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The Frederick County, Maryland Community Action Agency's Community Land Security Program

SUMMARY

The Frederick County, Maryland Community Action Agency's (FCAA) Community Land Security Program aspires to strengthen the domestic preparedness capabilities of the county's low-income communities. The program aims to help low-income communities remain safe and self-sufficient in the face of emergencies. The program also aims to build local emergency managers' awareness of the needs of low-income neighborhoods and to open a dialogue between local officials and representatives of previously disenfranchised communities.

BACKGROUND

In June 2002, a representative of the non-profit organization Community Action Partnership (CAP) announced a new initiative entitled, "Community Land Security." A play on the words "homeland security," the program focuses on bolstering domestic preparedness among low-income communities. In unveiling the new program, the CAP spokesperson stated that low-income communities lack access to fundamental information on terrorism and domestic preparedness. He also stated that disadvantaged communities are frequently located near areas vulnerable to natural disasters and potential targets of terrorism, including chemical plants, railroad lines, and military bases. As a result, the spokesperson argued, disadvantaged neighborhoods represent some of the nation's most vulnerable communities.

After announcing the program, CAP invited local Community Action Agencies (CAA) from its 1,000-member network to apply to participate in the program. CAAs are local organizations mandated by law to address policies, programs, and activities relating to poverty. They are focused around CAP's five mandates: to fight poverty; to promote self-sufficiency; to feed the hungry; to improve social services; and to engage the private sector in anti-poverty initiatives.

Community Land Security Pilot Programs

Programs initiated in 2004: Middlesex County, New Jersey; Columbia, Missouri; Knox County, Kentucky.

Programs initiated in 2005: Frederick County, Maryland; Monroe, Michigan; Fremont, Ohio; Rockland, Maine; Rio Grande City, Texas; Hugo, Oklahoma.

As of August 2005, 10 CAAs had been chosen as pilot locations for the Community Land Security program, among them the Frederick Community Action Agency, in operation since 1968. The FCAA's Community Land Security Program began in July 2005.

GOALS

The FCAA's Community Land Security program has two primary goals. The first is to inform and educate members of Frederick County's low-income communities on the topics of anti-terrorism and domestic preparedness. The second is to make County emergency managers aware of the needs of disadvantaged neighborhoods.

DESCRIPTION

Frederick County

In their grant proposal to CAP, FCAA personnel argued that their organization was uniquely suited to the Community Land Security program because of Frederick County's proximity to Washington, DC and the government facilities and military installations located there. The FCAA identified numerous potential terror targets in Frederick County, including Fort Detrick, the Camp David Presidential Retreat, the National Military Command Center-Raven Rock Mountain Complex, the National Cancer Institute, and the National Emergency Training Center, as well as a number of water treatment plants, municipal airports, industrial sites, and bio-technical research and production facilities. The FCAA also identified nine low-income communities located within close proximity to these sites.

Training Workshops for CAA Staffers

In September 2005, FCAA's new Community Land Security Coordinator began work on the program by attending a mandatory training workshop with CAP in Washington, DC. The CAP training program is ongoing and focuses on three basic plans of action: how to inform low-income communities about federal, state, and local homeland security efforts; how to work with community leaders to organize volunteer emergency response teams; and how to connect low-income communities with local government offices, both for receipt of vital information and to report suspicious people and activities. Within the three principal program activities, CAP training modules address processes for:

- Assisting community leaders in convening informational meetings and seminars;
- Facilitating presentations by local government representatives;
- Ensuring that written materials are available and easy to understand;
- Brokering relationships between public officials and community leaders in disadvantaged neighborhoods; and
- Coordinating volunteer teams.

"What I'm training [Community Land Security Coordinators] to do is to be able to consider the fact that low-income people are also a special needs group in terms of emergency response just like disabled people and seniors and people who are incarcerated and people in hospitals and school children."
--Gary Goldberg, Creator, Community Land Security Technical Training Manual

The one-day training program also included a detailed review of local planning, preparedness, response, and recovery activities and information on how community organizations can participate in them. The program concluded with a table-top exercise simulating a terrorist attack. In the exercise, the Community Land Security Coordinator and other CAA members practiced tactics for alerting emergency managers to the specific needs of low-income communities.

