Introduction

Catastrophic natural and technical disasters – such as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and pandemic influenza – can have devastating impacts on the well-being in individuals, families, communities, and regions. In light of the increasing geographic concentration of our nation’s population, areas that are defined as metropolitan areas at most vulnerable to experiencing major loss of life and to disruptions in the social, economic, physical, and political infrastructures in place in these localities. Certainly, major interruptions in these metro areas are likely to have major spillover effects on the surrounding nonmetropolitan counties given the interdependence commonly existing between metro and nonmetro counties that are located in various regional pockets in the U.S.

It is these recognized linkages among counties located in various areas of the country that prompted the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (DHS/FEMA) to launch the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program (RCPGP) in FY2008. Grants were awarded to 10 (ten) regional sites across the nation. Successful grantees were charged with the responsibility of developing regional plans that effectively addressed the major threats that their areas were at greatest risk of experiencing, such as the need for Mass Evacuation, Mass Care and Sheltering, Economic Recovery Planning, Citizen Preparedness, Disaster Housing, Regional Coordination and Logistics, and Debris Management. Grantees were responsible for developing not only regional blueprints, but also specific plan of actions for setting these regional efforts into motion. To be included in such plans were activities that strengthen the capacity of the region (i.e., its people, households, agencies, institutions) to effectively plan for, and respond to, catastrophic events.

As part of its FY2009 cycle of RCPGP grants, DHS/FEMA has sought to continue its support to the 2008 RCPGP grantees, providing resources to help further promote regional collaboration and implementation of projects deemed to be core elements of their regional plans. Their FY2009 applications also were asked to focus on six priority activities: (1) integration of planning and synchronization of plans via the use of national planning systems and tools; (2) the sharing of best practices; and (3) implementing citizen and community preparedness campaigns and educating citizens about and preparing for catastrophic events; (4) planning for, and pre-positioning of, needed commodities and equipment; (5) implementing the principles and processes that are consistent with the Integrated Planning System; and (6) addressing shortcomings in existing plans and processes.
Two specific components of the FY2009 priorities serve as the key focus areas for the SRDC project being submitted as part of a FEMA/CSREES Inter-agency Agreement, namely:

- Implementing citizen and community preparedness campaigns, especially strategies for educating citizens about catastrophic events and the necessary steps for promoting preparedness on the part of these entities;
- Addressing shortcomings of existing plans and processes

The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC), located at Mississippi State University, is seeking to partner with each Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDC) to carry out a careful assessment of one of the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program areas located in that specific RRDC’s region. The specific activities to be completed by each RRDC are detailed in the next section.

Project Purpose and Key Focus Areas

The central purpose of the SRDC team-led project is to evaluate and assess the regional catastrophic plans of five (5) of the 10 grantees receiving RCPGP funding in FY2008. In particular, the SRDC/RRDC team will examine the degree to which the five regional plans: (1) give specific attention and consideration to the needs of disadvantaged populations and communities/neighborhoods in the region; and (2) outline specific efforts to help educate and prepare disadvantaged populations about catastrophic events and steps they can take to prepare for such events. By “disadvantaged populations” we mean individuals, households or communities that are more likely to suffer from a hazard because of social or economic marginalization (i.e. minority, low income, non-English speaking, disabled, etc.). These individuals may be disadvantaged by a lack of resources, services and/or capabilities to take care of themselves.

The SRDC/RRDC team will employ a variety of approaches to help address the these two core focus areas and when completed, will identify strengths and shortcomings of the five plans and offer recommendations on how these plans can better integrate the needs of disadvantaged populations and at-risk communities into the RCPGP processes.

The Role of the Regional Rural Development Centers

Aside from the SRDC, the three remaining RRDCs in the country (Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, and the Western Rural Development Center) are being invited to submit an application to the SRDC regarding their proposed plan of work and budget needs in support of this initiative.

The following are the work activities that each RRDC is expected to include as part of its work with the SRDC:

1. Identification of Project Coordinator and Extension Representatives from the Region to be part of the overall National Project Team
2. Participation in Start-Up Meeting with FEMA and CSREES Representatives
3. Participation in Regularly Scheduled Conference Calls with the Multi-State Project Advisory Committee
4. Assistance in Identifying and Recruiting “Expert” Reviewers for the RCPGP Plans in the RRDC’s Target Site
5. Providing on Input on the Development of Core Roundtable Questions
6. Participation in Planning/Training Session with all RRDC Representatives and Extension Educators from Pilot Regional
7. Conducting Four Roundtable Sessions in the Selected RCPGP Site in the Region
8. Participation in the Meeting of Key Experts, RRDC Representatives, and Select Extension Educators from the Five Target Regions
9. Contributing to the Final Report to CSREES/FEMA:

**Budget and Budget Justification**

Funds in the amount of $46,400 are available to support the above noted activities of each RRDC. Funds can be distributed across the following categories: Salaries, fringe benefits, domestic travel, on site meeting expenses (for roundtable sessions), travel assistance for roundtable participants, long-distance telephone expenses, etc. No funds can be used to purchase equipment. No indirect costs are allowed.

Each RRDC is asked to provide a budget justification to support its budget request.

**Questions?**

Please contact Lionel J. Beaulieu, Director, Southern Rural Development Center at ljbeaulieu@srdc.msstate.edu or 662-325-3207.

**Proposal Deadline:**

Completed work plan and budget/budget justification should be submitted electronically to Lionel J. Beaulieu by Friday, October 9, 2009.