

Section 1: Becoming a Community-Based Organization (CBO) and/or Faith-Based Organization (FBO) Pre-Disaster Mitigation Volunteer

Learning Objectives: Learn how CBOs and FBOs can contribute to their communities by serving as pre-disaster mitigation volunteers.

Introduction to Partnerships in Pre-Disaster Mitigation

When it comes to disaster, emergency managers and community-based and faith-based organizations (CBOs and FBOs) have long operated within certain traditional roles. CBOs and FBOs are accustomed to deploying volunteers and services in disaster relief and recovery. Food, shelter, blankets, the organization of volunteer resources, and the provision of human warmth and comfort are their areas of expertise.

Emergency managers are typically focused on emergency operations and technical solutions. They are burdened with too much to do and too few resources. In many cases, emergency managers have their hands full maintaining a decent state of preparedness and responding when disaster occurs. They generally work with volunteers in well-defined circumstances during and after disasters.

There is a growing trend around the country for CBOs and FBOs to cooperate with emergency managers in a different kind of partnership. Community-based mitigation programs concentrate on ongoing efforts that can lessen the impact disasters have on people and property. These programs capitalize on the distinct and separate strengths that emergency managers and CBOs/FBOs represent.

CBOs and FBOs offer:

- Immense volunteer capacity
- Understanding of community needs and awareness of the most vulnerable populations
- Built-in credibility with the community
- Access to social and population groups that may avoid interaction with government officials
- The power of persuasion and community influence
- The ability to make decisions outside of government processes

Emergency managers provide access to:

- Funding available through government mitigation grant programs
- Government-based expertise and technical know-how
- Deep understanding of local risks and mitigation needs
- Current status of mitigation within the community
- Access to government expertise and resources at the local, state, regional and federal levels

The benefits of CBO/FBO and emergency management partnerships are enormous. They include the following:

- CBO/FBO and emergency management partnerships support the reduction of disaster risk, even in highly resource-constrained situations.

Community-based Pre-Disaster Mitigation for CBOs/FBOs

- Mitigation activities can keep experienced volunteers active and enthusiastic even in times when their special disaster response and recovery skills are not needed.
- Opportunities exist to bring a whole new group of volunteers into play.
- Program activities maintain community interest and increase awareness regarding disaster risk reduction and preparedness.
- Community members acquire a sense of empowerment through reducing their disaster risk. They buy in at the grassroots level.
- The partnerships and relationships built through such programs further strengthen community bonds.
- When disaster does strike, response and recovery efforts are likely to proceed more smoothly because people know each other, damage and loss are reduced due to mitigation activities, and citizens are apt to be more prepared as a result of their increased disaster consciousness.

Both CBOs/FBOs and emergency managers will be challenged by cultural and organizational differences when they step beyond traditional roles to form these new partnerships. Leadership and operational styles may vary widely. The mission of each group will vary distinctly, both within the CBO and FBO community, and between CBOs/FBOs and emergency managers. For example, CBOs and FBOs are likely to have decision processes that are less structured and potentially more consensus-based. On the other hand, emergency managers generally operate within a command-and-control, fairly hierarchical decision-making and leadership framework. For any partnership to succeed, it is important for each group to understand the cultural values and viewpoints of their partners, and to honor and respect them.

A Caveat on Community-Based Mitigation Programs

If your community chooses to either establish a community-based mitigation program – or to enhance an existing partnership between emergency managers and CBOs/FBOs – it's critical that emergency managers be informed and brought into the loop as early as possible. Emergency managers are a tremendous resource that should be tapped to help volunteer groups understand the local natural hazards and how volunteers most successfully and effectively address outstanding mitigation needs in the community.

Because emergency managers are charged formally with the task of community disaster preparedness, response, and mitigation, volunteer efforts must dovetail with the official plans either in place or underway. Volunteer support should be viewed as the asset it is. Failure to involve emergency managers in discussions could result in misunderstandings or even a situation in which volunteer activities impede progress. Coordination and solid communication are a must.

CBO and FBO volunteers can achieve optimum results when working in partnership with emergency managers and in accordance with official Community Mitigation Plans. By coordinating with the local emergency manager, volunteers will be able to join any pre-existing mitigation committee.



