

Identifying Key Planning Issues

ADAPTING TO RISING TIDES PROGRAM

This guide helps with...

Identifying the project's key planning issues for which the project team and working group will collaboratively develop adaptation responses in the next step of the planning process.

Definitions: Key Planning Issues

The project planning issues describe the problems that result from the climate impacts addressed in the project. These issues derive from the existing conditions and climate vulnerability and consequence information for the project's assets, systems of assets, sectors or services (collectively referred to as assets in the rest of this guide).

Key planning issues for a project are those planning issues that require the collective focus of the project team, the working group and, potentially, other stakeholders to develop adaptation responses in the Plan stage of the project.

In the ART approach to adaptation planning, identifying key planning issues is the process of sorting out priorities for the project. As such, it is important that the project team does this in a transparent way that gets input and buy-in from the working group.

Why define key planning issues?

The ART Program and other adaptation planning projects have developed adaptation actions to address a wide array of asset-specific vulnerabilities. These actions can be used to quickly identify how to address asset-specific issues. They should be included in the asset profile sheets to be shared, one-on-one, with the relevant asset managers and owners.

Unlike asset-specific issues, the vulnerabilities that underpin key planning issues cannot and should not be solved separately by individual asset managers or owners. These complex issues require collaborative problem-solving by the working group and other stakeholders. Focusing on addressing key planning issues with the working group makes best use of time and resources to achieve the project resilience goals.

Steps to Identifying Key Planning Issues

In advance of this step, the project team needs to have drafted profile sheets with the assessment findings and asset-specific issue statements, shared and discussed these with the working group members and incorporated their feedback. Refer to the Design Your Project Step 4 and [How-to Guides: Vulnerability and Consequence Statements](#) (📄), [Profile Sheets](#) (📄) and [Issue Statements](#) (📄).

Throughout the steps below, document your decision process. It is critical that you be able to clearly communicate how you went about identifying vulnerabilities and issues that contribute to or should – or should not – be elevated to key planning issues by the project team, the working group and, potentially other stakeholders to collectively address in the Plan stage of the project.

1. Review profile sheets

The ART Program has found that certain types of issues and vulnerabilities often underpin key planning issues. ART uses these as a framework to initially identify which issues and vulnerabilities (from the profile sheets) should potentially be developed into the project's key planning issues. These types include:

- Vulnerabilities that cut across multiple assets, sectors, jurisdictions or geographies will often appear on multiple profile sheets, and stem from the same source or dependency (e.g., one stretch of vulnerable shoreline protection.)
- Problems that individual asset managers cannot or should not try to solve independently. These vulnerabilities tend to require coordinated decision-making or funding.
- Issues or vulnerabilities that have significant and/or near-term consequences on society and equity, environment and/or economy.
- Issues that are clustered in/around a discrete geography.
- Vulnerabilities that require regulatory changes to solve.

Review the asset profile sheets and flag these types of vulnerabilities and issues. If you flag other types (not listed above) that appear to lead to key planning issues – i.e., those issues that require the collective focus of the project team, the working group and, potentially, other stakeholders to develop adaptation responses in the Plan stage of the project – document these decisions.

Sort, draft, review, revise... repeat

The best process for organizing the vulnerabilities and issues into themes and developing these into key planning issues depends on your project team and the project itself.

In the past, the ART team has needed multiple iterations using different methods to reach consensus. For example, each team member attempted to organize and sort the vulnerabilities and issues into themes on her own. Then the team met to discuss, re-organize (as needed) and come to consensus on the themes. An individual team member then drafted key issue statements, and the team convened again for another round of review and discussion of these draft statements and underlying vulnerabilities.

2. Identify common themes

Organize and group the vulnerabilities and issues that you flagged to identify common themes.

For example in the Hayward Shoreline Resilience Study, a few of the themes that were developed into key planning issues were:

- Study area is low-lying and protected by ad hoc shoreline protection.
- Sea level rise and extreme tides may impact regionally significant infrastructure and lead to widespread consequences for transportation and wastewater treatment and conveyance.
- Unique and regionally significant shoreline recreation and environmental education programming are at risk.

In the Oakland/Alameda Resilience Study, a theme that developed into a key planning issue was access on and off Bay Farm Island and to and from Oakland International Airport. All of the accessways are vulnerable to future flooding and seismic events, which would cause significant harm to the local and regional economy, public health and safety and community function.

Another theme developed based on a cluster of issues stemming from highly vulnerable flood control infrastructure in the vicinity of the Oakland Coliseum that require coordinated decision-making and funding to resolve. Significant consequences of near-term flooding and seismic vulnerabilities of housing, community members and facilities emerged as another key planning issue.

