

Building Resilient Communities

State Project Report Arkansas Project Summary



Project Summary

Please share your thoughts on the following items:

(a) Based upon the discussions that took place in the Roundtables and Bridge meetings held in your two counties, what are the 4-5 most important things a community can do to help:

- **At-risk** people prepare for and respond to disasters?
 - Recognize the importance of working together and sharing resources and responsibilities in disaster management.
 - Conduct vulnerability assessments and identify and map at-risk populations.
 - Increase awareness of their level of vulnerability and what they can do to address some of those issues.
 - Do an emergency management asset mapping to identify resources available for increasing awareness and preparedness as well as emergency responses.
 - Provide more information to at risk populations – in a number of formats and in a number of places.
- **Disadvantaged** people prepare for and respond to disasters?
 - Work through agencies to identify and locate disadvantaged population and their caregivers or families.
 - Establish appropriate communications with disadvantaged to increase their awareness and preparedness and so that they can communicate their needs.
 - Work with agencies and organizations to coordinate activities for disadvantaged.
 - Plan for necessary emergency services for those who are disadvantaged.

(b) What final recommendations would you offer on the EPD process, regarding:

- *The concept of a Community Coach?*

Almost everyone responded favorably to the idea of a community coach. However, they were uncertain about the process of finding and funding a community coach. Most communities will not go through this process unless funding is available.

- *The vulnerability assessment for addressing the needs of **disadvantaged** people?*

Again, nearly everyone responded positively to the need for a vulnerability assessment. However, as in the case of the community coach, they do not have the expertise or technology to conduct community assessments. Without funding and technical assistance, most communities will be unable to conduct an in-depth vulnerability assessment.

(c) What specific needs do the counties have with regard to emergency preparedness and response?

Most communities appear to need help (1) in developing coordination between those responsible for emergency management (with the state and local levels), (2) engaging

community members in the development of emergency management plans that are both specific to their needs and coordinated with the more comprehensive community level disaster plan and (3) disseminating information about disaster planning with the community.

Then, please share your thoughts on the following:

- *Which of these do you think Extension could play a valuable role in addressing?*

CES can help facilitate coordination among different stakeholders and can provide educational assistance to help increase awareness and preparedness. In a disaster situation CES can (and often does) work with emergency responders in rural areas to help identify people in need of assistance. Community development faculty in CES can also help (and has) in the long term community recovery process.

- *Which of these are likely to have special application to those who are also socially and/or economically **disadvantaged**?*

Coordination of stakeholder efforts and increasing awareness and preparedness in at-risk and disadvantaged populations.

(d) What do you think about the meetings that were held in the county?

- *Were they useful to the community?*

They were useful in helping communities and the emergency managers in these communities sit down across the table and talk with each other about what they do and how they can work together.

- *Do you feel they helped increase awareness of the special needs of local residents who are socially and/or economically **disadvantaged**?*

Yes. In both of our communities, most of the disaster planning processes were very top down and oriented from a “command and control”, “one size fits all” approach. The discussions about the at-risk and disadvantaged populations in their communities helped to increase their awareness of the issues facing these populations and seemed to open minds about new possibilities and techniques for disaster awareness, preparedness and management.

(e) Did you learn anything new as a result of your involvement in this FEMA/CSREES/SRDC project?

Absolutely.

- *If so, what did you learn?*

I had not realized (1) the level of the lack of coordination among emergency managers at the local level (including the politics of this lack of coordination), and (2) how little information (or access to information) that people have, especially in rural communities.

(f) Is there anything else you would like to bring to our attention in terms of your experiences taking part in these county meetings and the overall project?

In both communities, participants talked about their lack of information about comprehensive disaster plans and the lack of coordination between different jurisdictions and organizations. We were also surprised by the number of community people who told us they did not know what to do and who to call in case of disaster preparations and emergency responses. There is clearly a need for appropriate education and information dissemination.