Resource Guide: FEMA publication 386-1 "Getting Started: Building Support for Mitigation Planning," describes the mitigation planning process and how volunteers can contribute to it. For further information, see the "General Resources" section of the Resource Guide.



This icon appears next to brainstorming activities.

Throughout this guide, you will notice the following icons:



This icon appears when additional material is available in the Resource Guide.

Section 1.A: Understanding our Risk of Disaster

Brainstorm the following:

1. What natural hazards are of greatest concern to us? How have these hazards affected us in the past?
2. Is it possible to eliminate or reduce our risk from some or all of these natural hazards? How could we do that?
3. Who is most vulnerable to disaster in our community? In my personal circle? How would they be affected during a disaster?



Section 1.B: Can we Help Make our Community Safer?

1. Mitigation is one of the ways we can reduce our disaster risk. Mitigation brainstorm:



What is mitigation? Why should we mitigate?

Mitigation is defined as ongoing efforts that can lessen the impact disasters have on people and property. There is a distinction between community preparedness and mitigation activities. Community disaster preparedness gets people and communities ready for a disaster that almost certainly will occur.

Note: The focus of these training materials is on pre-disaster mitigation, even though preparedness and mitigation go hand-in-hand in making communities safer.

Examples of preparedness activities include:

- Knowing how to drop, cover, and hold on when an earthquake happens
- Warning sirens
- Emergency communication systems
- NOAA weather radios
- Evacuation plans
- Emergency supplies kit
- Sandbags
- Smoke alarms

On the other hand, disaster mitigation activities will actually prevent or reduce the impact of the hazard. Examples of mitigation activities are:

- Installing hurricane shutters
- Strengthening roofs
- Installing fire-resistant shingles
- Installing shatter-resistant window film
- Anchoring outdoor items that can become projectiles in hurricanes and high winds
- Implementing vegetation management – for example, removing fire-prone dry plant material from gutters and around residences and other buildings, or trimming tree limbs that overhang roofs to avoid roof damage during hurricanes, tornadoes, or high straight-line winds
- Clearing streams
- Adopting and enforcing stricter building codes
- Installing hail-resistant shingles

Community-based Pre-Disaster Mitigation for CBOs/FBOs

- Conducting a needs assessment – determining the level and type of mitigation needs present in the community; for example, identifying clogged drainageways and streams that could cause flooding during periods of high rainfall; can include specific details on the number of areas that need clearing and a prioritization of which areas need to be cleared first based on the severity of the problems that could result if the stream or drainageway remains uncleared
- Bolting bookshelves to walls
- Installing backflow valves – special valves that prevent toilet overflows when the household sewer system is infiltrated with floodwater
- Developing mitigation plans – specific plans for mitigation activities to address one or more hazards faced by a community
- Building safe rooms – specially designed rooms built to withstand high winds generally associated with tornadoes; these are available in modular, pre-built form or are built using specified materials to pre-engineering specifications

2. How does mitigation get done?

- The role of emergency managers in mitigation
- The role of CBOs and FBOs in mitigation

Brief Definitions of Mitigation Partner Organizations

- **Community-based Organization (CBO):** Non-commercial grassroots organization for community support; has visibility and influence; grounded in the community culture; may include politically focused organizations
- **Faith-based Organization (FBO):** A group that bases its gathering on a unifying faith or belief system; is visible and involved in the community; has formal or reputational influence
- **Emergency Managers:** Government employees who have the knowledge, skills, and ability to effectively manage a comprehensive emergency management program, including:
 - Working knowledge of all the basic tenets of emergency management, including mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery
 - Experience and knowledge of interagency and community-wide participation in planning, coordination, and management functions designed to improve emergency management capabilities

Brief History of CBO/FBO Involvement in Disaster Mitigation

Traditionally, CBOs/FBOs have been involved in the disaster response and recovery phase – providing shelter, food, clothing, and emotional support to victims of disaster. However, during the 1970s, researchers and government officials began to shift their thinking about disasters away from a simple emphasis on immediate response. Disasters began to be seen from a more continuous perspective, rather than as independent single events.

These ways of thinking stressed the need for disaster preparation and awareness – to be ready for disasters before they occurred rather than simply reacting afterward. Accordingly, how the conception of people who might be affected by disasters changed as well.

