

**COMMUNITY-BASED  
PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION FOR  
EMERGENCY MANAGERS  
  
STUDENT GUIDE**

**THESE MATERIALS WERE PREPARED THROUGH A CONTRACT FROM THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA), THE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE DIRECTORATE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS). THE MATERIALS ARE BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE AND COUNSEL OF COMMUNITIES, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGERS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY.**



## Introductory Workshop

**Learning Objectives:** Participants will gain a basic understanding of community-based mitigation; the benefits of partnerships among emergency managers, CBOs, and FBOs; and how mitigation could help their community.

### 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. Emergency managers typically are 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.

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.

There is a growing trend around the country for emergency managers to cooperate with CBOs and FBOs 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 offer.

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 level

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



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.

- The ability to make decisions outside of government processes

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

- Emergency management and CBO/FBO partnerships support the reduction of disaster risk, even in highly resource-constrained situations.
- 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 emergency managers and CBOs/FBOs 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 emergency managers and CBOs/FBOs. For example, emergency managers generally operate within a command-and-control, fairly hierarchical decision-making and leadership framework. On the other hand, CBOs and FBOs are likely to have decision processes that are less structured and potentially more consensus-based. 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 CBOs/FBOs understand the importance of ongoing coordination and consistent communication with emergency managers.

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. Emergency managers need to stay in the loop to forestall misunderstandings or even a situation in which volunteer activities impede progress.

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.

### Mitigation vs. Preparedness and Why Pre-Disaster Mitigation is Important

Many experts in the emergency management debate the differences between mitigation and preparedness. However, for the purposes of this workshop and to help emergency managers better understand how to work with CBOs and FBOs, 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.

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

- 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

### Importance of CBO/FBO Involvement with Emergency Management in Community Pre-Disaster Mitigation Activities

#### **Large Group Brainstorming (suggested time 25 minutes):**

1. What are the elements of your community that you value most?
2. What potential hazards or disasters most concern you?
3. What existing CBOs and FBOs are active in your community? Who are their members? What do they accomplish? What resources do they offer?



#### **Opportunities Identification Brainstorm (Small Group) (25 minutes):**

1. What opportunities exist to improve or expand upon hazard mitigation in our community?
2. Where have we seen the greatest benefits in our community from previous mitigation activities?
3. What geographical areas, facility types, or population groups are most in need of mitigation assistance?