Literature Dissemination in Low-Income Communities

In one of his first activities after returning from CAP training, the Frederick Community Land Security Coordinator established a Community Land Security Resource Center (CLRSRC) in the FCAA main offices in the city of Frederick, Maryland. The CLRSRC is staffed by the

coordinator, FCAA case managers, outreach workers, and community volunteers. The CLRSRC serves as a clearinghouse, central repository, and resource center for information (in English and Spanish) pertaining to homeland security and to the community's proximity to potential terror targets. The Resource Center is co-located with the FCAA food bank, which serves 300-400 families per month. During hours of operation, the FCAA distributes informational leaflets and plays videos on preparedness produced by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

In its outreach activities, the FCAA uses materials developed by numerous local and national partners engaged in homeland security and emergency preparedness activities. These organizations include the Frederick County Local Emergency Planning Committee, the Frederick Citizen Corps Council, the Frederick County chapter of the American Red Cross, the Frederick County Office of Emergency Management, the Frederick County Health Department, and area fire and police departments. The literature relays area-specific information, such as information on Frederick County television and radio channels that regularly broadcast emergency instructions for county residents and emergency procedures for county public schools. The pamphlets also include general preparedness tips, focusing on themes such as helping children cope with disaster, preparing special needs groups (e.g. people with disabilities), and maintaining emergency food and water supplies.

Connecting Potential Volunteers to Volunteer Opportunities

FCAA also works to involve members of low-income communities in the larger preparedness effort by connecting interested citizens with volunteer opportunities. Community Land Security representatives focus on connecting interested individuals and groups, such as tenant councils, with programs run by the Frederick Citizen Corps Council. The Citizen Corps Council assigns the volunteers to such organizations as the Frederick Medical Reserve Corps, the Frederick Volunteer Fire Corps, the Frederick Volunteers in Police Services program, and area neighborhood watch organizations.

Bringing the Needs of Low-Income Communities to Local Emergency Planning Sessions

Finally, the Community Land Security Coordinator has also secured a seat on the local emergency planning committee. In this capacity, the coordinator collaborates with city and county planners to incorporate the needs of low-income communities into the evacuation planning process. The program's mission is to address the most pressing issues relating to the evacuation of low-income communities, including the high population density of most disadvantaged neighborhoods and the lack of residents who own personal vehicles. The program is aimed at establishing a long-term process to incorporate these obstacles into city and county evacuation plans. As of December 2005, the coordinator had attended several emergency planning sessions and had laid groundwork for integrating the FCAA agenda into county plans.

REQUIREMENTS

Keys to Success

Reputation as an "Honest Broker." The Community Land Security Program's success hinges on the FCAA's reputation as an "honest broker." To achieve the program's goals, the program coordinator had to establish a relationship with members of low-income communities while simultaneously establishing a relationship with the public officials and emergency managers who serve those communities. Had the FCAA not been able to garner the trust and confidence of each group, the program could not have existed.

Resources

For the first year of the Community Land Security Program, the Frederick Community Action Agency received \$25,000 in funding from the Community Action Partnership and matching grants. The Frederick Citizen Corps Council also donated emergency preparedness starter kits, each one valued at approximately \$25 and including such items as flashlights, batteries, and first aid supplies.

Links

[Community Action Partnership](http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/default.asp) (<http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/default.asp>)

[Frederick County Community Action Agency](http://www.cityoffrederick.com/departments/CAA/Agency.htm)

(<http://www.cityoffrederick.com/departments/CAA/Agency.htm>)

[Frederick County Citizen Corps](http://www.frederickcitizenscorp.com/) (<http://www.frederickcitizenscorp.com/>)

[Frederick County Chapter of the American Red Cross](http://www.frederickredcross.org/es_feb04.htm)

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