Rather than passive “victims” of disasters dependent upon government assistance in the wake of a disaster, residents of affected communities began to be seen as potentially empowered to actively affect their own environment by taking action to mitigate the potential effects of disasters.

The knowledge of potential disasters faced by a community came to be seen as an incentive for communities to better plan and prepare for their occurrence. For example, hurricanes will always occur, but the amount of damage they cause will be determined in large part by where and how people choose to build, and how well-prepared they are to deal with the hurricane and its aftermath. Inherent in a number of these new ways of thinking about disasters was a realization that disasters could be effectively dealt with on a local level. This approach emphasized that local grassroots involvement was crucial to addressing the challenges that planning for a potential disaster posed to local communities. From these changes in thinking about disasters arose great interest in the concept of disaster mitigation.

The goal of involving CBOs and FBOs in local disaster mitigation can clearly be traced back to a number of these developments in thinking regarding disasters. As locally based organizations with strong networks within communities, CBOs and FBOs are well situated to bring about grassroots involvement in disaster mitigation. They can provide a truly “bottom-up” approach to mitigation, featuring an emphasis on social, rather than technological, solutions and empowerment of the local community.

Mitigation activities occur, first and foremost, at the local or individual level. Because of circumstances that are unique to individual communities, disaster mitigation must necessarily take place at a local level. Accordingly, the status of CBOs and FBOs as locally based organizations makes them excellent candidates to undertake or be involved in disaster mitigation activities.

Section 1.C: Establishing Mitigation Partnerships Between Emergency Managers and CBOs/FBOs

1. Communities like ours have been able to create beneficial mitigation partnerships. Use the case studies provided here to stimulate discussion. Additional resources are available in the Resource Guide and through the FEMA library.



Evansville, IN

In Evansville, Indiana, a project to help residents of two neighborhoods strap down their hot water heaters was done by the Disaster Resistant Community Corp. (DRC) along with CBOs/FBOs and the neighborhood's Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT). The local building inspector helped organize the event and train volunteers.

Materials for strapping down the hot water heaters were provided to residents in these two neighborhoods free of charge. Installation help was provided by the CERT and CBO/FBO members to residents who needed someone to do the actual work. There was no charge for this service.

Strapping down hot water heaters keeps them from falling over and causing gas leaks and possible fires, as well as providing 30 gallons of fresh water if water lines are damaged in an earthquake. In all, almost 40 water heaters were strapped down by volunteers, and kits for strapping down water heaters were distributed to another 30 households.

Polk County, MO

In Polk County, MO, a team formed to complete what became known as the "Bare Ditch Project." Various organizations, civic groups, and schools came together at 24 locations across the county to clear the drainages of debris and other obstructing items. The goal was to provide preventative maintenance by removing debris that collects and stops proper water drainage through drainage ditches, which can lead to flooding. In all, 47 community groups and 252 volunteers came out and worked 829 hours to accomplish the drainage clearing.

Ouachita Parish, LA

The Ouachita Multi-Purpose Community Action Program (OMCAP) and its community partners worked together to rehabilitate structures in a lower-income area of Monroe, LA. The Group Work Camp project consisted of a hurricane preparedness drill, the rehabilitation of 50 homes, cutting weeds and vegetation management, and the development of mitigation strategies for an encephalitis outbreak (clearing standing water). The project mitigated a number of natural and technological hazards in addition to improving the quality of life for participating families:

- Debris removal
- Weatherizing homes
- Roof repairs
- Minor structural repairs
- Disseminating educational materials

Partners included the City of Monroe (police, fire), City of West Monroe American Red Cross, United Way, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Fair Park Baptist Church Men's Group, and Ouachita Parish Civil Defense, among others.

Brattleboro, VT

In Brattleboro, VT, a group of volunteers from local agencies and CBOs worked together to retrofit local childcare centers against earthquake damage. The group contacted the Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS) for advice on how to assess the needs of these facilities to increase the safety for the children. Once the assessments were completed, it was decided that the needs included anchoring bookcases, bracketing shelves, and velcroing pictures and knick-knacks to keep them from falling.

Brainstorm the following:

2. As volunteers, how could we work with emergency managers to reduce our risks?
3. Are we interested in pursuing a community-based mitigation program?
4. Do we know others who would like to participate? Do we have special skills or networks that could help support our emergency managers in their efforts to keep our community safer?

