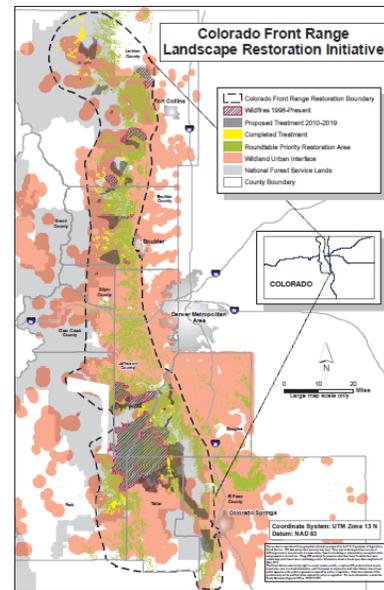


**A Case Study of Collaboration:  
The Front Range Roundtable and  
The Colorado Front Range Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project**



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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Colorado is endowed with several place-based collaborative efforts focused on reducing wildfire risk to communities and restoring healthy forest conditions. Individuals from government agencies, local communities, business and non-governmental organizations of all stripes voluntarily participate in a process to achieve goals they could not achieve by working alone. This is hard work for which many participants receive no direct financial compensation; they are simply taking what they think is the best approach to solve immediate problems affecting surrounding forests and communities. As is often the case when people are busy figuring out what needs to be done, there is little time for reflection and learning on what they have accomplished and the road ahead.

The Colorado Forest Restoration Institute has conducted case studies of collaborative forest health efforts over the past four years to identify the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned from these efforts. The intent is to highlight these efforts for other collaborative groups to be able to glean ideas, insight and inspiration to apply to their situations.

This case study on collaboration focuses on the Front Range Roundtable and the impact of the group's most recent effort, the Front Range Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (FR-CFLRP). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Front Range Roundtable (FRR) members to develop a detailed assessment of the FRR collaboration. FRR members were asked to assess the FRR's membership characteristics, the effectiveness of the collaborative process and group structure, communication channels, implementation, and resource availability. The people interviewed represented a diversity of interests including the US Forest Service and other federal management agencies, state agencies, local and national environmental conservation organizations, academic institutions, and research organizations. The interviewees consisted of a fair representation of both longer-term and more recent members of the FRR. The interview data was transcribed and compiled, which allowed for a thorough qualitative analysis of the levels of collaboration associated with the development and implementation of the FR-CFLRP. This report builds on a previous Colorado Forest Restoration Institute collaboration case study of the FRR's Woodland Park Healthy Forest Initiative.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the FRR collaborative efforts during the Woodland Park Healthy Forest Initiative see: [http://coloradoforestrestoration.org/CFRIpdfs/2010\\_CollaborationCaseStudy\\_WPHFI.pdf](http://coloradoforestrestoration.org/CFRIpdfs/2010_CollaborationCaseStudy_WPHFI.pdf).

## HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Front Range Roundtable (FRR) was established in 2004 with the goal of reducing wildfire risk to forest-based communities and restoring forest health across Colorado's ten Front Range counties - Boulder, Clear Creek, Douglas, El Paso, Gilpin, Grand, Jefferson, Larimer, Park and Teller Counties. The forerunner to the FRR was the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership, an effort organized by the USDA Forest Service's Regional Forester to increase coordination of hazardous fuel reduction efforts across state and federal agencies after Colorado's 2002 record wildfire season, which included the 138,000 acre Hayman Fire. The FRR augmented the Fuels Treatment Partnership by including local governments and non-governmental organizations with an interest in forest management and community risk reduction along the Front Range.

When the FRR began meeting, the group members identified four priority issues - community engagement, ecology, economics and policy - and established working groups to address these issues. These working groups developed the scientific basis and social consensus that led to the 2006 report, *Living with Fire: Protecting Communities and Restoring Forests*. This vision document identified a 1.5 million acre area for treatment on Colorado's Front Range consisting of 400,000 acres where treatment is needed to both protect communities and restore forest ecosystems; 700,000 acres of treatment primarily for community protection; and 800,000 acres in need of treatment to restore ecological conditions. The *Living with Fire* document allowed the Front Range Roundtable to focus its efforts on promoting treatments on these identified areas and to pursue additional policy and economic solutions to increase treatments.

