Guide to Expanding Mitigation

MAKING THE CONNECTION TO EQUITY

FEMA

When we create projects, programs and policies in partnership with populations that have historically been underserved, the entire community benefits. If you have ever walked along a sidewalk and used a pedestrian ramp — a small slope that allows for a smooth transition between sidewalk and street — you have benefited from this approach. Originally designed to provide greater access for people who use wheelchairs, pedestrian ramps make navigating the built environment easier for all. Having an extended crossing time and a median for pedestrians in the middle of a busy multilane street makes crossing safer. Drivers benefit, but so do pedestrians, from senior citizens to delivery people with packages to parents with small children in tow. We offer here an opening conversation on the subject of equity, recognizing that even an imperfect dialogue can advance the connections between equity and hazard mitigation.

WHAT IS EQUITY

How do we realize similar benefits in hazard mitigation? By placing equity at the center of all that we do. Although there is no one-size-fits-all definition, equity can generally be understood as policies, practices, interactions, cultures and resources that are responsive to all people. Equity is achieved not only when everyone is provided full access to information and assistance, but when we intervene to ensure that all are provided with the resources necessary to meaningfully participate, make progress and benefit from hazard mitigation. The illustration included within this guide highlights how, without equity interventions, equal access is inherently impossible. As human beings, we each have unique needs that must be met to allow our meaningful participation. To realize this vision, we must work in partnership with the "Whole Community."

This *Guide to Expanding Mitigation* shows how community officials can partner with the Whole Community to strive for equity in hazard mitigation, including the planning and project development process. This guide is a starting place for community officials to initiate a conversation about mitigation investments that make communities both more equitable and more resilient, while avoiding situations in which risk reduction measures displace the very people they are intended to protect.

This *Guide to Expanding Mitigation* is part of a series highlighting innovative and emerging partnerships for mitigation.

Photo: Daughter out for walk through neighborhood with father in wheelchair
Cover Photo: Volunteers and goat farm owners meeting about farm organizing

Photo: Flooded houses in central Texas

Photo: Young father and infant riding city bus

Photo: An elder Yurok couple stands on the steps of their front porch

UNDERSTANDING MORE DEEPLY

The most at-risk members in our community often experience the greatest losses from disasters. These community members may lack trusted relationships with government officials. As such, they can be routinely left out of planning and preparedness activities. In an emergency, they may have little access to information about what to do or lack the ability to act. This correlation highlights the importance of a Whole Community approach to hazard mitigation and involving historically underserved populations in the planning and decision-making processes.

Social vulnerability, understood as an individual's or social group's potential for loss, recognizes that certain characteristics influence an individual's or group's ability to prepare, respond, cope or recover from an event. These characteristics often overlap within populations to create heightened vulnerability which may be compounded by deficiencies in a community's infrastructure. Understanding where populations have an increased vulnerability and exposure to natural hazards, while not predictive, can help emergency managers take actions to reduce the impacts to these communities before an event or distribute needed recovery dollars after an event.

Indices such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Social Vulnerability Index tool can help emergency managers identify the geographic areas of heightened social vulnerability. For engagement purposes and to identify local partner organizations, it may also be useful to understand the characteristics of populations that may be disproportionately affected by disasters, including:

- Underserved communities with a low socioeconomic status.
- People of color.
- Tribal and First Nation communities.
- Women.
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness or displacement.
- Rural communities.

- Elderly and youth populations.
- Populations with limited English proficiency.
- Service workers and migrant laborers.
- Populations with limited cognitive or physical abilities.
- Institutionalized populations, such as those in prisons and nursing homes.
- Renters.

Some members of these populations may have strong social bonds that enable them to withstand disasters. However, many may find it difficult to stockpile

resources to prepare for an event, recover quickly, or take action to reduce the risk posed by natural hazards, while also meeting everyday needs.

The negative impacts of historic government policies continue to compound recovery challenges in communities of color and low-income populations. For example, redlining limited access to federally backed mortgages based on race until the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Research has shown that formerly redlined areas are, on average, 5 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than non-redlined areas, and summer surface temperatures in some areas can vary by as much as 20 degrees. Recent studies have also shown that within some urban areas, flooding losses have been concentrated in Black and low-income communities. Obtaining flood insurance to offset this risk is out of reach for our most underserved households.

