

Transparent Decision-Making

ADAPTING TO RISING TIDES PROGRAM

This guide helps with...

Using transparent decision-making in an adaptation planning process, and making sure that all aspects of sustainability are considered, to ensure that the process and outcomes are well-communicated, balanced throughout, and build a strong and actionable case for adaptation.

Starting points...

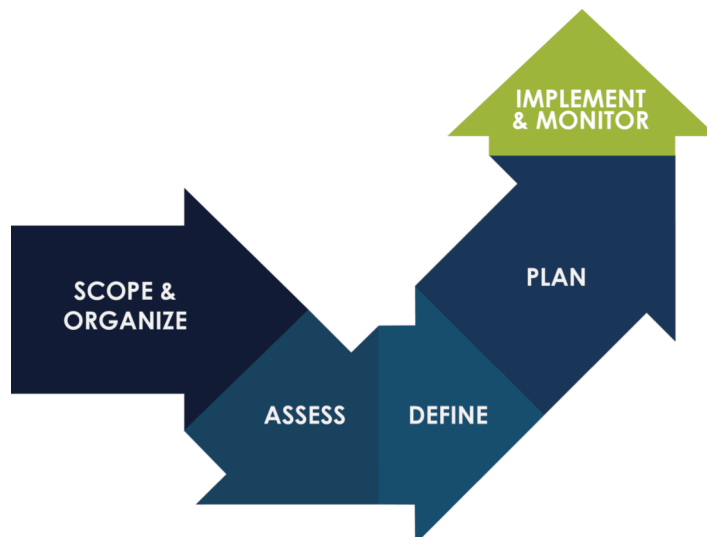
When initiating an adaptation planning project, decisions need to be made regarding the design and process to be used, who to convene in a stakeholder working group based on the purpose for the project. These choices influence the results of the planning effort, including the breadth, depth and types of issues identified, and whether an adequate case is made to support participants in taking next steps, including implementing adaptation responses. The ART approach emphasizes two important factors for making good decisions:

- *Following transparent planning practices that are well documented and communicated.*
- *Considering the relevance and implications of all aspects of sustainability.*

Four sustainability frames are incorporated into each step of the planning process – beginning with the development of the initial working group list, all the way to the selection of criteria to evaluate adaptation responses.

ADAPTATION PLANNING PROCESS

The ART approach to designing and conducting a successful adaptation planning project uses a five-step process. This guide highlights specific parts of the Scope & Organize, Assess, Define and Plan steps that provide opportunities to design and conducted the project in a transparent manner.



ART frames these components of sustainability as:

Society & Equity

Effects on communities and services on which they rely, with specific attention to disproportionate impacts due to inequalities.

Economy

Economic values that may be affected such as costs of physical and infrastructure damages or lost revenues during periods of recovery.

Environment

Environmental values that may be affected, including ecosystem functions and services, and species biodiversity.

Governance

Factors such as organizational structure, ownership, management responsibilities, jurisdiction, mandates, and mechanisms of participation that affect vulnerability to impacts.

1. Project Scope

To help to maintain clarity and transparency, and to set appropriate expectations, the project scope should be well documented and openly communicated to any that are interested, regardless of affiliation with the stakeholder working group. In adaptation planning, the scope defines the project area or geographic location, the stakeholder working group participants and the assets to be evaluated. Scoping the project with all four sustainability frames in mind will help set the stage for developing a comprehensive understanding of causes and components of vulnerability and risk, and will help ensure a broad and robust suite of adaptation responses are identified. While the scope is generally established early on in a project, it is important to allow for some flexibility in both the participants included in the working group and assets selected in order to address local issues and values unique to the project area and to identify any key information gaps that might arise.

Project Area

Geographic boundaries and scale of a project that help to (broadly) set the planning content.

Within project constraints (e.g., jurisdiction, timing or resource restrictions) select a project area that is broad enough to include assets, infrastructure, neighborhoods and services that:

- reflect the management responsibilities, goals, and values of the agencies, organizations and communities in the area; and
- enable you to assess a range of consequences on society and equity, economy and environment.

To do this, the project team will have to consider what (reasonably foreseeable) consequences of climate impacts could be. (See the Taking Action box, below.)

