

Building Resilient Communities

State Project Report Missouri 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:

Summary from the Bridge meetings in Buchanan and Maries Counties:

1. Identify the location of at-risk and disadvantaged populations.
2. Identify the needs of at-risk and disadvantaged populations.
3. Develop a community plan to address special needs and concerns.
4. Develop a communication and education plan to help individuals.
 - o Help people understand the issue and empower them to help themselves.
5. Execute – do not go back to business as usual.

Summary of important things a community can do - from the project facilitators:

1. Engage people in dialogue - exactly what we were doing in these roundtables - getting leaders and residents together to talk about the needs. Discuss the needs and assets of the community. Determine what everyone understands, what is taken for granted, and what can be done to make communication clearer.
2. Create a plan that is inclusive of all people in the community, but has annexes to it that specify particular populations that need extra attention, or are the exception to the rule.
3. Include people in the writing of the emergency plan who represent all walks of life and all areas of the community, so that you have the perspective of everyone and don't find out later that you left some part of the population out of the plan.
4. Practice the plan, so people know what to expect when an emergency happens.
5. Include in the plan either a budget or means for fundraising, so that those people who are unable to provide the basic supplies for survival in a disaster will have access to those supplies when the time comes; whether it is through regional caches, or some local organizations.
6. Those organizations that work regularly with people who are non-English speakers, physically or mentally handicapped, low-income, poorly educated, elderly, or otherwise disadvantaged need to make emergency preparedness part of their mission of care and concern for their special populations. In addition, they need to keep track of their clients, make sure the clients are as ready as possible for the disaster, that they survive it, and that they are given the help they need to recover as soon as everyone else. An example of this mission is the person on oxygen – the provider makes sure an ample supply is available for the client and makes it their business to check on the client regularly to determine that everything is working as it should and the client is okay.

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

The EPD Project is a good idea for any community, especially those in remote communities where other options are not wide-spread. The vulnerability assessment is needed, because people think they understand and know what the situation is in their community, but often do not. Interestingly they are very surprised by this revelation of not knowing. It is apparent from our experience with Buchanan & Maries Counties that this assessment is needed, and people are willing to try to make it happen.

The community coach would be very beneficial because it would be one person working as a coordinator for all the organizations who should be involved and helping them determine what needs to be done. People liked the idea, but had several reservations about it, primarily that the person would have to be someone from the community in order to be seen as a trusted and valuable player in the scheme of things. In fact, they thought it should be one of the emergency management office people, or someone already involved in emergency management. On the other hand, when they decided what the qualifications should be for this position they began to rethink their ideas about who that should be. However, when they looked at the qualifications they had established and what that salary would look like, they began to rethink it again, leaning back to a local person - concluding they could just lower the expectations for qualification. Another line of thought was that the community coach should come from outside of the community, so they would have a "fresh" perspective and not be tied with the politics and could "think outside the box." We think EPD & Coach are possibilities, but like any successful project, would need to be adapted to the community they are meant to serve.

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

These counties, more than anything else right now, need to continue the dialogue started by these Roundtables, so that they will continue to keep the enthusiasm and interest in emergency preparedness and response a priority. They need to review and/or write their emergency plan using community representatives as part of the committee to do the writing. They need to make sure the at-risk and disadvantaged populations are represented and that an annex to the plan is established for those special populations. There needs to be a way for the community organizations to come together around their clients to make emergency preparedness and response part of their mission. These points have to do with all the population, including at-risk and disadvantaged people, as identified in question a - 6. Extension could and should play a leadership role in all these aspects of emergency management, especially specialists in Community Development, whose profession it is to work with groups and communities to help them accomplish their goals. Community Development professionals facilitate such efforts as gaining community input and participation, writing plans, organizing the community to do things, helping organizations determine their mission and how to accomplish their goals, and anything else the community needs.

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

The meetings in the counties met our expectations and beyond. We thought they would be meetings much like others where people think they have to be there and would rather be somewhere else, but this was not the case in either county. The people in attendance were very enthused, took it seriously and were open to suggestion. We thought the meetings were well attended, even though several more people had been invited. Much was accomplished, especially the idea that these gatherings need to continue in order to make progress toward solving the problems. The professionals actually heard the residents say that they did not know there is a plan. Hearing some of the horror stories people had to tell really made the professionals sit up and take notice. They had no idea. On the other hand, when the residents heard the emergency people talk about how well they thought things went, how hard they worked to get to people, and the stories of incidents where they put themselves in jeopardy for the community, it made a difference. There was instant willingness to work together toward common ground and to make the community a safer place to live. In both counties, it was truly an awakening moment.

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

Primarily we, the facilitators, had reinforced for us that the system works. We experience these kinds of “ah-ha” moments all the time in our work with groups, but this scripted process for dialogue in the community did not feel as open to such possibilities as when we let the group dynamics dictate the agenda. However, in the end we had very much the same results. People embraced the questions (primarily because they were very important to THEM) and got very involved in the dynamics of what those questions implied. It was a learning experience for us, because we tend to resist the scripted process for fear we will lose that edge; maybe there is room for both, depending on the situation.

(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?*

It was such a good experience all around. The two facilitators have never worked so closely on a project together, so did not really know the style of the other; therefore, we had to have a couple of “discussions” to come to an understanding of how we would do this. We also had to rearrange so much in our individual schedules in order to be available not only for the program and those groups, but for each other. We are so eternally grateful to our colleagues in the counties for doing such a stellar job of preparing for our arrival; we could not have asked for more. We knew things are difficult in the world of emergency management, because of funding inadequacies, apathy in many realms, ignorance of what should be done, and inability to do what needs to be done, but there were examples that we had not even thought about. Aging in place and then having the spouse die and leave you to your own resources is difficult on so many levels, yet these people are becoming a larger and larger part of our population. They live daily on their farm, isolated from everyone, with no support; then when an ice storm hits and the only road is blocked by downed trees, the power goes off and they can’t even call for help! This is becoming more like the normal story these days and it is frightening. These Roundtables would be of benefit all over the country for so many communities (maybe even all communities) if for no other reason than to call attention to the situation and cause people to start talking to each other about what they can do together to make a difference. We think Extension could be very instrumental in making this happen, with the help of the Regional Rural Development Centers (RDC), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other such interested organizations and agencies.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to bring this program to two of our counties. It has been our pleasure and the residents were so appreciative. It was a good experience for us all and in addition, we got to meet all of the people who are involved in the project, which has been a great honor.