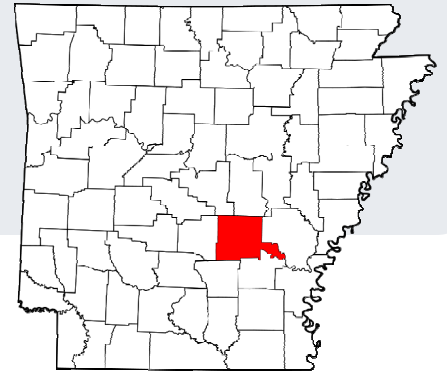


# Building Resilient Communities

## State Project Report Jefferson County, Arkansas



**State:** Arkansas  
**County Name:** Jefferson  
**County Type (Metro or Non-metro):** Metro  
**State Extension Facilitators:** Deborah Tootle, Bobby Hall  
**County Extension Facilitators:** None

### 1. Provide a Brief Overview of the County Site

We chose the Pine Bluff location (Jefferson County) AR because of its relatively high profile (second tier) on the Social Vulnerability Index, the large minority population (52.5% Black), and its high poverty rate (25.0%). Pine Bluff is a city that has a reputation of being racially divided. Moreover, Jefferson County AR is home to the Pine Bluff Arsenal, which is one of six locations in the nation where chemical weapons are stockpiled. Jefferson County Office of Emergency Management works very closely with the U.S. Army to maintain the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program in Pine Bluff. Because of CSEPP, Jefferson County OEM is uniquely prepared for disasters. However, their high level of preparedness does not eliminate the problems associated with at-risk and disadvantaged populations living in the area. The Pine Bluff Arsenal is in the process of eliminating the chemical stockpile.

### 2. Tell Us Who Took Part in Your Roundtable Sessions

(a) *How many attended your “Emergency Management” (EM) Roundtable and what type of organizations did they represent?*

16 (Office of Emergency Management, Fire Department, Pine Bluff Arsenal, Jefferson County Health Department, Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, Food Pantry, Jefferson County Public Schools, Pine Bluff and White Hall Police Departments, Salvation Army, American Red Cross)

(b) *How many attended your “Community” (CG) Roundtable and what type of at-risk or disadvantaged populations did they represent?*

11 (Minority – Black and Hispanic, Aging, low income)

(c) *How many attended the Bridge meeting and what diversity of organizations or groups did they represent?*

7 (Jefferson County Health Department, American Red Cross, local churches, Jefferson County Master Gardeners)

*If feasible, provide an overview of the diversity of your participants in terms of gender, age, race and ethnicity. This does not have to be precise, but just some idea of the mix of people who took part in each of your sessions.*

The groups were somewhat diverse, with a fairly even mix of men and women but participants were predominantly white and middle class. However, several of the city

officials attending were Black, we did have a representative of the Hispanic-Latino community attend the Community Meeting, and some of the clergy represented low income and minority populations.

### 3. Identify and Describe the Recent (Past 3-5 Years) Disasters Agreed or Disagreed upon by the Two Groups *(From Roundtable Session 1: Questions 1 and 2)*

Ice storms and freezes 2000, 2001, 2003, 2008  
Flooding 1990, 2007, 2008  
Wind damages 1990, 2008  
Hurricane evacuees (Katrina, Gustav and Ike) 2005, 2008

*(a) What were the key damages incurred by the county?*

Power outages, structural damages to homes (roofs) and vehicles, tree and crop damage, increase in fire risk, increase in crime

*(b) Were certain neighborhoods or sections of the county impacted more by this disaster and if so, how?*

Most of damages were county wide. However, residents of the Island Harbor residential and recreational area (mostly white) emphasized flooding.

*(c) Were there any disasters and damages on which the two groups did not agree?*

Disagreements hinged more on dates of events than anything else. However, emergency managers were acutely aware of tornadoes in surrounding communities in 2007 and 2008. Community members (who were predominantly white men) focused a great deal on the flooding of Island Harbor.

