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## GOOD STORY

# Community Preparedness: Miami-Dade County, Florida, Office of Emergency Management's Communities Organized to Respond in Emergencies

### SUMMARY

The Miami-Dade County, Florida, Office of Emergency Management's (OEM's) Communities Organized to Respond in Emergencies (C.O.R.E.) engages faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) in planning for, responding to, and recovering from disasters.

### BACKGROUND

Miami-Dade County is a culturally diverse county that is home to approximately 2.5 million people. Encompassing 1,946 square miles, it is Florida's third largest county. Miami is its largest city and has a population of approximately 425,000 people. The county is vulnerable to a range of hazards that threaten its communities, businesses, and the environment.

Miami-Dade County is at risk from hurricanes each year throughout the Atlantic Hurricane Season. In August 1992, Hurricane Andrew struck the county, killing 26 people and causing over $20 billion in damages. Several powerful hurricanes also struck Miami-Dade County in 2004 and 2005, including Hurricane Wilma in October 2005.

According to the National Hurricane Center, Hurricane Andrew was the third costliest hurricane in U.S. history.

The Miami-Dade County OEM is responsible for coordinating disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation in the county. The OEM recognized that FBCOs could provide assistance to the county after a disaster, particularly in areas that have been historically underserved. The county decided to partner with FBCOs to improve assistance to these areas after disasters. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) partnered with Miami-Dade County to develop C.O.R.E. and launched the effort on March 31, 2011.

### GOALS

C.O.R.E. engages diverse communities within Miami-Dade County to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. C.O.R.E. works to ensure that all areas of the county receive assistance after a disaster, including those that have traditionally been underserved by the county.



**Hurricane Andrew Damage
in Miami-Dade County
(Source: FEMA)**

### DESCRIPTION

In 2010, the DHS Center for Faith-Based & Neighborhood

Partnerships (DHS center) approached Miami-Dade County OEM about creating a pilot effort, C.O.R.E., to test the concept of engaging the Whole Community and to establish affiliations between the OEM and FBCOs. These affiliations would enable Miami-Dade County OEM to utilize the FBCO's services and resources during disaster preparedness and response. To facilitate achievement of this goal, C.O.R.E. would provide affiliated FBCOs with training, resources, and information.

C.O.R.E. is part of Miami-Dade County OEM's Human Services Program and part of FEMA's "Building Resilience with Diverse Communities" effort. An OEM employee directs the effort and is supported by the DHS center. A DHS center representative provides guidance to the effort.

### *Developing the Program*
C.O.R.E. seeks to employ a Whole Community approach in the county to respond to a disaster. C.O.R.E. researched FBCOs in Miami-Dade County that could help reach areas of the community that have typically been underserved during disaster responses. C.O.R.E. also sought referrals from organizations to identify other FBCOs that could provide assistance to communities following a disaster. C.O.R.E. identified FBCOs that work with seven populations within Miami-Dade County:

> FEMA defines Whole Community as involving all aspects of the community to effectively prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against any disaster. This includes involving traditional and nontraditional emergency management partners, including volunteer organizations, FBCOs, the private sector, and the public sector. For more information, please refer to FEMA Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2011-2014.

- Homeless
- Immigrants
- Limited English-speaking ability
- Low-income Spanish-speaking residents
- Minority faith traditions
- Seniors
- Youth

C.O.R.E. also established a key partnership with the American Red Cross (ARC) South Florida. This partnership is important to the success of C.O.R.E., as ARC South Florida develops partnerships and incorporates diverse members into its preparedness and response efforts.

### *Recruiting FBCOs to Affiliate with C.O.R.E.*
C.O.R.E. has actively recruited FBCOs to participate in the program. C.O.R.E. staff members conduct assessments with each organization's officials to determine if it has the ability to provide services and resources after a disaster. The C.O.R.E. staff members inquire about the organization's responsibilities, its preparedness level, and how it would respond after a disaster. C.O.R.E. also requires that the officials complete an online assessment that addresses such issues as the types of assistance the organization can provide and resources it requires to serve as a C.O.R.E. affiliate. As of June 2011, 103 FBCOs had been assessed, and 25 were affiliated with the C.O.R.E. program. Over 55% of the affiliates are faith-based organizations.

### *C.O.R.E. Database*
C.O.R.E. maintains a database that contains information relating to each affiliate. The database includes a directory that lists each affiliate's contact information, a point of contact (POC), what resources the affiliate can contribute after a disaster, and the area/district in which it operates. In addition, the database lists the level of training for each affiliate's key staff and their respective areas of expertise. C.O.R.E. can access this database to determine

where an affiliate can provide service and what resources it can provide. C.O.R.E. personnel update this database periodically.

