

Building Resilient Communities

State Project Report Maries County, Missouri



State: Missouri
County Name: Maries
County Type (Metro or Non-metro): Non-metro
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1. Provide a Brief Overview of the County Site

Maries County is southwest of St. Louis, Missouri with an estimated population in 2008 of 9,045. Maries County is very rural, with the closest town of any size being Rolla in Phelps County, 20 miles to the north. Therefore, access to accommodations and transportation is somewhat of a challenge, especially for the disadvantaged of the community. Maries County was chosen for this project, because it has many challenges pertaining to both at-risk and disadvantaged populations. Maries County has had many weather-related events in the last 5 years, which have caused difficulties for everyone, especially those who do not have the ability or the means to prepare and respond. The Extension Specialist in Maries County with whom we worked is very well regarded by the community and did everything possible to make the project a success. This Specialist is actively involved with the farmers, many of whom are aging in place and have little or no help. Most of the people attending the meeting were between 40 & 70 years of age. Many concerns have to do with aging in place, living alone after the death of a spouse, feeling isolated, being unable to get around easily, and having no help.

2. Tell Us Who Took Part in Your Roundtable Sessions

In the Maries County “Emergency Management” and “Community” roundtables there were mostly people whose outside jobs were part time and farming was their livelihood. Many people who are not on farms commute to other places for work.

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

There were 9 people who attended the March 25 “Emergency Management” roundtable, from 6 organizations and agencies. Many of the safety services are voluntary positions in Maries County. The roundtable meeting represented emergency management, police, sheriff, fire, and ambulance services. The diversity of the group was primarily white, average age about 55 years, with 6 men and 3 women.

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

There were 16 people in attendance at the March 26 “Community” roundtable and 10 of them were senior citizens. We met at the neighborhood restaurant/meeting place where everyone seemed very much “at home” and knew everyone else. Everyone was white and over 60, with there being 9 men and 7 women in attendance. The group spoke of being at risk depending on the kind of disaster; some had first-hand experience from flooding and being trapped in their homes due to the water being over the roads, while

others talked about the damage to their homes and businesses from tornadoes. Everyone talked about being at-risk for injury, loss of power, isolation and resulting illness due to freezing and/or excess heat events. Their primary disadvantage is the fact that they are older and in some instances alone and isolated at the end of the road having “aged in place” on their farms. Fear that they will be hurt or become ill as a result of an event and will have no way to communicate their plight is their main concern.

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

There were 13 people who attended the April 20 “Bridging” roundtable. Ten of them were the community representatives spoken of in item “b” and one person came who is a volunteer emergency manager assistant; two people were from MU Extension. There were eight men and five women in attendance, all of them white and the average age was about 60.

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)*

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

In Maries County:

Fire	2009
Flood	March, June and August 2008
Destroyed a business	
Highways destroyed	
Cut off parts of the county	
Tornado in Vichy	January 2008
Tornado	Spring 2008
Tornado	December 2007
Tornado	February 2002
High winds	March 2009
Ice storms	January 2007 and Late 2007 and early 2008

(The entire county was damaged mostly on the western side)

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

Both groups indicated that damage occurred throughout the county. No area was noted as one that was impacted more by the disasters. There was no population identified as impacted more by the disasters.

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

There was agreement between both groups about the disasters. The CG did note a number of storms that occurred before 2005, dating back to the early 1990’s.

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: How prepared was the county for the disaster(s) from the perspective of the two groups? Describe areas on which they agree, as well as differences of opinions they had on the county’s level of preparedness.*

Both groups felt that the community was well prepared. The citizen group felt the fire departments did an excellent job and had a great response time.

The CG felt the community was prepared, because neighbors took care of neighbors and families took care of their own needs.

One comment from the EM group was that “These questions must have been developed for a bigger city. We call the dentist or the nursing home if there is a problem coming.”

(b) Disaster Plan: Did the county have a disaster plan? Did both groups know about the county's disaster plan? Was it comprehensive or did it focus more on specific at-risk or disadvantaged populations, neighborhoods, and/or communities? Who and what groups were involved in the development of the disaster plan for the county? Were any at risk groups involved in preparing or reviewing the plan?

The emergency management group knew that there was a plan and felt the plan covered the needs of the entire county.

Only one person in the citizen group knew there was a disaster plan. The rest of the group had no idea that a plan even existed.

At the Bridging meeting, the following was agreed upon:

- Knowledge of the Plan is not consistent throughout the county the knowledge base is significantly different between responder and general public.
 - County has a plan and everyone needs to know what's in it.
 - Those who know about the plan did not take the time to read it.
 - The County needs to coordinate with neighboring counties.
 - Neighborhoods need to plan too.
- Organizations/businesses need to be prepared and willing to help in the event of a disaster.
 - Fire departments have equipment available to assist.
 - Neighbors can and will call each other.
 - Churches can and should open shelters during loss of electricity.
 - We need shelter for pets.
- We need a county-wide system to get word out about pending disaster – very important.
 - Reverse 911 – it is expensive and not currently available in county.
 - Text or email alerts should be implemented.
 - We need to develop a phone chain-type response system to get the word out.
- We also need to get the word out to families about being prepared.
 - Mass mailings
 - Flyers at fairs
 - Emergency drills at school
 - Newspaper articles - Media needs to get more information to the community.
- Preparation for the future should include:
 - We need neighborhood watch for emergency management as well as theft.
 - We need more involvement of churches. They would do more if they had more information or were asked to help.
 - Faith-based community needs disaster training.
 - More people need to do Community Emergency Response Team(CERT) training.

- Final Thought
We are a small county – we need to take care of our families and our neighbors because it will be days or weeks before we get help from the state or federal government.

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

Both groups identified the elderly and low income as “at-risk” in Maries County. They especially focused on seniors that have special needs for medical care, those in the nursing home, and the low income that do not have funds to plan and prepare. In addition, these people do not have access to generators and some do not have access to phones.

(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?*

Both the EM and CG groups felt that larger organizations such as the fire departments, churches, senior center, the Red Cross and community volunteers were trusted services available to assist in a disaster. Both groups also mentioned the city and county resources like emergency management personnel, the sheriff’s department, local law enforcement, and city and county employees were resources and trusted.

The primary difference between the EM and the CG groups was that the community group kept stating that people in the community were self sufficient, that they took care of themselves and their neighbors.

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

Both the EM and CG groups felt that the local news on television and radio were trusted sources of information. They also felt the computer provided useful information on river/flood stages. Both groups also indicated that they trusted and used weather radios.

The primary difference between the groups was that the EM personnel used and trusted State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and the national weather service. They felt that many of the disasters they experienced were slow moving, they had time to communicate with other communities in the area and stay on top of the needed information. They also felt that because the storms were slow moving they had adequate time to prepare and evacuate the affected areas before the disaster occurred.

(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).*

- People worked together; there was community cooperation.
- The county responded well – especially with road cleanup.
- Local fire and police departments responded well.
- The elderly were taken care of.
- There was no loss of life.
- Neighbors helped neighbors.

(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 nursing home had no generator.
- The community needs an early warning system.

- Not enough people took the time to prepare for the disaster.
- More people need to attend Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training.

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:

Churches
 Sheriff's department
 Local fire departments
 County – road and electric crews
 Water patrol
 Ambulance districts
 Local service clubs (Masonic, Eagles, Lions, etc)

(2) Could be involved (services and assets):

More service clubs
 For lodging, shelter, food, water, raise money, volunteers
 Vet clinics
 For animal shelter
 Extension center
 For local center that can answer questions, organize meetings, prepare newsletters

There were no differences in the responses from the groups.

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?

- Churches
- Fire and law enforcement
- Division of Family Services
- City employees

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

- Community volunteers
- Sheriff's department
- Missouri Department of Transportation – Road Closures
- Highway Patrol
- Fire Department
- National Guard
- Red Cross

(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.*

The primary similarity between the EM and CG groups is that the same “trusted sources of information” appear throughout the conversation. This could be attributed to the fact that this is a very small, very rural community. There are not many resources available to local residents. Those resources that are available are called upon time and time again.

This question was not discussed during the Bridge meeting.