WHOLE COMMUNITY

While each individual defines "community" differently, the "Whole Community" refers to all individuals and families (including those with access and functional needs), businesses, faith-based and community organizations, nonprofit groups, schools and academia, media outlets, and levels of government, (including state, local, tribal, territorial, and federal partners). The Whole Community has a shared responsibility for emergency preparedness and mitigation.
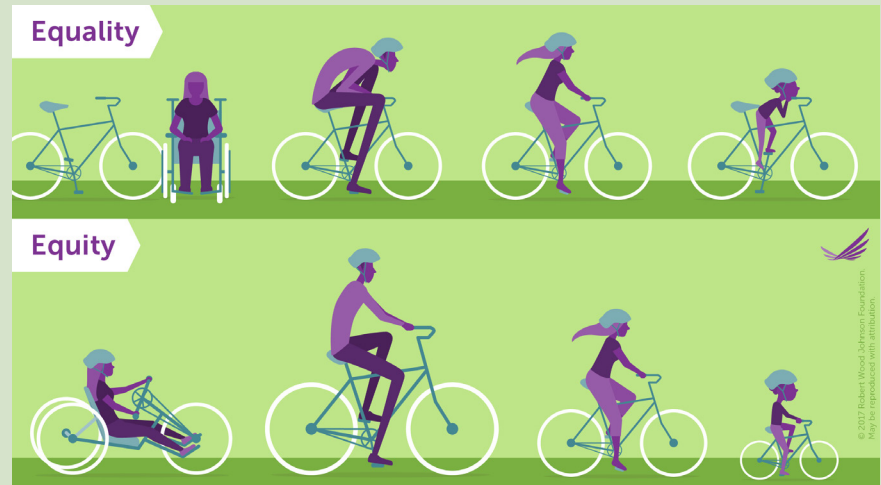
Equality

Equity

Equality provides the same opportunity to all. Equity provides to each according to need.

A CALL TO ACTION

All populations have value and should have the option to contribute to emergency management and hazard mitigation. When emergency managers engage the Whole Community early and often, residents can grow into partners in response, and emergency managers can grow into community allies. Because community members are local experts about their neighborhoods and hazards, they can help emergency managers manage risk. Community partners, including informal leaders with leverage outside of traditional community organizational structures, can serve as trusted voices that champion mitigation initiatives. At every stage of the disaster cycle, partnerships with those most affected by disasters allow our communities to thrive and become more resilient.

LEVEL UP

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region IX, in partnership with Georgetown Climate Center, produced the Level Up Audio Project to share stories, case studies, and best practices to inspire hazard mitigation action and strengthen our community of hazard mitigation and climate adaptation professionals. Listen to episodes here.

Understanding community needs and knowing where to target assistance in advance of an event will help emergency managers:

• Deploy the right resources to offset deficiencies in the physical or social infrastructure.

• Support communities in becoming more self-sufficient and reducing loss of life and property.

• Funnel scarce recovery funding to those most in need.

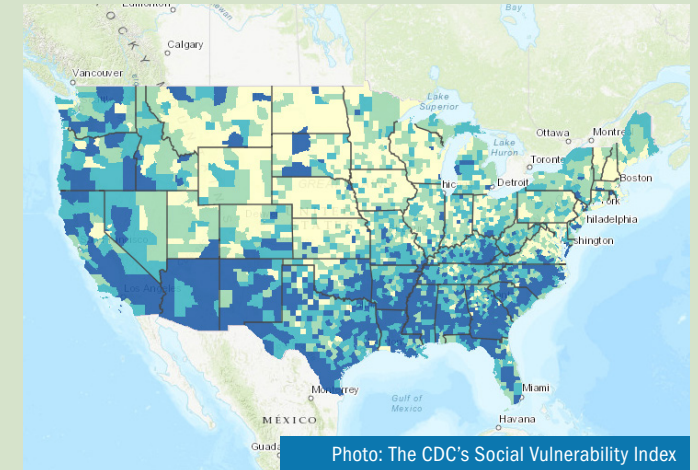• Prioritize mitigation funding for the communities most affected by disasters.

Considering equity is not just an important opportunity to make our profession more effective. As emergency managers and civil servants, we have a duty to see that our actions and programs do not have an adverse impact on the civil rights of those we serve. In addition to ensuring the equitability of specific hazard mitigation actions, we must see that the processes for realizing these actions are conducted equitably. To avoid implicit assumptions when making decisions about the nature of social well-being, people, and communities, we need to engage the members and representatives of the community as key contributors, early and throughout the mitigation lifecycle.

ASSESSING SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

Quantifying data that includes all vulnerable conditions can be challenging. Start by identifying the regions that experience social vulnerability through key demographic and socio-economic metrics, determined at the census tract level. This can help build a deeper understanding of groups' susceptibility to natural hazards. The CDC's Social Vulnerability Index pairs a mapping tool with 15 different variables and is one tool that can direct attention to vulnerable populations.

Learn more about the characteristics that can influence vulnerability: https://svi.cdc.gov/Documents/Publications/SVI_Community_Materials/atriskguidance.pdf

WORKING IN COLLABORATION

Fundamentally, emergency managers must know the communities they serve and collaborate with residents of the frontline communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters. Emergency managers must partner with and empower community-based organizations in mitigation planning, project development, and related initiatives. Consider establishing a community advisory committee that has power in the decision-making process. When communicating about mitigation, focus on the community's priorities or shared goals—such as safety, or on ways that mitigation can promote a vibrant, resilient community. Don't use highly technical terms. Translating the benefits of mitigation initiatives into the community's priorities will bring more people to the table and equip them to engage.