In reviewing the themes, the team should consider how well (or sufficiently) they address the breadth of issues. For example, after sorting:

- Compare the themes against the project resilience goals. Would they result in advancing issues as key planning issues in a manner that is consistent with the agreed upon project scope, the known values and perspectives of the working group members, and the project resilience goals?
- Try to articulate succinctly and transparently why some issues and/or vulnerabilities would be advanced as key planning issues and others not. Would this explanation make sense to the various audiences (e.g., the working group, other stakeholders within and outside of the project area) who will want to understand the basis for these decisions?

The Usual Suspects

In every ART Program project, permitting and regulatory issues, and overlapping ownership and jurisdiction have led to at least one key planning issue.

Another vulnerability that cuts across multiple assets and sectors is the lack of sufficient information about the effects of sea level rise on groundwater levels and salinity intrusion to support assessments of vulnerability and risk.

Even if it is not appropriate or feasible for the project team and working group to address these in the Plan stage, either because the right partners would not be at the table, or because these issues require broader scale (e.g. regional) planning and response, planning issues such as these should be included to communicate and elevate them to regional attention.

If the resulting key planning issues, taken as a whole, do not seem consistent with other aspects of the project, or the reasoning behind their selection is unclear, it may be necessary to take a step back and look again at the asset profile sheets and consider if there are other types of vulnerabilities and issues that should be considered.

3. Draft key planning issues

Once the team has come to consensus on the themes, summarize each of them into a draft key planning issue. Keep in mind that each key planning issue will be presented alongside the vulnerabilities that underpin it. As such, an issue statement does not need to capture details, but rather the overall problem or theme.

Below are two examples of key planning issue with their underlying vulnerabilities for the Oakland/Alameda Resilience Study area:

Key Planning Issue:

The Oakland Coliseum facilities, transportation assets, and neighborhood are vulnerable to both current and future flooding due to at-capacity flood control channels and rising Bay water levels.

Coliseum Facilities

- The Oakland Coliseum Complex provides economic value to the city of Oakland and the region through sports and entertainment events year round.
- Stormwater and wastewater drainage are insufficient and have caused disruptions to Coliseum facilities in the past.
- The complex also relies on roads, transit systems, utilities, and shoreline protection it does not own or maintain. Improving the resilience of the complex will require extensive coordination between private landowners and the Oakland Alameda Coliseum Authority, which governs the site.

Coliseum Community and Transit

- This area is part of an ongoing specific plan process led by the City of Oakland aimed at economic development with no explicit flood risk reduction benefits. Special coordination between the City of Oakland and other public and private partners will be necessary to plan for future water levels while meeting other local needs for housing and economic investment.
- BART, Capitol Corridor and AC Transit service in the area is vulnerable to future flooding and serves the transit-dependent Coliseum community and the region at-large.
- I-880 is vulnerable to flooding at its stream crossings in this area and is critical to goods movement and the regional economy.

Key Planning Issue:

Access on and off Bay Farm Island and to and from Oakland International Airport (OAK) is already limited due to the island's geography, is vulnerable to future flooding and seismic events, which will affect the local, regional and state economy, public health and safety, and community function if disrupted.

Doolittle Drive/State Road 61

- Doolittle Drive serves as shoreline protection along the northeast side of Bay Farm Island.
- In the near future, culverts under Doolittle Drive will need to be improved to reduce flood risk on Port of Oakland property.
- As water levels rise, Doolittle Drive may need to be redesigned in coordination with the Port of Oakland, EBRPD, City of Alameda, and Caltrans.

Hegenberger Road, 98th Avenue, OAC, and Airport Drive

- Hegenberger Road, 98th Avenue, BART's Oakland Airport Connector (OAC) and Airport Drive provide major goods and commuter movement corridors between OAK and the Bay Region.
- The roads and transit line are all vulnerable due to their low elevation and inadequate shoreline protection.
- 98th Avenue and OAC are particularly vulnerable because they travel underneath Hegenberger and could be subject to severe flooding in the underpass.
- The roads and OAC are owned by City of Oakland, Port of Oakland, and BART but the shoreline protection is owned by EBRPD.

4. Engage the working group in revising draft key planning issues

In the next meeting with the working group, the project team should share with them:

- the draft framework used to flag vulnerabilities and issues that contribute to or should be elevated to key planning issues for the project team;
- the themes that emerged from sorting and organizing them; and
- the draft key planning issue statements and underlying vulnerabilities and issues.

Regardless of how these are introduced, the project team should allow plenty of opportunities for Q&A and time for discussion (e.g., facilitated large or small group discussions; or one-on-one conversations during an “open house” engagement exercise)