After the release of *Living with Fire*, interest turned towards collaborative implementation of the document's vision and recommendations. After raising funds and advertising a request for proposals for demonstration sites, the FRR initiated the Woodland Park Healthy Forest Initiative (WPHFI) forest demonstration project in June 2008. The WPHFI encompassed a 41,000-acre project area in and around the Woodland Park area west of Colorado Springs. The demonstration's purpose was to focus resources and actions of federal, state, and local governments, and private landowners, to reduce hazardous fuels on 20% of the 41,000-acre project area.

A second collaborative implementation opportunity arose in 2009 with the passage of the Federal Landscape Restoration Act and the subsequent creation of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program administered by the USDA Forest Service (USFS). The program operates as a competitive allocation of USFS appropriated funds to on-the-ground implementation of projects that

have been developed collaboratively based on the best available science, demonstrate local economic development potential through utilization of forest restoration by-products, and include a multi-party monitoring plan. The Front Range Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (FR-CFLR) project proposal was one of the first ten in the U.S. to be selected in Fall 2010.

The goal of the FR-CFLR project is to complete forest treatments on approximately 32,000 acres across a 1.5 million acre landscape stretching across Colorado's Front Range and including portions of the Arapaho-Roosevelt and the Pike-San Isabel National Forests. The majority of the forests within this area are considered highly departed from the ecosystem's historic range of variability – the range within which an ecosystem experienced changes resulting from a host of natural disturbances over long periods of time – and are instead more susceptible to severe wildfires and insect and disease outbreaks. The objective of the FR-CFLR project is to reduce these risks by focusing forest treatments in areas where community protection, watershed restoration, and habitat improvement goals can be achieved in conjunction with forest restoration objectives. The FR-CFLR project intends to concurrently create socioeconomic benefits through job creation, increased wood utilization, and increased levels of collaboration.

The rest of this paper summarizes, and describes lessons learned from, FRR participants' experiences and perceptions about the collaborative process, focusing on the associated achievements and challenges the FRR has faced since it began its involvement with the CFLR program in 2009. The intent is to highlight these efforts for other collaborative groups to be able to glean ideas, insight and inspiration to apply to their situations.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The CFLR project has provided important benefits to the FRR in five key respects. The project fits well with the FRR goals, has improved relations among members and across organizations, has helped the collaborative to refine its decision-making processes, has increased communication across members, and has energized the group through the collaborative implementation of the project. These accomplishments are outlined below.

### *The project fits well with the Front Range Roundtable Goals*

A majority of the FRR members interviewed agreed the FR-CFLR project proposal and current implementation fit well with the FRR collaborative goals as articulated in *Living with Fire*. The FRR established a small working group consisting of two Forest Service representatives and one of the original FRR members to develop the FR-CFLR proposal. They presented the draft to the FRR to review and then developed the final proposal. The final proposal incorporated the priority areas and recommendations outlined in the 2006 vision document to identify areas and actions for the FR-CFLRP forest restoration efforts on the Pike-San Isabel and Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests. One member said, "I think it fits very well. The proposal is specifically tied to restoration and hazard fuels mitigation in the same project area that the FRR has defined so I think it's a 100% overlap with the FRR goals specific to treatments on national forest system lands." Others members also felt the FR-CFLR project has brought a greater focus to the ecological restoration goals of many of the FRR partners, which some felt is often overshadowed by fire risk mitigation efforts.

### *Improved Relations*

There was broad agreement across the members interviewed that there has been a diversity of interests represented in both the larger FRR and the subgroup of individuals actively involved in implementing the FR-CFLR project. Although several missing interests were identified everyone agreed that no interested parties were intentionally excluded from the process. This issue is further addressed in the "Challenges" section. Many members discussed how the FR-CFLR project has resulted in the addition of new members, as well as more active engagement of existing members on both the FRR and the Landscape Monitoring team.