Stakeholder Working Group

Project participants who represent the assets, agencies, organizations, communities, public and private interests and values and viewpoints in the project area.

Convening and engaging a stakeholder working group throughout a project provides an opportunity to address all four frames of sustainability and helps to maintain transparency in the project. At the start of the project and on an ongoing basis, identify and involve stakeholders who can responsibly represent the relevant areas of expertise, regulatory oversight, community values and perspectives, planning and management responsibility, as well as issue interests appropriate to the project area, goals, and expected outcomes.

Asset List


The sectors, services and assets that will be addressed in the planning project.

The asset list should be broad enough to ensure that the consequences of climate impacts on people where they live, work, recreate and commute, on emergency response, and on community assets and services, such as parks and recreation areas, cultural resources and community centers can be fully considered.

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Identifying “Reasonably Foreseeable” Consequences

Although it seems like putting the cart before the horse to discuss consequences of climate impacts prior to conducting the assessment, this is a useful exercise that can help the project team determine what project area and/or sphere of influence should be considered and identify key stakeholder interest areas and expertise. Most planners will already have a good sense for the types of issues that may arise as the climate changes, and should understand how these changes may link to community interests and assets. Regardless of the starting point, project staff may find it helpful to:

- Review climate impact statements and summaries of vulnerabilities and consequences developed by planning projects that addressed similar impacts and assets. In addition to the **ART Portfolio: Findings by Sector** and **Findings by Issue** webpages, possible sources include:
 - NOAA Digital Coast: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/
 - Georgetown Climate Center: georgetownclimate.org/
 - Climate Adaptation Knowledge Exchange: cakex.org/
- Have the project team develop a conceptual map to identify key linkages and inter/dependencies among assets. The ART Supplies webpage has the **Engagement Exercise: Understanding Vulnerability** () that can help you with this type of exercise.

2. Resilience Goals

Resilience goals define the desired outcomes of a climate change planning effort. Resilience reflects the ability of a community to “bounce back” after hazardous events, such as coastal storms and flooding, rather than simply reacting to impacts. In the ART approach, resilience is an overarching goal for adaptation planning outcomes, and resilience goals and supporting objectives are developed with the stakeholder working group during the early stages of the adaptation planning process in order to:

- Build transparency into the project at the outset so that all participants and others with an interest in the project know what will and will not be included;
- Engage the working group on deciding what shared desired outcomes they will work cooperatively to achieve, and in laying the foundation upon which future project decisions can be made; and
- Ensure that all four sustainability frames are considered throughout the project.

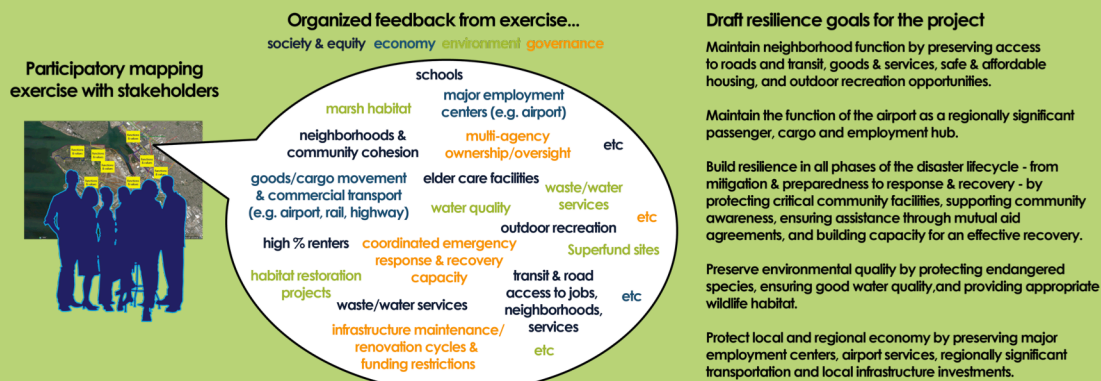
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Setting Resilience Goals

Set some goals for your goals – Ideally, resilience goals for the project will:

- Include the four frames (society and equity, economy, environment, and governance);
- Provide a shared vision for the project area while reflecting the differences among the assets, services, agencies and organizations; and
- Inform the evaluation of adaptation actions later in the project.