Photo: Colleagues in a conference workshop

Photo: Flooded car on an urban street

Photo: Paramedic in front of ambulance

WHAT MORE EQUITABLE MITIGATION LOOKS LIKE

Inclusive processes take time, but when we work collaboratively with diverse populations and stakeholders, we will arrive at more effective outcomes. Each community has its own definition of what it takes to achieve equity, and the definitions are often informed by local goals. One way to measure equity is through better outcomes, such as an easier long-term recovery or a disaster that does not disproportionately affect our most vulnerable residents. We can also measure equity successes in our mitigation initiatives by seeing that:

- At-risk risk populations lend expertise and have agency in the hazard mitigation process.
- Barriers to participating in mitigation activities are removed, and training, language access, transportation, meals and/or childcare are provided.
- Investment takes place in traditionally underserved communities.
- Race is no longer a determining factor of risk.
- Indicators of social vulnerability and environmental burden are assessed alongside hazards in mitigation plans and are used to target outreach or risk reduction projects.
- State and local governments include equity as a factor for prioritizing projects and applying their administrative and hazard mitigation plans.
- Cost share is reduced for small or under-resourced communities.
- Resources are provided to build local capacity and capability for grant application processing and administration.
- An impact assessment is completed before a mitigation project to ensure that it helps and does not negatively impact at-risk populations.
- Those engaged in mitigation activities are representative of the Whole Community.

These approaches are reflected in King County, Washington's 2020 Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. The plan includes a 2010 countywide ordinance requirement to include 14 pre-established determinants of equity in all county work, including plans, actions, systems and budgets. These 14 elements, along with population vulnerability, will be used to prioritize mitigation investments in the communities most vulnerable to disasters. The ranking criteria for projects, described in the Hazard Mitigation Strategy section of the plan, provide the basis for project submissions to FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program.

This guide and our opening dialogue end here, but the conversation of equity in hazard mitigation is only beginning. Please reach out to us and continue the conversation. If we mischaracterized any aspect of equity, social vulnerability or people, let us know. We strive to be active listeners, learning along the way and adapting as we grow in understanding.

ENGAGE WITH US

Are you a state, local, tribal or territorial official interested in making the connection between equity and hazard mitigation? Are you a community leader or resident interested in connecting with local officials to reduce risk from hazards? Please contact us at FEMA-ExpandingMitigation@fema.dhs.gov.

RESOURCES

Guides to Expanding Mitigation
https://www.fema.gov/mitigation-risk-reduction
Link to all available Guides to Expanding Mitigation.

American Planning Association Quick Notes on Inclusive Planning Processes
http://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/download_pdf/PAS-QuickNotes-82.pdf

Government Accountability Office Environmental Justice Guidance
https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/701401.pdf

Department of Homeland Security Environmental Justice Strategy
https://www.dhs.gov/dhs-environmental-justice-strategy

FEMA Environmental Justice Guidance
https://www.fema.gov/pdf/government/grant/pa/envmemo1.pdf

FEMA Engaging Faith-based and Community Organizations, Planning Considerations for Emergency Managers
https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/engaging-faith-based-and-community-organizations.pdf

FEMA Office of Equal Rights, Civil Rights Program
https://www.fema.gov/pdf/government/grant/pa/envmemo1.pdf

Addressing Social Equity through Natural Hazards Mitigation Planning
www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQZ_v9Fo1Mc

NAACP "In the Eye of the Storm" Action Toolkit
https://naacp.org/resources/eye-storm-peoples-guide-transforming-crisis-advancing-equity-disaster-continuum

Urban Sustainability Directors Network Guide to Equitable, Community-Driven Climate Preparedness Planning
https://www.usdn.org/uploads/cms/documents/usdn_guide_to_equitable_community-driven_climate_preparedness-_high_res.pdf?cn=bWVudGlvbg%3D%3D&utm_content=buffer03b62&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

REFERENCES

Cusick, Daniel. 2020. "Past Racist 'Redlining' Practices Increased Climate Burden on Minority Neighborhoods." *Scientific American*. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/past-racist-redlining-practices-increased-climate-burden-on-minority-neighborhoods/

Emrich, Christopher T., et al. 2019. "Measuring Social Equity in Flood Recovery Funding." https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17477891.2019.1675578

Frank, Thomas. 2020. "Flooding Disproportionately Harms Black Neighborhoods." *Scientific American*. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/flooding-disproportionately-harms-black-neighborhoods/

Jerolleman, Alessandra. 2019. "Disaster Justice for All: The Need for a More Equitable and Just Recovery Lens." https://hazards.colorado.edu/news/research-counts/disaster-justice-for-all-the-need-for-a-more-equitable-and-just-recovery-lens

Mikati, Ihab BS, et al. 2018. "Disparities in Distribution of Particulate Matter Emission Sources by Race and Poverty Status." https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304297

The Heinz Center. 2002. "Human Links to Coastal Disasters." https://research.fit.edu/media/site-specific/researchfitedu/coast-climate-adaptation-library/united-states/national/us---heinz-center-amp-nwf-reports/Heinz-Ctr.-2002.-US-Human-Links-to-Coastal-Disasters.pdf

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS