

# Building Resilient Communities

## State Project Report Ouachita Parish, Louisiana



**State:** Louisiana

**County Name:** Ouachita

**County Type (Metro or Non-metro):** Metro

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

Ouachita Parish is the most urban area in Northeast Louisiana, yet has a considerable agricultural industry. One of the larger rivers in the state is the Ouachita River which passes through the parish. One side of the river is hill country and the other is flat delta. It has been declared a disaster numerous times, had several different types of disasters, and has a high population of those who are socially vulnerable.

### 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?*

17 participated in the Emergency Management roundtable representing health, housing, social services, chambers of commerce, and food banks.

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

2 participated in the Community Group roundtable meeting representing socio-economically at-risk and disadvantaged citizens.

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

10 participated in the Bridge meeting representing United Way, Homeland Security, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Office of Public Health, and Agriculture.

### 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)

Floods, hurricanes Gustav and Ike, ice storms, west Nile virus, and tornado

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

Road closures, flooding, transportation, roof and water damages, electricity loss, street damage

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

Whole parish was impacted

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

All agreed

#### **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.*

Consensus of citizens was that they were not well prepared. Improvements had been noted since Hurricanes Rita and Katrina and were evidenced after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

- (b) *Disaster Plan:*

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

The parish does have a disaster plan, but attendees had very little if any knowledge of such a plan. Agencies were more aware of its existence than were community attendees.

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

The groups did not know the answer to this question

- *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?*

Homeland security and parish government officials made the plan. It is not known whether at-risk groups or disadvantaged groups were part of the planning process. At the Bridge meeting the consensus was that representatives from communities as well as government officials should be involved in preparing the plan. Once developed, the plan should be explained to all citizens in a clear, easy-to-understand way.

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

Elderly, physically challenged, developmentally challenged, those without transportation, and those living in isolation.

- (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?*

Sandbags, shelter, cleaning supplies, food supplies, faith-based volunteer resources, local government, law enforcement

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

TV, radio, Public Service Announcements, conversations with family and friends, 211

(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).*

Increase in sense of feeling of community; acknowledgement of citizens to work together to help each other in times of crisis.

(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.*

- Response time for services
- Need a plan that citizens know about and understand
- Education for citizens in communities
- Radios – select a common emergency channel
- Disaster kits for every citizen in at-risk populations

## **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:*

- Red Cross, Churches, Food Bank, Salvation Army, Police, Wildlife and Fisheries, College of Pharmacy, TV and Radio, National Weather Service

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

- Police Jury, Clothing Bank, Community Action Agency, Monroe City, Twin City Welfare, United Way, 211
- Note: National Guard, Ambulance Services and others were involved but the attendees were unaware of this

## **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?*

- State level, mayor and city officials
- Weather radios, tv, media

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

- Churches, Red Cross, neighbors and friends

(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.

- Bridge meeting stressed the importance of friends and neighbors and communication

## 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?*

- The need for at-risk and disadvantaged people to know details about a plan and that the communities were included in a plan was expressed. Regarding who prepares the plan, no definite opinions were voiced.
- Emergency Management people need to educate people about the plan and implementation procedures. Citizens could be involved in the review process of the plan as prepared.

## 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.*

- Yes, the steps are appropriate.
- Logical and well explained; concept of coaches
- Nobody knew about these.
- Not sure

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

- Both groups thought local input is important.
- Yes, local citizens can assist in checking for accuracy and ease of use
- N/A

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

- How coaches are identified was an issue.

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

- Improve communications.
- Increase education in the communities.
- Outreach efforts regarding the plan should be intensified.
- These efforts should be pursued.
- Best ways to get communities to buy-in to EPD process is to make sure representatives are involved in the planning process and that the final plans are presented at meetings held in the communities.