*Engage the working group creatively in developing resilience goals and objectives – Try participatory mapping with stakeholders to gather input. Organize their feedback about vision and values within the sustainability frames to “ground” the project’s resilience goals in these frames and make the linkages clear to stakeholders. (Refer to **Engagement Exercise: Functions & Values Mapping** (📎) in ART Portfolio How-to > Design Your Project > 1. Scope and Organize.)*



3. Assessment Approach

As the project scope takes shape, the project team should articulate an assessment approach, document it and clearly communicate it to the working group and others interested in the process. This increases the clarity and transparency of the planning process and builds support for the project outcomes.

The ART Assessment Questions

To help planners develop the approach, the ART program developed a series of assessment questions that have been tested and refined through multiple Bay Area adaptation planning projects. These questions are the basis of a systematic and thorough approach to gathering the specific information needed to build a picture of vulnerability and consequences that includes the four frames of sustainability.

The **How-to Guide: The ART Assessment Questions** (📄) in the ART Portfolio How-to > Design Your Project > 2. Choose an Approach.

Level of Detail

To set reasonable expectations for the assessment, it is important to consider the appropriate level of detail needed to assess the different types of assets in the project area. Depending on different factors – project scale, capacity, partners, funding, time available, data and information available – the level of specificity of the assessment could vary from sector-wide vulnerabilities and consequences to detailed investigations of individual assets and/or asset components.

Assessment of representative assets (i.e.,

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Getting to the 4 Frames in the Assessment

Consider the Consequences

The ART Assessment Questions specifically address consequences of sea level rise impacts that are relevant to: people where they live, work, commute and recreate; emergency preparedness and response; equity; habitat and species; environmental quality; the economy (ranging from local to international scales); and management capacity.

Consider Form & Function

Understanding both the physical and functional characteristics of assets, and how these affect vulnerability, is important to developing a comprehensive picture during the assessment.

For example, seaport facilities at the Port of Oakland have relatively low vulnerability to sea level rise and storm events. However, seaport operations are highly vulnerable because they rely on other, vulnerable infrastructure such as roads and rail to move cargo. The function of the seaport is therefore vulnerable because of the interconnected nature of the goods movement network. Consequences of this disruption in function could be far ranging not only on the regional economy, but on local communities as well in particular if more cargo is moved by truck due to disruption of rail line service.

The ART Assessment Questions address both physical and functional vulnerabilities.

assessing a few unique assets, such as one or two schools or pump stations rather than every individual school or pump station) can balance these two extremes, and help build a clear understanding of vulnerability and consequences for some types of assets. The stakeholder working group can often suggest the best assets to use to represent a sector or category of assets.

To maintain transparency and help ensure that the project team and the stakeholder working group are “on the same page,” these decisions regarding the assessment level of detail should be openly discussed and then documented in the assessment approach.

Information and Expertise Needs

The project team should also think through – in advance – the information and expertise needed to understand vulnerability and consequences. These will depend on the assessment questions, and how answers will be sought, for example through desktop research, surveys, expert interviews or, ideally, all three.

4. Define

The Define step in the ART approach is a bridge between assessing vulnerability and consequences and developing adaptation responses. Integrated into the Define step is a classification system characterize and communicate vulnerabilities, consequences and key issues identified during the assessment. As an alternative to rating or scoring vulnerabilities and consequences, the classifications avoid ranking issues against one another and forcing false choices for developing priorities. Instead, the classifications provide participants with a better foundation upon which to collaboratively identify key planning issues and develop effective adaptation responses; help ensure that their priorities are connected to the identified issues; and improve the transparency of decisions to prioritize certain responses.

ART ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

These questions were developed, tested and refined to guide the collection of data and information about existing conditions, vulnerabilities and consequences for a wide variety of asset types. The questions are grouped according to existing conditions, the different types of vulnerabilities observed, and consequences. This organization – referred to as the ART classifications –simplifies developing and summarizing the assessment findings.

