

Job Aid: Guiding Questions to Assess the Quality of Adaptation Decision-Making

A key dimension of adaptation success is how decisions get made along the way. This dimension is closely related to other dimensions – such as the adaptation process, adaptation actions and the outcomes – but is singled out here because of what goes into good decision-making.

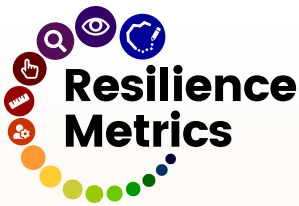
Here are some key questions to ask about the quality of decision-making for various decision-making aspects:

Good Adaptation Decisions

- **Framing the issue or decision** – Framing the issue that must be decided is closely related to the scoping and approach to adaptation.
 - ◇ Are whole systems considered or is a decision focused solely on a narrowly defined aspect?
 - ◇ Who is affected by the decision?
 - ◇ Who has decision-making authority?
 - ◇ Who has standing? Who should be heard?
 - ◇ If an issue is narrowly defined, what aspects can or cannot be considered during the adaptation process?
- **Clarity of outcomes** – Achieving clarity on outcomes of adaptation is an iterative process, but decision-making should have specific goals in mind.
 - ◇ How is the outcome of a decision defined and measured?
 - ◇ Is there scope to broaden, or a need to refine, the outcomes later on?
 - ◇ Is the effectiveness defined according to some stakeholders but not others?
 - ◇ Is it vague or concrete?
- **Quality, appropriateness and completeness of information and knowledge** – Often a key issue in climate-change adaptation, this aspect focuses on the data and knowledge that informs decision-making.
 - ◇ Do decision-makers consider the “best available” science?
 - ◇ What climate futures are considered?
 - ◇ Is the information credible and complete?
 - ◇ In addition to scientific information, how are other ways of knowing included and given appropriate space in the decision-making process?
- **Relevance and completeness of factors considered** – This aspect is closely related to the framing and should be guided by a systems view of the issues at hand.
 - ◇ Are all relevant factors considered or are key aspects ignored?
 - ◇ Are decisions reduced to matters of costs and benefits or are a wider set of issues being considered?
 - ◇ Do the factors considered mirror the vision stakeholders have created?
 - ◇ What parts of the system are included/excluded from consideration?



This job aid was created to serve as a reference for individuals interested in indicators and metrics to help communities define and track progress on their climate adaptation goals. Additional background and resources are available on the website: www.ResilienceMetrics.org. This website was developed in partnership with the National Estuarine Research Reserve System with funding from NOAA.



- **Integrity of the data** – Complementary to the quality and completeness of information, this aspect is more concerned with data quality and data interpretation per se.
 - ◇ Are there any biases or distortions in the data used or are issues truthfully represented?
 - ◇ Are all data credible, relevant and appropriate?
 - ◇ Is the interpretation of data fair?
- **Timeliness of the decision** – Decision timing is crucial both vis-à-vis the involvement of stakeholders and the actions that follow from them.
 - ◇ Is the decision-making process given sufficient time or rushed?
 - ◇ Is the decision made in time, so that actions can be implemented with enough time to achieve desired goals?
 - ◇ Is the timing of others involved in the adaptation process considered (e.g., time needed for permitting, obtaining funding, implementing a selected action)?
- **Commitment and accountability mechanisms established** – Decisions can have important consequences or they can result in not much at all. This aspect asks about decisions in the long-term context of adaptation pathways.
 - ◇ Are decision-makers prepared to see the decisions through to action?
 - ◇ Have mechanisms been set up to track what impact a decision might have over time?
 - ◇ If a decision leads to unintended consequences, when and how can decisions be revisited?
- **Assessment of potential unintended consequences** – Even the best decision-making can lead to unforeseen and unintended consequences. Good decision-making processes account for this.
 - ◇ How thoughtful and appropriate is the scanning for and evaluation of potential unintended outcomes?
 - ◇ How reversible or irreversible are the decisions and (non)actions once made?
 - ◇ Are social and/or political mechanisms available to address social justice concerns or deal with power imbalances?
 - ◇ What forums are available for expressing discontent and for redress?
- **Communication of the decision-making process** – Decision-making should not be viewed as separate from communication. Rather, meaningful and timely communication is part of a good decision-making process.
 - ◇ Are those responsible for the decision-making process communicating about it in complete, honest, transparent, and timely fashion?
 - ◇ Are all relevant stakeholders receiving the communication?
 - ◇ Are there opportunities for sincere two-way dialogue to influence the decision-making process?