torrens Resilience Institute**
The Torrens Resilience Institute advances the concept of resilience by providing toolkits to help communities assess their community connectedness, risk and vulnerability, planning and procedures, and available resources. A comprehensive toolkit and scorecard is available at: <http://www.torrensilience.org/community-resilience-toolkit>.

FAC SAT Feedback and Support

The FAC Net would like your feedback to support the ongoing improvement of the FAC SAT. The FAC Net may also be able to provide ideas or local contact information for communities interested in conducting the FAC SAT.

Please contact info@fireadaptednetwork.org for more information.

updated January 20, 2016