Nearly everyone believed the FR-CFLRP has had a positive effect on relations among members because it has allowed them to further operationalize the *Living with Fire* vision and has provided an opportunity for members to actively work together. One member stated, "It has really strengthened the relationship between people on the monitoring team. It has also made the relationship between the

collaborators and the Forest Service more direct because we're having more interaction with them about specific projects on the ground." One result of these relationships is relatively high levels of trust across the membership. The majority of FRR members interviewed thought everyone had a high level of commitment and was willing to work toward agreement on important decisions related to the project. Although the monitoring team has had to address some conflicting priorities among some members there is a lot of good will and productive collaboration within the group where as one member put it, "everyone is working in good faith toward the resolution of hard decisions."

Most members also thought relations between the FRR and other organizations have been positively influenced by the FR-CFLRP project. It has increased the FRR's involvement with other CFLRP collaborative groups across the country, as well as with local organizations and experts the FRR had not coordinated with before. It has also improved working relationships between USFS research scientists and managers, increased involvement with local governments, and improved relationships with local landowners.

#### *Improving the process and structure*

The FRR members were also asked to discuss the FR-CFLR project's collaborative monitoring process and structure. Members of the larger FRR collaborative see their role as providing oversight and recommendations to the implementation and monitoring of the FR-CFLR project. The FRR collaborative accomplishes this through a consensus based decision-making process. In contrast, monitoring team members clarified that they use a more informal decision-making process and have not made very many decisions. In general, most monitoring team members see their role as contributing to the FR-CFLRP monitoring effort with each member having specific tasks outlined in the detailed work plan developed by the facilitator (Beh Management Consulting). At the time of the interviews many members were unable to identify a formal process or clear structure for the FR-CFLRP partners to make recommendations for implementation and monitoring to the Forest Service. But since the time of the interviews, several steps have been taken to outline an adaptive management approach and a formalized process for the monitoring team to discuss recommendations with the larger FRR, as well as with the Forest Service.

#### *Strong Communication*

Overall, the members seemed satisfied with the levels of communication of both the larger FRR and the monitoring team. As one member stated, "There have been a lot of good phone calls and good relations formed outside of the formal meetings and phone calls." The majority of the members

interviewed agreed that open and frequent formal communication has occurred across the FRR partners through email and quarterly meetings. There has also been open and frequent communication among monitoring team members through bi-weekly meetings, phone calls, and regular emails. Informal communication within the monitoring team has also become much more frequent than among FRR members. Several members mentioned the FR-CFLRP project has significantly increased their involvement with other partners in the FRR.

### *Collaborative Implementation*

The FRR members interviewed agreed the FR-CFLRP project has re-energized the FRR. The project has given them the opportunity to implement their objectives more fully through a targeted project, has helped to clarify the FRR's work, and has brought back partners who had become disengaged. The members overwhelmingly agreed the project has re-energized the collaborative activities of the FRR and provided the group with an opportunity to implement projects more fully. As one member stated, "The project has breathed life back into the group. (Before the project) we were not interacting to accomplish anything the way we had in the development of the original vision document." Most members also felt the FR-CFLRP project was on track to implement forest treatments on the specified acreage.

Many members found that the collaborative has had little influence on the current implementation of projects because these projects had to be ready to go (i.e. completed the environmental analysis pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) – so-called "NEPA-ready" projects) when the CFLR program funding came through. Nonetheless, many also agreed the collaborative was having an influence on the current implementation of the FR-CFLRP project by providing feedback and additional resources, as well as helping to identify future FR-CFLRP forest treatments. In addition, the monitoring efforts are seen by many members as a work in progress where a few years of data collection are needed before it can be determined whether the treatments have met their intended goals. Most members agreed the current CFLRP resources were sufficient to implement the projects and monitoring programs. Nonetheless there was concern about limited resources for facilitation, coordination, research efforts, and monitoring.

## CHALLENGES

Although the FRR has achieved several accomplishments related to its FR-CFLRP collaborative efforts, the FRR has also faced some challenges. These concerns include: the project does not address all of the FRR goals; that some interests are missing; there are a few remaining trust issues across members; the process and structure of the project are unclear; concerns about informal communication; frustration with project implementation; and limited resources. These challenges are outlined below.