The types of ART questions are listed below with a few examples. Governance is not included under the Consequences questions because, while governance *vulnerabilities* are common findings in assessments, the ART Program has not identified clear *consequences* to governance.

EXISTING CONDITIONS Describes the asset and highlights current conditions or stressors that could affect its vulnerability Where is the asset located? What is its function? Who owns and manages it?	FUNCTIONAL Considers the function of assets and their relationships or dependence on other assets What services does the asset rely on? Is it connect to other assets, such that failure in one part of the system disrupts the entire system? Does the asset provide functions or services that are limited?	INFORMATION Determines if data is lacking, incomplete, poorly coordinated, or hard to access What information sources are publicly available? What is the quality of available information? What types of mechanisms exist to share information between owners of connected infrastructure?
PHYSICAL Identifies conditions or design aspects that make an asset particularly vulnerable Is the asset co-located with other assets? Are water or salt-sensitive components of the asset located at- or below-grade?	GOVERNANCE Identifies challenges with management, regulatory authority or funding options What systems are in place to manage the assets? What types of permits are needed to make changes? What funding sources exist that can be used for adaptation?	CONSEQUENCES Informs how climate change may affect society & equity, the economy and the environment Does the asset serve vulnerable communities or critical facilities? Is it near wetlands, parks or other protected natural resources? Are there hazardous materials at the site that pose a risk to the environment or public health? What is the scale of the economic costs if the asset experiences services disruptions or damage?

5. Adaptation Responses

An adaptation response consists of an issue or vulnerability, one or more adaptation actions to address the vulnerability(s) underlying this issue, and information about partners, process, and timeframes and sequencing for implementing the actions. Developing fleshed out adaptation responses is time intensive – much more so than merely listing adaptation actions or strategies – however, the packaged information in a response offers several benefits by helping to:

- Connect actions to the assessment findings (i.e. the vulnerabilities)
- Present a number of possible stand-alone or sequenced actions
- Characterize actions by type, priority, and implementation scale
- Identify possible implementation partners and processes
- Provide greater transparency to project decision making overall

Through the process of developing adaptation responses, project participants gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of adaptation. As they explore and refine specific adaptation actions they do so within the context of the issue or issues at hand, and with the possible pathways towards implementation in mind. Relationships and dependencies among actions are more easily recognized, as are the implications of specific actions on other decisions and planning timeframes.

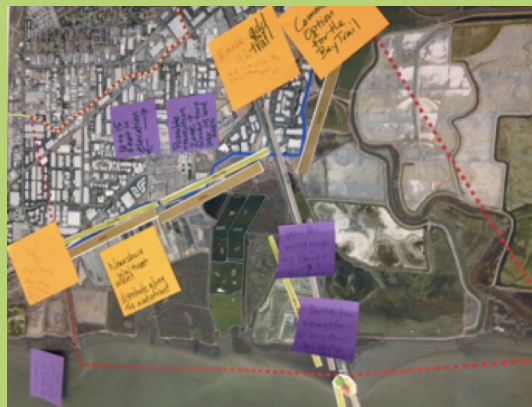
Examples of adaptation responses and guidance and engagement exercises for working with the stakeholder working group to develop adaptation responses, are all available in ART Portfolio How-to > Design Your Project > 6. Develop Responses.

TAKING ACTION

Exploring Adaptation Responses

Mapping the Possibilities

A facilitated mapping exercise can help asset managers creatively explore options and implications of broad scale, shoreline responses to sea level rise and storm event impacts that could benefit multiple assets.



Build-a-Response Tabletop Exercise

Using an example vulnerability or key issue, participants work with specific actions to build an adaptation response. Along the way they systematically explore various considerations such as sequencing, necessary partners for implementation, linkages between actions, and implications of taking certain actions and not others.

5. Evaluation Criteria

The selection of criteria for evaluating possible adaptation responses has an obvious role in ensuring transparent decision-making in adaptation planning. Using well documented evaluation criteria creates a clear acknowledgment of the issues and trade-offs being considered to weigh different adaptation actions. To guide a planning effort towards the selection and potential prioritization of adaptation responses that are robust and equitable, evaluation criteria should be selected to address each of the four sustainability frames: society and equity, environment, economy and governance.