

Introductory Workshop

Learning Objectives: Participants should gain a basic understanding of community-based mitigation; the benefits of partnerships among CBOs, FBOs, and emergency managers; and how mitigation could help their community. **Suggested time:** 1.5 to 2 hours



Instructor's Note: The following introduction should be used to explain why emergency managers and CBOs/FBOs might find it mutually beneficial to work together on pre-disaster mitigation programs.

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 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.

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 CBOs/FBOs and emergency managers offer.

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 level

Community-based Pre-Disaster Mitigation for CBOs/FBOs

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.
- 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



Instructor's Note: Discuss the following with participants to assure they understand the importance of CBO/FBO coordination with emergency managers and communication regarding official Community Mitigation Plans.

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.

Community-based Pre-Disaster Mitigation for CBOs/FBOs

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.

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



Instructor’s 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.

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

Community-based Pre-Disaster Mitigation for CBOs/FBOs

- 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



Instructor's Note: The message of **inclusion** and **partnership** should be introduced frequently throughout the session. The facilitator will discuss coalition building and inclusion as necessary to the success of a given project and will encourage all parties to contribute to the coalition-building process. Throughout the session, the workshop facilitator will focus on presenting opportunities for involvement to all willing participants.

Large Group Brainstorming (suggested time 25 minutes):

Directed by the facilitator, this initial discussion focuses on three questions:

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?



Community-based Pre-Disaster Mitigation for CBOs/FBOs



Instructor's Note: The goal of this process is twofold: First, it aims to ground the discussion locally and to make evident existing or potential connections CBOs/FBOs have in the community. Second, it aims to focus the discussion on the hazards/disasters of particular importance to the participants. The last question directs participants to focus on existing connections, how to best leverage them, and how to form new connections and networks.

Opportunities Identification (Small Group) (25 minutes):

Groups will break off and brainstorm the following questions:



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?



Instructor's Note: This general introduction can then lead into a specific section as outlined in the Instructor's Guide and Student Manual. If offering the entire program as a single set of courses for the same group of students, the general introduction should be offered only once.