### *The project does not address all of the Front Range Roundtable Goals*

The primary concern that was raised by some of the FRR members is that the FR-CFLRP can only focus on National Forest acres, while the FRR vision document identifies priority areas across land ownerships and jurisdictions. Since the CFLR program focuses on National Forests some interviewees believe the FR-CFLR project has steered the FRR away from its broader scale restoration and mitigation efforts on non-federal lands, which makes up a significant amount of the acreage identified in the FRR vision document. As one member stated, “there’s a lot of similarity between the proposal and the FRR report but the CFLRP is specific to National Forests and you’ll see that the FRR report identified an awful lot of the problem on private land. And so the CFLRP is really not capable of addressing that problem where it really largely exists.” As a result, many of the members were concerned the CFLR project would defer the FRR’s energy and funding away from projects on private or other public lands. Some members were also concerned that fire mitigation and forest restoration goals were not as well balanced in the FR-CFLRP proposal as they are in the FRR vision document.

### *Some interests are missing*

Although the FRR membership is open to all interested parties and does not intentionally exclude any interests, approximately half of the members interviewed identified key interests who are not currently involved or who have not been involved consistently with the FRR and/or the FR-CFLRP. Several members were concerned that the inconsistent participation of some interests in the FRR and/or the monitoring team could affect the decisions and implementation of the FR-CFLR project. The missing interests that were identified included representatives from the forest industry (other than the contractor), local citizens, local government (e.g., elected officials, planners), insurance industry, additional conservation organizations, and sportsmen’s groups (e.g., Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation). Members believe that including these interests would benefit the process by providing additional perspectives. Other members felt the FRR science and monitoring team specifically needed a stronger

representation of technical experts in the fields of watershed science, understory vegetation, social science, and wildlife. Nonetheless, many others felt there was a good diversity of interests represented in both the larger FRR and the FR-CFLRP science and monitoring team and that no interested parties were excluded from the process.

#### *A few remaining trust issues*

A few interviewed members thought the composition of the FRR collaborative had been affected by the FR-CFLR project because they perceive that the monitoring team is more actively involved with the FR-CFLR project than other members of the broader FRR. The interviews uncovered some confusion as to whether the monitoring sub-group or the FRR itself was the collaborative component of the FR-CFLR project. Some were concerned that since the monitoring group is “dominated by technical specialists and scientists” that it does not take into account other broader interests and specialties represented in the larger FRR.

In addition, one member stated that “While the FR-CFLR project has provided an opportunity for FRR members to express their perspectives and have an active role in working together instead of sitting in a room talking, it has also created controversy. Some members identified a lack of trust in the Forest Service by a few of the FRR members. This was attributed to a lack of clarity in the process to develop and implement the FR-CFLR project (i.e., unclear sideboards) and recent events in which some members thought the project implementation conflicted with the planning documents or national CFLR program. As one member put it, “Different stakeholders have different priorities and because the CFLR Act is broadly worded it has created uncomfortable discussions where members say ‘well the act says we need to do this’ but it doesn’t specify how or what.”

Some members also feel that their interests are not being taken into account to the extent of other issues and that there could be unresolved controversies. This includes the resolution or lack thereof, depending on the member, of the Taylor Mountain confrontation where there were differing perspectives on the prescriptions and treatments of the forest stand. Some members believed this was resolved sufficiently and helped to build relations between members, while others think this issue was never brought to the table for full discussion and has created distrust among some members.

#### *Unclear process and structure*

At the time of the interviews many members of the FR-CFLRP monitoring team did not have a clear sense of their roles or responsibilities. The greatest challenge for members to understand their roles and responsibilities came from a lack of clarity in both the FR-CFLRP process and monitoring team

structure. Many members attributed this lack of understanding to not having a clear process for the FRR collaborative to support or influence the implementation of the FR-CFLRP. As one member stated, “We’re supposed to come up with recommendations but there isn’t a clear process for providing those recommendations or how decisions are made.” This lack of clarity is partially due to the broad language used in the CFLRP Act. Another member clarified this saying, “The language of the CFLRP act talks a lot about collaboration and multiparty monitoring and how that influences the actions of the agency... but this doesn’t coincide with other laws the agency has to abide by.”

Some members also expressed frustration with not having collaborative involvement in determining the distribution of CFLRP funding on the project. One person argued, “The FLRA legislation refers to collaborative development and implementation but it’s never been clear what that means vis-à-vis the FR-CFLRP. There’s money that comes to the region that gets dispersed to the forests to do CFLRP work but there is, from what I can tell, no collaborative involvement in that decision-making process... once the forest has the money there’s no collaborative involvement in how that money gets spent.”

