Developing a Municipal Outreach Campaign for Flood Resiliency

Resilience refers to the "ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change." A community that has the capacity to remain strong against adversity or disaster is a resilient community. There are nine key elements to community resilience: local knowledge; community networks and relationships; communication; health; governance and leadership; resources; economic investment; preparedness; and mental outlook. These elements all play a part in fostering community flood resiliency. Communicating risk and mitigation techniques before a flood, response during a flood, and recovery after a flood is critical.

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Photo source: MTSOfan "High Water Marks." Flickr, taken July 17, 2014.

Introduction

Local governments can build resilience in their community by creating and implementing an outreach campaign to build local knowledge by communicating risk and response. With education, locals are empowered to overcome hardships and properly act in adverse situations. A flooding outreach campaign can also help a community earn points through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS) Program, which provides flood insurance premium discounts for the entire community based on sound flood plain management decisions. Our booklet titled *Developing a Community Engagement Program for Flood Resiliency* also has tips for building community resilience, more specifically related to public engagement.

Developing an Outreach Campaign

Developing a flood resiliency outreach plan for your campaign is key to implementing and evaluating your flood resiliency program. There are many resources and tools developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other organizations that can assist you with creating an outreach campaign. Developing an outreach plan should include the following steps:

- Establish an outreach communications person/team
- Assess current outreach information and gaps
- Create messages and projects to convey each message
- Create an implementation plan with responsibilities
- Evaluate effectiveness of program

See the following sources for more information:

- Communications Toolkit: Materials for Your Outreach and Promotion (America's PrepareAthon)
- Community Outreach Plan Template (FEMA)
- Community Outreach Toolkit (ReadyPA)
- Flood Outreach Toolkit (FEMA)
- Flood Risk Communication Toolkit for Community Officials (FEMA)
- NFIP Flood Insurance: Regional Toolkit (FEMA)
- Risk Communications Guidebook for Local Officials (FEMA)

Outreach Strategies

There are two types of outreach strategies addressed, based on the audience type: social media users and non-social media users. With modern technology, there are cost-effective options for outreach, but in Pennsylvania, there are still over 650,000 residents without a broadband connection. Although social media is a great strategy for outreach, employing additional outreach methods is also important. Suggestions for social media users and non-social media users (includes those with and without computers/smartphones) are listed below.

Social Media Users: Social media can be a powerful tool for local governments to reach many of their residents, due to its social and sharing nature. According to the Pew Research Center, approximately "seven-in-ten Americans use social media to connect with one another, engage with news content, share information, and entertain themselves." That means local governments have an easy, and affordable, way to reach a large portion of their population. Some benefits of local government utilizing social media include: two-way communication, creating community, cost-effective advertising, learning about residents through meaningful interactions, and increased awareness through social diffusion.

When it comes to social media, there are hundreds of websites and applications (apps) that facilitate the creation and sharing of information. According to Pew, the top five platforms by number of users include YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. Learn how to create an account for each of theseplatforms from HootSuite.com: YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter.

General Outreach best practices:
- Use engaging visuals – bright, vivid, high-resolution photos – to catch attention
- Simple messages are better
- Know your audience and tailor messages to them
- The average attention span is 8 seconds – keep messages brief and visually-appealing

Social Media Tips:
- Use an easy, recognizable profile image such as your logo
- Use your cover photo to highlight upcoming events
- View platforms on desktop and mobile to make sure they format well on both
- Have consistent business description across platforms with key words since only the first 140 characters will show in preview
- Provide a link to your website in the page bio on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook
- Highlight social presence on website/blog by adding social media buttons to your pages
- Create a posting calendar/schedule to have a regular presence on your accounts
- Link social media accounts together but don't post the same content on all of them

Non-Social Media Users:
There are large numbers of people who do not use social media or even the internet - over 650,000 Pennsylvania residents still do not have a broadband connection. Local governments still need to reach these groups of people for emergencies, updates, and general education. There are a variety of non-social media methods to reach constituents that fall into two general categories: visual or audio. Visual methods includes as billboards, brochures, displays, flyers, letters, mailings, newsletters, newspaper ads, and website content. Audio methods include radio ads, presentations, and TV commercials.

There are many easy-to-use tools to create these materials. Table 1 shows various programs and what products you can create with them. This list is non-exhaustive but a place to start with creating outreach material.

Program Name	Brochures/ Handouts	Graphics	Presentations	Newsletters	Maps	Websites
Microsoft Word	X	X				
Microsoft PowerPoint	X	X	X			
Canva	X	X				
Visme	X	X				
Constant Contact				X		
ArcGIS Online					X	X
Google Maps					X	
Google Docs	X					
Google Slides			X			
Squarespace						X
Weebly						X
Wordpress						X

Table 1. Programs and how they can be used to create outreach materials. Created by SPC Water Resource Center, June 2020.

Additional Resources

Additional resources for developing an outreach program can be found through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA)'s National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The NFIP has a voluntary program called the Community Rating System (CRS) that uses a point system to reduce residents' flood insurance premiums by up to 45%. One of the elements of the CRS program is the Program for Public Information (PPI). The PPI allows CRS communities to gain points for their outreach efforts by implementing a structure framework for a flood resiliency outreach program. The PPI framework is useful to any community who is considering an outreach plan for flood resiliency. The PPI framework generally consists of:
- Establish a Program for Public Information (PPI) Committee
- Assess the community's public information needs
- Formulate message
- Identify outreach projects to convey the message
- Examine other public information initiatives
- Prepare the Program for Public Information (PPI) document and adopt the Program for Public Information (PPI)
- Implement, monitor, and evaluate the program

This information is adapted from Developing a Program for Public Information. More information on creating a PPI can be found in the 2017 CRS Coordinator's Manual in Section 330.

This manual also has helpful information for communities who are interested in learning more about the Community Rating System as a whole. The outreach plan is only one way to gain points through the CRS program. Check out WRC's factsheet and webpage about the CRS as well.

The PPI framework can encompass a variety of flood-related outreach projects, depending on the community's needs. Below are examples of various flooding outreach projects that CRS communities have implemented, gathered from the Water Resource Center CRS Storymap and the Success with CRS website:

- Emergency Preparedness Day, annual newsletter, live water gauge information – Etna Borough, PA (Class 7)

- Social media posts about flood awareness, letters sent to realtors and insurance agents – Upper St. Clair Township, PA (Class 7)

- Elementary classroom education on flood safety, as well as handouts at schools – Pompton Lakes, NJ (Class 5)

- Flood booth at local events and fairs, participating in river cleanups, interpreting flood maps for residents, Adopt-a-Waterway, Spanish materials and announcements, flood response plan – Pasadena, TX (Class 5)

- Publications about flood insurance, preparedness in libraries, annual mailing to flood-prone properties and repetitive loss properties – Stamford, CT (Class 7)

- Updated website to provide flooding information - Winnetka, IL (Class 6)

- PPI identified strategies and priority audiences, action-oriented brochures mailed to floodplain residents, signs on benches about flood safety, booth at university housing fair, mobile app for flood info to target students – Fort Collins, CO (Class 2)

- 19 outreach activities through PPI such as mailings, email notices, workshops, articles during hurricane season, etc. – Santa Rosa Island, FL (Class 7)

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