C.O.R.E. plans to create and maintain a database that affiliated FBCOs can access to update their contact information, available resources, and other useful information. Affiliated FBCOs can also compare their resources and services with other affiliates to determine if it would be beneficial to collaborate before, during, and after a disaster.

### Resources and Services Offered by Affiliated FBCOs

FBCOs that affiliate with C.O.R.E. can provide a wide range of resources and services to support Miami-Dade County OEM after a disaster. For example, affiliates can employ their facilities as temporary shelters for the affected community. Affiliated FBCOs can also utilize their facilities as points of distribution (PODs) for emergency supplies. Further, affiliates can manage donation drives among their members and other members of the community. FBCOs can provide neighborhood translation services for residents who do not speak English. FBCOs can also assist with such activities as clothing drives, providing food and water, mobilization of volunteers, emotional and spiritual care, health and medical services, and recovery activities.

### Activating C.O.R.E. Affiliates After a Disaster

C.O.R.E. coordinates its response with Miami-Dade Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (MDVOAD) before, during, and after a disaster. MDVOAD serves as a support agency for Emergency Support Function 15 (Volunteer and Donations Management) during incidents. MDVOAD also coordinates the response between FBCOs and county agencies to identify and meet long-term and unmet needs following a disaster response. The county will have a communications representative to manage C.O.R.E.'s activation process. The county will activate C.O.R.E. the same way it activates MDVOAD, at the appropriate point in the response.

C.O.R.E. uses several methods to activate its affiliates. C.O.R.E. maintains a communications list in a Microsoft® Excel® spreadsheet that it can utilize to contact the designated POC for each affiliate. C.O.R.E. sends an email to all affiliates for which it has an email address. C.O.R.E. also uses a phone tree to ensure it contacts affiliates that do not rely on email. C.O.R.E. can reference this list to verify each affiliate's capacity and determine which affiliates to activate after a disaster.

### Maintaining Long-Term Relationships

C.O.R.E. develops and strengthens its relationships with affiliated FBCOs through several different methods. The county offers educational opportunities, including trainings and workshops, which are particularly valuable for smaller FBCOs that often do not routinely have access to them. For example, ARC and other organizations have provided affiliates training in areas such as feeding, mass care, and volunteer distribution.

To build the skills of smaller FBCOs, C.O.R.E. has partnered them with the larger FBCOs that are affiliates. The larger affiliates provide the smaller ones with guidance and other mentoring that prepares them for their disaster role in C.O.R.E. The county utilizes these partnerships to keep the affiliates engaged, maintain the commitment, and demonstrate that the relationship is mutual. The FBCOs benefit because of these increased training opportunities, guidance from larger organizations, and overall support from the county.

### *Initial Lessons and Outcomes*

The C.O.R.E. pilot program identified challenges and opportunities in engaging leaders and constituents of diverse groups. The pilot program also identified previously unknown assets that FBCOs could employ during an emergency situation.

C.O.R.E. successfully developed a network of 25 newly affiliated FBCOs to partner with Miami-Dade County OEM and ARC. Through these FBCOs, C.O.R.E. identified more than 250 additional volunteers from the community who can mobilize to support a disaster, as well as new methods to assist over 8,000 community members after a disaster. The program also identified nine existing facilities as potential new sites for feeding and sheltering, and another five as new PODs for commodities. Three faith and community coalitions helped C.O.R.E. to identify 65 houses of worship, community groups, and religious broadcasters to support disaster communications and language translation services. In addition, C.O.R.E. provided leaders from the 25 newly affiliated FBCOs with incident command system training.

### *Future Plan*

In order to ensure C.O.R.E.'s future success, Miami-Dade County OEM plans to institutionalize the Whole Community concept and associated processes. Due to significant budget cuts, OEM personnel reorganized their staff and established a team consisting of personnel from business continuity, human services, and infrastructure and logistics. This team will help implement the Whole Community concept within Miami-Dade County OEM by 2013.

## REQUIREMENTS

### *Keys to Success*

### Developing Relationships with FBCOs

C.O.R.E.'s dedicated outreach efforts have led 25 FBCOs to affiliate with the program.

### Training and Educational Opportunities

C.O.R.E. has provided training and educational opportunities that affiliated FBCOs could not receive elsewhere. These opportunities encourage affiliates to remain engaged in the C.O.R.E. program.

### Federal Support

The DHS center worked closely with the Miami-Dade County OEM to develop and launch C.O.R.E. This Federal support provided valuable assistance in designing this effective program.

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