The unclear process and structure of the FR-CFLRP may be partially due to the fact that the structure of the FR-CFLRP monitoring group has been evolving since the project started. It began with a temporary ‘CFLR Monitoring Plan Team’ from November 2010 to June 2011, which evolved into the ‘Science and Monitoring Team’ from October 2011 until September 2012 when it was renamed the ‘Landscape Monitoring Team’. The structure of the group has become increasingly consistent throughout this evolution, with additional members and interests being added through these transitions. Since the interviews were completed, the Landscape Monitoring Team has been working to develop a stronger and more transparent process and structure.

#### *Informal communication concerns*

A relatively new concern raised by interview subjects was over the informal communications occurring among individuals involved in the Landscape Restoration sub-team. They were concerned because these discussions may not include a diversity of interests and/or may not be relayed back to the larger Landscape Restoration Team or the FRR overall. A member summarized this by saying, “[There is] a lot of informal communications related to specific topics, but it’s limited to a smaller group of people. I think there is collaboration within those [sub-] groups but it would be nice to have more cross pollination. There isn’t a whole lot of communication among or between groups.”

### *Some frustration with project implementation*

A few members were frustrated by the implementation of projects that had been previously identified as hazardous fuels treatments and/or were associated with the Front Range long-term stewardship contract. In addition, some members felt the FRR collaborative had little influence on the implementation of current projects because these had gone through the required planning processes prior to receiving the FR-CFLRP project grant.

Many members indicated the monitoring was not as far along as they had hoped it would be. Some attributed this to a lack of agreement among members on the desired restoration goals and methods to measure whether those goals were being met. Others mentioned the FR-CFLRP monitoring team members may be less willing to continue to work toward agreements if they do not see results of their efforts soon, or if a more formal decision-making process is not put into place. The monitoring efforts are seen by most members as a work in progress where a few years of data collection are needed before it can be determined whether the treatments have met their intended goals.

### *Limited resources*

Members identified a few challenges related to the FR-CFLR Project's impact on resources. Some believe the FR-CFLRP has reduced the capacity of the FRR to achieve its broader goals because of the additional coordination, communication, and meetings associated with this project. It has also added requirements the FRR is obligated to meet, on top of the existing commitments. Many members expressed concern the FR-CFLRP has decreased the FRR's capacity to do diverse work because they focus less on other objectives (i.e. community protection, biomass utilization, and demonstration communities).

Regardless of these challenges, the members interviewed were optimistic about the collaborative effort and see the FR-CFLRP as a significant opportunity to achieve common objectives across diverse interests. In the time since these interviews took place both the FRR and the monitoring team have begun to address many of these challenges.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Many of the accomplishments and challenges identified by the FRR members interviewed are common across natural resource collaborative groups. The FRR members were also asked to share the lessons they learned from these accomplishments and challenges. These lessons learned provide useful recommendations for other collaborative groups to consider.

### *Involve the collaborative group early on*

Some members believe the FR-CFLR project would have benefitted if the Front Range Roundtable had been more involved in National Forest planning efforts prior to being awarded the CFLRP funding. They believe the FRR's involvement in the planning process (i.e. National Environmental Policy Act, National Forest Management Act) prior to submitting the proposal would have better prepared the collaborative group for developing common goals for the implementation and monitoring of the project.

Members also suggested future CFLRPs should write their monitoring plan prior to or during the development of the CFLRP proposal, and if possible to do the pre-treatment monitoring as soon as it is feasible. One member suggested the initial monitoring plan should include coarse parameters rather than very site specific measures to make this possible. Accomplishing these tasks at the early stages of the project should give future CFLRPs a head start and make them more competitive for funding. Developing the monitoring plan during the proposal stage will also improve the collaborative groups' ability to gauge the resources necessary for monitoring and to request enough funding in the proposal for accomplishing their monitoring objectives.