### 4. Describe the Nature of the County's Preparation and Response to the Disaster(s) *(Roundtable – Session 1: Question 3 and Session 3: Questions 3a, 3b)*

*(a) Preparedness:*

For the most part, participants thought that because of the CESPP, the Pine Bluff area was fairly well prepared for disasters. However, both groups admitted they were not well prepared for sheltering large numbers of people or for reaching the elderly or low income population.

*(b) Disaster Plan:*

- *Did the county have a disaster plan?*  
Yes.

- *Did both groups know about the county's disaster plan?*

Because of CESPP, the Pine Bluff area is well prepared for emergencies and agencies have a history of working together because of the great potential for disaster. CECPP is widely publicized through out the area; weekly sirens (with verbal instructions) are sounded and emergency alert radios (like weather radios) have allegedly been widely distributed in the community (this was more likely to be agreed upon by white middle class residents than minority lower class residents).

- *Was it comprehensive or did it focus more on specific at-risk or disadvantaged populations, neighborhoods, and/or communities?*

The plan is rather generic and apparently does not focus on at-risk or disadvantaged groups in particular. However, we have not seen the plan and do not know this for a fact.

- *Who and what groups were involved in the development of the disaster plan for the county?*

The plan is very top-down and developed primarily by the Army with some coordination on the part of local officials.

- *What were some of the conclusions on which the two groups agreed regarding the disaster plan at the Bridge meeting?*

In general, they all agreed that it was very important to the safety of the community.

- (c) *At-Risk or Disadvantaged Populations: Who did both groups (EM and CG) identify as being “at-risk” in the county?*

Participants viewed elderly, low-income, developmentally or physically challenged, medically dependent and non-English speaking residents as at-risk. The at-risk population was not associated with any one particular geographic area. Rather, the at-risk and disadvantaged populations seem to be distributed throughout the city.

- (d) *Services Available for At-risk or Disadvantaged Populations: What major types of services and/or assistance were identified as available during the disaster(s) for at-risk or disadvantaged people or places?*

Transportation, medical, food and housing, financial aid. Services were provided by Red Cross, Salvation Army, Health Department, Department of Human Services, Police, Fire, Sheriff's Offices, Highway Department and Army.

- (e) *Information Sources: What resources did both the EM and CG groups identify as being reliable sources of information?*

Radio, television, Office of Emergency Management bulletins, sirens, tone alerts, NOAA, Internet, friends and family. Most trusted public communications systems and OEM. The representative from the Hispanic-Latino community suggested that friends and family were the best sources of information. Many of the Hispanic-Latino community do not have the language skills to know what is happening.

- (f) *Positive Responses to the Disaster: Summarize (in bullet form) what both groups (EM and CG) agreed were the things that went right during the course of the recent disaster(s).*

Communications  
Exercises and drills  
Some agencies worked together

- (g) *Areas of Improvement: Present (in bullet form) the key items that both groups (EM and CG) agreed have to be addressed before a future disaster strikes.*

The elderly and handicapped were reluctant (unable?) to seek help. Language barriers existed. Needed: better communications, transportation services, more generators, more housing (some disagreement here between groups as to the adequacy of housing),

access to drinking water. In addition, CERTS were not activated (emergency managers response), churches and sheltering agencies were not coordinated and did not communicate with each other, they were overwhelmed with donations.

(Note discrepancies in the issue of communications. My interpretation is that communications to the public about weather events and their consequences were effective. However, communications and coordination within and among agencies and services were not as effective as they could have been. Some participants reported, in particular, about the divides among churches by denomination and race. This observation is consistent with what is widely repeated about Pine Bluff's racial divides.)

## 5. Summarize Existing Community Resources

*(Roundtable – Session 2: Questions 1 and 2)*

*For each pilot site, please provide a summary of the local organizations/resources that were identified as (1) currently involved; and (2) could be involved in helping the county prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.*

*(1) Currently involved:*

Army and National Guard, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Health Department, Department of Human Services, police, fire, and sheriff's offices, local churches and religious organizations, Pine Bluff Convention Center, hospitals and medical community, utility companies, Area Agency of Aging, Wal-Mart, local industries, neighbors. Community members were more likely to report neighbors as sources of assistance than were the emergency managers. Others that should be involved: Neighborhood Watch, Home Health, private and public schools, fraternities (University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff), YMCA. (A number of agencies and organizations that are involved were also mentioned here. This speaks to a lack of information about which organizations are providing services).