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 Maries County, the emergency management personnel felt that the current county plan supported all segments of the population and was sufficient to cover the needs of all county residents.

The community group also felt that the community needed one plan. However, they felt that neighborhoods and all citizens should be involved in creating a plan.

The citizen group felt that there should be local meetings and a discussion of the issue with all groups. However, they also stated that most citizens typically do not participate in community meetings. One idea to get the community involved was to feed them chicken and catfish and have music and fun at a meeting to discuss the emergency plan.

It also seemed to be a general consensus that the county contracted with the regional planning commission to create the plan. There was minimal community input and participation in its development.

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.*

Both groups liked the EPD process. They felt it was useful because there was a process and it had structure. Many also liked the mapping portion of the process because it provided a visual to locate vulnerable areas of the county. However, they also felt that the process required a lot of community participation. The groups did not believe that individuals would participate. They stated that it is a widespread problem in their community because many people (approximately 60% of the population) work outside of the county and could not/would not attend meetings.

Other advice from the group included the need to keep the process simple.

During the Bridging meeting, the group concluded that the EPD process would be helpful. They felt the county commission would have to oversee the process. Participants stated that they liked the process and thought it would be helpful if there could be a summary of the plan, perhaps something that were 3-5 pages and included maps. They felt that there should be representatives from each area to review the plan on a quarterly basis. The

groups also felt that there should be an “auditor” that could debrief the community after a disaster and incorporate the “lessons learned” in the plan.

Those at the Bridging meeting felt that the sheriff and all law enforcement departments are a critical piece of the puzzle and are critical in making the process work.

There was also a lot of conversation about the political nature of this type of process. They asked questions like:

- Who would be in charge?
- Who would be responsible for the process?
- The county commission has tight control of county funds, how would we pay for the process?

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

The general consensus from both groups is that “yes”, the vulnerability assessment process is useful. Statements from participants included: it encourages all local communities to have a specific plan and that all local residents need to plan and prepare together.

The main comments centered on the need to educate the public. The public needs to be a part of developing the plan and be prepared for disasters.

Other comments from the EM group included that it would be helpful to have a map where all homes are marked.

Both groups felt that local first responders or local citizens should develop the map and local citizens should review the map.

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

Both groups like the concept of the community coach. The CG group stated that it was a good idea, but not feasible because the community is large (geographically) and one person could not do the entire job. In addition, there are not enough resources to support this person.

When asked if it was a good idea to have a coach from outside the community, the CG stated that they already have the emergency manager and his plans, but a coach is a good idea.

During the Bridge meeting, concerns stated about the Community Coach included:

- How would the community coach be selected?
- Who would the community coach report to
- Who will help communities cope with disasters?
- Who will organize this process?
- Will there be a community advisory committee?
- Will they live in the community?
 - Some of the participants felt very strongly that the coach should live in the community and thus would know the community better.
 - Some of the participants thought that an outside person could eliminate the problems of local politics.

They also stated that the pluses of a community coach would be:

- Sometimes you need a ramrod to get things going.

- The right person could have more ability to get the job done and work with people.
- A coach could help keep rumors in check.

Some felt that a negative of having a community coach would be that it could complicate the many issues involved in emergency management.

A general consensus from the group was that regardless of how the community coach is selected and who they are, there will be a lot of politics, and the person would have to manage those issues.

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

The biggest revelation from the meeting was that all citizens need to be involved in preparing for disasters and the EPD process is good. During the Bridging meeting, the group generated several ideas about getting all people involved in the process. They included:

- Locating and identifying people who were at risk.
- Develop strategies to increase awareness and participation.
 - Making personal contact with people and help them better prepare for disasters
 - Newspaper articles
 - Radio programs
 - Programs in the schools
 - Flyers at the county fair and other public events
 - Asking churches to make disaster education a part of their ministry – possibly “Disaster Sunday”.
 - Since there are no community sirens, developing a phone-chain to alert people of a pending disaster.
- Getting people to attend meetings by providing food and music.
- Offering workshops on the topic and lots of advanced public notice to get people there.

Remarks concluded with the recognition that the group does not necessarily know who in their community is at-risk; even when they are identified, the group is unsure how to reach them.