### *Develop common objectives*

Related to early involvement of the collaborative groups, members indicated the development of common objectives was important to the successful progress of CFLR projects. As one member stated, "There needs to be a concrete understanding of the desired conditions. If we're going to make any meaningful strides towards addressing these resource concerns within the context of a forest restoration framework we have to have measurable goals that identify that we are on some sort of trajectory towards "solving" those issues." While many members agreed the FRR had identified common objectives in the proposal by using the vision document they had developed collaboratively, others were concerned about how to translate those objectives into the FR-CFLRP monitoring process. If the monitoring protocol had been developed with the proposal it may have had greater connection to the FRR objectives outlined in the proposal.

*Collaboration is no walk in the park ...*

Collaboration is difficult. Even though the Front Range Roundtable collaborative has existed for nearly a decade each member identified the challenges commonly associated with working through a collaborative process. Commonly heard expressions heard were: *“It’s not free!” “It takes time and money.” “You need to have transparency and open communication.” “It takes a lot effort.” “It requires open minds and a willingness to collaborate among all members.” “You need to invest in a coordinator to facilitate the process.”*

Members suggested the CFLR projects are better off if they begin with a strong collaborative group because it helps to already have those relationships developed and to have common goals and objectives outlined. Some members suggested that groups interested in the CFLRP should assess their ability to collaborate before applying. Others recommended all groups need to take the time to build collaborative relationships and a common vision at the beginning of the CFLR project. The Front Range Roundtable has been in existence for nearly a decade so a lot of these relationships were already in place. Newer collaborative groups will need to invest the time in developing these relationships and common goals.

Some members also brought up the fact that FRR participants have different ideas about the spatial and temporal scale of treatments. It was emphasized by members interviewed that the longer term scale of the CFLRP needs to be considered. One member was frustrated that *“we’re not talking about maintenance at all... You’ve got to think on the longer term. It’s not just ‘okay we’ll treat it, we’re done’.”* This was echoed by several members, outlining the difficulty of collaboratively planning longer-term landscape-scale projects. Yet others indicated longer-term planning, such as return treatments and maintenance were part of the collaborative learning process and were being taken into account and would be considered for future project planning.

*... but our collaborative efforts have resulted in ‘huge benefits’*

The members interviewed strongly agreed the FR-CFLR project was a solid achievement for the Front Range Roundtable. One member simply stated, *“This is the best thing that’s ever happened to the Roundtable.”* Another member backed this up by stating, *“We are proving that people can get together, can work together, and can make things happen and accomplish good things on the ground. And that we can get regular peoples’ voices into how the agencies think and react to projects through these collaborations. In the long run that’s a benefit to the agencies and it’s a benefit to everybody else.”*

In addition, several members discussed how the collaborative efforts of the Front Range Roundtable and the FR-CFLR project have allowed the group to leverage additional resources and funding. One member explained, “This is a powerful project to leverage. So if you can leverage other projects into it, it can be to the benefit of both the CFLR and other projects.”

Other members identified shared learning as an important benefit and an essential component of the FR-CFLRP. One member stated that the CFLRPs need to “learn and share the knowledge and we’re doing that. It’s a work in progress but we’re doing it.” Several people indicated the importance of learning from other CFLR projects, including how they have addressed similar challenges and how they have structured their collaborative process. The webinar discussions hosted by the National Forest Foundation were found to be helpful but several members indicated it would be beneficial to have increased opportunities for shared learning between CFLR projects across the country.

#### *Identify a clear process and structure*

Most members identified the importance of having a clear decision-making process and organizational structure for the CFLR project. One member outlined this insight by saying, “if I was to counsel any new CFLRPs I would counsel them not to neglect the process. I would urge them to think through how all the parts fit together and how decisions are made and how information flows; and to be explicit. Put out there a conceptual model of your collaborative and make sure that everybody, and even if it is incomplete and you never look at it again, that you at least go through a process like that so there is a common understanding of how it works.” Several members tied the development of a clear process and structure to the need for early involvement of the entire collaborative group. Through early involvement they believe there would be an improved understanding of common objectives, roles and responsibilities, as well increased transparency of the process and structure of the CFLR project. In addition, many members outlined the importance of having a dedicated facilitator to guide the CFLRP process. Members strongly believe that having a facilitator for the project is critical to the success of the program and praised the work being done by the current FR-CFLRP facilitator.



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