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INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Community Resilience: Building Resilience with Diverse Communities

SUMMARY

The *Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* team identifies innovative practices within the whole community, and documents these practices for emergency managers to consider or emulate when developing their own plans and exercises.

The Department of Homeland Security's Center for Faith-based & Neighborhood Partnerships (i.e., "DHS Center") created its Building Resilience with Diverse Communities (BRDC) program to examine the role of faith-based and community organizations in emergency preparedness and response. The BRDC program works to improve community resilience by engaging the whole community through its seven-stage process. Emergency managers identify underserved and unengaged faith-based and community groups and assess their capacity to participate in emergency preparedness and response activities. Based on that assessment, emergency managers can use the BRDC process to develop partnerships with these groups, provide training to strengthen their skills, and formally integrate them into emergency management plans and exercises. The DHS Center successfully used the BRDC process in a 2011 pilot initiative in Miami-Dade County.

"There often are not bridges of communication or cooperation between the emergency management community and the faith-based community because they just don't know each other. What this initiative does is create those bridges."
-Rev. David Myers

DESCRIPTION

The DHS Center created the BRDC program in conjunction with the DHS Science and Technology Directorate. The program helps jurisdictions improve emergency capabilities by engaging faith-based and community groups. The pilot initiative of the BRDC process began in 2011 in Florida's Miami-Dade County. The DHS Center selected Miami-Dade County for the BRDC pilot initiative because it has a diverse population, frequent disasters, and many organizations interested in partnering with the program, such as Miami-Dade Office of Emergency Management (MDEM) and local voluntary organizations. The DHS Center partnered with MDEM to start the Miami-Dade Communities Organized to Respond in Emergencies (M-D C.O.R.E.) initiative.

The BRDC process, as used in Miami-Dade County, follows seven stages:

Stage 1: Engagement

Organizers from the DHS Center and MDEM reach out to and engage formerly unengaged groups by building trust with faith-based and community group leadership. Organizers build trust by focusing on each group's capacities and strengths. This requires taking the time to

LLIS.gov defines Innovative Practice as successful and innovative procedures, techniques, or methods developed and/or implemented by the emergency management or response community to adapt to changing circumstances that others may wish to emulate.

listen to and work with group leaders to jointly identify group strengths, as well as being receptive to their inputs. Rather than tell groups what to do, organizers ask potential partners to share their experiences and expertise. Groups use what they are already doing and existing relationships to get involved in emergency preparedness and response. For example, in Miami-Dade County, M-D C.O.R.E. organizers used known and trusted leaders as “key force multipliers” to recruit new partners. This approach helped expand participation from 15 groups in 2011, to 110 groups by May 2013.

Stage 2: Assessment

Organizers work with the community to assess how faith-based and community groups want to participate in the emergency management process. Many groups are interested in a broad set of topics, often including volunteer and donations management, partnerships, and sheltering. Using the asset-based community development approach, the DHS Center asks communities to assess their own strengths and resources, considering groups to be “communities of resources” rather than “communities of need.” This inclusive approach can reveal unreported resources. In 2013, M-D C.O.R.E. organizers used this approach to identify unreported assets in Miami-Dade County, including 6,300 shelter spaces and nearly 2,500 volunteers.

Stage 3: Self-Guided and Group Training

Organizers use the assessments to help groups identify training that matches each group’s specific goals and skills. Training topics can include first aid, community emergency response, volunteer and donations management, and incident command. To provide more formal training, where needed, BRDC organizers partner with the American Red Cross (ARC) and local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD). Through these partnerships, BRDC organizers connect newly engaged groups to existing training courses from the ARC, the private sector, and FEMA. Organizers in Miami-Dade used these partnerships to connect groups with FEMA online courses.

Stage 4: Technical Assistance

In some cases, groups may require more assistance than training courses alone can provide. To help groups meet their goals, the BRDC process matches them with more seasoned emergency management partners who provide small-group or one-on-one technical assistance. In Miami-Dade, the local NAACP affiliate wanted to provide youth training in community emergency response. The M-D C.O.R.E. initiative connected the NAACP affiliate to FEMA’s [CERT Program](#), which shared technical assistance resources and its expertise about [teen CERT programs](#) to help shape a training effort. The local NAACP affiliate was able to leverage this effort into a \$75,000 grant from a local insurance company to continue their work.

Reaching Out to Key Groups

In Miami-Dade County, the C.O.R.E. initiative focused on reaching out to seven population groups that emergency managers felt were missing from engagement efforts:

- Immigrant populations;
- People with low literacy levels or limited English proficiency;
- Elders and seniors;
- Children and youths;
- People with access and functional needs;
- Homeless populations; and
- Low-income populations.

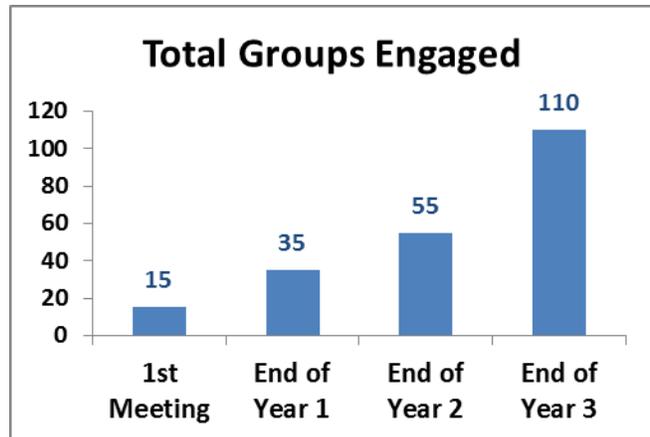
Miami-Dade C.O.R.E. and FEMA Online Training

In the summer of 2011, the Miami-Dade C.O.R.E. recommended specific FEMA online training courses for each group it engaged, including:

- [Introduction to Incident Command](#);
- [National Response Framework](#);
- [Emergency Support Function 6: Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing, and Human Services](#); and
- FEMA’s [volunteers and donations management program](#).

Stage 5: Participation in Scenarios/Exercises

The BRDC process builds on the newly acquired skills and capabilities of the engaged groups by making them a part of the jurisdiction's exercises and scenario planning. Participating in exercises tests groups' disaster readiness and skills. It also ensures smoother coordination between partner organizations and responders. M-D C.O.R.E. showed how these exercises can further incorporate these groups into the emergency management process. As part of the initiative in Miami-Dade, newly engaged groups that finished their training participated in several tabletop exercises. In 2014, MDEM hosted its first full-scale exercise involving these groups.



The Miami-Dade C.O.R.E. initiative has grown steadily over time to engage more than 100 groups. (Source: Phone interview with Rev. David Myers and Jannah Scott. August 5, 2014.)

Stage 6: Affiliation

Groups that complete required training and participate in an exercise can formally affiliate with an emergency management agency or known VOAD partner. By formally partnering with groups that have gone through the BRDC process, emergency managers can trust that new groups understand their role(s) and meet all legal and regulatory requirements. Affiliated groups can then better contribute to emergency management efforts. For example, MDEM formed affiliations with over 25 C.O.R.E. partners in its first year and reorganized its staff to improve whole community planning. The affiliation process also keeps groups active during non-disaster times by maintaining personal connections through engagement meetings, newsletters, web-based resources, and exercises.

Stage 7: Integration

Integrating affiliated groups into existing emergency management plans is the final stage of the BRDC process. This step expands emergency managers' capacity to respond to disasters and improves engagement with formerly unengaged faith-based and community groups. Building long-term community resilience requires subsequent staff and whole community partners to recognize successful outcomes from this process and continue the practices that helped drive those successes. To date, M-D C.O.R.E. has created partnerships with over 100 groups to provide services across 22 geographic areas in Miami-Dade County.

Potential Tasks for Faith-Based and Community Groups

Groups participating in M-D C.O.R.E. perform the following tasks:

- Sheltering
- Feeding
- Serving as points of distribution
- Housing disaster assistance centers
- Managing volunteers
- Providing services to the elderly
- Mass communications
- Crisis counseling and spiritual care

Interested communities can contact the Department of Homeland Security's [Center for Faith-based & Neighborhood Partnerships](#) for help in establishing their own Building Resilience with Diverse Communities program.

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