## 6. Identify Trusted & Respected Resources *(Roundtable – Session 2, Question 3)*

*(a) Who did the EM group identify as trusted sources of information about the needs of at-risk or disadvantaged populations and neighborhoods?*

Area agencies, health department, Salvation Army, churches, Neighborhood Watch, Department of Homeland Security, Home Health, Sheriff's Department, Volunteer Fire Departments, hospitals, Red Cross.

*(b) Who did the CG group identify as trusted sources of information about the needs of at-risk or disadvantaged populations and neighborhoods?*

They reported churches, schools, civic groups, family, friends and neighbors as trusted sources of information.

*(c) Please describe any key similarities or differences between the two groups' responses. If this was discussed during the Bridge meeting, please add any insights from that session.*

## 7. Development of a Disaster Plan by At-risk and Disadvantaged People

*(Roundtable – Session 3: Question 5)*

*Did the groups (EM & GC) at the Roundtable discussions believe that people living in at-risk or disadvantaged neighborhoods should develop a disaster plan for their neighborhood? What thoughts did they have regarding ways to build a strong working relationship between EM and at-risk or disadvantaged groups?*

In general, yes. However, the emergency manager was a little reluctant to agree with this position. His position was much more along the lines of command and control. What thoughts did they have regarding ways to build a strong working relationship between EM and at-risk or disadvantaged groups? Need to get more information to all people, overcome language barriers, coordinate services better, schools should be involved in process, bilingual signage and radio broadcasts, identify key contacts within communities, agencies need to get citizens involved in their projects.

## 8. Assessing the Emergency Preparedness Demonstration (EPD) Project

*(Roundtable – Session 3, Questions 1, 2, and 4)*

*(a) EPD Steps: Please summarize the group's responses to the EPD Steps.*

*What did they like about the steps?*

Necessary, organized, comprehensive and involve the community.

*What concerns did they express?*

Fundraising.

*What steps, if any, did they feel were missing?*

Coordination with faith based community, plan for disseminating information to community.

*Were there any key differences between the reactions of the EM and that of the CG to the EPD process?*

Emergency Managers stressed the importance of keeping OEM involved in the process.

*What additional insights, if any, came from the Bridge meeting on this topic?*

Some of participants did not think mapping was necessary. Others thought that community members would not be interested in being involved. They have always relied on OEM and the CESPP to do this type of activity.

*(b) Vulnerability Assessment: What reactions did the two groups (EM and CG) have toward the vulnerability assessment step (mapping process)?*

The Emergency Managers thought OEM should develop it. The Community Group thought maps should be developed by a combination of agencies and community members.

*What response did the groups have to the idea of having community members respond to the accuracy of the maps once developed?*

They all thought it was important.

*Were there any additional inputs provided during the Bridge meeting on this item?*

There were concerns that involving the community in developing a comprehensive plan would result in a plan that is not coordinated (this seemed to reflect the existence of social and political divisions within the city).

(c) *Community Coach: Please describe the reaction of the two groups (EM and CG) to the concept of a community coach.*

*What did they like or dislike about having this type of resource person?*

They mostly agreed on the necessity of an impartial outsider to act as a coach.

*What was the county's "final verdict" during the Bridge Meeting regarding having a community coach?*

They all agreed they needed one, but feared it would be difficult to find one.

(d) *Final Community Recommendations: During the Bridge meeting, participants were asked these questions. Please provide a summary of their responses:*

*Now that you have seen all the steps of the EPD project and reviewed your community's feedback, do you think this is a process that should be pursued to assist at-risk or disadvantaged communities with disaster preparedness and response?*

Yes, but money is an issue.

*What is the best way to get communities to buy-in to the EPD process?*

Help them to see how vulnerable they are at the present.