

Building Resilient Communities

State Project Report Florida 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:

No one really suggested what their "community" could do to help at risk or disadvantaged people other than the current practices of families helping family members and neighbors looking out for each other. It was pretty clear though that people in these two categories (like all others) did not do much to prepare for disasters. As one participant said, "I had never been through a hurricane before, so I didn't evacuate. Next time I'll know to leave."

The obvious actions a community can take include continuous education (the FEMA website has lots of downloadable materials), more active involvement from the institutions most trusted for information (local churches were cited).

Local communities **could** help identify disadvantaged people in their neighborhoods. However this would appear to be a one-off activity and there would be no real way to maintain a comprehensive and up to date list without a formal mechanism in place.

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

- *The concept of a Community Coach?*

People generally liked the idea of someone to "guide" them through the planning process. However there was no consensus on whether this person should be from the community or from the outside. In fact there was confusion and concern over the role of this person (facilitator or expert), who would pay for the person, how the process would work, etc. The phrase "community coach" needs to be defined and the role, responsibilities and how such a person would be found and engaged must be clear if the concept is to be used.

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

Participants generally thought this was a good idea and understood that GIS systems could be used in this effort, but there was a concern over who would undertake this effort, who would maintain it, how the original data would be collected and, primarily, who would pay for the development, maintenance and operation of such a system.

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

At one site the real need was for cooperation and information sharing within the "community." The issue is clearly political with the first responders eager for more information sharing and cooperation. The recipients of services did not see a problem since when asked about their needs being met all were pleased with what had been done for them by the government.

At our other site, the community was very well organized. The one thing they seemed to be concerned with was the lack of shelter space for people with medical needs.

In both these instances there did not seem to be a role for Extension per-se. However, Extension could be the source for either providing coaches or for providing training in the EDP process. Having someone from outside the community encourage broader citizen participation in the planning process would probably work better than having someone from an internal advocacy group (or groups) assume this role.

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

- *Were they useful to the community?*

Yes. In one site the meetings allowed the first responders to “vent” over the political situation. It may be that from this a commitment to act to change the way the community coordinates its response may come. In our other site the community was extremely proud of its achievements in developing a structure and organization that meshes the work of volunteer and other organizations with the role of first responders. Participants in these meetings used the opportunity to identify gaps that needed to be filled and to get some commitment to seek the involvement of other volunteer organizations.

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

Our meetings did not increase the awareness of the special needs of local residents. There are at least two reasons. First the first responders believe they know these needs and have done all they can to address them (address, not respond). Second, there were not enough people from the affected groups present to provide any significant evidence that their needs were not being met. In fact, the people we met with felt that in the situations where they needed help, the need was met. The sole exception to that feeling was where one participant had to deal with FEMA. In that specific instance it was felt that the FEMA rep was only there to “go through the motions.” Overall the locals were pleased with local efforts and critical of “national” organizations that came in after the fact.

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

Yes. Disadvantaged and at-risk people respond to disasters in much the same way as everyone else. They generally don’t prepare and (from our participants) expect that “the government” will take care of them if a disaster strikes. We did however have a relatively small group of disadvantaged or at-risk participants. We learned that the recipients of services do not know the details of first responder plans to deal with disasters. They just want to know that their needs will be addressed after the fact.

(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?

- Disaster planning has its own language. Making sure that everyone is using a common language as this project moves forward is important (first responder, community, neighborhood, at-risk, disadvantaged, etc.)
- Not all at-risk people are disadvantaged and not all disadvantaged are at risk. Yet the way the EDP is presented seems to assume that the target audiences are clustered. It will be difficult to implement an EDP targeted solely at a “category” of people who are dispersed within the general population.
- Terminology during this project changed. Is the focus on communities or neighborhoods?
- There is a role for Extension (community education), but there will never be a guarantee that everyone will prepare for a disaster. Communities want to do the right thing, but are

constrained by resources. Our focus was on disadvantaged and at-risk people. Yet there are counties that are disadvantaged and places that are at-risk.

- The EDP project does not address how you deal with resource poor communities. And this would appear to be a significant flaw. The EDP process will require education materials and training to implement. Both our sites liked the idea, but were clear in stating that the funding needed to implement, and probably maintain, such an effort would have to come from outside sources. And seeking grants from various agencies was not seen as a viable option.